

## **‘Just the Women’\***

**An evaluation of eleven British national newspapers’ portrayal of women over a two week period in September 2012, including recommendations on press regulation reform in order to reduce harm to, and discrimination against, women**



**A joint report by:  
Eaves  
End Violence Against Women Coalition  
Equality Now  
OBJECT**

**November 2012**

\* 'just the women' is what Newsnight editor Peter Rippon reportedly wrote in an email to a colleague concerning the lack of other authorities for evidence of Jimmy Savile's abuse

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## INTRODUCTION

The Leveson Inquiry was announced in July 2011 after months of allegations and revelations about press conduct. Although perhaps focused on phone hacking and relationships between the media, the police and politicians, the Inquiry's actual terms of reference are broad<sup>1</sup>. They include:

*"To inquire into the culture, practices, and ethics of the press...:*

*"To make recommendations:*

*"For a new more effective policy and regulatory regime which supports the integrity and freedom of the press, the plurality of the media, and its independence, including from Government, while encouraging the highest ethical and professional standards."*

Women's rights advocates have long been concerned with the potential for the media to create, reinforce, perpetuate, or alternatively challenge, sexism and discrimination, and were heartened to see the Leveson Inquiry make a call for submissions which would shed light on the way newsrooms operate; the training that journalists receive; whether the general law which individuals are subject to is adequate for press regulation; and the relationship between democracy and a free press. As such, our four organisations made written submissions to the Inquiry last December<sup>2</sup> and were pleased to be asked to give oral evidence in January of this year.

Our submissions focused on the representation of women, and violence against women in particular, within the British press. We argued that much current newspaper reporting about crimes of violence against women promotes and reinforces myths and stereotypes about abuse (such as 'real' and 'deserving' victims, 'provoked' or 'tragic' perpetrators etc.); is often inaccurate; and does not give context about the true scale of violence against women and girls (VAWG), or the culture in which it occurs. Such reporting can tend towards the normalisation, eroticisation and even condoning of VAWG. It sends a message to survivors of abuse that they will not be believed<sup>3</sup> or that what happened to them will not be taken seriously, and it tells potential perpetrators that their actions will not be sanctioned. As the Crown Prosecution Service<sup>4</sup> stated shortly after we gave evidence to the Inquiry, this prejudicial reporting may seriously undermine the justice system by having an impact on jurors' decision-making.

Around the same time we made our submissions, Kira Cochrane of the Guardian newspaper published an article<sup>5</sup> (Guardian, 4 December 2011) outlining that in a typical month 78% of newspaper articles are written by men, 72% of BBC Question Time contributors are men, and 84% of reporters and guests on BBC Radio 4's Today show are men. This male-dominance of the media further illustrates the importance of examining the portrayal of women in the press.

We note that the Inquiry is taking place at a time when the Home Office is leading a cross-departmental strategy, *Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls*, which has preventing violence against women and girls as a key objective. There is much evidence about the media's role in providing a conducive context for violence against women to occur by

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<sup>1</sup> See Leveson TOR: <http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/about/terms-of-reference/>

<sup>2</sup> See evidence pages of the Leveson Inquiry website or our own websites

<sup>3</sup> 70% of respondents to a Mumsnet survey felt the media is unsympathetic to women who report rape

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2012/jan/30/rape-victims-acquittals-chief-prosecutor>

<sup>5</sup> "Why is British public life dominated by men?" The Guardian, 4 December 2011

condoning, tolerating and normalising the abuse of women. The Home Affairs Committee is currently conducting an Inquiry into 'Localised child grooming'<sup>6</sup> and has heard evidence from Deputy Children's Commissioner, Sue Berelowitz, about the impact that pornography has on young men's attitudes and behaviours<sup>7</sup>, with the Director of Public Prosecutions, Keir Starmer, also speaking out about this issue<sup>8</sup>. Following several government-commissioned reviews, the Coalition Government is taking action to limit the harms of sexualisation on children, as are other countries, and Ofcom and the Advertising Standards Authority are also addressing these issues in their regulatory work. The importance of ensuring that this portrayal of women in the press, and prejudicial reporting of violence against women, is also addressed within debates regarding media reform is therefore clear. This is especially relevant given the endemic nature of violence against women and girls in our society, and the alarming level of victim-blaming myths and attitudes that accompany it.

### **The scale of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in the UK and public attitudes towards it**

- Almost one in three girls have experienced unwanted sexual touching at school (EVAW Coalition, 2010).
- Every year one million women experience at least one incident of domestic violence – nearly 20,000 women a week (Home Office, 2009).
- 3.7 million women in England and Wales have been sexually assaulted at some point since the age of 16 (Home Office, 2009).
- In 2011, there were 1468 instances where the Forced Marriage Unit gave advice or support related to a possible forced marriage, the majority involving women and girls (FCO website).
- It is estimated that of 17,000 migrant women involved in off-street prostitution in England and Wales, 2,600 have been trafficked and 9,200 are vulnerable migrants who may be further victims of trafficking (ACPO, 2010).
- 20 per cent of women say they have experienced stalking at some point since the age of 16 (Home Office, 2009).
- It is estimated that over 20,000 girls under 15 in England and Wales are at risk of female genital mutilation each year (Forward).

Violence against women and girls cannot be prevented unless the attitudes that excuse and normalise violence are changed. These include:

- 36 per cent of people believe that a woman should be held wholly or partly responsible for being sexually assaulted or raped if she was drunk, and 26 per cent if she was in public wearing sexy or revealing clothes (Home Office, 2009).
- One in five people think it would be acceptable in certain circumstances for a

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/home-affairs-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/childgrooming/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmhaff/uc182-i/uc18201.htm>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/9379401/Teenager-relationship-violence-link-to-internet-pornography-admits-Keir-Starmer.html>

man to hit or slap his female partner in response to her being dressed in sexy or revealing clothing in public (Home Office, 2009).

- Almost half (43 per cent) of teenage girls believe that it is acceptable for a boyfriend to be aggressive towards his partner (NSPCC, 2005).
- 1 in 2 boys and 1 in 3 girls believe that there are some circumstances when it is okay to hit a woman or force her to have sex (Zero Tolerance, 1998).

### **The impact of our evidence**

At the time of writing, Lord Justice Leveson is due to report back with his findings and recommendations. The impact of the Leveson Inquiry and the evidence of women's groups' is yet to be assessed. But the very fact of women's voices being respectfully listened to was welcomed, and noted as a rarity, by many women commentators:

*"It's cheering, in a limited way, just to hear critiques of the press's portrayal of women without them [women] being sighed or sneered at"* (twitter, Journalist Deborah Orr).

Furthermore, as a direct result of our evidence, the Editor of the Sun, Dominic Mohan was recalled to the Inquiry to defend the existence of Page 3. This was an historic moment, as it was the first time that this aspect of the press has been held to account, and questioned on its persistent objectification and sexualisation of women.<sup>9</sup> Our comments have also been strongly supported internationally, and were endorsed by Professor Rae Langton (of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology) in her submission to the Leveson Inquiry, which observed that *'Sometimes freedom of speech or of the press may need to be balanced against other aspects of the public interest, including equality, individual free speech and self determination'*. Langton explicitly referred to our submissions, agreeing that the kind of pornographic imagery which appears in the UK tabloid press should be 'zoned' (restricted in its availability). As noted above, our submissions were further referenced by Chief Crown Prosecutor Alison Saunders in a speech she gave on rape and serious sexual offences, and the culture in which gender based violence occurs which can lead to a lack of justice for rape victims.

It is clear that our evidence continues to be valid, and it has begun to resonate more broadly in the public sphere. For example, many women broadcasters and journalists have come forward with stories of sexual harassment in light of the Jimmy Savile revelations, and recent events on women in the media industry<sup>10</sup> (16 October 2012) and in Parliament<sup>11</sup> (1 February 2012) have referred to our Leveson evidence in discussions regarding media sexism.

On this issue, the recent Women in Journalism conference further highlighted the continued poor performance of media outlets, notably the BBC, in failing to have female contributors. On two consecutive days in October, the Today programme covered very gender-specific issues (teenage pregnancy and breast cancer) with male guests and presenters, reducing John Humphrys to asking: "imagine if you were a woman"<sup>12</sup> (Today programme Radio 4, 30 October 2012), and the BBC launched an appeal for women experts to become presenters<sup>13</sup> in October. The current importance and relevance of addressing issues of gender equality and the media therefore remains vital.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/hearing/2012-02-07pm/> from 160 minutes.

