

OBJECT

Women not
Sex Objects

Feminist Fridays Action Pack

Feminist Fridays consist of groups around the country coordinating actions to challenge misogynistic lads' mags being sold as part of the mainstream media. They are a fun way to take a stand against 'sex object culture' and to spread grassroots feminist activism.

This pack is designed to support and inspire groups and individuals to take action. You can use it as a guide – but feel free to be creative!

NB Please note that OBJECT promotes peaceful and legal protest which is positive, inclusive and empowering. We support groups to take part in Feminist Fridays in your own name and we take no responsibility for actions which go against the ethos of OBJECT. For more information about OBJECT you can visit our website at

www.object.org.uk



Feminist Fridays take place on the last Friday of every month.

This action pack includes:

- Examples and ideas for Feminist Friday actions
- Legality of actions
- 'Protester pointers'
- Feminist Fridays 'Comebacks'
- Leaflet on lads' mags (please print and make copies)
- Petition calling for lads' mags to be recognised and regulated as porn (please print and make copies)

OBJECT Feminist Fridays

OBJECT activists launched Feminist Fridays in April 2009 and since then they have been steadily growing each month across the UK. We have been targeting WH Smiths as one of the largest distributors of lads' mags and the Daily Sport, and Tesco as a leading family supermarket that has banned the wearing of pyjamas in some stores yet continues to stock pornographic lads' mags. Actions are also taking place in student unions and other suppliers of so-called 'soft' porn.

"It's really empowering and it makes a big statement not only to the retail outlets and store managers but also to the public who see what we are doing"

OBJECT Activist

Ideas for Feminist Fridays

1. Covering lads' mags in paper bags with anti-sexism slogans

One successful stunt has been to **cover lads' mags and newspapers like the Daily Sport with paper bags covered in anti-sexist slogans**. Writing slogans together as a group has been a fun and empowering part of these actions.

Examples of messages written on the paper bags have included – '**MAXIMUM Sexism**' (over a Maxim magazine), '**For Horrible Misogynists**' (Over FHM), '**Women, not sex objects**', '**Love women, hate sexism**'... and many more.

In the majority of occasions so far we have been able to cover entire displays before being asked to move on by the manager. This has been really effective.

In fact, **upon returning to a Feminist Friday target two weeks after the first London action, an activist found that the display had been moved to the back of the store and had been greatly reduced**. The Manager on duty informed her that 'the display had been moved as a result of a group protesting about it and causing a "disturbance" earlier that month' – **result!**

Tip - If you are unable to cover the display before being spotted by the manager and asked to move on, you can explain your reason for protesting and hold the bags so that customers can read the messages. That way you still get the message across that you object to the sexual objectification of women and that you are not alone. Whatever happens - make sure you get a photograph!

1a. Tailor the stunt for your local Tesco and don your pyjamas and slippers!

Pyjama wearing campaigners across the country are descending upon their local Tesco on Feminist Fridays to highlight the absurdity of some stores banning the wearing of pyjamas because it is considered 'offensive', yet continuing to sell degrading and misogynistic "lads mags" at children's eye level next to ordinary newspapers and comics.

"It sends out a message that we don't have to passively accept the debasement of women in our mainstream media and where it occurs we will challenge it"

OBJECT Activist

You can still cover displays of lads' mags with paper bags with anti-sexist slogans as outlined above, but additions include things like: **"Pyjamas won't harm us, but lads' mags do, Stop selling Loaded, Front, Nuts & Zoo"**

2. Taking magazines off the shelf and complaining to the manager

Another idea is to adopt the strategy used by many feminist campaigners in the past and to enter shops in small groups; collect a sample of the sexist materials; take them to the till; ask to see the manager and make a complaint about why pornographic materials are displayed next to ordinary magazines and newspapers.

In order to make this stunt visual you can **either cover the remaining display with leaflets or try taking *all* the magazines off the shelf and leaving the leaflets in their place.** Remember to always take a photograph!

The great thing about this idea is that there is no need to be discreet and groups can target the same shop over and over until complaints are taken seriously. This strategy is also easy to organise and requires little preparation.

Groups can then meet at a central place at the end of the evening to exchange stories and have a sense of being part of a team.

Making the stunt visual

It makes a difference if the stunt can be visual and have some humour to it.

