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LADS' MAGS

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AND SHOULD BE
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KEY TERMS

Feminism

Lad

INTRODUCTION

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'Lads' Mags' first appeared in the mid-1990s with titles such as Zoo, Nuts, Loaded and FHM, and are aimed at 18- to 35-year-old men. The content variously includes pictures of semi-naked glamour models as well as interviews with sportsmen and actors and features on technology and gadgets. In May 2013 the Lose the Lads' Mags campaign was launched by an alliance of two women's rights groups, UK Feminista and Object. The campaign called on high-street retailers to withdraw lads' mags and papers featuring pornographic front covers from their stores. The Lose the Lads' Mags campaign argue that lads' mags portray women as dehumanised sex objects, that they feature sexually objectifying images of women and that they can help normalise violence against women [Ref: [Lose the Lads' Mags](#)]. The campaign has had some success, resulting in Coop stores no longer stocking the magazines until they come in "modesty bags" which hide the front covers [Ref: [Independent](#)], Tesco restricting sales to over-18s only and also agreeing a deal with lads mag publishers to produce more modest covers [Ref: [BBC News](#)]. For opponents, the Lose the Lads' Mags campaign has a patronising view on woman and men, and that it reinforces the censorious idea that publications you don't like should be banned [Ref: [Telegraph](#)]. They also raise questions about the connection between lads' mags and violence against women [Ref: [Huffington Post](#)].



Dehumanising women?

The core of the anti-lads' mags campaign is that they portray women as dehumanised sex objects – both within the pages and on the front cover of the magazines. They argue that there is extensive research that shows that the way these magazines portrays women fuels sexist attitudes and behaviours, and that the objectification helps support violence against women [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. As such, they argue that continuing to stock and display lads' mags results in breaches of equality legislation - because each store that sells these magazines is also a workplace, the display of these magazines and the possible requirement of staff to handle them in the course of their jobs may amount to sex discrimination and sexual harassment contrary to the Equality Act 2010 [Ref: [HM Government](#)]. Similarly, exposing customers to the images in these publications may also result in breaches of the Act [Ref: [Object](#)]. There is also the question of how these images affect the self-image of women and girls - in a related campaign, a supporter of the current campaign to abolish 'Page 3' of the Sun newspaper asks: "I wonder what children think when they see the paper and they see page after page of men in clothes doing things, like running the country and one massive image of a woman standing there in her pants?" [Ref: [No More Page 3](#)].

Or patronising women?

Some feminists have criticised these new campaigns, arguing they make patronising assumptions about women who appear on the covers as brainless victims, and of every man who purchases that magazine as a potential rapist. Drawing comparisons between other censorship campaigns, one

commentator argues that "either we credit men with the ability to think for themselves and reject sexism, or we consign them to a fate of being so moronic and malleable that glossy magazines must inevitably drive them to sexual violence" [Ref: [Telegraph](#)]. Others extend the argument that the campaign patronises women – arguing that it views them as incapable of living in the public sphere without having an external authority to put modesty bags or modesty tape on images that might offend them – even making a comparison with the dress codes of some Islamic states which force women to cover up in public [Ref: [Huffington Post](#)]. Others question the specific targeting of lads' mags and Page 3 and ask why these are: "...singled out and not the torso-glistening covers of gay magazines? Why is it acceptable to have a size zero model with her nipples out in a fashion title" but not lads' mags? Are different standards applied to the portrayal of women dependent on where they are displayed and for which audience? Why, for example, are we accepting of portrayals of naked women in art galleries, but not on Page 3? [Ref: [New Statesman](#)].

An increase in violence?

Supporters of these campaigns argue that although lads' mags are not the only publications sending out damaging messages about women's role in society - some criticise the harmful effect that women's magazines have on women's body image and self-esteem - but lads' mags, it is argued, are a distinct group of publications that have a very specific consequence [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. By portraying women as sexual objects for their mainly male readership, lads' mags fuel attitudes that underpin violence against women and perpetuate rape myths.

THE LADS' MAGS DEBATE IN CONTEXT CONTINUED...

