



OBJECT BRIEFING

Key points to include in policy consultations on ending violence against women

The *End Violence Against Women Coalition*¹ has campaigned since 2004 for a cross-government integrated strategy to tackle endemic violence against women. This campaigning has paid off – in the last few months various strategies to tackle violence against women have been proposed.

- **April 2009:** The Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, launched ‘The way forward: a call for action to end violence against women’ – setting out a proposed programme of action². *Deadline for responses is July 20th 2009.
- **March 2009:** The Home Office published ‘*Together we can end violence against women*’ consultation paper on a cross-governmental strategy³. *Deadline for responses is May 29th 2009.
- **December 2008:** The Conservative Party published ‘*Ending Violence Against Women*’ strategy paper for a cross-governmental strategy⁴.

It is **vital** that any strategy includes **firm action to tackle the sexualisation of women and girls in the media and popular culture** – as has been pointed out by EVAW in every ‘Making the Grade report’ since 2005. Like OBJECT, EVAW firmly links the increasing sexualisation of women to the mainstreaming of the sex industry⁵. The following table shows current gaps in policy proposals to tackle violence against women:

Policy Proposal	Addresses sexualisation of women and girls	Addresses mainstreaming of the sex industry
Mayor of London: “ <i>The way forward: a call for action to end violence against women</i> ”	No	Yes: calls for tougher action on lap dancing clubs and cutting demand for prostitution
Home Office: “ <i>Together we can</i> ”	Yes: consultation includes a “fact-finding review into the	No: the consultation solely details <i>other</i> policy work

<i>end violence against women”</i>	increasing ‘sexualisation’ of teenage girls” and invites responses to the question “ <i>Is there a link between sexualised images, perceptions and actual violence?</i> ”	undertaken to tackle trafficking
Conservative Party: <i>“Ending Violence Against Women”</i>	Yes: “we must be honest about the growing sexualisation of our society, and be sensitive to the way in which women are portrayed in the media”. <i>However no clarification of what this would entail.</i>	Yes: although this is limited to tackling trafficking “We will also look at targeting potential ‘consumers’ and ‘employers’ through public campaigns in order to highlight the suffering caused by forced labour and prostitution”.

Key points relating to the sexualisation of women to include in your response:

- Use the above table to either welcome the inclusion of the sexualisation of women in the relevant policy consultation or raise concern over its absence.
- Draw attention to the prevalence and increased sexualisation of women and girls in the media and popular culture. This is occurring across television, video games, the internet, film, advertising, clothing, products, animated cartoons, magazines and news – and is linked to the increased mainstreaming of pornography and ‘porno-chic’ **(you could use our briefing ‘*Joining up the Dots*’ to illustrate this and give examples).**
- Raise concern over the impact of gendered sexualisation. A growing body of research has firmly linked the sexual objectification of women and girls to a negative effect on individual health and well being- with increased sexualisation leading to severe dissatisfaction over body image and self esteem; high rates of eating disorders among women and girls; rising levels of women turning to plastic surgery and increased incidences of sexual bullying and damaging sexual relations between young people.
- The sexual objectification of women is also linked to the promotion and reinforcement of sexist attitudes – via exposure to media which overwhelmingly contains gender stereotyping and affects perceptions of all women. This has significant overlap with racism via the objectification of women according to their ethnicity. Finally a large body of evidence demonstrates the connection between the sexualisation of women in the media and popular culture with violence against women. **You can use our briefing ‘*Joining up the Dots*’ to illustrate all these points.**
- In this context it is of absolute importance that the government takes strong, effective action to tackle the sexualisation of women and girls in the media and popular culture and this must form a crucial part of any prevention strategy.

