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Obscenity versus objectification:
A feminist reading of Leveson and its aftermath

by
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

City, University of London
Departments of Journalism and Sociology
January 2020

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Parts of this work have been published as:

Gill, R. & Toms, K. (2019) 'Trending now: Feminism, Postfeminism, Sexism and Misogyny', in Carter, C. Steiner, L. Allan, S. (eds.) *Journalism, Gender and Power*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisors Professors Suzanne Franks and Rosalind Gill, whose patience, encouragement and academic wisdom kept me on course.

My thanks to City, University of London for funding my work with a studentship and enabling me to do this doctoral research.

I thank my participants who generously gave their time to help me with this research, and Bob and Joey for their help with interview access.

I am indebted to the PhD gang at City University who from day one unhesitatingly adopted me as one of their own despite my wonky credentials. I'm sure I would have given up had it not been for your kindness, warm welcome, humour, support and feedback.

Thank you to my readers – Ella, Finn, Jacqui, Jiun-Yi, Jon, Juvaria, Laura, Marloes, Naveen, Nick, Radwa, Rina, Simon, Sonila and Yvonne. This thesis is far better than it would have been without your feedback.

Thank you to my parents who taught me to question everything, accept nothing and in the words of Andrea Dworkin 'to resist, do not comply'.

My love and thanks to the women of London Feminist Network, Object and Anti-Porn London who informed, educated and inspired me.

A very special thank you and so much love to my dear feminist friends Becca Mordan, Dr Julia Long and Dr Finn Mackay who have kept me company and supported me in so many ways throughout this PhD. I'm so grateful that when I started out on my feminist journey the hands reaching out to take mine were yours.

My love always to my dear sister Mandy, dear Simon and the Fann-Toms clan of Meadow Lodge, whose love, constant support and open-door policy has kept me afloat in the most trying of times. To my dear sister Ginny who is always 100% on my side, loving me and cheerleading me from afar. And to my dear friends Cleo and Katie who listen and love me unconditionally.

Finally, my love to Daryl and Coco Darling, for their unflagging support, patience and acceptance that 'Mama is working' day and night, and their unstinting love always waiting for me at the door. Thank you, Daryl, for tending the 'pram in the hall', taking on a big chunk of the domestic work and enabling me to try and be in two places at once. I thank you and return your continued love and support.

Abstract

This thesis provides the first significant study of the Leveson Inquiry hearings where feminist activists gave evidence about media sexism and sexualised imagery and the then editor of *The Sun*, Dominic Mohan was recalled to defend the Page 3 feature. Identifying and analysing three key discourses – *moral*, *liberal* and *feminist* – at the Leveson Inquiry, this thesis contextualises and theorises debates about media sexism on the cusp of both a resurgent feminism and renewed misogyny. This is a qualitative, mixed methods, feminist thematic analysis which examines a range of textual sources including transcripts and written evidence from the Leveson Inquiry, as well as interviews gathered for the purposes of this research with key feminist campaigners. This thesis contributes to understandings about how power operates and is sustained through the media and judiciary and how media portrayals of women are defined and debated. It is argued that these hearings at the Leveson Inquiry were a significant moment on the public record with implications for tabloid newspapers, press regulation and feminist campaigning. An extensive repertoire of sexist justifications, defences and argumentations is identified at the Leveson Inquiry, alongside feminist strategies of resistance in this hostile postfeminist context. A triple entanglement of moral, liberal and neoliberal male rights argumentations is identified, which, it is argued, acts to silence an emergent feminist human rights discourse.

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Abbreviations

ABC	Audit Bureau of Circulations
ASA	Advertising Standards Authority
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CAP	Campaign Against Pornography
CEDAW	The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CPC	Campaign against Pornography and Censorship
DCI	Detective Chief Inspector
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DCMS	Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
DMG Media	*The Daily Mail* Group of Companies
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
EHRC	Equality and Human Rights Commission
EM Fems	East Midland Feminists
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
EVAW	End Violence Against Women
FAC	Feminists Against Censorship
FACT	Feminist Anti-Censorship Taskforce
FHM	For Him Magazine
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FiL	Feminism in London conferences
FOI	Freedom of Information
FPSI	Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICO	The Information Commissioner's Office
IMPRESS	Independent Monitor for the Press
Incel	Involuntarily Celibate
IPSO	Independent Press Standards Organisation
JCHR	Joint Committee on Human Rights
MRA	Men's Rights Activism
NFOL	Nationwide Festival of Light
NFRN	National Federation of Retail Newsagents
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NHSC	National Heritage Select Committee
NOW	National Organisation for Women
NVALA	National Viewers' and Listeners' Association
Ofcom	The Office of Communications
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PCC	Press Complaints Commission
PNC	Police National Computer
PressBoF	The Press Standards Board of Finance
PR	Public Relations
PRP	Press Recognition Panel
RFC	Regulatory Funding Company
TRP	The Red Pill
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
WAVAW	Women Against Violence Against Women
WHOA	Working to Halt Online Abuse
WI	Women's Institute
WiJ	Women in Journalism
WLSR	World League for Sexual Reform
WOW	Women of the World Festival at Southbank Centre

Timeline of events

1857	*The Obscene Publications Act*
1868	R v Hicklin (Hicklin Test)
1928	*The Well of Loneliness* banned
1929	*Ulysses* banned
1947	The first Royal Commission; The Ross Commission
1949	Ross Commission Report
1953	General Council of the Press set up
1953	European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) came into force
1955	*Lolita* banned
1959	*The Obscene Publications Act*
1960	R v Penguin Books (Trial of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*)
1961	The second Royal Commission: The Shawcross Commission
1963	The General Council of the Press renamed The Press Council
1964	Jacobellis vs Ohio ('I know it when I see it')
1965	National Viewers' and Listeners' Association (NVALA) set up
1966	National Organisation for Women (NOW) set up in America
1969	Rupert Murdoch purchases *The Sun* newspaper
1970 November 17	First Page 3 feature is published in *The Sun*
1970 November 20	Feminists protest the Miss World Competition
1970	Equal Pay Act 1970 passed and came into force in 1975
1970	The Younger Committee
1971	Nationwide Festival of Light rallies
1972	The Younger Report on Privacy
1972	Longford Report
1974	The Third Royal Commission: The McGregor Commission
1975	Sex Discrimination Act 1975 came into force
1976	Unsuccessful trial against *Inside Linda Lovelace*
1977-9	The Williams Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship
1977	The McGregor Commission Report
1977	Eaves Housing set up
1980-1993	Campaigns led by Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW)
1981	Indecent Displays (Control) Act
1981	Arrest and trial of Peter Sutcliffe
1983	Dworkin-MacKinnon Anti-Pornography Civil Rights Ordinance
1984	Feminist Anti-Censorship Taskforce (FACT) set up in America
1986	Winston Churchill MP Private Member's Bill on obscenity
1986 March 12	Clare Short tables Ten Minute Rule Bill on Page 3
1987	Gerald Howarth Private Members Bill
1987-1997	The Campaign Against Pornography (CAP)
1988 April 13	Clare Short tables Ten Minute Rule Bill on Page 3 for a second time
1989-1992	Campaign against Pornography and Censorship (CPC)
1989	Feminists Against Censorship (FAC) set up
1989	Hillsborough disaster
1989	Calcutt Committee
1990	Calcutt's *Report of the Committee on Privacy and Related Matters*
1990	Broadcasting Act
1991	Press Complaints Commission set up and first Editors' Code of Practice
1992	Equality Now set up
1992	Heritage Secretary David Mellor forced to resign over an affair
1993 January	Calcutt's *Review of Press Self-Regulation*

1993	*The Fourth Report of the National Heritage Select Committee (NHSC) on Privacy and Media Intrusion*
1995	Heritage Secretary Virginia Bottomley declined to take forward either Calcutt or the NHSC's recommendations for statutory regulation
2000	The 1998 Human Rights Act came into force
2000-2002	Andy Coulson Deputy Editor of *The News of the World*
2002	Police search found serious breaches of the Data Protection Act by serving and former police officers selling data from the Police National Computer (PNC).
2002	Milly Dowler missing and murdered, and phone hacked by *News of the World*
2003-2007	Andy Coulson Editor of *The News of the World*
2003	Ofcom established
2005	Ofcom Broadcasting Code first published
2005	Hollaback! set up
2008	Passage of *Section 63 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008* relating to extreme pornography
2003	Operation Motorman commenced
2003	Object set up
2004	London Feminist Network set up
2004	First revival of London Reclaim the Night
2005	EVAW set up
2005	*The News of the World* phone-hacking of Prince William and Tom Bradby's phones revealed
2006	*What Price Privacy: the unlawful trade in confidential personal information* report published, followed six months later by *What Price Privacy Now?*
2006	Retailers voluntary code of practice agreed to cover up lads' mags and *The Sport* and display away from children
2007	*The News of the World* Royal Editor Clive Goodman and private investigator Glen Mulcaire convicted and imprisoned for phone-hacking
2007	First Press Complaints Commission internal investigation
2007	David Cameron appointed Andy Coulson as Director of Communications for the Conservative Party
2009	Second Press Complaints Commission internal investigation
2009	*The Guardian* alleged phone-hacking at *The News of the World* was widespread
2009	Closure of *Maxim* magazine
2010	Equality Act 2010 came into force
2010 May 11	David Cameron and Nick Clegg go into coalition together
2010	Prime Minister David Cameron appointed Andy Coulson Director of Communications at 10 Downing Street
2010	UK Feminista set up
2011 January	Andy Coulson resigned as Director of Communications at 10 Downing Street
2011	Closure of the *Daily Sport* and *Sunday Sport*. Relaunched as thrice-weekly title
2011	*The Guardian* newspaper implicated other newspapers in phone-hacking including the *Daily Mirror*
2011	Operation Weeting, Operation Elveden and Operation Tuleta launched
2011 July 4	*The Guardian* newspaper revealed that *The News of the World* had hacked murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler's phone

2011 July 6	David Cameron announced The Leveson Inquiry in the House of Commons
2011 July 7	*The News of The World* closed after 168 years
2011 July 8	Andy Coulson arrested, charged with phone-hacking and given 18-month sentence
2011 July	News Corp forced to abandon bid to take full control of Sky
2011 July	The Leveson Inquiry opened
2012	Everyday Sexism set up
2012 January 24	Object, EVAW, Equality Now and Eaves gave oral evidence to the Leveson Inquiry
2012 February 7	Dominic Mohan, then editor of *The Sun* recalled to give evidence to the Leveson Inquiry about Page 3
2012 August	No More Page 3 set up
2012 November 29	The Leveson Inquiry closed and Leveson's Report: *An Inquiry into the Culture, Practices and Ethics of the Press* is published. David Cameron states he does not support statutory underpinning
2013 March	Cross party agreement that press regulators would be encouraged to seek recognition from the Press Recognition Panel, set up by Royal Charter
2013	Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 enacted
2013	Co-operative and Tesco Supermarkets announced they would no longer stock lads' mags and *The Sport*
2014	Press Complaints Commission closed
2014 September	The Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) set up
2014 November	Press Recognition Panel set up
2014	Gamergate controversy began
2014	Closure of *Front* and *Nuts* Magazines
2015	Closure of *Zoo*, *Loaded* and *FHM* Magazines
2015	Eaves Housing and Object closed
2015	Women's Equality Party set up
2015 January	No More Page 3 reached over 215,000 signatories to its petition
2015 January 22	Last bare-breasted Page 3 feature is published in *The Sun*
2016 June 16	Murder of MP Jo Cox by a Far-Right extremist
2016 October	The Independent Monitor for the Press (IMPRESS) set up
2017 January 20	Trump inaugurated
2017 January 21	Women's march against Trump
2017 October	#MeToo spread virally
2017	Jane Austen appeared on £10 notes as a result of Caroline Criado-Perez's lobbying
2018 March	Leveson Part Two cancelled
2018 September	Comcast outbid 21st Century Fox and purchased Sky
2019 January	Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) announced that obscene publications depicting consensual sex acts would no longer be subject to prosecution
2019 April	Last bare-breasted Page 3 feature is published in *The Daily Star*

Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction to the thesis

On Thursday 22 January 2015, 44 years after it came into existence and after decades of campaigning against it, *The Sun's* Page 3 featured its last glamour model with bare breasts. Media proprietor Rupert Murdoch was even moved to tweet on the matter, and the page has indeed evolved into an approximation of his vision of a 'halfway house with glamorous fashionistas' (Murdoch, 2013). By the same year, after over a decade of features such as the 'street strip challenge' (*Nuts*), 'win a boob job for your girlfriend' (*Zoo*) and 'high street honeys' (*FHM*), every lads' mag title, including *Maxim* (2009), *Front* (2014), *Nuts* (2014), *Zoo* (2015), *Loaded* (2015), and *FHM* (2015) had folded. In 2011 *The Daily* and *Sunday Sport* closed and relaunched as a thrice weekly title, with an unspecified combined circulation figure estimated at less than 100,000 copies a week (The Drum, 2011; MacNeill, 2016). In April 2019 the *Daily Mirror* followed *The Sun* and removed bare breasts from its Page 3.

As a counterpoint and perhaps contributing to the demise of Page 3 and lads' mags, feminist activism in the mid to late 2000s underwent a resurgence. Campaigns to end Page 3, such as No More Page 3 and Turn Your Back on Page 3, and campaigns against lads' mags, such as those spearheaded by the women's organisation Object, claimed these developments as victories. Furthermore, this period was one of crisis for UK (and global) journalism, in which once all-powerful businesses and proprietors were scrabbling for answers as their daily sales plummeted on a relentless trajectory downwards. This point in time marked a rebranding and re-evaluation for newspapers and magazines, a taking stock and a reassessment which contributed to changes such as the end of lads' mags and the cover-up of Page 3.

Into this fraught and contested context, The Leveson Inquiry emerged as the perfect stage for these debates to be articulated. The primary purpose of the Leveson Inquiry, a judicial public inquiry into the culture, practices and ethics of the British press carried out in the wake of the phone-hacking scandal, was to investigate UK press regulation on privacy. Regardless of the outcome, The Leveson Inquiry was significant as it captured on the public record an in-depth examination of all aspects of press ethics and behaviour which were investigated in a detailed report by an independent, senior judge. Of specific interest to this thesis was a section of the inquiry focusing on media treatment of women, included as part of the wider remit on issues of press ethics and standards. The final report of the Leveson Inquiry in November 2012 seemed to pre-empt and hasten the shift in feminist activism, upholding evidence given by

women's organisations and finding that UK print media's 'failure to treat women with dignity and respect' and the practice of 'demeaning and degrading women' was a concern (Leveson, 2012b, p. 663).

And yet, as feminist campaigns such as Everyday Sexism testify, whilst progress towards equality for women in the UK seems to be advancing, the computational turn has resulted in women facing perhaps more sexism and misogyny than ever before (Holland *et al.*, 2017; Amnesty International, 2018) particularly via hate speech and trolling online (Jane, 2014a, 2014b; Megarry, 2014; Cole, 2015). Both a feminist resurgence and a renewed misogyny have gathered pace since the Leveson Inquiry concluded in 2012; an intensification exemplified through developments such as the killing of MP Jo Cox in 2016 and the pinnacle of #MeToo in October 2017.

The UK Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) working group published a report in 2013 confirming this situation with regards to the visual representation of women in print media. The report found that;

> This persistent portrayal of women as sexualised objects in the print-based media is clearly discriminatory in nature, it is un-paralleled for men, and it exists without context.

And further that;

> This lack of press regulation on the issue is inconsistent with other forms of media, and equality legislation, and it allows for the sexual objectification of women in mainstream media to continue unchecked (UK CEDAW Working Group, 2013, p. 48).

Thus, whilst obvious examples of media sexism such as Page 3 and lads' mags may have reduced, everyday sexism in media reporting and features continues. Irresponsible and unethical reporting around rape and male violence against women remains static (O'Hara, 2012; Easteal, Holland and Judd, 2015; Royal, 2019) and UK political reporting frequently focuses on issues such as 'trousergate', the female Prime Minister's choice of trousers (Moseley, 2016), and, most notoriously, 'Legs-it', a *Daily Mail* front page objectifying Britain's two female political leaders at the time, Nicola Sturgeon and Theresa May, with the headline: 'Never mind Brexit, who won Legs-it!' (The Daily Mail, 2017, p. 1). Additionally, from a

regulatory perspective, the recommendations of the Leveson Report with regard to media representation of women remain largely unadopted.

It is in this context that this thesis focuses on an often overlooked, but nonetheless pivotal area of potential change for UK print media and society post-Leveson, namely how the Leveson Inquiry dealt with women and sexism. Further, this thesis considers how feminist campaigners account for the tactics and strategies used to resist media sexism. Given this conflicted moment of apparent decline, yet obdurate persistence, of media sexism and a rise in feminist resistance against media objectification, the Leveson Inquiry offers a detailed and high-profile snapshot through which to analyse the dominant discourses on this topic.

This opening chapter will provide an introduction to the research. Firstly, the rationale and aims of this project will be presented and there will be a brief overview of the methods and theoretical framework underpinning the research. The context of the Leveson Inquiry will then be set out and the details of the organisations to be studied will be described and discussed. Finally, an overview of the thesis will be provided, with a chapter summary explaining how the thesis will be structured.

Rationale

There has been much dissection of what Leveson's findings mean for UK print media and society – a flurry of research referred to by Horgan as 'Levesoniana' (Horgan, 2013, p. 115). However, whilst researchers have pored over issues such as what the inquiry might mean for privacy law and the victims of hacking, the impact on investigative journalism, and the case for and against statutory underpinning; very little attention has been given to the evidence submitted by campaign groups about the representation of women in UK print media. One notable exception is O'Neill who reviews and amalgamates research showing that women are negatively affected by sexual objectification in UK print media, and finds that these effects would be partially mitigated by a code that would permit third party complaints. O'Neill concludes that beyond this 'what is needed is a wider cultural change in the attitudes of the press' (O'Neill, 2013, p. 114).

Visual representation is a long-established field offering an extensive body of research into representations of women in both mainstream media and pornography. There is also considerable research into the growing human rights agenda with regards to many different expressions of hate speech. However, there is a lack of analysis into how legislation and regulation of print media has developed in relation to women, particularly post-Leveson. It is

these gaps in knowledge which this work aims to address. Additionally, whilst research into the moral, liberal and feminist discourses around media are all clearly established fields, this study takes a different approach by drawing all three discourses together, and examining them in the particular postfeminist post-Leveson context to better understand issues around the representation of women in UK print media. There is also an emphasis on analysing the accounts of feminist campaigners with regards to their strategies and approaches when critiquing media sexism at the Leveson Inquiry and beyond.

It is worth noting that this thesis has involved grappling with temporal awkwardness, as it was written over a fairly long period of time during which much has changed. Trying to do the thesis 'in time', as it were, has proved challenging. As such, it may seem strange to study a public inquiry that took place eight years ago, and which, by most accounts, has been deemed ineffective. However, the Leveson Inquiry hearings analysed were chosen as significant because both feminist argumentation and the liberal and moral defences of sexualised imagery, objectification and media sexism are on the record in detail. Written evidence was submitted of the highest standard and those who gave evidence at the hearings analysed were cross examined by a leading barrister and senior judge. The witnesses gave evidence under oath at a public inquiry as defined by the Inquiries Act 2005, and were live-streamed on the internet. This was a chance for all sides to have their day in court and display their most convincing arguments. These hearings then were a demonstration of the operations of power; a public articulation of the dominant discourses about sexualised imagery which offer an indication of which versions of reality and truth prevail on this issue. The Leveson Inquiry hearings on this issue thus offer a rich opportunity for analysis at a key point in time.

Given the (apparent) waning power of mainstream media, particularly print journalism, it may seem redundant to study discrimination in this arena. However print media continue to play a key agenda-setting function for other media, particularly broadcast (Cushion *et al.*, 2018). Newspapers are widely quoted and referenced online and in print and broadcast media, and TV and radio outlets often look to the staff of newspapers for specialist comment. As such newspapers often have disproportionate influence in comparison to their relatively small circulation figures and, as will be discussed later in this chapter, the online reach of several UK national newspapers is significant and increasing.

Furthermore, as noted by Millwood Hargrave and Livingstone, the print media still perform a key function in framing public discourse, informing the public and affecting attitudes, which in

turn influences policy making (Millwood Hargrave and Livingstone, 2009, p. 212). In this regard Litosseliti draws on Fairclough to argue that;

> The media are not simply representational, but can be seen as sites for the discursive *construction*, and *contestation*, of knowledge, beliefs, values, social relations and social identities. Media discourse works *ideologically*: the meanings produced serve a system of power relations (Litosseliti, 2006, p. 92) (Emphasis in the original).

Indeed, although sales are in decline, *The Sun* is still the UK's highest selling print newspaper, shifting 1.22m print copies a day (Tobitt, 2019b). That this cornerstone of British life until very recently carried a daily full-page image of a partially naked woman thus has symbolic significance and impact. There is a strong case, detailed in **Chapter Three** and most notably articulated by Mooney, Boyle, and Coy, Wakeling and Garner, to suggest that mainstreaming through features such as Page 3 provides an important normative function for the pornography industry, and due to their access and visibility these images may in fact be more impactful than 'extreme' pornography (Mooney, 2008; Boyle, 2010a, p. 3; Coy and Garner, 2010; Coy, Wakeling and Garner, 2011).

As this section has established, the Leveson Inquiry and Report represent a landmark in British media history, the implications of which are still being digested. In particular, the implications for women's inequality remain largely unexplored. Therefore, this project will look critically at Leveson from a feminist perspective to raise questions about how its framework may affect both the representation of women in the UK press, and the ways in which questions of women's representation are understood and theorised.

Aims

This research sets out to consider how women's inequality was constructed and contested at the Leveson Inquiry. It identifies and traces three dominant discourses in debates around the visual representation of women in UK print media – moral, liberal and feminist – and analyses these discourses with particular reference to The Leveson Inquiry, Leveson Report and written submissions to the inquiry. This study aims to examine how these discourses have been deployed in relation to shifts in UK press regulation, to locate them within a wider social and cultural context and to theorise the relationship between these discourses and the significance for women's inequality in the UK.

My research questions were as follows:

RQ1 What discourses are there in the Leveson Inquiry and Report that shape understanding of the representation of women in UK print media?
RQ2 How do feminist campaigners account for their strategies and approaches when critiquing discriminatory coverage of women in print media at the Leveson Inquiry and beyond?

RQ3 What are the implications of the Leveson Inquiry for academic understanding of representation of women in UK print media and parliamentary debate, lobbying and campaigning on these issues?

This thesis sets out to ask:

- How was media representation of women discussed at the Leveson Inquiry?
- How were sexualised images talked about, defended and attacked?
- What arguments were put forward by feminist organisations?
- In what ways did news organisations engage with feminist critiques?
- What kinds of language, strategies and tactics were used?
- How did Lord Justice Leveson interpret the evidence?
- How did feminist campaigners account for their strategies and tactics?

This research seeks to understand how media sexism is established and maintained discursively by asking:

- What can the Leveson Inquiry reveal about discourses and argumentation about media sexism?
- How and why have moral right and liberal discourses on this issue proved dominant for so long?
- How do we define sexualised imagery and who gets to decide if it is sexual or sexist, or if it is obscene and offensive or prejudicial and discriminatory?
- How do the moral, liberal and feminist arguments differ and are there any points of convergence?
- How are arguments about sexism 'heard' successfully, if at all?

The purpose of this thesis then is to explore discourses about sexualised imagery and to catalogue how argumentation both in favour of, and against it, was articulated at the Leveson Inquiry and beyond. In doing so this research seeks to make an original contribution to knowledge about the history and development of regulation around the visual representation of women in UK print media, and provides the first significant study of this section of the

Leveson Inquiry. The thesis also offers key insight into feminist discourse, activism and organisations campaigning on media sexism.

A key focus of this study is thus how reality is constructed through power and language and how this connects to women's inequality. By analysing the evidence given by *The Sun* and *The Sport* at the Leveson Inquiry the aim is to examine the ways in which tabloid newspapers continue to uphold, produce and reproduce the cultural hegemony of male interests. This thesis analyses interviews with key campaigners on this issue in order to reveal their approaches and tactics of resistance. At the core of this research is a desire to reveal how power operates and how it is sustained in the key sites of the mainstream media, politics and the judiciary. The central thrust of this work follows the line of inquiry articulated by Hall to ask: 'How was this active work of privileging or giving preference practically accomplished?' (Hall, 2005, p. 63).

This research does not examine media images or texts depicting sexism and objectification, nor does it ask how women are affected by sexual objectification in UK print media or what they feel about it. It does, however, build on O'Neill's summary of research about media objectification and widens this into an examination of the discourses around the regulation of the representation of women in UK print media.

Methods

This a feminist qualitative study, focusing on the evidence given by women's organisations, *The Sun* and Sunday Sport Ltd at the Leveson Inquiry about media sexism and discrimination against women, and interviews carried out with key feminist campaigners on this issue. Data analysed includes the transcripts and film footage of the Leveson Inquiry, relevant written submissions to the inquiry and the documents that make up the Leveson Report; specifically, the sections pertaining to the visual representation of women in UK print media. (As detailed in **Chapter Five**, some of this data was in the public domain, whilst some was restricted and challenging to access). Supplementary data collection and analysis included qualitative research conducted via five semi-structured face-to-face interviews with some of those who gave evidence at the inquiry on behalf of the women's campaign groups as well as key feminist campaigners relevant to this issue. Further data consulted includes relevant media coverage, parliamentary debate post-Leveson and nine contextual background interviews with MPs, politicians, academics, media commentators and regulators.

Theoretical Framework

This thesis takes a social constructionist approach to research (Burr, 2015, p. 9), and the material is subjected to a thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The work is informed by a feminist perspective (Eichler, 1985; Hartsock, 1987; Stanley and Wise, 1990; Letherby, 2003; Riddell, 2005; Doucet and Mauthner, 2007), as the theoretical model and method of empirical study, in order to address the research questions.

Throughout this work a Gramscian view of hegemony is adopted, in which it is understood that domination and power are maintained by cultural and ideological means, and in which media are crucial for manufacturing consent (Hall, 2005, p. 82). By shaping the media landscape and determining what makes up our culture, dominant discourses produce a normative function with implications across a wider continuum of how women are represented and treated in all walks of life and all social and cultural expressions. Taking this position, images of semi-naked women do not exist in a vacuum, but a society where unequal power relations persist between men and women. Media then, can be viewed as a key site of male domination.

As will be outlined in **Chapter Three**, this thesis is situated in postfeminist understandings of visual representation and media sexism as operating in a neoliberal context, in this regard most notably drawing on the work of McRobbie and Gill. Throughout the thesis a postfeminist contextual framework as established in **Chapter Three** is combined with the conceptual framework as detailed in **Chapter Four**. This conceptual framework draws on three discourses defined by Rees: A 'moral bloc' where discourse is typified by language around obscenity, taste and decency; a classic liberal discourse concerned with civil rights and freedom of speech which is located in the private sphere; and a feminist discourse around sexism, objectification, equality and human rights which is rooted in radical and revolutionary feminist understandings of pornography (Rees, 2007, pp. 204–212). This study then unifies a range of theories about obscenity, liberalism and objectification to build a conceptual framework through which to approach the analysis. A conceptual framework and a postfeminist contextual framework are thus deployed in tandem in this research in order to trace and theorise the three key discourses and analyse the data.

Background to The Leveson Inquiry

The Leveson Inquiry took place between July 2011 and November 2012 and was prompted by events at the Sunday edition of *The Sun* newspaper, *The News of the World*, owned by media mogul Rupert Murdoch's News International (now News UK). After years of ongoing investigations about phone-hacking by *The Guardian*, it was the revelation on 4 July 2011 that murdered school girl Milly Dowler's phone had been hacked which led to public outcry and

high-profile coverage across all media. Speaking in the House of Commons at Prime Minister's Questions on 6 July 2011, then Prime Minister David Cameron agreed to the Leader of the Opposition Ed Miliband's calls for an independent public inquiry, and described the events as 'disgusting', saying that the public must be 'revolted' by what had taken place (Cameron, 2011b). The following week Cameron announced the Leveson Inquiry into press standards and ethics, stating that Lord Justice Leveson would examine:

> the culture, practices and ethics of the press; its relationship with the police; the failure of the current system of regulation; the contacts made, and discussions had, between national newspapers and politicians; why previous warnings about press misconduct were not heeded; and the issue of cross-media ownership. He will make recommendations for a new, more effective way of regulating the press—one that supports its freedom, plurality and independence from Government, but which also demands the highest ethical and professional standards. He will also make recommendations about the future conduct of relations between politicians and the press (Cameron, 2011a).

Part two of the inquiry was planned to investigate criminal practices by newspapers and any police corruption that occurred as part of this. The second part of the inquiry was scheduled to begin after criminal proceedings with regards to phone-hacking had taken place in order to avoid contempt of court, but was cancelled by the Conservative government in March 2018.

The Leveson Inquiry sat for 97 days over a nine-month period and took place at the Royal Courts of Justice. It was the first UK public inquiry to be streamed live over the internet (the Iraq, or Chilcot, Inquiry was also broadcast live, but it was not classed as a public inquiry under the Inquiries Act 2005). Video and audio streams were available for broadcast, and journalists were permitted to tweet from the courtroom, which was open to the public. The inquiry was chaired by judge Lord Justice Leveson (now Sir Brian Leveson, President of the Queen's Bench Division), who shared the cross-examination with lead counsel Robert Jay (now Sir Robert Jay, a High Court judge) and five other barristers, and was assisted by six assessors. The terms of the inquiry were open in nature, as it solicited: 'general comments, submissions and evidence (…) from anyone who wished to submit them' (Leveson Inquiry, 2011). However, Leveson made clear in his opening statement that it was at his discretion whether individuals or groups would be permitted to give oral evidence to the inquiry, stating:

> I make no commitment that anyone who does so [provides information], whether in response to a formal request for a statement or otherwise, will necessarily be called to give oral evidence (Leveson, 2011).

Disability campaigners, for instance, were angered that their request to appear at the hearings was turned down (Disability News Service, 2012).

Organisations and individuals were invited to put themselves forward as 'core participants' to the inquiry. Those granted core participant status could; be represented by a barrister; apply for public funding for legal costs; see evidence, including witness statements, before they were presented; ask for evidence to be redacted; cross examine witnesses and make opening and closing statements (Leveson, 2012e). The decision as to who was given core participant status rested with Leveson, and several applications were turned down. Additionally, core participant status was not granted to all core participants for all sections of the inquiry. For instance, Leveson turned down editor of *News of the World* during the phone-hacking scandal, Rebekah Brooks's application for core participant status for module one of the inquiry, but granted her application for module three of the inquiry.

In all, 13 core participant organisations were confirmed, including: News International (*The Sun* and *Times* newspapers), Northern and Shell Network Ltd (*Express* and *Star* newspapers), Guardian News and Media Ltd, Associated Newspapers Ltd (*Mail* and *Metro* newspapers, now DMG media), Trinity Mirror, Telegraph Media Group, the Metropolitan Police, Surrey Police, The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime, the National Union of Journalists, the Media Standards Trust, the Press Standards Board of Finance (PressBoF) and Government (limited to specific ministers). Core participant status was granted to 53 victims of phone-hacking including the actors Hugh Grant and Sienna Miller, the author J.K. Rowling, the parents and sister of Milly Dowler and the parents of missing child Madeline McCann (Leveson, 2012d). Rebekah Brooks was the only individual to be granted core participant status who was not a victim of phone-hacking. Other key media figures and politicians cross-examined by Leveson and his panel included media proprietors Rupert and James Murdoch, deputy editor and editor of the *News of the World* at the time of the phone-hacking, Andy Coulson, and former Prime Ministers John Major, Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and David Cameron. In total 337 people gave evidence to the inquiry in person and the written evidence of 300 additional people or organisations was considered (Leveson, 2012a, p. 3).

The inquiry was organised into four modules which looked at the relationship between the press and in turn; i) the public, ii) the police and iii) politicians. These first three modules consisted of witnesses and legal representatives giving evidence and being cross examined. Module four considered the future of the media and recommendations for policy and press regulation and took the form of two days of summing up via written and verbal closing statements. As part of module four the inquiry also received an update from the Deputy Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Sue Akers, on the latest developments in the police investigations – Operations Weeting, Elveden and Tuleta.

The Leveson Inquiry remit regarding the visual representation of women

Although the focus of the Leveson Inquiry was issues of privacy and press intrusion in the wake of the phone-hacking scandal, it also encompassed a wider remit on press ethics and standards. The inquiry was open to written submissions regarding all areas of press regulation. In this capacity four women's campaign groups – Object, Eaves Housing for Women, Equality Now and End Violence Against Women submitted written evidence to the inquiry in December 2011 and January 2012, and were then called to give oral evidence in January 2012. As a result of their testimony, the former editor of *The Sun*, Dominic Mohan, was recalled to give evidence to the inquiry for a second time to discuss Page 3, and Leveson's final report included a section addressing the representation of women in UK print media. Also as a result of the women's testimony, a Rule 13 warning letter was issued to Sunday Sport Ltd. Rule 13 letters were issued by the inquiry to notify individuals and organisations that they had been criticised at the Inquiry, or may be the subject of criticism in the subsequent report, and to offer them the right to reply. Sunday Sport Ltd responded with an 8,000-word document defending the visual representation of women in its papers. It is these written submissions and hearings, as well as the section of the report regarding the visual representation of women in UK print media, that this study considers in depth for the first time.

The four women's groups that gave evidence to the Leveson Inquiry were drawn from what is referred to by the Women's Resource Centre as the 'women's sector'. Founded in 1984, the Women's Resource Centre is an umbrella organisation representing women's organisations in England and Wales. These groups make up a segment of the UK's 'third sector' (i.e. as differentiated from the private and public sector) and are typically funded by grants from central and local government, trusts, charities and individuals.

The women's sector consists of some of the following, which can be organised into four categories based on their function:

1. Groups that provide frontline services to women, particularly survivors of rape and male violence against women, such as Rape Crisis and Women's Aid.
2. Think-tanks and research groups such as The Fawcett Society.
3. International campaigning groups, some offering front-line services such as Womankind Worldwide.
4. Funded and unfunded direct-action grass roots campaign groups such as Guerrilla Girls and UK Feminista.

Several of the larger charities such as Amnesty International, Oxfam and Save the Children, have specific campaigns and sections of their organisations dedicated to women's issues such as Save the Children's work on girls' access to education. Other organisations with a key remit with regards to women and girls include government departments such as the Government Equalities Office and non-departmental government bodies such as the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC).

Over the past decade this sector has been hit by central and local government funding cuts, with women's organisations bearing the brunt, as refuges and domestic violence centres have been forced to close down. Two of the organisations that gave evidence to the inquiry have since closed – Eaves Housing for Women and Object. Natalie Gyte of the Women's Resource Centre asserts that this is 'tantamount to state discrimination' and describes how;

> The women's sector is experiencing the worst crisis it has ever seen; so many services are being forced into closure, are not able to provide services to fit the demand, or are having to turn women away (Gyte, 2012).

The women's groups that gave evidence at the Leveson Inquiry form part of the women's sector as follows:

Table 1: Women's organisations that gave evidence at the Leveson Inquiry

	Name of organisation	**Category**	**About the organisation**
1.	Eaves Housing for Women	1. Frontline service provision to survivors of male violence against women.	Eaves was set up in 1977 to provide housing and support to female survivors of domestic violence and trafficking. Eaves lobbied, published research and

			campaigned against prostitution, lap dancing and male violence against women. Eaves was a company limited by guarantee and a charity. Eaves closed in October 2015 due to lack of funding.
2.	End Violence Against Women (EVAW)	2. A coalition of women's organisations which aims to campaign and lobby government to end violence against women and girls.	EVAW was established in 2005 and is a company limited by guarantee and a charity. Most of the organisations EVAW represents fall into the first category of providing frontline services to survivors of male violence against women. For example, key coalition members include Rape Crisis England and Wales, Refuge and Women's Aid, and formerly Eaves Housing for Women.
3.	Equality Now	3. International campaign group.	Established in 1992, Equality Now seeks to end women's inequality globally by lobbying government and seeking to change legislation – as their mission states 'Let's use the law to change the world' (Equality Now, 2017). Key campaign issues include female genital mutilation (FGM) and trafficking.
4.	Object	4. Funded, direct action, grass roots campaign group.	Object campaigned against 'sex object culture' with key targets being lads' mags, lap dancing and prostitution, and aimed to change legislation via a variety of methods including protests,

			demonstrations and lobbying MPs and parliament. Object was a company limited by guarantee which operated as a membership organisation. Object closed in 2015 due to lack of funding[1].

All four organisations were united by a concern about male violence against women, with a sizeable part of their work comprising lobbying for legislative change.

The written evidence submitted by the four women's organisations examined the visual representation of women in media and highlighted newspapers;

> routine failure to report accurately on violence against women; some newspapers' tendency to uphold myths about domestic and sexual violence, prostitution and violence against ethnic minority women; news reporting which implicitly blames women for violence committed against them; and the normalisation of images and stories which sexualise and objectify women in every edition of particular newspapers (Eaves, Object, End Violence Against Women, *et al.*, 2012).

The organisation Object submitted a 25-page document in conjunction with the single issue, unfunded, grassroots campaign group, Turn Your Back on Page 3, which included a content analysis of a selection of UK newspapers, entitled: 'A Week In The Life Of *The Sun*, *The Daily Star* and *The Sport'* as well as recommendations to address what was termed the 'hyper-sexualisation of women in the press' (Object and Turn Your Back on Page 3, 2011). The four key recommendations put forward by Object and Turn Your Back on Page 3 in their written evidence were that; images of women be subject to the same standards as those imposed on broadcast media, i.e. content that would not pass the 9pm broadcast watershed should not be printed in mainstream newspapers; that images of women in newspapers be subject to the same standards found in the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Equality Act 2010, regarding what is permissible in the workplace; that third party complaints be admissible to any prospective UK press regulation bodies; and that issues of women's equality and discrimination be key components addressed by any prospective new codes of practice for the

[1] Since 2015 one member of the Object board has continued to update the organisation's website and social media accounts. The limited company has been dissolved and Object is no longer a membership organisation with a core activist group. This thesis refers to the initial incarnation of the organisation only.

press industry (Object and Turn Your Back on Page 3, 2011).

As noted, Object, Eaves Housing for Women, Equality Now and End Violence Against Women were subsequently invited to give oral evidence. This hearing took place as part of module one, the examination of the relationship between the press and the public, on Tuesday 24 January 2012 and lasted for approximately an hour and 20 minutes, from 11.44am to 1.05pm. Representing the four organisations were Anna van Heeswijk, Campaign Manager for Object, Heather Harvey, Lilith Research and Development Manager for Eaves Housing for Women, Jacqui Hunt, director of the London office of Equality Now, and Marai Larasi, co-chair of End Violence Against Women, who had a dual role as Director of Imkaan, a charity and a company limited by guarantee which lobbies and researches to end male violence against black and minority ethnic women and girls.

The testimony given by the women was based on their years of expertise either as activists and campaigners, or as women's sector specialists working directly with women who have experienced male violence, or as political lobbyists and researchers. As detailed in **Table 1** in **Chapter Two**, several of the women who gave evidence, such as Anna van Heeswijk of Object, combined these roles. For instance, Object created and led direct action protests and demonstrations, did detailed work lobbying parliament and worked with survivors of prostitution and lap-dancing.

Anna van Heeswijk introduced herself to the inquiry as the campaigns manager for the human rights organisation Object. In evidence submitted to the inquiry she described Object as;

> an award winning human rights organisation which challenges the sexual objectification of women and girls, and the mainstreaming of the sex and porn industries in the media and popular culture (Object and Turn Your Back on Page 3, 2011, p. 2).

Together with the campaign group Turn Your Back on Page 3, Object submitted a 25-page content analysis of three red top tabloids, *The Sun*, *Daily Star* and *The Sport*, over one week from 14-20 November 2011. This submission made several recommendations to address what was referred to as 'the hyper-sexualisation of women in the press' (Object and Turn Your Back on Page 3, 2011, p. 3). This content analysis was supported by research from academic journals, government-backed reviews and statistics, and reports by international human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and the United Nation's CEDAW Committee.

Object and Turn Your Back on Page 3 also submitted a written witness statement to the inquiry offering a summary of the concerns, conclusions and recommendations raised in the content analysis. This statement referenced the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Equality Act 2010, as well as the government-backed Bailey Review 2011 and The Sexualisation of Young People Review (2010). In the statement the position of both organisations was said to draw on; 'numerous meetings with politicians, women's organisations, and NGOs representing children and parents'. The submission also referred to evidence gathered 'through Object's work with schools', including insight from teachers and their pupils (van Heeswijk, 2012b, p. 4). The recommendation to bring print media in line with broadcast via a similar rule to the watershed was said to have cross-party support in the House of Commons, and the statement referenced a letter to the Prime Minister supporting this measure signed by 35 women's organisations (van Heeswijk, 2012b, p. 5). Van Heeswijk considered the case against *The Sun's* Page 3 at the Leveson Inquiry to be a continuation of Clare Short's bills in parliament in the 1980s. Van Heeswijk met with Short ahead of the hearing and the MP was supportive of Object's work.

Heather Harvey introduced herself to the inquiry as the research and development manager for Eaves Housing. She described Eaves as 'a charity that works on all forms of violence against women', and explained that Eaves was offered frontline services to women affected by violence, and also carried out research. Heather Harvey submitted a written witness statement on behalf of Eaves in which its service users were described as:

> women in or exiting prostitution, women trafficked for domestic or sexual labour, young women fleeing family, teenage or gang violence, survivors of rape and sexual assault as well as domestic violence, forced marriage, honour crimes and related issues that are often linked to violence against women such as women with substance abuse issues, mental health problems and in or at risk of homelessness (Harvey, 2011).

Heather Harvey's written submission offered a detailed analysis of several examples of irresponsible reporting of violence against women in UK print media. This was supported by evidence including academic research and a report from the United Nation's CEDAW Committee. The written submission also cited two research projects produced by Eaves Housing for Women about the portrayal of rape, prostitution and trafficking in the UK print media.

Marai Larasi introduced herself to the inquiry as the co-chair of End Violence Against Women (EVAW) and the director of Imkaan, and stated that she had over 17 years' experience working 'in the violence against women field'. Larasi described Imkaan as an organisation which 'works against violence around black and minority ethnic women and girls'.

Larasi submitted a 27-page document on behalf of EVAW, which stated that the organisation is a coalition of more than 40 organisations and individuals in the UK, with members such as Rape Crisis, Women's Aid, Refuge, the WI, Amnesty International and the TUC, as well as 'grassroots service providers such as refuges and specialist BME women's services'. Members areas of expertise were listed as; 'rape and sexual violence, forced marriage, FGM, trafficking, sexual harassment, domestic violence and other forms of violence against women and girls.' EVAW was said to take an 'authoritative and evidence-based approach' and campaign for;

> government at every level in the UK to take a more strategic, integrated and properly resourced approach to ending and preventing violence against women and girls in all its forms (EVAW, 2012, p. 4).

The submission also noted that EVAW;

> advise the Government through our attendance at VAWG Inter-Ministerial Groups on VAWG, chaired by the Home Secretary, and stakeholder groups in both the Home Office and Department for Education.

The EVAW submission detailed and discussed 10 examples of poor media behaviour and reporting of violence against women that had been supplied by some of its members. The submission supported this analysis with statistics about the prevalence of violence against women, taken from a 2011 EVAW report (Cerise, 2011) calling for joined-up government action to tackle this issue, which the submission states was; 'developed with our network of academics, frontline service providers and others with expertise on preventing VAWG.'

The submission was also supported by government reports such as the Bailey Review 2011 and the The Sexualisation of Young People Review (2010), and academic research about attitudes to violence against women and the media's role in this.

Jacqui Hunt introduced herself to the inquiry as 'the director of the London office of Equality Now', which she described as 'an international human rights charity working to protect and

promote the rights of women around the world'. She stated that Equality Now has members in over 160 countries and works at grassroots level to support local and national groups to advance women's rights.

Hunt submitted a three-page witness statement to the inquiry which proposed that the 'widespread objectification and sexualisation of women in the UK press' was an infringement of women's rights and was 'promoting their second class status in society' (Hunt, 2011, p. 1). The submission highlighted the UK's obligations in international law such as the United Nation's CEDAW Committee's 2008 findings and recommendations in relation to the elimination of discrimination against women, and its agreement to protect the rights of women as outlined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Academic evidence was also cited in relation to potential negative impacts of media sexualisation and stereotyping of women.

At the inquiry, the women were questioned by barrister Robert Jay and, to a lesser extent, judge Lord Justice Leveson, with each woman focusing on a different aspect of the representation of women in media. Marai Larasi discussed media coverage of male violence against women and in particular rape. Heather Harvey also presented evidence about male violence against women. Jacqui Hunt gave a brief, more wide-ranging comment about women's equality. Anna van Heeswijk covered what she referred to as the 'sexualisation' and 'objectification' of women and 'Page 3 imagery'. The evidence given by Anna van Heeswijk on behalf of the organisation Object is of particular interest to this research in relation to the visual representation of women in print media and the impact of sexualised and sexist imagery.

The former editor of *The Sun*, Dominic Mohan returned to the inquiry on Tuesday 7 February 2012 and answered questions for approximately one hour and 20 minutes from 4.07pms to 5.31pm, about issues which had arisen since he initially gave evidence to the inquiry on 9 January 2012. A small section of this subsequent session covered Page 3 and the visual representation of women, in response to the verbal evidence given by Anna van Heeswijk on 24 January. Mohan was questioned by Robert Jay and to a lesser extent Lord Justice Leveson. This research examines Mohan's submission and oral evidence to the inquiry regarding Page 3 as well as the written evidence submitted by Sunday Sport Ltd.

Having offered an overview of the thesis and what it sets out to do, including a summary of the rationale, aims, methods and theoretical framework, and having given an overview of the

Leveson Inquiry and the hearings focusing on women and media sexism, there now follows a summary of the chapters in this thesis.

Outline of the thesis

Chapter One offers an outline of the research to be undertaken in this thesis, demonstrating the importance and timeliness of this topic. It begins with an explanation of the significance of the Leveson Inquiry as a detailed, high profile snapshot through which to analyse the discursive strategies used to attack and defend sexualised imagery. The Leveson Inquiry hearings are contextualised as a moment in time on the cusp of both a feminist resurgence and renewed public misogyny. Despite the crisis facing mainstream media, and what may be seen as the resulting weakening relevance of print journalism in particular, this chapter argues for the study of mainstream media as a key site of the construction and contestation of social relations and values, in particular the maintenance of unequal power relations between men and women. The study is positioned as a feminist analysis of postfeminist culture drawing heavily on the work of McRobbie and Gill and the cultural studies tradition.

The aims of the research are explained; chiefly to trace and analyse three discourses, moral, liberal and feminist, as they are captured in the Leveson Inquiry and Report. Further, to theorise the contemporary significance of these discourses and consider how the Leveson Inquiry and Report contribute to academic understandings of the visual representation of women. And finally to assess and analyse key feminist campaigner's accounts of their resistance to media sexism at the Leveson Inquiry and beyond. The nature of the problem to be tackled is outlined and this chapter demonstrates that there is a gap in knowledge, as the Leveson Inquiry and Report have yet to be analysed with regards to the representation of women. A brief overview of the methods and theoretical framework relevant to this study is given. In this chapter the origins, remit and parameters of the Leveson Inquiry are detailed, with particular attention paid to the hearings and sections of Leveson's report regarding media representation of women.

Chapter Two surveys print regulation over the past 70 years and argues for the Leveson Inquiry to be considered as one small episode in a long succession of media commissions, reports and inquiries, and a public and political concern about press ethics and standards stretching back centuries to the origins of print newspapers. The Leveson Inquiry is contextualised as part of a repeating cycle of media scandals and inquiries, and it is argued that this issue has yet to be resolved due to political reluctance. Particular attention is paid to

the Calcutt reports of the early 1990s and how these prefigured the Leveson Inquiry 20 years later.

The events leading up to the Leveson Inquiry are chronicled, including details of the particular phone-hacking incidents and unlawful behaviour at the *News of the World* and other outlets between 2003 and 2011. This chapter examines Leveson's recommendations for change in his report and maps developments in press regulation since, including the establishment of the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) and the Independent Monitor for the Press (IMPRESS) and the complex political impasse that remains.

The media landscape is mapped and the contemporary crisis facing mainstream media, specifically UK print journalism is detailed, and this is positioned as a key contextual backdrop for this study. It is argued that despite the threats posed due to the lack of an alternative credible business model post-digital shift, UK print media still play a key role in influencing and establishing societal norms and setting the agenda for both broadcast and online media.

The particular concerns of the campaigning organisation Object are outlined with regards to three so-called red-top tabloids – *The Sun*, *Daily Star* and *Midweek* and *Sunday Sport* – a focus which is carried through into this research. The historical opposition to Page 3 is detailed, beginning with Clare Short's campaign in the 1980s, and this chapter argues for the Page 3 feature as a key site for the normalisation of women's inequality.

This chapter considers UK press regulation with regards to discriminatory and prejudicial representations of women and contextualises this issue in relation to the broadcast and print regulation approaches to racism. It is argued that there are gaps and contradictions in both legislation and regulation on this issue of discriminatory representations of women.

Chapter Three offers a review of the literature. The context for this thesis is set out with an outline of the research undertaken in this field and an explanation of how this has informed the thesis. It is established that this thesis is rooted in the work of Rosalind Gill (Gill, 2007d, 2016, 2017; Gill and Scharff, 2011) and Angela McRobbie (McRobbie, 2004, 2009) and the analysis to be undertaken is situated in a neoliberal, postfeminist context.

The particular historical context for this research is detailed, taking place at a tipping point of both renewed feminist activism and intensified misogyny, both of which have been facilitated by the internet. It is argued that a feminist resurgence enabled by the internet can be detected

from the mid to late 2000s. Visual representation, in particular sexual objectification and pornography, are identified as key concerns of feminist campaigners. This chapter identifies and discusses several grassroots, high-profile feminist campaigns throughout this period, including the work of Object which is analysed further in this study. It is argued that this phenomenon must be seen in the context of a simultaneous outpouring of misogyny, also enabled by the internet. Several key cases of women being attacked online are highlighted, both individually and as part of concerted campaigns such as Gamergate and 'The Fappening', and it is argued that this is part of the ongoing project to silence women in public life. It is argued that the women who gave evidence at Leveson did so as part of a feminist resurgence, which in turn preceded a further surge in feminist activism, typified by #MeToo and the women's marches in the wake of Trump's election. It is argued that this feminist resurgence should be viewed cautiously as it cannot be disentangled from the growing 'toxic technocultures' for women (Massanari, 2017).