The paper bag stunt is very visual in itself, but whatever you decide to do, please take with you leaflets and / or a flip chart piece of paper with an anti-sexist slogan about lads' mags such as **"Love Women, Hate Sexism? – OBJECT to lads' mags"**, or **"Women, not Sex Objects – take lads' mags out of our face"** written in large letters and take a photograph which includes the big sign and / or the leaflets next to the display or next to your action. You can send photographs to anna@object.org.uk.

The only pointer here is that the message can't be construed as 'offensive', but other than that- **enjoy being creative!**

We will then put all the photographs together for a **Feminist Friday collage.**

The petition and leaflets

Please remember to **photocopy the petition** so that we can collect as many signatures as possible calling for sexist magazines to be covered up and put on the top shelf. It is also useful to have copies of the leaflet which you can hand out to people who are interested in what you are doing.

In larger groups, it is good for some members to hand out leaflets and get passers-by to sign petitions whilst others are covering the displays and / or speaking to the manager – you can take it in turns to do different things.

Legality of actions (according to advice we have received from police officers)

It is perfectly legal to ask to see the manager and to make a complaint about what is being sold in their shop.

It is also perfectly legal to put magazines in paper bags as long as you don't damage the magazines or make them unsellable, and as long as the messages you write on the paper bags cannot be construed as 'offensive' i.e. no swear words.

It is perfectly legal to take photographs of the displays as long as there is no notice saying that photography is prohibited.

Issues regarding the legality of these actions arise, however, if a manager asks you to leave the store and you refuse - as that can be interpreted as trespassing. **Therefore, you must leave the premises if asked to do so by the manager if you do not want to be liable for trespassing.**

If the store is on a high street, and therefore on public property, it is perfectly legal for you to continue petitioning outside the store. You do not *need* police permission to petition unless you are within one square mile of the Houses of Parliament.

If you wish to conduct what could be construed as a protest in Westminster you will need to speak to somebody within the 'Events Department' of Westminster police.

If you are not within one square mile of Westminster and wish to advise the police that is completely your choice.

“Although he [the manager] kept explaining that he had to speak on behalf of Smiths, he admitted to agreeing with us for the main part. I thanked him for being so reasonable...

Can't wait for the next one! ☺”

OBJECT Activist

Protest pointers

One of the key objectives of Feminist Fridays is to promote grassroots feminist activism which is **positive, inclusive and empowering**.

An action which is positive and inclusive has a far greater chance of being effective in terms of getting people on board. It will also be a lot more fun and empowering to be part of –

You will leave feeling like the world is yours and like you can take on anything!

If you are **interested in getting involved** in Feminist Fridays go to the OBJECT Facebook Page or email anna@object.org.uk

If you take part in a Feminist Friday, **please take photographs and send us what can be a brief account of what happened** to so that we have an idea of how many people are taking action and so that we can collate experiences and put together a **Feminist Friday collage**.

Also, please get as many signatures as you can using the **petition** in this pack and please send them to the address given at the bottom of the petition.

NB We support groups to take part in Feminist Fridays in your own name and we take no responsibility for actions which go against the ethos of OBJECT. For more information about OBJECT you can visit our website at www.object.org.uk

www.object.org.uk

ido@object.org.uk

Feminist Friday 'comebacks'

Before you start it can be fun and useful to brainstorm together as a group to think about how you would answer potentially challenging questions.

The more you get to practice your arguments with the group, the more confident you will feel and the easier it will be to remain calm and not get dragged into confrontational disagreements. There are also 3 key messages which can be helpful to put into your own words and keep repeating – especially if you ever feel a little tongue tied ☺

These 'comebacks' and messages are meant as a guide to help you and to inform you of some of the facts and arguments, they are not meant to be prescriptive.

3 key messages:

- 1. Lads' mags and newspapers like the Daily Sport objectify and demean women by portraying them as sexual objects**
- 2. They should not be sold at the eye-level of children and next to ordinary magazines and newspapers because of the harmful messages they send out about how women can be viewed and treated**
- 3. This is in the 2006 voluntary code of practice drawn up by the Home Office, the Periodical Publishers Association and the National Federation of Retail Newsagents Office**

“What are you doing here?”