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Others counter that if the campaigner's claims were true then an increase in violence against women would be expected to coincide with increased sales of lads' mags [Ref: [Huffington Post](#)]. According to the British Crime Survey the opposite is the case: when lads' mags first appeared in the mid-90s the most popular ones, such as Loaded, sold upwards of 450,000 at their peak, yet between 1997 and 2009 incidents of domestic violence fell by 64 per cent, the number of victims of sexual assault decreased between 2004/05 and 2008/09 and "has shown no statistically significant change" [Ref: [Office of National Statistics](#)]. So are lads' mags dangerous and in need of covering up, or is this a patronising campaign in danger of censorship?

ESSENTIAL READING

How I became a lads mag feminist

Lulu Le Vay *New Statesman* 8 October 2013

UK Feminista founder Kat Banyard: 'It's staggering retailers sell lads' mags'

Kira Cochrane *Guardian* 23 June 2013

FOR

Why does a Tory MP think that getting your tits out is a 'national institution'?

Sally Peck *Telegraph* 10 December 2013

Lads' mags: I've been part of the problem – let me be part of the solution

Daniel Boffey *Guardian* 13 October 2013

Porn has changed - for the worse, even men have noticed

Joan Smith *Independent* 29 September 2013

Is the war of the sexes over

Johanna Sartori *Huffington Post* 13 September 2013

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AGAINST

Lads' Mags: Objectification Is Bad, But So Are Censorship and Sexual Repression

James Bloodworth *Huffington Post* 9 August 2013

You Know What Other Countries Cover Up Lads' Mags?

Misogynistic Islamist Ones

Brendan O'Neill *Huffington Post* 3 August 2013

While we're censoring lads' mags, let's put women's glossies in modesty bags

Dr Brooke Magnanti *Telegraph* 29 July 2013

Get real, banning lads' mags would patronise women

Catherine Scott *Telegraph* 13 June 2013

IN DEPTH

Ex-glamour model: anti-lads' mag bid flawed

Stefanie Marsh *The Times* 19 August 2013

Jimmy Savile revelations have proved feminists were right all along

Joan Smith *The Times* 17 October 2012

BACKGROUNDERS

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Co-op banning lads' mags: inequality existed long before lads' mags and will continue long after

Dr Brooke Magnanti *Telegraph* 9 September 2013

Anti-lads' mags and anti-people

Saleha Ali *spiked* 27 August 2013

Feminism, it's over. But I'm keeping the name

Katie Glass *The Sunday Times* 25 August 2013

Magazine abcs: Loaded drops 26.3% as men's lifestyle freefalls

Mark Banham *Media Week* 12 August 2013

The demonisation of lads mags isn't about equality or respect

Peter Lloyd *Daily Mail* 11 August 2013

Lose the Lads' Mags? Lose the Censorship

Sarah Woolley *Huffington Post* 31 May 2013

First they came for the lads mags... then they came for me

Toby Young *Telegraph* 27 May 2013

Focus on: Violent Crime and Sexual Offences, 2011/12

Office of National Statistics 7 February 2013

Let's get it off our chest Camilla Long

Camilla Long *The Sunday Times* 21 October 2012

Equality Act 2010

HM Government

ORGANISATIONS

Lose the Lads' Mags

Object

UK Feminista

IN THE NEWS

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David Cameron defends opposition to Page 3 ban

Guardian 22 November 2013

Co-op bans lads' mags from its stores

Independent 9 September 2013

Tesco reveals lads' mags 'modesty' deal and under 18 ban

BBC News 3 August 2013

Tesco could be next to force lads' mags into covering their modesty

The Times 30 July 2013

Big Brother contestant blasts call for lads mags to cover-up

Telegraph 29 July 2013

Loaded owner criticises Co-operative Group over 'lads' mags' ban threat

Guardian 29 July 2013

Cameron refuses to back ban on Sun's Page 3 topless images

Guardian 22 July 2013

Girl Guides urge Sun to end Page 3

Guardian 9 April 2013

Tories blame lad mags for absent fathers and sexism

Guardian 4 August 2008

Object and UK Feminista join forces with a group of lawyers to tell shops to lose the lads' mags

Object



LADS' MAGS:

"Lads' mags degrade women and should be covered up"



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