Academic inquiry is mapped, from the work of Mulvey and concepts of objectification and the 'male gaze', through to Gill's understanding of a new and more pernicious internalised subjective gaze. Key challenges to the academic understanding of visual representation, namely articulations about empowerment and agency which posit the pornification of the mainstream and the 'democratisation of desire' (McNair, 2002) as positives are discussed. The string of reports about sexualisation in the late 2000s commissioned by governments in the UK, America and Australia is detailed and consideration is given to how these reports have been conceptualised variously as a 'moral panic' and as shifting the spotlight away from central issues relating to women's equality. In this chapter agentic understandings of objectification via a framework of neoliberal individualism and consumerism (Gill, 2007c, 2007d) and research questioning overly positive readings of empowerment and agency are drawn together and critiqued. Research particular to this topic is highlighted, which theorises the normalising, sales function of cultural mainstreaming, such as glamour models, in relation to prostitution and pornography (Coy and Garner, 2010; Boyle, 2013), alongside research which conceptualises Page 3 as performing a similar normalising function – as fun, light-hearted and therefore beyond critique. The final section of this chapter considers contested debates about how enduring sexist media representations may contribute to structural inequality for women including; attitudinal and behavioural sexism; inequality in the workplace, education and other public realms; the impact on girls mental and physical health; and in relation to a normative and normalising role with regards to male violence.

Chapter Four draws on Jeska Rees's study of revolutionary feminism in England 1977-1983 to establish the three discourses traced and analysed in the research – a moral right, a liberal and a feminist discourse. These discourses are defined and historicised in order to provide a conceptual framework for this study. Early moral codes around sexual pollution beliefs are explored and linked to understandings found throughout the history of UK obscenity legislation. The liberalisation of obscenity law is considered and complicated as it is argued that both moral and liberal approaches seek solutions in zoning and restricting sexual imagery in the private sphere. Feminist articulations and resistance against pornography and sexual imagery in the UK are detailed, with particular attention paid to the legislative attempts made by Clare Short in the mid to late 1980s with regards to Page 3. This conceptual approach is then combined with the postfeminist contextual positioning given in **Chapter Three** to create a framework which will be applied to analyse the data in **Chapters Six, Seven and Eight**.

Chapter Five outlines the methodology and the feminist position taken in this research. Firstly, the chapter establishes a feminist standpoint and describes how a feminist position informs the study. A explanation of how the research questions have been addressed methodologically is offered, and an outline of the analytical process undertaken is given. A reflexive position is adopted in relation to the work and there is a consideration of the challenges encountered during the thesis. There is a discussion of the decision to apply a thematic analysis and to take a mixed methods approach which blends a textual analysis of the relevant documents and hearings from the Leveson Inquiry with supplementary interviews. The data collection strategy with regards to documents selected and the sampling strategy with regards to interviews are explained, and the analytical process is accounted for in detail. This chapter continues with a description of the approach to conducting interviews and a discussion of some of the challenges that were encountered. Ethical considerations are discussed with an explanation of how the Economic and Social Research Council's Framework for Research Ethics was adhered to.

Chapters Six, Seven and Eight provide the analysis at the heart of this thesis. **Chapter Six** assesses the evidence given by the women's organisations, both in writing and orally, and traces feminist discourses as represented at the Leveson inquiry. This chapter pays particular attention to the ways in which the campaigners articulated arguments collectively that demonstrated the impact of media coverage on the daily lives of women and girls as a group or class. It is argued that this hearing was a critical moment in hastening a renewed and open feminist language around sexism and misogyny in public life, capturing this discourse on public record in a high profile and highly regarded setting. This chapter highlights a key moment of

articulation for a human rights approach in feminist discourse, with regards to positioning sexism and objectification as discrimination not obscenity. An emphasis on women's material reality and structural inequality is detailed and linked to historical radical and revolutionary feminist understandings of patriarchy and male violence against women. This chapter then considers Leveson's response to the evidence given by the campaigners as expressed in his report. Finally, there is a discussion of the key recommendation made by the campaigners, and taken forward by Leveson, of providing for third party complaints.

Chapter Seven considers the written and oral evidence given by Dominic Mohan, then editor of *The Sun*, in defence of Page 3, and the defence of sexualised imagery submitted in writing by Sunday Sport Ltd. In this chapter these defences of sexist imagery are placed within a broader neoliberal framework concerned with issues of free speech and a free market, whereby images of women are confined to the private sphere. The extensive repertoire of sexist argumentation drawn upon by both *The Sport* and *The Sun* is detailed and theorised as a four-step framework as identified in this research, and consisting of denial, reframing, deflection and projection. It is argued that this approach is consistent with corporate PR strategies and political gaslighting techniques. An extensive array of varieties of sexism is noted in the repertoire, from arguments about heritage, harmlessness, and humour to an emphasis on agency, and the contention that men are objectified too.

Chapter Eight considers the dominance of a moral discourse, both historically in obscenity legislation, and as expressed by Mohan, *The Sport* and Lord Justice Leveson at the inquiry and in his final report. It is argued that whilst both *The Sun* and *The Sport* strengthened their argument with reference to moral ideas of taste and decency and refused to engage with the idea of the imagery as sexist, there was a stark difference in approach between the two publications in terms of whether to frame the images as sexual or not. The analysis in this chapter draws on five interviews with feminist campaigners, two of whom gave evidence at the inquiry. The differing discursive tactics and strategies accounted for by these campaigners are outlined, critically, with regards to how direct to be about male violence against women, and when, and how, to openly declare their organisations and intentions as feminist. In this chapter the complexity the campaigners encountered when confronted with obdurate taste and decency framings is highlighted and the differing approaches they used to counter this position are detailed. Approaches taken by campaigners to negotiate the problematic line between harm to children as discrimination, and harm to children as a moral, conservative position are analysed. Through this analysis this chapter builds on the themes established in

Chapters Six and Seven and uses the interviews conducted as a kind of triangulation, or comment on, the findings of the textual analysis.

Chapter Nine presents the conclusions of this work and places the three discourses evidenced at the Leveson Inquiry in a postfeminist neoliberal context. In this chapter the questions central to this investigation are considered, the findings are detailed and reflection is offered on the knowledge gained in relation to the research questions. It is argued that the Leveson Inquiry marked a critical moment, capturing on the public record both feminist discourses and the extent of varieties of sexism. Taste and decency is found to still be actively mobilised, obstructing a discrimination and human rights articulation about sexism and objectification in mainstream media. The Leveson Inquiry and report is considered historically by surveying key developments since, notably the global #MeToo movement, the explosion of online misogyny, the incel movement and the murder of MP Jo Cox. There is an exploration of the implications of the research for future research practice and academic understanding, and future research directions are suggested.

This chapter has introduced the thesis and outlined the work to be undertaken. In summary this study will carry out a detailed study of discourses about media sexism at the Leveson Inquiry in order to add to academic understanding about how women's inequality is upheld discursively in mainstream media, politics and the judiciary. As Lillian states;

> whether or not any law prohibits racist, homophobic, or sexist hate speech and whether or not we think laws should prohibit such speech, we ought still to study it for what it is and then use the knowledge that we gain in political action that seeks to improve the lot of all disadvantaged groups, women included (Lillian, 2007, p. 738).

This thesis will now go on to consider the background to the study in **Chapter Two**, by surveying the historical and political context of UK print media, print regulation, media scandal and the events leading up to the Leveson Inquiry, the print media landscape and the visual representation of women, and approaches to media discrimination against women in legislation and regulation.

Chapter Two: Background: Leveson, press regulation, media and feminist landscape

Introduction

As established in **Chapter One**, this chapter provides a more thorough outline of both the historical and contemporary contexts for this study. This chapter is divided into three parts. The first section offers a history of print regulation and scandal pre-Leveson before going on to detail the events that triggered the Leveson Inquiry and the wider outcomes of the Inquiry and report in terms of political and media response. The second section offers an overview of the print media landscape, examining the drop in circulation and shift to online and arguing for the continued significance of print media. An overview of the visual representation of women in print media is given, followed by a discussion of key activism and opposition to Page 3 and an exploration of the feature's demise. This chapter then offers a history of media legislation and regulation with regards to discriminatory representations of groups, in particular women, and a discussion of proposals for a third-party complaints facility. Comparisons are made between the regulation of print, broadcast, online and advertising and differences are noted in reference to statute varying from obscenity law to hate speech legislation and latterly human rights law. Hence the purpose of this chapter is to contextualise the Leveson Inquiry within the history of print regulation and media scandal.

Part One: Background to UK print regulation and the Leveson Inquiry

The historical and political context of UK print media

This thesis is rooted in the history of press regulation, and thereby, in the history and development of the press in the UK. A short history of the distinct context and culture of the UK print media will therefore now be provided, to set the stage for the Leveson Inquiry and to consider the historical treatment of women in the UK tabloid press.

Curran and Seaton note that in contrast to broadcast the emergence of a daily mass market press in the UK is a story of commerce. A reliance on income from advertising has dominated the workings of the mass market UK print media since the nineteenth century, which operates in a system of free market competition (Curran and Seaton, 2018, p. 4). In the mass market popular press there has always been a competitive battle for circulation. As Taylor notes; 'Tabloid journalism is the direct application of capitalism to events and ideas. Profit, not ethics, is the prevailing motivation' (Taylor, 1992, p. 409). Richard Desmond, once the notorious

proprietor of the *Express* and *Star* titles who rose to considerable wealth through his ownership of pornography magazines, infamously summed this up when he told barrister Robert Jay at the Leveson Inquiry; 'ethical, I don't quite know what the word means, but perhaps you'll explain what the word means, ethical' (Desmond, 2012). Snoddy agrees with this thesis that newspapers in the UK are culturally and ethically distinct, arguing;

> Newspapers are different from broadcasting. They have historic and hard-won freedoms and a tradition and even a duty to be scurrilous and perhaps sometimes unfair. This difference between an impartial BBC and an often partial press becomes more pronounced because of economic circumstances and the totally unregulated internet (Snoddy, 2012, p. 372).

However, Curran and Seaton argue that far from a free market indicating a 'free' press, the foundations of the mass market print media in the UK were rooted in an entanglement and corruption with political power from the outset (Curran and Seaton, 2018, p. 6). For Fenton and Freedman the phone hacking scandal was thus a natural consequence of what they describe as;

> a media where editors and top politicians dine at the same tables, are educated at the same institutions, and share many of the same corporate values and ideological agendas (Fenton and Freedman, 2017, p. 3).

Furthermore, this noted divergence between broadcast and print journalism in the UK, economically, culturally, ethically, and politically, has led to vastly different policy approaches where;

> in general broadcasting policy has been framed within a pro-state, anti-market framework, while press policy has been formulated within a framework that is anti-state and pro-market (Curran and Seaton, 2018, pp. 365–8).

Conboy argues that a further distinct aspect of print media in the UK is the emphasis on speaking for, and with, a specific reader. Thus for Conboy the commercial success of the early tabloids was not merely as transmitters of information, but through the creation of 'links between institutions of information and their carefully constructed communities of readers' (Conboy, 2015, p. 219). This twin emphasis on commercialism and community was eventually to find its apotheosis in Murdoch's *Sun* of the early 1970s. *The Sun* set out to speak in the voice

of a working-class reader, both through reader's letters and through a 'vernacularisation'; the particular style and mode of address employed by the writers and editors (Conboy, 2015, pp. 220–1). Conboy links this distinct style with the *Carry On* films of the 1970s, and notes that in both cases; 'a mixture of saucy humor, innuendo and wordplay was a winning formula in the pursuit of popular taste' (Conboy, 2015, p. 221).

Of particular interest to this study, Conboy argues that the tone was set in terms of the discriminatory treatment of women and minorities due to this emphasis on speaking for, and with, the imagined working-class reader. Conboy points to the influence of *The Sun* during Kelvin McKenzie's editorship in the 1980s when the paper revelled in an 'appeal to the basest of instincts' (Greenslade, 2004a) and pilloried issues relating to human rights and equality. In this way;

> many of the prejudices and stereotypes of the paper's target audience were amplified with hostile coverage – feminists, anti-nuclear campaigners, *Guardian* readers, trade unionists, gays, anything broadly categorized as the 'looney left' (Curran, Gaber and Petley, 2005) (Conboy, 2015, p. 222).

Thus, the representation of women in the UK tabloid press is deeply entangled in the culture and historical development of the print media. Similarly Greenslade argues with regards to the Leveson Inquiry that the events leading up to it should be read as;

> the culmination of a historical process stretching back many years, and, at the same time, as a consequence of the mode of ownership of our press (Greenslade, 2012, p. 418).

Background to UK print regulation

UK print regulation follows a chequered but ultimately consistent pattern. Unlike UK broadcast media, which is governed tightly by compulsory state regulator the Office of Communications (Ofcom), and in the case of the BBC is also overseen by the BBC Board under the terms of a Royal Charter[2] with government, newspapers have so far resisted compulsory direct or indirect state regulation. As Lord Justice Leveson noted in the final volume of his report, 'flash points' throughout UK newspaper history have recurrently triggered calls for, and inquiries into, press

[2] A Royal Charter is a document granted by the monarch giving rights or powers to either individuals or organisations.

regulation, often with very little tangible outcome. Leveson labelled the development of UK press regulation as 'a pattern of cosmetic reform' and identified;

> a cyclical pattern of (i) crisis, (ii) the press coming under heavy public and some political pressure, (iii) some reforms, usually of a limited nature, being carried out, (iv) ephemeral improvement, (v) deterioration in press behaviour, and ultimately (vi) another crisis (Leveson, 2012b, p. 1535).

Leveson made clear in his report that he considered the phone-hacking scandal to be the latest crisis in this cycle of press self-regulation. He articulated this as a sustained failure by the industry over several decades, not an isolated incident, stating;

> I cannot emphasise too strongly that the revelations of July 2011 must not be visualised in any sort of self-contained way as a watershed or a bolt from the blue in the context of the 21 year history of the PCC. To interpret events in such a way would, in my view, amount to a form of historical revisionism which ignores the whole of the post-War narrative and the performance of the PCC since its creation in 1991 (Leveson, 2012b, p. 1517).

Indeed, concern over the role and remit of print media is nothing new. With the advent of newspapers in the 17th century, government sought to control and censor content either directly – through licensing legislation, or indirectly – through taxes (Brown, 1992, pp. 24–25). As newspapers boomed in the late 19th and early 20th century, concerns were raised over the question of press ethics, particularly with regards to privacy and press intrusion, and monopolies of ownership (Conboy, 2010, p. 20; Hewitt, 2013, p. 18). Beckett agrees that 'Since journalism began there have been people lamenting its tawdry nature and the inevitable descent into trivia and sensation' (Beckett, 2008, p. 31). As early as 1868 the magazine *Saturday Review* used the term 'newspaper sewage', to refer to a general trend of sensationalism and press intrusion. Editors at the *Saturday Review* took particular exception to newspaper coverage of a Queen's Bench slander case, detailed via

> a full, true, and particular account of inhuman lusts and unspeakable horrors, which it is not only 'a shame to speak of', but pollution to let even a thought rest upon (*Saturday Review*, 1868).

Into the 20th century and over the past 70 years, scandals and questionable ethical practices at UK newspapers have led to several commissions and reports on press ethics and standards, and calls for press regulation to be reviewed. The first examination of press regulation in 1947 was a Royal Commission concerned with accuracy of reporting and lack of plurality in media ownership. The resulting 1949 report of the Ross Commission noted 'a progressive decline in the calibre of editors and in the quality of British journalism' (Ross, 1949, p. 4), and recommended that a press regulator should be set up with 20% of the board comprised of members of the general public. Four years later in 1953, the General Council of the Press was created as a voluntary, self-regulating, regulatory body with no legal powers. The board was made up of 25 newspaper editors and proprietors. Ross's recommendations that the board also include members of the public and an independent chairperson were not carried through due to press resistance.

A second Royal Commission, the Shawcross Commission, was set up in 1961 to again review the ethics and economic practices of the print press due to the recommendations of the Ross Commission not being sufficiently implemented. The Shawcross Commission threatened statutory regulation if the press did not implement Ross's recommendation of introducing members of the public to the board. Following Shawcross the General Council of the Press was renamed the Press Council in 1963, and it was agreed that members of the public would be added to the board at the recommended 20% ratio. In 1964 the first independent chairperson – Lord Devlin – was appointed. Like the General Council, the Press Council was voluntary, self-regulating and had no legal powers.

Between 1970 and 1972 the Younger Committee reviewed the effectiveness of the Press Council and concluded;

> we commend to the Council the possibility of a codification of its adjudications on privacy, in a form which would give rather readier guidance to busy practising journalists, and to the interested public, and that it should be kept up to date (Younger, 1972, p. 55).

The committee recommended that all corrections and apologies should be published in the same place and at the same size as the initial article. These two key recommendations on privacy were not carried out by the Press Council. The Younger Report on Privacy also criticised the low ratio of members of public on the board, and recommended an increase to 50% (Younger, 1972, p. 40). The Press Council responded by increasing lay membership to a third.

The McGregor Commission, set up in 1974, was the third Royal Commission to investigate press ethics and standards. Reporting in 1977, the commission found 'flagrant breaches of acceptable standards' and 'inexcusable intrusions into privacy' (McGregor, 1977, p. 210). The Press Council rejected McGregor's key recommendation of a written code of practice. However there were developments in 1978 when the ratio of press to members of the public became even (18 press, 12 from newspapers and magazines, four from the National Union of Journalists and two from the Institute of Journalists, to 18 members of the public), with the independent chairperson with voting rights tipping the balance away from newspapers.

Public outcry over a growing culture of tabloid sensationalism and a series of high profile press intrusion cases (Greenslade, 2004b, pp. 534–40) led to another review of press regulation in the late 1980s. A government appointed committee was set up in 1989 and was chaired by Sir David Calcutt QC, with the main remit being issues of privacy. Calcutt's two reports on press behaviour are recounted by Snoddy as part of a wider discussion of the cycle of scandals and subsequent commissions and reports throughout the history of UK print media (Snoddy, 1993). Key cases identified by Snoddy which triggered the review included sensationalist coverage of the arrest and trial of the serial-killer Peter Sutcliffe in 1981 and *The Sun's* widely condemned coverage of the Hillsborough disaster in 1989. Several further incidents came to the fore during the Calcutt deliberations; namely the intense press scrutiny of the marriages of the Prince and Princess of Wales, and Duke and Duchess of York. In common with the scandal that would later trigger the Leveson Inquiry, there were two cases of phone tapping relating to the Prince and Princess of Wales, known as 'Squidgygate' and 'Camillagate', which initially purported to be 'accidental' recordings made by amateur enthusiasts, but were later suspected to have been recorded and then leaked by MI5. Press behaviour was again severely criticised in 1990 when Gorden Kaye, a popular actor on the TV series *'Allo 'Allo!,* was photographed in his hospital bed by a *Sunday Sport* reporter and photographer who gained entry to his room and tried to interview him whilst he was recovering from brain surgery. Kaye's agent obtained an interlocutory injunction to stop the photographs being printed. However this was overturned by the Court of Appeal as UK law offered no privacy protection until the Human Rights Act 1998 came into force in October 2000 (Lewis and Crick, 2014, pp. 153–4).

A few months into Calcutt's initial consultations, Conservative cabinet minister David Mellor echoed a 1983 *Guardian* editorial and captured public feeling by famously stating that newspapers were 'drinking in the last-chance saloon' (Mellor, 1989). Calcutt's 1990 *Report of*

the Committee on Privacy and Related Matters reiterated this position, stopping just short of recommending compulsory, state regulation and giving newspapers an opportunity to get their house in order. The report advised that:

> the press should be given one last chance to demonstrate that non-statutory self-regulation can be made to work effectively. This is a stiff test for the press. If it fails, we recommend that a statutory system for handling complaints should be introduced (Calcutt, 1990, p. 73).

The outcome of Calcutt's first report was the establishment of the Press Complaints Commission (PCC), which ran from 1991 to 2014, and was a continuation of the Press Council in all but name. Calcutt's guidance regarding the role of the PCC included; a code of practice; more control over the appearance, nature and form of apologies and corrections, and a hotline for press complaints. In common with its predecessors, the PCC was a voluntary, regulatory body which was self-regulating and had no legal powers. It charged newspapers that wished to join an annual levy, and made rulings on press complaints by following the new Editors' Code of Practice, also set up in 1991. The Code had a separate committee made up of 13 serving editors and was reviewed once a year. Typically journalists were contractually obliged by their employer to abide by the code. Calcutt's first report also recommended the introduction of three criminal offences with regard to physical intrusion such as door-stepping, the use of long-range cameras and bugging (largely in response to the Kaye hospital intrusion case) (Snoddy, 1993, p. 104). Criminal offences were to include; entering private property, placement of unlawful surveillance devices and photographing and recording someone on private property. Calcutt also recommended the use of High Court injunctions in cases of privacy intrusion and strengthened legislation regarding the non-identification of minors and victims of sexual assault in criminal cases.

Calcutt's second report, the *Review of Press Self-Regulation*, published in January 1993, was a reassessment to review whether the press had indeed got their house in order via the Press Complaints Commission. Finding it had not, Calcutt concluded that;

> The Commission [the PCC], as constituted, is, in essence, a body set up by the industry, financed by the industry, dominated by the industry, operating a code of practice devised by the industry and which is over-favourable to the industry (Calcutt, 1993, p. 41).

In particular, Calcutt was struck by the way in which the PCC had widened his restricted definition of 'the public interest' into a generalised consideration, thus reducing an individual's protection, for instance in cases of privacy intrusion. He found that;

> In my view the protection for individuals which the Privacy Committee's proposed code would have provided has been significantly reduced by the industry's code; and that code does not hold the balance fairly (Calcutt, 1993, p. 33).

Calcutt recommended that the PCC be replaced by a statutory, publicly funded Press Complaints Tribunal, with a specific facility for third party complaints and the power to impose fines. He also recommended that the Government investigate the idea of introducing a privacy tort and consider extending the provisions of the Data Protection Act to protect against privacy intrusion. In a dramatic twist that almost overshadowed publication of the second report, David Mellor, who had famously uttered the 'last chance saloon' ultimatum and ordered the second Calcutt review on behalf of the Government, became engulfed in scandal and on the receiving end of press intrusion himself via (legal) phone tapping. The resulting revelations of an affair forced him to resign as Heritage Secretary in 1992.

The Fourth Report of the National Heritage Select Committee (NHSC) on Privacy and Media Intrusion published two months later in March 1993 reconsidered the issues, agreed with and extended the privacy legislation recommendations both civil and criminal, but rejected Calcutt's recommendations for state intervention. The Committee was 'against legislation which imprisons the press in a cage of legal restraint' (Kaufman, 1993, p. 6) and instead proposed the appointment of a new statutory Press Ombudsman. After two years of discussion the Conservative government under Prime Minister John Major failed to reach cabinet and select committee consensus and ultimately felt it would not be able to carry the legislation through parliament successfully due to a small majority. Thus the then Heritage Secretary Virginia Bottomley responded in 1995 declining to take forward either Calcutt or the NHSC's recommendations for statutory regulation, finding that 'industry self-regulation is much to be preferred' (Secretary of State for National Heritage, 1995). Calcutt's civil and criminal privacy legislation recommendations were also not enacted. Again, the newspaper industry narrowly avoided compulsory state regulation and the PCC continued without further intervention for another decade.

Context of the Leveson Inquiry

The revelations that led to the Leveson Inquiry began in 2002 after a police search of a premises in Surrey found that there had been serious breaches of the Data Protection Act by serving and former police officers who had sold confidential personal data from the Police National Computer (PNC). Many of the buyers were found to be journalists. The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) commenced Operation Motorman in 2003 and in May 2006 published a report – *What Price Privacy: the unlawful trade in confidential personal information*. The report contained details from the Operation Motorman raid on private investigator Steve Whittamore's house in 2003 (referred to in the report as 'the Hampshire private detective') and confirmed that he had unlawfully gained private data, including from the PNC, and sold this to 305 named journalists from a variety of different publications (the individual names of the journalists and the relevant outlets were not given in the report).

This report was followed six months later by *What Price Privacy Now?* which, following a Freedom of Information request, named the publications guilty of this behaviour, listed the number of transactions associated with each outlet, and the number of journalists, or clients engaged by them, who were involved in this activity (ICO, 2006, p. 9). The Information Commissioner Richard Thomas noted that although Whittamore and various others had been put on trial between 2002 and 2005, this had resulted in acquittals, conditional discharges, cautions, and small fines of no more than £5,000 (ICO, 2006, p. 6). As *Guardian* journalist Nick Davies recounts in his story of investigating the phone hacking scandal, in the aftermath of these two reports there were no criminal or civil cases pursued against any journalists or news outlets implicated in Operation Motorman. None of the named journalists were even interviewed, despite ample evidence of illegal activities (Davies, 2015, p. 114). Thomas expressed disappointment that the reaction from some newspapers to the first report was that journalists should have special exemption from his proposed new custodial sentences for Section 55 data protection offences[3]. Representatives of the industry failed to support his recommendations, arguing that there would be a 'chilling' effect on investigative journalism and the exercise of free speech if journalists were to be prosecuted (ICO, 2006, pp. 23–27).

In 2005 it became apparent that the *News of the World* was carrying out illegal phone-hacking, after Prince William (now The Duke of Cambridge) and the ITV reporter Tom Bradby concluded that information published by the *News of the World* about them could not have been accessed in any other way. Following a Metropolitan Police investigation, *News of the World* royal editor Clive Goodman and Glenn Mulcaire, a private investigator he worked with, were

[3] Powers to grant custodial sentences for Section 55 data protection breaches and a strengthened public interest defence for journalists who committed Section 55 breaches were subsequently introduced as part of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Bill 2008. However these remain inactivated (Barnett and Townend, 2014, p. 162).

charged with phone-hacking and sentenced to prison. After their conviction in 2007, two internal investigations by the Press Complaints Commission in 2007 and 2009 sought evidence from The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), the *News of the World*, the *Guardian* and other national newspapers and concluded that the hacking by Goodman was a 'rogue exception' carried out by a single journalist, and that there was 'no evidence that the practice of phone message tapping is ongoing' (Press Complaints Commission, 2007, 2009). The *Guardian*, however, which, through the work of journalist Nick Davies had long been pursuing this story, continued its investigations and in 2009 alleged that illegal phone-hacking was widespread at the *News of the World*. By 2011 other UK tabloid newspapers were implicated – primarily the *Daily* and *Sunday Mirror*. Three police investigations were launched in 2011; Operation Weeting, which examined allegations of phone-hacking, Operation Elveden, which investigated paid-for police data breaches to journalists, and Operation Tuleta, which investigated alleged computer hacking.

It was early in July 2011 that the story erupted with the shocking revelation, again uncovered by the *Guardian* newspaper, that the phone of murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler had been hacked by Glenn Mulcaire acting for the *News of the World*, in the six months when she was missing and not yet confirmed dead. Initially it was reported that journalists via Mulcaire had accessed and then deleted voicemails from Milly Dowler's phone to make space so that more messages could be left, leading the Dowler family to believe that Milly was still alive and deleting the voicemails herself, and destroying vital police evidence in the process. It was later suggested by Scotland Yard detective, DCI John MacDonald in written evidence presented to the Leveson Inquiry that the voicemails would have been auto-deleted after 72 hours by Milly Dowler's mobile phone provider. MacDonald went on to say that this explanation was not definitive;

> we cannot conclusively say whether any voicemails were or were not manually deleted, however there do appear to have been two messages missing that should have been present (…) (MacDonald, 2012).

What is indisputable, however, is that the *News of the World* did hack Milly Dowler's voicemail during this period and listen to messages of distress left by Dowler's family imploring her to get in contact and come home. The scandal deepened further after it emerged that voicemails of bereaved relatives of both dead British soldiers and the July 7 bombing victims had also potentially been hacked.

Three days after the Milly Dowler revelations broke, News International closed the *News of the World*, ending its 168 year history. The scandal of Milly Dowler's phone being hacked led to high profile coverage across all media. The revelations suggested that the industry as a whole could not be trusted to self-regulate, given that such grievous and illegal practices were apparently so common-place, and breaches of the Editors' Code of Practice were occurring with impunity. That the victims of phone-hacking were 'everyday' members of the public, including bereaved relatives and murder victims, sparked widespread outrage amongst the British people. Social media, predominantly Twitter, was used by members of the public to pressure organisations to withdraw their advertising from the *News of The World*. Companies who did so included mobile phone provider O2 and the supermarket chain Sainsbury's. Commenting on the withdrawal of advertising, The Co-operative Group, a consumer co-operative which runs a range of businesses including supermarkets and funeral directors noted: 'These allegations have been met with revulsion by the vast majority of members who have contacted us' (Co-operative Group, 2011).

The fallout of the Milly Dowler phone-hacking revelations also led to Rupert Murdoch's News Corp failing in their bid to take full control of satellite broadcaster Sky. The deal had government support and was supposedly a few days away from completion when the *Guardian's* revelations broke in July 2011 and News Corp were forced to abandon the bid due to public outcry against the organisation (Williams, 2019, p. 122). Murdoch went on to make a second attempt to takeover Sky, this time via his company 21st Century Fox, but ultimately he was outbid by Comcast who paid £30 billion for the broadcaster in September 2018 (Waterson, 2018).

As more details of the phone-hacking emerged the scandal began to engulf not just the newspaper industry and the police, but also government, centring on Andy Coulson, who had been deputy editor of the *News of the World* when Milly Dowler's phone was hacked in 2002, and editor from 2003-2007 at the apex of the phone-hacking practices. Serving Prime Minister at the time of 2011 revelations, David Cameron, had appointed Coulson as Director of Communications for the Conservative Party in 2007. In 2010 Cameron took Coulson with him into government, appointing him Director of Communications for 10 Downing Street. Coulson resigned in January 2011 as the phone-hacking story intensified, and in July 2011, four days after the Milly Dowler revelations, Coulson was arrested, charged with phone-hacking and eventually given an 18-month prison sentence.

Some, such as Ashcroft and Oakeshott, suggest that Cameron panicked, and cite former Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Paul Stephenson's view that he announced the inquiry to 'spread the heat around' his decision to take Coulson into Downing Street (Ashcroft and Oakeshott, 2015, p. 466). However Davies is clear in his account of the hacking scandal that the 'moral outrage' and uproar in parliament unleashed by the Dowler revelations made an inquiry inevitable (Davies, 2015, pp. 338–342). Cathcart supports this view, explaining that the campaign group that he co-founded, Hacked Off, felt their calls for a public inquiry were highly unlikely to be successful, until the Dowler story broke; 'The public revulsion that greeted this revelation transformed the terms of the debate, and the principle of a public inquiry was conceded by all parties almost immediately' (Cathcart, 2012, p. 40).

Press regulation post-Leveson

As noted in **Chapter One**, Cameron did announce an inquiry under the Inquiries Act 2005, appointing Lord Justice Leveson to lead it. The Leveson Inquiry took place between July 2011 and November 2012. Leveson's Report, *An inquiry into the culture, practices and ethics of the press* was published on 29 November 2012 and totalled 1,987 pages in four parts with a 48 page executive summary. The key recommendation was that the Press Complaints Commission should be replaced by a new voluntary self-regulating body for the print press, independent of serving editors, government and business, 'governed by an independent Board', and that; 'the Chair and members of the Board must be appointed in a genuinely open, transparent and independent way' (Leveson, 2012b, p. 1759).

Crucially Leveson recommended that any new press regulator should be backed by legislation and certified and recognised as meeting his requirements by a recognition body, stating 'The answer to the question who guards the guardians should not be "no-one"' (Leveson, 2012b, p. 1460). His suggested framework was therefore via so-called statutory underpinning of press self-regulation (Leveson, 2012b). Leveson identified Ofcom as his preferred recognition body, and added that Ofcom should monitor the new press regulator's performance after two years and then every three years going forward. A statutory independent recognition commissioner was suggested as another means of certification and recognition, but Leveson made clear that this was a 'less attractive alternative' (Leveson, 2012b, pp. 1771–1772).

As with previous press reviews and commissions, Leveson called for the body to be able to levy fines on newspapers 'of up to 1 per cent of turnover with a maximum of £1 million'; for a whistle-blowing hotline; and for more prominent placement of corrections and apologies (Leveson, 2012b, p. 1767). He also called for any new press regulator to have the power to

investigate breaches of the code, and for a new transparent civil arbitration process to be carried out by the regulator so that claims could be dealt with quickly and inexpensively without going to court.

The report recommended that any newspapers that declined to join this new press regulator should be regulated by Ofcom, but again that this was not preferred or desirable. Further it suggested that newspapers which did not join a recognised press regulator, thereby denying claimants access to the cheap, quick arbitration process of the proposed new press regulator, would be liable to pay for the costs of both parties in media law cases, whether the newspaper won the case or not. (In English litigation the loser typically pays a proportion of the legal costs of the winner.) To balance this press regulation out, Leveson recommended a duty in law to ensure the Government would 'uphold and protect the freedom of the press' (Leveson, 2012b, p. 1781), a provision that has been compared to America's first amendment on free speech (Tomlinson, 2018). There were also recommendations for government to consider changes to the Data Protection Act and sentencing powers with regards to data breaches, as well as to undertake a review of damages in civil law.

Leveson's overall message was that he was calling time on a self-regulating industry 'marking its own homework', as he stated in a press conference publishing the report (Leveson, 2012c). The conclusion of the inquiry was that stand-alone press self-regulation had led to unacceptable outcomes, with Leveson finding that the press 'has caused real hardship, and, on occasion, wreaked havoc with the lives of innocent people whose rights and liberties have been disdained' through 'behaviour that, at times, can only be described as outrageous' (Leveson, 2012a, p. 4). Leveson clearly signalled that this was the end of the road for the print press as far as he was concerned, echoing Mellor and Calcutt when he stated: 'I cannot, and will not, recommend another last chance saloon for the press' (Leveson, 2012b, p. 1757).

Much of Leveson's exasperation was due to his findings aligning with Calcutt's over 20 years previously, and the sense that he too would be ignored. Leveson recognised that the outcome of the inquiry rested on the political will of those in power to implement it, and was in agreement with former Prime Minister John Major's view given at the inquiry that;

> on this occasion it's the politicians who are in the last-chance saloon. If, at the end of this Inquiry (…) the recommendations that are made are not enacted and nothing is done, it is difficult to see how this matter could be returned to in any reasonable period of time (Leveson, 2012a, p. 31).

Within 90 minutes of the report being published Prime Minister David Cameron signalled that he did not back Leveson's key recommendation with regards to statutory underpinning as he had: 'serious concerns and misgivings', regarding 'issues of principle, practicality and necessity', stating that he was wary of the principle of 'writing elements of press regulation into the law of the land', concerned that the changes would make legislation more complicated, and with regards to necessity 'not convinced at this stage that statute is necessary to achieve Lord Justice Leveson's objectives' (Cameron, 2012). Ed Miliband, Leader of the Opposition Labour Party countered that he was in favour of adopting Leveson's recommendations fully, arguing that 'statute is important' (Miliband, 2012). Speaking later that afternoon ahead of cross-party talks, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, leader of the Liberal Democrat half of the coalition government, also expressed his support for statutory underpinning. In his 2019 autobiography Cameron recalls that this was the most challenging difference of opinion between the coalition leaders, and describes how they 'nearly came to blows' over implementing Leveson with Clegg shouting at Cameron;

> no piece of legislation matters as much to me as this and I am prepared to fuck up all the legislation in order to get what I want on this (Cameron, 2019).

Cameron passed responsibility for cross party negotiations to take Leveson's recommendations forward to cabinet minister Oliver Letwin. Compromise was reached between the negotiating parties (which included the campaign group Hacked Off) in March 2013 with the agreement that new press regulators should seek recognition by a Press Recognition Panel (PRP) created by Royal Charter, instead of Leveson's recommendation of underpinning by statute and a regulation body such as Ofcom. It was agreed that the Press Recognition Panel, chosen by an independent appointments panel, would assess whether press regulators that apply for recognition meet the 29 required standards of effectiveness and independence listed in schedule three of the Royal Charter (PRP, 2021). Free speech advocates such as Index on Censorship argued that the entire framework set up to underpin press regulation, namely the Royal Charter and Press Recognition Panel, constitute unacceptable state intervention. Others took issue specifically with the Royal Charter and claimed that the process is not independent of potential political interference as 'politicians could conceivably vary the terms of the charter' (Greenslade, 2016b). Greenslade also points to BBC entanglement with government via its Royal Charter, arguing that 'Parliamentary control of the corporation's budget has had the effect of reducing editorial staff and thereby reducing editorial coverage' (Greenslade, 2016b).

Following this resolution, two rival press regulators were established. In September 2014 The Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) was set up and is seen by many as a continuation of the PCC in all but name. Former Deputy Leader of the Labour Party Harriet Harman referred to IPSO as 'business as usual' (PA Mediapoint and Press Gazette, 2015), while a group of people who felt their complaints to IPSO had not been properly investigated stated in an open letter to IPSO chairman Sir Alan Moses that the organisation was 'simply a cosmetically altered version of the discredited PCC' (Hacked Off, 2015). IPSO continues to use a revised version of the Editors' Code of Practice as its guiding reference and has a board of 12, including a chairperson, one of whom is in a managerial role at a national newspaper. Over 90% of the UK's newspapers and magazines have signed up to IPSO. Matters are complicated by the presence of the Regulatory Funding Company (RFC), which funds IPSO and owns the copyright of the Editors' Code of Practice. The RFC controls IPSO's constitution, rules and procedures as well as the Code and consists entirely of print industry personnel. The RFC chairperson is Kevin Beatty, chief executive of dmg media, which owns the *Daily Mail*, and there are nine board members including Beatty, all of whom are serving newspaper personnel. IPSO continues to work with an Editors' Code Committee which is a subcommittee of the RFC, chaired by Neil Benson, group executive editor of Trinity Mirror, and consisting of nine other current newspaper personnel plus the chairperson and Chief Executive of IPSO and three independent lay members. Critics argue that the RFC's control over IPSO and the Editors' Code, the presence of print personnel on IPSO's board, the RFC and the Editors' Code committee, and funding from the press industry via a levy on newspapers means that IPSO is not independent in the way that Leveson prescribed.

The recommendation that corrections and apologies are published with equal prominence to the offending article has still not been taken up by IPSO. Furthermore, and perhaps most critically, IPSO did not apply for recognition, and as it stands would not qualify for recognition, by the Press Recognition Panel, and thus has not been recognised by the PRP as a regulator (Wolfe, 2019, p. 4). Therefore in a complete sidestep of Leveson's intentions, IPSO continues to regulate most national newspapers but stands outside the adopted framework based on Leveson's recommendations. This outcome clearly follows the established pattern of behaviour by the press of avoiding imposed industry regulation at all costs.

In contrast, rival press regulator to IPSO, The Independent Monitor for the Press (IMPRESS), was set up in October 2016 and has been recognised by the Press Recognition Panel as complying with all 29 rules and standards required. However, no national newspapers have

signed up to IMPRESS, and critics argue that its independence is constrained by the £6.8 million contributed to date by the charitable trust of the ex-president of Formula One Max Mosley. Mosley won a breach of privacy ruling against the *News of the World* in 2008*,* but lost a legal action to change UK privacy laws in the European Court of Human Rights in 2011. IMPRESS used the Editors' Code of Practice as an interim starting point but as the Regulatory Funding Company (RFC) which controls IPSO owns the copyright to the code, IMPRESS were compelled to develop their own Standards Code to avoid any breaches. The IMPRESS code covers similar ground to IPSO's code, with some key differences, as will be discussed shortly. *The Guardian*, *Financial Times* and *The Independent* have not joined either IPSO or IMPRESS, but instead have set up their own complaints systems.

Thus in the intervening eight years since the Leveson Report was published, something of an impasse has occurred, with a stalemate position developing between the press and those who campaign for Leveson's recommendations to be fully implemented (namely the pressure group Hacked Off, which represents victims of phone-hacking.) For several years Hacked Off tried to break this deadlock – whereby the dominant press regulator, IPSO, exists as an unregulated body, whilst the approved regulator IMPRESS lacks membership from the national press – by pushing for the enaction of Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013. This would have brought into law Leveson's recommendation that any newspaper not belonging to a recognised press regulator would be liable to pay for the costs of both parties in libel and privacy cases, whether the newspaper won the case or not. The Section 40 amendment was passed by Parliament, but the legislation remained inactivated by government. Following a 10-week public consultation on the issue published in 2017, the Government announced its intention to repeal Section 40 'when there is a suitable legislative vehicle' (Rudd and Hancock, 2018, p. 23). However this has yet to happen and Section 40 remains on the statute book, abandoned by the current Conservative government, but potentially available for reactivation should the political will change in the near future.

The 2017 public consultation also solicited views on whether to proceed with part two of the Leveson Inquiry, which was set to examine government corruption and criminal activity relating to the press and police. Following the consultation, then Culture Secretary Matt Hancock announced in March 2018 that Leveson part two would be dropped by the Conservative government as it was deemed out of date and unnecessary. As the landscape had changed considerably since the Leveson Inquiry was announced four years prior, it was argued that the financial costs to the taxpayer did not merit further investigation into what some felt had been resolved both by Leveson part one, and the criminal trials and convictions.

This political inaction follows the pattern identified by Barnett and Townend whereby the powerful print media influences legal policy in order to protect its own interests. Barnett and Townend's study examines how this has acted as a block to media reform in terms of data protection breaches and media plurality, but this assessment could equally be applied to political inaction with regards to part two of the Leveson inquiry and the issue of media sexism and discrimination (Barnett and Townend, 2014).

Leveson gave a weary plea when opening the press conference to launch his report stating;

> This is the seventh time in less than 70 years that the issues [of press regulation] which have occupied my life since I was appointed in July 2011 have been addressed. No-one can think it makes any sense to contemplate an eighth (Leveson, 2012a, p. 31).

However it increasingly seems that this is the most likely outcome of the inquiry.

Having established the history of print scandal, inquiries and the evolution of print regulation in general terms, this chapter will now move on to section two, an outline of the media landscape, which pays particular attention to the drop in print circulation and the visual representation of women. Opposition to Page 3 is discussed and the context and decisions that led to the end of the feature are considered.

Part Two: Media landscape and visual representation of women in print media

Media landscape: Print decline and a shift online

It should be noted that there is a general media trend away from print towards online, with year on year sales across the print sector in rapid decline (See Appendix 1). This decline in circulation is important in relation to this study because this competition for market survival is part of the context, and arguably a contributory factor, to the end of *The Sun's* Page 3 and the decline of lads' mags. Whether features such as *The Sun's* Page 3 continue to have any significance and impact given this decline in circulation, is also a factor that will be considered in this section.

ABC figures for November 2019 show that sales at 13 national daily newspapers fell at a rate of more than 12 per cent year on year. The UK's top selling daily newspaper *The Sun*, has fallen by 13 percent, when the free bulk copies it supplies are removed from the figures (See

Appendix 2). *The Guardian's* print sales as at November 2019 were 128,492 making it the lowest selling daily national newspaper, and barely viable in a country with a population of over 60 million people (Tobitt, 2019b).

However online figures are much healthier for these UK newspaper outlets (See Appendix 3). Earlier the same year *The Guardian's* online audience share reached 23 million unique monthly browsers, and *The Sun* overtook the *Daily Mail* to become the newspaper with the highest web traffic at 33 million unique browsers per month, a growth of 8% year on year (Tobitt, 2019a).

However, the black hole left by print advertising revenue has yet to be filled by a credible online business model for newspaper outlets. Two key versions have been attempted, what is referred to as a paywall at News UK titles including *The Times* and *The Sun,* where online content is paid for by subscription, and a race for readers by offering free content in the hope that advertising revenue will follow, exemplified by *The Guardian*. A middle ground or 'soft paywall' with some content offered for free and some behind a paywall has been attempted at papers including the *Financial Times*. Other strategies include adopting a 'digital first' approach and attempting to become a 'world news brand', both of which have been attempted at *The Guardian*, for instance (Sabbagh, 2011; Sweney, 2014). These models have had varied success, with no clear leader. *The Sun's* paywall was dropped in November 2015 for instance (Sweney, 2015) and *The Guardian* has only just managed to post a small operating profit for the first time in 20 years, arguably in large part due to its voluntary subscription, or paid membership, model (Rajan, 2019).

This trend is also reflected in the magazine sector with *Cosmopolitan* magazine attempting desperate measures to reverse a decline in readership, including slashing the cover price to £1 and giving away 100,000 copies per issue (Jackson, 2016). This experiment was ultimately unsuccessful as 2019 figures show a 32 percent year on year circulation fall for *Cosmopolitan* to 206,510 copies per issue, the biggest drop in sales in the women's monthly magazine sector (Tobitt, 2019c). Of the three remaining magazine titles in the paid-for men's lifestyle sector, sales per issue continue to slip, with *Men's Health* at 146,785, *GQ* at 110,063, and *Esquire* at just 59,002, with half of these copies being given away for free (Walker, 2019b) (See Appendix 4).

In contrast, social media platforms continue to increase both users and profits. Facebook currently has 2.45 billion monthly active users, almost a third of the world's population, and 5

billion monthly active users combined when including the Facebook-owned Instagram, WhatsApp and Messenger platforms (Pham, 2019). The Facebook company is expected to make over £55 billion in advertising revenue in 2019, which is the source of most of its income (Moore and Murphy, 2019). TikTok, a China-based social media application, which allows users to create and share short music video clips, is one of the youngest contenders in the social media market. At just three years old TikTok and its Chinese counterpart Douyin have 1 billion monthly active users (Pham, 2019), and parent company Bytedance Ltd has been billed as the world's most valuable start-up at almost £60 billion (Bloomberg, 2018). Meanwhile, Google continues to increase profits from advertising revenue, earning over £90 billion from advertising in 2018 (Forbes, 2019). Google and Facebook are predicted to earn £9.3 billion in digital advertising in the UK in 2019, a 63% share of the market, and by 2021 it is predicted that Google and Facebook will account for 65% of all money spent on UK digital advertising (Walker, 2019a). This decimation of online advertising revenue for newspapers is further compounded by the increasing popularity of adblocking – whereby users download software that removes adverts from websites. As publishers do not get paid for content that isn't viewed, this threatens to further cut off the already limited income from advertising for online news sites. This continued squeeze means the traditional newspaper business model of funding via advertising revenue is no longer viable (Thomas, 2016). Combined with the drop in circulation figures, this represents a lethal threat to traditional news media outlets, particularly newspapers.

As we move towards the third decade of this millennium, the internet and social media present us with new and conflicting phenomena, such as mass digital interconnectedness and communication, alongside increasing individualisation. Of significance to this study, it is clear that we are living in what is not just a digital age, but an age in which the image dominates, as exemplified by the content of Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok and Facebook. Imagery is posted, shared, scrolled through and consumed at vast speed and in vast quantities. Words are giving way to pictures in what is now primarily a frenetic visual culture, and theories of accelerated temporality abound (Gleick, 1999; Eriksen, 2001). What are referred to as 'legacy media', outlets that began life as printed newspapers, such as *The Guardian, The Sun* and *The New York Times*, are thus grappling not just with the financial impacts of the shift to online, but a complex revolution in what type of content their audiences are consuming, and how they view this data. Increasingly more time is spent on mobile phones than on any other kind of device, with the most significant time spent in social media or messaging applications or 'apps' (See Appendix 5). This has created a very different way of behaving and interacting with technology

– the old method of browsing a newspaper's website is becoming as obsolete as the idea of flicking through a printed newspaper.

Clearly newspapers cannot compete with the vast audience share of social media, and are beginning to accept that advertisers cannot be wooed away from Facebook and Google, with their reach and detailed audience segmentation. Platforms like Facebook are able to target advertising very specifically to those who will be most receptive to it, due to the large amount of data they hold on each user. As a result, think tanks, publishers and researchers are attempting to come up with alternative business strategies for news media that do not involve advertising or traditional subscriptions – many of them based on 'public service' models. The think tank ResPublica for instance has called on Facebook and Google to put a share of their income towards funding what could be a public service newspaper or news provider, similar to the public service broadcaster the BBC (Greenslade, 2016a). Meanwhile, as noted previously, *The Guardian* is encouraging take up of a membership model, akin to the BBC licence fee, albeit a voluntary system with no legal compunction and collected directly from the reader by the outlet (Ponsford, 2016). This membership model at the *Guardian* has been a runaway success with 650,000 regular contributors and 300,000 one-off contributions in 2019 alone, a key factor enabling Guardian News and Media to record its first operating profit since 1998, of £0.8 million for 2018-2019 (Rajan, 2019). As a natural accompaniment to this decline in print circulation, media plurality is shrinking, causing an increasing democratic deficit. A report by the Media Reform Coalition shows that three companies own 83% of national newspapers, and when online readership is included this extends to only five companies (News UK, DMG, Reach, *Guardian* and *Telegraph*). Similarly 80% of local newspapers are owned by five companies: Gannett UK Ltd, (Newsquest), JPIMedia, Trinity Mirror (now known as Reach), Tindle and Archant (Media Reform Coalition, 2019b, p. 1).

To say that the situation looks bleak for newspapers then, is a moderate position. Academic enquiry has turned to the possibility of a post-print future, as news consumption increasingly shifts online. Cathcart argues with regards to UK print newspapers, that 'sooner rather than later they will all go' (Cathcart, 2016). However what the future looks like for legacy outlets in terms of a mixture of print and online, online-only, or free-print iterations is still the subject of contested academic speculation (Thurman and Fletcher, 2018).

Given this decline, whether these newspapers still matter is clearly a pertinent question. However as argued previously in this chapter, UK newspapers still have the power to set the agenda of both broadcast and online news, and despite dwindling circulation figures this does

impact on attitudes, public discourse and policy making. From phone-hacking to the MPs expenses scandal, newspapers frequently uncover important stories and expose wrongdoing. While they still exist, this public function of newspapers, in terms of how they hold power to account and carry out important investigative work, is a key part of the democratic process. As such, McNair argues that the 'sense-making' function of the skilled journalist is needed more than ever in the digital world, in the face of overwhelming information flow (McNair, 2012, pp. 79–83).

