



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

**Sexualisation of Girls in the Media**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 8 February 2010**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Monday, 8 February 2010  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Rishworth, Amanda, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** Yes  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Ms RISHWORTH** (Kingston) (9.04 pm)—I move:

That the House:

- (1) notes with concern the increasing sexualisation and objectification of girls in mainstream media;
- (2) recognises that both media and peer influences contribute to the sexualisation of girls including:
  - (a) television, music videos, magazines, music lyrics, movies, cartoons, clothing, toys, computer games and the internet; and
  - (b) attitudes of peers and family;
- (3) notes with concern the potential negative consequences of the sexualisation of girls on children and young adults, including negative body image, eating disorders, low self esteem, mental illness, poor physical health and gender role stereotyping;
- (4) believes further research is necessary to understand the full effects that early sexualisation and objectification of girls in the mainstream media has on children and young adults;
- (5) urges governments, publishers, broadcasters, advertisers, retailers and manufacturers to:
  - (a) work together to review and develop appropriate standards and industry guidelines to address the sexualisation of children and limit its negative impact; and
  - (b) assist parents and children to understand and manage the influence of sexualisation of girls in the mainstream media and associated negative consequences.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)**—Is the motion seconded?

**Ms Vamvakinou**—I second the motion.

**Ms RISHWORTH**—I am very pleased to rise tonight to move this motion, because the increasing sexualisation of our girls through mass media has become of increasing concern to me. Having raised this issue publicly over the last few weeks, I have come to appreciate that this is a concern shared by

many people—most of all, parents who feel that they are at a loss when it comes to moderating the images and the messages that their children are exposed to. Whether it is the Bratz dolls, who are wearing fishnets, heavy makeup and boob tubes and are targeted at young girls, the music video clips that depict women gyrating around fully clothed male singers that play alongside the Saturday morning cartoons or the pre-teen magazine ads for sexy lingerie, we have all seen confronting examples of disturbing messages that are being sent to young children through the mass media: a message that is telling women and girls that being sexy is the only thing that defines who they are.

My own decision to speak out publicly on this issue was made after watching many of my friends trying to navigate through this area with their own children. Through them I could see that ensuring that the messages that their children were exposed to were age appropriate was becoming more and more difficult. It goes without saying that it is not just children who are absorbing messages from general advertising, but what I find particularly disturbing is the increasing stronger and more persistent message being sent to girls through toys, magazines, clothes, cartoons and the internet that they need to be sexual objects. A very topical illustration of this—and this has been reported on recently—is the My-Minx website, which is gaining popularity amongst pre-teen girls. On this website young girls are encouraged to create their online profile, or avatar, selecting features like breast and lip size, as well as skin colour and hairstyle. This online persona, or Minx, is then required to be dressed and can buy lingerie and designer clothes from outlets using fake ‘pink pounds’ from an account which needs to be topped up with mobile phone credit. Having dressed their persona, users can then take their Minx to clubs, earn money by working as a stripper and increase their Minx’s happiness rating by getting plastic surgery. I think everyone in this House would find that is not the message that we want to be sending to our young children.

While adults are hopefully capable of critically reflecting on and evaluating games such as this one and other general advertising, we know that younger children are more likely to accept the behaviour depicted in these false realities and, through the mass media, more generally accept it as a norm. It is not difficult to understand and see that this exposure is

having a negative influence on both young girls' self-perceptions and relationships to peers.

The findings of research and academic work into the consequences of the sexualisation and objectification of young girls are quite alarming. In response to public concern in this area, the American Psychological Association recently outlined the impacts that it can have: negative self esteem, appearance anxiety, eating disorders, more depressed moods and depression, and negative effects on cognitive functioning. Certainly, in some accounts that I have heard these have a significant impact on a young person's life.

From the correspondence and support I have received, I know that these fears are shared by many. To mention just one, I would like to mention Mr Andrew Lines, a teacher from a school in my electorate who recently contacted me, highlighting his concerns about the effect that objectification of women in the mass media is having not on women but on the attitudes of young boys, especially in the way he sees them treat girls and women. Mr Lines's concerns have prompted him to develop a school program called The Rite Journey, which seeks to help young people develop into self-aware, responsible and resilient adults.

Since raising this issue I have been overwhelmed by the support of parents, psychologists, teachers and authors who have expressed their support and concern. In particular I would like to thank and acknowledge Dr Amy Slater, a researcher from the Flinders University near my electorate, for her assistance and patience in helping me understand some of these complex issues and the negative impacts that will be felt by the next generation. In collaboration with her colleague Professor Marika Tiggeman, Dr Slater is conducting much-needed research into the negative impacts on young people of this disturbing message. This motion before the House recognises that this is a complex issue, but it also recognises that, as a society, we need to start actively addressing this issue.