



MY BEST SHOT

by Lisa Ross

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SUBURBAN REALITY CHECK FOR ENTERTAINMENT COPS

Check it out—there is no childhood in America’s suburbs.

For families living in upscale communities like Carmel Valley and Del Mar, where the line between childhood and adulthood has been eroding for years, a widely reported Federal Trade Commission study released last week detailing the deliberate marketing of explicit violent and sexual adult entertainment to children was no news flash.

Predictably, the report incited a flood of public debate over responsibility, ethics and civil liberties as tarnished fingers pointed in every direction after the FTC told entertainment marketers to stop selling R-rated thrills to kids under 17 or risk government imposed controls. Such flailing, as usual, missed the point.

Entertainment marketers never needed a pre-meditated plan to lure pre-teens into the smarmy world of violence and adult sexuality. The invasion of little people into adult places has been creeping across the generation line like the blob since the American Yuppie revolution. Youngsters are everywhere, from late-night restaurants, to sports bars and racetracks, to upscale beauty salons. There’s hardly a place left where children fear to tread.

For many aging adults, whose biggest childhood movie trauma was the untimely death of Bambi’s mother, watching a live mom bludgeoned to death on the big screen while a row of kids whisper in voices that won’t change any time soon, is unconscionably surreal—especially when their real mom and dad are sitting right behind them.

If audiences in our local movie theaters are any indication, the PG-13 rating means “appropriate for kids 13 and under,” as if a film like the adult funny, “The Crew,” in which dotty old guys get a new life sleeping with lap dancers, torching rats and gunning down drug lords, bears any resemblance to that sweet codger movie, Cocoon. As

the Hollywood oligarchs like to say, don’t blame the movies—popular art simply reflects social custom.

Consider an afternoon at Carmel Valley’s most sophisticated beauty shop where children often wait on a cozy living room couch for their mom or for their very own \$100 hairdo. No “American Girls Magazine” on this coffee table—but plenty of cultural works with catchy titles like “Cosmo’s Karma Sutra 3: Do it to him now,” “Pleasure Triggers: How to Find and Use Them,” “Undress Your Date: Perfect Your Stripping Skills on Virtual Boy-Toys,” and several others I won’t repeat in a family newspaper but are available to any kid in line at Ralphs Market.

But, the neighborhood kiddy hairdo shop doesn’t reek of childhood, either—no Barney’s or animal crackers to spoil the positively no-geek ambiance, here. There are displays of designer hair products, services that include manicures and pedicures (perhaps to help discourage nail biting), and some serious rock and roll blaring over the sound system. On the QT I hear the boys are scooting over to the adult shop for their dye jobs.

Our standards for children under 13 have changed so dramatically that kids, who used to dress-up like mommy and now dress just like mommy and daddy, regularly dine in the middle of breweries and bars where they can observe a level of conversation and social intercourse unlike anything experienced at Chucky Cheese. After that, perhaps such television tributes to the human spirit like “*Sex In the City*” and “*Oz*” are all the more digestible.

And, as one of the worst offenders, officials of the State of California are hardly the folks to enforce children’s entertainment standards. The state owned Del Mar Racetrack regularly markets itself as a family venue, even offering a summer camp. Great place to learn probability theory, I guess.

So, perhaps the next stop is letting the little tykes try “gaming” at regulation-free Indian casinos. And why not—we’ve let the kids in everywhere else.