Further, as noted previously, the concentration of media power and the close personal relationships between those in politics and the media has resulted in undue media influence over politicians and political decision-making. In particular Barnett and Townend argue that the excessive power of Murdoch's empire caused a fear of retribution for politicians, both personally in terms of potential scandalous stories and harassment, and also politically with regards to election outcomes (Barnett and Townend, 2014).

The next section will move on to discuss how newspapers, specifically the red top tabloids, represent women and whether this is still significant in this increasingly visual and online landscape in which print circulations are in decline. This discussion pays particular attention to opposition to *The Sun's* Page 3 feature, and *The Sun's* possible motivations for eventually removing bare breasts from the page.

Charting the visual representation of women in UK print media 2012-2017

A key aspect of this study focuses on images of women printed in the three so-called 'red top tabloids'; *The Sun*, *Daily Star* and *Midweek* and *Sunday Sport* as examined by the organisations Object and Turn Your Back on Page 3 in their submissions to the Leveson Inquiry. During the inquiry these newspapers were collectively referred to as the 'Page 3 tabloids', by Object's Anna van Heeswijk as they all print posed images of semi-naked, female glamour models throughout their pages, typified by the image of the Page 3 girl. These titles also use images of semi-naked women throughout the newspaper to accompany news and features; for instance, a piece about a female celebrity is often illustrated by a photograph of her in a bikini or underwear.

The volume of these images per issue varies to greater or lesser extent depending on the title, this was referred to at the inquiry by van Heeswijk as 'a sort of gradient of extremity running from *The Sun* to the *Daily Star* to *The Sport*' (van Heeswijk, 2012a). At the more extreme end of the spectrum, *The Sport* and *Daily Star* typically print a posed image of a semi-naked 'glamour

model' on every page, whereas *The Sun* carries the Page 3 feature, Dear Deirdre – a comic strip agony Aunt feature illustrated with semi-naked photographs of female models in underwear – and a handful of other images of semi-naked women to accompany news and features throughout the paper.

Leveson noted in his report that;

> although Page 3 imagery is limited to page 3 of *The Sun*, it is found on many more pages in the *Daily Star* and yet more still in *The Sport*. Indeed, *The Sport* contains a self-explanatory 'nipple count' which often numbers over 100. In each of these titles, the posed photographs of topless women may be accompanied by stories including 'up-skirt' photographs[4], and extensive advertising for sex web cams, pornographic DVDs and 'escort agencies' (Leveson, 2012b, p. 662).

This gradient could be extended to run to the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Express*, which print a similar amount of this imagery to *The Sun*, and the *Daily Mail*. Whilst the *Daily Mail* does not carry posed images of glamour models produced by the paper itself, it does include a high volume of images of semi-naked women to accompany news and features. Additionally, both *The Times* and *Daily Telegraph*, but particularly *The Times*, were found in two content analysis studies by the organisation Women in Journalism (WiJ), to frequently print large images of semi-naked women and images of female celebrities in revealing outfits on their front pages, with little news-related reason or relevance (Carter, Turner and Paton, 2012; Martinson *et al.*, 2012). As noted previously, along with the decline of print media more generally, a reduction in mainstream media titles with a high volume of images of semi-naked women, particularly so-called lads' mags, can be observed post-Leveson.

Opposition to Page 3 and media objectification of women

The Sun newspaper was bought by Rupert Murdoch in 1968 and relaunched in 1969. The rapid turnaround of the paper; from a fading broadsheet selling 850,000 in the Spring of 1969 to sales of over 4 million by 1978, was driven by Murdoch and editor Larry Lamb's energetic vision. Together they reimagined *The Sun* as 'strident, campaigning, working class, young, entertaining, politically aware, cheeky, radical, anti-establishment, fun, breezy and, most of all,

[4] Upskirting refers to the now illegal practice of photographing a woman's crotch area without her consent. Upskirting became a criminal offence punishable by up to two years in prison with the passing of *The Voyeurism Offences Act* on 21 June 2018. Prior to the law coming into force in April 2019 this type of photograph was often published in tabloid newspapers such as *The Sport* and was typically captured by paparazzi zooming in with a long lens camera in the brief seconds when a woman in the public eye was entering or exiting a vehicle wearing a short skirt.

hugely profitable' (Chippindale and Horrie, 2013, p. 13). The first bare breasts appeared on Page 3 in November 1970, in the same week that second-wave feminists protested the Miss World competition in London, and the feature gradually became a key part of *The Sun's* successful brand. Nude women were presented as edgy, fresh and youthful, in order to signal that the new *Sun* was throwing off the stuffy 1950s and embracing the spirit of the sexually permissive 1960s.

Using sex to sell the paper was a key decision commercially, as Chippendale and Horrie argue; 'From day one *the Sun* had chosen sex as the battleground for the coming circulation war with its rivals [the *Daily Mirror*]' (Chippindale and Horrie, 2013, p. 26). In the race for readers the *Mirror* and then new rival *The Daily Star* both eventually introduced Page 3 features. Page 3 type imagery thus became a key component in the British tabloid offer. This was sealed with the arrival of the *Sunday Sport* in 1986, described by its editorial director Mike Gabbert as featuring 'wall to wall tits' (Chippindale and Horrie, 2013, p. 270).

The genesis of Page 3, and the historical basis for this type of imagery in the UK is perhaps unsurprising given the male dominated workforce and environment of the Fleet Street papers in the early 1970s. Certainly there were women working at *The Sun* when it relaunched in the early 1970s – most notably women's editor Joyce Hopkirk and her team of female feature writers known as the Pacesetters[5] (Chippindale and Horrie, 2013, p. 31). However, the working conditions, particularly at *The Sun* and *News of the World's* Bouverie Street premises, were grim, and rooted in the male dominated print industry. Newspaper offices were 'filthy places much more akin to factories and their position as one of the few industries left in the heart of London' (Chippindale and Horrie, 2013, p. 51).

Beckett notes that the 'rude, raucous, rough, red-top press' is a 'particularly British beast' (Beckett, 2011), and arguably Page 3 became the totemic feature in this unique tabloid mix of partisan politics, scandal, sex, sport and celebrity gossip. Indeed Rupert Murdoch famously asserted that Page 3 would never work outside the UK, stating; 'show it to me in any other newspaper I own. Never in America, never in Australia. Never. Never. Never. It just would not be accepted' (Murdoch, 1994).

Although feminist activists did not immediately target Page 3, by the mid 1980s protest against the feature was well established (Bingham, 2014, p. 192). Clare Short captured an outpouring

[5] The term pace setters originated at the previous, broadsheet, edition of *The Sun,* which had been *The Daily Herald* from 1912 to 1964. A readers' survey identified the broadsheet *Sun's* target audience as a post-war, younger generation with more disposable income and leisure time – hence pace setters.

of anti-Page 3 sentiment when she tabled her Ten-Minute Rule Bill in 1986, later publishing a selection of the many thousands of letters she received in support of her campaign (Short, 1991). As Snoddy notes, this led to a lengthy 'vendetta' campaign against 'killjoy Clare' in which *The Sun* and the *News of the World* engaged in harassing and humiliating behaviour, such as publishing unflattering photos of the MP alongside sexist comments, sending out car stickers to supporters, and attempting to secure revealing photos of her from her first husband (Snoddy, 1993, p. 110). Protest against Page 3 then is nothing new, and unsurprisingly has resulted in some vicious reactions from *The Sun*. However, post-Leveson there were indications that opposition was coming not only from expected quarters, but from *Sun* readers themselves. For instance, a YouGov survey in October 2012 found that almost a quarter of *The Sun's* readership did not wish Page 3 to continue (YouGov and The Sun, 2012).

Post-Leveson there were other signs that wider public opinion was perhaps shifting towards greater intolerance of the sexual objectification of women in UK print media beyond Page 3. In February 2013 *The Sun's* decision to illustrate its news coverage of the fatal shooting of South African model Reeva Steenkamp with a front-page full cover photograph of her in a bikini, led to widespread public outcry and backlash across the rest of UK media and social media. Over 6,000 people signed a petition calling on *The Sun* to apologise for the cover, and Former Labour Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott took to Twitter to urge readers to complain to *The Sun*. Similarly, the previously mentioned *Daily Mail* Legs-it front page attracted widespread condemnation across the world (Bearak, 2017).

Historically the removal of *The Sun's* Page 3 feature was resisted by its editors and proprietors due to a fear that doing so would cause a decline in circulation. However from 2012 onwards, in a sign that the paper was preparing to shift position on the feature, *The Sun* carried out several surveys, polls and focus groups of readers to gauge what would happen if Page 3 was dropped (Davies-Arai, 2014). That Page 3 has finally been covered up may therefore simply indicate that *The Sun's* editors, managerial staff and proprietors felt that a knock-on effect with regards to a sales decline was no longer a concern. The result of this 'listening to readers' and readers apparent lack of attachment to Page 3, may indicate a general shift in public opinion, influenced by campaigns against objectification and Page 3 specifically, as well as reflecting a desensitisation or disinterest caused by the explosion of online pornography and the mainstreaming of pornography in everyday life.

From an economic perspective, newspaper proprietors and readers may be less wedded to features such as Page 3, due to the growth of social media platforms, in particular Instagram,

which has created a steady source of imagery to be used by newspapers of women in public life in bikinis and underwear. Models and minor celebrities tolerate newspaper reuse of their Instagram images and also often collaborate with newspapers and pose for photographs in bikinis and revealing outfits through an 'explicit or implicit collaboration between paparazzi photographers and celebrities' (Jerslev and Mortensen, 2018, p. 168). This is an era in which 'celebrities themselves perform their private lives and selves in abundance on social media' (Jerslev and Mortensen, 2018, p. 158). In this regard Page 3 is no longer unique or rare, and crucially similar posed, semi-naked images can be accessed for use in newspapers with greater ease and at reduced cost. Newspapers can use these self-posed and self-posted images without the associated expense of publishing a feature like Page 3, such as paying for the model, photographer and studio time, as well as post-production photo editing.

This Instagram image availability for newspapers was not fully developed until after the Leveson Inquiry concluded and after Page 3 had ceased to be fully nude, but has gone on to further render the posed glamour model imagery traditionally found in newspapers somewhat obsolete. Instagram was released as an app on Apple only in October 2010, before being released across other devices and bought by Facebook for almost £800 million in 2012. It is one of the most successful social networking sites to date, achieving over one billion monthly active users in just eight years.

With specific reference to this thesis, it is also pertinent to consider whether a daily image of a woman in her underwear on Page 3 of a newspaper means anything, given immediate public access to not only self-posted and posed imagery of celebrities and models on sites like Instagram, but a wealth of online pornography, much of it available for free. Indeed Page 3 is now available as an online iteration, which from August 2013 to November 2015 was behind a paywall, but is now free. 30 years after Clare Short first campaigned against Page 3, its removal coming so late in the day could be seen as something of an irrelevance.

However as noted previously and as will be discussed in detail in **Chapter Three**, there is a strong argument that the continued sexualised imagery found in UK newspapers does have an impact in several ways. Bingham notes that;

> the *Sun* normalized female toplessness as mainstream popular culture's primary symbol of sexual pleasure, and powerfully reinforced the idea that women's bodies should be available for public scrutiny and consumption (Bingham, 2014, p. 196).

Conboy agrees that tabloid representation of women in features such as Page 3 denote 'broader discourses of a national community' and contribute to 'the imagined daily space of the nation' (Conboy, 2006, p. 151). Johansson corroborates this idea of *The Sun* as a repository of collective identity and 'belonging', with an emphasis on Britishness, in her research based on interviews with readers of *The Sun* and the *Daily Mirror* (Johansson, 2008, p. 410).

Having detailed the print media landscape, particularly with regards to the representation of women and the demise of Page 3, a consideration of specific regulatory approaches to discriminatory representations of women in print media follows. Particular focus will be paid to the issue of third party complaints as emphasised at the Leveson Inquiry. This section will consider how print regulation interacts with UK and EU legislation and make comparisons with other media regulation, such as broadcast, and regulation of other protected characteristics, such as race.

Part Three: Omissions and contradictions in regulation and legislation regarding discriminatory representations in media

Legislation and discriminatory representations of women

Evaluating UK legislation it is evident that contradictions and omissions lie at the heart of approaches to discriminatory representations of women. Whilst all UK media is subject to laws of general application, notably in the case of the representation of women with regards to obscenity legislation, and in the case of some protected groups with regards to hate speech and hate crime legislation, mainstream media has never been subject to specific legislatory constraints regarding discriminatory representation of women as a group. UK laws on hate speech and hate crime make no reference to sex or gender, and obscenity law governs material that 'tends to deprave or corrupt'; a definition that could not be said to extend to discriminatory, or specifically sexist material. Similarly, statute relating to the possession of extreme pornography is constrained to depictions of acts which threaten a person's life or could cause severe injury; depictions of bestiality and necrophilia; and depictions of non-consensual rape or assault by penetration. UK legislation has evolved to encompass the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) via the Human Rights Act (1998) which does specifically name sex discrimination in Article 14. The Equality Act 2010 also lists sex as a protected characteristic in relation to employment and use of public and private services. However, as noted, inconsistencies remain in regards to the omission of women/sex as a category in hate crime and hate speech legislation, and whilst the Ofcom Broadcasting Code

explicitly references the Human Rights Act and the ECHR, this has yet to be fully reflected in print regulation.

Print regulation, obscenity and third party complaints

As this thesis will go on to explore in **Chapter Four** and analyse in **Chapter Eight**, the representation of women in print media has historically been framed as an issue of taste and decency within obscenity legislation, not as an issue of discrimination. As detailed earlier in this chapter, from 1991 to 2014 the UK print industry was self-regulated via the Press Complaints Commission (PCC), with newspapers compelled to adhere to the specific guidelines set out in the Editors' Code of Practice. Examining the way in which obscenity laws guide and influence press regulation on a micro level illustrates how this taste and decency framing has been historically played out in the rulings of the PCC, as Walden notes:

> in its decisions, the PCC regularly used the following wording to respond to complaints that offended readers: 'To come to an inevitably subjective judgement as to whether such material is tasteless or offensive would amount to the Commission acting as a moral arbiter' (Walden, 2016, p. 72).

Additionally unlike facilities provided for by, for instance Ofcom, with regards to broadcast media, and the Advertising Standards Authority, with regards to advertising, the Editors' Code of Practice had no specific compulsion with regards to discriminatory or sexist material about groups or categories of people, and crucially offered no recourse to complain about such material, unless an individual was the subject of the material themselves. The emphasis in the code was on offering redress to individuals who felt they had been represented in a discriminatory way. It did not offer a facility for members of the public to complain about coverage or representation that they felt was discriminatory in a more general manner. Whilst third party complaints were technically permissible, the PCC website stated that 'We normally accept complaints only from those who are directly affected by the matters about which they are complaining.' (Press Complaints Commission, 2012) and the 2009 second edition of the Editors' Codebook advised that 'The PCC will not proceed with a third-party complaint without the subject's consent' (Beales, 2009, p. 62).

Thus Clause 12 of the Editors' Code of Practice stated that;

> The press must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual's race, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness or disability.

> Details of an individual's race, colour, religion, sexual orientation, physical or mental illness or disability must be avoided unless genuinely relevant to the story (Press Complaints Commission, 2014).

However the Editors' Codebook stated;

> the Code does not cover generalised remarks about groups or categories of people, which would involve subjective views, often based on political correctness or taste, and be difficult to adjudicate upon without infringing the freedom of expression of others (Beales, 2009, p. 61).

Indeed, this issue has long been on the table. This oversight with regards to third party complaints was noted by Calcutt in his final review in 1993, but such a facility was not adopted by the PCC (Calcutt, 1993, p. 47). In 2007, several years prior to the Leveson Inquiry, the Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR), a UK select committee, examined the PCC Code and stated;

> We note that other jurisdictions have included more robust protection for groups within a framework of self-regulation and freedom of expression and recommend that the PCC draws on best practice from overseas. The right to free speech is sacrosanct in the USA, but has not prevented the media from working within a Code which provides protection for vulnerable groups (Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2007, p. 105).

For instance the JCHR noted that the US Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics includes instruction such as 'Tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so' (Society of Professional Journalists, 1996). The JCHR thus concluded that the PCC's regulatory system: 'is not sufficiently robust to protect asylum seekers and other vulnerable minorities from the adverse effects of unfair and inflammatory media stories' (Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2007, p. 105). In other jurisdictions, this issue is dealt with as 'group defamation', as is the case in Denmark, Norway, France, Spain and the Netherlands, although the Danish and Dutch laws cover race, religion and sexual orientation, not women, gender or sex (Waldron, 2012; van Noorloos, 2014). The German law is more open and refers to 'part of the population' (Waldron, 2012, p. 40). As **Chapter Six** will go on to analyse, this gap or oversight with regards to group discrimination and a lack of third party complaints facility in print media regulation was a central issue in evidence put forward by women's groups at the Leveson Inquiry, and it continues to be a live

issue raised by the organisation Hacked Off with regards to a wide range of groups which face discrimination.

As representatives of Travellers[6] noted in written evidence to the Leveson Inquiry*:*

> The result [of the PCC not considering third party complaints] is that as long as they are carefully worded, derogatory references to Travellers can be published repeatedly, as they were in *The Sun's* 'Stamp on the camps' campaign, without committing any offence. Yet it is clear that articles of that sort do cause substantial damage to the rights and reputations of Travellers, fanning hostility against them in settled communities (Irish Traveller Movement in Britain, 2012, p. 1).

The organisation Hacked Off added that this has implications beyond just one group*;*

> For Travellers, read women; Muslims; Poles; gay, lesbian bisexual and transgender people; those with eating disorders; the mentally ill; the disabled; those claiming benefits and many other groups in society that may sometimes be targets of hostile reporting (Cooper, 2015).

Racism and print media regulation

Beyond this issue of third party complaints or group defamation not being recognised or addressed in UK print media legislation, there was an inconsistency in how different types of discriminatory representation were viewed in print media regulation. With regards to racism, adjudications demonstrate that the Press Complaints Commission *did* adopt a group defamation approach and allow some third party complaints to be considered. For instance, although the complaint was not upheld, in an adjudication to a complaint made by asylum rights campaigners concerning several pieces in the *Daily Mail*, the PCC asserted;

> The Commission has in the past underlined its deep concern that newspapers should not incite racial hatred (…) Discrimination has no place in a modern society and the Commission would censure most heavily any newspaper found guilty of racist reporting (Press Complaints Commission, 2000).

[6] In the UK the term Traveller refers to those who have traditionally pursued a nomadic lifestyle. Irish Travellers are recognised as a racial group and Romany Gypsies as an ethnic group, and both are protected against discrimination by the Equality Act 2010.

However the PCC line was entirely different with regards to sexism and misogyny. The case of Alix Bromley demonstrates this lack of provision. In 2006 the magazine *Loaded* reproduced photographs of Bromley aged 15 in a low-cut top found on the internet, and printed them in the magazine without her consent. The piece featured the headline 'Wanted! The epic boobs girl!' and offered a reward of £500 to any male reader who identified her and either supplied more photographs of her or 'persuaded' her to take part in a *Loaded* photoshoot. Bromley was then the subject of harassment through unsolicited contact by *Loaded* readers attempting to persuade her to pose for a photoshoot in order to win the £500 prize. When Bromley and her family contacted the PCC citing invasion of privacy, the PCC would not uphold the complaint, stating that there were no grounds as the photos had been shared widely on other internet sites. *Loaded* magazine argued that they had not taken the photographs from Bromley's Bebo account as asserted, but from elsewhere on the internet (Press Complaints Commission, 2010).

The adjudication, which was also not upheld, rejected any question of sexism or discrimination and instead offered a subjective interpretation framed in the language of obscenity legislation and argued that;

> issues of taste and offence – and any question of the legality of the material – could not be ruled upon by the Commission, which was compelled to consider only the terms of the Editors' Code (Press Complaints Commission, 2010).

This demonstrates the historical framing in print regulation of discriminatory representations of women as a taste and decency issue, in comparison to the framing of racism as an issue of discrimination. As noted previously, UK hate crime and hate speech legislation omits any mention of women, gender, sexism and misogyny, so this difference of approach in print regulation could be a reflection of the parameters of legislation on this matter.

Broadcast regulation and discriminatory representations of women

In contrast to print media, broadcast media is subject to much stricter regulation. Broadcasters are required to adhere to the Ofcom Broadcasting Code, first published in 2005, in order to meet their licensing conditions. This is particularly marked when comparing print regulation with broadcast regulation with regards to obscenity, as well as with regards to the status of third party complaints. Prior to the 2003 Communications Act and the establishment of Ofcom, broadcasters were compelled by law not to create any programme;

> which offends against good taste or decency or is likely to encourage or incite to crime or to lead to disorder or to be offensive to public feeling (*Broadcasting Act 1990*, 1990, sec. 6).

However, since 2003 broadcast legislation no longer draws on obscenity legislation as print media does, but instead has been updated to frame discrimination as a human rights issue. With the creation of Ofcom the clause relating to taste and decency was repealed by the 2003 Communications Act, as a BBC report advises;

> The BBC's Editorial Guidelines previously referred to 'taste and decency' as the standards by which content should be judged. With the advent of the broadcast industry regulator Ofcom and the publication of its Code of Standards in 2005, broadcast content must now be shown to be either 'harmful' or 'offensive' before it is considered to be unsuitable for broadcast – a higher test than merely being tasteless or lacking in decency (BBC, 2009, p. 15).

The Ofcom Broadcasting Code also makes specific provision for zoning sexual content away from children via what is known as a watershed between 9pm and 5.30am. Between these hours a relaxation is permitted on issues of offence and violence. The broadcasting code also specifies that clear advance warnings must be given about pre-watershed material that could be deemed offensive. There is no comparable regulation regarding similar content in newspapers, which are often prominently on view in the sightline of children, outside petrol stations and in newsagents and supermarkets.

The BBC adheres to its own internal guidelines and standards, as well as Ofcom's rules. The organisation's Editorial Standards includes a section outlining guidance on harm and offence which states;

> We aim to reflect fully and fairly all of the United Kingdom's people and cultures in our services. Content may reflect the prejudice and disadvantage which exist in societies worldwide but we should not perpetuate it. In some instances, references to disability, age, sexual orientation, faith, race, etc. may be relevant to portrayal. However, we should avoid careless or offensive stereotypical assumptions and people should only be described in such terms when editorially justified (BBC, 2011, pp. 46–47).

The Ofcom Broadcasting Code sets an expectation with regards to broadcasters and discriminatory content and specifically lists gender as an attribute;

> In applying generally accepted standards broadcasters must ensure that material which may cause offence is justified by the context (…). Such material may include, but is not limited to, offensive language, violence, sex, sexual violence, humiliation, distress, violation of human dignity, discriminatory treatment or language (for example on the grounds of age, disability, gender, race, religion, beliefs and sexual orientation) (Ofcom, 2011b, p. 15).

In contrast to print regulation, it is thus possible for members of the public to complain to Ofcom about broadcasting on very general grounds such as 'sex discrimination', 'racial offence', 'religious offence', 'violence' and 'offence' without specific reference to an individual or having to be the individual represented. Whilst there is no specific mechanism available to complain about sexism or the derogatory portrayal of women, there is plenty of scope for complaints of this nature as set out in the general terms of what is grounds for complaint and how these complaints are assessed, which holds that a complaint can be made by 'any person or body who considers that a broadcaster has failed to comply with a relevant requirement (…)' Complaints can, for example, be made about;

> harmful or offensive material, material which is inaccurate or partial; material which encourages or incites crime or disorder; the protection of those aged under 18 (…) (Ofcom, 2011a, p. 15).

This is in marked contrast to the PCC's Editors' Code where typically complaints about discrimination against women were only accepted on grounds of accuracy. Furthermore the Ofcom Broadcasting Code states that it was 'drafted in the light of the Human Rights Act 1998 and the European Convention on Human Rights ("the Convention")' and specifically references discrimination regarding sex and Article 14 of the ECHR 'the right to enjoyment of human rights without discrimination on grounds such as sex, race and religion' (Ofcom, 2011b, p. 2).

Advertising standards and harmful representations of women

Similar to broadcast media, there is a third-party complaints system in the UK with regards to advertising which is framed around harm and offence not obscenity. Members of the public can complain about adverts to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), and there is a clear guidance on the ASA's website which states that;

> The ASA has a strong position on ads which may sexualise, or objectify people and advertisers must also ensure that ads do not present harmful or offensive gender stereotypes (ASA, 2019).

For instance of the top 10 most complained about adverts in the UK in 2017 most related to third party complaints on the grounds of offensiveness, primarily with regards to issues of taste, sexual content and behaviour, and animal cruelty (ASA, 2018). The ASA's CAP Codes for broadcast and non-broadcast advertisements allow members of the public to make complaints on a wide range of issues relating to harm and offence. The ASA's guidance on the codes specifically names and details the offences of sexualisation and objectification, and advises that the ASA has received and upheld many complaints by members of the public about objectification, primarily of women (ASA, 2019). In 2017 the Advertising Standards Agency announced new rules to specifically target harm and offence caused by gendered stereotypes in advertising and stricter rules about the sexual representation and portrayal of those under 18, or who appear to be under the age of 18 (ASA, 2017; Sweney, 2017). Thus advertising regulation demonstrates a clear departure from print regulation in terms of third party complaints and by offering a specific facility to complain about gender stereotypes, sex discrimination, sexualisation and objectification.

Online regulation and discriminatory representations of women

It is worth noting that Leveson faced criticism for not addressing internet regulation in his inquiry (Ball, 2012; BBC, 2012). However given that it is a medium with no central authority which traverses borders, it is perhaps understandable that Leveson declared the internet off-limits. Online outlets are of course subject to UK, EU and international law covering everything from libel and contempt of court to copyright and data protection, and IPSO regulation for legacy media brands such as *The Times* and *The Sun* also extends to their online iterations.

However with regards to content hosted on the dominant global social media platforms, this has evolved as a system of self-regulation with no one overarching regulatory body either in the UK, EU or internationally. Consensus is growing towards the conclusion that much like print outlets, online media powerhouses cannot be trusted to mark their own homework and self-regulate in the interests of users not profits (Select Committee on Communications, 2019, p. 5). However logistical issues abound, not least with the sheer scale of these platforms, which host billions of users, making human moderation unachievable. Issues are being raised particularly with regards to the protection of children and vulnerable people (Select Committee on Communications, 2017, p. 14).

Violent abuse suffered by women online is also of serious concern to a number of international organisations such as the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE, 2019) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2019). These issues may not be a matter of illegality, but still present serious harms that have the potential to conflict with individual rights and freedoms under EU and international law, such as the right to childhood, and the right to be protected from discrimination.

As will be detailed in the following chapter, this problem is particularly acute when it comes to voracious misogyny online, as this has the potential to exclude women and girls from participating in public life. This lack of regulation and the overwhelming volume of hateful content online has the potential to dwarf racism and sexism in print media and render it inconsequential, and, as will be explored in **Chapter Seven**, this can be used by print media outlets to distract from their own poor standards in this regard.

Having situated the framing of sexist representations in print media regulation at the point of the Leveson Inquiry in comparison to racist representations in print media, and with regards to other media regulation including broadcast, advertising and online, a summary of the chapter will now be given.

Concluding summary

This chapter has established the historical and political context of UK print media, provided a history of print regulation and situated the Leveson Inquiry within the 40 year cycle of UK print media scandals, commissions, inquiries and reports. A thorough outline of the events leading up to the Leveson Inquiry has been established and the outcomes for print regulation have been considered, including the development of IPSO and IMPRESS and the continuing deadlock that remains.

An overview of the print media landscape has been provided giving the context of a sharp decline in circulation and the shifting business model that has emerged. It has been argued that despite this drop in circulation print media continue to have cultural significance when it comes to setting the agenda for other media and influencing public attitudes and policy making. An overview of the extent and volume of sexualised imagery in each of the UK national newspapers has been given and an outline of the key moments of opposition to this imagery, particularly the Page 3 feature, has been detailed. It has been argued that the economic imperative to keep Page 3 lessened alongside vocal activism and a shift in public

opinion against the feature, leading to the end of bare-breasted models on the page. However despite the growth of online pornography the case has been made for the symbolic significance of the Page 3 feature and this type of imagery across the print media. This chapter has highlighted inconsistencies and gaps in approaches to discriminatory representations of women, particularly in regards to inadmissible third party complaints in print media regulation and lack of provision in hate speech and hate crime legislation. Having established the context in terms of events, regulation, legislation and political and technological developments, the next chapter will go on to detail the particular postfeminist contextual positioning and academic understanding that underpins this thesis.

Chapter Three: Situating the Leveson Inquiry in a postfeminist neoliberal context

Introduction

Having surveyed print history and regulation, the Leveson Inquiry and the media landscape in **Chapter Two**, the undertaking of this chapter is to provide a contextual backdrop to the debates that will be analysed in **Chapters Six, Seven and Eight.** An overview is given of the particular feminist landscape during the inquiry; as a moment in time simultaneously on the cusp of a feminist resurgence and an intensification of misogyny. Discriminatory media representations of women are situated from the perspective of wider trends in feminist activism and public misogyny. This chapter roots the thesis in the theories of Rosalind Gill (Gill, 2007d, 2016, 2017; Gill and Scharff, 2011) and Angela McRobbie (McRobbie, 2004, 2009), and plays a key role in contextualising the analysis that will be undertaken by situating debates about media sexism and public misogyny within feminist understandings of a postfeminist, neoliberal culture.

This thesis contends that the feminist campaigners who gave evidence at the Leveson Inquiry were operating in a hostile context of neoliberal postfeminism, in which feminism is at once upheld and disavowed (McRobbie, 2009), and in which a preoccupation with individual choice, empowerment and agency holds sway (Gill, 2007d; Rottenberg, 2018). As **Chapters Six and Eight** will go on to analyse, argumentation with a neoliberal framing is particularly hard to counter and this postfeminist context demands complex strategies of resistance. For Rottenberg, the neoliberal project necessitates 'the conversion of everything into capital and the infiltration of a market rationality into all spheres of life, including the most private ones' (Rottenberg, 2019, p. 9), and this dominant neoliberal discourse is 'rendering it more difficult to pursue a vocabulary of social justice' (Rottenberg, 2018, p. 13). The contextualisation set out here is therefore key to addressing RQ2 – How do feminist campaigners account for their strategies and approaches when critiquing discriminatory coverage of women in print media at the Leveson Inquiry and beyond?

This chapter draws together and maps academic understandings of the visual representation of women using key concepts such as Mulvey's male gaze theory, theories of sexual objectification and subjectification and discourses of agency and empowerment. It establishes the interplay between feminist activism and feminist academic understanding, and outlines how the academic literature has informed the thesis. Particular attention is paid to research

about sexualised imagery, the normalisation of objectification and pornification and how this has been discussed within the literature in terms of the impacts on structural inequality for women and girls. Research such as that from McNair, Attwood and Smith (McNair, 2002, 2013; Attwood, 2004, 2006; Smith, 2010a) proposing an 'emancipated new femininity' and 'centring on rights, freedoms and choices' (Lazar, 2011, p. 38) is considered from the position of this neoliberal postfeminist critique.

This chapter is divided into three parts. First an overview is given of the particular postfeminist context that women's organisations were operating in at the time of the Leveson Inquiry. In order to make sense of this neoliberal postfeminist moment the second section offers an outline of debates within the field of visual representation of women and considers how academic understanding has developed and arguments have conflicted and changed over time. The third section investigates academic research exploring the impact of sexism and misogyny on women and girls, particularly in relation to inequality, power and public life, and positions this work as an analysis of postfeminist culture (Gill, Kelan and Scharff, 2017, p. 227) contributing to these debates.

A postfeminist neoliberal context

Postfeminism is a contested term used widely in academic theory since the 1990s to denote several theories. For the purposes of this thesis I follow Gill's understanding which emphasises postfeminism as a cultural phenomenon, and proposes the analysis of this culture as a critical approach. Gill articulates a 'postfeminist sensibility' (Gill, 2007d) in which both feminist and anti-feminist ideas coexist. For Gill this postfeminist sensibility is marked in key aspects of contemporary culture. In common with McRobbie and other theorists, Gill notes an emphasis on neoliberal ideas of individualism and empowerment and a 'retreat from structural accounts of inequality' (Gill, Kelan and Scharff, 2017, p. 227). She highlights other features of this postfeminist sensibility, including the framing of femininity as a bodily property, an essentialist view of male/female sexual difference and a shift from objectification to subjectification, particularly through make-overs and self-surveillance (Gill, 2007d).

For Gill this particular neoliberal context in which postfeminism operates deflects structural inequality towards the individual, who must take on responsibility for all aspects of their life via various types of 'work' (Gill, 2007d, p. 164). She problematises a linear advancement, instead arguing for an understanding of postfeminism that reflects 'a constellation of beliefs, ideas and practices that are dynamic, that travel and that change' (Gill, Kelan and Scharff, 2017, p. 230).

Exploring similar themes to Gill, McRobbie complicates ideas of backlash, whereby feminism is completely relegated to the past (Faludi, 1992), and instead proposes that postfeminism constitutes a 'double entanglement', in which feminism is at once achieved and repudiated (McRobbie, 2009, p. 12). This is an undoing of the women's movement, a 'disarticulation and displacement, accompanied by replacement and substitution' (McRobbie, 2009, p. 26). In this postfeminist landscape everyone is a feminist and equality has been won and consigned to the past. This is a double bind, a masking, a disavowal and reframing which neuters arguments against misogyny as it is widely held to no longer exist. Yet alongside this backlash McRobbie finds that 'spaces of luminosity' (McRobbie, 2009, p. 78) have been carved out in the public sphere where liberal feminist values are promoted, and women in the workplace, and other areas of public life such as education and law, are afforded a 'notional form of equality' (McRobbie, 2009, p. 2). However any resistance to structural equality is off limits and the idea of a political feminist movement is attacked as out of date and no longer needed (McRobbie, 2009). For McRobbie, rejecting a feminist movement and any interrogation of structural inequality is a key requirement for the new postfeminist subject in this 'gender regime' (McRobbie, 2004, p. 262) as 'withholding of critique is a condition of her freedom' (McRobbie, 2004, p. 260).

For theorists such as McRobbie and Gill then, this neoliberal postfeminist culture offers a constrained form of gender equality which celebrates women's individual choice and freedom, but leaves both existing and emerging iterations of sexism and misogyny to flourish. This particular contextual framework is central to this thesis, as applying a postfeminist logic 'helps us to see and identify the patterning of this cultural sensibility or regime' (Gill, Kelan and Scharff, 2017, p. 227). Having established the theoretical position this thesis draws on, this chapter will now move on to consider the conflicted landscape for feminist activism pre-Leveson.

Part One: Setting the stage: Feminist resurgence vs 'toxic technocultures'

A key contextual backdrop for this study is the birth of the internet, not just with regards to the decline in print media, but also as both an enabler and disabler for feminist activism. It is clear that whilst the internet has been a key factor enabling feminists to gather and organise, it is simultaneously a site of renewed misogyny (Linabary, Corple and Cooky, 2019).

Internet as an enabler

There is agreement that feminist activism in the Western hemisphere in the mid to late 2000s underwent a resurgence, particularly around an anti-pornography and sexual objectification agenda (Long, 2012; Redfern and Aune, 2013). UK activism surged at the same time as feminist campaigns in America and Australia and around the world, with protests in Russia by Pussy Riot also taking place during this period. Global actions such as One Billion Rising were enabled by the connectivity of the internet. Cochrane asserts that activity in the UK peaked in 2013 and posits that the internet performed a critical transformative function for feminist activism via a kind of online mass consciousness raising, particularly as very private and distressing personal experiences could be shared anonymously (Cochrane, 2013, pp. 9, 112).

Thus the internet has enabled a gathering and resurgence of grassroots feminist activism both online and offline. Many feminist groups and campaigns began as online petitions and Facebook pages, and significant movements have grown around key websites such as Hollaback! and Everyday Sexism, set up in 2005 and 2012 respectively, which encourage women to share their experiences of sexism and take action through petitions, demonstrations and protests. Private groups on Facebook and Yahoo, for instance, and Twitter hashtags, have enabled organisations such as London Feminist Network, set up in 2004, and UK Feminista, set up in 2010, to network, communicate, publicise and plan. Blogs and websites have emerged which give feminists a sense of collective identity, such as *The F Word* set up by Catherine Redfern in 2001 and US sites *feministing* set up by Jessica Valenti in 2004 and *Jezebel* set up by Anna Holmes in 2007. New groups, both funded and unfunded, conferences, actions, campaigns and demonstrations have been enabled through this arena, resulting in an upsurge in actions such as; stunts and protests, stickering and graffiti, political lobbying, demonstrations outside parliament, rallies, marches, writing to MPs and newspapers, media engagement, appearing on broadcast media and at public debates, producing research and reports, and creating and signing petitions. The movement was further galvanised by campaigners being able to share the results of activism through videos, images and blogs on the social web (Long, 2012, p. 153).

Key UK actions during this period included the revival of the London Reclaim the Night in 2004 by London Feminist Network, and subsequently in many other UK towns and cities, and the founding of Million Women Rise in 2007 – both of which are marches against male violence against women. Conferences including the FEM conferences, from 2004-8 in Sheffield and 2011 in London, Feminism in London (FiL), set up in 2008 and the Stop Porn Culture and Rad Fem conferences, acted as gathering and galvanising moments for the movement. There was also a surge in full time students' union women's officers and feminist societies in universities

during this period (Hilton, 2013; Pearce, 2014). Additionally, a political party for women was founded in 2015 following an event at Southbank Centre's WOW – Women of the World Festival in London. The Women's Equality Party fielded candidates in the 2016 London Mayoral and London Assembly elections, Scottish Parliament election and Welsh Assembly election. No seats were won, but 350,000 votes were cast for the party. Seven candidates stood in the 2017 election gaining just over 3,000 votes in total and Kay Wesley, the first Women's Equality Party councillor was elected in 2019 to Congleton Town Council. For the December 2019 UK General Election the party stood three candidates who were survivors of domestic violence in seats where MPs were accused of assault and harassment against women.

The growing expansion and mainstreaming of franchises such as Playboy, Hooters and Miss World and the X-Biz EU adult entertainment convention, was the subject of protest for grassroots feminist activists such as Anti-Porn London, East Midland Feminists (EM Fems), North West Feminists, Sheffield Fems and Bristol Fawcett Society, groups which were all set up and peaked in activity during the first decade of the millennium and into the 2010s. Legislative change was achieved in this regard by the organisation Object, which was instrumental in closing the loop hole which enabled lap dancing clubs to be licensed in the same category as cafes, by lobbying for them to be reclassified in the same bracket as sex shops. This resulted in legislative change via Section 27 of the Policing and Crime Act 2009.

During this period, and of specific interest for this study, campaigns to end sexual objectification in print media, namely *The Sun's* Page 3, gained increasing traction. Perhaps bolstered by developments around The Leveson Inquiry, targeted campaign group No More Page 3 by January 2015 reached over 215,000 signatories to a petition for *The Sun* to cease publication of its daily photograph of a topless woman. Protesters even 'hijacked' the newspaper's 'royal baby monitor' – a video camera trained on St Mary's hospital awaiting the imminent arrival of Catherine, The Duchess of Cambridge's first baby – to deliver a message on camera to *The Sun*.

As noted, a key focus of this research is the organisation Object and its campaigns with regards to print media. From 2003-2015, Object staged direct action protests against lads' mags through what they called 'Feminist Fridays', where groups of activists would demonstrate at supermarkets such as Tesco, handing out fliers to the general public, chanting, singing, dancing and waving placards and banners. Lads' mags were placed in paper bags with slogans written on them, such as 'This promotes rape culture' and 'This is sexist'. Magazine titles were

subverted, so that for instance, *FHM* (For Him Magazine) became 'For Horrible Misogynists'. Tesco branding was also subverted with cards left throughout the shop with slogans on them such as 'Get rid of lads' mags – Every Little Helps'. Protestors wore pyjamas and waved placards saying 'Porn is more harmful than pyjamas', in reference to a much publicised Tesco ban in certain stores with regards to shoppers in pyjamas. Participants in the protest formed a conga and danced through the stores singing 'Let's get rid of lads' mags'.

Object also lobbied government, retailers and industry bodies via petitions, protests and meetings on this issue, and worked with MPs on Early Day Motions and Ten-Minute Rule Bills. In 2006 this resulted in the Home Office, Periodical Publishers Association and the National Federation of Retail Newsagents (NFRN) drawing up a voluntary code of practice recommending that retailers cover up lads' mags and *The Sport*, to ensure that they are displayed away from children's titles and not at children's eye level or below. In 2013 the Co-operative Supermarket announced that it would no longer sell lad's mags such as *Front*, *Nuts* and *Zoo* as well as *The Sport*, after the publishers refused the supermarket's request to seal them in 'modesty bags'. Tesco followed suit and insisted that lads' mags either make their covers 'more modest' or cover them up.

Thus campaigns to end Page 3, such as No More Page 3 and Turn Your Back on Page 3, and campaigns against lads' mags, such as those spearheaded by the women's organisation Object, claimed the demise of what they saw as sexist media as campaign victories. Commenting on this upsurge of activity, Cochrane notes that much of this renewed activism concerned what she terms 'cultural sexism' – issues relating to: 'the ugly wallpaper of women's lives – Page Three, lads' mags, music videos, the dearth of women in broadcasting, street harassment' (Cochrane, 2013, p. 212).

Long draws on social movement theory to suggest that this period of activism was a natural result of a preceding period of latency. She also suggests that the building blocks were in existence for this resurgence through abeyance structures, the fruits of the second wave which provided continuity in this period of latency; for example through books and receptive female MPs in parliament and women in other positions of power (Long, 2012, pp. 149–151). Through her detailed case studies of two London-based campaign groups, Object and Anti-Porn London, and interviews with feminist activists who were part of these groups, Long theorises that much of this resurgence was a reaction to the expansion and mainstreaming of pornography 'creating a tipping point where the distress and anger it has provoked in young women has demanded a voice' (Long, 2012, p. 109).

Internet as a disabler

And yet, the internet has been an enabler not only for feminist activism, but also for an explosion in online pornography and misogyny. The source of gathering, networking and communicating for feminists is simultaneously home to an outpouring of misogyny and violence against women including intense online abuse and harassment (Jane, 2014a, 2014b; Megarry, 2014; Cole, 2015). In terms of women's day to day interactions, the internet is thus a complicated and hotly contested landscape. Much of this intensified misogyny can be interpreted as a backlash against growing feminist visibility in the public sphere. Banet-Weiser understands this as a kind of mirroring, where the hyper-visibility and normativity of what she terms a popular feminist zeitgeist, as expressed on t-shirt slogans, via Twitter and Instagram hashtags and ironic blogs and Tumblrs, has inspired a zeitgeist of popular misogyny. This misogynistic outpouring;

> with its basic anti-female violent expression, helps contribute to a misogynistic political and economic culture, where rape culture is normative and reproductive rights and other rights of the body for women are either under threat or being formally retracted (Banet-Weiser, 2015).

Women in all areas of public life have been on the receiving end of vicious online hate speech during this period, united only by the fact that they have entered the public domain. Statistics show that this online abuse is disproportionately carried out by men towards women, with 70% of those reporting online abuse in the period 2000-2013 being female (Working to Halt Online Abuse (WHOA), 2013). In 2013 campaigner Caroline Criado-Perez successfully lobbied the Bank of England regarding its decision to replace Elizabeth Fry, the only woman featured on a banknote, with Winston Churchill. As a result of Criado-Perez's lobbying Jane Austen has appeared on £10 notes since 2017. When the decision was announced Criado Perez appeared on television and then began to receive rape and death threats on Twitter with very specific details of exactly how these threats would be carried out. The threats were issued over a sustained period and at the height of the harassment she was receiving 50 threats an hour. Bomb threats were issued to journalists who supported her. Criado-Perez asserted that the abuse showed; 'it's not about what women are doing, not about feminism. It's that some men don't like women, and don't like women in the public domain' (Criado-Perez, 2013). The classicist Mary Beard faced similar abuse after appearing on the BBC1 programme *Question Time* in 2013 and coming to public prominence presenting history programmes for the BBC.

Beard has since taken on the issue of women in public space, giving lectures and becoming known as an expert on the topic. Beard is in agreement with Criado-Perez that;

> it doesn't much matter what line you take as a woman, if you venture into traditional male territory, the abuse comes anyway. It's not *what* you say that prompts it, it's the fact you're saying it (Beard, 2014).

Diane Abbott is one of a long line of female MPs to receive intense and personal online abuse. The shadow home secretary who was elected as Britain's first black, female MP in 1987 receives vicious abuse that is both racist and sexist on a daily basis. In a piece written for *The Guardian* Abbott detailed the shocking abuse she receives, stating:

> suppose that someone had told me back then that 30 years on I would be receiving stuff like this: 'Pathetic useless fat black piece of shit Abbott. Just a piece of pig shit pond slime who should be fucking hung (if they could find a tree big enough to take the fat bitch's weight'). I think that even the young, fearless Diane Abbott might have paused for thought (Abbott, 2017).

The online abuse towards Abbott intensified around the Government vote on Brexit in February 2017 – in one tweet she was portrayed as an ape wearing lipstick. Abbott said she had begun to fear for her personal safety and started taking death threats more seriously following the murder of Labour MP Jo Cox in June 2016. Abbott too expressed concern about the message racist and sexist abuse online sends to women about being involved in politics and public life:

> Not only does it tend to marginalise the female 'offender', but other women look at how those of us in the public space are treated and think twice about speaking up publicly, let alone getting involved in political activity. Who needs their intelligence, motivation and personal appearance to be savaged in the tabloids and online? Better to stay silent or say whatever the men are saying (Abbott, 2017).

Indeed UK female politicians are the particular target of this kind of abuse, with Labour MP Jess Phillips revealing that she received 600 rape threats in just one day in 2016, ironically in response to her role in launching a parliamentary campaign against sexist online bullying – Reclaim the Internet (Rawlinson, 2018). Ahead of the December 2019 UK General Election

several female MPs stood down, citing the intense abuse they received as a reason they no longer wanted to continue in public office (Scott, 2019).

As this online misogyny has become normative, heightened security measures have been adopted for women in public life. In 2016 Laura Kuenssberg, the BBC's first female political editor faced a torrent of sexist abuse via an online petition alleging that she was biased against the Labour Party and Jeremy Corbyn. The BBC now employs a bodyguard to protect Kuenssberg due to the belief that her safety is under threat. Other high profile women have been forced to adopt similar measures or even cancel public talks due to security threats.

Another case that underlines this abuse starkly concerns Nottingham Women's Centre manager, Melanie Jeffs. In 2016 Jeffs was part of the campaign which successfully lobbied Nottinghamshire Police to become the first force in the UK to expand its definition of hate crime to include misogyny. Following the adoption of this policy in Nottinghamshire in May 2016, Jeffs faced a barrage of sexist abuse online including one messenger who '"threatened to put a machete" through the back of her head', another who said they would come and find her and tie her up and a third who said they hoped she got cancer (BBC Nottingham, 2016).

But as Beard and Craido-Perez identify, it's not just women who are overtly political or feminist in their viewpoints or their role in public life who face this abuse, it is any woman taking up public space. As Cochrane points out: 'Misogynists have even targeted the women who appear on the Great British Bake Off – a show that hardly seems designed to threaten male supremacy.' Contestant Ruby Tandoh was subject to online abuse including being called a 'filthy slag' (Cochrane, 2013, p. 144).

Two key cases of online harassment and abuse have occurred outside the UK in this period which have developed on a much bigger scale – with groups of men co-ordinating and targeting groups of women in a concerted campaign of online sexual harassment. These attacks were enabled by what has become known as the 'manosphere' (Marwick and Caplan, 2018) – a cyber world made up of 'toxic technocultures' (Massanari, 2017) – a series of forums, blogs and websites where men come together to discuss masculinity and men's rights, often in opposition to feminism. The social media site Reddit, founded in 2005, is one of the most popular forums for this kind of discussion, specifically via a section called 'The Red Pill' (TRP), which between 2012 and its closure in 2019 gathered almost 420,000 subscribers. The name is a reference to the film *The Matrix*, wherein the main protagonist has the choice between the 'blue pill' which will enable him to live a comfortable life of unknowing in a fake

world, and the 'red pill' which will enable him to escape the matrix, but will reveal the reality of the darker world that he is living in. The red pill of Reddit denotes the idea that feminism is the source of everything that is wrong with the world, with followers subscribing to the idea that men face more injustice and hardship than women.

In 2014, the Gamergate controversy began when the ex-boyfriend of a female video games developer and programmer posted a disparaging blog post about her. The blog post was shared via platforms such as 4chan, an anonymous image posting website, and Reddit and other users joined in, falsely accusing her of unethical practices in her work and issuing rape and death threats. The Twitter hashtag #Gamergate became an online movement of harassment and delegitimisation, attacking women working in the online gaming community, and was largely co-ordinated through the website Reddit. Also in the same year, 'The Fappening' concerned almost 500 illegally acquired, primarily nude, images of celebrities, most notably the actor Jennifer Lawrence, being posted online, discussed and distributed primarily via Reddit and 4chan.

As Massanari notes, this kind of activity is enabled by Reddit as unlike other social media sites such as Facebook, Reddit users post pseudonymously. At the time of both controversies Reddit only prohibited content that was either sharing someone's private contact details, or contained sexualised images of children (Massanari, 2017, p. 331). Due to the set up and algorithms of these types of websites, until recently both Reddit and 4chan were associated with the posting of intimate images without consent (so-called 'revenge pornography'). This has now been banned by both sites due to tightening legislation in this area, but continues on a similar site called 8kun[7].

A peculiar outcome of this sexist outpouring online is the unequivocal demonstration that misogyny exists: As deputy editor of the *New Statesman*, Helen Lewis, wryly notes in what she calls 'Lewis's Law': 'the comments on any article about feminism justify feminism' (Lewis, 2012). She asserts that for anyone who is in any doubt that sexism and misogyny are prevalent and real, the online sphere is a shameless, open and public documentation of the full extent of this abuse. In the context of this study then, it is clear that the women's organisations that gave evidence at the Leveson Inquiry did so as part of a wider upsurge in UK feminist activism, particularly around visual representation. However this should not be read as a triumphant era

[7] Formerly 8chan until November 2019 when it was rebranded and relaunched.

of victory for feminism, particularly given that the internet has at once both enabled and disabled progress for women.