We are here to complain about the fact that you display lads' mags and newspapers like the Sport at the eye level of children and next to ordinary magazines and newspapers. These magazines and newspapers objectify, sexualise and demean women. They make fun of issues like rape, trafficking and prostitution and they are full of pages of adverts for hardcore pornography. We find it offensive and unacceptable that we are bombarded with these images every time we come into your store to buy a newspaper.

“If you don't like lads' mags, don't buy them”:

That's not the point. If these magazines were covered up and put on the top shelf then it would be up to us to decide whether or not we want to buy them, but currently we have no choice about whether or not we want to be subjected to these sexually objectifying images because they are displayed so prominently.

We are campaigning to restore our choice to be able to go shopping for a newspaper or some milk without being confronted with images which we find offensive and degrading; And for children to be able to look at their magazines and comics without being subjected to sexualised images which promote a warped and sexist view of how women are supposed to look and how they can be viewed and treated.

“There’s nothing illegal about selling these magazines and displaying them where we want”:

Since 2006 there has been a Voluntary Code of Practice with guidelines for displaying lads’ mags and magazines with sexually explicit imagery which you are currently breaching.

This Code of Practice was drawn up by the Home Office along with relevant stake holder groups such as the Periodical Publishers Association and the National Federation of Retail Newsagents Office in response to a growing number of complaints from individuals, pressure groups and MPs. These guidelines recommend that retailers display lads’ mags and newspapers with sexually graphic front pages well above children’s eye level and away from children’s titles and comics.

In only a few hours, we have already collected hundreds of signatures from people calling for lads’ mags and other pornographic magazines and newspapers to be covered up, put on the top shelf and for age restrictions to be applied to their sale – isn’t it time you listened to your customers?

“Lads’ mags aren’t pornography”:

(Here you can just open the pages of the lads’ mags and the Sport to show the hundreds of adverts for hardcore pornography and ‘sexual services’ and ask the manager to honestly try and tell you that these publications are not linked to the porn industry.)

Even without these direct links, the purpose of lads’ mags and papers like the Sport is to sexually stimulate male readers by turning women into sexual objects who are always sexually available and who represent the ‘porn dream’.

It is clear that these publications are part of the sex and porn industries and they should be recognised and regulated as such to take into account the harmful effect that they have on how women are viewed.

“They’re just a bit of harmless fun”:

Lads’ mags provide sexual stimulation by portraying women as sexual objects who are always sexually available and whose purpose is to fulfill the sexual fantasies of men. They are directly linked to hardcore pornography and prostitution through their advertising and they constantly trivialise or make fun of issues like rape, trafficking and prostituting women.

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

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

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

“Women choose to do it”

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

“Glamour models make a lot of money”

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

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

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

“What about freedom of speech/censorship?”

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

“You're just anti-sex”

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

“Wouldn’t these regulations take us back to the Dark Ages?”

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

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

“Why is the objectification of women an issue?”

Objectification dehumanises women. The first part of any oppression is to dehumanise the group which is oppressed. The more it becomes acceptable to view women as a sum of body parts, over which men have entitlement, the easier it becomes to disrespect, to mistreat and to act out violence and sexual harassment towards women as a group.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

www.object.org.uk

ido@object.org.uk

Lads' Mags—Just Harmless Fun?

Lads' mags objectify and demean women. They portray women as sexual objects who are always sexually available and whose purpose is to fulfil the sexual fantasies of men

Lads' mags make fun of issues like rape and prostitution:

- Maxim - "Women fantasise about being raped and having sex with animals, it's a myth that women like soft sex"
- Front - "The only time I use a pillow is to cover her face"

Lads' mags promote a warped view of how women are supposed to look and act sexually. Nuts and Zoo have competitions where readers can win breast implants for their girlfriends and where girlfriends are encouraged to enter *Assess my Breasts* competitions. In 2005, the height of the lads' mags boom, the number of women having breast implants doubled.

Lads' mags are directly linked to hardcore pornography and prostitution services through ads in their back pages. Research shows that lads' mags are often just as contemptuous to women as recognised porn titles

- **It is unacceptable that lads' mags are sold next to magazines and broadsheet newspapers as if they were a normal part of the sex industry**
- **Lads' mags are part of the porn industry and they should be recognised and regulated as such.**
- **If sold, lads' mags should be covered up and put on the top shelf, with age restrictions applied.**
- **The harmful effects of the images and messages that lads' mags promote should be recognised and addressed as part of sexism**

