

Of child beauty pageants, Chantal Jouanno stated that young girls were being “disguised as sexual candy in a competition over appearance, beauty and seduction”, which she said was “contrary to the dignity of the human being” and “a step backwards in the battle for sex equality.” (Chantal Jouanno, a senator and former sports minister of France, 2012)



Not all pageants sexualise, but all of them objectify – how can we tell the difference?

***The Australian Psychological Society's definition of sexualisation:***

*"Sexualisation occurs when a person's worth is judged on the basis of sexual appeal and behaviour to the exclusion of other characteristics, when a person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness with being sexy, or when a person is seen as a sexual object rather than a person with their own independent thoughts and behaviour."*



**Sexualising clues**

Is the child presented in an 'adultified' fashion?

1. Do the graphics and stylized content of the image fly in the face of what we know of child development principles of 20<sup>th</sup> century theorists?
2. Do the advertised images, slogans or activities assume that children function like adults do?
3. Does the dress imply that sexual attractiveness ought to be a part of the childhood experience?



**Objectification clues**

Are the values implicit in the activity or image, encouraging physical appearance as intrinsic to self-esteem and social worth?



**FOUR regular arguments by pro-pageant groups**

## **Argument 1:** Pageants increase self-confidence

### **Reality 1:**

- There is evidence which indicates that rather than build self-confidence, these activities have damaging effects on girls as they grow up.
- The risks to self-confidence far outweigh any potential gains.
- It is indicated that, '(Although) many pageant parents attributed their daughters' higher self-esteem to pageantry, the high self-esteem was mostly true for girls who won the pageants. Girls who lost more than they won had lower levels of self-esteem.' (Dr. Pannell-Longard)



There are far healthier options for girls to develop confidence and public speaking skills.

## **Argument 2:** Pageants are just like any other sport.

It's rather telling how we think about gender, that we construct beauty as a sport.

### **Reality 2:**

- Girls that play sport or do a craft can get a tutor, work hard at fine tuning their skills or try out a new activity altogether.
- Beauty pageants do not encourage girls to value intrinsic competencies or skills; they incidentally teach that happiness or achievement are dependent upon how people judge them, outwardly.



VS



**Argument 3:**  
Little girls love to dress up.

**Reality 3:**

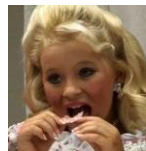
- Pageant dressing up is not at all equal to regular childhood role-play.
- Pageants are concerned with comparison to other children's dress, hair, nails and make-up.
- Girls learn that value lies not in the qualities of a character they may play, but in how that character looks.
- Pageants push children into an adult world far too early.



**Argument 4:**  
We still teach our daughter that inner  
beauty is most important.

**Reality 4:**

- What a paradox! This underlying message mismatches the overt message.
- Children are given confusing messages when entered into pageants, where outward beauty is judged and rewarded.



"Pageants judge girls and women very narrowly. Those ideas are insidious and they do real damage to real girls and women."  
(Andi Stepnick, Assoc professor)

On a cultural level, when we sexualise the female child, we chip away at the norms that define children as off limits to male sexual use.

(Prof. Gail Dines, Author of Pornland)



### Possible outcomes of Child Pageantry:

- "Having a **good body image** is a **crucial building block** for kids to be healthy and happy ... children's ability to feel good about themselves is being undermined by the increasing sexualisation of our society, where a person's value is becoming more and **more reliant on their physical attractiveness and sexual appeal.**" (Australian Medical Association president Dr. Steve Hambleton)
- "There is strong evidence that premature sexualisation is likely to be **detrimental to child health and development**, particularly in the areas of **body image and sexual health,**"
- "Direct participation and competition for a beauty prize where infants and girls are objectified and judged against sexualised ideals can have **significant mental health and developmental consequences that impact detrimentally on identity, self esteem, and body perception.**" (Dr. Kowalenko, RANCP)
- "A large body of literature links exposure to media propagated images of unrealistic body image to **eating disorders and other child and adolescent health problems.**" (Dr. McAneny AMA)

The sad truth is that our culture curbs the ambitions of young women by enforcing the idea that it is impossible to be successful without being physically appealing.

This narrow interpretation of femininity requires an entire cultural shift. It is a change that not only needs men to think differently about women, but also needs women to think differently about themselves, each other and their children.

### Take action!

- Write to senators and local MP's. Such as:  
Senator Helen Polley (Tas)  
Senator Catryna Bilyk (Tas)



- "*We need to work together. Industry, government, parents and the community need to work together to ensure that as a society we deal effectively with this important issue so that future generations of Australian boys and girls can grow and develop in an environment that promotes positive and healthy messages.*" Amanda Rishworth (Federal MP, Kinston )

Supporting Rishworth's motion were: Jill Hall, Shortland NSW; Kirsten Livermore, Capricornia Qld; Sophie Mirabella, Indi Vic, Lib; Kelly O'Dwyer, Higgins Vic, Lib; Laura Smyth, Latrobe Vic; Luke Simpkins, Cowan, WA, Lib; Deborah O'Neill, Robertson, NSW, ALP; Jane Prentice, Ryan, Qld Lib.

- "*The failure of self-regulation to protect children from sexualised advertising means other measures must be looked at. He has called for a fresh inquiry into the sexualisation of children, backed by a firm regulatory response to rein in the excesses of the industry and let children have a childhood.*" Dr. Hambleton