Having detailed the particular contested landscape of renewed feminist activism and resurgent misogyny, and having framed this within a postfeminist culture, this chapter will now move on to consider historical understandings of visual representation. Theories of postfeminist culture have emerged from decades of activist work and academic research in the feminist media studies field. The key debates in feminist academic theory from which theories of postfeminist culture emerged will therefore now be explored in the next section of this chapter.

Part Two: Active or objectified? Understanding the visual representation of women

Origins: The male gaze

In the 45 years since Laura Mulvey articulated the concept of the 'male gaze' and the idea of women's 'to-be-looked-at-ness' (Mulvey, 1975, p. 11) the field of feminist media scholarship has expanded to cover a wide-range of issues and insights into women and media, critiquing four main strands; absence, representation, employment/production and consumption (Byerly, 2012).

Mulvey was concerned with visual representation – a key aspect of this study and still a polarised area of academic understanding. Indeed, although presented as a manifesto for change directed specifically at the Hollywood film industry, Mulvey's critique and concepts are applicable across a range of media. For Mulvey, the only function of women in film was as an 'erotic object' (Mulvey, 1975, p. 11) and 'one-dimensional fetish' (Mulvey, 1975, p. 18). She asserted that women's image had been 'stolen' and 'used' for the purposes of traditional film-making and must be reclaimed. Mulvey's purpose was political, she was critiquing not just the representation of women in film, but women's role in society when she identified 'the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning' (Mulvey, 1975, p. 7).

Berger, writing at the same time as Mulvey and analysing fine art, corroborated this idea of women as passive objects to be viewed with his assertion that;

> Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to

> themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight (Berger, 1972, p. 47).

This concept of women as passive objects as identified and detailed by Mulvey formed the basis of scholarship relating to the visual representation of women from the outset – what Boyle refers to as 'the gendered conditions of spectatorship' (Boyle, 2015, pp. 880–881) and was 'the text that described most compellingly how the process of looking was imbricated with power relationships and, inevitably, with politics' (Garb, 2015, p. 473).

From the Women's Liberation Movement to academic theory

Mulvey's essay emerged from her participation in a Women's Liberation Movement reading group and, alongside her analysis of the film industry, critique of representations of women across all media emerged as a key concern of second-wave feminists – as the advertising, pornography, film, TV and magazine industries boomed in the 1970s. Betty Friedan is often credited with sparking the Women's Liberation Movement in America through her bestseller *The Feminine Mystique* – a study in part based on a content analysis of women's magazines. She too was concerned with the image of women and articulated the idea of damaging stereotypical depictions stating that;

> There was a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform, the image that I came to call the feminine mystique (Friedan, 1963, p. 1).

Alongside Friedan other women emerged from varied backgrounds and movements including the student and civil rights protests of the 1960s. Together they formed what became known as the Women's Liberation Movement in America. In the UK, women began to organise, inspired by the media coverage of working women and their call for equal pay, particularly the strike at Ford's Dagenham plant, and the upsurge of activism in America.

One concern of feminist activists in this period was to examine what they saw as media's tendency to depict demeaning stereotypes of women. Several large content analysis studies were carried out across America by NOW. A 1971 study of TV commercials, for instance, concluded that women were depicted as 'household functionaries', 'decorative objects' and 'unintelligent' (Gill, 2007c, p. 10). In a seminal study Tuchman drew on Gerbner in the 1978 collection *Hearth and Home* – 'the first systematic examination of sex-role stereotypes in the

media' – which looked at 'the effect of the mass media upon women' (Tuchman, Kaplan Daniels and Benet, 1978). Through content analysis across a range of media Tuchman theorised media depiction of women as a 'symbolic annihilation', 'from denigration through victimization and trivialization', via three modes, condemnation, trivialization and absence (Tuchman, 1978, pp. 7–13). For Tuchman understanding how media representation of women reflected and restricted their lives was key to challenging inequality for women. Karen Boyle underlines this crucial interplay between the work of women's liberation activists and feminist academic theory in this period, noting that;

> an interest in 'the image', in representation, was central to second wave feminism from its beginning, and that it is largely *from* this activist interest that theoretical positions developed (Boyle, 2014, p. 218).

Tuchman's conceptualisation in particular continues to resonate today, and this content analysis work continues almost 50 years later with the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) which has mapped the representation of women in the world's mainstream news media every five years since 1995.

Objectification challenged: Women as active and empowered

The notion of 'objectification' – of women being presented as passive objects to be looked at by men – was subsequently challenged by scholars positive about sexualisation (Williams, 1989; Juffer, 1998; Attwood, 2002; Smith, 2010a). With a sensibility grounded in the neoliberal values of empowerment, individualism, choice and consumerism there was an emphasis on the 'desirability of women's freedom to express themselves sexually, as "sex-objects" (…)' (Press, 2011, p. 118) an undertaking;

> naturally economically compatible with a consumer society which offers a plethora of products to a liberal self concerned with self-expression through the mode of an ever-more-perfectible appearance (Press, 2011, p. 118).

Thus instead of viewing these images as sexist and objectifying and the women in them as passive objects, it was posited that both the women represented and female viewers can be active, assertive, empowered and in control (Duits and van Zoonen, 2011). Lerum and Dworkin argue that;

> bodily iconography of girls and women have now stretched beyond thin, passive,

> sexualized ideals to include a broader range of strong, empowered, and muscular bodily ideals than ever before (Lerum and Dworkin, 2009, p. 254).

Via these discourses women are presented as 'doing it for themselves not men', being 'up for it' and unafraid to flaunt their sexuality in order to gain sexual power over men and confidence from being desirable to men. Attwood describes a; 'new, liberated, contemporary sexuality for women' where 'sex is stylish, a source of physical pleasure, a means of creating identity, a form of body work, self-expression, a quest for individual fulfilment' (Attwood, 2006, p. 86).

Alongside this academic critique, so-called third-wave feminists such as Baumgardner and Richards and Stoller also made the case that women are empowered and agentic in their sexual choices. Baumgardner and Richards have sought to reclaim contested indicators of femininity arguing that;

> Barbie dolls, makeup, fashion magazines, high heels (…) using them isn't shorthand for 'we've been duped.' Using makeup isn't a sign of our sway to the marketplace and the male gaze: it can be sexy, campy, ironic, or simply decorating ourselves without the loaded issues (Baumgardner and Richards, 2004, p. 60).

The understanding developed by some revolutionary second-wave feminists which framed pornography as violence against women was thus critiqued as too essentialist (Attwood, 2004). Referencing Featherstone, Attwood suggests that the notion of objectification is not necessarily a negative:

> Objectification is, perhaps, more likely to be understood as a necessary precondition for erotic gazing in a narcissistic culture where the body is widely represented as an object for display and a key component of a marketable self (Attwood, 2004, p. 15).

Alternative readings of pornography as a positive transgression against cultural norms instead of an expression of white, male privilege and power relations, and its regulation a negative suppression of female pleasure-seeking and sexual agency, not an attempt to prevent exploitation of women and children, have been put forward (Juffer, 1998; Attwood, 2004; Duits and van Zoonen, 2007; Smith, 2010a).

Sexualisation or sexism?

Objectification was thus recontextualised within a new sphere, what McNair has termed the 'pornographication of the mainstream' (McNair, 1996, p. 23), an era where sexual display demonstrates assertiveness, confidence, success and power, particularly among female celebrities. This has been conceptualised as a liberating 'democratisation of desire' (McNair, 2002) where 'sexy images have become the currency of the day' (Attwood, 2004, p. 15).

The advent of the internet and the explosion in online pornography has made the 'biggest single contribution to the increasing sexualisation of popular culture and wider social relationships' (Ballinger, 2011, p. 324). Western societies have become 'saturated by sexual representations and discourses' across all media (Gill, 2013, p. 589); through the 'increasingly frequent erotic presentation of girls', women's and (to a lesser extent) men's bodies in public spaces' (Gill, 2007d, p. 150). Some examples of this 'sexualisation' and 'pornographication' include pornographic practices and aesthetics such as pole dancing exercise classes and lap dancing clubs becoming mainstream hobbies and entertainment; young girls wearing and using Playboy merchandise; and mainstream music videos becoming increasingly sexually explicit (and in some cases directed by and starring pornographers) (Andsager, 2006; Grabe and Hyde, 2009; Vandenbosch, Vervloessem and Eggermont, 2013). Pornography has moved into the mainstream and become normalised, thus scholars argue that this moment is distinct from previous historical preoccupations with sex and pornography (Garner, 2012; Gill, 2012b).

As noted, this new era has been welcomed by some in academia as an expression of women's agency and active participation in their sexuality, and a chance to redefine desire and create new ways of experiencing sex and sexualities (McNair, 2002; Attwood, 2004; Smith, 2010a; Duits and van Zoonen, 2011). Others view this as a further commodification of women (Whelehan, 2000; Levy, 2005; Jeffreys, 2008; Walter, 2010) and express concern about the way it creates a 'conducive context' (Kelly, 2007, 2016) for male violence against women and girls. This is typically a view expressed by policy makers and those in the NGO sector delivering frontline services to survivors of male violence. For instance, Coy and Garner note that in direct contrast to the academic findings, the evidence from NGOs is that 'sexualised popular culture leaves even smaller spaces for young women to refuse sex and/or develop an autonomous sexual self' (Coy and Garner, 2012, p. 296).

Several reports about sexualisation have been commissioned by think tanks and governments (American Psychological Association, 2007; Australian Senate, 2008; Byron, 2008; Buckingham *et al.*, 2009; Papadopoulos, 2010; Bailey, 2011). The findings of these reports and their interpretation in mainstream media have centred on health and wellbeing issues such as poor

body image and so-called low self-esteem in young girls, with the harm of sexualisation presented as purely 'too much too young', i.e. there is a certain cut-off age beyond which a sexualised culture is not a problem, but prior to that children must be protected. Coy and Garner have critiqued these reports for failing to frame their findings within an analysis of male violence against women and girls (Coy and Garner, 2012). Commenting on Papadopoulous (2010) Coy and Garner note:

> The concern here appears to be at what stage in the life course an individual 'should' enter the sexualised cultural landscape rather than the sexualised cultural landscape itself (Coy and Garner, 2012, p. 290).

They note a similar focus in the Bailey Review and add that it references 'homogenous and almost entirely genderless children' showing 'little, if any, analysis of the gendered meanings of sexualisation' (Coy and Garner, 2012).

Elsewhere these reports have been critiqued for lacking in empirical evidence and academic rigour (Smith, 2010b; Smith and Attwood, 2011). The reports and accompanying media coverage and political discourse have been termed 'anti-sexualisation' and viewed as a moral panic, itself part of the sexualisation of culture (Attwood, 2006; Thompson, 2010; Duits and van Zoonen, 2011). Attwood posits that 'the only real link between them is the anxious response they produce' (Attwood, 2010, p. 744). Others such as Gill (Gill, 2011) and Coy and Garner (Coy and Garner, 2012, p. 287) express concern that this idea of 'sexualisation' has further erased the terms 'sexism' and 'sexual harassment' and is a notion that is 'difficult to operationalise and therefore to use analytically' (Gill, 2011, p. 65). Similarly, Garner notes that in discussion of sexualisation 'most current debate positions men, male practices and masculinities at the periphery' (Garner, 2012, p. 328). In this discussion of female agency and how women can or cannot negotiate this new landscape, 'what about men?' asks Garner, especially 'where discourses of male sexual entitlement are so ubiquitous' (Garner, 2012, p. 328). Duschinsky concurs that this focus on sexualisation shifts the spotlight away from women's inequality to a narrow, somewhat pointless discussion about whether girls are sexually innocent or empowered (Duschinsky, 2013). Recent research has turned to postfeminist digital cultures and specifically women's self-representation via social media. Dobson notes the complexity of this terrain which can be read as sites of resistance in which women are now producers in control of their own content. She perceives women and girls objectifying themselves via social media not as a development that should elicit disapproval or concern but as a survival strategy in which woman and girls are '"getting by" in the conditions

of postfeminism' (Dobson, 2015, p. 5). Davis notes this 'duality of freedom and oppression offered by social media' to women, and cautions that 'original content of women embracing their sexuality and femininity can be quickly and easily transformed into sites of hostile surveillance via the male gaze' (Davis, 2018, p. 3).

Poststructuralist counter-challenge: Structural inequality vs agency

Neoliberal entanglement

Yet this 'turn to agency' or 'agency fetish' (Gill and Donaghue, 2013) does not resolve the dilemma of what these images mean for women within a continued reality of structural inequality, and is perhaps too unreflective of an entanglement in what Gill refers to as 'a grammar of individualism that fits perfectly with neoliberalism' (Gill, 2007d, p. 162). As noted, this postfeminist neoliberal context is a key contextual backdrop to this study, and as will be analysed in **Chapter Eight**, this current cultural preoccupation with neoliberal values renders arguments which promote choice extremely difficult for feminist campaigners to counter. For Radner, and analysts of postfeminist culture such as Gill, McRobbie and Rottenberg, this emphasis on empowered choice should be seen not as a backlash against feminism (Faludi, 1992) but as an intrinsic part of neoliberalism – what Radner terms neo-feminism. Thus instead of a belief in women's liberation through political change, there is a belief in transformation through consumption (Radner, 2011, pp. 8–9). For Fraser, a historical re-examination of some aspects of second-wave feminism finds an enabling of neoliberalism leading to a shift away from the project of collective redistribution of power, and instead a focus on projects such as individual career advancement (Fraser, 2013).

In this postfeminist framing, women are the ideal subjects of neoliberalism (Harris, 2004; Gill, 2007c; Baker, 2010; Evans, Riley and Shankar, 2010), an ideology where 'The individual must bear full responsibility for their life biography, no matter how severe the constraints upon their action' (Gill, 2007d, p. 163). As such there has been 'an intensification of feminine as site (both subject and object) of commodification and consumption' (Walkerdine and Ringrose, 2008, p. 230) played out via cosmetic surgery, hair removal, dieting and other modifications to the body. Tincknell explains that;

> the "self" has become a collection of disparate body parts to be endlessly worked on or even replaced as part of the plenitude of consumer choice. In this way, "wholeness" for the female human subject can only be a temporary and contingent condition achieved through her participation in consumer culture (Tincknell, 2011, p. 86).

Thus a new pornified culture has provided women with the 'technologies of sexiness', 'through the disciplined use of makeup, clothing, exercise, and cosmetic surgery, linking femininity, consumer culture and heterosexuality' to transform the self into a sexualised subject (Radner, 1999, p. 15), and although this is presented as a choice within the neoliberal framework, it is a requirement to 'consume oneself into being' (Evans, Riley and Shankar, 2010, p. 35). In this sense Evans, Riley and Shankar argue that any freedoms gained for women have become entangled in a new imperative of 'self-surveillance, self-monitoring, and self-discipline' which is 'presented as choosing, agentic, hedonistic, sassy, and self- confident' but reinforces structural oppression through a 'neoliberal imperative to work on the self through forms of consumerism' (Evans, Riley and Shankar, 2010, p. 35). Gill's theory of a 'postfeminist sensibility' (Gill, 2007d), centres this interplay between agency discourses and neo-liberal consumer pressures. She notes that as 'seductive as the call to "respect" girls' "choices" is, it remains trapped in precisely the individualising, neoliberal paradigm that requires our trenchant critique' (Gill, 2007a, p. 72) and;

> In this sense, empowerment itself (or certainly its proxies: confidence and adventurousness) has been 'sexualised' and cannot be said to operate entirely independently of 'sexualisation' (Gill, 2012a, p. 738).

Boyle draws on Pitcher (Pitcher, 2006, p. 12) to argue that;

> personal choice has become so fetishized in post-feminist culture that there is a hesitation to decry or interrogate actions involving personal choice: the phrase 'it's my choice' has become virtually synonymous with 'it's a feminist thing to do' (Boyle, 2014, p. 226).

Heteronormativity

Indeed for analysts of postfeminist culture, the notion of empowerment is questionable given that what are often framed as free, authentic choices result in a uniform version of heterosexuality and ideal body which is, for instance, mostly hairless, thin, young, and reflective of the heterosexual norms and beauty ideals found in popular culture and mainstream pornography for men (Bordo, 1997; Levy, 2005; Gill, 2008; Lamb, 2010). Gill is struck by 'the degree of fit between the autonomous postfeminist subject and the psychological subject demanded by neoliberalism' (Gill, 2007d, p. 154). Coy and Garner refer to this as 'patriarchal framings of pornographic bodies' (Coy and Garner, 2010, p. 669) and

critique what Madhok et al see as 'naïve celebrations of agency' (Madhok, Phillips and Wilson, 2013, p. 3) as 'legitimated only by masculinity and therefore unable to claim power of its own.' (Coy and Garner, 2010, p. 660). That this version of sexuality is contingent on male approval is seen by some to underline the continued presence of the male gaze and suggests that it is not based on women's authentic sexual desire. Fine and McClelland argue that such a narrow version of sexuality which is about presenting oneself as alluring, can only be a 'performance of desire' not actual desire (Fine and McClelland, 2006, p. 300). Indeed, given the historic suppression of female desire and privilege of male sexuality it is unconvincing to posit that these power dynamics between men and women have been swept away completely.

Through McRobbie's understanding of a repudiated feminism at once adopted and disavowed, that these pressures come to bear at this socio-historic moment is precisely because women are now active subjects within the workplace and education. Therefore 'the postfeminist masquerade re-secures the terms of submission of white femininity to white masculine domination' (McRobbie, 2009, p. 70). Thus she finds that this 'new sexual contract' reinforces the heterosexual matrix and is upheld by both government and commerce (McRobbie, 2009, p. 72). Ross agrees with this idea of a male backlash in reaction to women gaining power in the workplace and analyses this in relation to the emergence of lads' mags: 'where men can exercise a hyper-masculinised sensibility by subordinating women, if only vicariously, through consuming their compliantly silent bodies' (Ross, 2008, p. 120). Mooney maps the construction of lads' mags, detailing how publishers had to transform men into consumers to attract the advertising on which the magazine industry depends, and thus deliver a viable business model. She argues that lads' mags require a binary and essentialist view of gender – 'the authentic masculine male and the attractive, partially clothed woman' in order to offset the risk of the 'inherent femininity of consumption' and the images of objectified men in advertising (Mooney, 2013, pp. 201–202). Thus the more polarised the binary between male and female presented by the magazine, i.e. the more aggressively masculine the image of men presented in its pages and the more objectified the women, the better the images of objectified men in the advertising could be offset. Building on Gill's observations of an emphasis on essentialist sex difference in postfeminist culture, Mooney finds that this format leans on the re-emergence of popular psychology and discourse asserting innate differences between men and women, such as John Gray's *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* (Gray, 1992). For Mooney this is a convenient alibi allowing 'boys to be boys' and thus receive no censure for looking at images of naked women (Mooney, 2013, p. 206).

This is not to suggest that agency is not present for some women in some situations, and as Duits and van Zoonen note (Duits and van Zoonen, 2007), questioning women's claims of enjoyment and pleasure in sexual display runs the risk of framing them as passive objects in research as well as in media. They caution that 'Such silencing of girls is unacceptable, whether it comes from capitalism, Islam, Christianity or feminism' (Duits and van Zoonen, 2007, p. 164). Similarly some academics foreground the idea that children are literate consumers of media and are able to actively deconstruct and critique the content and imagery they engage with (Bragg and Buckingham, 2009; Duits and van Zoonen, 2011).

Overstatement of media influence and agency

However, as Storr argues '*feeling* empowered is not the same as *being* powerful' (Storr, 2003, p. 31). It is necessary to acknowledge that images of semi-naked women do not exist in a vacuum, but a society where unequal power relations persist between men and women. Scholars such as Duits and van Zoonen maintain that 'texts are polysemic and that reception is active' (Duits and van Zoonen, 2011, p. 492), but as Gill has noted, the enthusiasm of contemporary media scholars to reject the idea of media influence and the notion of audiences as 'passive cultural dopes' does not address 'how it is that what is "out there" gets "in here"' (Gill, 2011, p. 66). Furthermore, whilst it may be true that young girls are better able to critique the media they engage with, this does not remove any negative effects. As Gill notes of the feedback from 'tween' girls in her research with Jackson and Vares (Vares, Jackson and Gill, 2011; Jackson, Vares and Gill, 2013).

> despite an extraordinarily sophisticated vocabulary of critique—they said media representations still got to them, still had an ability to hurt them, still—as they repeatedly told us—made them 'feel bad' or 'feel sad' and/or made them long to look a particular way or to own a particular product (Gill, 2013, p. 595).

Gill further argues that this overemphasis on encouraging media literacy is sexist in and of itself;

> not only because it treats gender oppression as trivial, but also because it emphasizes the requirement for girls and young women to work on the self, to perfect the ways they engage with media, to become ever more responsible neoliberal subjects (Gill, 2013, p. 596).

Gill also warns against taking interviewees statements at face value and suggests that they

should be viewed as performative. She cautions that;

> the tradition relies on the assumption that respondents are 'transparent to themselves' – i.e. able to excavate and lay bare their feelings and influences, as if they were entirely rational unitary subjects (Gill, 2013, p. 593).

Boyle agrees that to take interviewees statements at face value is poor practice;

> If the academic has no active role in interpreting their data, however, it is difficult to see what the point of academic research is (as opposed to market research, for example) (Boyle, 2014, p. 226).

Hutchings adds that a simple 'choosers or losers' paradigm with regards to women's agency is inadequate for academic analyses (Hutchings, 2013) and argues that this means;

> refusing the temptation either to set up a particular model of feminist agency as "real", and therefore authoritative, or of treating recognition of agency as a substitute for judgement in the worlds that are at stake in action (Hutchings, 2013, p. 15).

In this sense;

> repudiating patronising images of the oppressed and powerless – a concern in most contemporary feminist writing – requires us to deny, or at least obscure, the extent to which social relations of inequality and domination continue to structure our lives (Madhok, Phillips and Wilson, 2013, p. 3).

Stoljar agrees that 'preferences influenced by oppressive norms of femininity cannot be autonomous' and argues in common with Gill that choices can only be considered autonomous when women are able to critique *and* resist these oppressive norms (Stoljar, 2000, p. 95). Stoljar argues that women's complex choices must be explained by more than procedural and rational theories of autonomy if they are to be understood. In this regard she notes that women are often 'motivated by oppressive and misguided norms that are internalized as a result of feminine socialization' (Stoljar, 2000, p. 98).

Thus eagerness to reject the idea of women as victims has resulted in the argument that women engage in this sexual display purely for their own benefit perhaps being overstated

(Baker, 2010). Gill draws on Butler and argues that sexual agency has become a 'regulatory project' and Foucauldian 'mode of governmentality' so that;

> rather than agency or 'voice' being the solution to the silencing of women's desire identified by Fine and others, it becomes itself part of the apparatus that disciplines and regulates feminine conduct, that gets 'inside' and reconstructs our notions of what it is to be a sexual subject (Gill, 2008, p. 53).

It becomes one of, as Gerhard puts it: 'the shadowy psychological and institutional crevices in which men hide their power over women' (Gerhard, 2005, p. 40). Gill cautions that other power relations such as race and class should be taken into account when reading these images, as well as contextualising them within a visual culture that is not only heteronormative but ageist and (dis)ablist. She finds that terms such as 'sexualization' and 'pornification';

> tend to homogenize, ignoring differences and obscuring the fact that different people are 'sexualized' in different ways and with different meanings (…) Furthermore, the terms seem to pull us back into a moral domain, rather than one of politics or ethics—they pull towards judgments about 'explicitness' and 'exposure' rather than questions about equality or justice (Gill, 2013, pp. 593–594).

As this thesis will go on to explore in **Chapter Six,** developing strategies of resistance within this postfeminist cultural context, and countering these neoliberal and moral narratives with argumentation that emphasised structural inequality and women's oppression was a key facet of the evidence given by the women's organisations at the Leveson Inquiry.

Empowerment understood as consumerism

Whilst the concepts of a culture of 'sexualisation' and a 'pornographication of the mainstream' have been read as a positive opportunity for women's empowerment and celebratory sexual display, they have also been interpreted in a negative light as a 'raunch culture' where what is presented as empowerment is understood as consumerism (Levy, 2005; Lazar, 2006). Coy and Garner argue that this surface reading of sexualisation as a progressive and transgressive display of active female desire is a far more complex era of 'conspicuous consumption packaged as feminist achievement' and state that 'where young women recognize economic opportunity and cash in with their bodies, this is not feminist empowerment but enterprise capitalism' (Coy and Garner, 2010, pp. 670–671). Lazar agrees that any sense of agency and power that women have through this sexual display is bound up in consumerism repackaged

as both ‘an extension of women’s right to freedom and liberation’ and an opportunity for women to exercise choice, as part of a ‘consumerist discourse of emancipation’ (Lazar, 2011, p. 38). This has been described (critically) as ‘choice feminism’ (Murphy, 2012; Mackay, 2015b) and ‘weak feminism’ – ‘easy for the feminist, and in true feminine form, “nice” to everyone else’ (Kinser, 2004, p. 145). Murphy defines this as ‘Falling somewhere between victim feminism and the American dream’ and states that it is the belief that ‘any time a woman makes a choice it is an act of feminism’ (Murphy, 2012, p. 21). Or as Zeisler puts it ‘if everything is feminism, then nothing is’ (Zeisler, 2014).

Hollows details how the advertising industry has decoupled the rhetoric from feminism and used the ideas of ‘liberation’, ‘freedom’ and ‘independence’ to sell products – for instance the image of the liberated woman in advertisements for menstrual products (Hollows, 2000, pp. 194–195). Gallagher describes this as a;

> stripped-out, neutered version of ‘women’s empowerment’ that we find in a great deal of contemporary media discourse, which explicitly equates empowerment with sexual assertiveness, buying power, and individual control (Gallagher, 2013, p. 27).

This tactic has been employed most notably by the Unilever brand Dove via the Campaign for Real Beauty which features what are referred to as ‘real’ women instead of models, and exhorts women to be themselves, to boost their self-esteem and throw off restrictive beauty practices (by buying and using beauty products sold by Dove: one of the largest skin care brands in the world.)

For Gallagher;

> The false-feminist rhetoric in these exhortations to exercise ‘choice’ gives the illusion of progress, while reaffirming the age-old centrality of the female body in media discourse (Gallagher, 2013, pp. 27–28).

This depoliticisation of feminism – making the political personal – acts in two ways; firstly, by commodifying feminist emancipation and secondly by presenting this as an ‘emancipation from (second-wave) feminism, as misguided and curtailing of women’s realization of their “true” feminine selves’ (Lazar, 2011, p. 49).

The sales function of glamour models

This notion that sexual display is empowering has become normalised via British newspapers such as *The Sun's* Page 3 feature, as part of a development Jyrkinen refers to as 'McSexualisation' – 'the mainstreaming and industrialization of sex as business(es) and the commercialization of bodies, sex and sexualities' (Jyrkinen, 2012, p. 24). Furthermore, it has been argued that glamour models such as Jordan (the alter-ego of Katie Price), have a particular function to 'sell sexualization as a path to empowerment' (Coy and Garner, 2010, p. 671) through discursive tropes such as linking self-esteem to breast enlargement surgery. Boyle notes, for example, the aspirational lifestyle in the ITV drama *Secret Diary of a Call Girl*;

> her apartment is luxuriously furnished, the contents of her Bradshaw-esque walk-in wardrobe extensive and expensive, her gadgets sleek, slim, and shiny. There are no chain stores, there is no visible poverty, it never rains, and it is a world in almost permanent soft focus (Boyle, 2010b, p. 115).

Through their analysis of two UK Television documentaries aired on BBC Three in 2008 – *Glamour Girls* and *Page 3 Teens* – Coy and Garner suggest that mainstream media is 'fundamentally grounded in the idea that women using their bodies for profit is empowering' (Coy and Garner, 2010, p. 658). They draw on Kotlowitz's notion of 'consumer citizenship' to argue that women can 'acquire economic power through their bodies but in doing so are ultimately denied legitimate social status' (Coy and Garner, 2010, p. 664). They cite the example of Katie Price, who was denied access to a Cartier polo event for being 'not the sort of person' the organisers wanted in attendance. Price went on to protest this exclusion in a letter to *The Times* where she detailed her roles as business woman, equestrian expert and author (Coy and Garner, 2010, pp. 662–664). As Skeggs and others have detailed (Kitzinger, 1995; Skeggs, 1997; Gill, 2007d) this is the particular class-based tightrope between perceived respectability and sexual deviance that women and girls can fall foul of when engaging in sexual display, particularly for economic profit. Coy and Garner note that Cartier's 'othering' of Katie Price shows that 'Her empowerment therefore has limitations; she has accumulated economic capital but is socially and culturally bankrupt, denied access to "respectable" space' (Coy and Garner, 2010, p. 663).

Boyle agrees that glamour models and prostituted women (real and fictional) have a particular normalising and selling function within mainstream media on behalf of the wider porn industry. She argues that TV shows such as *Secret Diary of a Call Girl* 'address women, representing commercial sex as an aspirational career choice largely made on the basis of the (non-sexual) consumption practices it allows' (Boyle, 2013, p. 263). Thus the function of the

women in these 'soft porn', mainstream media versions of prostitution and pornography is both to lure more women into these industries and normalise and sanitise them at large, and also to reconfigure women as products and make them better consumers (of, for instance, sex toys, pole dancing classes and manicures);

> To the extent that these texts invite women viewers'/readers' participation in the sex industry, they invite women to make themselves products in order to become better consumers. Women are not typically figured as consumers of people, but are invited to—as porn star Jenna Jameson puts it—see themselves as the product (Boyle, 2013, p. 264).

The Sun: Retroactive imagery, irony and humour

As established in **Chapter Two**, it is clear that the notion of Page 3 as fun, light-hearted, harmless entertainment is built into *The Sun*'s core neoliberal values which promote personal freedom, having fun and the capitalist free market. Specific research analysing tabloid images of glamour models has identified a particular aesthetic tactic which utilises irony, humour and retroactive imagery. Whelehan notes that;

> While feminism is successfully portrayed as the thief of femininity, cultural productions that celebrate and exaggerate retroactive images of femininity will obscure the nature of feminism's political and cultural victories (Whelehan, 2014, p. 248).

Williamson has also detailed a retro-sexism in advertising, noting that;

> Retro-sexism is sexism with an alibi: it appears at once past and present, 'innocent' and knowing, a conscious reference to another era, rather than an unconsciously driven part of our own (Williamson, 2003).

The Sun's Page 3 is one example of this heteronormative, retroactive imagery. Holland writes convincingly that Page 3 has been positioned as a familiar and reassuring item, presenting an always smiling, wholesome 'girl next door' in images similar to a family holiday snap; at once sexually confronting yet simultaneously devoid of danger and any link to the act of sex (Holland, 1998). Ross agrees that the aesthetic is;

> page3 as seaside postcard brought to life. The use of visual and textual codes

> associated with the 'saucy' postcard genre attempts to subvert the accusation of pornography and (un)dress it up as a bit of fun, nudge nudge, wink wink, know what I mean (Ross, 2008, p. 122).

Coy and Garner note that this 'girl-next-door-image' is highly valued as 'men want to view women who appear attainable and ordinary while sexualized in a particular way' (Coy and Garner, 2010, p. 667). Thus irony and humour are used as a perpetual gloss to mask the overt sexism of items such as Page 3. Ross identifies this use of irony and humour as a calculated ploy to shut down any criticism of these images;

> What *is* rather clever, though, is packaging soft-core porn as simply "a bit of a larf". This means that absolutely no shame accrues to the reader because it's all good, clean, harmless fun and, moreover, handling these goods, in every sense, actually signifies an authentic masculinity (Ross, 2008, p. 120).

This use of irony is a key feature of the postfeminist sensibility identified by Gill, in which the arch weapon of irony is prudishness. No woman wants to be called joyless, sexless or uptight, so by utilising this name-calling any opposition can effectively be shut down. As Gill notes 'In this context, critique becomes much more difficult – and this, it would seem, is precisely what is intended' (Gill, 2007d, p. 161).

From objectification to subjectification

A self-policing responsibility to look alluring for men has come to form the basis of current academic understanding of the visual representation of women in media. Gill's ground-breaking work has defined this concept whereby objectification has evolved into subjectification. She notes that there is an 'obsessional preoccupation with the body' and that 'femininity is defined as a bodily property rather than (say) a social structural or psychological one' with 'possession of a "sexy body" (…) presented as women's key (if not sole) source of identity' (Gill, 2007d, p. 149). Gill argues that far from being a liberated choice, this new sexualisation of women in media is an upgrade to a 'more "advanced" or pernicious form of exploitation (…) because the objectifying male gaze is internalized to form a new disciplinary regime.' Gill defines this not as objectification but a 'Foucaultian idea of (sexual) subjectification', a kind of liberation and empowerment that is still nonetheless tied to male approval, as;

> Not only are women objectified (as they were before), but *through sexual*

> *subjectification they must also now understand their own objectification as pleasurable and self-chosen.*

Gill draws on Foucault to argue that this is not a top-down imposition, but a system 'in which power works *in and through subjects*' (Harvey and Gill, 2011, p. 55). Thus academic understanding has evolved from Mulvey's 'external, male judging gaze to a self-policing, narcissistic gaze' (Gill, 2009, pp. 101–107).

This surveillance of women's bodies (both celebrity and non-celebrity) is reinforced by popular media including a slew of TV makeover shows which emerged in the late 1990s, such as *What Not To Wear, 10 Years Younger* and *Extreme Makeover* and current series such as *Queer Eye* and the forthcoming *You Are What You Wear*. Magazines such as *Heat* and *Closer* and countless online iterations, (notably *The Daily Mail's* so-called 'sidebar of shame') also police women for variously being too fat, too thin or for other 'aberrations' such as 'fat' ankles and 'ageing' hands. Gill argues that what marks out this new era of surveillance (primarily of women not men) from decades past is the intensity of the scrutiny (and disavowal of this scrutiny); the range of aspects which are to be policed, everything from the body to career to friendships; and the requirement for women to transform psychological aspects of their inner lives such as their relationship with their mother or their networking skills (Gill, 2007d, pp. 155–156). Latterly Gill describes an intensification and extensification of this surveillance in women's lives afforded by developing digital technologies. She documents a shift to increasing self-surveillance, with apps specifically targeting women via new ways of tracking and measuring everything from weight and calories to mood, menstruation and pregnancy, as well as the ubiquity of 'selfie filters' and modification tools. She notes too that digital technologies have also led to a 'micro-surveillance' in beauty advertising, with devices such as magnifying glasses, peep holes and red circles zooming in on pores, blemishes and other 'imperfections' and that peer to peer 'horizontal surveillance' has increased due to social media (Gill, 2019).

Sexism entrenched yet erased

Whilst a vast amount of ground has been covered and academic understanding around visual representation of women in media has evolved considerably since Mulvey's polemic was published 45 years ago, it could also be argued that media sexism is more entrenched than ever. As Gallagher notes:

> These twenty-first-century paradoxes and contradictions—in particular the incorporation of feminist ideas into media discourse—oblige feminists to confront the

> question of how, despite apparent changes, media images and representations intertwine with political and social ideologies to reaffirm relatively stable gender positions in society (Gallagher, 2013, p. 27).

It is clear that whilst the gains of sustained feminist activism since the 1960s have won some concessions in the way that women are represented and communicated to in media, the overall structure and power of patriarchy is still present – albeit reframed and repoliced by a consumerist agenda that appropriates and resells feminist values as part of its sales package and insists on an internalised policing by women themselves. Images of glamour models, such as *The Sun's* Page 3 feature, far from being innocuous 'harmless fun' are at the vanguard of the sex industry, normalising and selling the notion that empowerment is achieved by consumerism and sexual display, with the ultimate result that women's bodies are turned into a product with monetary value attached to this sexual display (Coy, Wakeling and Garner, 2011).

Whilst scholars can agree that we are living in an unprecedented era of 'sexualisation', opinion varies as to whether this is to be celebrated or a cause for concern. At the turn of the millennium it seemed that this focus on sexualisation had erased the term sexism and its very notion. Both Gill and Williamson warned that this was a dangerous place where sexism went unnamed and unchallenged, swallowed up by neoliberal values and silenced as variously non-existent, an affront to women's agency, and the whimpers of second-wave feminist prudes (Williamson, 2003; Gill, 2011). As discussed earlier in this chapter, sexism is very much back on the agenda for feminist activists, a resurgence evidenced by campaigns such as Everyday Sexism, No More Page 3 and more recent social media-led feminist movements challenging overt sexism such as #MeToo. It is thus more important than ever that media and cultural sexism is identified, defined and critiqued by feminist media scholars.

Now that an overview of debates and developments in the field of visual representation has been provided, this chapter will move on to discuss the possible impacts of media sexism, sexualised imagery and hostile public misogyny in terms of structural inequality for women and girls. Particular attention will be paid to how this might disempower women and contribute to the silencing of women in public life and to research that explores the interplay between sexist imagery and male violence against women and girls.

Part Three: Impact on women's material reality and inequality

Academic understanding, then, offers a polarised position on images of semi-naked women in media, with some theorising this as damaging and others viewing it as a positive development. Those scholars who can agree that these images are objectifying seek to ask why this matters, what the possible impacts might be, and how this connects (or does not connect) with structural inequality for women. However, these impacts are far from universally accepted. This is a contested area, particularly with regards to male violence against women and girls, with a gulf in understanding between cause and effect. Despite decades of research and interest in this area, definitive answers have yet to be found. Impacts research on the normative function of sexism and objectification is slight, with the focus resting on direct impact, often with polarised findings, such as Horvath et al's study on the link between lads' mags and rape culture (Horvath *et al.*, 2012), or D'Amato's assertion that the 'sharp rise in access to pornography accounts for the decline in rape' (D'Amato, 2006, p. 93).

Attitudinal and behavioural sexism: a culture of inequality

As noted previously in Gill and Williamson's research (Williamson, 2003; Gill, 2011), perhaps the most important, yet least stated, point made about these images is that they are sexist in and of themselves and thus they symbolically reinforce and contribute to sexist attitudes at large (Lanis and Covell, 1995; MacKay and Covell, 1997; Taylor, 2005; Peter and Valkenburg, 2007; Horvath *et al.*, 2012). As Ross argues: 'Even if we don't read *The Sun*, we know what page3 means and what it denotes. There *is* an impact' (Ross, 2008, p. 123).

Returning to the assertion of second-wave feminists that these images contribute to what Vivienne Hayes, chief executive of the Women's Resource Centre describes as the 'attitudinal and behavioural barriers' that are blocking women's liberation (Hayes, 2013) and reinforce the idea that women are other, second class and subordinate, it is clear that these notions are still valid today. As Dahl, Vescio and Weaver argue; 'men's sexualization of women reduces women's power and elevates men's based on a particular ideology, and thus represents a form of ideological dominance' (Dahl, Vescio and Weaver, 2015, p. 245) in which sexualised women are objectified and viewed as less powerful and agentic (Gervais *et al.*, 2012).

The wide-ranging nature of this attitudinal and behavioural sexism has been documented on the Everyday Sexism website created by feminist campaigner Laura Bates to detail the sexism women experience in their day to day lives. The project reached over 100,000 submissions in over 13 languages in its first three years (Melville, Eccles and Yasseri, 2019). Similarly, *The Guardian* analysed '70 million comments left on its website since 2006 and discovered that of the 10 most abused writers, eight are women' (Gardiner *et al.*, 2016). Another example

showing how far this culture of sexism affects women's lives is research demonstrating that female sellers on the online auction site eBay make 20% less than their male counterparts when selling identical new items – a finding suggestive of widespread, deeply entrenched sexist attitudes (Kricheli-Katz and Regev, 2016).

Both the second-wave feminist movement (Rees, 2007), and successful lobbying and campaigns by the current feminist resurgence, (Long, 2012) have delivered considerable improvements for the lives of women in the UK. Yet there are still areas where equality has yet to be realised – from high levels of male violence against women and a low rape conviction rate, to lack of parity in pay and lack of female representation in the judiciary, parliament and at CEO and board level in business (Walby, Armstrong and Humphreys, 2008; Banyard, 2010; Conley and Page, 2018).

As Wesely, Gill and Levy all argue, sexist imagery impacts on how women are treated in their day-to-day life, and how women are afforded power and presented in public life, creating an ideological framework that contributes to a culture of inequality (Levy, 2005; Gill, 2011; Wesely, 2012). This reinforces and upholds unequal pay; the prevalence and acceptance of sexual harassment at work, at school and on the street; the lack of rape convictions (partly due to jurors' belief in rape myths) (Dinos *et al.*, 2015); and a cultural passivity towards male violence against women. As Gallagher points out;

> although media narratives regularly suggest that the struggles launched by the women's movement of the 1970s are no longer relevant, no country in the world has achieved gender equality. The 2012 Global Gender Gap Report, which since 2006 has measured progress on tackling gender gaps in health, education, economic and political participation, found that in 13 of the 111 countries for which it had data (12 percent), the overall gender gap has actually widened since 2006 (Gallagher, 2013, p. 27).

Coy and Garner further assert that 'The sexualized individualism celebrated by glamour modelling serves to mask this persistent gender inequality' (Coy and Garner, 2010, p. 671). Boyle agrees that sexist imagery has a symbolic and actual relationship to women's position in society and states that 'pornography, in its current forms, could not exist in a society where there was gender equality' (Boyle, 2014, p. 217).

This chapter will now go on to discuss particular aspects that have been considered in the academic research in terms of how sexist imagery impacts on women and girls – including male violence against women and girls, the normalising, silencing and censoring function of the imagery and the potential impacts on girls mental and physical health.

Male violence against women and girls: the seduction of the effects paradigm

As well as considering the symbolic, cultural and ideological significance of sexist imagery, there has been a wealth of academic research considering the contribution sexualised imagery and pornography may have with regards to male violence against women and girls. As will be examined in **Chapter Six**, media representation of male violence against women was a key aspect of the evidence given by the campaigners Marai Larasi and Heather Harvey to the Leveson Inquiry. Data reveals a current worldwide pandemic of male violence against women and girls (United Nations, 2006). In the UK a woman is killed on average every three days by a man (Long, Harvey and Harper, 2018, p. 3). In the year ending March 2018, 1.3m women in England and Wales suffered domestic abuse (Office for National Statistics, 2018). According to the 2018 police effectiveness review;

> Domestic abuse crimes now stand at half a million a year, an 88 percent increase from June 2013. Sexual abuse offences have doubled since 2013 (HMICFRS, 2018, p. 18).

The specific role that sexist imagery plays in creating and upholding normative values linked to male violence against women has been the subject of intense academic inquiry and division within feminist activism, ever since Robin Morgan's assertion that 'pornography is the theory, rape is the practice' (Morgan, 1980, p. 128). This entanglement between sexist imagery and male violence poses questions that have yet to be resolved by academic research. However whilst a direct causal link is unproven there is academic consensus that sexist imagery and pornography is a contributory factor in upholding and normalising pervasive violence against women and leading to what has been termed a rape culture (Brown and L'Engle, 2009; Ybarra and Thompson, 2018; Foubert *et al.*, 2019). This demand for cause and effect is a long accepted facet of feminist research and activism with regards to discussion of the visual representation of women. Boyle corroborates this, adding that;

> so-called 'effects' research is widely discredited within media and cultural studies (…), its use by anti-porn feminists has too often skewed the debate to porn's disputed 'effects' – whether porn *directly and unilaterally* causes people to do or think certain things – something which has only recently begun to be challenged by empirical work

> on consumption (Boyle, 2014, p. 221).

She urges that weight is instead given to testimonies of female survivors of male violence rather than scientific experiments done in a laboratory, noting that understandably;

> the effects paradigm was – and sometimes still is – seductive for feminists seeking to influence public policy as it seemed to provide 'scientific' proof of the arguments feminists had developed from grassroots work (Boyle, 2014, p. 221).

Mooney adds that;

> a sustained representation of an event (or in this case, women) may well influence the way in which we most readily conceive of it (and them). Whether there is a causal connection is not directly relevant (Mooney, 2006, p. 40).

Coy and Garner thus advise that sexist imagery is seen within a context of power relations and as part of a 'conducive context' (Kelly, 2007, 2016) for male violence against women, stating that;

> conceptualising sexualisation as a conducive context for VAWG [Violence Against Women and Girls] avoids positing direct causal links, yet situates sexualised popular culture within a structural analysis of power (Coy and Garner, 2012, p. 289).

For Garner, Kelly's concept of a conducive context;

> does not assume that sexualisation *causes* violence against women and girls, but rather it raises questions about the contexts of VAWG. In other words, what stories are told about gender and sexuality across culture and how might they contribute to the formation of everyday identities, experiences and practices? (Garner, 2012, p. 327).

Boyle also presses for a different approach arguing that;

> in the context of debates which have been dominated by behaviourism (what porn does – or does not do – to viewers) and, more recently, where the 'discovery' of porn addiction has medicalized and depoliticized men's porn use, considering how and in

> what contexts viewers 'do things with' porn is a necessary corrective (Boyle, 2014, p. 226).

Normalising function of sexualised imagery

As previously noted earlier in this chapter, *The Sun's* Page 3 feature, and other glamour model features like it, have a particular normalising function by presenting nudity and sexualised imagery in a so-called 'family newspaper' as innocuous, harmless fun, and merely 'soft porn'. That these papers are on display and available to view and buy in newsagents, supermarkets and petrol stations provides a powerful, sanitised front for prostitution and the pornography industry in a mainstream accessible way, rendering them acceptable and beyond criticism (Itzin, 2002, pp. 23–25; Mooney, 2008).

For Mooney, publications such as lads' mags and *The Sun*'s Page 3 are 'pornography inserted into the cultural landscape while shedding its loaded lexical tag. It is no longer pornography when normalised, it is, simply, normal' (Mooney, 2008, p. 260). A focus on sexualised imagery could be questioned in light of more extreme pornography, but equally contesting extreme pornography becomes difficult when Page 3 is accepted as harmless fun. This was the position held by Clare Short when she tabled her Ten-Minute Rule Bill in an attempt to end Page 3 in 1986;

> I didn't believe extreme examples of sexual violence were the problem, but rather the sanitised drip of violence and the 'acceptable' soft porn that is so common (Short, 1986, p. 11).

It could be that these images have more impact on the day to day lives of ordinary women, precisely because they purport to show ordinary women. In this way perhaps Page 3 is more pernicious than extreme pornography because it shows a 'girl next door' as always 'up for it'. Mooney argues that lads' mags similarly normalised 'pornography through an invocation of "the real"' (i.e. featuring 'ordinary' women not celebrities), and 'by encouraging reader action and interaction' via features such submitting stories or photos of their partner or voting in polls (Mooney, 2008, p. 247). Other tactics noted by Mooney include normalising the content of men's magazines by aligning them with women's magazines through consumer items such as fashion and product reviews, and features such as letters pages, readers' hints and tips and relationship advice columns (Mooney, 2008).

Silencing, censoring function of sexualised imagery

While it is easy to dismiss features like *The Sun's* Page 3, it is this normalisation of sexism that creates a culture of acceptance of male violence against women (Ryan and Kanjorski, 1998; Coy, 2014). As Ballinger asserts:

> Only when such wider structures are addressed will it be possible to challenge the dominant heteropatriarchal social order which sustains the male fratriarchy that has allowed violence against women to become normalised. Only then will it be possible to address the most serious fallout from that normalisation of violence – sexual murder (Ballinger, 2011, p. 327).

Not only do images like those found on Page 3 support the idea that women are (or should be) always sexually available, they promote the idea that to be a woman is to be trivial and engaged in trivial things. Gill is clear that;

> there is nothing innocent about sexualized representations of women; they are part of the operation of power which trivializes women's perspectives and keeps them 'in their place' (Gill, 2007c, p. 117).

There is specific research on the silencing and censoring impact of images such as those found on Page 3. Rakow and Kranich state that women in mass media are silenced to the extent that they operate as sign, not as speaking subject:

> since women are found so infrequently in news stories, and since they always sign as 'woman' (unlike men, who do not ordinarily carry meaning as 'man' because the culture assumes maleness as given), their function as sign is unique (Rakow and Kranich, 1991, p. 13).

For others this imagery is a deliberate attack to shut down women's collective organising for women's liberation. Firstly, there are the hours spent on activities such as hairstyling, weight loss and pedicures which result in brain space, money and time diverted away from organising collectively for women's liberation and taking on positions of power. This has been theorised as a 'postmodern paralysis' whereby;

> the ideal of liberated womanhood, playfully created through the market and playing creatively in that market, acts to quell any activist notions, any thoughts of subversion from outside the market (Catterall, Maclaran and Stevens, 2005, p. 490).

For analysts of postfeminist culture such as McRobbie, this rejection of activism and political activity is a condition of women's new constrained freedom and choice, for instance in the workplace and as consumers, whereby; 'Young women are able to come forward on the condition that feminism fades away' (McRobbie, 2009, p. 56).

There is also a symbolic and representational silencing of women. Gallagher quotes Gerbner's 'three main tactics of resistance to change used in media imagery of women – discrediting, isolating, and undercutting – with the result that there' is a '"counterattack on the women's movement as a social force for structural change"' (Gallagher, 2013, p. 24).

Carter argues that not only does sexualised imagery impact on women's lives, it also affects the content of media that is produced and discussions that can happen across the rest of media;

> The discursive use of a woman's body, underpinning the view of the world presented by the 'downmarket' tabloids, makes radical, democratic content less possible. Although women continue to contest the masculine definition of the Page Three image, their public participation is called into question when a sexualised difference remains as a constant potential discipline on their actions (Carter, 1998, p. 14).

Impact on girls mental and physical health

There is a significant body of research which examines the impact of sexualised images on girls – specifically in terms of the various potentially damaging impacts of 'self-objectification' (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997; Calogero, 2004; Tiggemann and Kuring, 2004). With regard to mental health, some of the findings indicate that these images lead girls to measure their self-worth solely on their physical appearance and sexual appeal (Button *et al.*, 1997; Vandenbosch and Eggermont, 2012) and can be a factor in girls not developing their own autonomous sexuality and sexual desires (Tolman, 2002; Fine and McClelland, 2006; Calogero and Thompson, 2009; Lamb, 2010). Via these images, heterosexuality and penetrative sex are understood as compulsory, with male desire prioritised over, or subsuming, female desire. (Hird and Jackson, 2001; Tolman *et al.*, 2003; Impett, Schooler and Tolman, 2006). Teenage girls appear to be under increasing pressure from pornography-consuming boys to replicate sex acts seen in pornography such as anal sex, gag-inducing fellatio and having their face ejaculated on (Marston and Lewis, 2014; Bridges *et al.*, 2016; Stanley *et al.*, 2016). Aggression and coercion were identified as common features in teenage relationships in one study which

found that in England more than four in 10 girls reported being coerced into sex acts, a fifth of girls had experienced violence or intimidation such as being strangled or beaten, and a fifth of boys agreed strongly with statements such as; 'It is sometimes acceptable for a man to hit a woman if she has been unfaithful' (Stanley *et al.*, 2016).