<sup>10</sup> Women in Journalism, 16 October 2012

<sup>11</sup> "The media: a female politician's worst enemy?" All Party Parliamentary group on women in parliament, 1 February 2012

<sup>12</sup> Today programme, 30 October 2012

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/news/view/female\\_experts\\_day\\_attend](http://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/news/view/female_experts_day_attend)

## Why we have published this report now

We have compiled this report, to accompany our original evidence, in order to ensure that the debate on press reform which follows the publication of Lord Justice Leveson's report takes into account the real harm and discrimination associated with the way much of the press currently portrays women. It is not acceptable to have a debate conducted in terms only of abstract principles of freedom and the public interest, but rather it is essential that we are clear about whose freedom is being discussed and negotiated, and whose interests are being served by the current, and any new, regime.

While many welcomed our initial evidence to the Inquiry, and recognised the harm in some of the reporting highlighted, others have more recently commented that matters such as the inclusion of pornified imagery in daily newspapers are mere matters of taste.<sup>14</sup> Such comments fundamentally misunderstand the impact of the media, and the nature of discrimination. Our newspapers are a central, essential, living part of our shared national culture. They are the 'first draft of our history', and their contents, including the way in which they report, as much as what they report, clearly have an impact on our lives. Furthermore, unlike broadcast media, newspapers are a completely unrestricted product in terms of retail. They are displayed at child's eye level, children are allowed to purchase them, and every day thousands of copies are left in public places for people other than the original buyer to consume. Comments such as *'If you don't like it, don't buy it'* do not therefore suffice any more than attitudes stating *'if you don't like it, turn it off'* suffice for television viewing. A society which values all of its members, from all parts of the community, female and male, needs to have that value reflected in its media, including its press. With this broader context of 'public interest' in mind, those who make recommendations or join this debate may find it enlightening to familiarise themselves with the daily contents of all our newspapers in relation to their portrayal, or lack of representation of women.

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<sup>14</sup> Nick Clegg in responding to BBC Radio 5 Live question about the No More Page 3 campaign

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Methodology

In the run up to the publication of Lord Justice Leveson's report, our four organisations have collaborated to monitor the portrayal of women in eleven British national newspapers (print and online) over a two week period: 3-18 September 2012. The eleven newspapers monitored are: *The Sun*, *The Daily Mirror*, *The Daily Star*, *The Sport*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Express*, *The Times*, *The Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent* and *The Telegraph*. This report is the result of that two week monitoring. It highlights, with examples, some key areas of concern which illustrate why we initially gave evidence to the Leveson Inquiry, and the basis for the recommendations we are making for the reform of press regulation to ensure that harm to, and discrimination against, women and girls is addressed.

Between 3 and 18 September 2012, we took these eleven newspapers and also consulted their online versions. We scrutinised reporting according to some of the key issues we had raised at Leveson, including how crimes of violence against women are reported, how women are portrayed and in many cases objectified, and the general invisibility of women in public life.

After a short trial review we clarified the headings against which we would log news reports to reflect our concerns. At the end of the fortnight, we had over 1300 examples that illustrated one or several of these issues. We then selected a group (approximately 10) of the most illustrative and broadest examples of each to discuss in more detail, and grouped them into the broad chapter headings of this report.

### Key findings

We find that across the British national press there is consistent, systematic sexism, which has the potential to negatively impact on women's enjoyment and participation in public life, and women's access to justice where crimes of violence are committed against them. Specifically we found:

1. A lack of context in reporting leading to inaccurate, incomplete or misrepresentative and misleading impressions of women and women's lives;
2. Imagery and coverage that focuses on women's appearance and the degree to which women's behaviour conforms to a stereotyped code of acceptable femininity, which has the potential to reduce women's aspirations and participation;
3. Excessive objectification of women in some parts of the press, reducing them entirely to sexual commodities in a way that would not be broadcast on television, nor allowed in the workplace because of equality legislation;
4. Selective, de-contextualised reporting that can perpetuate stereotypes and myths about victims and perpetrators of violence, having the potential to negatively impact on our justice system;
5. Glamourisation and eroticisation of violence against women and girls;
6. Narrow and stereotyped coverage of "women's issues" coupled with the abuse of women who speak out on public matters, which can lead to silencing, reduced aspirations, and a deficit in our democratic discourse.

The first chapter looks at the reporting of violence against women and girls and a context that contributes to the normalisation of rape. We found that the way VAWG is reported is often inaccurate, minimises the actions of perpetrators, while placing blame on the victim or others, and that it reinforces myths and stereotypes. In this way, such prejudicial reporting contributes to, and reinforces, a cultural context in which VAWG occurs.

The second chapter looks at how the media reports on the sexualisation and abuse of children, especially girls. We found that significant parts of the media perpetuate the sexualisation of girls, whilst purporting to condemn it, and that sexual abuse of children is sometimes represented in a way that minimises the abuse or could even be titillating.

The third chapter looks at objectification of women and related issues of women's body confidence. We found a persistent portrayal of women as sex objects, coupled with the promotion and mainstreaming of the sex industries, in the mainstream tabloid press, and a further reduction of women to their appearance, with women being portrayed and judged solely on the basis of how they look, in newspapers across the board.

The fourth chapter looks at the silencing, humiliating and invisibility of women in public life. We found a repeated celebration of young, 'attractive' women, but often in a way that infantilised them and focused on their looks and private lives rather than on their achievements; common mocking of the appearance of older women if they were seen at all; general clear exhortations on how women should look and behave; and an almost visceral undermining of women in power, or those who seek publicity for their views.

In our conclusion we draw out some of the broader principles that these articles illustrate and make suggestions to address them.

We hope that this is an enlightening report which will contribute not only to the Leveson discussions, but to broader policy work to tackle women's access to justice, safety and equality.



## **“Now that’s an invasion of her privates”: Rape culture and the reporting of violence against women and girls**

### **Rape culture**

The portrayal of violence against women by the media was at the root of our decision to give evidence to the Leveson Inquiry. During our September 2012 monitoring period, we found numerous instances of violence against women coming across as sexual and titillating. We call this “rape culture” because this reporting of violence against women and girls not only trivialises the abuse, but it further contributes to an increasingly conducive context for rape and sexual abuse to take place with impunity. Articles which appear to present violation, fear, and lack of consent as appealing were not uncommon and were often also placed next to adverts for pornographic content or for sexual services.

### **Marginalisation of the victim, victim blaming and perpetrator empathy**

We found instances in which the violence and harm suffered by victims of abuse was marginalised, trivialised or even made invisible. As with so much of this media monitoring, there were also several examples of myths and stereotypes about victims and perpetrators, in particular blaming or neglecting the victim whilst empathising with the perpetrator. In none of the incidents reported was there ever any contextualisation of the incident in the wider patterns and prevalence of violence against women, nor any expert commentary from academics or women’s groups working on the issues.

### **Misleading and potentially harmful coverage**

Similarly the coverage was such that it is actively misleading to the reader, as it reinforces false stereotypes about who is a victim and who is a perpetrator. It damages access to justice creating impunity for perpetrators and deterring victims from coming forward; It sends a clear message to perpetrators that their behaviour will be understood, rationalised and draw sympathy; And it sends an equally clear message that the victim’s behaviour will be scrutinised and blamed. As such, this form of prejudicial reporting is actively harmful, not merely tasteless, as it undermines justice and runs contrary to the public interest.

### **Lack of contextualisation**

The Sterne report of an independent review in the handling of rape complaints in 2010 conducted by Baroness Sterne CBE on behalf of the Home Office and Government equality office found:

- Official crime statistics show that in England and Wales in 2008/9, 12,129 rapes of women and 964 rapes of men were recorded by the police.
- The British Crime Survey, based on interviews with 46,000 people over the age 16, interviewed 23,000 people about intimate violence, with results suggesting that only 11% of those who have been raped, tell the police about it.
- The Metropolitan police data 2009/10 shows an increase in recorded rape of 29% and in England and Wales the number of recorded rapes rose from 2,855 in 1988 to 7,636 in 1998 and 13,093 in 2008.

- The lifetime prevalence for rape and attempted rape in those over 16 was nearly one in 24 women and one in 200 men.
- The conviction rate for rape may be in the normal rate of convictions for cases actually reaching court but in fact only 6% of reported rapes achieve a conviction for rape.

In her report, Baroness Sterne also highlighted that most rape is conducted by someone whom the victim knows, whether as a brief acquaintance, friend, colleague, partner or family member, and that *“stranger rapes are a small proportion of what is most often reported by the Newspapers.”*

She also addressed false allegations and could not find that there were more false allegations than for other crimes, and in fact that false allegations were described by lawyers, judges and police as extremely rare. However, allegations of women trying to pervert the course of justice by alleging rape feature prominently and disproportionately in the tabloids. The report cites one police officer who says, *“They devalue the other cases and tabloids love it”*.

