

# 'Shock-value' lyrics reflect the pull of commercial media

An editorial in the News Journal (March 21) advised, "Let overreacting remain the province of parents." The advice was prompted by State Rep. V. George Carey's bill to require labeling of recordings with shock-value lyrics.

The editorial had a point. You cannot set standards by legislation. On the other hand, Mr. Carey does recognize a problem. He sees, no doubt, that kids are being saturated with crude, sensa-

Kathleen Bader Lynch of Wilmington is a retired psychiatric social worker and current president of Message To The Media, an organization working for socially responsible media practices.

## ANOTHER OPINION

Kathleen Bader  
Lynch

tional entertainment because this stuff fascinates them at certain stages and sells big. It's great for the growth of recording company profits, but not for the growth of kids. Unfortunately, the problem is too complex to be solved by labeling.

Journalists today tend to write off as rabid citizens who think

that, even within a pluralistic framework, our society owes children clear moral norms and cultural ideals to guide their development. The press is prone to hoot at the idea that this is more than a private parental matter.

Nevertheless, common sense and our ethical common bonds tell us that it is a responsibility of total citizenry to care about the psychological and teaching environment in which children are growing up, to care about whether we give them healthy and helpful messages in their formative years. Their future depends on it. Human progress depends on it.

Many parents, in fact, are not competent standard setters in our

ethically confused society. Caught up in their own stresses, they are often underattentive rather than overreactive to societal pressures on their children. Many parents are struggling with their own immaturity. For thousands of unmarried teen parents, standards don't enter the picture.

Startling though it sounds, the most powerful standard setter in the lives of contemporary children is not parents but mass marketing. Research has made this abundantly clear. Commercial media have become the authority, the universal arbiter of mores, manners and morals. Unprincipled and unrestrained mass marketing married to titillating mass entertainment appears to be recreating

the culture in its own godless image.

The dominant credo of the commercial standard is anything goes if it sells, and having it all is life's greatest good. It ignores the needs and rights of children. It doesn't encourage them to think and learn, to develop their potential and their goals. It urges them to hitch their wagons to the "in" things, however foolish or demeaning they may be, because that's what they spend on; and spending is the name of the game. Insatiable consumer demand — it's the marketers' dream that runs the show.

A good look around the city and suburbs, the malls and marts

where youth congregate, reveals how effectively the media mentors have impoverished the spirit, identity and aspirations of spending-obsessed, pleasure-addicted, profoundly bored young people. It's the perfect setup for drugs, drug peddling, trouble.

Not only parents, but educators, mental and physical health specialists, church and government leaders and social policy experts ought to be looking more closely at the situation. All of these people need to address the right of children and adolescents to develop in freedom from the stunting effects of commercial exploitation.

Mr. Carey is overreacting?

\* Probably should have said: "... by legislation of this kind."

George

Your critique of this would be welcomed.  
I'm glad the paper was willing to give  
it the space. K