



September 18, 2020

Senator Mike Lee
United States Senate
361A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Lee:

Thank you for your letter inquiring about the marketing and release of the film, *Cuties*. We welcome the opportunity to address your questions and concerns regarding the film.

Cuties is an award winning, semi-autobiographical film directed by first time feature filmmaker, Maimouna Doucouré. The film captures her own experience and observations of the pressure young girls face as they grow up. Doucouré observes that, “our children should have the time to be children.” However, society and media often send the opposite message: “Our girls see that the more a woman is overly sexualized on social media, the more she is successful. Children just imitate what they see, trying to achieve the same result without understanding the meaning. It is dangerous.”¹

The film has generated discussion about social media and pre-adolescent sexualization. We welcome conversations that address the important social issues raised by this film. However, it is unfortunate that a significant volume of negative commentary has come from those who have not watched the conclusion of the film in which innocence and childhood are restored. In fact, many may be unaware that *Cuties* is a social critique *against* the sexualization of children.

Netflix opposes the exploitation of children. *Cuties* is a film that exposes and condemns the persistent problem of the sexualization of girls in society.

Cuties is a cautionary tale exposing how society encourages the sexualization of young people. It emphasizes the critical role that family and community play in the protection and development of our children. The film begins with the main character, 11 year old Amy, rebelling against the confines of her strict family by joining a troupe of girls from school, whose dance routines mimic the suggestive choreography of mature performers they see on social media. The film concludes with Amy recognizing the oppression that comes when

¹ We encourage viewing of the Director’s remarks explaining why she made the film and the extensive research she did in preparation for filming. See <https://www.netflix.com/watch/81340455>.

society normalizes the exploitation of girls and their bodies. In the end, she rejects that oppression to embrace her own childhood and innocence

Cuties is not pornographic², does not contain underage nudity³, and does not depict sexual acts, simulated or otherwise.⁴ The film does not glamorize or promote the sexualization or exploitation of children -- just the opposite. The film's central theme is that the conduct of the "Cuties" is not sexy, arousing or alluring. Rather, given their ages, it is inappropriate, shameful, and a hallmark of a cultural failing. As Doucouré explains: "It's because I saw so many things and so many issues around me lived by young girls, that I decided to make this film and sound an alarm and say, 'We need to protect our children.'"

The film shines a painful light on the message that young girls face everyday: "Sexiness is valued. Childhood is not." The film's themes and some scenes are uncomfortable and upsetting. They are supposed to be. By forcing the audience to see how society is inured to, and even encourages the sexualization of children, the film makes it impossible for viewers to ignore the consequences of exploitation that are actually occurring in our communities. In that sense, the film *Cuties* achieved what often only art can do -- it caused people to learn more and to see the world through the lens of another. It also created hard conversations that one might hope will resolve towards change and betterment of society.

For Netflix and our creative partners, the safety and well-being of children and minors on productions is paramount.

Netflix acquired *Cuties* as a finished film shortly before its premiere at this year's Sundance Film Festival. When we license a film we require, at a minimum, that the licensor warrant that filming complied with the law, including as it relates it to minors. The film's director went further to support her cast by providing resources to the child actors, including making a counselor available during filming and for after the film's release. Unfortunately, the misinformed and vitriolic social media commentary about the film has fomented threats towards the director, and we have had to provide additional security to the creator and cast to ensure their safety, and that of their families.

Cuties is a film for mature audiences. It is not designed for or intended to appeal to children.

Every title on Netflix has a maturity rating and we are committed to building and refining tools on our service to help members make informed choices about what to watch, including parental controls for families. Netflix assigned *Cuties* a TV-MA maturity rating because it

²18 U.S.C. § 2251, et seq.

³ There is a fleeting moment of nudity in the film where the lead character watches a video on social media of an older dance group and one of the older dancers in the video briefly exposes her breast. The actor in that scene is not one of the child actors, but was another actor who was of majority age at the time of filming.

⁴ See *U.S. v. Dost*, 636 F.Supp. 828 (S.D. Cal. 1986), *aff'd* 813 F.2d 1231 (9th Cir. 1987).

contains mature language. A TV-MA rating automatically excludes the film and its promotion from inclusion in any “Kids” profiles, and from any profile where parents have put in place age-based ratings limits. Members also have the option of using a PIN to block individual films or series on any profiles.

We deeply regret that the artwork and title description that initially accompanied the announcement of *Cuties*’ debut on Netflix were not reflective of the subject matter or message of the film. We removed them as they failed to properly represent the film, leading to a false narrative that the film and our promotion of it, were exploitative of minors. This was a disservice to the film’s message and we have apologized to the public and the director for the error.

Thank you again for this opportunity to address your concerns. We are happy to engage in conversations regarding the important policy and social issues raised by this film.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Garfield". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Dean Garfield
Vice President, Global Public Policy
Netflix, Inc.