The impact of the media on women’s access to justice was further highlighted in the Mumsnet campaign on rape *“We believe you”* in which out of 1,600 women surveyed,

- Nearly three-quarters (70%) of respondents feel the media is unsympathetic to women who report rape
- Over half (53%) feel the legal system is unsympathetic
- And over half (55%) feel society at large is unsympathetic

### Rape culture: glamorisation and trivialisation of rape and violence against women



Women’s lack of consent is explicitly sexualised – ‘upskirt’ photography is presented as exciting precisely because the woman does not consent to the image being taken. The language of violation is often gleefully used when talking about these images, for example an article entitled, *“Now that’s an invasion of her privates! (The Sport, 16 Sept).* The same edition included, *“Dwarf snappa’s Perry nice view”* which is a staged, false image purporting to be of Katy Perry’s buttocks and revels in her supposed humiliation and her own responsibility for it because she wears minis: *“Pop babe is latest upskirt conquest of papararsey Pete...Curvy Kate is the latest sexy celeb to fall prey to our dynamic pipsqueak photographer...”*, he explains: *“Luckily Katy likes wearing nice short skirts, so it was pretty easy to get the shots I wanted.”*

Again the Sport in advertising its pornographic film offerings appears to particularly highlight the desirably reluctant nature of the young girls portrayed: *“Reluctant Bukakke babes - seriously sleazy guys receive oral sex and film throat gagging footage...the 2nd [girl] is making her very first porno! You can see by her face that she has “bitten off more than she can chew” but hey ho -*



*it makes really kinky 'reluctant footage' for you to enjoy!"* (The Sport, 5 September).

They continue this theme with a large photograph of what is meant to look like a very young woman or girl (looks 15/16 years old) wearing only childish looking pink knickers, curled up on the floor as if protecting herself, with a fearful expression on her face.



*"At home with Lauren Robson". See her topless for the FIRST TIME this Sunday"* (The Sport, p31, 05/09/2012). The caption implies loss of virginity and the whole pose implies vulnerability and violation. All of this is portrayed as desirable.

The inter-changeability of women inside and outside of the sex industry is emphasised by the placement of features of semi-naked women (9 September, Sport readers' partners supposedly send in photos of themselves topless or naked), surrounded by sex advertisements. Articles commonly stress in derogatory language how happy "hookers" are, and that their relationships with the buyers are so happy that buyers want

to marry them (Daily Star, 14 September) and they themselves find buyers better than boyfriends (16 September, Sport). This is a deliberate attempt to minimise the harm in prostitution and suggest that all women are, and should be, happily available for men to purchase and use as they like.

Several articles and advice pages further appear to suggest that men's sexuality is an uncontrollable, natural and healthy need that women should meet, or else risk losing their partner. In The Sun (9 September) in an article entitled, *"Childbirth wrecked our sex life so I cheat online"* the young man apparently claims, *"sex... very painful for my girlfriend... I've been using internet sites to find no-strings sex...my urges get the better of me."* In the 3 September edition of the Daily Mail's Sex Column in an article entitled – *"I hate sex with my husband"*, the agony aunt says:

*"You say you haven't discussed your true feelings with your husband, but he must be aware of them. If you're tense and muted in bed you'll be transmitting that anxiety to him... If the issue is not discussed, it's under those circumstances that a spouse is most likely to turn to someone else for comfort."*

These articles also stress the importance and desirability of conformity to stereotypes such that a man should be strong and women love to be mastered by them. In an article in the Sport (5 September) they have a quote from a celebrity, *"Kara: Real men drive me crazy"* in which she appears to say that she *"...can't get enough of...Ray Winstone's rugged charm... 'He is so alpha, the sort of 'real' man that makes a girl go weak at the knees as he slings her over his shoulder and carries her out of danger. I really think that in 2012 we need the return of real men, so that everybody knows where they stand."* The promotion of a stereotype of strong men in control is such that at one point what could potentially be a domestic violence situation is completely ignored (Daily Star – *"fella is boss at home"*).





It is not only rape and sexual violence that is presented in this titillating and trivial manner; domestic violence, murder and suicide may also be treated in this fashion. Several papers covered the case of a man who murdered his partner, Annette Creegan, and threw her overboard their hired boat on the Norfolk Broads leaving the woman's 13 year old daughter on the boat alone. The story was covered by several media outlets but the focus, as in this headline from the Sun (4 September) and similarly repeated in the Mail, was on the items found in the boat and their association with sex and violence. *"Purple sex toy, duct tape, hard drive, cable ties and a sheet covered in blood"*.

### Marginalisation, victim blaming, perpetrator empathy

Where the alleged perpetrator is a man of some status, celebrity or wealth, it is common for the focus of reporting to be on the man, often showing empathy with him and implicitly questioning or neglecting the victim.

*"Killer Stoke Ace gets life"*, (Sun, 8 September) focuses on the tragic loss of the young footballer's career potential rather than the fact that he murdered his 15 year old girlfriend, stabbing her 60 times. *"Alex Reid won't face criminal damage charges over his late night arrest"* again is quite humorously covered with a focus on the cage fighter as a bit of a wild boy, although in fact he was trying to break into his girlfriend's house. *"British business man accused of rape fails in anonymity bid"* (Telegraph, 12 September) is a lengthy article about the public school education and successful business history of this man and his concerns that to be named would hurt his business and reputation. These three stories were covered in both tabloids and broadsheets and, focusing on both domestic and sexual violence, appear to empathise with the perpetrator by eulogising their achievements, and highlighting their careers, their celebrity and their supposed respectability. The women they have attacked are hardly featured in the story.

### Victim invisibility in relation to women

In another stark example of the invisibility of the victim, where a new mum and her partner are attacked leaving the hospital with their newborn, the headline only features the male. In, *"Hospital guards beat up new dad"* (Express 12 September), it is not immediately apparent that the new mother was injured until further down it says in passing she *"also received a black eye"*.

### Perpetrator empathy

Similarly in the Metro (3 September) *"Graham Anderson may have killed two sons out of fear, say neighbours"* a man who has a history of violence towards his partner cannot accept the end of his relationship despite being split up for a year and, resenting her starting a new relationship, kills them and himself. The article refers to the perpetrator in its headline as a *"nice guy"*, and it focuses on his distress at the end of his marriage, the ex having a new relationship,



the fact that he gave up his job to look after the boys but is stressed at being unemployed at risk of eviction, and therefore unable to show he can accommodate his sons so at risk of losing custody. These articles also focus at length on the woman having started a new relationship. The impact is again one of empathy for the perpetrator and a degree of blame for the woman victim. There is no coverage of other incidents of this nature of which there have been several this year, whereas it is interesting to note that the rise in these cases in other European countries has led to those journalists looking at the cases together as a trend or pattern and questioning them (Drame D'Auxerre, Une nouvelle tuerie familiale, France Soir, 18 July 2012).

### **Victim blaming**

In a Daily Mail report (3 September) of a case of extreme violence by a man against his ex, *"Soldier 'stabbed ex-girlfriend to death after he hacked her Facebook account and discovered she'd had an abortion"* the reporting focused heavily on the fact that the victim had secretly aborted the baby of her partner (a soldier about to be deployed to Afghanistan). This focus appears to blame the victim whilst providing a rationale for the perpetrator and obscuring the gravity of his conduct. He had already tried to strangle his ex for which he was given bail. Only at this point did she obtain an abortion. After he hacked her Facebook page and found out about this, he went to her home, kicked in the door, stamped on her face and stabbed her to death.

In addition to shifting blame from the perpetrator to the victim, there is a common strain of mother-blaming. In a particularly egregious example, the Daily Mail (13 September) reports on a young woman who was not allowed to travel on the bus late at night because she did not have the right change and no-one came to her aid. She started to walk home calling her mother to ask for a lift but was attacked and raped. The Daily Mail's reporting appears to blame the perpetrator's mother for the rape that her son committed saying; *"with a mum like that, Joseph never stood a chance"* and headlines the report, *"So Shameless: Mother stands by thug who raped law student after she was thrown off bus for the want of 20p."*

This story is covered extensively in such a way that it is the fault of everyone but the rapist. Other papers also cover the case but this time it is the bus driver's fault: *"bus scandal"*, *"lack of a small gesture of kindness"*.

In another instance of mother-blaming (Telegraph, 5 September) a man with a drug addiction has killed his son, the report is about the several [50] occasions on which social services could have intervened but did not. The picture though is a photograph of the mother with the child!

### **Misleading and harmful coverage**

Reporting of all forms of violence against women is commonly misleading but where this is particularly pointed is in the coverage of rape cases. Where the accused would be expected to be a "decent" man the focus is often on the danger to him of such a rape allegation, with a tendency to denigrate and question the credibility of the victim. In relationships, or where the parties are known to one another, if it features at all, (despite being in the region of 82% of all rapes), the focus is on the dress, sexual history and alcohol consumption of the woman. The idea that rape is committed by a stranger, usually a foreigner, jumping out at an "innocent" woman late at night remains the common understanding of rape or "real rape". Despite this being in stark contrast to the reality, it remains that which is most commonly featured in the media, usually with heavy racist overtones if the accused is indeed a foreigner as in this article in the Mirror (7 September) *"Double rapist" "here illegally"*. All the examples above are misleading in that they present a very skewed picture of blame, of victims and of perpetrators. This inaccuracy and misrepresentation impacts directly on the

reporting, prosecution and conviction of crimes and so goes to the heart of our justice system and women's access to justice.

