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News in brief

# Children need more protection from porn

The Bailey report on the sexualisation of children published last week does not go far enough to protect young people from the easy availability of pornography, warns Tanith Carey, a parenting author and journalist. Although Carey has welcomed some of the recommendations in the report, written with backing from David Cameron, she emphasises that it is a start and not a solution.

The report concluded a six-month independent investigation into the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood, focusing particularly on the advertising and retail sectors.

## Access to porn

Bailey, chief executive of the Mothers Union, wants retailers to voluntarily remove sexually suggestive clothing from children's sections and put age ratings on music videos.

Magazines and newspapers with sexual images should be kept out of sight of children.

But although the report also says parents should be given the right to choose at the point of purchase whether they want adult content on their home internet, laptops or smart phones, Carey said it did not go far enough.

"While porn may be fine for adults I do worry how



Rihanna: raunchy videos



Carey: onus on parents

ridiculously easy it is for very young children to access or to find porn," said Carey. "I am also concerned about how hardcore these images are and how much they show the humiliation and degradation of women, and what children are learning about sex from these images."

Carey is author of *Where Has My Little Girl Gone?*, a guide for parents on how to screen out messages about body image and sex from the internet and the media.

## Teenage angst

She said sexualised commercial and celebrity images harm children's self esteem.

"It makes them feel worthless and this is what lies behind the increase in depression and eating disorders among our young girls," she said.

According to the thinktank Demos, twice as many girls in Britain are suffering "teenage angst" as boys, and as many as 900,000 girls describe themselves as "unhappy and depressed". A quarter of 16-21 year old girls are already considering cosmetic surgery

and the UK has about 1.1 million people affected by an eating disorder, mostly in the 14-25 year old group.

Carey welcomed the Bailey report's guidelines for retailers. "They are a clear signal to society that it is no longer acceptable to use sexy products to commercially target children who are not ready for these items," she said.

Carey said the report generally puts the onus back on parents, getting them to take responsibility as the first gatekeepers for their children.

## Turn off TV

She was not opposed to the raunchy videos of pop acts like Rihanna but welcomed Bailey's recommendation of a watershed before which they would not be shown. That would bring them into line with other TV content.

"I think that it is fine for pop acts to continue to express themselves like this but they can't expect it to be broadcast any time of the night.

"Ultimately however it is up to parents to turn off the TV if Britney is climbing up a pole in stockings and suspenders at tea time."

Carey added that it is a parent's responsibility to examine the values that they are passing on to their children, and that it is up to society as a whole to create a world where children can develop and learn at their own pace rather than spending time worrying about how they look or how "hot" they are.

"We can't leave it to regulation and government," she said. "At the end of the day even if an eight year old wants a padded bra, it's a grown-up that pays for it."

KELLY MATTISON

## BEST BRITISH ROADS

Cheshire and Cheshire West has been named the best council at filling potholes. In a bid to make roads safer the public were invited by the National Cyclist Organisation and Aggregate Industries to enter their local potholes into a map. The councils were then rated on how quickly they got fresh tarmac on to the roads, as well as general road quality. You can still report a pothole at [www.fillthathole.org.uk](http://www.fillthathole.org.uk).

## HUMANIST TALKS

The British Humanist Association's annual conference will be held in Manchester this year, with the *Meaning of Life* as its theme. Guest speakers Philip Pullman, Peter Atkins and Polly Toynbee are among the speakers at the three-day event. The association works on behalf of non-religious people who want to live ethical lives based on reason. The conference starts on 17 June at the Hilton, Deansgate. For more information visit: <http://bhaconference.org.uk/>.

## NUCLEAR COSTS

The cost of nuclear energy will be put under the microscope in Victoria Hall, Grange over Sands at 7pm on 15 June. Radiation Free Lakeland and Friends of Chernobyl Children oppose plans to dump nuclear waste in Cumbria. Friends of Chernobyl Children say there has been an 800 per cent increase in cancer among children from the blighted area. For more information email [rafl@mariannebirkby.plus.com](mailto:rafl@mariannebirkby.plus.com).

## ABANDONMENT LAWS

A Yorkshire woman who was abandoned as a baby is now campaigning to change a law that allows mothers to be jailed for up to five years. Alley Lofthouse thinks it would be safer for children if mothers had a legal way to leave their babies. Alley, who has set up a website to reunite foundlings and natural parents, is promoting "baby hatches", found in Europe, which allow mothers to deposit their child anonymously and safely at hospital.