Research is conflicted as to whether adolescents can differentiate between pornography and reality, however in a review of the literature between 1995 and 2015, Peter and Valkenburg found that whilst more research needs to be undertaken, 'cumulative evidence is building up about the predictors of adolescents' use of pornography and its relation with sexual attitudes and sexual behaviour' (Peter and Valkenburg, 2016, p. 525). Other studies have shown that girls feel boxed in to a narrow definition of what it is to be a girl by sexualised images, and lower or dismiss their expectations in terms of career and life choices. Girls come to understand that they should be quiet, passive, submissive and compliant, something to be looked at, not an active, doing person in the world (Sherman and Zurbriggen, 2014; Daniels and Gillen, 2015). Links have been made with serious clinical mental health issues such as eating disorders and depression (Field *et al.*, 1999; Moradi, Dirks and Matteson, 2005; Greenleaf and McGreer, 2006; Harper and Tiggemann, 2008) and negative effects have been shown with regards to mental processing – such as how well girls perform at maths (Fredrickson *et al.*, 1998; Pacilli, Tomasetto and Cadinu, 2016). Studies have also shown a physical impact as girls avoid activities such as swimming or running due to concerns about how they will look and the uniforms required (Slater and Tiggemann, 2010, 2011).

There is a wealth of academic research concerning body image which will not be detailed here. For a summary of this field see Wykes and Gunter and Grogan (Wykes and Gunter, 2005; Grogan, 2016). It is worth noting however that whilst there is a substantial amount of research which points to a link between media consumption and body image, there is also evidence to suggest that eating disorders, for instance, are attributable to a range of factors depending on the individual. This could include any or all of: genetic disposition, media consumption, parental influence and peer comparison (White, 1992; Freeman, 2015).

Continuum of sexualisation

Wesely defines what she terms 'the continuum of sexualization' as a gender socialisation that has always existed and is now becoming ever more pornified, so that women and girls understand 'that their sexualized embodiment is a major part of their identity and value' (Wesely, 2012, p. 136). She shows how this damages all girls and women in various ways throughout their lives on a continuum of harm and states; 'This sexualization is its own

victimization of women and girls, with the culture as perpetrator' (Wesely, 2012, p. 138). Coy and Garner add that images of glamour models in particular have a direct impact on women and girls stating that;

> The promotion of 'glamour girl' bodies and the ways in which female celebrities emulate such bodies through cosmetic surgery promotes breast enlargement as an opportunity for young women to assuage feelings of inadequacy (Coy and Garner, 2010, p. 670).

Indeed, the tabloid newspapers have been noted for their propensity to decry and vilify paedophilia (see for example, the *News of the World's* high profile campaigning around the murder of schoolgirl Sarah Payne in 2000) whilst simultaneously engaging in paedophilic behaviour. For instance, *The Daily Mail* ran a piece expressing outrage at an episode of the TV comedy *Brass Eye* about paedophilia on the same page as photographs of Princesses Beatrice and Eugenie, then aged 11 and 12, in bikinis (Clarke, 2001; The Daily Mail, 2001). Both this hypocrisy and paedophilic aesthetic have long been apparent in the tabloids. When Page 3 began, most of the women featured were literally 'girls next door' as they were under 18. Perhaps the most famous Page 3 girl – Samantha Fox – made her debut at 16 and retired at 20. Her first photo was published with the caption 'Sam, 16, Quits A-Levels for Ooh-Levels' (The Sun, 1983). In the late 1980s *The Sun* also ran a **'**Back to Skool Girls' week-long edition of Page 3, which featured topless models dressed in school uniform, accompanied by photos of them as children (We are unfinished, 2013). Bray argues that 'a paedophilic sexual aesthetic is becoming mainstream' (Bray, 2008, p. 324) and shows how a binary has been drawn 'between the abnormal gaze of the paedophile and the normal gaze' of everyone else – thus denying the existence of corporate paedophilia (Bray, 2008, p. 333). She traces the accusation of 'hysterical woman' throughout history – from the suffragettes to second-wave feminists, to current feminists who dare to critique the sexualisation of girls, and are now charged with contributing to a panic around the sexual abuse of children (Bray, 2008, pp. 330–331). She theorises that the landscape has been reframed so that 'In a move that is common to moral panic and risk theory, the real danger is the CSA [Child Sexual Abuse] moral panic' (Bray, 2008, p. 332).

Others suggest that those who problematise sexualisation and pornification and point to links with girls mental and physical health are adding to what they see as an unjustified moral panic. Egan theorises the phenomena of intense interest in the sexualisation of girls as located in 'adult preoccupations and projections' and 'emblematic of a fractured and corrupted middle-class status' (Egan, 2013, pp. 8–9). As noted previously, some academics also contest the

notion that children are powerless to resist these images and propose instead that they have the skills and understanding to decode them (Buckingham and Bragg, 2004; Egan and Hawkes, 2012).

For many the answer to this situation is to encourage girls to develop 'media literacy' so that they can assess and critique these images and thereby negate any harm. However, as discussed previously, Gill describes this push for 'media literacy' as a 'panacea' and has shown that even when girls are able to step back and dissect these images they are still affected by them (Gill, 2013, p. 594). Indeed, the impact of these images may also continue into adulthood – with studies showing that many women view their bodies as broken, incomplete, lesser and disgusting (Veale *et al.*, 1996; Gill, 2019). Women engage in dieting, cosmetic surgery and excessive consumption of beauty and anti-ageing products and treatments, with several of these interventions reflecting the norms of the pornography industry, such as; breast enhancement, labiaplasty, removal of all pubic hair, and nail extensions.

Concluding summary

This chapter has established the particular neoliberal postfeminist context that forms the theoretical basis of this study. The contextual backdrop for the work has been established in relation to the computational turn, and how this has led to a conflicted landscape in which feminist activism and renewed misogyny are simultaneously flourishing. An outline of debates and developments in feminist research has been given, particularly in relation to the topics analysed in this study; media sexism, sexualised imagery and hostile public misogyny. This chapter has emphasised the shift from notions of the male gaze and objectification to theories of self-policing, self-surveillance and sexual subjectification, and has questioned notions of agency and choice within a postfeminist neoliberal context. By adding to debates which complicate ideas of sexualisation and objectification and resist positioning this as a binary between good/bad, this chapter instead proposes that these issues are considered in the context of neoliberal consumerism and in relation to women's material reality and structural inequality. Further, it has been argued that sexualised imagery plays a key role in normalising and mainstreaming the sex industry, as well as adding to a context of retrosexism and ironic laddism, both key features of a postfeminist culture in which feminism is at once upheld and disavowed. The combination of these research frameworks allows this project to better argue that media sexism and hostile misogyny, particularly online, matters, in terms of how women's power is curtailed and how women are silenced in public life.

As this chapter has argued, academic understandings of visual representation emerged from the work of feminist activism in the 1960s and 1970s. This mutual knowledge exchange passing backwards and forwards between feminist activism and academia will be explored throughout the thesis, particularly when addressing RQ2 – How do feminist campaigners account for their strategies and approaches when critiquing discriminatory coverage of women in print media at the Leveson Inquiry and beyond? in **Chapter Six**, and considering how feminist discourses were deployed at the Leveson Inquiry and in subsequent campaigning about sexualised imagery. The particular neoliberal postfeminist context that has been emphasised in this chapter will be explored further in the analysis in **Chapters Six, Seven and Eight** in terms of how this hostile backdrop set the parameters of discourse and debate about media sexism and public misogyny, and how this has evolved throughout the first two decades of the 21st century. Having outlined the postfeminist contextual positioning which anchors this research project, the next chapter will detail the conceptual framework applied. As noted previously, the postfeminist contextual framework established in this chapter and a conceptual framework established in the next chapter are deployed in tandem in order to address the research questions and analyse the data.

Chapter Four: Conceptual Framework: Identifying, defining, historicising and theorising the discourses

Introduction

This chapter outlines the conceptual framework which underpins this thesis and situates the research as focusing on debates about media sexism. A key aim of this research was to trace three discourses as they were articulated in the Leveson Inquiry and report and beyond. This chapter sets out the context for the study by identifying and defining the key discourses around the visual representation of women – namely *moral right, liberal* and *feminist* discourses. It charts the historical deployment of these discourses in legislation, and attempts at legislation, and briefly theorises these dominant discourses. This chapter situates debates about media representation of women as a conflict between a feminist human rights discourse and both a long established moral right discourse, which carries the weight of history and legislative backing, and the favoured liberal discourse which privileges the male position through the defence of the status quo.

In studying these discourses this research seeks to explore 'language in use' (Jaworski and Coupland, 2006, p. 3) and also the way 'Discourse transmits social and institutionalized values or ideologies, and also creates them' (Wales, 2001, p. 114). This chapter seeks to establish a framework of the theoretical definitions of the themes that will be traced in the data, and which will guide the analysis of the Leveson Inquiry hearings and documentation and the interviews conducted later in this thesis. The prevalence, dominance and evolution of the three discourses defined in this chapter will thus be explored in the analysis, and the extent to which they were heard at the Leveson Inquiry and in related campaigning about sexualised imagery will be theorised.

Identifying the discourses

The process of arriving at the three discourses, moral right, liberal and feminist, was an inductive one, the inspiration for which this work is indebted to Jeska Rees, whose thesis on revolutionary feminism in England 1977-1983 proposes the origins of this framing as a reaction to the so-called 'sexual revolution' of the 1960s and in reference to debates about pornography (Rees, 2007, p. 2).

In this study the definition of a moral right discourse is drawn from what Rees identifies as a moral bloc. Referred to by the press in the 1970s as 'an anti-porn crusade', Rees argues this

was exemplified in the Longford Report, the Christian organisation the Nationwide Festival of Light and Mary Whitehouse's National Viewers' and Listeners' Association (NVALA). She identifies the moral bloc as resting on the belief that people's sexual behaviour could be, and was, influenced by representations of sexuality and thus exposure to this was dangerous both to individuals and the wider fabric of British society (Rees, 2007, p. 204).

The definition of a liberal discourse is taken from what Rees defines as a left liberal bloc growing out of the liberalising law reforms of the 1960s, such as the decriminalisation of homosexuality and abortion and lobbying against state censorship exemplified by *The Williams Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship* (1977-9), which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter (Rees, 2007, p. 205).

Rees cites a third discourse, that of revolutionary feminism, which rejected both the moral and liberal discourse and instead emphasised male violence and power over women via a sex class system, and fought for complete liberation through a women's revolution (Rees, 2007, p. 211). Rees notes that revolutionary feminists distanced themselves from the moral discourse and directly opposed a liberal discourse 'which regarded attempts to limit its [pornography's] availability as amounting to state censorship and a restriction on personal freedoms' (Rees, 2007, p. 211). She cites Coulias et al as an example of the revolutionary feminist position on pornography as distinct from both a moral and liberal stance:

> To launch an attack on porn we have to take a stand, to say that it is not the god-given right of any ruling group with money and power to plaster the environment with their sadistic, dehumanising, and degrading view of a less powerful section of society. If this is to advocate censorship then this is what we must do. There already exists an example of grounds on which censorship can be reasonably demanded, in the area of race relations. Inasmuch as magazines devoted to the brutal dehumanisation of blacks would be regarded as "incitement to racial hatred" so we must demand that porn be prohibited on the grounds that it is an "incitement to sexual hatred", in fact a clear incitement to rape and murder, as well as to the general inferiorisation of women (Coulias *et al.*, 1978 cited in Rees, 2007, p. 211).

As this chapter will now go on to detail, and as this thesis demonstrates, these discourses are of course not static. They have changed, fragmented and become entangled over time. However the strength of these discourses historically, particularly the moral right discourse as enacted in legislation, means that they continue to reverberate albeit in shifting forms.

McGlynn, for instance, noted in her study of debates about the criminalisation of possession of extreme pornography between 2005-2008 that despite the passage of time and changes in legislation, feminist discourse was marginalised and instead 'these two dichotomous perspectives, of moralism and liberalism, hold a tenacious grip on public and policy debates about pornography' (McGlynn, 2010, p. 193).

Historicising the concept of obscenity

The notion of obscenity is rooted in the idea of women as dirty, porous and contagious, with women's bodies viewed as something to be contained and bounded in. As this chapter will go on to discuss, ideas about obscenity have historically formed part of a set of beliefs and systems to control women. The specificity of woman as dirty, and the pollution of bodily fluids through menstruation and childbirth is reflected in symbolism and ritual around women's impurity in many cultures across millennia (Douglas, 2002, p. 42).

Carson gives a fascinating and detailed dissection of the lives of women in Ancient Greece. Women were deemed to be wet and men dry, and dryness was linked to intellect (Carson, 1991, pp. 137–8). Women's wet nature indicated liquidity in terms of emotions pouring forth, and a voracious and uncontrollable appetite both in terms of gluttony and sexual desire. It was believed that women were unable to restrain themselves and were linked to the wild, chaos of nature and thus needed to be contained and controlled by men (Carson, 1991, pp. 138–9). Furthermore, women were viewed as a particular problem in ancient Greek belief systems as they were considered 'units of danger' when they moved from household to household in marriage, adultery, or prostitution, which therefore made them 'unstable' and 'prone to leakage' (Carson, 1991, p. 159). Crucially, women were deemed to be sexually porous, spreading dirt and pollution wherever they went in a contagious manner. This lead to complex codes of conduct and pollution beliefs in Ancient Greece whereby vigilance had to be upheld to ensure that women and all their accompanying dirt and pollution were contained within strict boundaries.

Echoes of these belief systems can be detected throughout millennia and arguably have resonance in the previously mentioned moral-right framing of the 1960s identified by Rees, in which exposure to representations of sexuality are dangerous to both the individual and wider society. As Carson notes;

> Sexually the female is a pore. This porous sexuality is a floodgate of social pollution, for it is the gate of entry to *oikos* ('household') and *polis* ('city-state'). (…) The pores

> must be kept closed. The unbounded must be bounded. The purity of all that lies within depends on it (Carson, 1991, p. 159).

Morrison documents how this belief system carried into the Middle Ages following an Aristotelian categorisation where men were aligned with the soul and women with the body. Her study of excrement in the Middle Ages finds a gendered belief system. She traces the same idea of preoccupations with shifting borders and boundaries in pilgrimage texts and argues that;

> (…) the body of non-closure, is threatening, much as women's bodies were perceived to be in the Middle Ages and, in the misogynistic tradition, condemned and reviled. The identification of women as leaky vessels carries over into secular pilgrimage literature, where women pilgrims are almost inevitably represented as sexual or deviant, singled out for censure. Their fluidity in movement makes them threatening figures, open to mockery and criticism (Morrison, 2008, p. 109).

Heath notes that this concept of porous contagion was expressed in the 18th century through an Enlightenment understanding that not only was physical touch contagious, but additionally immorality 'could be absorbed into the skin through corpuscles (which bore the mark of a person's moral and physical condition) in the atmosphere around bodies.' The term 'moral contagion' was coined by the French doctor Philippe Hecquet in 1733 and was used to explain the perceived contagion of phenomenon such as mental illness, riots and criminality (Forth, 2001, p. 62). Obscenity represented a key transgression in this regard due to the way it celebrated 'bodily excess' and could 'undermine the ability of individuals to govern their own bodies and, in turn, to destabilize the boundaries of culture and society' (Heath, 2010, p. 36).

It is unsurprising then, that the discourse of obscenity and moral outrage throughout the 20th century located sex and the female body in terms that have their origin and association in the idea of nature's worst elements – dirt and excrement and the disgust of something that smells and revolts the senses. Words such as 'foul', 'lewd', 'revolting', 'muck', 'filth', 'noxious' typify the language of sexual morality, alongside frequent mention of sewers. The anti-obscenity crusader, James Douglas, for instance, who railed against what he viewed as obscene literature throughout his *Sunday Express* editorship in the 1920s and 1930s, referred to the eventually banned *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) as 'unutterable putrefaction' (Douglas, 1928). Similarly film critics in 1948 railed against the film (based on the James Hadley Chase novel) *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*. What they are describing is male violence against women and rape, but note

how each quote adds a moral dimension to the condemnation often utilising the language of dirt – 'a piece of nauseating muck', 'as fragrant as a cesspool' and 'all the morals of an alley cat and all the sweetness of a sewer' (*Life Magazine*, 1948, p. 137).

The Obscene Publications Act 1857: Protection of the weak and privileged access

As noted, throughout the history of UK legislation concerning the representation of women in media, the dominant identifiable discourse has been a moral right discourse constructed around issues of obscenity and taste and decency, and the likely outcome of depravity on the adult (assumed) male consumer or, latterly, the unwitting child. Long positions this moral discourse about pornography and sexual imagery as framed around the idea of sex as appropriate only for procreation within heterosexual marriage, and something that is not for consumption by children and other potentially corruptible people. Long notes;

> The conservative position also brings in questions of "taste": the idea that particular forms of sex or sexual expression might be distasteful or disgusting; offensive to moral decency (Long, 2012, p. 61).

Initial obscenity laws, chiefly *The Obscene Publications Act*, first enacted in 1857, during a time of Victorian concerns around sexual restraint, thus protected the right of the male educated elite to view pornography, whilst attempting to prevent the degradation and corruption of women, children and the lower classes. Viewed through a subject-object paradigm, the woman represented is defined as an object that can cause harm to others, and this is reflected in the resulting legislation.

Cocks notes that the concept, and emergence of, pornography as a distinct category containing only sexual imagery intended to arouse (as opposed to being one element of bawdiness, political and religious satire or even erotic philosophical fiction) was in part due to the new possibilities of mass print production and efforts to contain print between the late 16th and late 18th centuries. Similarly the concept of obscenity as something to be restricted and censored did not emerge until the late 16th century. Cocks demonstrates that post-French Revolution the English government were propelled by a moral panic about law and order and began legislating against obscenity specifically, and threats to the individual or moral order. Previously such crimes were framed as blasphemy and satire against the church and state (Cocks, 2012, pp. 275–281).

Kendrick (Kendrick, 1996) argues that obscenity was less about the actual depiction, content and imagery and more about harm and access – i.e. restricting access by persons who were seen as weak and corruptible. Thus throughout history there can be found private rooms, museums and cupboards, such as the notorious Secretum, later cupboard 55, at the British Museum; a repository of objects that were considered obscene, namely the personal collection bequeathed to the museum by Dr George Witt between 1865 and 1866 (Wickstead, 2018).

On the excavation of Pompeii and Herculaneum in the 18th and 19th centuries and the discovery of the Roman predilection for depictions of phalluses, sexual graffiti and brothels, the contents were hidden away in the National Archaeological Museum in Naples and not opened to permanent general access until 2000. Similar rooms and cupboards could be found across Europe in the 19th century; typically access was restricted to upper-class males;

> (…) a gentleman with appropriate demeanour (and ready cash for the custodian) would be admitted to the locked chamber where controversial items lurked; women, children, and the poor of both sexes and all ages were excluded (Kendrick, 1996, p. 6).

Sigel highlights a similar paradox whereby the same material could be deemed as obscene, or not, depending on the viewer. Artist's studies and medical advice featuring sexual content were thus not prosecuted, but the same photograph of a naked body viewed by the poor or the same medical literature sold for mass consumption was deemed by judges to be obscene. Crucially this meant that 'Objects became indecent through the act of viewing or reading' (Sigel, 2002, p. 4). Thus the obscene has been historically presented as protection of weaker members of society, but equally operated to privilege access to the upper-class male. Pornography was initially off limits to the both the (typically illiterate, uneducated and financially constrained) working class and women as it was mainly text based, contained Latin, Greek, French or mythological references and was expensive and inaccessible due to methods of production and distribution. The advent of cheap, visual pornography, particularly in the form of postcards ended this inaccessibility. Universal access to pornography undermined the social and moral order in which white, upper-class men were the powerful oppressors. Working class people, women, children and black people becoming the viewer as well as the viewed was therefore a dangerous category violation;

> The direction of ideas – who could imagine whom and therefore who could recreate whom for the purpose of pleasure – remained central to the preservation of the social

> order that governed both imperial and domestic relations. The social implications of 'filth' in the wrong people's hands did more than expose hypocrisy, it exposed sexuality as a method of social control (Sigel, 2007, p. 878).

While the women featured in pornography and in imagery such as Page 3 may still be the economically constrained, access to view is now open to all classes and to both men and women. As noted in **Chapter Three** there is an all pervasiveness of pornography in the current online era, and *The Sun's* Page 3, for instance, is self-proclaimed in its target of working-class men, 'a symbol of the paper's identity as a brash and irreverent working-class publication' (Bingham, 2014, p. 185). Access for children is still restricted however, and this protectionist approach to screening off sexual imagery continues today with the practice of zoning through licensing legislation and restrictions; such as pornographic magazines on the top shelf, 'sex shops', film classifications and parental controls.

Obscenity Law: Problems with definition

Indeed this issue of obscenity law depending not on the content but the viewer foregrounds one of the most notable aspects of UK obscenity law throughout history; its vagueness and resulting issues of interpretation and application. Writing in 1929, Ernst and Seagle argued that;

> few words are as fluid and vague in content as the six deadly adjectives – *obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy, indecent* and *disgusting* – which are the basis of censorship (Ernst and Seagle, 1929, p. vii).

In this regard the 1857 act offered no definition in law as to what would be considered obscene and left this to be defined by magistrates.

Some clarification was gained in 1868 when a definition was established by case law in R v Hicklin in what became known as the Hicklin Test. Benjamin Hicklin, then Recorder of London, reversed a conviction under the Obscene Publications Act on appeal. When the case was passed to Lord Chancellor Alexander Cockburn he ruled that the act covered material where;

> the tendency of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences and into whose hands a publication of this sort might fall (Cockburn, 1868, pp. 360–371).

However although a written definition was at last provided, it is clear that the resulting text is still entirely subjective and open to interpretation. The 1959 Obscenity Act tightened things further with a 'Test of obscenity' which governed any

> article containing or embodying matter to be read or looked at or both, any sound record, and any film or other record of a picture or pictures

Which when;

> taken as a whole (…) tend to deprave and corrupt persons who are likely, having regard to all relevant circumstances, to read, see or hear the matter contained or embodied in it (*Obscene Publications Act*, 1959, sec. 1).

Those publishing such material (rather than those in possession of it) are liable to prosecution via the act.

The law moved closer again to definition during the trial of Lady Chatterley's Lover in 1960, R v Penguin Books, in which presiding judge Mr Justice Byrne ruled;

> to deprave means to make morally bad, to pervert, to debase or corrupt morally. To corrupt means to render morally unsound or rotten, to destroy the moral purity or chastity, to pervert or ruin a good quality, to debase or defile (*R v Penguin Books*, 1961).

However this is still clearly open to interpretation, as a 1969 Working Party Report which advocated complete repeal of the act noted;

> The Obscene Publications Act 1959, though it introduced many improvements, was unable to overcome the hard basic fact that no two people can be counted upon to agree what is or is not obscene (Report by the Working Party, 1969, p.14).

However despite several moves towards clarification there is still no definition of 'deprave' or 'corrupt' given in the current act, which has been amended several times since 1959, no explanation given as to persons who might be depraved or corrupted by obscene material, and indeed no definition given as to the types of content or subject matters that might be considered obscene. Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) guidance offers more information,

including a citation of the R v Penguin definition and advice that; 'The clearest and most common question will be whether there exists a likelihood that children would access the material' (Crown Prosecution Service, 2019a). The act is therefore open to interpretation, as Fox notes;

> To the lawyer obscenity exhibits a chameleonic quality – legally its presence or absence in a publication is always ultimately determined by the time, place and circumstances of dissemination and the audience to whom it is directed (Fox, 1967, pp. 32–33).

Heath draws on Foucault to note that;

> Terms like *obscenity* and *indecency* are thus socially determined concepts that, as far as those responsible for regulating them are concerned, change according to who is reading or viewing the work in question and when and where they are doing so (Heath, 2010, p. 51).

The Oxford English Dictionary definitions are no more helpful, and similarly telling with regards to the terms being fluid and dependent on time, place and societal standards. The definition of obscene is given as 'offensively or grossly indecent, lewd' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2019d). The term deprave is no clearer – listed in the Oxford English Dictionary as to: 'make bad; to pervert in character or quality; to deteriorate, impair, spoil, vitiate' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2019c) and to corrupt as to 'render morally unsound or "rotten"; to destroy the moral purity or chastity of; to pervert or ruin (a good quality); to debase, defile' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2019a).

Similarly the Indecent Displays (Control) Act 1981, which, as it suggests, controls the display of indecent material, offers no explanation or definition as to what is to be considered decent or indecent. Indecency was similarly ill-defined in case law by Lord Reid as 'anything which an ordinary decent man or woman would find to be shocking, disgusting and revolting' (*Knuller v DPP*, 1973).

Section 63 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 relating to extreme pornography does offer a definition of the pornographic and a list of illegal acts, but utilises a similar, if slightly repositioned discourse, where something is said to be extreme if it 'is grossly offensive, disgusting or otherwise of an obscene character' and prosecution depends on agreement that

the depiction is 'explicit and realistic'. An image must be said to be both pornographic and extreme for prosecution to proceed (*Criminal Justice and Immigration Act*, 2008, sec. 63).

Crucially for this study legal definitions of obscenity were carried through into media regulation in a similarly subjective way via the ill-defined terms of 'taste' and 'decency', as was discussed in **Chapter Two**. Who decides what is obscene, and what is meant by taste and decency, is therefore subjective, fluid, open to interpretation, and has historically demonstrated a lack of attention to gender and power. What is considered pornographic and obscene and what this means in practice has been constantly shifting since the late 18th century.

Arguably it is this lack of definition that has rendered obscenity law simultaneously hard to apply and hard to resist, and whilst obscenity laws may have diminished to the point of near irrelevance, as will be discussed shortly, taste and decency as a concept is still a dominant discourse in debates on pornography and media representation of women.

Obscenity Law: a turn to Liberalisation?

Following the passage of the first act and into the 20th century there were several notorious obscenity cases which centred on works of literature, reflecting an ongoing moral panic about mass production and distribution and disruption to the social order – notably *The Well of Loneliness* (banned in 1928), *Ulysses* (banned in 1929), and *Lolita* (banned in 1955).

Cocks details various individuals such as Havelock Ellis, Marie Stopes, Bertrand and Dora Russell and groups such as the World League for Sexual Reform (WLSR) and Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals (FPSI) who were active under the broad category of 'sex reformers' throughout the early 20th century and whose aims included a relaxation of divorce laws, birth control education and lessening censorship (Cocks, 2004, pp. 470–475). With regards to obscenity there was a growing desire for a public interest defence for works of artistic merit, by authors, publishers, booksellers, lawyers and MPs in both the UK and America. Many advocated a clear distinction between art and pornography, or 'dirt' as D.H. Lawrence referred to it;

> It is individuals of this sort that tell dirty stories, carry indecent picture post-cards, and know the indecent books. This is the great pornographical class – the really common men-in-the-street and women-in-the-street. They have as great a hate and contempt of sex as the greyest Puritan (Lawrence, 2004, p. 242).

Towards the end of the 1950s and into the 1960s there was a growing permissiveness and mood for reform (for instance in relation to divorce laws, an end to theatre censorship and the decriminalisation of homosexuality). As a result the second Obscene Publications Act passed in 1959 did establish a public good clause particularly with regard to literature and literary intent, and crucially amended the legislation so that the whole article or work was considered in its entirety, not just a part or parts.

Cocks notes that the 1959 Obscene Publications Act 'allowed a work to be defended on grounds of artistic merit for the first time.' (Thus highlighting the classed nature of access to sexual material and drawing a distinction between low brow smut or pornography for pornography's sake, a point which will be discussed in further detail shortly) (Cocks, 2012, p. 276). As Cocks points out, this boundary or distinction was always going to be impossible to maintain and define, and is complicated 'by the uncertain status of nudity in any legal context – sometimes illegal, sometimes not, depending on what the body or bodies were doing' (Cocks, 2012, p. 276).

The passing of the 1959 act then, represented a liberalisation which effectively protected works of literature from prosecution under obscenity law. This was confirmed when the law was tested in 1960 and D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was published successfully in the UK for the first time since it was published privately in 1928 (*R v Penguin Books*, 1961). However several scholars caution against an overly simplistic chronology in which moral concerns gave way to liberalism on this issue of obscenity (Hunt, 2009, pp. 193–194; Heath, 2010, pp. 49–50). Cocks agrees that;

> these liberal trends ran in parallel with increasing levels of prosecution and new attempts to reinforce the distinction between pornography and artistic or scientific material (Cocks, 2004, p. 482).

As noted, moral right campaigning continued and peaked in the 1970s notably with groups such as the NVALA and Festival of Light. In 1972, in an attempt to reassert a moral framework, Lord Longford tried to reverse the 1959 act by proposing the removal of the public good clause (which stated that material can be justified if it is artistic or in some other way promoting public interests) and redefining obscenity as material that would 'outrage contemporary standards of decency or humanity accepted by the public at large' (Longford Committe, 1972, p. 383), but the recommendations were not implemented by government. Then in 1976 the

unsuccessful trial against *Inside Linda Lovelace* (1974), a later retracted autobiography of Linda Marchiano's participation in the pornographic film *Deep Throat* (1972) confirmed that no text, literary merit or not, was likely to be prosecuted under the act.

Precedent was further established by the Government appointed *The Williams Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship* (1977-9), which was remarkable for finding very little subject matter or material that should be restricted. After viewing and assessing various examples of pornography the committee recommended that the written word be entirely exempt from obscenity legislation as: 'to be offended by written material requires the activity of reading it' (Williams, 2015, p. xii). The report made clear that the committee was concerned with the *'immediate involuntary offensiveness*' (Williams, 2015, p. xii) for instance of, and in the main, imagery. However it also recommended no restriction on the availability, possession, sale or purchase of any film or imagery, so long as it was restricted to the private sphere (mail order and licensed shops and cinemas) and not on general display or accessible to under 18s. Williams was in favour of a complete repeal of the existing obscenity law including the public good clause, and instead proposed a law based on another subjective term which is open to interpretation; 'offensive to reasonable people', via a policy of zoning and restriction (Williams, 2015, p. 213). Thus the Williams Committee demonstrated a liberal emphasis on the private sphere.

Furthermore, debate drew heavily on John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* (1859) and the harm principle. However, when it came to the balance of rights versus harm the Williams Committee reading of Mill deemphasised harm, or at least imposed a very high threshold. In this regard the report conceived of no harm from, or in, pornography unless it involved children or the depiction of actual physical harm (Williams, 2015, pp. 175–176). The Williams Report was also unimplemented, but this was nonetheless an extensive inquiry on the public record which set the parameters of debate around a classic liberal framing for years to come.

As demonstrated, this liberal discourse around the representation of women in UK print media is centred on promotion of the sexual freedom and liberation of the (assumed) male consumer and locates this activity within a private sphere, not to be restricted by state intervention. Whilst liberal approaches to pornography typified by the Williams Report do balance some notion of harm against the rights of the individual, this analysis lacks any comprehension of structural inequality and power differentials, and critically, 'this has not been seen as harmful to women, because the liberal human subject is constructed as male' (Long, 2012, p. 63). Orford argues that 'pornography and its regulation is central to the liberal project' (Orford,

1994, p. 75) and identifies the private sphere as one of the key processes through which this is achieved, noting; 'The liberal acceptance of the public/private dichotomy also operates to depoliticise all those things which occur in the private sphere' (Orford, 1994, p. 89).

As this thesis will go on to discuss and analyse in **Chapter Seven**, arguably the current dominant neoliberal ideology builds on and reifies this classical liberal concept of individual rights in the private sphere by further emphasising notions of individual choice, agency and empowerment and a public sphere free of state interference. As Brown describes it;

> a host of policies that figure and produce citizens as individual entrepreneurs and consumers whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for 'self-care' —their ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions (…) (Brown, 2006, p. 694).

The founding of the pro-pornography Feminist Anti-Censorship Taskforce (FACT) in America in 1984, and Feminists Against Censorship (FAC) in 1989 in the UK, added further emphasis to the liberal position. FACT and FAC worked in coalition with the pornography industry and civil liberties campaigners to oppose what they saw as state censorship. Critique was centred on capitalism, namely labour-conditions for workers and countering the industry by producing feminist pornography. FAC continues to be active today, opposing legislation to criminalise the possession of extreme pornography for instance (McGlynn, 2010, p. 198).

There were attempts into the 1980s to push back this liberalisation of the law, but these were unsuccessful. The remit of the 1959 legislation did not cover broadcast, nor did the Williams Committee; a point which Mary Whitehouse and the NVALA lobbied fiercely on, resulting in two attempts to amend the act and introduce a moral framing. Notably Winston Churchill MP attempted to move a private members' bill in 1986 to radically extend the act to encompass radio and television and ensure that any publication depicting sex available to under 18s was deemed to be obscene and thus illegal. This would have entailed a total zoning approach whereby such material was only available in licensed shops. Churchill's key concern was protection of children who may be corrupted or influenced by such depictions and he emphasised what he believed was a link between rising levels of violence and rape and depictions in mass media (Marsh, Read and Myers, 1987). A 1987 bill by another Conservative MP, Gerald Howarth, also sought to extend the act to cover television and to shift the test of law from material which tends to 'deprave and corrupt', 'to that which was "grossly offensive" to a "reasonable person"' (Durham, 1991, p. 91), but this was also unsuccessful, sealing the

dominance of the liberalised 1959 legislation. It was not until the Broadcasting Act was introduced in 1990 that obscenity law encompassed broadcast.

McGlynn details a similar dominance of liberal understandings of free speech, civil liberties and the private sphere in debates around *Section 63 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008* relating to extreme pornography, where as well as drawing heavily on moral language such as 'disgust', 'vile' and 'sickening', debate focused on freedom of speech and excessive state interference in the private sphere (McGlynn, 2010, pp. 194–195).

Historicising feminist resistance to pornography and media sexism

Feminist resistance to pornography is typically found in radical feminist definitions and understandings which, in direct contrast to the moral and liberal positioning outlined above, are united in concern about the harm of pornography to women and an understanding of pornography as part of structural oppression. This discourse is most clearly articulated by radical anti-porn feminists such as Dworkin (Dworkin, 1981), Brownmiller (Brownmiller, 1975), Morgan (Morgan, 1980) and MacKinnon. (MacKinnon, 1993). This critical understanding of pornography's rendering of women 'dehumanized as sexual objects' (MacKinnon, 1987, p. 176) has been theorised in the academic literature, most notably by Nussbaum who contributes the following understanding of objectification – 'one is treating *as an object* what is really not an object, what is in fact a human being' (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 257). She outlines 'seven ways to treat a person as a thing' (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 256), which are typically present when women are sexually objectified:

1. *Instrumentality*: The objectifier treats the object as a tool of his or her purposes.
2. *Denial of autonomy*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination.
3. *Inertness*. The objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity.
4. *Fungibility*: The objectifier treats the object as interchangeable (a) with other objects of the same type, and/or (b) with objects of other types.
5. *Violability*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in boundary-integrity, as something that it is permissible to break up, smash, break into.
6. *Ownership*: The objectifier treats the object as something that is owned by another, can be bought or sold, etc.
7. *Denial of subjectivity*: The objectifier treats the object as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account

(Nussbaum, 1995, p. 257).

This understanding of Nussbaum's; that objectification works on multiple levels and 'that there can be morally sinister objectification' which goes beyond depictions of the sexual, beyond violence, and as Nussbaum argues even beyond 'gender roles' (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 289), has been a central focus for feminist activists opposing the mainstreaming and normalisation of pornography in outlets such as the red top tabloids and lads' mags. This framing theorised by Mackinnon (MacKinnon, 1993) and Langton (Langton, 1993) draws on speech act theory (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1992) to argue that pornography and objectification constitute harm discretely; and that a cause and effect demonstration is not needed or warranted in this approach.

In the UK this resistance to pornography and objectifying media representations of women has found some, albeit limited, expression in the politico-legal sphere. Following the gains and successes of the second-wave feminist movement in late 1970s and early 1980s Britain, and the increased representation of women in parliament, feminist discourses around sexism, objectification, equality and human rights emerged to challenge the dominant moral and liberal discourses around the visual representation of women. A key moment in establishing this feminist discourse came when Clare Short addressed the issue of the representation of women in UK print media in her Ten-Minute Rule Bill, Indecent Displays (Newspapers) Bill debated in 1986 and 1988, using a discourse that focused on the effect on women as both subject and viewer and the wider impact on society. Campaigns led by Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) (1980-1993), the Campaign Against Pornography (CAP) (1987-1997) and the Campaign against Pornography and Censorship (CPC) (1989-1992) in the 1980s and 1990s, which included extending UK laws on incitement to racial hatred to include sexism, were resisted, including by pro-pornography feminists. Similarly in America in the 1980s, Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon sought to reposition the discourse around the visual representation of women, specifically with regards to pornography, via their Anti-Pornography Civil Rights Ordinance (1983). This was proposed as a civil law which instead of focusing on moral or liberal arguments framed the legislation around the harm caused to those involved in the production or distribution of pornography and more widely in the form of sexual discrimination to all women (Dworkin and MacKinnon, 1988).

Presenting the Ten-Minute Rule Bill, Indecent Displays (Newspapers) Bill 1988, which aimed to bring an end to *The Sun's* Page 3, Short's argument drew on a moral dimension, including harm

to children, but her main focus was on an explicit argument about harm to women and the impact on women's equality. Discussing the thousands of letters she received in support of the bill, Short stated;

> The overwhelming majority of those who write argue that the pictures degrade women and portray them as sexual objects to be used and taken whenever men feel the need to do so ('HC Deb 13 April 1988', 1988, col. 169).

Short sought to draw a continuum between sexist imagery and male violence against women stating that it: 'helps to create a sexual culture that encourages sexual assaults on women and rape and sexual abuse of women and children' ('HC Deb 13 April 1988', 1988, col. 169).

She addressed liberal arguments about free speech noting that;

> It seems quite extraordinary to suggest that a small number of people can define freedom while the rest of us are not allowed to impose some constraints on what they print and circulate. Quite rightly, we have restrictions on material that excites racial hatred. We should also have restrictions on material that degrades women ('HC Deb 13 April 1988', 1988, col. 169).

Itzin optimistically wrote 30 years ago that;

> Women campaigned for over 50 years to get the vote. It may take women 50 years or more to get rid of pornography, but the effort appears to be well and truly under way (Itzin, 1988, p. 47).

However attempts to bring about legislative change in this area and the focus on this issue by Short, Itzin, Mackinnon, Dworkin and others in the late 1980s were short-lived. Indeed if we look at points of feminist visibility in politico-legal debates about pornography and representation of women these were scarce in the 40 years pre-Leveson, with parliamentary objections to *The Sun's* Page 3 in the 1980s and debates about extreme pornography between 2005-2008, being the most notable interventions. This demonstrates the rarity of the Leveson Inquiry as a moment where feminist voices entered the public debate on legislation about pornography and representation of women. As McGlynn argues;

> with feminist arguments and interventions falling on deaf ears (…) What we have seen is a policy process in which the classic terms of debate about the regulation of pornography has been reinforced, as if feminist debates did not exist (McGlynn, 2010, p. 190).

As noted in **Chapter Two** and as this research will go on to detail, in the late 2000s a resurgence in feminist activism again turned to issues of media sexism, pornography and objectification, with organisations such as Object and Turn Your Back on Page 3 targeting lads' mags and *The Sun's* Page 3. Much consideration then has been given by feminist activists to legislation and regulation that may tackle the issue of media sexism, but no consensus has been reached as to what would be the most effective approach, and no such legislation or regulation has yet been achieved.

Concluding summary

Having summarised the dominant discourses in the debate about pornography and objectification it has been established that the three key approaches include a moral right perspective, a classic liberal perspective and a radical feminist perspective. As this chapter has demonstrated, moral conservatism takes a paternalistic approach grounded in Christian values and centring on harm to children, the immorality of promiscuous sex outside the family and loving relationships and how this impacts on the social order and standards within society more generally. The liberal approach foregrounds a balance of rights and harms, albeit privileging the position of the individual male. Neither encompass understandings of structural inequality and gendered power relations – the approach taken by the marginalised radical feminist position. In summary although the moral right and liberal approach appear to be oppositional, they are in fact mutually reinforcing through the current approach in statute which has emphasised a zoning solution which satisfies both positions, and in both cases upholds male power. Zoning *restricts* access thus protecting children and moral standards and upholding the male power system located in marriage and monogamous heterosexual relationships, but at the same time *ensures* access to the privileged male consumer in an assumed male private sphere. It does not problematise content beyond that which depicts children or that which depicts non-consensual adults being actually harmed. As will be argued in the analysis chapters, the moral and classical liberal positions have become further entangled in the interests of reifying the male hegemonic order.

Whilst the moral position, resting as it does in subjective ill-defined terms, may not stand up to intellectual scrutiny and appear outdated and outmoded, it is still a common viewpoint that

holds sway in the arguably paternalistic, morally conservative annals of power in the UK – the legislature and judiciary. As McGlynn and Ward note, this is not limited to the Conservative party or those who are considered right wing. It was evident in the Christian morality of Tony Blair which infused New Labour policy, and across the House of Commons during debates on extreme pornography legislation in the early 2000s (McGlynn and Ward, 2009, p. 330). Whilst the moralistic idea of pornography as 'I know it when I see it', as proclaimed by American Justice Stevens in 1964 (*Jacobellis vs Ohio*, 1964, 378 US, 197), may be easy to ridicule, clearly the classic liberal position is grounded in more intellectual rigour; noted previously in the Williams Committee reliance on Mill, a position which continues to prevail today. As this thesis will go on to argue in **Chapter Seven**, using the evidence given by both *The Sun* and *The Sport* at the Leveson Inquiry, this classic liberalism has been further strengthened by a neoliberal ideology in which the right to individualism and choice prevails.

This chapter has provided a conceptual framework tracing three discourses, moral, liberal and feminist, which form the core of this research and will later be applied in the analysis of data, both talk and text in **Chapters Six, Seven and Eight**. These discourses have been defined, historicised and problematised in the current context. A combination of the postfeminist contextual positioning given in **Chapter Three** and the conceptual framework outlined in this chapter offer a research framework which allows this project to better theorise how these discourses were played out at the Leveson Inquiry and in feminist campaigning about media sexism and Page 3.

As will be demonstrated in the analysis, the relevant Leveson Inquiry hearings and documents will be explored to discover how the moral right, liberal and feminist discourses were expressed in the Leveson Inquiry and Report. Interviews with feminist campaigners will be analysed to uncover how these discourses have been expressed in media, parliamentary debate, lobbying and campaigning since the Leveson Inquiry and Report. This data will then be used to theorise how the Leveson Inquiry affected academic understanding of gender representation. Now that the conceptual framework has been established, the next chapter will go on to explain the process of designing the research methodology.

Chapter Five: Methodology

This chapter focuses on research design and outlines the methodology to be undertaken. In Part One I situate myself in relation to my research, explain my position as feminist researcher and how this placed me in relation to my study. Part Two details how I designed and applied my research methodology and presents my rationale for choosing and implementing the qualitative research methods outlined. In Part Three I discuss how I overcame the methodological challenges presented when carrying out the research and offer some reflections on the research process.

Part One: Positioning and Reflexivity: Situating myself as a feminist researcher

Feminist research

When theorising about social practice and analysing the economic and institutional conditions underpinning the discourses found in the Leveson Inquiry and Report, I draw on several key feminist understandings of research. As a feminist researcher I acknowledge feminist understandings which locate research as situated and objectivity as problematic. As Stanley and Wise argue;

> *all* knowledge, necessarily, results from the conditions of its production, is contextually located, and irrevocably bears the marks of its origins in the minds and intellectual practices of those lay and professional theorists and researchers who give voice to it (Stanley and Wise, 1990, p. 39).

Secondly I note that feminist research is not a matter of choosing certain methods, it requires a political perspective which is central to the methodological approach. Feminist research aims to bring about structural change and improve women's lives. It takes inequality and power differentials as a given starting position (Skeggs, 1994, p. 77) and then attempts to tackle this inequality with 'research that is driven by, and aimed toward, a desire to challenge multiple hierarchies of inequalities within social life' (Doucet and Mauthner, 2007, p. 42). As a feminist researcher I aim to both deploy a methodology that supports this goal and to situate and acknowledge myself within the research process as transparently as possible.

A feminist standpoint

Feminist standpoint epistemology positions the researcher from the point of view of women's experiences. Taking this perspective allows the researcher to encompass two different kinds of

knowing; both male dominated, academic, abstracted theories and women's lived experiences, which Stanley and Wise emphasise when 'insisting upon the indivisibility of the ideological and the material' (Stanley and Wise, 1990, p. 42).

Thus I acknowledge that I have a position in relation to my research, as 'it is a condition of all knowledge that it is just one representation of the world among many other possible representations' (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 22). In every stage of the research my choices have come to bear on the process; from who I choose to interview to how I conduct the interviews, what questions I ask, which texts I choose to analyse, how I carry out the analysis and how I structure the thesis. Adopting this position of reflexivity, and noting the part the researcher plays in the research process, is of course a common understanding in all research, not just feminist research.

> The researcher always takes a position in relation to the field of study, and that position plays a part in the determination of what he or she can see and can present as results. And there are always other positions in terms of which reality would look different (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 22).

Thus my findings present one reading of the data, of which there are many possible readings, and these findings are subject to my interpretation.

Contrary to the idea of a feminist researcher operating from a position of bias, a feminist standpoint could instead be embraced as one in which this view brings advantages, and a 'privileged vantage point on male supremacy' (Hartsock, 1987, p. 159). Thus I understand my study as 'scholarship that makes its biases part of its argument' (Lather, 1986, p. 259).

Thus I acknowledge that I am a positioned researcher, however I tried as much as I could to let my participants speak for themselves in order to provide valid findings. In this sense I adopted what Ward calls 'pragmatic objectivity', a stance he applies to the working journalist. As he defines it, this approach is;

> 'objectivity with a human face' because it does not seek an absolute (or certain) judgment about the objectivity of interpretations. Rather it is the imperfect, all-too-human task of critiquing beliefs that are tied closely to purposes and situations (Ward, 2019, p. 23).

Therefore whilst I am transparent about my positions and alignments, and acknowledge my subjectivities, as much as possible I followed objective methods to approach my findings.

Applying feminist standpoint epistemology to my research

The following aspects of my identity are relevant to my research standpoint: my identity as a woman, my industry experience as a journalist and publicist, my campaigning as a feminist activist and my position as a research student. This all contributes to my feminist standpoint. Stating my position transparently enables me to be reflexive throughout the research process and in my work.

I identify with a radical feminist position as a theoretical framework in my research, outlined by Mackay as a four-point definition as follows;

> acknowledgement and analysis of patriarchy, the prioritisation of women-only political organising, a focus on male violence against women as a keystone of women's oppression and, fourthly, the extension of the analysis of male violence against women to include the industries of pornography and prostitution (Mackay, 2015a, p. 119).

As Mackay goes on to note, this is contested ground, but like her and many other radical feminists I view gender as a social construction and sex as a biological fact used to oppress women as a sex-class (Mackay, 2015a, pp. 121–122).

Whilst I acknowledge my own radical feminist position I note that there are various diverse kinds of feminisms. Within the broad definition of feminism, such as that put forward by Kelly that 'Feminism is based on the fundamental belief that women have been and are systematically oppressed and on a political commitment to end that oppression' (Kelly, 1988, p. 58) there are many contested notions of feminism which place differing emphasis on the location of women's oppression and approaches to it.

My particular position influenced the dynamic of the interviews. I was known personally to some of the interviewees who I had conducted feminist activism alongside. Others I had worked with or collaborated with as a journalist, PR or academic. Some were aware of my public profile either as a feminist activist, journalist, PR or academic. My status as a feminist activist, journalist and PR was announced to a greater or lesser degree when seeking interviews and during the interview process – this commonality allowed a more instinctive

kind of 'shorthand' and directness in discussions. It also perhaps resulted in a richer and more open interview due to the participant's understanding of my position and the goals of my research as sympathetic to, and aligned with, their own campaigning on women's issues and media reform.

Reflecting on these issues around transparency, I can see that adopting a very deliberate 'neutral' position and, for instance, not asking what might be seen as 'leading' questions, would not only have led to very bland responses and very long and drawn out interviews, but would have also been a kind of 'false performance' on my part. Artificially attempting to 'cover up' my background as an activist, journalist and PR, and my research questions and the aims and motivations of the study would have been pointless.

Part Two: Methodology and methods

Outlining the research problem and research aims

As noted in **Chapter One**, whilst there has been extensive research on the Leveson Inquiry more generally, relatively little attention has been paid to hearings at the Leveson Inquiry covering media representation of women. I argue that Leveson offers a key moment in time on the public record to analyse discourses about media representation of women. This thesis sets out to provide the first in depth study of this topic. The overall aim of my research was to examine language and power as expressed in the layers of legislative and political argumentation found in the Leveson Inquiry and Report and beyond. Additionally, through interviews with key feminist campaigners I set out to analyse their accounts of the strategies and tactics used to challenge discourses about media sexism during and after the Leveson Inquiry.

Research questions

My research questions were as follows:

RQ1 What discourses are there in the Leveson Inquiry and Report that shape understanding of the representation of women in UK print media?

RQ2 How do feminist campaigners account for their strategies and approaches when critiquing discriminatory coverage of women in print media at the Leveson Inquiry and beyond?

RQ3 What are the implications of the Leveson Inquiry for academic understanding of representation of women in UK print media and parliamentary debate, lobbying and campaigning on these issues?

Rationale: choosing my research methods

In choosing my research methods I aimed firstly to select the most effective and appropriate means of answering my research questions, and secondly to honour feminist research principles, as noted previously, by directing my research towards structural change that will improve women's lives.