### **Solutions**

As indicated, in none of these stories was there ever any coverage of the scale and extent of violence against women in the UK, nor were there any commentary, quotes, opinions or explanations by experts. We are calling for closer working between media and experts, a register of possible commentators and representatives on equality, advisory and accountability structures.

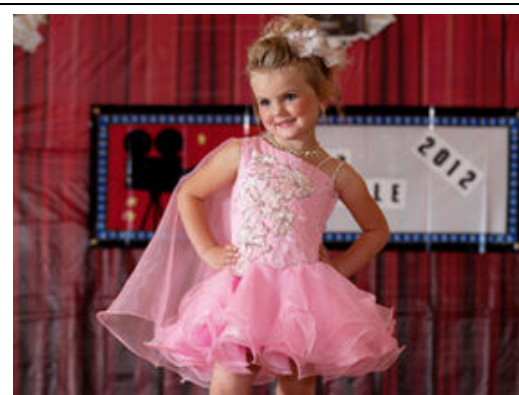
We would also like to see the possibility for thematic, group and third party complaints to address the cumulative and discriminatory effect.

We believe that newspapers should be subject to the same rules as the broadcast media in relation to pornified and sexually explicit images.

**'Brit Tot Parade!': The reporting of abuse of girls, including the sexualisation of girls in newspapers**

**Preening, pouting and posing...  
The spray-tanned beauty  
pageant toddlers in bikinis**

Daily Mirror, 3 September 2012



**TODDLERS IN SWIMWEAR  
AND MAKE-UP, DISTURBING  
CHILD PAGEANTS COME TO  
BRITAIN**  
**Daily Express, 4 September**

**Sexualisation of girls**

The sexualisation of children is an issue that has come increasingly under the spotlight, both in the UK<sup>15</sup> as well as abroad<sup>16</sup>, and there is a growing body of expertise in this area. Current work in Westminster is jointly led by Number Ten and the Department for Education who are working on a series of actions recommended by Mothers Union chief Reg Bailey in his 2011 review, which was commissioned by David Cameron<sup>17</sup>. However the Coalition Government has so far focused very little on sexualisation of children in the print media, even though this agenda is running in parallel to the Leveson Inquiry and a 'stock take' of actions on sexualisation is due to be published shortly after Lord Justice Leveson reports. Our findings of repeated sexualised images of, and articles about, young girls, including toddlers, strongly suggest that future work on sexualisation should explicitly include the print media and should be linked to recommendations taken forward following publication of the Leveson report.

<sup>15</sup> Sexualisation of Young People Review, Dr Linda Papadopolous 2010  
<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/Sexualisation-of-young-people2835.pdf?view=Binary>

<sup>16</sup> Report of the APA Taskforce of the Sexualization of Girls 2010  
<http://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/girls/report-full.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Letting Children be Children - Report of an Independent Review of the Commercialisation and Sexualisation of Childhood <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/CM%208078>

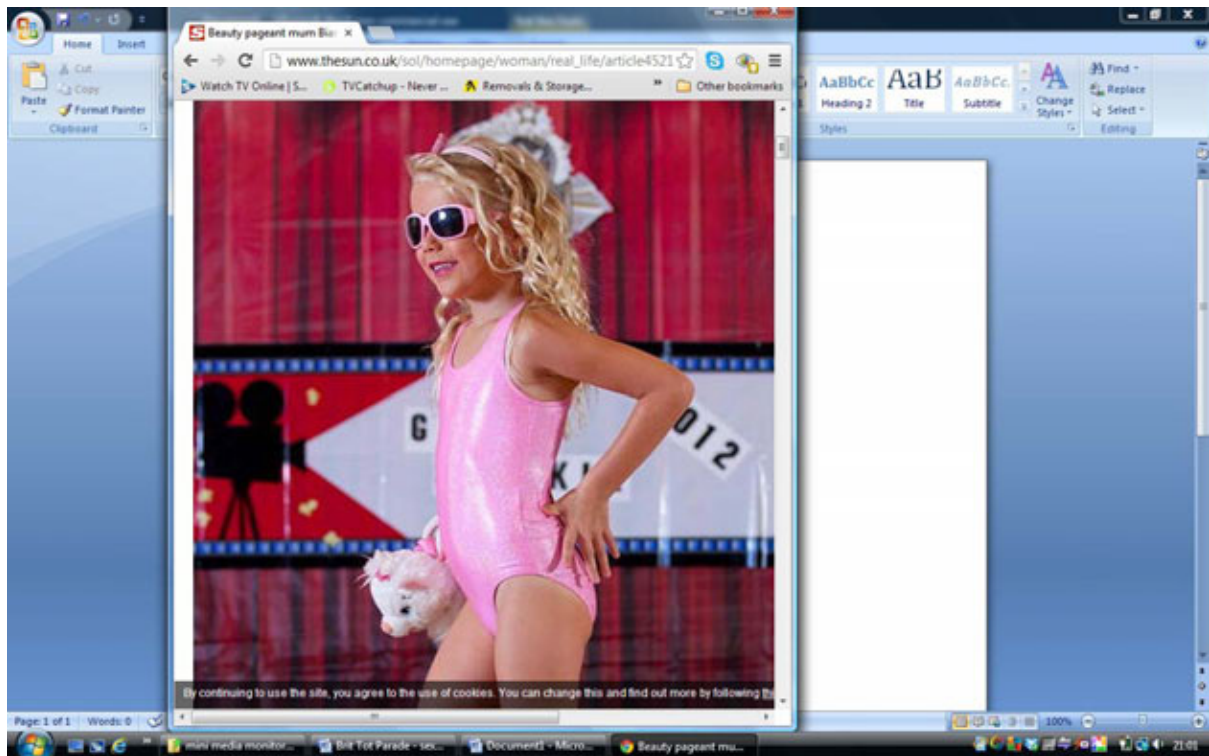
Daily Mirror, 3 September  
2012



There was widespread coverage in the tabloids of the Miss Glitz Sparkle event, a beauty pageant for young girls, in Lincoln in early September 2012 including the Sun, Express and front page of the Mirror. The headline and text of these articles was critical of the pageant, providing a pseudo rationale for running the story, whilst the accompanying pictures showed numerous images of young girls in bikinis and swimsuits, makeup and heels.

The Sun's headline on 4 September was '*Sick...the beauty shows for kids*' with the sub-heading '*Fury as events start up in UK*'. These were accompanied by large pictures of children at the pageant. The next day, the Sun ran another story about the pageant online about Bianca Alsop who sunbathed with her young daughter Ocean in order for her to get a real tan ('*Ocean, 4, sunbathes with me...I don't like fake tans*'). Whilst purporting to be about the health risks of young children sunbathing, it was in fact yet another opportunity to show sexualised images of young girls. The sub-heading of the piece read '*CAVORTING provocatively in a tiny pink swimsuit and clutching a cuddly stuffed kitten, little Ocean Orrey struts her stuff in a British beauty pageant – aged just FOUR.*' Whilst apparently concerned for her welfare, this portrays a young child as acting in a sexy and knowing way. The story was accompanied by several pictures including a large picture of the four year old girl.





The article also discussed how Alsop had entered her 18 month old twin boys in the pageant, yet the only photograph of them showed them fully clothed thereby exemplifying the paper's sexualisation of girls and differential treatment of boys.

The Mirror ran the story about the pageant on its front page on 4 September quoting a child welfare charity's concern about sexualisation. The article also stated that the organisers insisted the event was safe from the '*prying eyes of paedophiles*'. However, the paper's concern about 'paedophiles' did not preclude it from splashing pictures on the front page of three toddler girls in bathing suits, one just 20 months old. The Mirror also ran a double-page spread of the pageant on pages 4 and 5 of the paper with the headline '*Preening, pouting and posing*'. As with the Sun, this implies a choice and intention that such young children could not possibly have, and serves to remove responsibility from adults, such as parents or organisers of the event.

The reporting of this story would have been considerably more balanced if those who have undertaken research on sexualisation<sup>18</sup> or other experts were asked for their view of the impact of toddler beauty pageants, for example on girls and career aspirations or on how they might contribute to a culture in which women and girls are sexualised and objectified.

### **Sexual abuse of girls**

Sexual violence, particularly sexual abuse of children, is constantly in the news headlines at the moment with ongoing revelations about sexual abuse committed by Jimmy Savile and allegations against others connected to him, as well as other non-related cases. This is a significantly misunderstood and misrepresented issue. Police records show that over a third of rapes in England and Wales are committed against under 16 year olds, mostly girls. Most

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<sup>18</sup> M Coy and M Garner, Definitions, discourses and dilemmas: policy and academic engagement with the sexualisation of popular culture 2012 <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09540253.2012.667793>

perpetrators target victims known to them and a significant proportion of perpetrators are adolescent boys and young men.<sup>19</sup>

Stories about child sexual abuse that are titillating, victim-blaming or minimising of the harm caused are routine in some newspapers. This is often done by implying consent or 'sexiness' on the part of the child, particularly in relation to girls aged between 12 and 15 – an age where girls are targeted for sexual violence.