- Popular arguments against such action are centred around the human right to freedom of expression. However, such a right must be weighed against the need and importance of taking effective steps to protect the human right of women and girls to live their lives free of gender-based violence and discrimination.
- The current UK framework heavily prioritises the right to freedom of expression – ignoring the fact that regulation of the media is not solely about freedom of expression but is also about economics. In terms of gender equality and reducing violence against women the media currently faces no meaningful obligations or incentives yet it is increasingly clear that market forces alone cannot guarantee socially just outcomes.
- To this end any Violence Against Women policy should include the following measures:

Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)

- Gender equality to be mainstreamed into media regulation – at present concerns relating to the sexualisation of women are judged solely on the grounds of obscenity and decency. This must be extended to **gender equality** by bodies such as OFCOM and ASA.
- This regulation should be enacted via **legislation**. Voluntary ‘codes’ have proved meaningless in relation to a long-term impact⁶.
- Anti-racial discrimination measures for the media (such as those in the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006) should be extended to include anti-sex discrimination measures so that gender hate speech is recognised as an offence.
- Positive incentives for improved media representation to be enacted. In Spain the Government has created Gender Equality media watchdogs and awards for positive gender reporting in the media⁷. Similar steps should be taken in the UK to improve accountability and provide models of best practice.

Department for Children, Schools and Family

- National Curriculum to include media literacy from a gendered perspective to equip young women and men with the tools to identify gender stereotyping and distorted coverage of gender roles.
- Sex Education to include information on pornography to counter its impact and influence on sexual relations and sexist attitudes.

Home Office

- Lap dancing clubs are currently licensed in the same way as cafes and karaoke bars – preventing any concerns related to sexism or gender equality from being raised. Increasing normalisation of the sex industry should be challenged by ensuring lap

dancing licensing reforms apply universally across England and Wales and apply to all lap dancing venues – regardless of how frequently lap dancing is occurring. Licensing reforms must deliver real change and ensure that all lap dancing activities are subject to Sex Encounter Venue licensing.

- Prostitution is a form of violence against women and the commodification of women through prostitution contributes to the sexualisation of women in wider society. Crucially many women, children and men experience abuse and exploitation in prostitution and face poor access to exit services. The Home Office should ensure that prostitution is included in any cross-governmental violence against women strategy – to ensure that sustainable funding is given to exit services and to ensure that firm measures are taken to tackle the demand for prostitution. This should be linked to other policy developments in this area – as currently proposed in the Policing and Crime Bill – which form an important first step towards adopting ‘Nordic’ policy on prostitution. This approach decriminalises all persons selling sexual acts whilst criminalising the buyers of sexual acts and providing generous exit strategies. The Home Office should introduce legislation which *fully* matches this approach – current proposals go only part of the way by criminalising the purchase of sexual acts from persons “subject to force”.

Department for Work and Pensions

- Since 2003 Jobcentre Plus has carried adverts for positions as ‘lap dancers’, ‘masseuruses’, strip webcam performers and ‘escorts’. It is well known that ‘massage parlour’ and ‘escort agency’ are euphemisms for prostitution and it is extremely alarming that government job agencies are legitimising the exploitation and abuse experienced by many women and girls in prostitution. This also legitimises attitudes described in this report linked to the sexualisation of women and girls. OBJECT urges the Department for Work and Pensions to reverse this policy⁸.

For more information about OBJECT please go to www.object.org.uk or email sandrine@object.org.uk

END NOTES

¹ <http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/>

² <http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/crime/vaw/>

³ <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/cons-2009-vaw/>

⁴ http://www.conservatives.com/News/Blogs/~/_media/Files/Policy%20Documents/violence-against-women.ashx

⁵ EAW *Making the Grade* 2005, 2006, 2007 & Realising Rights, Fulfilling Obligations: A Template for an Integrated Strategy on Violence Against Women for the UK2008: <http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/pages/resources.html>

⁶ See http://www.object.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=17&Itemid=33

⁷ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A6-2008-0199+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

⁸ For more information please see our briefing on this topic <http://www.object.org.uk/index.php/job-agency-and-ads-for-sex-industry>