My first research question, RQ1, sought to trace discourses about media sexism and sexualised imagery as they were expressed at the Leveson Inquiry, so it followed that a textual analysis of the transcripts of the hearings would be the most appropriate approach.

Taking as a starting point the notion that all knowledge is socially constructed (Burr, 2015, p. 9), I follow Eichler's four premises for feminist research, relating to the sociology of knowledge:

1. that all knowledge is socially constructed
2. that what is accepted as a dominant ideology is the ideology of the ruling group;
3. that there cannot be such a thing as a value-free science (and it is debated what constitutes objective science in contradistinction to value-free science); and
4. that the perspective of people, including their insight into the workings of society, varies systematically with their position within that society

(Eichler, 1985, p. 630).

I chose to apply an inductive, iterative thematic analysis informed by a feminist perspective, as my theoretical model and method of study. I applied thematic analysis as;

> a constructionist method, which examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 81).

In order to address my research questions I took a qualitative mixed methods approach including data analysis of both existing texts and my own original interviews with five feminist campaigners. During my research I was keen to analyse language use, including absences, and situate these discourses within the particular historical, social, political and economic contexts they were operating in, in order to develop nuanced understandings particular to that point in time.

In order to consider RQ2 and RQ3 and fully analyse the ongoing implications of discourses about the representation of women at the Leveson Inquiry, I chose to carry out supplementary interviews with five feminist campaigners, two of whom gave evidence at one of the Leveson Inquiry hearings analysed. This enabled me to further understand the tactics and strategies employed by feminist campaigners when tackling moral and liberal discourses and discover how this debate has developed since the Leveson Inquiry and Report. Supplementary interviews offered up more nuanced data and gave campaigners the chance to reflect on their approaches in a more in-depth way.

The intention of this mixed methods approach was that my supplementary interviews would be carried out in a second stage and act as a kind of validation by triangulation (Bryman, 2012, p. 392) which would either support or refute the findings in my textual analysis. I specifically refer to Denzin's concept of methodological triangulation, in this case between-method triangulation consisting of texts and interviews (Denzin, 1970, p. 301). I follow Bryman's caution that this should not lead to a position of naive realism, but should instead be viewed as 'adding a sense of richness and complexity to an inquiry' (Bryman, 2011, p. 1143).

It was through this detailed contextual and textual analysis and supplementary interviewing that I was able to uncover the strategies and ideologies of the dominant discourses found in the Leveson Report and Inquiry and developments since. The purpose of my primary interviews was to explore the strategies used by feminist campaigners both during and after the Leveson Inquiry in order to address RQ2 – How do feminist campaigners account for their strategies and approaches when critiquing discriminatory coverage of women in print media at the Leveson Inquiry and beyond?

Rationale: Data collection: texts

Whilst Rees identified the three discourses as part of a historical study based in the late 1970s and early 1980s, it was clear from my initial reading that the discourses this research draws on were still in evidence in 2012 at the Leveson Inquiry. As noted the frame of this thesis was clear from the outset – I set out to examine dominant discourses around the visual representation of women and media sexism using the Leveson Inquiry as a crucial snapshot in time which offered rich data on the public record. It was clear that when it came to this data I would adopt a purposive sampling technique – analysing texts that related to the hearings when the women campaigners and the editor of Page 3 gave evidence on this issue.

The Leveson Inquiry archive

The National Archives at Kew in London hold the official records of The Leveson Inquiry. The archived website that was in use at the time of the inquiry, including the video recordings of all the hearings, is available for immediate public access via the National Archives website database as LEV1. This constitutes a small fraction of the documentation relating to the Leveson Inquiry, and was all that was available whilst I was researching my thesis.

The National Archives also hold other documents made available to and created by the inquiry that were not uploaded to the website in use at the time of the inquiry, such as evidence that was submitted or used in the court room, correspondence, judicial reviews, policy rulings and administrative documents. These were not available at the time that I was carrying out my research and are now recorded on the National Archives database as LEV 2 and LEV 3. Some of this data is also available via the Discover Leveson website which launched in December 2018.

At the time of researching and writing this thesis, this second batch of data (LEV 2 and LEV 3), did not yet exist in the National Archives database, so it was not possible to even view the index of these records. Towards the end of completing this thesis index records for LEV 2 and LEV 3 were uploaded to the National Archives database, but much of the data relating to the hearings I analysed is marked as restricted access for 60 or 100 years. I believe some evidence is still not indexed, so it is not possible to view the full range of documents relating to the hearings I analysed.

I managed to gain access to some extra evidence that I became aware of because it was referred to in other documents and at the Leveson Inquiry hearings. I was able to obtain a letter written by the women's aid charity, Refuge, used to support *The Sun's* position, via Freedom of Information requests to the National Archives and DCMS. I also obtained one piece of evidence denied to me by the National Archives and DCMS, the response to a Rule 13 Letter written by Sunday Sport Ltd, , directly from Sunday Sport Ltd.

Data that I was unable to access, and was unable to view index records for, included the 'bundles' of evidence that were used in the courtroom at the Leveson Inquiry for the two hearings I analysed. These are the numbered files of documents that the judge, barrister, witnesses and others in the court room were looking at and referring to during the court hearings. I was also not able to access the Rule 13 Letter sent by the inquiry to Sunday Sport Ltd. There may also be additional evidence, correspondence and administrative documents relating to these two hearings that I am not aware of and was not able to access.

Textual data analysed

My data included two transcripts from the Leveson Inquiry which are in the public domain. These were, firstly, a hearing at which representatives from four women's organisations, Eaves Housing, Equality Now, End Violence Against Women coalition (EVAW) and Object, gave evidence about the representation of women in the press. This hearing took place as part of module one of the inquiry, the examination of the relationship between the press and the public, on Tuesday 24 January 2012 and lasted for approximately an hour and 20 minutes, from 11.44am to 1.05pm.

The second transcript was taken from a hearing where Dominic Mohan, the former editor of *The Sun*, returned to the inquiry for a second time on Tuesday 7 February 2012 and answered questions for approximately one hour and 20 minutes from 4.07 to 5.31pm, about issues which had arisen since he initially gave evidence to the inquiry on Monday 9 January 2012. A small section of this subsequent session covered Page 3 and the visual representation of women, in response to the verbal evidence given by Anna van Heeswijk of Object on 24 January, and it is this section of the hearing which was analysed.

Written evidence to the Inquiry in relation to these two hearings which is in the public domain was also analysed. This included evidence submitted ahead of the first hearing on 24 January; namely Anna van Heeswijk's witness statement, a joint submission from Object and Turn Your Back on Page 3, and a submission from EVAW. There were also two follow-up letters written jointly to the Inquiry from Eaves, EVAW, Object and Equality Now sent in February 2012 and after the hearings had concluded in July 2012. Also analysed was Dominic Mohan's written evidence about Page 3 submitted ahead of his second appearance at the Leveson Inquiry.

I analysed the documents that make up the Leveson Report; specifically, the sections pertaining to the visual representation of women in UK print media – Volume II, Part F, Chapter Three, Section Three and Chapter Six, Section Eight, the recommendations regarding third party complaints contained in Volume IV and the specific recommendations regarding discriminatory representation of women in Volume IV Chapter Nine.

Written evidence and correspondence relating to these two hearings that is not in the public domain was also successfully gathered for the purposes of this research. This included a letter written by the Chief Executive of the women's charity Refuge written in support of *The Sun* ahead of Dominic Mohan's second appearance on 7 February 2012 and a letter written by lawyers for Sunday Sport Ltd.

Table 2: Summary of Textual Sources

	Date document created/date of hearing	Name of witness(es) giving evidence/author	Type of document	Length in minutes/words	In the public domain
1	Tuesday 24 January 2012, 11.44am to 1.05pm	Heather Harvey: Eaves Housing for Women, Jacqueline Hunt: Equality Now, Marai Larasi: End Violence Against Women coalition (EVAW), Anna van Heeswijk: Object	Transcript of oral evidence given at Leveson Inquiry hearing	1 hour 21 mins, 11,741 words	In the public domain
2	Tuesday 7 February 2012, 4.07 to 5.31pm	Dominic Mohan, editor of *The Sun* newspaper	Transcript of oral evidence given at Leveson Inquiry hearing	26 mins, 3,999 words relating to Page 3 (1 hour 24 mins, 7,821 words total)	In the public domain
3	Monday 23 January 2012	Anna van Heeswijk: Object	Written evidence submitted to the Leveson Inquiry	3,018 words	In the public domain
4	December 2011	Object and Turn Your Back on Page 3	Written evidence submitted to the Leveson Inquiry	6,241 words plus a selection of newspaper cuttings	In the public domain
5	January 2012	End Violence Against Women (EVAW)	Written evidence submitted to the Leveson Inquiry	10,407 words	In the public domain
6	Monday 27 February 2012	Heather Harvey: Eaves Housing for Women, Jacqueline Hunt: Equality Now, Holly Dustin: End Violence Against Women coalition (EVAW), Anna van Heeswijk: Object	Written evidence submitted to the Leveson Inquiry	701 words	In the public domain

7	Friday 13 July 2012	Heather Harvey: Eaves Housing for Women, Jacqueline Hunt: Equality Now, Holly Dustin: End Violence Against Women coalition (EVAW), Anna van Heeswijk: Object	Written evidence submitted to the Leveson Inquiry	3,050 words	In the public domain
8	Sunday 5 February 2012	Dominic Mohan, editor of *The Sun* newspaper	Written evidence submitted to the Leveson Inquiry	2,184 words	In the public domain
9	Thursday 29 November 2012	Lord Justice Leveson	Leveson Report Volume II, Part F, Chapter Three, Section Three and Chapter Six, Section Eight	8,253 words	In the public domain
10	Thursday 29 November 2012	Lord Justice Leveson	Leveson Report, Volume IV recommendations relating to women and third-party complaints	4,340 words	In the public domain
11	Saturday 4 February 2012	Sandra Horley, CBE, Chief Executive, Refuge, women's aid charity	Written evidence submitted to the Leveson Inquiry (letter in support of *The Sun*)	310 words	Not in the public domain
12	Monday 5 November 2012	JMW Solicitors LLP, Lawyers for Sunday Sport Ltd	Written evidence submitted to the Leveson Inquiry (response to Rule 13 Letter issued by the inquiry)	8,040 words	Not in the public domain

Rationale: Data collection: elite interviews

Supplementary data collection included qualitative research conducted via semi-structured face-to-face and phone interviews with key campaigners on these issues. These interviews were with feminists who were actively campaigning about media sexism at the time of the

Leveson Inquiry or soon after, two of whom who spoke at one of the Leveson Inquiry hearings I analysed. As well as these primary interviews which I analysed, I also carried out contextual background interviews with nine other people whose work was closely linked to the issues covered in this research, including MPs, politicians, media commentators, academics and regulators.

I use the term 'elite' when referring to my participants as I follow the definition given by Hochschild, who explains;

> by 'elite' I do not necessarily mean someone of high social, economic, or political standing; the term indicates a person who is chosen by name or position for a particular reason, rather than randomly or anonymously (Hochschild, 2009).

For the purposes of this thesis I therefore selected interviewees based on their experience of, and proximity to, campaigning about media representation of women. Participants were chosen for their insight into, and experience of, the issues at the heart of this research. Thus I chose to carry out elite interviewing because I was interested in canvassing the attitudes, perceptions and experiences of my participants in relation to my research questions and the wider issues of media sexism and public misogyny.

I therefore applied a purposive sampling technique which involved creating a list of targets and selecting participants with experience of campaigning on media sexism. I was particularly keen to interview women who gave evidence at the Leveson Inquiry as they were able to look back and rationalise as well as look forward and future cast.

Initially I drew up a list of approximately 50 people – this extended to almost 70 people as my research progressed. I prioritised this list based on those who could offer most insight and had most experience of the issues, and made requests via email, phone and direct message on social media. As my research progressed and it became clearer who my key targets were, I did an audit of gaps in order to focus my efforts. My primary analysis and contextual background interviews were conducted in two batches; one at the end of my second year and beginning of my third year, from December 2017 to May 2018, and one at the end of my third year in January and February 2019.

Fourteen interviews were conducted in total, five of which were used as data for primary analysis, and nine of which provided contextual background information. The primary

interviews analysed were with five feminist campaigners – Anna van Heeswijk (Object), Heather Harvey (Eaves Housing for Women, now at the Nia Project), Lucy-Anne Holmes (No More Page 3), Martha Jephcott (Nottingham misogyny hate crime campaign) and Rebecca Mordan (Reclaim the Night and Scary Little Girls theatre company).

The nine background interviews were with two MPs; Jess Phillips (Labour, Birmingham Yardley) and Jo Swinson (Liberal Democrat, East Dunbartonshire, now leader of the party); a former Solicitor General and Police and Crime Commissioner, now The Victims' Commissioner, Dame Vera Baird; a regulator, Lexie Kirkconnell-Kawana (complaints and investigations manager at media regulator IMPRESS); five media commentators and academics, Professor Roy Greenslade, Professor George Brock, Professor Brian Cathcart, Professor Jane Martinson and columnist Suzanne Moore.

Five of my participants (van Heeswijk, Harvey, Brock, Cathcart and Greenslade) gave verbal and written evidence to the Leveson Inquiry. My participants ranged in age from 24 to 70, were mainly White British, were all University educated and were mainly based in London at the time of interview. Eleven of my participants were women, three were men. (Please see Appendix 6 for a more detailed participant demographic.)

Of the four women who gave evidence at the Leveson Inquiry, I sought interviews with two – Anna van Heeswijk of Object and Heather Harvey of Eaves Housing for Women. I focused on van Heeswijk and Harvey as these two women articulated arguments at the inquiry about the key themes of this research – objectification, the silencing of women in public life, stereotyping and media sexism. Additionally Object was at the forefront of feminist campaigning on issues of cultural sexism and misogyny in the years before and during the Leveson Inquiry, and the work of this organisation, and others like No More Page 3, were central to addressing RQ2 and exploring the feminist strategies used in campaigning against media sexism at this time. As will be discussed in detail in **Chapter Six**, which traces the feminist discourses articulated at the inquiry, the work of Equality Now and End Violence Against Women was less tied to the themes of this research and they were not engaged in feminist activism and campaigning on issues of media sexism at this time. At the inquiry, Jacqui Hunt's evidence for Equality Now was a more wide-ranging comment on women's equality, and Marai Larasi of End Violence Against Women focused exclusively on media portrayal of violence against women. Similarly, organisations such as Refuge and Feminist's Against Censorship, and individuals such as Germaine Greer were approached for interview as the

emphasis in this thesis was on exploring the accounts of feminists campaigning against media sexism both during and after the Leveson Inquiry.

Table 3: List of participants: Primary analysis interviews with feminist campaigners

	Name	Relevant organisation(s)	Type of organisation/role	Job title(s)	Gave written and oral evidence to the Leveson Inquiry
1	Anna van Heeswijk	Object	Grassroots direct-action feminist lobbying and campaigning organisation	Campaign Manager/CEO	Gave written and oral evidence to the Leveson Inquiry
2	Lucy-Anne Holmes	No More Page 3	Grassroots direct-action feminist campaigning organisation	Founder/activist, novelist, actor	Did not give written or oral evidence to the Leveson Inquiry
3	Martha Jephcott	Hollaback! Nottingham, Nottingham Citizens UK	Nottingham Misogyny Hate Crime campaign	Campaigner, Misogyny Hate Crime Trainer for Nottingham Police	Did not give written or oral evidence to the Leveson Inquiry
4	Heather Harvey	Eaves Housing for Women/Nia	Frontline service provision to survivors of male violence against women	Research and Development Manager	Gave written and oral evidence to the Leveson Inquiry
5	Rebecca Mordan	Reclaim the Night/Scary Little Girls theatre company	Grassroots direct-action feminist campaigning organisation, feminist theatre company	Founder/activist, Artistic Director, actor, scriptwriter	Did not give written or oral evidence to the Leveson Inquiry

Table 4: List of participants: Contextual Background interviews with MPs, politicians, media commentators, academics and regulators

	Name	Relevant organisation(s)	Type of organisation/role	Job title(s)	Gave written and oral evidence to the Leveson Inquiry
1	Jo Swinson MP	Liberal Democrat Party	Political party	MP for East Dunbartonshire, Leader of the Liberal Democrats	Did not give written or oral evidence to the Leveson Inquiry
2	Jess Phillips MP	Labour Party	Political party	MP for Birmingham Yardley	Did not give written or oral evidence to the Leveson Inquiry
3	Lexie Kirkconnell-Kawana	IMPRESS	Press regulator	Complaints and Investigations Manager, Barrister (New Zealand)	Did not give written or oral evidence to the Leveson Inquiry
4	Suzanne Moore	*The Guardian, The Sunday Times, The Daily Mail, The New Statesman*	Journalism	Journalist/columnist/commentator	Did not give written or oral evidence to the Leveson Inquiry
5	Professor Roy Greenslade	*The Guardian, London Evening Standard*, City University	Journalism, Higher Education	Professor/media commentator/journalist	Gave written and oral evidence to the Leveson Inquiry
6	Professor Brian Cathcart	*The Independent, The New Statesman*, Kingston University, Hacked Off	Journalism, Higher Education, media campaigning	Professor/media campaigner/journalist/ founder and former director of Hacked Off	Gave written and oral evidence to the Leveson Inquiry

7	Professor Jane Martinson	*The Guardian*, City University, Women in Journalism (WiJ)	Journalism, Higher Education, women's journalism network	Professor, journalist, former Head of Media at *The Guardian*	Did not give written or oral evidence to the Leveson Inquiry
8	Professor George Brock	City University, *The Times, The Observer*	Journalism, Higher Education	Professor, journalist	Gave written and oral evidence to the Leveson Inquiry
9	Dame Vera Baird DBE QC	Labour Party	Politics, law, higher education	Politician, barrister, academic, Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales, former Labour MP and Minister, former Solicitor General for England and Wales, former Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria	Did not give written or oral evidence to the Leveson Inquiry

Before entering the interviewing phase I drew up an interview schedule with questions. All participants were sent a participant information sheet and consent form ahead of the interviews (Please see Appendix 7 and 8). Eight interviews were conducted face to face and six were via telephone. Interview length ranged from 15 minutes to 1 hour 45 minutes. Although I always pursued face to face interviews, phone interviews were necessary due to the time constraints and busy schedules of some of the more high-profile participants I interviewed. Whilst the particularities of phone interviewing, such as the lack of facial cues and body language perhaps led to less intimacy and openness, and did not give the same sense of open-ended time and space to discuss at length, the phone interviews still provided me with valuable and insightful data.

All but one of the interviews were audio recorded and one involved taking detailed notes. I also took intermittent notes of salient points as all of the interviews were in progress, and jotted down some notes both immediately pre and post interview recording. In two cases some extra response and information came via email as a follow up to the interview.

Conducting an open and flexible interview process

Interviews were semi-structured via an interview guide which included several suggested topic areas. When carrying out the primary interviews with the five feminist campaigners for analysis, I asked them questions about the types of arguments they used when campaigning on media sexism and the types of arguments they encountered. I was interested to uncover strategies and techniques of resistance that may have been utilised by feminist campaigners to negotiate the hostile postfeminist context as outlined in **Chapter Three**. For instance when interviewing No More Page 3 campaigner Lucy-Anne Holmes, I asked questions such as: 'Did you have a particular approach or set of arguments regarding Page 3?', 'Was there a conscious decision about how to frame the arguments?', 'Were there things you emphasised or things you deliberately left out?', 'Was there an approach or argument that you felt gave the best chance of "winning"?, and ,'What were the key "counter arguments" that you encountered?' When interviewing the feminist campaigners who gave evidence at the inquiry, I added more specific questions, such as 'How did it come about that you gave evidence to the inquiry?', 'How did you decide which arguments to emphasise?' and 'How do you feel about the way your hearing was reflected in the final report?'. When carrying out my background contextual interviews with MPs, politicians, academics, media commentators and regulators, I asked more general questions about wider media sexism and regulation, such as 'In your opinion where are we with media sexism? What do you think still needs to change and what are the worst issues?' and 'Do you think any changes should be made to press regulation or legislation to reduce this type of imagery in print media?' As will be discussed in more detail shortly, I also attempted to create a snowballing effect via my background interviews, as contacts and suggestions from these interviews in some cases led to other interview opportunities opening up.

I was interested in interviewees contributing their own direction and thoughts to the process as well bringing my own questions. Topics and questions were modified and varied interview to interview based on the participant's highly individual experience and specialism, how much time I had with them and whether the interview was face to face or via phone. The schedule of interview questions changed as I was doing the interview depending on how the conversation developed. I always had a sense of the key things I wanted the interviewee to address, but my iterative process meant that I was able to be flexible when carrying out the interviews. Sometimes conversations veered away completely from the questions in the guide and typically on the spot decisions were made about ordering and importance of questions, with some questions being downgraded to the point of being unnecessary or irrelevant as the

interview progressed. The highly individual profiles of my participants meant that some subjects or lines of inquiry were simply not relevant to them or were areas in which they had limited knowledge. This open process to interviewing allowed me to listen to, and respond, to my participants and to provide as much space as possible to hear their views from their own position and perspective.

Due to the highly informed position of most of my primary participants, many of whom have been campaigning on the issues central to this thesis for years, if not decades, prior knowledge and understanding of this field of academic debate was often a given when interviewing. Whilst I did not explicitly put my interim findings to the participants whose interviews I analysed and ask them to give direct feedback, as a result of this prior knowledge and insight, what might be considered 'leading questions' were sometimes asked. This included, for instance, asking the feminist campaigners how they negotiated the difficult territory of discourses about harm to children. This issue of 'neutrality' and 'leading questions' was something I was mindful and aware of throughout the interview process. Initially I felt concerned that my questions were too leading and that I was not adopting a 'neutral' position as an academic researcher should. However as the process developed, and as Kvale (Kvale, 1996, pp. 157–159) notes, I came to understand and accept that leading questions are often unavoidable and not necessarily negative to the research process. For instance it may be necessary to ask what could be seen as a leading question in order to gain a very specific insight to a particular issue or topic, which may result in a new contribution to knowledge, especially given the time constraints when interviewing busy working participants who are in the public eye. In this regard then, I was transparent with my participants about the aims of my research and my research questions, precisely because I was interested in answers that directly spoke to and answered both my research questions and the interim findings of my textual analysis.

My interviews and the questions I asked were in direct contrast to the type that may be found in a study seeking very personal inner thoughts about participant's private life, whereby it may be necessary or desirable to offer a 'blank slate' in the interview process, with little or no allusion to the aims and research questions of the study. The highly informed and engaged nature of my primary participants means that, as one of the feminist campaigners noted, part of their daily work is the 'intellectual process' of considering, and attempting to resolve, the issues central to this research, albeit in an activist and political sphere, rather than an academic one. This is not to claim that the conversations were completely open. I, as

researcher, did control the topics discussed and questions asked, and the dialogue was, of course, far from a spontaneous, everyday conversation in this regard.

The fact that I conducted my interviews in two batches (at the end of my second year and again at the end of my third year), with the second quite late into my research timeline further enabled this process of my participants contributing to my research and informing my thinking as it developed. Although this extended data collection period was quite stressful in that it impacted on the final stages of my analysis, I feel that it was more fruitful than if I had conducted my interviews at an earlier stage – early in my second year and prior to my textual analysis for instance. As it was I had already gained considerable insight into my textual data ahead of my interviews and this allowed me to bring more clarity to the interviewing process and ensure that the conversations were aligned to the theoretical challenges at the heart of my study.

Through the interviews, feminist campaigners were able to tell me what they understood about the three discourses – such as how to tackle the moral right and liberal discourses and how to enable a feminist discourse. The interviews were a way to solicit reflective and reflexive comment from the interviewees about my research questions, with echoes of Roseneil, who describes using her participants as a 'research team with whom to mull over findings and hunches' (Roseneil, 1995, p. 12).

Ethics and confidentiality

I followed City University's ethics requirements with full clearance and ensured that I adhered to the Economic and Social Research Council's Framework for Research Ethics during this project. I was fully committed to undertaking my research in accordance with the principles contained in the ESRC's framework and to ensuring, as far as was possible, that no harm was done to participants, that any participation was entirely voluntary, and that my research was conducted with the highest standards of professional integrity possible.

My study incurred minimal risk as my main data was existing text in the public domain. In terms of interviews, my participants were all public figures, so any safeguarding was in the realm of protecting against any (very unlikely) potential reputational damage and/or damage to potential income-generation. I dealt with this by ensuring that all participants signed a consent form, and that all interviewees were given a participant information sheet ahead of the interview (Appendices 2 and 3).

The consent form and interview participant information sheet ensured that participants:

- Understood the aims and objectives of my research
- Consented to being interviewed as part of the research and understood how and where the interview would potentially be used
- Consented to being audio recorded (one interview was not recorded)
- Understood that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time
- Understood that they would not be anonymous in the study and that what was discussed would not be confidential, but that interviews would respect the privacy of the interviewees and deal with issues relating to their public role only

I also verbally summarised this information at the beginning of interviews and ensured that I had verbal consent from participants to audio record and that they had verbally indicated that they understood that participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time.

As noted, some interviews were face to face, others were telephone conversations. Where interviews were face to face, I put participants at ease by meeting at a time and place convenient to them (typically in their home, workplace or a café nearby). When interviewing in person, I tried to be as unobtrusive as possible with my recording device. I also opened interviews with a few background questions which were deliberately designed to be unchallenging and put participants at ease. I drew on my considerable previous personal experience and interview skills gained during my training and practice as a journalist.

From the outset it was clear to me that guaranteeing anonymity to my participants would be a false promise that would be almost impossible to carry through into the research. The high-profile nature of my participants and their presence as public figures, combined with the very distinct and particular careers and experiences of each participant would have rendered them identifiable even after removal of typical identifiers such as name, job and geographical location.

I explained to participants that I would not be able to guarantee them anonymity, and none of them had any issue with this. I decided where possible not to give participants anonymity unless they expressly required it, which no participant did. If a participant had requested complete anonymity I would likely have had to remove them from my research completely, due to my inability to carry this through. Where participants indicated that they did not want something to appear in my final research as it was confidential due to it being sensitive or personal information, or where they asked that something was ‘off the record’, I verbally

agreed to honour this and carry it through. For instance, one interviewee suggested that something they had said was an unsubstantiated rumour and could be libellous if repeated and attributed to them.

Whilst inability to grant anonymity was initially of concern to me, on reflection I am pleased that I named my research participants as I feel it served a further purpose. Giving participants credit and acknowledgement could be argued to be a feminist approach which narrows the distance and the power dynamic between researcher and participant.

Data analysis: approach

My research was concerned with discursive strategies and power relations across several big sets of data. One of the documents I analysed was 8,000 words long, for instance, and I analysed both existing text from the Leveson Inquiry and interviews I conducted myself. I initially proposed a discourse analysis, but it became clear early on in the research process that this kind of micro, very detailed analysis of language would not be appropriate for such a large data set, and would create inconsistency and imbalance in the study if only applied to the text and not the interviews.

Similarly, although I did consider a content analysis part way through my study, it was clear that I wanted to go beyond counting the content of the data, to attend to the power relations, interactions and latent meaning on a much bigger scale, to 'the discursive procedures whereby human beings gain an understanding of their common world' (Letherby, 2003, p. 52). I thus decided on a thematic analysis across both text and interviews, which was both appropriate to the type and volume of data I was analysing and the research questions I addressed in this study. In accordance with Braun and Clarke's definitions, I was interested in analysing my data at the latent level;

> to identify or examine the *underlying* ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations – and ideologies – that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 84).

I used Braun and Clarke's six phases of thematic analysis as a guide for my analytical process, namely:

1. Familiarizing yourself with your data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes

4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

(Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 87).

Thematic analysis also enabled me to effectively weave together the two data sets in order to connect experience with understanding, a key principle of feminist research where 'knowledge is derived from a committed feminist exploration of women's experiences of oppression' (Stanley and Wise, 1990, p. 27). This mixed methods approach and the volume and many different types of data analysed did present problems when structuring and merging the findings of my research. The weaving involved in combining the two different strands of data was particularly hard due to the big historical gap between them and certainly made the research process messier, but it also made it more authentic and less abstract.

Data analysis; texts

I subjected the textual data to a systematic thematic analysis with three key stages. Firstly, as outlined at the beginning of this chapter, I identified and defined the three discourses I wanted to plot, trace and uncover; a moral right discourse, liberal discourse and feminist discourse.

In early 2016 I undertook a reading of the two hearings, where I took notes whilst reading the transcripts in detail for the first time. I made observations, notes and comments, highlighting quirks, points of interest, points for further inquiry, absences, contradictions whilst noticing and tracing themes. (This was consonant with Braun and Clarke's notion of the first phase – an initial reading of the data.)

For the second stage of analysis in mid 2018, I tidied the texts and imported them into NVivo. Referring closely to RQ1, What discourses are there in the Leveson Inquiry and Report that shape understanding of the representation of women in UK print media? I identified themes and categories within the three discourses in order to trace the moral right, liberal and feminist discourses in my data. I created nodes via a thematic coding framework in NVivo and then carried out detailed coding for each hearing and relevant written submission to the Inquiry. I also coded each participant's contributions as cases.

I solidified the nodes by deleting, extending, renaming and moving them. This went through several iterations. As the coding process continued, some themes were deleted as there was no relevant content. Some themes were expanded upon with parent themes sometimes

growing and extending to children and grandchildren. After roughly five iterations I created a set coding scheme broken down into three sections, one for each discourse, with several subsections to each. Thus my experience of this core process of coding and theming the data (phases two to five as outlined by Braun and Clarke) was a 'recursive process, where movement is back and forth as needed, throughout the phases' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 86).

In the final stage I then coded all the documents to this coding scheme in NVivo by highlighting and recording each node in the text. I produced tables and word clouds showing the frequency of each word, term or usage and patterns of themes by participant and document. Finally I created coding outputs by copying and pasting the data for each node from all participants into a Word document, allowing me to look at and review the data for each node in one document. I repeated this process for each of the three discourses – feminist, liberal and moral. At this point I was ready to move to the sixth stage of Braun and Clarke's process of thematic analysis; producing the report, based on my findings regarding the three discourses with an analysis chapter for each.

Data analysis; interviews

Coding of my primary interviews was not carried out in accordance with a coding scheme, but was again an iterative process which included several systematic steps. Firstly, transcribing – in which I listened and looked for themes and similarities with the coding scheme and the interim findings of the coded textual data. (Three of the interviews analysed were transcribed by me, two were transcribed by a transcriber. This was due to the volume of data I was analysing and the time constraints of the project.) Secondly, an initial reading – in which I highlighted quotes of interest and similarity with the coding scheme, three discourses and research questions. This was followed by coding in Word – in which I highlighted the quotes that talked most directly to the themes identified in the coding scheme. I then pasted all the highlighted quotes from all the primary participants into a Word document. Second stage coding followed – in which I amalgamated the quotes from all the interviews into themed sections and subsections. I then paraphrased each section in a few sentences. I then summarised each section with a one-line heading and each subsection or mini-theme with a one-line heading. Finally I selected the most relevant and pertinent quotes that spoke to each theme.

During the coding process I was attendant to the historical aspect of the interviews with feminist campaigners, specifically the rationale and explanation of their strategies and arguments when campaigning at the Leveson Inquiry and beyond. How did they account for

and understand this argumentation in hindsight? I was also interested in future casting – what did the interviewees have to say about the direction that this issue is going in and the dominance of these discourses?

Opening up space in the study for my participants

In this thesis I could have just presented an analysis of the Leveson Inquiry hearings, but it was important to me to give some of the campaigners who presented evidence at the Inquiry, and some of those who have campaigned on this issue both before and after, a voice and a platform. Effectively, some of my participants spoke twice in this research – once on record at the Inquiry, and once in an interview with me. This could almost be seen as a 'right of reply'; in my interviews, participants had time to think, reflect and recount at length without the pressure of being in the glare of the high profile public spotlight at the Leveson Inquiry, where they were being live streamed and cross examined by a barrister and senior judge under a time constraint.

When I came to write my final analysis chapter, **Chapter Eight**, I tested several different structural approaches. I considered weaving interviews into the analysis of the hearings. I considered splitting the chapters according to speakers. In the end what felt most right to me was to effectively hand the final analysis chapter over to the women campaigners; to let them speak for themselves in their own words and be heard; to allow them space to explain, discuss, reflect, commiserate and celebrate their campaign struggles and triumphs, and to present a multiplicity of approaches, strategies and tactics without judgement. In step with the way that Leveson conducted the hearing and the report in relation to the women, I came to understand that trusting women and giving them the public platform to speak and be heard was a political act.

An overarching theme in this work is of women being silenced and pushed off public platforms and debates, (either by overt misogynist attacks and attempts to shut them down or by less direct institutional sexism and misogyny). I came to realise that I was perpetuating and contributing to this process by bringing my own internalised misogyny to bear, by critiquing and judging the actions of the campaigners, when in fact what I needed to do was let them speak for themselves and consider more thoroughly the constraints and context within which they were operating. In this respect I was guided by Riddell's insightful discussion of how feminist politics and values come to bear on the ethics of data interpretation. Riddell draws on both her own and Finch's analysis (Finch, 1986) to describe how interpretation may become closer and more nuanced when taking into account situation and context. In this way Riddell

explains that Finch was able to both maintain academic rigour and take an ethical stance with regards to her participants as she;

> arrived at a more subtle interpretation, and was not obliged either to suppress data or to suggest an analysis which might have been damaging to the women who had helped her do the research (Riddell, 2005, p. 87).

In her own research on the gendered and classed nature of pupils' subject option choices at secondary school, Riddell's initial finding was that working-class women were uninvolved in the educational and career choices of their daughters, however taking into account the context in which these women were operating, she concluded that;

> working class women were just as radical as middle class women, and their mistrust of their daughters moving into non-traditional areas of the curriculum stemmed from their perception of what jobs were actually available in the local labour market (Riddell, 2005, p. 87).

This mirrors my own experience of research, in which an initial analysis of women's accounts of their choices and actions may be simplistic and overly critical, but a closer analysis taking into account situation and context leads to more nuanced findings.

Given the nature of the interviews, and the informed and potentially 'leading' questions I asked, it was important to ensure that the position and views of the participants was carried through accurately into the final study. In this regard I paid particular attention not to attribute false meaning to quotes through excessive editing, and to indicate where an answer was given in response to a particular line of inquiry, thus establishing that the quotes were the result of a dialogue and rumination between two people, not an unprompted monologue or subconscious train of thought on the part of the participant.

Part Three: Research challenges

Access to documentation

As noted, in terms of access and authorisation, most, but not all, of the transcripts, documents and film footage that make up the Leveson Inquiry are freely available in the public domain. However, despite the fact that the Leveson Inquiry was a public inquiry under the Inquiries Act 2005, access to some key documentation required for this thesis was not in the public domain.

I therefore submitted several Freedom of Information requests to the National Archives and the Department for Digital, Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) in order to attempt to access this data, some of which were successful and some of which were not.

Access to the letter written by the women's charity Refuge was made by a FOI request which was initially denied by the National Archives but was granted when the request was escalated to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

Access to a letter written by lawyers for Sunday Sport Ltd was requested via a Freedom of Information request to both the National Archives and DCMS. Access was denied by both the National Archives and DCMS. This request was escalated but access was still denied. I subsequently petitioned the Managing Editor of Sunday Sport Ltd who emailed me the document in question – an 8,000-word letter written on 5 November 2012 in response to a Rule 13 warning issued by the Inquiry on 16 October 2012. The Rule 13 Letter advised Sunday Sport Ltd that it was the subject of written and oral evidence to the Inquiry by the women's organisations that was critical of its publications, and offered an opportunity to respond in writing.

Therefore a frustration to this research was not being able to access all of the written evidence and correspondence relating to the two Leveson Inquiry hearings in question. However, as I go on to discuss, a limit on the data analysed was eventually necessary due to the sheer volume amassed, and further data analysis would arguably not have strengthened the work.

Access to participants

Challenges I anticipated when conducting elite interviews were; gaining access, being offered limited time for interviews, and complex power dynamics where the typical power balance between researcher and researched is inverted (See McDowell, 1998; Harvey, 2010, 2011 for detailed discussions of these challenges). Some participants were easy for me to access due to my contacts as an activist, journalist and PR, but others were very difficult to pin down due to their high profile nature and busy schedule, and the competing demands on their time. I initially anticipated that my purposive sampling technique would lead on to a snowballing sampling technique in my interviews, and this did work well in some cases. However, again due to the high-profile nature of my targets and their time constraints, there was often an (understandable) reluctance to pass on contact details for people who are already very in demand and under pressure. In some cases these might be professional contacts that have been hard won, and for whom maintenance of a good-working relationship is critical to their

job (and thus passing on their details indiscriminately to someone else would jeopardise this), or they might be personal friendship contacts (and thus passing on their details may bring a personal relationship into the public realm and be seen as a kind of sullying or betrayal of the friendship.)

In several cases even where I gained access to a potential subject, I was met with a forthright and unequivocal 'no'. Typically, as detailed, this was due to competing priorities and pressured time constraints and the volume of such similar requests that these subjects receive. Some of the more high profile subjects I approached (such as Clare Short) are in a position where a default 'no' is the norm, and they have reached a stage in their life and career whereby there is nothing to gain from further discussing a subject they have discussed in depth on the record on numerous occasions. However despite the challenges presented by seeking elite interviews I did manage to conduct five in depth interviews which were analysed as part of this research, and nine background interviews with participants who had considerable insight to bear on this topic due to their years of campaigning and work in this area.

Volume of data

I note that the volume of data to analyse, both text and talk, in the given time, was certainly a challenge as there is only so much data one person can analyse within the parameters of a thesis length (word count and duration). I initially felt downcast that I only achieved 14 interviews of my initial goal of 20, of which five were analysed in depth, and that some key interviewees declined to take part. However as I moved further into the analysis it became clear that this number was in fact not only perfectly adequate to address my research questions and carry out this study, but that increasing the number of interviews would have hindered my research process due to the sheer volume of data that I was amassing. Arguably the additional workload involved in presenting an analysis of all the data I had access to would not have led to the same level of thoroughness or attention to detail and would in fact have led to a weaker and more generalised study. As Potter and Wetherell note;

> It is *not* the case that a larger sample size necessarily indicates a more painstaking or worthwhile piece of research. Indeed, more interviews can often simply add to the labour involved without adding anything to the analysis (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 161).

Despite the challenge presented by this volume of data, I still feel that a mixed methods approach was right for this research as it resulted in wide array of rich data which I was able to

analyse using a systematic process in order to address my research questions in a detailed and unique way.

Concluding summary

In this chapter I have outlined my research methodology and the particular processes I undertook as part of this thesis, as well as the challenges I encountered. I paid particular attention to how I situate myself as a feminist researcher in relation to my work, and how I bring a feminist standpoint and understanding to the research process. I will now go on to apply my research methodology in the forthcoming analysis **Chapters Six, Seven and Eight**.

Chapter Six: Tracing feminist discourses at the Leveson Inquiry

Introduction

Having established the methodology for this study, this thesis now moves on to present the analysis. This is structured as three chapters. The first, **Chapter Six**, is an analysis of the hearing at which the four women's organisations gave evidence and a consideration of how these feminist arguments were taken forward by Leveson in his report. The second analysis chapter, **Chapter Seven**, theorises the varieties of sexism on display at The Leveson Inquiry. This chapter is an analysis of the written and oral evidence given by Dominic Mohan, then editor of *The Sun*, about the newspaper's Page 3 feature, alongside analysis of a written submission from Sunday Sport Ltd about the representation of women in its titles. The final analysis chapter, **Chapter Eight**, focuses on moral discourse at the Leveson Inquiry, in both *The Sun* and Sunday Sport Ltd's evidence, and in Leveson's final report. **Chapter Eight** also acts as a kind of triangulation of the textual analysis by drawing on the interviews conducted with feminist campaigners and analysing their accounts of the complex negotiations and tactics they employ to articulate their arguments and ensure they are heard. Further discussion of the three analysis chapters will be provided in **Chapter Nine**, the conclusion to the thesis.

This key aim of this chapter, **Chapter Six**, is to address RQ1 and analyse feminist discourses at the Leveson Inquiry. The chapter is structured in four parts. In Part One a short recap summary is offered of the Leveson Inquiry hearings which are to be analysed. The particular landscape that the women were operating in at the Leveson Inquiry is defined, drawing on the contextual framework established in the literature in **Chapter Three** and the conceptual framework created in **Chapter Four**. This contextual and conceptual framework provides the basis for the analysis of feminist argumentations at the Leveson Inquiry that follows. The second section theorises language use by the women who gave evidence at the inquiry and identifies patterns in frequency and absence placing this in the established contextual landscape. In the third section three key framings are identified which were used by the campaigners to reposition the narrative away from the dominant moral and liberal discourses and to foreground feminist discourses about structural inequality and discrimination. The three key positioning frames established are; sexualised imagery as discrimination not obscenity, an emphasis on structural inequality and women and girls as an oppressed class, in particular via a repositioning of male violence against women, and the silencing of women as a form of censorship. The content of the women's argumentation is considered through an analysis of the topics and critiques of media sexism that they chose to present and emphasise. Four key argumentations are

identified; around silencing, stereotyping, objectification and male violence, and the way these topics were presented is analysed in detail. Finally, the extent to which Leveson took on the argumentation put forward by the women and upheld their articulations is also analysed in this chapter. As noted, this chapter will be built upon in the interview analysis in **Chapter Eight** and elaborated upon in the discussion in **Chapter Nine**.

Part One: Setting the scene

Summary of The Leveson Inquiry hearings analysed

Four women's organisations gave evidence to the Leveson Inquiry – Object, Eaves Housing for Women, Equality Now and End Violence Against Women. The hearing took place on Tuesday 24 January 2012 and lasted for approximately an hour and 20 minutes, from 11.44am to 1.05pm. Representing these organisations were; Anna van Heeswijk Campaigns Manager for Object, which campaigned against the sexual objectification of women in the media and popular culture; Heather Harvey Lilith Research and Development Manager for Eaves Housing for Women, a charity which worked to combat male violence against women; Jacqui Hunt, London director of Equality Now, an international campaign group which seeks to use the law to end women's inequality globally; and Marai Larasi Co-Chair of End Violence Against Women, a UK coalition of organisations campaigning to end male violence against women and girls, and Director of Imkaan, which focuses on male violence against black and minority ethnic women and girls.

The women were questioned by barrister Robert Jay and, to a lesser extent, judge Lord Justice Leveson. Each woman presented a different aspect of the representation of women in media. Anna van Heeswijk covered what she referred to as the 'sexualisation' and 'objectification' of women and 'Page 3 imagery'. Marai Larasi and Heather Harvey discussed media coverage of male violence against women and, in particular, rape. Jacqui Hunt gave a briefer, more wide-ranging comment about women's equality.

Following this hearing the then editor of *The Sun*, Dominic Mohan, was recalled to give evidence to the Inquiry about Page 3 (as well as other issues that had arisen since he initially gave evidence to the Inquiry on 9 January 2012). As noted, Mohan's evidence regarding Page 3 alongside a written submission from Sunday Sport Ltd will be discussed in the following chapter.

Contextualising feminist argumentation at the Leveson Inquiry

As established in **Chapter Three** the Leveson Inquiry took place at a particular moment of incipient feminism which began in the mid 2000s, gathered pace in the year after the Leveson Inquiry and continued with the global #MeToo movement and the women's marches against Trump in 2017. The evidence given by the women at The Leveson Inquiry can be read as part of this resurgence of global feminist activism in the mid to late 2000s.

The organisations Object, which gave oral and written evidence to the inquiry, and Turn Your Back on Page 3, which contributed to the written evidence submitted, were key examples of this swell of grassroots activism and online connectivity and organising. Prior to giving evidence at the inquiry Object had been at the forefront of successful and high-profile direct action since 2003, lobbying and campaigning with regards to lads' mags, lap-dancing clubs and prostitution. As implied by the organisation's name, Object was concerned with the sexual objectification of women, and thus focused on cultural sexism, in common with much feminist campaigning at this time (Cochrane, 2013, p. 212). Object's position drew on the academic research established in **Chapter Four**, particularly the notion of objectification as a discrete harm (Langton, 1993; MacKinnon, 1993; Nussbaum, 1995).

However as established in **Chapter Three**, The Leveson Inquiry also took place at a key moment of renewed misogyny as the intense online vitriol directed at women was starting to become apparent. Furthermore, drawing on the academic understanding outlined in **Chapter Three**, it is clear that the women who gave evidence at the Leveson Inquiry were operating in a complex postfeminist, neoliberal context. Postfeminism denotes a contested terrain in which feminism is achieved yet denied (McRobbie, 2009, p. 12). The particular postfeminist context in 2012 led to the women giving evidence following an intense period of backlash and disavowal in the 1990s and early 2000s in which retrosexism and ironic laddism was at its peak. This presented a real challenge to feminist resistance which was typically dismissed as humourless and prudish, particularly around Page 3 and sexualised images of women (Williamson, 2003; Gill, 2007b; Ross, 2008). Neoliberalism casts structural inequality as invisible, foregrounds individual agency and choice (Gill and Kanai, forthcoming, p. 9) and aligns with capitalist interests, such as that of the pornography, fashion and beauty industries (Lazar, 2011; Jyrkinen, 2012; Gallagher, 2013; Sarikakis, 2013; Boyle, 2014). Critiquing and resisting normalised and mainstreamed sexualised images of women within these conditions is therefore fraught with complexity.

The conceptual framework outlined in **Chapter Four** established the discursive landscape the women were operating in; in which both moral and liberal discourses dominated, particularly

via obscenity law, entrenched notions of taste and offensiveness and a strong philosophical tradition of free speech and individual rights anchored in Mill (McGlynn and Ward, 2014). Successfully articulating a feminist discourse around discrimination, human rights, structural inequality and gendered power relations was therefore challenging in this context.

Taken together these particular conditions denote a complex terrain in which to articulate resistance. Having established this contextual and conceptual framework, this chapter now sets out to uncover the nature of feminist argumentations and how they were mobilised at The Leveson Inquiry, given this fraught and challenging landscape.

Part Two: Language use at the hearing: Reading the feminist lexicon

In order to consider and deconstruct the argumentations and approaches taken by the women at The Leveson Inquiry this chapter now sets out to examine their lexical choices and expressions. This language use, including frequency and absence of key words and the type of words chosen, is considered in the context of the complex terrain outlined above in order to theorise feminist resistance at this point in time.

One of the most striking patterns identified in the analysis of the evidence given by the four women's groups at the Leveson Inquiry is how frequently the words 'women', 'woman', 'women's', 'girl' and 'girls' were deployed – 152 times in total across the 80-minute hearing. In contrast the word 'female' was not used at all, the word 'gender' was used just twice by the women and the word 'equality' on just ten occasions. Marai Larasi, co-chair of the End Violence Against Women coalition (EVAW) and director of Imkaan, which works to combat male violence against black and ethnic minority women and girls, demonstrated the strongest association with this discourse. Larasi was the only person across the whole inquiry to use the term 'patriarchy', understood as a system of power and domination of men over women. This language use demonstrates the sex-class understanding of women and girls as an oppressed group that the four women brought to the inquiry. This indicates a basis in the radical and revolutionary feminist understandings outlined by Rees and Mackay (Rees, 2007, pp. 204–212; Mackay, 2015a, pp. 126–130). Mackay explains this position via the theory of Millett as 'the understanding of patriarchy as political rather than biological' (Mackay, 2015a, p. 127). In this radical and revolutionary feminist framing of women as a sex-class it is not women's bodies that present the problem, but how women's bodies have been interpreted ideologically in order to oppress them.

Interestingly for a discussion concerned with media sexism, the words 'sexism' and 'sexist' were used relatively few times – there were just nine instances in total across the hearing. This is consistent with the noted shift towards growing use of these terms after decades of disuse (Williamson, 2003; Gill, 2011) and this moment of incipient feminism. Speaking at a literary event in 2018 for instance, the founder of Everyday Sexism, Laura Bates noted that prior to setting up her project in 2012 she rarely heard the word sexism, but that six years later she felt the word was commonly used and accepted (Bates, 2018). However, despite what could be read as a low frequency of usage, there is no doubt that on the occasions that the terms sexism and sexist were used during the women's hearing, the idea of media sexism was strongly and unequivocally asserted as will be analysed in more detail later in this chapter.

Elsewhere, Anna van Heeswijk of Object used the term 'sexualised' or 'sexualisation' 14 times across the hearing, referencing two government-backed reviews into the sexualisation of children and young people that were current at this time (Papadopoulos, 2010; Bailey, 2011). This could be read as a pragmatic and politically expedient tactic by the campaigners, pragmatically emphasising the preoccupation with sexualisation at the time, as reflected in government, media and wider societal priorities (Attwood, 2006; Thompson, 2010; Duits and van Zoonen, 2011).

The analysis identified that reference to misogyny at the hearing was even rarer than the term sexism – use of the word misogyny and associated stems occurred just six times across the inquiry. This included an exchange between barrister Robert Jay and Marai Larasi, where the word 'misogyny' was used twice, once by Jay and once by Larasi, and the word 'misogynistic' used once by Larasi. The other instance was at a hearing in November 2011 where journalist and former director of the campaign group Hacked Off, Joan Smith, gave evidence and referred to the 'misogyny of the tabloids' and 'misogyny in the media' as well as the title of her book, *Misogynies* (Smith, 1996). The term hate speech was used just three times during the Inquiry, and not at all at the women's hearing. Heather Harvey of Eaves did devote a section of her evidence to discussing the particular online abuse of women, but she did not frame this as misogynistic or hate speech, instead she referred to 'sexist and gendered abuse' and 'violent vitriolic language', which she stated was 'obscene' and 'intimidating' and calculated to silence women and prevent them from engaging in public debate. However, beyond the context of incipient feminism it is worth noting that the parameters of the inquiry did not cover the online sphere, perhaps explaining this absence somewhat.

Both the terms sexism and misogyny hold significance when analysing feminist discourses at this particular point in time. As Smith notes (Smith, 1996, pp. vii–ix), the word misogyny matters and is significant due to its explicit meaning – the hatred of women. In contrast, the term sexism can be applied to either sex, is understood to range from benevolent to hostile, e.g. Glick and Fiske's Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick and Fiske, 1997) and Mills's notion of overt and indirect sexism (Mills, 2008, p. 149), and does not denote hate, but 'prejudice, stereotyping or discrimination' (OED Online, 2008). Thus, whilst this study upholds sexist discrimination and the very real and direct impact it has on women and girls, the literature indicates that the term misogyny is typically seen as a more direct and unequivocal naming of women and girls' class-based oppression.