## Girls, 12, married off in UK

**BRITISH Muslim imams are offering to conduct marriages with child brides as young as 12, it was claimed yesterday.**

It is feared it could lead to underage sex.

On 10 September the Sun ran a story titled *'British Muslim imams are offering to conduct marriages with child brides as young as 12, it was claimed yesterday.'* The article says *'It is feared it could lead to underage sex'*. The article also notes that UK law lets Imams marry consenting under 16s provided they do not have sex until 16. There was no discussion about the issue of forced marriage and the statement in the last line of the article, *"PM David Cameron wants to ban forced marriages"* is inaccurate as forced marriage is already criminalised under a range of different laws. In fact, what the Prime Minister has announced is that there will be a specific criminal offence of forced marriage.<sup>20</sup>

The Daily Mail article on 10 September covering the same story (*'Muslim mosque leader at centre of British child bride scandal steps down after 'being caught agreeing to marry girl of 12'*) likewise uses 'child bride' and uses an image of a couple's joined hands symbolising unity and consent, rather than violence and abuse. The article is also accompanied by stock images of 'Islam' i.e. a mosque and a woman in Islamic dress.

The language used is critical to the tone and message of these articles. For example words and phrases such as 'marriage', 'child brides' and 'underage sex' imply consent when in fact children under 16 are not legally able to give consent, and gives a very different impression from the more accurate term 'child rape'. 'Underage sex' in particular reflects the language of pornography and is titillating. Worth particular mention is use of the word 'paedophile' or its tabloid derivative 'paedo'. This literally means 'lover of children' and serves to pathologise the deliberate actions of men who rape and sexually abuse girls and sometimes boys. It also portrays child sex offenders as 'others', those who are outside the normal bounds of society, rather than ordinary men and even boys who abuse and are often family members, peers or in the local community. The word 'paedophile' also serves to remove responsibility from society for considering the part that broader cultural issues play in providing a conducive context for sexual abuse of children to occur.<sup>21</sup> It reinforces myths that most sexual offenders

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/resourcesforprofessionals/sexualabuse/statistics\\_wda87833.html](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/resourcesforprofessionals/sexualabuse/statistics_wda87833.html)

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN01003>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.troubleandstrife.org/articles/issue-37/what-the-papers-say/>

are strangers hanging around the school gate (although some may be), when they are far more likely to be in children's everyday environments.

Images accompanying articles also play a critical role in setting the tone and message the reader takes away. For example use of heavily made-up and 'sexy' models to represent a story about child sexual abuse give the impression of a young adult who may be seeking sexual attention.

There is a particular focus in some newspapers, such as The Sport, to sexualise and objectify female students. On the 9 September The Sport ran a story about a student sex survey with the headline '*They bang 'em in Bangor...but there's no sex in Essex*' and accompanied by a picture of a topless young woman lying on her back in a bar with other young men and women around her. The universities where students have the most sexual partners are listed as the '*naughtiest*' and those with the least as the '*worst*'. The article is extremely titillating, using the language of pornography, for example using phrases such as '*horny young learners*' and '*bonking*'. There is another picture of a young woman wearing only pants describing the sexual activities of students at her university. Disturbingly, beside this story is an article headlined '*Peeping Tom shower perv avoids prison*' about a man convicted of having secretly filmed two 16 year old girls showering. Thus a story about sexual violence is placed next to a titillating story about students having sex accompanied by pornographic images, a common occurrence in some newspapers. To compound this, below the sexual violence story was an advert for an escort directory. It should also be noted that The Sport online has a regular feature on students having sex.<sup>22</sup>

### **Solution:**

We believe that third party complaints are essential for addressing issues relating to the sexualised or otherwise prejudicial reporting of issues such as these. This is particularly the case where there is a vulnerable victim such as a child who will not make a complaint, or where there is a thematic problem that needs to be addressed. In relation to the issues identified here, experts on child development, child sexual abuse and sexualisation are just some of those who would clearly have an interest in there being a mechanism for third parties to complain.

We also believe that ensuring representation on the new body which represents equality stakeholders and has expertise on matters of gender and age inequality (and the way they intersect) is a critical function. This would directly link to the section in the new Code that addresses issues of prejudice.

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.sundaysport.com/?cat=24>

## **‘Irina is a booty’: The objectification of women and body confidence**

One of the disturbing findings of this report has been the extent to which women and girls are objectified and sexualised within certain aspects of the UK Press. This portrayal of women as sex objects, coupled with a persistent scrutiny of women's bodies, represents a form of discrimination, misrepresentation and stereotyping which is unparalleled for men, and it paints a damaging picture of gendered relations in which men are portrayed as active participants in suits and sportswear, and women as trivial decoration who exist to look sexy for a male audience.

These messages directly impact the ways in which women and girls feel about themselves, with research finding that 66% of teenage girls would consider plastic surgery<sup>23</sup>; that of the 1.6 million people in the UK suffering from an eating disorder, around 89% are female<sup>24</sup>, and that pressures to become sexualised have led to girls across all social strata reporting mental disorders at a rate of 44% - making them the most depressed section of the population<sup>25</sup>. Furthermore, research conducted by the Future Foundation think tank (April 2012) found that one in four girls has low self-esteem, concluding that Britain could lose some 319,000 future businesswomen, lawyers and doctors, as well as more than 60 women MPs by 2050 unless young women can be helped to retain confidence in their own abilities<sup>26</sup>.

Objectification and sexualisation further impacts the ways boys and men are conditioned to view and treat women and girls, with the American Psychological Association (APA) finding that “*exposure to sexualised depictions of women may lead to global thoughts that women are seductive and frivolous sex objects... and foster an overall climate that does not value girls’ and women’s voices or contributions to society*”<sup>27</sup>, and that after being exposed to images that sexually objectify women, men are significantly more accepting of sexual harassment, interpersonal violence, rape myths, and sex role stereotypes<sup>28</sup>.

## **Objectification, sexualisation, and the mainstreaming of the sex Industries**

The newspapers highlighted in this chapter clearly promote the sexual objectification of women. This portrayal of women as one-dimensional sex objects is most evident in the Page 3 tabloids, with The Sport depicting women as naked body parts on almost every page. However, although to varying degrees, the theme of valuing women only on the basis of her body has been found to be common within the UK press. This creates a drip-drip effect and makes it seem 'normal' for women and girls to be viewed and treated as a mere sum of body parts, not equals. It should be noted that sexualised and objectified images of women found within these newspapers are overwhelmingly white, young, able-bodied and thin. This further serves to reinforce oppressive stereotypes of attractiveness.

One place that sexually objectifying images of older and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women were found was within the pages of adverts for the sex industry contained within some of these publications, in which women who do not conform to the 'young, white, thin'

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<sup>23</sup> mykindaplace.comsurvey of 1,800 teenage girls, 2005

<sup>24</sup> The National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence, referenced by Beat: <http://www.b-eat.co.uk/about-beat/media-centre/facts-and-figures/>

<sup>25</sup> Sweeting H, Young R, West P. GHQ increases among Scottish 15 year olds 1987-2006. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 2009; **44**:579-86.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/health-news/girls-interrupted-revealed--the-true-cost-of-low-selfesteem-7606258.html>

<sup>27</sup> American Psychological Association (2007) *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualisation of Girls*

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

ideal of the Page 3 model are degraded on this basis. This explicit promotion of the sex industries represents another great concern, especially given the anomaly that they form part of mainstream newspapers which are universally available, openly displayed, and are not age-restricted.



This is a front page of the Sunday Sport (16 Sept). It shows an 'upskirt shot' taken without permission and as such forms part of a regular feature '**Dwarf snappa strikes**'. Not only is this completely inappropriate for a mainstream newspaper displayed at child's eye level, it has no connection with the news, it objectifies the female celebrity, and perhaps most disturbingly it encourages and condones sexual harassment in the form of 'sexting'. This is an issue of great concern and, according to an academic report prepared for the NSPCC, is one that young girls increasing face in schools ([http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/resourcesforprofessionals/sexualabuse/sexting-research-report\\_wdf89269.pdf](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/resourcesforprofessionals/sexualabuse/sexting-research-report_wdf89269.pdf).)



This photo accompanies a story in The Sun (4 Sept) entitled: '**Scientific proof: Coco's buttocks declared '100% real'**'. It serves no news value and is solely based on objectifying and sexualising 'Coco' as a body part, describing the tests that Coco went through to prove that her buttocks are real.





