

The Leveson Inquiry
Royal Courts of Justice,
Strand,
London
WC2A 2LL

27 February 2012

Dear Lord Justice Leveson,

As women's organisations working to end discrimination and violence against women and girls, we would like to thank you for the opportunity to give evidence to the Inquiry and to raise the importance of addressing the portrayal of women as part of the investigation into the culture, ethics and practices of the UK media. We wanted to take this opportunity to summarise our key recommendations, and to clarify the steps needed to implement some of these changes.

In particular, we would like to draw your attention to the fact that the below recommendations would not require any legislative change that extends beyond the remit of the Inquiry.

In relation to applying the pre-watershed restrictions of broadcast media to mainstream newspapers which are not age-restricted, such guidelines could be written into the new code of practice, assuming that a professional code of practice remains the mainstay of the regulatory system for the print-based media, and would not require separate legislation for implementation. This is important as it places the issue firmly within the remit of the Inquiry to be considered as one of the potential recommendations.

If written by an independent body of experts, as opposed to the industry itself (a recommendation we would further support) we believe this would provide a stronger framework for a professional and responsible press. Any such code must be capable of appropriate enforcement, which as it stands strongly suggests statutory underpinning, but we appreciate that this is a broader concern and one that the Inquiry, as well as the Government, is assessing.

To reiterate, greater consistency in media regulation in relation to restricting sexualised imagery in unrestricted newspapers we believe would not in and of itself require a change in the law, only a change of the code of practice, backed up by an effective enforcement mechanism.

As presented at the Inquiry, our key recommendations include the following:

- That the PCC is replaced by a stronger body which will hear complaints from groups as well as individuals; which has powers to investigate on its own authority as well as acting on complaints; which is independent of the press and has representatives of equality groups on it; of which membership is compulsory; and which can impose strong sanctions when complaints are upheld, including perhaps fines.

- That gender equality and issues related to discrimination on the basis of sex should be key and distinct components of any new codes of practice for the print based media and that women's groups should be consulted in drawing up the code to ensure these elements are appropriately captured.
- That this new and independent body should carry out ongoing monitoring of patterns of discrimination.
- That journalists should receive training on the myths and realities about violence against women and how to treat victims as well as on issues concerning gender stereotyping and the harms associated with sexualisation and objectification.
- That a new code of practice is developed for the way 'case studies' are dealt with by the media.
- That regulation of printed materials should be consistent with other forms of media regulation so that if sexually objectifying material would not pass pre-watershed restrictions on the television it should not be printed in unrestricted newspapers.
- That schools should be required to tackle gender inequality and gender stereotypes and deliver media literacy classes.

In our testimony, we touched on the fact that certain members of parliament who have in the past raised serious concerns about the portrayal of women in the media have themselves been vilified in the press and, if they are women, also objectified and sexualised, thus restricting their freedom of speech and our democracy. We look forward to this matter being taken up further in Module 3.

We would be very happy to meet with you or your legal team to discuss any of this further and please feel free to email any questions or queries to Anna van Heeswijk, Campaigns Manager at OBJECT, at anna@object.org.uk.

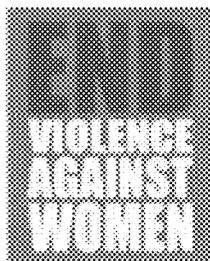
Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

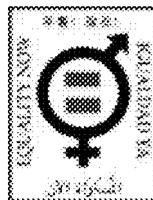
Heather Harvey
Eaves Housing



Holly Dustin
End Violence Against
Women



Jacqueline Hunt
Equality Now



Anna van Heeswijk
Object