Unsurprisingly given the contextual landscape, an evolution in the meaning and use of the two terms – sexism and misogyny – appears to have been taking place over the past two decades (Loyet Gracey, 2019, pp. 71–2). Eight years on from the inquiry, following some significant feminist challenges to overt sexism, such as #MeToo, and following the murder of MP Jo Cox, misogynistic abuse, particularly online appears to be growing (Jane, 2014b, 2014a; Megarry, 2014; Cole, 2015; Holland *et al.*, 2017; Amnesty International, 2018). In this context, use of the term misogyny and misogynistic hate speech is understandably more frequent than it was at the time of the Leveson Inquiry. Thus in 2019 Aron argued that the term 'misogyny is having a moment' stating;

> *The word, which conventionally means hatred of women, was once a radical accusation. But recently, it seems to have eclipsed the gentler ''sexism'' and ''chauvinism'' in popular use. It's now unremarkable to find ''misogyny'' in a headline, much less a tweet* (Aron, 2019, p. 2).

Writing four years prior to the inquiry, Safire highlights this shift, and theorises about the collapse and conflation of the terms sexism and misogyny. Referencing the Oxford English Dictionary he notes;

> *In 1989, the definition was ''hatred of women''; in the 2002 revision, the definition was broadened to ''hatred or dislike of, or prejudice against women.''*

He argues;

> *Thus, sexist and misogynist are now in some respects synonymous. Because sexist has been so widely used, apparently misogynist – in the same sense of ''prejudice'' rather than ''hatred'' – now carries more force with those who are familiar with the word* (Safire, 2008, p. 22).

Manne notes a similar shift in several other dictionaries, including Australia's Macquarie Dictionary. The entry for misogyny was amended in Macquarie in 2012 to reflect the meaning emphasised in a speech made by Julia Gillard, the first woman Prime Minister of Australia, when she attacked the sexism and misogyny of her opponent Tony Abbott. The Macquarie Dictionary still leads with hatred of women as the first definition, but has added 'entrenched prejudice against women' as a second definition (Manne, 2018, pp. 81–4). However in common with the understanding in this thesis, Manne finds that despite this dictionary conflation there is still a distinction between misogyny as 'hostile' and 'enforcing' and sexism as 'discriminatory' and 'justifying' (Manne, 2018, p. 78).

Therefore the analysis in this study theorises that the language deployed by the four women's groups at the Leveson Inquiry indicates both an anchoring in the radical and revolutionary second-wave feminist discourses identified by Rees (Rees, 2007, pp. 204–212), and stands as a precursor to current more common lexical usage of terms such as sexism, misogyny and hate speech. This reflects the point in time at which the hearing was situated – as a feminist resurgence began to gather pace and these terms were beginning to be re-embraced and re-evaluated lexically. This language use is discussed further in the analysis of interviews with feminist campaigners in **Chapter Eight**, in which they reflect on their lexical choices in this hostile context.

This chapter will now go on to analyse the particular framings and critiques employed by the women at the hearing, including the way in which the campaigners attempted to negotiate and invalidate dominant moral and liberal discourses in order that a feminist discrimination argumentation could be heard.

Part Three: Framing strategies and critiques mobilised by the women at the hearing

This section identifies the ways in which the women attempted to reposition and reframe the dominant narratives about media representation of women, and create their own narratives about structural inequality for women in the UK. The analysis also examines the content of the women's argumentation and how they described and evidenced the way in which this

structural inequality is upheld and reinforced by mainstream media. The analysis identifies that these articulations were a key attempt to reject dominant narratives and present an alternative version of facts and reality in order that feminist argumentations were heard on the public record.

Three key framing strategies have been identified in the analysis which were used by the campaigners to reject the dominant moral and liberal discourses and reposition the narrative to foreground feminist analyses of structural inequality and discrimination. Firstly, a repositioning of liberal free speech arguments from the perspective of the silencing of women in public life (the campaigners argued that this is a component of male violence against women); secondly a repositioning of sexualised imagery as discrimination not as a moral discourse about obscenity; and thirdly, foregrounding feminist discourses via testimony about structural inequality for women in the UK, with an emphasis on repositioning dominant narratives about male violence against women and girls.

The analysis has established that the campaigners applied each of these three frames to their critique of mainstream print media in order to demonstrate and evidence institutional media sexism and bias and the impact that this has on women. The analysis has grouped four different critiques highlighted by the women; mainstream media silencing of women, in some cases via a campaign of deliberate harassment; narrow, negative and discriminatory stereotyping of women including the trivialisation and infantilisation of women; objectification as a direct harm and the normalising, normative effect this has; and a focus on irresponsible reporting of male violence against women and how mainstream media creates a conducive context in this regard. The analysis that follows will examine in turn the campaigner's attempts to refute liberal and moral discourses and to assert feminist discourses.

1. Rejecting Liberal discourses

Frame 1: The silencing of women in public life as a form of censorship and male violence against women

As noted previously the campaigners were concerned about the silencing of women in public life, both in mainstream print media and online. This analysis has established a framing in which the silencing of women in public life was positioned not only as a negative, but as a form of censorship. Heather Harvey, of Eaves Housing for Women, argued that this silencing 'curtails and limits women's freedom of expression and women's ability to engage in public debate.' Jacqui Hunt of the campaign group Equality Now, also referred to the censoring

impact of women being silenced, noting the need to make sure that women are not 'taken out of political and human and society participation'.

This approach could be read as an attempt to head-off and pre-empt the dominant liberal framing of free-speech absolutism as noted in **Chapter Four**. In this liberal argumentation any attempt to address representation of women in media as discrimination is negated as an incursion on free speech (in which the assumed subject is male). The campaigners repositioned and pushed back against this liberal discourse, framing the issue instead as an incursion on women's free speech. Harvey discussed silencing of women online, and framed this as one piece of the wider issue of women being silenced in public life, arguing that this abuse of women is:

> *about preventing or resenting women's right to comment on public matters. (…) there is a challenge to her right to have and express an opinion, and a lot of the women who blog themselves feel that this is actually about intimidating women into knowing their place.*

Furthermore this silencing of women was clearly framed by the campaigners as a form of violent intimidation of women, and as a particular type of extreme abuse directed specifically at women. When discussing the treatment that women receive online Harvey framed this as a kind of attack, stating that:

> *the abuse that women get when they comment on issues of public policy generally, but particularly on issues relating to women's rights or feminism, is very sexist and gendered abuse.*

Although a minor point in the oral evidence given by the women, Harvey's discussion of online abuse, and clear articulation of how this is a significant and serious concern with regards to the silencing of women in public life, is notable. This discussion predates wider awareness of online misogynistic abuse which eight years later has become much more evident and widely discussed.

Critique 1a: Print media silencing of women

Drawing on this established framing of the silencing of women in public life as a form of censorship and violence against women, the campaigners argued that this is a typical tendency in mainstream print media coverage. Harvey argued that in print media;

> *women's voices and women's issues are actually being silenced, to some extent intimidated, not adequately covered, or covered in a partial way, in a stereotyped way that can be misleading, misrepresentative, inaccurate and is not a true representation of how women experience life.*

The campaigners also presented cases which evidenced media silencing of women, and those who critique media representation of women, as a form of direct discrimination and attack. Examples were given at the hearing of direct harassment of women carried out by newspapers, such as a piece in *The Sun* about a Traveller family. Marai Larasi, of End Violence Against Women and Imkaan, noted an ethical breach stating that; 'the woman concerned complained of being harassed, her children were photographed.'

Anna van Heeswijk of Object detailed the campaign of intimidation and harassment carried out by *The Sun* over several years against public figures who criticised Page 3, beginning with: 'the real vilification and targeting of Clare Short, who initially instigated the campaign against Page 3 in the 1980s.' She highlighted a piece where;

> *Clare Short's face was superimposed onto a Page 3 model and the headline is: "Fat, jealous Clare brands Page 3 porn." They likened Clare Short to the "back of a bus" and they told jokes, in inverted commas, [such as] that making her into a Page 3 girl would be a "mission impossible".*

Van Heeswijk argued that this was a deliberate campaign to silence and close down any critique of Page 3, noting that politicians Harriet Harman and Evan Harris had also both been targeted and stating: 'this is clearly a bullying tactic' via a 'culture of fear which silences groups, politicians, anybody, from speaking out against the persistent portrayal of women as sex objects, against Page 3'. Van Heeswijk argued;

> *the effect has been to close down free speech in relation to groups and individuals feeling free to speak out and make a critique against these newspapers.*

Critique 1b: Discriminatory stereotyping as a barrier to women's participation in public life

In order to demonstrate this framing of women being silenced and censored in public life, the campaigners presented an extensive critique about persistent stereotyping in print media. The

campaigners demonstrated that this not only trivialises women, but creates an absence of realistic portrayals of women in the public sphere.

As noted in the academic research highlighted in **Chapter Three**, second-wave feminist activists critiqued narrow and negative stereotypes of women in mass media and situated this portrayal as a 'symbolic annihilation' of women 'from denigration through victimization and trivialization' (Tuchman, 1978, pp. 7–13). Whilst both academic and activist positions have been refined to become more nuanced over the past four decades, feminist activist critiques of sexualised imagery as sexist and damaging have remained constant. This is most notably the case via content analyses such as the Global Media Monitoring Project, which has documented the representation of women in mainstream media every five years since 1995, and in reports by organisations such as Women in Journalism (WiJ) which catalogue continued media sexism (Carter, Turner and Paton, 2012; Martinson *et al.*, 2012). As highlighted in **Chapter Three**, the internet enabled feminist resurgence of the mid to late 2000s was noted for a renewed focus on a sexual objectification agenda (Long, 2012; Cochrane, 2013; Redfern and Aune, 2013). Building on these understandings, all of the women who gave evidence at the hearing analysed in this chapter drew attention to problematic stereotyping of women in mainstream media, both in terms of negative portrayals and in terms of absence and lack of diversity and/or active representations.

Hunt was the most direct speaker in terms of naming this stereotyping directly as sexism arguing: 'sexist stereotypes in the media are a form of discrimination against women' and pushing for a need to 'really focus on the harms of this sexist stereotyping in media and it being a barrier to achieving the equal participation of women.' Anna van Heeswijk of Object was concerned with the impact of sexualised and objectified stereotypes and the narrow version of femininity this conveys, noting with reference to the promotion of Page 3 models as 'idols':

> *what story is this telling to young girls about what they should aspire to, about the stereotypes of femininity that are portrayed to young girls?*

She also highlighted a media tendency to portray men as active agents and women as passive objects, arguing:

> *I think we do have to ask ourselves what kind of a story this tells, especially to young children, to boys and girls, when they see in mainstream newspapers men in suits, men*

in sports attire, men as active participants, as subjects, and women as sexualised objects.

She argued with specific reference to comment which was printed alongside an image of a woman skiing that; 'even when the image itself is of a woman engaging in a sport, she is still sexualised and reduced to a body part.' Hunt highlighted the issue of absences in mainstream media portrayal, and the lack of diversity, noting; 'We don't have very diverse images of women in the media; BME women, older women, women with disabilities are virtually absent.' Larasi drew attention to the multiple layers of discrimination often found in this stereotyping, highlighting both sexist and racist portrayals in mainstream media. When discussing a media story about a Traveller family she noted:

apart from promoting racist stereotypes and a misogynistic position, I'm not quite sure what this particular story was hoping to do except feed particular stereotypes.

She went on: 'in my mind, the whole tone of this is completely irresponsible.'

Linking closely to this issue of negative and narrow stereotypes of women, there was a focus in the women's testimony on how women in public life and positions of power, particularly in politics, are portrayed. Hunt argued that: 'Women in decision-making roles: they have very negative stereotypes. Blair's babes, Dave's dolls', elaborating on the trivialising impact of these stereotypical depictions:

Even when the content of the article is about a very interesting issue or debate, the headlines on there signal immediately trivialisation of women, infantilisation of women, demeaning of women, so that women having an opinion is really seen, in a broader sphere, as something negative, and it reinforces the way society thinks about those issues and legitimises that.

The key recommendation emphasised by all four women at the Leveson Inquiry, to address this issue of entrenched sexist portrayals that they had identified, was introducing a facility for third party complaints. This was suggested as a fairly minor amendment to press regulation through changing the wording in The Editors' Code of Practice. The women argued that this would have a big impact in terms of allowing people to highlight and complain about discriminatory representation in print media. Hunt emphasised this call for a third party

complaints facility, as a 'means of bringing a complaint as a member of a group or a community', arguing that this is;

> *the only way you can bring in line the possibility of some of the less tangible but nonetheless real harms that could arise in a system that persists as being unequal and discriminatory.*

2. Rejecting moral discourses:

Frame 2: Repositioning sexualised imagery as discrimination not obscenity

Not only did the women demonstrate and name sexism in mainstream print media at the hearing, they crucially made the distinction between sexualised images as an issue of obscenity, taste and decency and sexualised images as an issue of discrimination. This was a key attempt to combat and reframe the dominant moral discourse on this issue, which, as detailed in **Chapter Four**, is anchored in obscenity legislation and the dominant notion of taste and decency. For instance, when discussing recommendations to the inquiry and the idea of women's groups being involved in the creation of a new press regulator, Hunt referred to the distinction between taste or tone, and gender equality and discrimination in the Editors' Code, saying;

> *we note there are those headlines of discrimination and inaccurate reporting, and there's also a carve-out for so-called good taste or tone, and I think if you don't understand the context and you don't understand the gender equality arguments, you might be persuaded in thinking this is about tone rather than actually about the substance of discrimination.*

Van Heeswijk similarly argued for an approach based on the impact on women not obscenity noting that the women's position was of;

> *gender equality being the baseline of any form of regulating this type of material, so that it is considered in relation to the impact that it has on women, the impact that it has on shaping the attitudes of children and young people about women, about young girls, rather than in relation to more subjective notions of obscenity.*

This was a significant intervention regarding the obdurate notion of taste and decency, and, as the analysis in **Chapter Seven** will discuss, is still a focal point for those who wish to defend and uphold the way these images are currently defined and treated.

Critique 2: Objectification as a negative and its normalising effect

In order to evidence and demonstrate a framing in which sexualised imagery is discrimination, a large part of the testimony given at this hearing, specifically by van Heeswijk of Object, focused on objectification in mainstream media and its impacts. In this regard van Heeswijk stated:

> *It is clear that the Page 3 tabloids contribute to a culture in which women are perceived as existing for the sole purpose of providing these sex objects, or being sex objects*

Van Heeswijk went on to argue that;

> *the common theme throughout this is the Page 3 feature, which is of a topless, or sometimes fully nude, young woman who is sexualised and objectified.*

She described the typical coverage in *the Sunday Sport*, urging:

> *if you care to look through it, you'll see that every page is just photograph upon photograph of more or less all white women (…) and these women are completely sexualised and objectified, degraded, portrayed as sex objects.*

Van Heeswijk argued that what she referred to as the 'mainstream Page 3 tabloid press' portrayed: 'women as sexualised objects who essentially are naked or nearly naked on, in the case of *The Sport*, every single page.'

This critique reflects the academic research (Langton, 1993; MacKinnon, 1993; Nussbaum, 1995) in emphasising the way this objectification reduces women to body parts, as van Heeswijk argued:

> *what we're trying to illustrate here is the extent to which women are persistently and relentlessly portrayed as a sum of sexualised body parts within the Page 3 tabloid press*

She later noted: ‘in this exhibit the women are completely nameless, headless. It's only focusing on one part of their body, which is extremely objectifying and sexualised.’ Two examples discussed by Van Heeswijk and Jay related to a piece about the glamour-model Kelly Brook which focused on her breasts, and a piece about the sister of the Duchess of Cambridge, Pippa Middleton, which focused solely on her bottom. Van Heeswijk articulated a discourse which situated sexualised imagery as pornography arguing ‘there is a sort of gradient of extremity running from *The Sun* to *The Daily Star* to *The Sport*’. She noted that these tabloids often carry ‘adverts for the porn and sex industry’ and when Jay asked:

> *if one were to rename these papers Penthouse, Mayfair, or whatever, what is the difference, if any, between a publication which is (…) expressively pornographic and the material we've just been looking at? Is there a difference, and if so, what is it?*

Van Heeswijk responded:

> *I think you'll find that there isn't a marked difference between the content which exists within these classified pornographic materials and the contents within some of these mainstream Page 3 tabloids.*

Whilst arguing for sexualised imagery to be considered as *actual* pornography, van Heeswijk also articulated the idea of the normalising, normative effect of objectification and sexism as a discrete harm, and the notion of mainstream media creating a cultural continuum from small scale to bigger scale sexism and lack of equality for women and girls. As noted previously, van Heeswijk argued with reference to one image that it normalised behaviour such as using camera phones to engage in voyeuristic, harassing and bullying behaviour such as upskirting. She noted more generally: ‘it is actually more harmful to have these images within mainstream newspapers because of the normalising, (..) legitimising effect that it has’, and

> *the fact that they exist within a newspaper lends them a legitimacy and makes this type of portrayal of women seem unquestionable, normal and acceptable.*

3. Foregrounding feminist discourses about structural inequality

Frame 3: Repositioning male violence against women and girls

Reflecting the noted language-use framing women and girls as a class or group, a large component of the women’s testimony was thus concerned with articulating the material

reality for women and girls in the UK at that point in time, and the particular issues and oppressions facing them. Consistent with the emphasis found in both radical and revolutionary feminist frameworks as identified by Rees (Rees, 2007, pp. 204–212), the structural issue affecting women described in most detail at this hearing was violence against women. This direct and unequivocal naming and calling out of violence against women was unusual to this extent in mainstream debate at this point in time in which postfeminist neoliberal discourses of choice and personal responsibility prevailed (Litosseliti, Gill and García-Favaro, 2019). Due to the remit of the inquiry, there was necessarily an emphasis on issues most pertinent to mainstream print media. However, the narrative emphasis went beyond this, to put a reframing of violence against women and girls on the record more generally, not just in the way this relates to and intersects with media coverage.

With regards to violence against women, both Harvey and Larasi presented the day to day existence and reality of women's lives which are directly affected by this violence. Both women documented the extent and type of this violence. Harvey sought to put this reality on the record stating at the outset:

> *the position we're coming from, which reflects the position in CEDAW and other international conventions, is that violence against women is linked directly to the public policy sphere. It's linked to our society and our economy and our choices. It's not inevitable and it's a reflection, and a cause and a consequence of inequality.*

Larasi documented the facts of violence against women emphasising how common and widespread it is, stating that 'women are murdered twice a week by a current or former partner, over 50 women are killed every week' and arguing that;

> *When you're talking about, one in three women experiencing violence in her life, we're talking about huge statistics there. So what we want is for people to understand that violence against women and girls too often is very normal.*

Harvey also highlighted the statistics, noting:

> *when you have got two women a week being killed by their partners or ex-partners, there is a context there which needs to be addressed.*

Harvey went on to note that the reality of rape in the UK is that the overwhelming majority of perpetrators are known to the woman they rape, with only a small minority of perpetrators being 'strangers'. Larasi argued that 'men who commit violence are our brothers or fathers or sons – they're the men around us.'

Larasi was unequivocal in her testimony about responsibility for violence resting with male perpetrators, arguing this point forcefully throughout the hearing. For instance when she stated;

> *we know that where culture and religion can be used as vehicles, ultimately the causes are the same. It's violence against women and girls. It's patriarchy.*

Harvey similarly emphasised the responsibility of male perpetrators, arguing:

> *There will be all sorts of reasons that may push a man over the edge or that may cause him to be violent, but the point about it is ultimately he has been violent, he has chosen to be violent*

Both Larasi and van Heeswijk drew particular attention to the reality of life for girls in the UK, with van Heeswijk stating that voyeurism, sexual harassment and bullying;

> *are of great concern, particularly to young girls and young women in schools, who are often subjected to this form of sexual bullying and harassment, especially now with the widespread use of camera phones.*

Larasi agreed that there is a particular context and power imbalance with regards to girls and young women being vulnerable when it comes to rape and male violence. She made this point with regards to advising on how court reporting of a gang-rape case should have been presented by media, arguing for the need to; 'contextualise the young women's behaviour within the context of young women being vulnerable to sexual exploitation.' As will be discussed in the women's critique of media coverage of violence against women, they argued that failing to acknowledge the context of gendered power imbalances is a form of distortion.

Critique 3: A catalogue of failures: Irresponsible and unethical reporting of male violence against women

All of the women at this hearing were unanimous in their testimony that the framing outlined above in which male violence is a key component of women's structural inequality, was carried

through in irresponsible, unethical media coverage. The campaigners argued that this creates a conducive context for male violence against women. Larasi stated that: 'the media creates, reflects and enforces attitudes' and argued that;

> *Those who work in the media should be conscious of this and should actively seek not to reproduce attitudes which condone violence against women and girls.*

Harvey added:

> *our press not only reflects our society but can also create, shape and reinforce standards in our society, and if we do not take into account the existing power imbalances that are in our society, then you can simply replicate discrimination, sexism or a misleading interpretation of what is occurring.*

Hunt also drew clear links between;

> *the legitimisation and normalisation of sexism in society by the broader community, which may also legitimate violence against women, and that in turn might have a legitimate consequence on access to justice for women.*

She stated that; 'any example of women, given a sexist stereotype, it's actually limiting women's participation in society, or having justice, or being able to combat violence.'

Larasi highlighted several instances where mainstream media publish inaccuracies with regards to male violence against women, which, although they may be unintentional, go beyond misrepresentation and have serious implications. This was raised as a particular issue with regards to the law on rape. UK law states that victims of sexual offences have lifelong anonymity, but Larasi noted that this is still nonetheless breached by UK media.

As well as unlawful behaviour there were serious ethical breaches highlighted by the women with regards to coverage of male violence. For instance, Larasi documented intrusive reporting of victims of rape and male violence against women and their families, which was a breach of the guidance in The Editors' Code of Practice about intrusion, privacy and harassment. Both Harvey and Larasi highlighted examples of serious bad practice and poor journalism with regards to how male violence against women is reported across a range of print titles including the *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Mail* and *The Sun*. This coverage was critiqued by the campaigners in

terms of the basics of journalistic integrity and ethics that journalists are assumed to be abiding by in their day to day work. Harvey stated that not asking tough questions of politicians and decision-makers and not pressing for action on male violence against women, represented a failing of journalists' civic duty. She argued;

> *a free press which is meeting its own aims of holding people to account, could and should be asking challenging questions about our society and the status quo.*

When discussing representation of women in mainstream media as a whole, the four women argued in several places that coverage can be inaccurate and distorted and that journalists can present issues in a way that are misrepresenting and lacking in context. As will be discussed below, this point was made in most detail with regards to male violence against women where grave failings were highlighted.

The campaigners argued that some of this behaviour was possibly unintentional whilst other aspects involved more serious accusations of direct or deliberate discrimination. As will now be discussed, the accusations of deliberate discrimination were particularly around titillating, sensationalising, exoticising and gratuitous coverage. There were also some specific instances where newspaper staff and proprietors were accused of carrying out sexual harassment in their reporting. This critique was presented by the campaigners within the previously highlighted framing of male violence against women as central to structural inequality and the oppression of women.

Three key issues have been highlighted in the analysis of this study with regards to irresponsible and unethical mainstream print media coverage of male violence against women. This catalogue of failures with regards to mainstream print media coverage has been identified in the analysis to be as follows.

Failure 1: Persistently reproducing incorrect narratives about the frequency/commonplace nature of male violence against women

Both Larasi and Harvey argued that mainstream print media have a tendency to present an uncontextualised, inaccurate depiction of male violence against women. They alleged that the bigger picture of male violence against women is not being presented, as mainstream media omit the context and wide-ranging extent of male violence. Larasi and Harvey argued that this misleading interpretation and misrepresentation of male violence against women results in

media perpetuating myths. This was particularly highlighted with regards to the frequency and commonplace nature of male violence against women.

With regards to frequency the women argued that reporting cases as isolated one-offs fails to acknowledge the many incidents of male violence happening every day in the UK. With regards to the commonplace nature of male violence against women, Larasi and Harvey argued that media perpetuate an inaccuracy as the emphasis found in mainstream media on violent perpetrators who are male strangers is the reverse of the reality. For instance, Harvey stated that;

> *only 8 per cent of rapes are the kind of stranger who leaps out of a bush on a dark night, or attacks a woman sleeping peacefully in her bed (…) The rest are acquaintance rapes, date rapes, marital rapes. You would never know that from reading the papers.*

Harvey highlighted how the selection of rape stories by mainstream media distorts this reality, noting;

> *they're reporting the cases that are, in their view, or what they perceive to be their readers' views, the most interesting, or the most different, or the most unusual, and, or, in many cases, the ones that most fit with what their readers' own views are, or how they view society.*

Both Harvey and Larasi highlighted lack of rigorous research as a key aspect in mainstream media's failing to present an accurate narrative about male violence against women. They argued that journalists are ignoring facts and failing to embrace findings in the existing body of academic literature. Harvey asserted that there is a failure to ask challenging questions. Comparing the lengths that media go to in order to probe, question and contextualise issues such as the riots that happened in the UK in the summer of 2011, and the complexities around gangs and gang violence, the women found the media lacking with regards to male violence against women. Harvey highlighted the growing catalogue of cases of men murdering their wife and children en masse, stating that media fail to look for patterns, trends and common factors across these cases, and do not embrace or highlight the available research and statistics demonstrating that male violence is a common, linked phenomenon. The women argued that instead male violence against women is presented as a one-off tragedy, which can't be prevented or predicted; an inevitability about which nothing can be done.

Larasi argued that the failure to present male violence against women as commonplace and frequent is linked to a distortion about violence with a cultural or religious element. She stated that this is particularly the case when the media use the wrong language around so-called 'honour-based' violence, such as calling forced marriage arranged marriage. She noted that;

> *particular practices are reported primarily as cultural or as religious rather than as violence against women and girls, and therefore are not linked to other forms of violence against women and girls.*

Larasi argued that this emphasis leads to the narrative that this type of crime 'is less serious or somehow inevitable.' She noted that this not only distorts the facts with regards to the link with male violence more generally, but also creates a racist narrative whereby men from certain ethnic minorities or religions are depicted as more likely to be violent, despite this not being the case. Larasi highlighted;

> *the frequency with which the focus is on a Muslim father. A Muslim father did this, this happened within Muslim families (…) as experts working around violence against women and girls, we know that this is not primarily an Islamic issue. We know that this is happening across a range of communities.*

Larasi also noted an exoticising effect with regards to male violence that is labelled religious or cultural, stating that this framing serves to trivialise this violence and render it less serious.

Harvey argued that the intense overemphasis in mainstream media on reporting so-called 'false' allegations of rape leads to a distorted picture of how common these allegations are, and the context which leads to them being on the record in this way. She argued that this media distortion is due to a lack of contextualisation and thorough examination of the research. She said that responsible reporting would contextualise this issue to ask;

> *How common is a false allegation of rape compared to a false allegation of other crimes? What goes on that causes a false allegation? What is recorded or reported as a false allegation? It could be no crime. There's a whole series of things that actually could get reported as a false allegation, where actually it may just have been that there was no conviction.*

Failure 2: Victim-blaming, including lack of balance when reporting the perspective of the female victim and the male perpetrator

Both Larasi and Harvey highlighted a victim-blaming tendency in mainstream print media. They noted this in the general approach and framing taken by mainstream media, and also highlighted what they argued was deliberate behaviour by some journalists leading to serious breaches.

Larasi and Harvey noted a lack of balance in mainstream print media when giving an account of the male perpetrator and the female victim, often through court reporting which favours the defence perspective. Larasi noted that this differed from the balance that would be required when reporting male violence on broadcast media. Larasi and Harvey identified several common approaches which they argued demonstrated a skewed balance in print media.

Firstly they highlighted an over-focus on scrutinising the behaviour of the victim. They argued that this is often accompanied with a victim-blaming tone and language which implies that the woman provoked or triggered the man. Larasi cited a *Daily Telegraph* story to demonstrate this, noting;

> *the way it was reported was "Man murdered wife after she changed Facebook status to single". And the whole tone of the story focuses on; she changed her status to single, their relationship was breaking down... and then he killed her.*

Larasi countered;

> *From a violence against women and girls perspective, he killed her because he was abusive. He killed her and he killed her. He didn't kill her because she changed her status on Facebook.*

Harvey also noted a media tendency to over scrutinise the female victim, emphasising aspects such as;

> *what was her behaviour, and what was her lifestyle like? Was she a difficult person? Did she say unpleasant things? Was she having an affair? She may have been, and all those things may be, reprehensible or dislikeable or may make the situation more difficult, but (…) what a reader could go away with is the impression that somehow*

there is a validation or a justification or an explanation of why that man would commit that violence.

When referring to a *Daily Mail* piece about the gang-rape of two girls, Larasi noted that the story;

completely focuses on their behaviour, their attitudes, what they did (…) and even went so far as to focus on their parents as opposed to the behaviour of the young men.

Whilst acknowledging that these pieces often involve reporting scrutiny of a victim's behaviour in court proceedings, Larasi said that this coverage could still be more balanced arguing;

I'm not saying that you can't have a position where you say: "In court, there was scrutiny of the young girls' behaviour", (…) but I would expect some scrutiny of the young men's behaviour... and I would expect that it would be reported in a way that was a lot more responsible, that suggested actually young women are vulnerable.

Alongside over-scrutiny of the female victim Harvey identified the opposite trope in media reporting whereby female victims are invisibilised, and the context around an assault or rape is not detailed. She alluded to the many cases where a woman has been the victim of ongoing abuse, yet this is deemphasised in media coverage and not contextualised as typical of prevalent male coercive control behaviour. Harvey stated; 'often it's amazing how little you find out about the woman who is actually the victim', adding, 'there is another half to that story, which is what's been happening in the lives of that woman and of women more generally.'

Harvey and Larasi both highlighted a print media tendency towards overempathy and lack of scrutiny of the behaviour of male perpetrators, noting that journalists often go to great lengths to justify a man's motivations and avoid depicting him as responsible for his violence. They argued that being overly empathetic to the position of the violent man has the effect of trivialising the violence. Harvey stated that media coverage often demonstrates;

a considerable focus on the perpetrator in an often quite sympathetic way. So, he was depressed, he was losing his job, he feared that his wife was going to leave him, he was provoked, she said something that triggered him in some way.

Larasi evidenced this point via the reporting in the *Daily Mail* gang-rape piece stating;

> *what we find is this almost sympathetic approach to these young men. They added that the careers of the promising young footballers had been ruined by the biggest mistakes of their lives.*

Larasi noted a contrasting tendency in mainstream media of demonising the male perpetrator. She argued;

> *men who commit violence are excessively demonised in the press and are portrayed as beasts or demons or monsters. (…) And when you demonise those men what you do is you take it out of the context of normal society.*

Larasi suggested that the tone of some of the coverage with regards to victim-blaming was deliberate, arguing:

> *Victim-blaming is very different from providing a critical perspective around violence against women and girls (…) looking at the circumstances, looking at the wider issues is not the same as having a tone which suggests "she called this down on herself"*

Larasi also gave evidence about some coverage which victim-blames by deliberately distorting and misrepresenting the reality of male violence against women. Citing a piece in *The Daily Telegraph* that directly reversed the statistics, she stated:

> *the original press release said "Promiscuous men more likely to rape". The Telegraph then reported the piece as "Women who dress provocatively more likely to be raped" (…) Why would you twist the piece in that way? What agenda is being served?*

She continued, stating that she was;

> *concerned about the reporter's intent, or the editorial intent around this piece, because it's misrepresenting the information and it's presenting an unpublished piece almost as science, as research that is valid. And it's completely twisted and distorted the original piece anyway.*

Larasi also highlighted the example of a gang-rape case involving two girls who were aged 12 at the time of the assault. This is automatically classed as statutory rape under UK law as the girls were under the age of 13, and should be referred to as such by UK media. However coverage by the *Daily Mail* described the incident as an 'orgy', in a feature which was unethical and deliberately victim-blaming.

The women at the hearing argued that these victim-blaming myths and inaccurate narratives impact on women's lives in several ways. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, on the lives of the women in the coverage, as Larasi noted with regards to the girls who were the victims of gang-rape, but portrayed as sexually predatory in mainstream media. This could include impacts on their mental health, their relationships with friends and family, and potentially the whole course of their lives. Secondly they argued that there is an impact on women and girls as a whole, who come to understand from mainstream media coverage of rape and male violence that this is not something that happens to 'normal' women, it is something that happens to 'other' women. The campaigners stated that this then has the effect that women and girls do not recognise male violence when it is happening to them and do not come forward to report it. It may even lead women to blame male violence on themselves. As Larasi argued with regards to male violence;

> *if you sensationalise it, what you are likely to do is to have people disconnect from it, have people "other" that violence, and therefore not see it as something that's related to them.*

She added that this persuades women against reporting rape as;

> *if things are reported badly, then how women see that is: "This isn't me", or: "It's not necessarily safe for me to report", or: "I might not be believed", or: "But he wasn't a demon; he was (…) my loving husband and he happened to be really, really violent."*

The women argued that this also has an impact in terms of women blaming themselves for male violence. As Harvey stated, media coverage; 'feeds a discourse around what is a "real" rape, who is a "real" victim, who is a "real" rapist.' She argued that as a result there are;

> *examples of women saying that they blame themselves, that they shouldn't come forward because they were drinking or they were wearing certain clothes or they'd known this person, it was a friend of theirs, or even, in some cases, they'd had sex with*

them in the past. And what they have read in the papers or heard in the discourses is that in some way they are responsible for that. That's not "real" rape.

Harvey went on to argue that 'where it's harmful is it can deter women from reporting rape. And this is similar with false allegations.' In this regard Harvey cited a Mumsnet survey indicating that high numbers of women indicated that they were victims of rape but would not report the crime due to; 'fear of being blamed or of being accused of false allegations.'

Failure 3: Trivialising male violence through sensationalising, eroticising and exoticising

Larasi and van Heeswijk both argued that print media trivialise male violence by sensationalising and eroticising it in various ways, for instance in the manner that stories are selected and framed. As noted previously Larasi highlighted the so-called 'Facebook murder' as reported in *The Daily Telegraph* and in particular demonstrated issues with the sensationalised framing, saying; 'the focus on Facebook trivialises the murder of this woman, and moves the focus away from this man's violent actions', adding;

the fact that it became known as a Facebook murder is in itself symbolic. It wasn't a Facebook murder. It was a murder of a real woman by her partner.

Van Heeswijk argued in her testimony that print media have a tendency to eroticise and thus trivialise male violence against women, typically by using attention-grabbing, titillating framing and language. She highlighted a piece about male violence towards two sisters who featured in the TV reality show *The Only Way is Essex* (*TOWIE*) arguing:

the photograph used to accompany that is a sexualised image of one of them in her underwear, which completely trivialises the acts of violence that she was subjected to, and sends out a broader message of not taking these kinds of violent acts seriously.

Larasi highlighted similar language such as the use of words like 'Lolita' and statements such as; '"The other girl was more reluctant and was raped by just one player"' to demonstrate that stories about male violence are often deliberately titillating. She noted regarding the piece about gang-rape; 'you put the term "orgy" in, and what you immediately do is grab people's attention. It becomes titillating.' She argued that a different approach is needed: 'so that what you're not doing is trivialising or exoticising what happened'.

The campaigners highlighted another point closely linked to this idea of violence as titillation; print media's inconsistency with regards to paedophilia. The academic literature indicates that one of the biggest media-fuelled moral panics in recent years is about paedophilia (Thompson, 2005, p. 20; Cohen, 2011, pp. xvi–xix). At the Inquiry, van Heeswijk argued that mainstream print media is simultaneously obsessed with condemning paedophilia, whilst also participating in sexualising and being sexually predatory towards girls and young women, and therefore normalising and promoting paedophilia. Discussing a photograph in *The Daily Star*, van Heeswijk noted;

> *It's Charlotte Church at 15. The commentary is important here: "She's a big girl now. Child singing sensation showed just how quickly she's grown up after she turned up at a Hollywood bash looking chest swell."*

She went on;

> *Clearly an emphasis on a 15-year-old young woman's breasts (…) juxtaposed with this article, which is outrage against a spoof satire around paedophilia. The hypocrisy within these newspapers is often quite evident.*

This is a complex issue to navigate, with the danger that campaigners could be accused of contributing to the moral panic they set out to critique. However this is clearly a legitimate concern with regards to sexism and violence against women and girls, as Bray notes 'if the statistics on the prevalence of child sexual abuse are to be believed, paedophilia is much more than a marginal sexual preference' (Bray, 2008, p. 334). Similar to the tactic of referencing government inquiries about the sexualisation of young children, tapping into this moral panic debate about paedophilia could indicate a pragmatic strategy pursued as a means of being heard in a hostile context.

Having considered the nature of feminist argumentation at the Leveson Inquiry, paying close attention to language use, framings mobilised and the topics emphasised, this chapter will now move on to discuss how feminist language and argumentation was reflected in Leveson's final report.

Part Four: Feminist discourses expressed in Leveson's Report

Consistent with the explicit and assertive articulation about media sexism by the women at this hearing, this analysis finds that Leveson's report took on many of their arguments, demonstrating the impact of their evidence.

Terminology – upholding women as a class

As discussed, the campaigners used language and framing which emphasised women and girls as an oppressed class. This language use and framing was carried through by Leveson in his final report, where he referred to women as a 'class of people' stating;

> *Section 8 then examines a broader critique: a complaint that the press, or parts of it, fail to represent women and minorities fairly. This critique is not related so much to representations of individuals as the representation of* whole classes of people (Emphasis added) (Leveson, 2012a, p. 592).

He also noted in the Report:

> *What makes these complaints different from those which precede them is that they are complaints on behalf of* classes of people*, rather than a series of individuals* (Emphasis added) (Leveson, 2012a, p. 660).

The report continued, stating that the section would address: 'the representation of women and minorities (such as immigrants or asylum seekers)'. The fact that women were included in this category of discrimination and bracketed as 'women and minorities' was significant. Women were not erased by more general cover-all terms such as gender or equality. Notably, when it came to the final report Leveson turned his attention to discussing women first, and a bigger section of the report is devoted to issues affecting women than to the other minority groups he mentions.

Framing objectification and sexualisation as discrimination

Leveson began the section of the report relating to discrimination by saying that the concern raised by all these groups, representing both women and minorities, was that press representation was 'discriminatory and ill-considered.' This followed the framing established by the women in which the issue is one of discrimination and sexism as opposed to historical notions of obscenity. Leveson illustrated that he understood the women's approach, stating that their argument was not restricted to Page 3 being offensive or discriminatory, but was a more wide-ranging articulation about media sexism, noting;

> *the interesting point is that it was not Page 3 per se which gave rise to the core complaints made by women's groups. Instead, it was a general attitude which was found throughout the pages of those tabloids which contained images of semi-naked women* (Leveson, 2012a, p. 663).

In the report, he noted that the women's groups argued that this imagery was: 'part of a broader culture of objectification and sexualisation of women in those newspapers.' Leveson clearly made the point again that this was not just an objection to the Page 3 image, stating:

> *Importantly, these criticisms of the Page 3 tabloids do not derive from the fact those newspapers contain an image of a topless woman on Page 3 (or not only from that fact). They are criticisms for which evidence can be found on a reading of <u>all</u> the pages in those newspapers <u>as a whole</u>. They are also supported by the response that the tabloids have made to those who have criticised Page 3* (Emphasis in the original) (Leveson, 2012a, p. 665).

Leveson summed up his position in the report and stated that he agreed with the evidence given by the women's groups, arguing;

> *The evidence as a whole suggested that there is force in the trenchant views expressed by the groups and organisations who testified to the Inquiry that the Page 3 tabloid press often failed to show consistent respect for the dignity and equality of women generally, and that there was a tendency to sexualise and demean women* (Leveson, 2012a, p. 664).

Leveson commented on the individual papers in his report, agreeing with van Heeswijk's analysis of a 'gradient of extremity' noting;

> *That failure is particularly clear in the pages of The Sport, which is, in my view, hardly distinguishable from the admittedly 'softer' end of top-shelf pornography. But it exists to a lesser degree in the Daily Star and The Sun* (Leveson, 2012a, p. 664).

Leveson's final report strongly supported the women's key recommendation of a third party complaints facility. The report also suggested that amendments to the code should be considered to enable redress in cases where equalities legislation is breached. Again, Leveson

was broadly supportive of the women's position, arguing for amendments to the Editors' Code of Practice that;

> *would equip that body with the power to intervene in cases of allegedly discriminatory reporting and in so doing reflect the spirit of equalities legislation* (Leveson, 2012a, p. 665).

However, whilst Leveson strongly demonstrated his support for the campaigner's position, by echoing and reproducing their language and framing, he also utilised liberal and moral language and argumentation in his final report. This will be analysed further in **Chapter Eight**.

Summary of the analysis

This chapter has analysed the argumentation mobilised by feminist activists and considered how this was articulated at the Leveson Inquiry, paying particular attention to language use, framings and the topics and issues that were emphasised. This chapter has argued that the women who gave evidence at the Leveson Inquiry about the representation of women in mainstream print media were operating in a hostile context, following a period of intense backlash amidst the 'lad culture' of the 1990s, but before an upturn in both high-profile social media led feminist movements such as #MeToo and the explosion of online misogyny. This study contends that this postfeminist, neoliberal landscape on the cusp of a feminist resurgence therefore determined the way in which the campaigners presented their case, both in terms of language use and argumentation. The strength of dominant moral and liberal discourses around the representation of women in media further increased the difficulty of feminist discourses being heard at the Leveson Inquiry. This chapter has established that this complex and hostile context therefore led to some nuanced negotiations by the feminist campaigners at this hearing.

This chapter has examined language use at the Leveson Inquiry, paying attention to the frequency and absence of key words. In particular the frequency of the words 'women' and 'girls' was found to be striking and it was argued that this indicates an analysis based in the understanding of women and girls as an oppressed sex-class. Use of the words sexist and sexism were lower, and use of the words misogyny and misogynist were almost completely absent. However this chapter has demonstrated that this is consistent with this moment of incipient feminism. This evolving language use is something feminist campaigners were acutely alive to, as will be expanded on in the interview analysis conducted in **Chapter Eight**.

The analysis in this chapter identified three key framing strategies used by the campaigners at the Leveson Inquiry. Firstly there was an attempt to reposition the dominant liberal discourse whereby any critique of media representation of women is dismissed as an incursion on (men's) free speech. Instead the campaigners argued that silencing women in public life, both in mainstream media and online, is a form of censorship and a component of male violence. The campaigners articulated this silencing and discrimination as mainstream media carrying out an attack on *women's* free speech and participation in the public sphere, clearly seeking to invalidate and reposition narratives about feminist campaigning with regards to media representation of women as an incursion on men's free speech.

This was also a key moment of visibility for the idea that media sexism and objectification is discriminatory and not an issue of taste or offence. This was a clear attempt by the feminist campaigners to push back against dominant moral discourses framing sexualised images as an issue of taste and decency. This chapter therefore argues that the evidence given by the women marks a key moment of visibility for a feminist human rights discourse.

The third frame identified in this research concerned the campaigner's emphasis on women and girls as an oppressed class and the issues affecting them. This particularly focused on a repositioning of the reality of violence against women; its frequency and widespread nature, the fact that perpetrators are not typically strangers, and on emphasising responsibility with the perpetrator. Via this framing the women took corrective steps to reassert a feminist narrative on the public record – emphasising issues of structural inequality.

Having established these three frames in the analysis, this chapter then demonstrated the ways in which the women evidenced their position. The analysis maintained that this was directed in four key areas; media silencing women in public life, including direct attacks and attempts to shut down women and those who campaign against discriminatory representations of women; discriminatory and trivialising stereotyping of women, objectification as a discrete harm and the normalising impact this has; and the irresponsible reporting of violence against women.

The campaigners asserted that media coverage created and contributed to a conducive context for violence against women, and this analysis demonstrated that the argument was clear and unequivocally direct in the way that male perpetrators were named and this violence was emphasised.

The analysis has identified three argumentations presented by the campaigners with regard to violence against women. In their testimony the women argued that this irresponsible and unethical reporting creates and upholds several damaging and inaccurate narratives about rape and male violence against women, including:

1. Failure to acknowledge the frequency/commonplace nature of violence against women, rendering it inevitable, without solution and not the product of power imbalances and socio-economic structures.

2. Victim blaming and implying that male perpetrators are justified and not responsible for their violence, including creating the myth that the majority of perpetrators are strangers and demonic 'one-offs' and depicting false allegations as frequent.

3. Trivialising violence against women as not frequent/not widespread/not serious, but a rare, sensational, exotic, sexy, fun occurrence that happens to other people

This chapter has demonstrated that the compelling language and argumentation put forward by the women was displayed in the way that it was carried through by Leveson in his report. In particular the report was critical of media portrayal of women and the lack of third party complaints function, and clearly advocated for changes that would benefit women. It is argued that Leveson was broadly supportive of the case put forward by the campaigners, and that the framing in the report of women and girls as a 'class or group' was notable. Leveson took on the argument that mainstream media, in particular the red top tabloids, contribute to a culture in which women are reduced to sex objects, and agreed that some of the content in the red top tabloids, particularly *The Sport*, was barely distinguishable from some top shelf pornography.

Key findings

This chapter asserts that this hearing at the Leveson Inquiry offers a snapshot of a particular moment of incipient feminism, before #MeToo and all the feminist activism that has followed since 2016. Therefore the impact of the evidence given by the women should be understood as a significant and genuine moment of public feminist resistance, particularly given the hostile context the campaigners were operating in. This discourse was also striking in contrast to the surge of 'popular feminism' that has emerged since. As Banet-Weiser notes; 'most popular feminisms are typically those that become visible precisely because they do not challenge deep structures of inequities' (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

This chapter contends that the evidence given at The Leveson Inquiry by the women with regards to Page 3 and sexualised imagery was also a key chapter in the history of opposition to the feature, following the action begun by Clare Short in the mid to late 1980s, and acting as a precursor to the No More Page 3 campaign which began in August 2012, seven months after the women gave evidence, and potentially as a prompt to the internal rethink of the feature by *The Sun* and its parent company News International (operating since 2013 as News UK, a subsidiary of News Corp).

The women at the hearing not only gave evidence, they set the agenda with regards to how the Inquiry and Report proceeded. By collating and submitting a week's worth of tabloid coverage, Object and Turn Your Back on Page 3 pre-empted and removed any possibility of dismissal via arguments that the coverage was just a few 'one-offs', not representative, historical or dated. The compelling testimony of van Heeswijk led to the editor of *The Sun* Dominic Mohan being recalled to defend Page 3. It was also significant that a Rule 13 letter was sent to *The Sport* and that Leveson's final report was so critical of the outlet, even suggesting that this type of media should be repositioned as top-shelf pornography.

Chapter Eight will consider the ways in which feminist campaigners negotiated this complex territory in more detail by analysing interviews in which key actors, including some of the women who gave evidence at the Leveson Inquiry, reflect on the strategies and tactics they employed. The next chapter, **Chapter Seven**, will go on to consider the verbal and written evidence given to the inquiry by Dominic Mohan, then editor of *The Sun*, and the written evidence given by Sunday Sport Ltd. This argumentation will be considered in response to the critiques and framings utilised by the campaigners at the hearing analysed in this chapter.

Chapter Seven: Varieties of sexism practised at the Leveson Inquiry

Introduction

Having analysed the testimony given by the feminist campaigners to the Leveson Inquiry in **Chapter Six**, this thesis now moves on to analyse the evidence given to the inquiry in defence of sexualised imagery and media sexism. The key aim of this chapter is to address RQ1 and identify and analyse the varieties of sexism practised at the inquiry by examining the written and oral evidence given to the inquiry by *The Sun* and Sunday Sport Ltd. This rich, extensive data, including the responses of Mohan under cross-examination, has yielded numerous examples of different framings, defences and justifications in relation to sexualised imagery and media sexism, which this chapter will analyse in detail.

This chapter is structured in two parts. In the first section a brief overview of the data to be analysed is detailed, including the written and oral evidence given by the then editor of *The Sun*, Dominic Mohan, to the inquiry and the written evidence from Sunday Sport Ltd. An explanation of the Rule 13 Letter which led to Sunday Sport Ltd's response is given. The contextual underpinning of this chapter is established drawing on the work of Gill and Billig (Gill, 2014) as theorised in the academic literature. The extent to which the classic liberal discourses outlined in **Chapter Four** were used in the defence of sexualised imagery by *The Sun* and Sunday Sport Ltd is considered. In this regard attention is paid to the dominance of notions of such as free speech, civil liberties and the private sphere. The argumentation of *The Sun* and Sunday Sport Ltd is examined in relation to the cultural context at this point in time, in which a neoliberal preoccupation with choice and the individual prevailed. Techniques and tactics used to defend sexualised imagery are also identified in the literature, and similarities are noted in the approach of *The Sun* and Sunday Sport Ltd with political communications and corporate public relations strategies. In Part Two this chapter moves on to analyse the written and verbal evidence given by the two organisations and theorises this as a framework with four key strategies. This four-step framework is defined and described, and examples of these tactics are demonstrated in the evidence given to the inquiry via 22 sub-strategies and arguments.

Part One: Background

Dominic Mohan and *The Sun*

Following the verbal evidence given by the four women's organisations to the Leveson Inquiry on 24 January 2012, the then editor of *The Sun*, Dominic Mohan was recalled to make a second appearance at the Inquiry, which took place on Tuesday 7 February 2012. Mohan answered questions for approximately one hour and 20 minutes from 4.07 to 5.31pm. A small section of his appearance covered Page 3 and the visual representation of women, in response to the verbal evidence given by Anna van Heeswijk of Object and the written evidence jointly submitted by Object and Turn Your Back on Page 3. Mohan was questioned by Robert Jay and to a lesser extent Lord Justice Leveson. Mohan submitted a second witness statement to the Inquiry dated 5 February 2012 in which he stated he would address;

> *certain matters upon which I understand the Inquiry wish me to give further evidence on 7 February 2012, in particular the criticisms which have been made of 'Page 3' of The Sun and the attitude of The Sun to women's issues.*

One of Dominic Mohan's first jobs in the newspaper industry was editing the *Sunday Sport* at the age of 24, although this is not an aspect of his career he discusses openly and is therefore not widely known. Mohan's career progression; shifting between different newspapers and sections, is typical in an industry made up of relatively few journalists. This is significant to this study as it indicates a contributory factor to shared values at the UK's tabloids in terms of tone, approach and agenda-setting.