Page 3 forms a staple part of The Sun and The Star newspapers and has been described by the current editor of The Sun Dominic Mohan as a 'British Institution'. It serves no function other than to reduce women to sex objects, who are of value only in relation to the appearance of their breasts. Accompanying the Page 3 image of a topless, and sometimes entirely naked young woman, is 'News in Briefs', which is centred upon mocking the intelligence of the Page 3 model by putting words and opinions into her mouth which the reader is encouraged to 'knowingly' dismiss as too intellectual for a woman who has been objectified in this way.



This entire article, contained within the MAIL ONLINE (4 Sept) is based on holiday photographs of Rita Rusic in her bikini, with commentary on the various ways in which Rita wears her necklace and using that commentary to draw attention to her sexualised body parts: *"Instead of using the item to draw attention to her ample cleavage, Rita instead wore it as a belly chain - to highlight her slim and toned stomach."* There is only a minor mention of Rita's acting career, with the crux of the article focusing on her as a sex object.



This is a small excerpt (5 Sept) from the pages upon pages of adverts for the sex industry contained within each copy of The Sport and the Sunday Sport. The adverts for pornography exemplify the extreme end of objectification and misogyny. They further demonstrate the ways in which BME are degraded on the basis of their ethnicity, and older women on the basis of their age, with titles such as: *'Filthy Oriental Slut!'*; *'Black and Beautiful... F\*\*ks like a Beast'*; *'Granny Sucks.. Granny craves a mouthful of cock'*. This is all contained within newspapers which are not age-restricted.

**Body Confidence in the media**

This report finds it common for certain aspects of the press to reproduce unrealistic and often contradictory images of feminine beauty, and then to scrutinise women on the basis of

how they conform to these often unattainable ideals. The harmful impact that this culture has on women and girls is highlighted by the government initiated **Body Confidence campaign**<sup>29</sup>.

### Naked photo shoots



The headline *'I've been feeling self-conscious': Danielle O'Hara poses in her first topless shoot since emergency implant removal*<sup>1</sup> is a recurring theme amongst papers like The Daily Mail, The Sun and The Mirror; that women can overcome their self-consciousness with their bodies by posing naked in the paper. There is a stark absence of discussion as to *why* women feel negatively about their bodies, and what the newspapers themselves are doing to exacerbate the problem. This photo-shoot claims to have made O'Hara feel better about her post-operative breasts, but serves to make many female readers feel less at ease with their own bodies.

Similarly, The Daily Mirror (8 Sept) ran the story ***"I'm not afraid to expose myself": Keira Knightley says she finds sex scenes easy and is happy to take her clothes off if the role needs it***. Articles like these present the notion that women should be happy to remove their clothes and show off their bodies for an audience if their body conforms to a certain stereotyped femininity.

### Weight loss

As well as bombarding female readers with images against which they judge their own figures, headlines such as: ***'Sticking to the Hollywood diet? Cat Deeley shows off skinny legs as she shops for groceries in Los Angeles'*** found in the 'Femail' section of the Mail (5 Sept), and ***'Ladies who lunch... lightly'*** in The Sun 'Me' supplement (13 Sept), further encourage women to scrutinise female bodies, including their own, in relation to weight loss.

Women are further encouraged to compete with one another in order to achieve a feminine ideal based on thinness. Another Sun 'Woman' headline ***'Mum v daughter in Miss Big Beauty UK'*** (6 Sept) introduces a two-page spread about a mother and daughter who are competing in a plus-size beauty pageant. Instead of providing a positive alternative to the images of thinner women littering the majority of this paper, this article once again cements the notion that the most important thing about a woman is her looks, and that thinness equates with 'attractiveness'.



The Sun Online headline ***'Being dumped by my boyfriend made me lose six stone'*** (6 Sept) precedes a story about a woman who lost a large amount of weight when her boyfriend broke up with her, and is now "inundated with men asking her out". This story presents the notion that becoming thin will make you more attractive to men, which plays on insecurities and makes women especially prone to eating disorders. This focus on the size and shape of women's bodies is damaging in terms of body confidence.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/equalities/equality-government/body-confidence/>

## Cosmetic surgery



HAVING IT LARGE: Girls believe they'll turn into eye-catchers if they get bigger boobs

In The Daily Star (12 Sept), a letter is included in the Dear Jane section entitled: **'My Three Girls all want a Boob Job'** in which a father explains how paying for his wife's breast implants was justified as *"she needed to get her figure back... plus, of course, I'd get the benefits!"* but that he doesn't want to pay for daughters' operations because: *'I don't like to think of them like that'*. Within a newspaper saturated with topless images of young women, the response by *Dear Jane*: *'It's very shallow of your wife to believe that having big boobs will bring big rewards by attracting some guy they can live off,'* promotes woman-blaming attitudes rather than recognising the role that newspapers like The Daily Star play in creating a culture in which women are valued according to the size of their breasts.

As well as the tabloids, The Independent on Sunday (16 Sept) ran the story of a woman who spent £3500 on cosmetic surgery for her eyebrows: **'Why women are embracing the lowbrow look'**, which included the subtitle: **"Greater equality means high, arched brows are out of vogue, and increasing numbers are turning to surgery."** The fact that a woman's eyebrows are considered newsworthy demonstrates the ways in which women's bodies are scrutinised in the press. Furthermore, the claim that women altering their eyebrows through cosmetic surgery is a sign of 'greater equality' fundamentally misunderstands the notion of equality, and ignores the context in which women are turning to expensive and intrusive surgery to alter their looks.

## Solutions

The persistent reduction of women to body parts in the UK press represents a form of discrimination which has direct implications for body confidence, self-esteem, and attitudes and behaviours associated with inequality and violence against women and girls. It is therefore imperative that the sexualisation and objectification of women be recognised and regulated in terms of equality, as opposed to subjective notions of 'taste and decency'. In order to allow for those impacted by this stereotyped portrayal of women to be given a voice, it is further necessary to introduce a mechanism for third-party complaints on thematic issues such as sex discrimination.

In relation to the sexual objectification of women in the press, consistency in regulation is key. For example, in broadcasting there is a watershed which prevents objectifying images from being broadcasted before 9pm, and policy which ensures that sexually explicit materials must always be justified by its context. Furthermore, in legislative terms, the Equality Act 2010 prevents 'Page 3' type images from being displayed in the workplace because they are considered a form of sexual harassment. Yet, in a situation unusual to the UK, these very images saturate mainstream newspapers which are not-age restricted and which are read and left lying around in the public domain. This lack of a consistent approach to regulating the sexual objectification of women in the media and public space is contradictory, and it undermines the Government's efforts to tackle the ever-increasing sexualisation of children and young people.



Therefore, our argument and our solution is simple: Sexually objectifying images which would be restricted from broadcast media before the 9pm watershed, and which would not be allowed in the workplace because of equality legislation, should not be printed in national newspapers which are not age-restricted and are displayed at child's eye level.

## **‘Babes, retro babes, celeb babes, sports babes, hot celeb babe pics’: Disappearing, stereotyping and humiliating women**

Women are to be found all over the press. Not in large part in articles about the variety of their lives, their achievements and their broad contributions to society, but more often in pictures as decoration to stories that have little or no mention of them. Frequently those pictures have no names attached and more often than not the photo will show all or most of a woman’s body. The vast majority of pictures will feature young, 'attractive', white women most likely dressed in revealing clothes or sometimes very few clothes at all.

- **Invisibility:** Several pages of newspapers will appear without any reference to a woman at all, leaving the impression that women make no contribution to broader society. Even when women are featured, the dearth of representation of older women, BME women, and women with disabilities makes their voices virtually silent in public discourse.
- **Stereotyping:** Stories, when they appear, portray women in stereotypes, emphasising the importance of women looking attractive and of being a good wife and mother, sometimes backing up support for traditional roles or for promotion of deemed attractiveness with dubious science. Even reports of sporting prowess which appeared during the Olympics made frequent reference to a sportswoman’s marital status, romantic life and looks rather than focusing on her sporting victories.
- **Humiliation:** Pieces about women who have achieved some level of political or societal power often appear to take pleasure in denigrating those women, again focusing frequently on appearance and attacking them viscerally as women rather than for any policies or views they may espouse. Women generally are infantilised, scrutinised and humiliated in many articles about them.

We found both the selection of stories that are run, and the way stories are headlined and/or reported, send messages on how women should behave. On the one hand, women should be attractive and “sexy”; on the other they must not be too “sexy” and must behave “appropriately” for their age. This repeated limiting definition of a woman’s role in society can lead to a narrowing of women and girls’ aspirations, indicating that they will come in for less criticism and more praise if they conform to stereotypes. It normalises and reinforces traditional roles in society, limits women’s expectations and consequently life choices, restricting both their aspirations and their advancement.<sup>30</sup>

Articles that serve to humiliate women contribute to an atmosphere in which it is considered acceptable to viciously attack women for expressing opinions, taking part in politics, or simply being in the spotlight, and makes public life and public space hostile places for women.<sup>31</sup> Women are often referred to as “girls”, infantilising or belittling them even when, as for example during the Olympics, their achievements were lauded by the nation.

