



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2009 - 2014

Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

2012/2047(INI)

20.6.2012

DRAFT REPORT

on the sexualisation of girls
(2012/2047(INI))

Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

Rapporteur: Joanna Katarzyna Skrzydlewska

CONTENTS

	Page
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION.....	3
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT.....	8

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the sexualisation of girls (2012/2047(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 1, 3, 11, 23, 24 and 32 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
- having regard to the 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),
- having regard to Articles 2 and 17 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child,
- having regard to the Commission Report of 2010 on the equality between women and men (COM(2009)0694),
- having regard to the communication from the Commission entitled ‘Strategy for equality between women and men 2010–2015’ (COM(2010)0491),
- having regard to the Commission document on protecting children in the digital world (COM(2011)0556),
- having regard to the European Strategy for a Better Internet for Children (COM(2012)0196),
- having regard to the European Pact for gender equality (2011–2020), adopted by the European Council in March 2011,
- having regard to its resolution of 10 February 2010 on the equality of women and men in the European Union – 2009¹ and of 8 March 2011 on the equality of women and men in the European Union – 2010²,
- having regard to its resolution of 17 June 2010 on assessment of the result of the 2006–2010 Roadmap for Equality between women and men and forward looking recommendations³,
- having regard to its resolution of 12 March 2009 on the protection of consumers, in particular minors, in respect of the use of video games⁴,
- having regard to Article 48 of the Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality

¹ OJ C 341E of 16.12.2010, p. 35. 35.

² Texts adopted, of 8.3.2011, P7_TA(2011)0085.

³ OJ C 236E, 12.8.2011, p. 87.

⁴ OJ C 87E, 1.4.2010, p. 122.

(A7-0000/2012),

- A. whereas significant manifestations of sexualisation impact adversely on the psychophysical development of girls, distort peer relationships and weaken the ability to build healthy relationships, reduce self-esteem and cause a series of psychologically based eating disorders, lead to self-objectification, restrict choice of professional aspirations, and increase the probability of aggressive behaviour towards girls;
- B. whereas the number of children using the internet is growing while it has been noted that the age threshold at which children begin using the internet with little parental control is becoming lower, as a result of which the age at which children first encounter pornography is also decreasing;
- C. whereas besides the eroticised imagery of women used in advertising an increase in the number of sexually charged images of children in that industry has been noted;
- D. whereas the transformation of teenage stars into sex symbols in order to increase their chance of success in show business leads to establishing a conviction among girls that being sexually attractive causes others to perceive such a person as being more mature;
- E. whereas degrading the value of women and presenting their image in a manner derogatory to their dignity, being a manifestation of sexualisation, contribute to an increase in violence against women, and to the intensification of sexist attitudes and outlooks, which in the long term lead to discrimination against women as employees, sexual harassment and to undervaluing their work and achievements;
- F. whereas in television programmes, computer games and musical video clips there is an increasingly noticeable tendency to present provocatively dressed women, in sexual poses, and the lyrics of songs for young people contain sexually suggestive content;
- G. whereas clothing manufacturers offer girls scaled-down versions of clothing appropriate for grown women, which leads to a situation in which they are perceived by the outside world as being more grown up than they actually are;

The subject of sexualisation

- H. whereas the subject under consideration in this report is girls between 6 and 13 years of age, and the impact sexualisation has on the development of their personality in the broadest sense of the term, and that the aim is to define the notion of sexualisation and to provide recommendations for the parties directly or indirectly affected by the problem, in order to scale down this effect and to counteract the adverse consequences thereof;

The definition of sexualisation

- I. whereas sexualisation consists of an instrumental approach to a person by perceiving that person as an object for sexual use disregarding the person's dignity and personality traits, with the person's worth being measured in terms of the level of sexual attractiveness; sexualisation also involves the imposition of the sexuality of adult persons on girls, who are emotionally, psychologically and physically unprepared for this at their particular

stage of development; sexualisation not being the normal, healthy, biological development of the sexuality of a person, conditioned by the individual process of development and taking place at the appropriate time for each particular individual;

