

Submission  
No 42

**INQUIRY INTO BULLYING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG  
PEOPLE**

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**Date received:** 24/03/2009

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I'd like to share the findings of my book *What's Happening to Our Girls?* published last July with Penguin. I think it's important that we look at the very new pressures and influences that are creating an ever-more intense environment for bullying.

*What's Happening to Our Girls?* was the result of two years' research into the lives of girls - talking to girls, teachers, school counsellors, child psychologists, medical staff, law enforcement personnel, and those working underground on the net. I also had an in-depth look at popular culture and at current marketing trends.

Briefly in terms of bullying I discovered:

- \* the **overwhelming influence of brands** - now at **preschool** - is causing great anxiety around presentation, as little girls feel judged by peers

- \* a **growth of sexually inappropriate behaviour at pre-school**

- \* these trends are **intensifying during the tweens (6-12) - including sexual grooming**

- \* we're now seeing **friendships being based more around brands in the tweens up** - for girls' clothes etc, boy's high tech items

- \* by the time kids are at high school these pressures intensify

- \* with the growth of DVDs and branded toys, fearful parents, the lack of extended family, children are inside a lot more, their friendships are very peer-based, and so we're seeing a **narrowing of life experience from very early years**. This makes kids less mature in dealing with the emotional complexities of human interaction when they've only peer experience to call on.

- \* parents and teachers are the last 'go-to' people, as kids see adults as so far out of date

- \* school counsellors talk of the **spike in bullying coinciding with the advent of reality TV** - if you lack wider life experiences, and mix only with your peers, you could be forgiven for thinking this is how you're meant to behave - put another way, a collapse of empathy

- \* new technologies giving kids a greater range of ways in which to bully - I have two case studies of **teen girls grooming other teen girls to suicide**.

- \* I feel that we underestimate the overwhelming combined **power of marketing, the collapsing of life experience, the lack of friendships across generations** (so peers become everything), **children being contactable 24/7**, their lack of a wider sense of belonging than peers/ popular culture (the

**uber parent), the impact of reality TV, bitchy magazine and TV entertainment editorials** which constantly take the celebs apart all add to the spike in bullying.

Children have access to a world of information, but have less maturity to deal with it. Internationally renowned neuroscientist Baroness Susan Greenfield did a survey of a group of 11 yr olds three years ago, and found that cognitively this group were two to three years behind 11 yr olds she had studied only 15 years earlier.