Kira Cochrane’s research in December 2011 that female reporters average only 22.6% in national publications and on the BBC 4’s Today programme might provide an indication that

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<sup>30</sup> See also Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 10 July, 2008 (CEDAW/C/UK/CO/6)

<sup>31</sup> See also Review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective towards the full realization of the Millennium Development Goals, Report of the Secretary-General, E/2010/4\*-E/CN.6/2010/2\*, 8 February 2010

the lack of diversity in staffing is also reflected in the choice of stories and the way they are covered by the press.

The silencing of women either through their absence or by denying them a true voice has an impact also on policy formation. Those reading the press include those making decisions about how we as a nation are being governed and who participates in our institutions. This democratic deficit hinders women becoming full and equal participants in society and contributes to the slow progress in achieving true women's equality.

### **Examples of the problem:**

#### **Invisibility**

##### *Sometimes seen, but rarely heard*

In the news: On the main page of the Daily Star online (6 Sept) there was no mention of women except as "babes", "retro babes", "celeb babes", "sports babes" and "hot celeb babe pics" or as celebrities "flaunting cleavage" or "performing raunchy burlesque routine". This is from a publication classified as a newspaper. The Times online carried almost no women on its main page on 6 September. It did however "illustrate" a business story about the popularity of Japanese Airlines with investors with a very large photo of a nameless female flight attendant. Pippa Middleton cheering on Andy Murray in the US Open was one of the few "mentions" of women highlighted by the Daily Express online (6 Sept) on its main page, along with Sophie, Countess of Wessex in a pink dress and Pippa Middleton again as a "party princess".

In sport: The print version of the Star (6 Sept) carried 13 pages of men playing sport, with only one article mentioning a sportswoman. In the Mail on Sunday's 24-page sport supplement (9 Sept) there was only one photo story and only six articles about women, one of these focusing on the miscarriage of a sportsman's partner. The Sun's 28-page Goals feature (3 Sept) had not one mention of women's football, nor did the Daily Mirror's 20-page football supplement (3 Sept). This, despite all the discussion about the importance and success of women in sport during the Olympics.

#### **Stereotyping**

##### *Looks are everything*

"*You look lovely, dear...*" is the front page "news" in the Daily Telegraph (5 September) that women should not wear miniskirts over the age of 42, whereas the tone of the Sun Online's "*Fearne Cotton won't go mumsy*" article on the same date suggests approval that Fearne Cotton will continue to do her sartorial duty despite being pregnant. In "*Ladies who lunch...lightly*", the Sun (13 Sept) offers a double-page spread about women "counting calories" focusing on women needing to eat carefully and modestly. And the Daily Mail (13 Sept) wants Britney Spears to "get an early night" so that she looks better, with photos illustrating the Mail's view of the need and a suggestion that even fans would have noticed "perhaps the extra pounds she is now carrying". "*Frock Horror: Nancy Dell'Olio looks like the Mess of the Year...*" in the 'Femail' section of the Daily Mail, presents yet another article for older women on how *not* to look, calling Nancy Dell'Olio "brazen" and underscoring her age, at 51 (Mail online, 5 Sept), whereas the fashion seal of approval was given to younger women attending the same event including a musician whose "risqué" dress was a "feminine outfit" which "turned heads".

"*Get a Kardigan*" was the headline in the Sun of all papers, chastising Kim Kardashian for exposing too much cleavage when a button popped on her top (online, 5 Sept). "Poor old Aled" Jones needs to "boost his profile" according to "*Double or Pits*", a photo story about a celebrity look-alike app which compared him to Clare Balding, she, presumably, being the "Pits" of the title (Sun online, 5 Sept). In the Sunday Times' "*Frolic away, Carol, and all you other muttonkins*" (9 Sept) the author talks about marking women on their appearance and

gives women “extra points if they’re 50-plus and wearing Asos”, but fewer “if they have plastic lips”. Carol Vorderman, despite being 51, gets the thumbs up partly because she has, in the writer’s estimation, an “amazingly un-Caucasian” and “remarkable” bottom. While the journalist does wonder in the final paragraph how “pro-woman” and “evolved” the message of “youth at any price” is and professes herself “increasingly thinking mutton is a good thing”, she still maintains there’s a thin line between “great dress” and “sexually desperate” at “this sort of age”. And the Daily Mail reminds its readers that “Any woman worth her salt knows she’s supposed to wear matching underwear” (6 Sept).

...Media continues to inadequately reflect women’s roles and contributions to society and women are often portrayed in a stereotyped manner – as victims, sex objects, economically and emotionally dependant, and weak, passive and unprofessional. Men predominate in media coverage in most areas, including, in particular, in politics, the economy and sports. Biased news coverage in both traditional and new media has reinforced gender stereotypes by depicting a world in which women and girls are relatively invisible. Stereotyped portrayals of women in the media...have remained a serious challenge...

*Report of the UN Secretary General, 8 February 2010, para 349, cited above*

THE TRUTH IN SHORT IS 40-SOMETHINGS STILL DARE TO WEAR MINIS

Why working and being a domestic goddess don't mix: It can harm marriage, says agony aunt

Housework 'reduces risk of breast cancer'

Ladies, you look bra-vellous

LIFE-SAVING LOVELIES PROVE THERE'S SO MUCH MORE TO BEING A VIRGIN TROLLEY

If I had a trout pout like her I'd kill myself:

## Humiliation

### *Ideas above their station*

The few prominent women in power regularly attract the vilification of the press. The Mail on Sunday (9 Sept) noted that “awkward” Baroness Warsi was enraged at being moved from the Tory chairmanship. Keeping her in government had caused David Cameron problems, the article suggests. However “having presented this working-class Yorkshire Muslim as a new face of the Conservative Party”, it was claimed the Tories “can’t afford to lose her now”. So “she will probably get what she wants”, it reports. While “*How do you solve a problem like Maria*” is the title of a comment piece in The Independent (online, 8 Sept) detailing things “to keep [the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport] busy for a week or two” the article itself focuses on the role of the position rather than the person in it. Not so the article in the Midweek Sport (5 Sept) heralded by a picture of Ms Miller. Entitled “*A wee bit of trouble for ministers*”, the piece feels it important to inform the public that female MPs (really, several of them?) have fallen on their bottoms in a puddle of urine leaking into the “little girls’ room” from the male MPs’ toilets into theirs. It is fortunate then that the Daily Mail (14 Sept) feels that “Mumsy Miller” is “one of life’s copers”. Maria Miller not being a “heavy-hitter” indicates to the Financial Times (5 Sept) that the department for culture “has lost much of its status since the Olympics”. The illustration for the Sun’s story on the cabinet reshuffle (4 Sept) shows three female ministers with a red arrow pointing down and three male ministers with a green arrow pointing up, with the women described as “axed”, “anonymous” and “bungler” and the men as “big winner” and “strongly tipped”. The Sun (6 Sept) reveals an insider’s report that three “axed ministers blubbed”, but only had names for the two women

supposedly concerned whereas the alleged male sniveller remains anonymous. "Why do the majority of [female MPs], as well as not being able to permeate the Cabinet, seem to have no sense of style?" asks the Daily Mirror (8 Sept). For these badly or hideously dressed female MPs send "out the message that they, being out of touch with fashion, are out of touch with the real world, too". Despite claiming "you can't help but like the woman," the Sunday Times (9 Sept) appears somewhat disappointed that Edwina Currie is still "howling", "long after we had expected the former minister to shut up and go away". After telling us that Edwina Currie "rages like a scouse banshee that has just been told its haunting days are over" the author shares with us his vision of Ms Currie's genitalia. Quoting from her autobiography about John Major: "His face, as they say, bears the imprint of whoever last sat on it", the journalist's feels compelled to share with us his imaginings: "Given what we know about the relationship between the two of them, this little nugget conjures up a vision so shudderingly awful that I feel guilty foisting it on you on a Sunday morning. I will never be able to look at a photograph of Major again without trying, subconsciously, to make out Currie's imprint".

The persistence of gender stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes regarding the roles of women and men, including women's ability to lead, continues to be a significant barrier to achieving equal participation of women in decision-making processes at all levels. Women who are active in politics often encounter negative feedback. Owing to the prevalence of gender stereotypes, voters, including women, continue to demonstrate a lack of trust in women's leadership capacity by not voting for women candidates.

