

OBJECT

Women not
Sex Objects

Lads' mags FAQ

What exactly are you campaigning for?

We are campaigning for lads' mags and newspapers like the Sport to be recognised and regulated as part of the porn industry and not displayed at eye level next to magazines, comics and broadsheet newspapers as if they were a normal part of the mainstream media.

We think that if lads' mags and newspapers like the Sport are sold at all that they should be covered up, put on the top shelf and that age restrictions should be applied. This would send out the message that as a society we do not think that it is acceptable for women to be objectified, demeaned and degraded and that we do not condone it as part of our mainstream media.

Why do you say that lads' mags are part of the porn industry?

Links to hardcore pornography and prostitution are made explicit in the pages of ads at the back of every lads' mag and essentially the entire content of The Sport (which comprises thousands of ads for hard core porn, sex chat, masseurs and escorts). But even without these direct links, the purpose of lads' mags and papers like the Sport is to sexually stimulate male readers by turning women into sexual objects who are always sexually available and who represent the 'porn dream'. Lads' mags also publish articles specifically about pornography. For example, in 2006 Zoo published an A – Z of pornography which included wrapping your girlfriend in cling film and defecating on her. It also included lots of references to women as the 'B' word with advice on how to deal with your 'B' if she doesn't comply. It is clear that these publications are part of the sex and porn industries and they should be recognised and regulated as such to take into account the harmful effect that they have on how women are viewed.

Aren't lad's mags just a bit of harmless fun?

Lads' mags provide sexual stimulation by portraying women as sexual objects who are always sexually available and whose purpose is to fulfil the sexual fantasies of men. They are directly linked to hardcore pornography

and prostitution through their advertising and they constantly trivialise or make fun of issues like rape, trafficking and prostituting women.

This is especially alarming when we consider that 66% of children and young people say that they find out about sex, love and relationships through the media (Institute of Education, 2003). Do we want young people who are shaping their sexual identities to be learning about sexuality from magazines like Maxim (2006) who advised male readers that "*most women fantasize about being raped*" and that "*it's a myth that women like soft sex*"?

But this isn't only a question of protecting children from these harmful messages. Lads' mags promote a warped view of how women are supposed to look and behave sexually which is damaging for us all, as they influence the way that men view women and the way that women view themselves. Take 2005 – the height of the lads' mag boom – when Zoo ran a competition where male readers could win breast implants for their girlfriends and Nuts started the infamous 'Assess my Breasts' competition with reader's girlfriends being encouraged to send in photographs of their breasts to be graded by male readers. In this year the number of women who had breast implants doubled (British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons, 2006).

When we live in a society in which 92% of girls under 22 say that 'they hate their bodies' (Bliss 2005), 63% of girls say that they would rather be glamour models than teachers or doctors (Manchester Online 2005), the UK spends more on cosmetic surgery than any other EU country - of which approximately 90% is spent by women (Intel, 2008), 1 in 4 women are raped in their lifetime with 92% of rapes committed by 'ordinary' boys and men who are known to the woman (Kelly, Lovett and Regan; 2005), and the positions of power in society are still overwhelmingly dominated by men, can we really say with confidence that portraying women as sexual objects is just harmless fun and has no effect whatsoever on the attitudes behind these statistics?

But women choose to do it?

Indeed 63% of girls say that they would rather be glamour models than teachers or doctors. We find these findings quite alarming as it says a great deal about the kinds of aspirations that are being held out for women in our society.

But glamour models make a lot of money?

Out of the thousands of women who aspire to be glamour models, very, very few actually 'make it'.

Even if it were the case that every women who aspired to be a glamour model 'got rich', what would that say about our society if the majority of women (the 63% who aspire to this profession) stripped off to look sexy as their profession whilst all the positions of power were still overwhelmingly dominated by men? Is that the kind of society that we want?

Surely we need to question why girls are aspiring to be glamour models rather than politicians, teachers, doctors or any other position of real influence. Here we have to look at the way that publications such as lads' mags glamorise the porn industry.

What about freedom of speech/censorship?

This is an equality issue not an issue of freedom of speech. In the same way that boycotting / not giving a platform to racist views is making a political decision to challenge deeply entrenched racism, boycotting and not giving a platform to sexist views is a way of challenging deeply entrenched sexism. Opposing the sexist portrayal of women in the media is taking a political stance against sexism, it is not censorship.

Does opposing lad's mags mean you are anti-sex?

Challenging the pornification of society and sex object culture does not make you anti-sex, it just means that you are pointing out the danger of continuing to represent women as sex objects who are always sexually available in a culture in which sexual violence is so endemic. It makes you **anti-sexism, not anti-sex.**

Wouldn't these regulations take us back to the Dark Ages?

These measures are about recognising and regulating publications like lad's mags and The Sport for what they are and recognising the harmful effects of mainstreaming pornography and the sexual objectification of women.

The issue of challenging the objectification of women is an issue of equality which is a progressive ideal. It is the sexist attitudes that lads' mags promote that belong in the past.

Why is the objectification of women an issue?

Objectification dehumanises women. The first part of any oppression is to dehumanise the group which is oppressed. The more it becomes acceptable to view women as a sum of body parts, over which men have entitlement,

the easier it becomes to disrespect, to mistreat and to act out violence and sexual harassment towards women as a group.

We are not saying that all men who read degrading materials about women will have sexist views, let alone be abusive or violent, but when we live in a society in which gender inequality is massive and violence against women is endemic - with 1 in 4 women raped in her lifetime and 2 women dying each week from domestic violence (Rape Crisis) – any industry which promotes the objectification of women inevitably has an impact on the sexist attitudes which underpin abuse and cannot be said to be harmless.

Bliss Magazine (2005) [Survey](#) of 2000 young people on body image and self-esteem

Buckingham and Bragg (2003) *Young people, media and personal relationships*, Institute of Education

Kelly, L, Lovett, J., and Regan, L. (2005) *A gap or a chasm? Attrition in reported rape cases*, Child and Women Abuse Studies Unit. Home Office Research Study 293.

Manchester Online (2005) *Naked ambition rubs off on teen girls*

[Mintel](#) (2008) *Brits demand a daily dose of cosmetic surgery*

The British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (2006) [Press release](#) on cosmetic surgery increase

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