Recommendations

1. Notes that a series of integrated actions must be taken in order to broaden the horizons and develop the outlooks of small girls and boys in relation to their guiding values, by means of deliberate strategies to protect children from the process of sexualisation and objectification and to create new tools and spaces where young persons will be able to develop and discover their sexuality at an appropriate time and in their own way;
2. Notes that parents as the first source of authority and the persons closest to their children should influence the shaping of children's attitudes towards the issues of gender and sexuality, and also support them in coping with and placing eroticised imagery and content in a broader context;
3. Alerts parents not to heighten the self-objectification of girls through their behaviour by encouraging girls to participate in beauty contests, to attach undue importance to appearance, and at a later stage, by permitting the use of cosmetic surgery in order to improve self-esteem;
4. Notes that a particular effort is called for to make parents, carers and teachers aware that computer games are full of sexualising content, that children using them manifest increased levels of aggression, that sexual violence patterns are perpetuated and that the objectification of women increases exponentially;
5. Calls for a wide dissemination of ratings under the Pan-European Game Information system (PEGI), which allows parents to check the content of computer games and adapt them to a child's age, and calls for an expansion of the ratings under that system to cover sexualising content;
6. Encourages the introduction into school curricula for children between 6 and 13 years of age of programmes aimed at developing children's ability to use the media, at enhancing their capacity to think critically and select from the information available, and at enabling them to acquire an understanding of marketing techniques;
7. Recommends the introduction into school curricula, in cooperation with parents and under their control, of a subject entitled: 'Preparation for family life with elements of sexual education', which will prepare young girls and boys to develop healthy, respectful and emotionally satisfying relationships;
8. Calls for appropriate preparation of teachers through essential training in the area of gender equality, detection of and reaction to various types of abuse connected therewith and to sexual violence;

9. Notes that staff providing psychological support in schools should be appropriately prepared to deal with problems related to sexualisation;
10. Encourages the governments of Member States to engage in dialogue with internet service providers, consumer organisations, social organisations and parents' organisations in order to define the sexualisation effect and its impact on child development, and to influence cultural standards concerning sexual behaviour and attitudes;
11. Calls upon the governments of Member States to establish cooperation with internet service providers in order to block access to websites promoting anorexia ('pro-ana') and bulimia ('pro-mia') and to delete or, where that is not possible, to block websites containing child pornography;
12. Calls upon Member States to create websites containing information targeted at parents and concerning commercial standards regarding the marketing of products intended for children in conjunction with a system for easy on-line submission of complaints to appropriate monitoring authorities;
13. Encourages Member States to draw on good practices and solutions devised for example in the United Kingdom and to ensure by appropriate legal measures, that parents' organisations' views on child welfare are taken into account where binding standards in the advertising industry are concerned;
14. Encourages Member States to control access to advertising with a sexual content, the recipients of which may be children, and to prohibit the use of children as brand ambassadors;
15. Encourages Member States to establish cooperation with manufacturers of goods intended for children, including clothing and toys, in order to develop a code of best practice that provides for child welfare and promotes high ethical standards;
16. Calls on the Commission to prepare statistical data in the context of sexualisation covering areas such as: the saturation with erotic content of television programmes potentially accessible to children, the level of sexual violence in schools, the level of violence and of content derogatory to women's dignity in computer games, children's access to the internet, beginning with the youngest age groups, trends in the use of new media and the exploitation of images of girls in advertising;
17. Calls on the Commission to develop tools enabling parents to control and filter content accessible to children within the scope of the introduction of the 'Safe Internet' programme, and calls for similar solutions to be put in place regarding mobile phones, smartphones and mobile devices with access to the internet;
18. Calls on the Commission to take into account, in the programmes being developed in respect of gender equality and non-discrimination, of the impact of sexualising content on the psychology and development of girls, and in the context of society as a whole, of the entrenchment of discriminatory stereotypes as a consequence of this phenomenon;

19. Encourages the Commission to promote and propagate good practices and standards already individually developed in certain EU countries, such as the United Kingdom and France, arising from an awareness of the problem and a well-developed sense of social corporate responsibility, and involving the introduction of self-regulation, for example;
20. Calls on the Commission to assist Member States in combating sexualisation not only by compiling the necessary data, promoting good practices and organising information campaigns, but also by providing financial support for actions taken in the Member States;
21. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and to the Commission.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

We are living at a time when eroticised content is easily available not only to adults but also to children. Easy access to sexually charged imagery has led to an intensification of the sexualisation effect, which consists of perceiving a person solely through the prism of that person's sexual attractiveness, identified as physical attractiveness. It has also led to objectifying the person, which means perceiving the person as an object for sexual use. With regard to girls, this translates first and foremost into the attribution of the sexual characteristics of adult women. At the same time as individuals cease to be perceived as persons, a space is created which facilitates abuse, aggressive sexual behaviour, and violence. When attempting to understand the sexualisation effect, the latter should be perceived in its cultural context and an effort made to understand just how dangerous this effect is, especially nowadays, when oversaturation with eroticised imagery is greater than ever. Young persons and children have unrestricted access to content inappropriate for their age, published inter alia on the internet, television, and in video games. The impact of such content on the everyday life of children and on their development is enormous and one of its consequences is the perception of children as sexual objects.