*Report of the UN Secretary General, 8 February 2010, para 247, cited above*

**BARONESS WARSI**  
Axed as Tory chairman . . . now considering new job

**CHERYL GILLAN**  
Anonymous minister loses job as Welsh Secretary

**SARAH TEATHER**  
Bungler set for push as education minister

**ANDREW MITCHELL**  
Big winner is promoted to key post of chief whip

**GRANT SHAPPS**  
Strongly tipped to become new Tory party chairman

**DAVID LAWS**  
Lib Dem back as deputy to education boss Gove

**QUITTING Louise Mensch**  
**Walkout MP may cost us further £45k**

**Awkward... but Warsi will get what she wants**

**Maria Miller**  
The surprise ▲

**Disabilities minister to culture secretary**  
A surprise promotion for the otherwise low-key former disabilities minister to head up the culture department. Not putting a big-hitter into that job shows the department has lost much of its status since the Olympics.

**IT'S MICHELLE ODRAMA**



### *Too uppity*

Author Naomi Wolf comes in for some attention in The Sunday Times of 9 Sept. “Yes, thank you Naomi, we’ve all seen it. Do cover up now” describes Naomi Wolf as a “glossy former babe” who it is suggested could not be a “real woman” because she apparently took offence at a friend’s creation of vulva-shaped “cuntini” pasta. In a Times online article of that same date, “All hats and no bras”, about the Democratic national convention, another journalist proposes “there is a genuine possibility [Bill Clinton] will be raped” given that there are “200 Naomi Wolf lookalikes [waiting] with pulsating knickers for a private address”. “Who said the Democrats were saner than the Republicans?” the journalist ventures, highlighting three delegates to illustrate her point, including a “black lesbian”. If “that Tulisa woman” wonders why men are scared of her, a Sun journalist (6 Sept) does her the favour of explaining he suspects it’s “because most of them have seen that [sex] tape, love”. He then shares a critical description of the tape and states it would give even the “bravest bloke nightmares for months” although he suggests he hasn’t seen the tape himself. A photo of Tulisa much larger than the text rounds off the feature.

### **Solution**

Women need to be featured more in the press in all their diversity. We are calling for greater representation of women in the press which could be achieved by press training on how fairly to portray women without denigrating, humiliating or stereotyping them, closer working between the media and experts, and use of a register of possible female commentators on all subject matters.

We would also like to see the possibility for thematic, group and third party complaints to address the cumulative effect of discriminatory reporting.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, our short period of monitoring of British newspapers over a two-week period in September 2012 shows that it is the norm for many, if not most newspapers to report on matters as diverse as politics, crime, sport, society and culture in a way which omits women's voices, misrepresents women, is inaccurate about women's lives, and which ultimately promotes some harmful myths and stereotypes. In particular, reporting about crimes of violence against women frequently strays into prejudicial editorial which blames women for the crimes committed against them, and to some degree makes excuses for the perpetrator. This can cause real harm by deterring women and girls from reporting assaults, sending potential perpetrators a message that violence will not be taken seriously and perpetuating myths that the public and crucially jurors may believe. Other reporting focuses relentlessly on women's appearance, subjecting them to scrutiny in a way that has no parallel for men. Furthermore, some publications contain pornified material on a daily basis, and the anomaly that allows them to do this, when they are available to any buyer without restriction, needs urgent attention. This exists within a context in which, much newspaper reporting simply passes over women and silences their views and achievements (in the year of London 2012 this absence of women in sports reporting is emblematic of the whole).

It is not for this report to assess or speculate upon the reasons for this prejudicial and anti-democratic treatment of women by the British press. Others have recently noted the lack of women working in newsrooms, especially at editorial levels, and those concerned with a lack of participation of women in other areas of public life such as politics and business have shown that the consequences of this can include respectively a lack of policy addressing women's specific needs and poorer productivity than more inclusive workforces lead to.

It is however our strong contention that the current treatment of women by the press is a key area of consideration in any examination of media ethics and standards. The consequences of a key cornerstone of our common cultural life perpetuating damaging stereotypes and attitudes are clear – from providing a conducive context for violence against women and girls, through to limiting women's and girls' aspirations and excusing and perpetuating discrimination.

The press is not of course charged with being an organ for social change. Newspapers are ultimately commercial enterprises which need to consider the bottom line and survive in an intensely competitive and ever-evolving market. But – the Leveson Inquiry was set up because of the shared belief that this commercial press must nevertheless NOT act in a way which is illegal, nor which is unethical or contrary to the public interest. At a minimum it must 'do no harm'.

This public interest is not an abstract 'good' but rather means the general wellbeing of the whole community, which consists of many different groups and individuals. Women are always over half of these and no regime which ignores or actually facilitates harm to women could be said to be in the public interest. Therefore, it clearly runs contrary to the public interest to allow news reporting which regularly, directly or indirectly, has a negative, cumulative impact on women's rights.

The new regime which follows this Inquiry must ensure that media conduct which harms women is prevented and penalised if it does take place. There is a clear consensus in our society about the need for women's equality and justice and this requires a free, robust and investigative press which will expose abuse of power and how, for example, those who abuse women and girls often act with impunity (the failure ever to conduct a thorough enough investigation to expose Jimmy Savile must be noted here). Furthermore, the press

has responsibilities which include the responsibility not to promote discrimination, but rather to represent and reflect a wide diversity of actors and opinions. Our democratic discourse has been considerably narrowed by the stereotyped portrayal of women in the press including the general lack of representation of black and minority, ethnic women, older women and women with disabilities, rendering whole segments of society barely visible and without an audible voice.

### **Our specific recommendations**

Based on our findings about how the British press currently treats women, and after examining the regime of the Press Complaints Commission to date and considering how this might be changed to incentivise better treatment of women, we are calling for the following measures to be implemented:

1. The new regime must allow for 'third party complaints' to the body set up to adjudicate on press behaviour. Women and girls who are victims of abuse and who are misrepresented and worse in press reports are often not in a position to complain (women living with the consequences of abuse and perhaps trying to build a new life in a new place; women in fear of a perpetrator of abuse; women who themselves internalise the victim-blaming messages written about them). Women and girls more broadly are affected by poor reporting about other women and it should be possible for such reporting to be brought by third parties to the attention of a press regulatory body which would also have the power to carry out thematic investigations into press reporting of specific issues or cases. The current regime has placed too much responsibility on victims of all kinds of poor reporting and does not acknowledge the cumulative effect of negative and discriminatory reporting.
2. The new adjudication body must include prominent representation of experts on equality who are able to recognise fundamental and persistent inequality in press conduct and who can advise their peer members of the body on the likely impact and consequences of such reporting. These representatives should seek to make themselves accountable to the equality sector.
3. The new 'Editors' Code' should set clear, professional standards that promote equality and respect for all people, including women. Discrimination against women in the press should be fully recognised as such and not relegated to a "taste and decency" sphere that is not applied to other forms of discrimination. It must be clear that offences of harassment also include sexual harassment.
4. The new regime must have compulsory membership if it is to have any teeth. If titles are permitted to leave the new body they will be able to continue a 'race to the bottom' in reporting standards on women and depictions of women.
5. The anomaly of permitting 'newspapers' to contain sexually objectifying imagery must end. We recommend that a parallel is drawn with the broadcasting watershed where 'adult material' is not shown until after 9pm. If 'newspapers' wish to continue including, and as such selling, sexually explicit images and materials then their sale must be restricted – they should not be available to under-18s and they should not be generally displayed in stores.

In addition to these critical proposals, we are also calling for:

6. Specific training for journalists and editors on violence against women and girls and the relationship between its depiction and harm to women and girls; we want to see those offering training courses to journalists include discussion of these issues in



their curricula and for newspapers to require/encourage their staff to take such training. The apparent repeated failure by Newsnight to properly report on matters of child sexual abuse, including protection for vulnerable survivor/victims, underlines this point.

7. An inquiry by the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee into sexism across the media. There is now a wide range of voices from those working in the press and their representatives, to women's organisations, women in politics/business/sport/other professions, the Crown Prosecution Service, people working with girls, and many more, all saying that the persistent sexist portrayal of women in the media is widespread, undermines our justice system, is limiting girls' aspirations, and that it does real harm. This stereotyped portrayal of women is not inevitable and it is not an issue of 'taste'. It is discriminatory, and it should be thoroughly examined with specific measures drawn up to tackle media sexism.

Our four organisations made written submissions to the Leveson Inquiry in December 2011 outlining many of the issues we evidence with our new survey in this short report. We gave oral evidence together in January 2012, and then wrote formally again to the Inquiry in July with our comments on the Draft Criteria. All of these documents are available on the Inquiry website and on our own websites.

We welcome warmly Lord Justice Leveson's and his team's consideration of our written and oral submissions which recognised the place of the issues raised above as part of the discussion of how to create a new regime for the British press which requires it to act in the public interest. We hope of course to see our recommendations included in Lord Justice Leveson's final report, and then to be part of the consequent national debate as the government prepares its response. In the long term, we hope our reports and research will also contribute to a now established debate about media sexism in democratic, free market societies. More information about our four organisations' broader work in this area is available on our websites and we are available to debate and discuss further.