



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

ADJOURNMENT

Portrayal of Girls in the Media

SPEECH

Wednesday, 14 May 2008

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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Date Wednesday, 14 May 2008
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Questioner
Speaker Polley, Sen Helen

Source Senate
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Senator POLLEY (Tasmania) (7.11 pm)—*The incorporated speech read as follows—*

Mr President I rise in the Senate this evening to thank Women's Forum Australia for all the great work they are doing at the moment, particularly with their new magazine style research paper "Faking It".

In April I had the pleasure of attending a Get Real Forum held at the University of Tasmania, hosted by Women's Forum Australia.

I feel the forum was an excellent opportunity to discuss the issue of the portrayal of girl's bodies in advertising, marketing and popular culture.

Too often, women and girls are bombarded with unrealistic images of females which can have adverse consequences on their body image, health and wellbeing.

These unrealistic images may lead to extreme dieting, depression, anxiety, and poor self esteem.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has stressed the importance of exposing young girls to positive images of women, focusing on their contribution to their family, community and workplace, and fulfilling goals that are important to them.

Melinda Tankard-Reist of Women's Forum Australia is a leader in exposing the dangerous trends happening in society at the moment.

She has recently expressed concern about the growing number of girls wanting to have breast implants, young

teenagers seeking Brazilian waxes, and pole dancing kits for 6 year olds.

Melinda rightly states "Girls have been reduced to the sum of their body parts."

The International Journal of Eating Disorders assert that low self esteem increases the chance of developing an eating disorder.

Statistics show that approximately one in 100 adolescent girls develop anorexia nervosa.

Anorexia Nervosa is the third most common chronic illness for adolescent girls in Australia after obesity and asthma.

The incidence of Bulimia Nervosa in the Australian population is 5 in 100.

At least two studies have indicated that only about one tenth of the cases of bulimia in the community are detected.

We should be very concerned about the prevalence of eating disorders in Australia and we should be doing something about it.

Liza Berzins, researcher of eating disorders, and author of "Dying to be Thin" has stated that young girls are more afraid of becoming fat than they are of cancer, nuclear war or losing their parents.

I am concerned that we have allowed the development of a culture that is toxic to young women.

Rather than being seen as human beings, equal and deserving of respect, young women are being barraged with hyper-sexualised messages that turn them into sex objects.

As I am sure many of you can appreciate, the teenage years are hard enough with all the stereotypes and blending in with the crowd without having to worry about body image.

Melinda Tankard Reist asked her readers an important question in the Courier Mail last year in March....

Why aren't we as worried about creating an environment destructive of the physical and mental health of girls as we are about greenhouse gases?

We need to protect the innocence of our young people. Earlier this week I heard reports of 11 year olds being

addicted to gambling. How can we, as a responsible society, allow this to happen?

Why do we allow our young girls, 4 and 5 years old to wear bras, revealing and skimpy clothing, and t shirts plastered with inappropriate slogans.

Young girls should not be exposed to this overt sexual culture.

I wholeheartedly agree with Dr Amanda Gordon, President of the Australian Psychological Society.

There is nothing smart about having a 4 year old in a bra.

Dr Louise Newman, Director New South Wales Institute of Psychiatry has stated her concerns of the conflicting messages we are sending to the community.

On the one hand, we're telling people that children need to be protected - that paedophilia is regarded as one of the most heinous crimes - on the other hand we allow advertisers and marketers to present images and saturate our media with images that might be sexually arousing to paedophiles."

On the internet, children, usually by mistake, come across sexual and other inappropriate content.

A recent online survey of teenage girls ran by an Australian magazine found that 7 out of 10 had accessed pornography by accident on the net.

It is unacceptable that our young people are being exposed to this inappropriate material, especially considering there is growing evidence that young people's sexual practices are changing dramatically because they are imitating what they see on the internet.

In the media this week, we have heard reports of young people playing a dangerous and potentially fatal choking game. Our kids are learning about the game on the internet, watching instructional video's on You Tube.

Medical practitioners say the choking game, which is also known as the "black-out" or "knock-out" game, provides a brief feeling of euphoria for its participants brought on by cerebral hypoxia effectively oxygen being deprived from the brain.

In the United States, 82 deaths have been attributed to the game, including the strangulation of a 12 year old boy in Colorado last month.

This is dangerous material we should be protecting our children from.

Monitoring children's Internet use is very important, and we as a Government should do all we can to protect them from the dangers online.

The Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Stephen Conroy, today announced a targeted plan to create a safer online environment for Australian children.

Although the internet has opened up a world of possibilities and benefits to Australian children, it has also exposed them

to continually emerging and evolving dangers that did not previously exist.

That is why the Australian Government has committed \$125.8 million to a comprehensive range of cyber-safety measures, including law enforcement, filtering and awareness, over the next four years.

Central to the Government's plan to make the internet a safer place for children is the introduction of Internet Service Provider (ISP) level filtering of material such as child pornography.

The ISP filtering policy is being developed through an informed and considered approach, including a laboratory trial, extensive industry consultation, and close examination of overseas models to assess their suitability for Australia.

I trust the measures put forward by the Rudd Labor Government will help protect the innocence of our young people.

The American Psychological Association recently found that sexually objectifying material contributes to significant harm to young women. "...there is evidence that sexualisation contributed to impaired cognitive performance in college-aged women, and related research suggests that viewing material that is sexually objectifying can contribute to body dissatisfaction, eating disorders, low self-esteem, depressive affect, and even physical health problems in high-school-aged girls and in young women.

"In addition to leading to feelings of shame and anxiety, sexualising treatment and self-objectification can generate feelings of disgust toward one's physical self.

Girls may feel they are "ugly" and "gross" or untouchable....strong empirical evidence indicates that exposure to ideals of sexual attractiveness in the media is associated with greater body dissatisfaction among girls and young women.

The Australian Childhood foundation has commented that Childhood is "shrinking", stating that we are exposing our children to adult concepts that they can't manage and are developmentally inappropriate.

Girls are told early their bodies aren't good enough - they need continual upgrade and enhancement.

We need to seriously rethink the way society is pre-sexualising young girls.

I urge the young women of Australia to stop fixating on their so called flaws. In particular, I ask that mothers talk to their daughters about chasing the illusion of a so called perfect body.

All that should matter is that we are happy and healthy.