When considering sexualisation, it must be noted that this notion is often confused with the notion of an individual's sexuality, which is a part of every individual's normal development and a factor motivating the individual concerned to establish positive and healthy relationships with other people. Sexuality is shaped by biological, psychological, and socio-cultural factors, which is why the environment in which an individual reaches maturity is so important. Growing up in a culture which accepts sexualisation, children and young people encounter content that they are not cognitively and emotionally ready to internalise.

During puberty, children and young people find themselves under pressure generated by eroticised and retouched pictures illustrating the desired 'sexy' and 'appealing' look. The ideal physical look presented is unrealistic and therefore impossible to attain. Ongoing exposure to such imagery leads to constant monitoring of one's body and to comparing one's own appearance with the look presented in the media. This then results in the development of depression, low self-esteem and eating disorders. Surveys clearly indicate the adverse impact of sexualisation on children and young people, especially on girls.

Magazines are one of the main sources of eroticised imagery and content. They constitute an important point of reference for young girls building their own identity. The trend evident in magazines involves promoting women's sexual attractiveness and impressing it on them that men's interest in women is awakened only and exclusively through physical appearance. It is becoming increasingly common for children and especially girls to appear as models in such magazines, which means that the presentation of children as sexual objects is becoming the norm. This may be contributing to the increased incidence of sexual abuse of children.

The presentation of women on the television is another issue to be considered. In the case of that medium, many more adverse consequences of sexualisation must be assessed, as television shows not only images but also patterns of behaviour. Studies indicate that there is a steady increase in the number of scenes showing sexual violence appearing on the television and in the cinema. Furthermore, the presentation of women as objects controlled by men whose sole purpose is to satisfy men's needs has a significant impact on the behaviour and development of girls, who absorb the content of such films and model themselves upon it. This leads to low self-esteem, withdrawal and lack of ambition, and therefore has serious consequences for adult life, particularly as regards establishing relationships and building a professional career. Stereotypical presentation of women and over-exposure to scenes of

violence results in a series of negative outcomes such as sexist attitudes, discriminatory views, discrimination against women in the workplace and refusal to recognise their skills and professional qualifications.

The internet is undeniably the medium which makes the greatest contribution to the dissemination of the sexualisation effect. The complex nature of the internet means that it often escapes the control of parents and teachers, who can be unaware of the nature of the content accessed by children. Even if children do not have direct access to inappropriate content because parental control filters are in place, they are still able to receive such content through e-mail accounts or mobile telephones. A particularly negative development involves children posting their own sexually charged photographs of themselves, which clearly illustrates the significant and widespread impact of content presented in the media in terms of its effect on the behaviour of children and young people. It should be borne in mind that by presenting photographs of themselves in provocative and sexual poses, children, and especially girls, risk awakening the interest of adults, who may attempt to establish a sexual relationship with them. Surveys conducted in the United Kingdom clearly show that children surfing the internet often encounter pornographic websites and that pornographic content is mainly disseminated using mobile telephones. In recent years, incidents of sexual violence and harassment have become commonplace. When such incidents are recorded using a mobile telephone, they can become a means of exerting control, often contributing to the victim's depression and withdrawal or, in extreme cases, even to the victim's suicide.

Computer games are another issue that should not be overlooked when considering sexualisation. The games are perceived as a form of relaxation for children and young people, and are not subject to control by adults, who are frequently unaware that computer games are filled with inappropriate content, often of a sexual nature. The computer game market is becoming full of products designed with the idea of enabling the player to engage in sexual behaviour or commit sexual violence against women, inter alia rape. Computer games differ from other media, in that they enable children to create alternative identities and to interact in violent ways. Bearing in mind the limited cognitive abilities of children at the early stages of their development, it is obvious that children may easily confuse the reality presented in a computer game with the reality of everyday life and transpose into the latter the behaviour they engage in during a game. This often results in aggressive sexual behaviour.

The sexualisation effect may be found also in advertising, which is closely connected to the clothing industry and has a significant impact on the latter. The image of women created in advertising is a distorted one, which results in gender stereotypes becoming entrenched in society. Ever-younger models are being used to present clothing intended for adults. This encourages clothing manufacturers to create lines of clothing for girls in the style of clothing for women, thongs or push-up brassieres for example. When young girls wear garments of this nature they are perceived as grown women and attention is drawn to sexual characteristics they do not yet possess. This can lead to adult men having similar expectations of young girls as they have of grown women. The result can be objectification of the female body, reinforcement of female stereotypes, and also incitement for small girls to be treated as objects of male desire.

From the above it clearly follows that many of the issues addressed by the European Parliament, such as gender discrimination, unequal pay, the intensification of sexual violence and the problem of pornography are largely due to the increasingly widespread sexualisation of life in our society.