Sunday Sport (2011) Ltd's response to a Rule 13 Warning letter

Publishers of the *Midweek Sport* and *Sunday Sport*, Sunday Sport (2011) Ltd, were issued with a Rule 13 Warning Letter by the Inquiry dated 16 October 2012. Rules 13-15 of The Inquiry Rules 2006 concern what are referred to as 'Warning Letters' and state:

1. *The Chairman may send a warning letter to any person:*
    a. *he considers maybe, or who has been, subject to criticism in the inquiry proceedings; or*
    b. *about whom criticism may be inferred from evidence that has been given during the inquiry proceedings; or*
    c. *who may be subject to criticism in the report, or any interim report.*

2. *The recipient of a warning letter may disclose it to his recognised legal representative.*

3. *The inquiry panel must not include any explicit or significant criticism of a person in the report, or in any interim report, unless*
    a. *the chairman has sent that person a warning letter; and*
    b. *the person has been given a reasonable opportunity to respond to the warning letter.*

Leveson issued a ruling – Application of Rule 13 of the Inquiry Rules 2006**,** on 1 May 2012 which advised that:

> *as is clear from the legislation, I have a discretion about warning anyone who has been criticised expressly or inferentially in the evidence or who may be criticised in the Report but I cannot include any explicit or significant criticism of a person to whom I have not given such a warning.*

And; *'As required by Rule 14, any notice under Rule 13 will identify the evidential basis for the criticism that I am contemplating.'*

This particular Rule 13 Letter advised Sunday Sport Ltd that it was the subject of written and oral evidence to the Inquiry by the women's organisations critical of its publications, and stated that:

> *The Inquiry is minded to conclude that your titles in particular, but not exclusively amongst the tabloid press, often fail to show respect for the dignity and equality of women generally, and a tendency to sexualise and objectify women. The Inquiry, based on the evidence it has seen, considers The Sport to be indistinguishable from top-shelf pornography.*

Sunday Sport Ltd were advised that any response must be received by 30 October 2012, a timescale to which they gained a six-day extension. Solicitors responded on behalf of Sunday Sport Ltd on 5 November 2012 with an 8,000-word defence of the sexualised imagery contained in *The Sport* newspapers, which addressed the two accusations contained in the above paragraph. This response is not in the public domain. A Freedom of Information request to the National Archives and the Department for Digital, Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) was denied, but the document was gained for the purposes of this research after petitioning the management of Sunday Sport Ltd.

Contextualising the varieties of sexism at the Leveson Inquiry

In analysing and critiquing varieties of sexism this thesis follows the understanding put forward by Gill, which draws on the work of Billig (Billig, 1987, 1988; Gill, 2014) to argue that prejudices such as sexism are not a static, unitary set of discourses or practices, but a shifting, multi-faceted occurrence, changing according to situation and context. In this sense, as Gill asserts;

> sexism can never be identified a priori but is always a historically, culturally and socially specific phenomenon that requires empirical examination in particular local contexts (Gill, 2014, p. 121).

As such the analysis in this chapter considers the forms and varieties of sexism on display at the Leveson Inquiry in the particular postfeminist, neoliberal context of this point in time, as will now be discussed.

Tracing dominant classic liberal and neoliberal discourses

As noted in **Chapter Four**, a classic liberal position is typically taken when defending sexualised imagery, expressed as privileging male access and freedom within the private sphere. That these tenets of liberalism are typically gendered from a male perspective is established by McGlynn who notes;

> civil and political rights, with their privileging of the individual, the privacy of the home and freedom of political expression, have all been interpreted in ways which often hinder women's claims (McGlynn, 2010, p. 199).

As identified in **Chapter Four**, this liberal positioning with regards to sexualised imagery has been particularly dominant over the past 40 years since the report of *The Williams Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship* (1977-9). Williams's report drew heavily on Mill's harm principle (1859), but his interpretation emphasised the rights of male viewers and overlooked harm to women from the perspective of structural inequality and gendered power relations. This established a dominant framing which claimed that as no harm was being caused, intervention and legislation was undesirable. Furthermore as argued in **Chapters Two** and **Three** the core values of *The Sun*, anchored in its heyday of the 1980s, are encapsulated in the Page 3 feature, which upholds a liberal framing in which viewing sexualised imagery is a personal freedom and a (male) consumer right.

Politically the Leveson Inquiry took place at a point in time that marked a move to the centre. Tony Blair had taken the Labour Party into government in 1997 on a ticket of centrism – the third way. After 13 years in opposition the Conservative Party under David Cameron had re-entered power in coalition with the Liberal Democrats. Cameron won power in both his own party and with the electorate by branding his leadership a modernisation and a moving away from traditional Conservative Party values. Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg was similarly at the heart of a rebranding in his own Liberal party which was encapsulated in *The Orange Book: Reclaiming Liberalism* (Marshall and Laws, 2004), 'the unofficial manifesto of the Liberal Democrats' right wing' (Ashcroft and Oakeshott, 2015, p. 336). Cameron stood for Liberal Conservatism, Clegg for right-leaning Liberalism. At the time of the Leveson Inquiry these two parties had been together in coalition for two years. These neoliberal values coalesced around 'small statism' – an enthusiasm for restricting state intervention and a hands-off approach in which markets are left to regulate and consumer choice prevails (McAnulla, 2012, pp. 178–80). As this chapter will go on to argue, this dominant neoliberal ideology was therefore a key factor in the contextual landscape in which the inquiry took place and as a consequence both classic liberalism and neoliberal discourses informed the defence of *The Sun* and Sunday Sport Ltd.

Political communications, public relations, propaganda and gaslighting

Unsurprisingly given the high-profile public arena that this debate played out in, this analysis has identified that the response of *The Sun* and *The Sport* had strong similarities with corporate and political PR strategies and techniques. Political media management has become known as 'spin'; a strategy where communicators 'feed the media not only the event, but also the interpretation of that event' (Savigny, 2002, p. 4). This carefully constructed and controlled method of public relations came to prominence in the UK in the Blair-era between 1997-2007, and is most closely associated with Blair's Downing Street Press Secretary and Director of Communications, spin-doctor Alastair Campbell.

The debates at the Leveson Inquiry focusing on sexualised imagery and media sexism can be understood via the PR strategy of issues framing. Hallahan defines this type of PR further and explains the key facets of what he terms issues framing. In his identification of seven models of framing used by the public relations industry, Hallahan draws on Grunig and Hunt to describe framing as being a key avenue through which public policy and attitudes are formed, noting that this centres on;

> a dispute between two or more parties, usually over the allocation of resources or the treatment or portrayal of groups in society. Issues frequently result in extensive public discussion and frequently require resolution within a public policy forum, such as a legislature or the courts. Issues are the bases around which publics are organized and public opinion is formed (Hallahan, 1999, p. 217).

Furthermore as will be referenced in the analysis carried out in this chapter, some typical PR framing techniques present in the evidence given by *The Sun* and Sunday Sport Ltd include those recognised by Koob as what he terms a 'public relations spin cycle'. This includes tactics such as 'denial and minimising (…) distortion, distraction and reframing' (Koob, 2015). Similar strategies have been identified by Laufer in his study of corporate greenwashing, such as attempts by big companies such as Mobil Corporation and Dow Chemical to obscure environmental damage. Laufer classified this corporate public relations deception as falling into three categories – confusion (casting doubt on the problem), fronting (employing front groups such as ethics committees to promote the companies interests) and posturing (promoting projects and initiatives that demonstrate a commitment to ethics) (Laufer, 2003). Furthermore many scholars argue that the phenomena of gaslighting, a 'term used to describe the mind-manipulating strategies of abusive people' (Sweet, 2019, p. 851) is being enacted on the political stage, particularly in the manipulative behaviour of Donald Trump (Welch, 2008; Sarkis, 2018; Stern, 2018). Whilst this hearing at the Leveson Inquiry was not on such a high-level political stage, nonetheless these PR framing strategies, including gaslighting approaches, have been identified in the analysis of the evidence given by *The Sun* and *The Sport*, as will be discussed in the analysis.

Part Two: Varieties of sexism practised at the Leveson Inquiry via a four-step framework

Overview of the four-step framework

The strategy used by *The Sun* and Sunday Sport Ltd to defend and justify sexualised imagery and media sexism has been theorised in this analysis as a pattern fitting a framework with four identifiable tactics – denial, reframing, deflection and projection. Within each of these four categories were various sub-strategies, most of which were used by both *The Sun* and *The Sport*, some of which were used by one and not the other. This framework follows Billig's theory of prejudice in which 'speakers try to make their discourse "reasonable" by finding external reasons for discrimination' (Billig, 1988, p. 91). The specific arguments and

approaches put forward by *The Sun* and *The Sport* were thus identified in the analysis as fitting the following pattern.

Frame 1: Denial

Utilising a denial framing, both outlets argued that sexualised imagery and media treatment of women is harmless and acceptable. Various types of outright denial identified in the analysis that follows were mobilised to argue that media representation of women does not need further regulation.

Strategy 1: Free speech

An anticipated response to the critiquing of sexualised imagery was a hard rebuttal via an assertion that such depictions are acceptable, and that any further incursion against them would be an attack on free speech. *The Sport* directly articulated this position on several occasions, arguing against censorship and in favour of both freedom of expression for both those who publish and their readers, stating;

> *If this* [stricter regulation] *is what the Inquiry has in mind to recommend, it would represent a massive inroad into freedom of expression, which is not only the freedom to publish but also the freedom of members of the public to buy and/or read the newspaper titles in question.*

The Sport highlighted the liberal framework this position draws on by quoting the Miltonian and Millian notion of 'the marketplace of ideas' (i.e. freedom of expression akin to the competitive, unrestricted nature of a free market economy) and deploying the then Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, and leader of the Liberal party, in support of this viewpoint. *The Sport* noted that in a contemporary interview, Clegg;

> *declined to back the campaign to ban Page 3 girls from the Sun, which he compared to censorship. He observed that the state should not dictate the content of newspapers and that such a ban would be "deeply illiberal".*

The Sport twice cited Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), Freedom of Expression, in support of this position, and asserted that this viewpoint was shared by Feminists Against Censorship.

Strategy 2: Laissez faire/private sphere

Both *The Sun* and *The Sport* advanced classic liberal notions of a hands-off, laissez-faire approach to newspaper regulation. This was articulated from the point of view of government control and a deregulated free market open to competition. Both outlets also cited the perspective of the newspaper reader as a private citizen, who they argued should be free to make their own choices, including reading newspapers in the private sphere of the home. In this framing, the familiar argument that sexualised imagery can be resolved by an 'if you don't like it, don't buy it' approach was put forward by Mohan who argued;

> *readers have a choice in a free market economy like that of the United Kingdom where newspapers jostle for attention and sales. If readers do not agree with the values that drive the editorial engine of the Sun then they would not buy it in such astonishingly huge numbers.*

The Sport similarly argued that;

> *paid-for newspapers (…) are the subject of purchasing decisions by individuals who select what they want to read knowing what they will find by way of content.*

Responsibility with regards to children also was placed in the private sphere with parents, across all media, as *The Sport* argued; 'access to material which parents do not want their children to see comes down to parental control.'

With regards to regulation *The Sport* maintained that any censorship such as categorising its titles with top-shelf pornography would have the effect of 'distorting competition within the newsprint market'. *The Sport* argued forcefully and at length that the self-regulatory model, including the voluntary Code of Practice adopted by retailers' organisations was working, and that no further restrictions were necessary. *The Sport* demonstrated this by asserting that its outlets were subject to minimal complaints by members of the public to the Press Complaints Commission and Advertising Standards Authority. However, this referred to complaints investigated and taken forward by the PCC and ASA, not the total volume of complaints made, and made no account for the previously noted lack of third party complaints facility.

The Sport appealed for outlets to be allowed to continue to self-regulate via retail stockists, stating; 'No retailer is forced to stock any title that it and its customers find objectionable.' The claim that retailers are 'responsive to customers' wishes' was not evidenced by *The Sport*. Whilst it suggested that a feedback channel was available for customers, no formal structure

like this existed. The case of East London newsagent Hamdy's which fought a 17-year battle with wholesale magazine and newspaper supplier WHSmith over the newsagent's refusal to stock pornography suggests that this argument was overstated (Verkaik, 2011).

The Sport challenged Anna van Heeswijk of Object's argument that print media should be regulated in the same way as broadcast, specifically with reference to the watershed. In this regard *The Sport* appeared conflicted, with one argument suggesting different approaches to broadcast and print. *The Sport* presented one argument stating that TV is different and as such there is a reason for broadcast restrictions. However elsewhere *The Sport* argued for a similarity in approach between print and broadcast, positing that the restriction of the TV watershed was meaningless and pointless due to contemporary viewing habits and devices.

This culminated in an another appeal by *The Sport* for a hands-off regulatory approach to TV, digital and print whereby all are unrestricted and left to the reader or viewer and in the case of children, parent, to control and select. This advocating of private sphere choice and control also rested on the 'don't buy it, then there's no problem' argument in which responsibility for children's viewing is a matter of parental control.

Strategy 3: Denial of sexism, objectification and sexual harassment

A central strategy in the denial framework was identified in the analysis as a direct rejection and denial of allegations of sexism. Mohan directly denied the accusation of sexism when he was pressed under cross examination stating;

> *some of the allegations that I've heard about the Sun being sexist in some way and not tackling women's issues I think is a false one.*

He similarly denied any link to sexual harassment in a piece about Pippa Middleton's bottom, stating: 'I disagree with that. I don't think it eroticises sexual harassment.' There was no detailed argument or discussion from Mohan about sexism – he mentioned the word sexist once, as above, and made no mention at all of the words sexism or objectification.

The Sport similarly avoided any discussion of sexism, but this was articulated via a more direct and detailed approach. With regards to the allegation that *The Sport* failed; '"to treat women with dignity and respect and/or a practice which, intentionally or not, has the effect of the objectifying and degrading women"' *The Sport* responded that it 'emphatically disagrees with this highly subjective, emotive and morally judgmental criticism of its contents.' *The Sport*

refused to engage with the notion of objectification calling it 'ill-defined jargon used to convey a highly subjective viewpoint' and denying its existence by arguing that;

> *There is no consensus as to what "sexual objectification" means, by what criteria it is to be recognised and whether (in the absence of any evidential underpinning) it is to be considered as causative of harm and, if so, to whom and in what way. Moreover, it is not possible to understand how The Sport can be accused of objectifying girls because girls do not feature in the newspaper.*

This very literal denial that the paper could not objectify girls because there were no girls featured in the paper inferred that the only impact of objectification could be on the person in the photograph. This approach showed no engagement with the idea that girls can be affected by depictions of women and ignored the detailed case put forward by Anna van Heeswijk about the impact of portraying women as sexual objects on both girls and boys.

Like *The Sun*, *The Sport* denied the allegation of sexual harassment. *The Sport* was more direct and detailed, arguing;

> *The specialist employment law opinion obtained by The Sport for the purpose of addressing her [Anna van Heeswijk's] argument is that having a copy of The Sport or the Sun in a work environment, for example, lying on a desk, would not satisfy the criteria for "harassment" under section 26(4) of the Act. That section imposes a high threshold of seriousness.*

The Sport also denied what it interpreted as an allegation of racism, stating;

> *The reference to women appearing in The Sport as "almost always white" is inaccurate. It appears to imply an editorial policy of racism. This is an unjustified and unsubstantiated insinuation.*

This analysis seems unlikely. *The Sun's* Page 3, for instance, by 2012 had only featured four black glamour models in its 40 year history (Surtees, 2012). This response also missed the wider point made by Anna van Heeswijk that the ideal female body featured in sexualised imagery is a very reductive, uniform aesthetic; typically slim, white and blonde. As noted in the literature in **Chapter Three** this has been identified as problematic as it does not reflect agency and choice in female desire, sexuality and beauty, but legitimises the male gaze.

Strategy 4: Denial of media role in perpetuating and contributing to male violence against women

As noted previously, both Mohan and *The Sport* refuted the allegation of sexual harassment. Furthermore *The Sport* discussed the academic debate over the connection between pornography and rape, media and violence in detail. This causal connection was not alleged by the women's organisations, who framed their critique in terms of a conducive context. However in several places *The Sport* addressed the notion of a causal connection between sexualised imagery, violence and harm, arguing; 'This is an utterly unsupportable and unsupported claim and the Inquiry would be proceeding in error by founding any conclusions upon such a premise'. *The Sport* expanded;

> *there is no universally accepted evidence in the form of academic study or research establishing a causal connection between Page 3 imagery (or any of the content of The Sport titles) and violence inflicted on women or other harm (…) the evidence does not demonstrate that viewing pornography (let alone Page 3) actually makes men more likely to commit rape or other acts of violence.*

With regards to irresponsible reporting of rape and male violence against women, *The Sport* offered a strong rebuttal. In response to two examples of pieces about male violence published in *The Sport* cited by Marai Larasi of End Violence Against Women, *The Sport* argued;

> *The accusation is emphatically denied. The content of crime stories is usually taken directly from agency reports. The stories are very rarely embellished for the simple reason that The Sport does not have specific crime reporters and to do so would create legal risk. It has a policy of reporting crime stories without comment and it is very careful in its approach. The allegation that it trivialises or sexualises violence is simply incorrect.*

Elsewhere a crime story about groping was dismissed as reporting 'in the public interest'. Similarly a strong rebuttal was given regarding allegations of the titillating juxtaposition of pieces about violence against women alongside images of naked women. *The Sport* argued that this claim was; 'utterly far-fetched and obviously incorrect', stating that;

> *The placement of the article next to happy, smiling models does not in any way detract from that message* [that such behaviour is wrong and criminal]. *On the contrary, it provides a striking and salutary contrast.*

This idea that naked women provide positive benefit when placed alongside a story about violence against women was a clear attempt to undermine and discredit the women's evidence. A similar defence was given by *The Sport* regarding a piece highlighted by Object and Turn Your Back on Page 3 in which the comedian Roy 'Chubby' Brown discussed the plot of the TV series Coronation Street. The storyline featured a fictional teenager called Rosie Webster who was kidnapped and held captive for five weeks by her ex-teacher John Stape. The headline in *The Sport* stated: 'Rosie's not tied down' and Brown's commentary went on to say; 'I'd love to give her one. But the only way I'd ever get anywhere near a girl like Rosie is if she was still tied to John Stape's bed!'. *The Sport* responded that; 'the linkage with "violence" is highly tenuous and the gloss placed upon the item is far-fetched and strained.'

Strategy 5: Discrediting the feminist campaigners and the conduct of the inquiry

Discrediting and undermining the feminist campaigners and their evidence was *The Sport*'s key approach, and formed the majority of the 8,000 words submitted to the Inquiry. This was a feature throughout the letter which was notable for its impassioned language and tone. For instance, *The Sport* referred to the women who gave evidence at the Inquiry as 'radical extremists', representing a 'highly controversial standpoint', calling them a 'fringe minority', and arguing that they were from 'small unrepresentative groups'.

The Sport discredited and challenged the evidence put forward by the women calling it; 'unsubstantiated, untested under cross examination, not independently evaluated'. *The Sport* further argued that the data was not 'gathered by objective and rigorous methods', and that it was 'not evidence of fact but of opinion', 'inaccurate', 'one-sided', and 'without any underpinning or support from any academic or research evidence'. Van Heeswijk was said by *The Sport* on one occasion to assert a 'sweeping and subjective claim', and one that is 'absurd and offensive to the intelligence of readers'. The evidence given by the women was argued to be 'based on assumptions and assertions'. *The Sport* argued that 'it is highly doubtful that they [the feminist campaigners] would have been permitted to testify in civil proceedings as qualified to give expert opinion evidence.' *The Sport* patronised and infantilised the campaigners, an approach which included accusing Anna van Heeswijk of being 'confused' and wrong about equality legislation, broadcast regulation and the guidance about magazine display used by organisations which represented the retail industry.

Framing the problem with the interpreter of the imagery in this way is consistent with the notion of political gaslighting – specifically the idea of challenging a person's version of reality. In this case *The Sport* implied that opponents of sexualised imagery and media sexism were delusional and their concerns imaginary. For instance the quotes marks used below in the explanation of the material provided by *The Sport* to the Inquiry convey the idea that Anna van Heeswijk is deluded and hysterical;

> *On the approach urged by Ms van Heeswijk, [these pieces] would fall to be characterised as portraying: the "sexualisation" of women and of men; the "objectifying" of women and of men; the "oppression of women by pornification"; and the "degradation" of men.*

There were several sections of *The Sport*'s letter which discredited the conduct of the inquiry. *The Sport* accused the Inquiry of 'unfairness' on several occasions, alleging it had not been given enough time to respond or asked to give written or verbal evidence, 'or even to suggest areas of questioning of the witnesses upon whose evidence the Inquiry now relies'. *The Sport* argued; 'that the Inquiry has already formed conclusions that it is "minded" to make' and stated that therefore the Inquiry's findings would be;

> *unsupported by any evidence that was objective, or that had been tested under cross-examination, or that had been the subject of independent investigation and scrutiny on the part of the Inquiry*

It attacked the inquiry stating that to have;

> *not even entertained evidence from any of the stakeholders, academics, researchers or groups representative of wider society's views on the content of Page 3 titles, is insupportable as well as manifestly unfair.*

It argued; 'There can be no justification for picking on *The Sport* titles' and concluded 'the conclusions and recommendations are flawed as a question of fact and vitiated as a matter of law by unfairness and irrationality', as 'The Inquiry appears to have simply adopted uncritically the viewpoint expressed by the representative of a small minority group.'

The Sport attempted to discredit the inquiry further attacking the approach of Barrister Robert Jay and stating that;

> *The evidence of Ms van Heeswijk was not tested by counsel to the Inquiry and it is of concern that it was counsel's question to the witness that "egged" her on with a leading question which originated the suggestion that the newspapers in question were indistinguishable from Penthouse and Mayfair or other "expressively pornographic" publications.*

The Sport argued that issues affecting lads' mags fell outside the Inquiry's remit, that the retail sale of *The Sport* was outside the Inquiry's terms of reference, and that not consulting those who put together and oversee the Code of Practice used by retail organisations was; 'irrational and unfair'. This approach of discrediting, undermining and misconstruing was not taken by *The Sun*, as previously noted.

Strategy 6: Agency of the models, sexualised imagery as empowering

Dominic Mohan argued that the models on Page 3 have agency and are empowered and benefit from the work. This is a familiar argument with regards to sexualised imagery, which typically emphasises the idea that the models have more power, particularly economic power through the work, than male viewers, who are actually the ones being exploited. This argument has similarities with discourses about women in other scenarios such as prostitution, pornography and lap-dancing.

Mohan utilised this agency argument in a discussion about the successful glamour model, presenter and actor Kelly Brook. This was notable for woman-blaming language and the silencing inference that neither Brook or anyone on her behalf can complain about sexism with regards to her image. Mohan further deflected responsibility away from *The Sun* by saying it was an official photo sent out by the film company, arguing;

> *She's made quite a good living out of wearing not too many clothes, and actually this was an official picture, I believe, sent out by the film company to promote the film.*

At the inquiry Mohan also stated:

> *A lot of the Page 3 girls, they're much more than just models. They've become ambassadors for the paper. A number of them have travelled to Afghanistan, are*

> *heavily involved in Help For Heroes and raising money. Some have gone into careers in photography.*

This argument revealed that Mohan viewed being a Page 3 model, or any kind of model, 'just models', as low status; a beginning not an end. The last sentence regarding careers in photography is particularly revealing – citing progress away from Page 3 modelling posits the initial scenario as undesirable. The unspoken word in this sentence; 'Some have "even" gone into photography' – reveals that this is an exception. Mohan knew that the majority of women do not progress beyond Page 3, and used these exceptional examples to deflect away from discussion of their experiences as Page 3 models.

The Sport used a similar argument stating that;

> *The women who pose for The Sport do so willingly. To say otherwise is to deny their sincerity (or self-knowledge). It is a great mistake to assume that glamour models are in some manner coerced.*

The Sport went beyond the models in the paper to discuss agency of women and girls more broadly with regards to sex, sexuality and desire, and argued that 'Many women enjoy sexual imagery and consider that it makes a positive contribution to their lives. Some consider it empowering' and 'one person's sexual "degradation" is another's sexual "assertiveness".

Strategy 7: Co-opting feminist arguments and pitting women against each other

One of the key tactics used by both *The Sun* and *The Sport* was to use women as an alibi. This is a strategy of dispelling criticism by demonstrating support for sexism from the group being discriminated against. For instance in order to demonstrate that Page 3 is acceptable Mohan gave evidence in which women state that they like and support the feature and *The Sun*. Mohan drew on a wide range of women, feminists and organisations in an attempt to put Page 3 above critique. A letter of support from the domestic violence charity Refuge, for instance, was one of his key defences. His testimony also rested heavily on perhaps the UK's most well-known feminist, Germaine Greer. Mohan noted that *The Sun* commissioned Greer to write a pro-Page 3 piece for the 40th anniversary of Page 3, and quoted from it extensively at the hearing. This was clearly a deliberate tactic to quote the words of a leading feminist like Greer in support of Page 3, instead of addressing his own responsibility as editor in publishing the coverage discussed at the inquiry. In a double-layered invocation of women, Greer's defence

of Page 3 depicted an imaginary woman who she claimed was not offended by Page 3, demonstrating the power and reliance on this device in defence of sexualised imagery.

Citing feminists in this way was a key tactic of both outlets. Similar to *The Sun's* use of Greer, *The Sport* cited feminist academics, drawing on 'the position of feminists, such as Strossen and Segal' and arguing with regards to Anna van Heeswijk that there are 'many who disagree with her, including feminist groups not represented at the Inquiry'. Pitting feminist academics against the campaigners was a key tenet of *The Sport*'s attempt to discredit the women who gave evidence. *The Sport* went further than *The Sun* in this regard, even using name-calling by other feminists to discredit the women giving evidence. *The Sport* thus stated that the campaigners were; 'described by other feminists as constituting "a new moral purity movement" (Wilson), as "anti-porn crusaders" (McIntosh), responsible for stirring up a "moral panic" (Rubin).' *The Sport* also positioned the women who gave evidence at the Inquiry against what it called 'libertarian feminists' and 'respected groups such as Feminists Against Censorship'. This also served to foreground and normalise the idea of free speech.

Mohan also used women more generally to defend and justify *The Sun's* treatment of women. Responding to questions about a piece featuring Pippa Middleton's bottom, Mohan avoided responsibility by using another woman to defend the feature – female photographer, Alison Jackson. First Mohan stated that Jackson was 'very, very well-respected' and 'very respected'. When pressed again Mohan stated that the creator of the photographs was a woman, inferring that the piece was therefore beyond criticism, stating; 'Look, the picture was supplied to us by Alison Jackson, who, as I say, is a very, very well-respected female artist, photographer (…).'

When asked about a piece trialling Debenham's invisible shaping bum boosters 'by testing men's reaction to a woman's bottom when she stands at the bar and bends down at work' Mohan evaded the accusation of sexism and the idea that the piece promoted harassment at work. He instead focused on the fact that it was tested by 'a female', with the implication that it therefore could not be sexist.

Mohan also used women's voices indirectly, claiming to speak on behalf of the subjects pictured and whether or not they would be offended. When asked about the Pippa Middleton piece, and being directly accused of encouraging harassment and irresponsible messaging around consent, Mohan argued that it: 'would neither have offended, I wouldn't think, Pippa

Middleton or Prince Harry', and of Kelly Brook: 'I'm sure Kelly Brook wasn't particularly offended.'

Frame 2: Reframing

A reframing strategy was identified in the analysis in several of the arguments put forward by *The Sun* and *The Sport*. This was a rejection of the narrative presented by the feminist campaigners and the criticisms of sexualised imagery and media sexism. A reframing and renaming enabled the outlets to argue that features such as Page 3 have been misunderstood and misinterpreted and to instead position this coverage as something positive.

Strategy 8: Desexualising, neutralising and normalising the imagery

In several places Mohan reframed Page 3 away from sexism and objectification either by repositioning or deflecting. This desexualising and normalising of the image was key to his defence. As noted, Page 3 has, since its inception, presented a curiously desexualised image of the 'accessible girl next door'. This deliberate desexualisation strategy was corroborated by Roy Greenslade, now a Professor of journalism at City University and a media commentator, who during his career was a subeditor on *The Sun* in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Interviewed for this research Greenslade revealed;

> *I can tell you this from the inside, we went to extraordinary lengths to de-sex the pictures. We painted out pubic hairs. And breasts would be too big. Sometimes if there seemed to be too much flesh we painted over it. We [were told to] choose pictures in which the model mustn't be overtly sexy (…) the essence of The Page 3 girl had to be that she was in fact* not *sexy* (Roy Greenslade).

Mohan built on this idea of Page 3 as normalised and desexualised and repositioned it away from pornography. In his written evidence he stated of Page 3; 'It was a statement of youthfulness and freshness. It is as innocent today as it was in 1970'. This distancing from concerns about sexism was continued by Mohan when he reframed Page 3 as a positive celebration of the female body in its natural form, stating: 'it's meant to represent youth and freshness and it celebrates natural beauty. We don't have models who have had plastic surgery on the page.'

The two Germaine Greer quotes given by Mohan in his written submission were central to this framing and convey the way in which the proprietors of *The Sun* wanted Page 3 to be viewed – not as sexual or sexually explicit;

> *Nowadays all of us who have a digital TV run a daily risk of beaming into our homes adult channels by simply pressing the wrong button. What we would then see and hear would make Page 3 look like a toothpaste ad. That is the truly extraordinary thing about Page 3. It is no more explicit, no more revealing than it was in 1970.*
>
> *The appeal of Page 3 is not simply sexual (…) Her indoors would ban the Sun from the house if Page 3 offended her but it doesn't. She regards her old man's glance at it on his way to the sports pages as like grandad's crush on Charlie Dimmock, basically harmless.*

The idea of Page 3 as a harmless crush epitomises the reframing that Mohan presented. The definition of the word 'crush' as 'an infatuation' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2019b) contains an understanding that this feeling is unrequited and whilst it remains a crush it is unconsummated and without sexual contact. This idea served to remove Page 3 from the realm of the sexual; a crush is something pre-pubescent teenagers have, or a crush implies acceptable, harmless, non-sexual behaviour, in a marriage, for instance, as conjured by Greer. Here a crush falls short of the sex act; there is no actual infidelity or affair, it is sanctioned, harmless silliness that doesn't threaten heteronormative monogamy and the marriage contract.

As noted elsewhere however, this was dangerous territory and a difficult line to maintain. Attempting to keep Page 3 in the realm of the non-sexual pre-pubescent and presenting the idea of 'the girl next door' carried with it a risk of collapse into, and sanctioning of, paedophilia. Even the notion of a 'grandad' with a crush on 'Charlie Dimmock' (a television presenter whose appearance on gardening programmes without a bra underneath her clothing attracted much media comment), implied a vast age difference, a whiff of something 'inappropriate', if this concept was not upheld.

The Sport took a much stronger approach, as demanded by the accusation in the Rule 13 Letter that its titles were indistinguishable from top-shelf pornography, stating;

> *Insofar as Ms van Heeswijk implies that the content of The Sport is to be equated with "porn" she is presumably alleging, but not substantiating, that The Sport contains explicit sexual imagery. This is demonstrably false*.

Thus *The Sport* repeatedly offered outright denial that the imagery was pornography – specifically top-shelf pornography and definitely not adult content. *The Sport* instead bracketed its titles with mainstream newspapers and magazines, stating of its publications; 'Their glamour content is more akin to that of "lads' mags"', and arguing that the retailers' Code of Practice 'does not pick out as requiring any special treatment *the Sun*, *the Star* or *The Sport*.' *The Sport* were content for the publications to be viewed as sexual, but insisted that the titles were not explicit, extreme, hardcore or fetish. Thus whilst Mohan argued that *The Sun* was not at all sexual, *The Sport* urged that its titles were not *too* sexual, citing 'anti-censorship feminists' who;

> *argue that the defining feature of pornography should be its level of sexual explicitness. This is a point of some importance because The Sport's titles contain Page 3 images but they are not sexually explicit.*

As will be discussed in more detail in the analysis of moral discourses at the Leveson Inquiry in **Chapter Eight**, this concept formed the basis of *The Sport*'s defence of sexualised imagery and was framed in relation to obscenity legislation.

Strategy 9: Annexing male violence away from objectification and invisibilising male perpetrators

As noted previously both outlets denied accusations that they trivialised and eroticised male violence against women and any link between their coverage and workplace harassment. *The Sun* also closely aligned the paper with campaigners against domestic violence, thus distancing the paper from accusations of any link to male violence stating;

> *It is wrong to suggest that the Sun trivialises offences against women. On the contrary, the Sun has run ground-breaking campaigns highlighting the problems of domestic violence and sexual assault.*

The Sport also argued that the harm of sexualisation was not conclusive and presented a detailed argument reframing sexualised imagery as harmless in connection to male violence against women. This was a stronger, much more direct approach than that taken by *The Sun*. The images were not merely dismissed as harmless (i.e. silly) but a detailed case was made drawing on research to demonstrate that pornography does not harm (or at least that there was no research that conclusively demonstrated that pornography *does* cause harm.)

The Sport said it had 'no time' to address any of the women's evidence other than Anna van Heeswijk's and objected to the women's organisations being grouped together at the Inquiry; inferring that this categorisation implied a causal connection between sexualised imagery and male violence. In this strategy *The Sport* annexed the groups who addressed male violence away from those who addressed objectification, stating;

> *The other witnesses, grouped by the Inquiry with Ms van Heeswijk, made submissions to and attended the Inquiry to give evidence in a different capacity, as anti-violence campaigners.*

This language use was significant. Using the term 'anti-violence' not only removed the notion of male violence against women and distanced objectification and violence away from each other, it was also a striking tactic which served to lexically invisibilise men as perpetrators of male violence. The generic term 'anti-violence' could refer to many forms of violence, for instance campaigns for nuclear disarmament. This lexical invisibilisation was notable elsewhere in both Mohan and *The Sport*'s discourse. Both used ambiguous language to describe male violence against women, and did not directly name men. For instance, Mohan used the term; 'offences against women', and *The Sport* referred to 'violence inflicted on women or other harm' and 'individuals' who access extreme pornography online.

This grouping by the women's organisations and the Inquiry was intentional, and was reflected in the way that the women presented structural inequality and the oppression of women as an overarching framework. In this regard the feminist campaigners all emphasised a conducive context with regards to violence against women. This was an attempt by *The Sport* to reject the framing presented by the women and to reframe the discourse away from the notion of a conducive context for male violence against women.

Frame 3: Deflection

A deflecting strategy was identified in the analysis which was used to evade allegations of sexism and direct attention on to other problems in different industries which were framed as 'worse', particularly around moral panics such as sexualisation, body image and eating disorders. Other tactics in this deflection framing included bargaining, for example claiming that unacceptable behaviour was in the past, as well as justifying and legitimising negative behaviour by emphasising positive behaviour such as campaigning and charity work. This strategy demonstrated a defensive acceptance of criticisms of sexualised imagery and sexist

portrayals, and the discourse reflected a more desperate tone in which small elements of taking responsibility were evident.

Strategy 10: Women-blaming

As noted with regards to Kelly Brook, both Mohan and *The Sport* deflected blame to women rather than accepting responsibility on behalf of the newspaper. *The Sport* used this tactic in its defence of upskirting. By framing upskirting within the bounds of privacy law *The Sport* inferred that women were to blame for wearing revealing clothing and being photographed in what was legally defined as a 'public place', as *The Sport* argued;

> *The majority of 'up-skirt' photographs are posed for by models. The minority are sourced from photographic agencies and show images taken in a public environment and where the subjects have no reasonable expectation of privacy.*

This women-blaming argumentation also carried an inference that the campaigners' approach was patronising to other women, and that the feminist campaigners were themselves guilty of women-blaming. For instance in *The Sport*'s accusation that Anna van Heeswijk was guilty of 'perpetuating myths of "good" and "bad" women'.

The Sport also drew on work of the academic David Buckingham in several places to support an agency argument. This included a section of his 2009 report for the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), *The impact of the Commercial World on Children's Wellbeing*. With regards to agency, *The Sport* quoted a section of this report in which Buckingham notes that those who oppose sexualised imagery are alleged by critics to be presenting a kind of 'victim feminism' and 'a form of false consciousness'.

Strategy 11: Deflecting responsibility to the reader

Dominic Mohan used several devices to deflect responsibility away from the editorial team and proprietors of *The Sun*. This included using the familiar 'reader decides' argument expressed as a liberal free market supply versus demand principle. *The Sport* articulated a similar argument, stating that readers decide whether to buy the newspaper or not and thus have power over its contents. When confronted with ethically complex issues, placing power with readers was a tactic to avoid taking responsibility. In contrast when claiming responsibility for petitioning the Government about equal access to the breast cancer drug Herceptin, or

when discussing electoral voting, Mohan did place power and responsibility with the owners, editors and journalists of *The Sun*.

However with regards to Page 3, in his written submission he argued;

> *The Sun has a readership of over 7.7 million. If readers didn't want to see Page 3 they would tell us or, alternatively, they wouldn't buy the paper.*

Similarly he argued at the inquiry that;

> *the ultimate sanction lies with the reader. The reader is not compelled to buy the newspaper on a daily basis. It is tolerated in British society by the majority of British society.*

However at this time and throughout the history of Page 3, *The Sun* has conducted surveys of readers to gauge their support for the feature (YouGov and The Sun, 2012). This indicates that *The Sun* was aware that people buying the paper in its entirety was not necessarily a demonstration of their feeling towards Page 3. The paper comes as a package – it is not possible to purchase pages one and two, for instance, without purchasing Page 3.

Mohan and Greer's use of the word 'tolerate' with regards to Page 3 was also revealing. This indicates an understanding that readers and the general public were only merely tolerating Page 3, as opposed to liking it or supporting it.

Strategy 12: Placing unacceptable behaviour in the past

Another deflection strategy used by both *The Sport* and *The Sun* as a distancing device, was to argue that unacceptable behaviour was in the past. For instance, it was established between Jay and Mohan on several occasions that Mohan was either not at the paper, on another section or not senior enough to have any involvement in the pieces that were critiqued. Mohan also presented himself as a reformed character and stated on several occasions that his unacceptable behaviour was in the past. This has similarities with the noted strategy in political communications, when politicians are typically advised that admitting to drug use prior to being in public office is acceptable but that a distinction between before and after must be maintained. For instance when running as a Conservative Party leadership candidate David Cameron was pressed by an audience member about his drug use on BBC1's *Question Time* and responded; 'politicians deserve a private life before entering politics' (Cameron,

2005). Following this tactic, when pressed about coverage of a woman romantically linked to the footballer Wayne Rooney with the headline 'Rooney tart's dad has heart attack', for instance, Dominic Mohan responded: 'it does grate with me and it's something I would think about greatly before doing again.' When asked about disparaging pieces about Clare Short and other politicians who had critiqued Page 3, and whether he would run a similar piece again, he responded: 'possibly not in that way, no' and 'It's not probably something I would run now, no', and 'I don't think I would run it in that way now'. He compared a piece that he did publish about female politicians favourably with what he framed as the harsher treatment of Clare Short in a piece run before he was editor, arguing; 'I didn't use that kind of language that was used in the previous article.'

The Sport had less reason to utilise this argument as it was not cross examined under oath at an oral hearing. However the argument that unacceptable behaviour was in the past was still evident. For instance, with regards to criticism of the column by Chubby Brown, *The Sport* labelled him a 'former' columnist. *The Sport* also claimed that things were different under the 'new regime'. In this regard a break was established between the old ownership (negative) and the new ownership (positive), despite the fact that the new management was made up of mostly the same people. In this regard *The Sport* argued;

> *The owners/managers of The Sport titles have been very willing to take on board constructive criticism and over the years the titles have introduced a robust policy in terms of the acceptability of adult industry advertising. Under the new ownership regime, the titles have been thoughtful and responsible in their approach to reporting crime, the judicial processes and 'hard' news.*

Strategy 13: Deflection to women's Corporate Social Responsibility activity

One of the central tenets of Mohan's argument was an appeal for sexualised imagery to be seen in the wider context of the paper and its positive activities. Thus he deflected away from sexism in the paper and argued that *The Sun* couldn't be sexist because of its support for women and women's issue campaigning and charities. The analysis in this study has identified this as a key deflection strategy and an example of positive PR brand campaign positioning in which an allegation is minimised by distracting with other ethical behaviour. This technique has been theorised by Laufer in his study of corporate greenwashing as 'posturing'. This involves attempts to present a persuasive case for 'the organization's collective commitment to ethics' (Laufer, 2003, p. 257). In this regard Mohan argued;

you shouldn't look at Page 3 in isolation. You should look at all the other work we do with women's issues. I outline quite a few of the campaigns here that we've run, one against domestic violence in 2003. There's also a letter from the head of one of the domestic violence charities, Refuge, which is attached.

In his written submission Mohan gave a paragraph of detail about seven of these campaigns including domestic violence, rape, Poly Implant Prothèse (PIP) breast implants, Herceptin, sunbeds, cervical cancer and size-zero models, as well as a lengthy description of the positive work done for women by *The Sun's* agony aunt 'Dear Deirdre'. Mohan even presented a long story in his written evidence claiming that *The Sun*, via Deirdre, saved the life of a young mother and her baby. He claimed that Deirdre had personally tracked down this woman, who was suffering from post-natal depression, and prevented her from leaving her baby to die and committing suicide. Mohan highlighted these campaigns further in his oral evidence.

However, the clearest example of *The Sun's* strategy of deflecting to Corporate Social Responsibility activity was a letter from the women's domestic violence charity, Refuge, submitted by Mohan to the inquiry. This document was not in the public domain but was accessed via a Freedom of Information request for the purposes of this research. It is notable that this was not a document historical to the inquiry, but was dated 4 February 2012, three days before Mohan appeared at the inquiry for a second time to defend Page 3. This was therefore requested by *The Sun* from Refuge specifically to support *The Sun* and its defence of Page 3. Significantly the letter from Refuge was supplied after the women had given evidence on 24 January (and following the subsequent national press coverage of their hearing.) As noted previously, this letter also represented a key element in the strategy of co-opting women's arguments and pitting women against each other. The letter from Sandra Horley the Chief Executive of Refuge supported *The Sun* stating that; 'Together we have raised awareness of domestic violence', and advised the inquiry that;

> *There can be no doubt that The Sun has significantly helped to raise Refuge's profile and the work it undertakes. The Sun has done much more than any other national paper to bring the issue of domestic violence – the facts and the myths – to the public's attention*

Mohan wrote that Refuge;

> *say the Sun has done more to champion the cause than any other media partner since*

> *2003 (…) The charity reports that the volume of visits to their website trebles and calls to their helpline doubles when the Sun runs stories on this issue. The Sun's coverage spearheaded the drive for Domestic Violence Protection Orders, which are currently being piloted in Greater Manchester, Wiltshire and West Mercia.*

Strategy 14: Deflection to outlets that objectify women for women

Another device used by Mohan and *The Sport* was to deflect to outlets which are largely understood as by and for women – such as women's magazines and the fashion industry (in contrast to pornography and sexualised imagery which is understood as by and for men). This reflects a neoliberal emphasis on choice and agency and draws on the familiar idea of women as their own worst enemy.

The Sport similarly deflected to images of women and men 'for women' contained in women's magazines, fashion magazines, celebrity gossip magazines and other glossy style magazines, enclosing examples from *Cosmopolitan, Star Magazine, New Magazine, Sunday Times Magazine* and *Tatler*. *The Sport* emphasised that, like the coverage in its own outlets, all of these images were in mainstream magazines which were unrestricted and on open display.

The Sport built on this point by addressing a 'wider cultural failure' across all media and argued that looking at sexualised imagery in isolation was unfair as it failed to take in the range of sexualised imagery found in; 'fashion advertising, clothing styles, music videos, computer and mobile downloads, internet and other areas of everyday life'. *The Sport* reiterated that;

> *Any recommendation for consistency across the media must surely stem from an Inquiry or review which is tasked with examining the issue of sexual imagery across all forms of media, including books, magazines, internet, new media etc.*

The Sport stated that the Inquiry's approach was 'piecemeal and segmented' and an 'attempt to tinker with the fringes', arguing;

> *It is unfair and irrational to look to The Sport titles (and perhaps also the Star and the Sun, if in receipt of similar "potential criticisms") to rebut an unsubstantiated standpoint concerning a supposed society wide cultural failure.*

Strategy 15: Deflection to moral panics including sexualisation, body image and eating disorders

A key deflection strategy identified in the analysis was the way in which Mohan and *The Sport* transformed allegations of sexism into discussions of sexualisation. This foregrounded the moral panic around sex and young girls – a narrative of 'too much too soon'. As noted Mohan evaded the accusation that Page 3 women may be objectified and that the images may be sexist. Instead he argued that the images were not sexualised, anorexic or photo-shopped. In his opening statement to the Inquiry Mohan asserted; 'I don't think that the images are sexualised in the way that even some clothed images are in magazines, advertisements and pop videos.' Mohan's use of the word 'clothed' was notable, as it added to the central claim made by *The Sun* at the inquiry; that semi-naked images of women are not inevitably sexualised as a consequence of their nudity.

Like *The Sun*, *The Sport* deflected to the moral panic around sexualisation as opposed to sexism; the key point presented by the women's organisations and put forward by Jay in the cross examination. As noted, objectification was dismissed outright by *The Sport*. Instead a significant section of its written response was devoted to discussing the sexualisation of children, including citing large passages of the previously mentioned Buckingham Report and examining the Bailey Report at length. (Both were government-backed reviews into the sexualisation of children in 2009 and 2011 respectively.)

As cited in the literature and discussed in **Chapter Three,** the notion of sexualisation has been problematised as unhelpful and, as identified in this tactic used by *The Sun* and *The Sport* at the inquiry, distracting from the more important issue of sexism. Furthermore, this approach has been critiqued by Coy and Garner and others for focusing on the idea of an age beyond which sexualisation is appropriate, rather than critiquing the concept of sexualised culture from the perspective of male violence against women and girls (Coy and Garner, 2012, p. 290).

Both Mohan and *The Sport* referenced other moral panics in their evidence. The approach, noted previously, of deflecting to outlets such as women's magazines and industries such as fashion was twinned with a 'worse perpetrator' argument, in this regard. For instance Mohan discussed the preoccupation with the harm caused to girls and women by phenomena such as eating disorders, poor body image, low self-esteem and mental health issues, which he in part attributed to photo-shopping, plastic surgery and 'unhealthy' fashion models. When asked about objectification and whether 'Page 3 treats women as sex objects', Mohan offered no response to the question. Instead he compared Page 3 to what he argued was a worse offender; catwalk models, who, as noted, exist within an industry seen as for women not men. Mohan responded;

> *No, I don't, because I think that the girls are very healthy, for instance. They're good role models. If you look at a lot of catwalk models, they're stick thin. Some of them don't look very healthy. So I would disagree with that.*

This was echoed in Mohan's written statement where he argued that;

> *In a culture that encourages plastic surgery such as breast implants, Page 3 girls are an advertisement for natural beauty. There is a no-silicon [sic] policy. The Page 3 candidates are healthy girls in stark contrast to many of the stick-thin models who grace the pages of high fashion magazines in varying states of nudity.*

Mohan also reiterated the idea of other worse offenders when profiling *The Sun's* 'Anti-Size Zero' campaign. This deflection strategy positioned *The Sun* as morally and ethically upstanding and the fashion industry as the problem to be tackled;

> *More than 3,000 readers signed a Sun petition that was handed in to Downing Street in 2007 to ban underweight models (BMI* [Body Mass Index]*, of less than 18) at London Fashion Week. The Sun's continuing Anti-Size Zero campaign has highlighted the poor example stick-thin models set to impressionable youngsters.*

Strategy 16: Deflection to positive, caring behaviour in other parts of the organisation

One of Mohan's core framings was the idea of *The Sun* as a 'force for good' – a point which he detailed with several examples of *The Sun's* positive and caring behaviour in other parts of the publication and organisation. He framed this as a key component of *The Sun's* brand, and went into some detail to argue this point, stating that *The Sun* was; 'always a loyal companion to our readers, male and female', as 'It relates to them in a more passionate way than any other title'.

To evidence this Mohan gave examples including praise for *The Sun's* science coverage, as well as offering a long account of the beneficial work done by *The Sun's* agony aunt, Dear Deirdre, and her team. He stated that 'Deidre and her team of six counsellors and two researchers reply free of charge by email or post to every genuine reader's problem', and argued that the;

> *advice service is the embodiment of the pledge in the first editorial of the Sun under the ownership of Rupert Murdoch in 1969 that the Sun is a paper that cares for its readers.*

Mohan also emphasised additional activities undertaken by the Page 3 models arguing that they 'can be role models and a force for good'. He demonstrated this via a detailed account of five Page 3 models who went on a 'morale-boosting assignment' to visit serving British troops in Afghanistan. He focused on one of the Page 3 models in particular, Peta Todd, who he said 'is a patron of the Help for Heroes charity who regularly visits injured soldiers' and;

> *has raised tens of thousands of pounds for the charity, climbing Mount Kilamanjaro [sic], wing-walking, cycling hundreds of miles across France and running the London Marathon.*

The Sport were less able to utilise this argument because the paper was almost entirely made up of sexualised imagery and sport. However *The Sport* did emphasise that they were a good business and good for the economy in terms of providing people with jobs. *The Sport* also claimed good behaviour with regards to Press Complaints Commission and Advertising Standards Authority complaints claiming that;

> *The Sport has enjoyed a very positive relationship with the PCC which can confirm that The Sport has always replied and acted promptly when dealing with complaints*

The Sport also argued that 'Over the course of its history *The Sport* has received only a few complaints concerning accuracy of which a small number have been upheld'. This argument did not register the fact that the Leveson Inquiry was triggered by the PCC's failure to self-regulate or note issues around inadmissibility of third party complaints.

Another attempt to deflect away from media sexism and towards other positive aspects of the organisation was Mohan's framing of *The Sun* as serving a democratic function. In this regard he argued that *The Sun* performed 'a public duty with a public interest: to inform a mass readership so that British democracy can function properly'. Mohan detailed this throughout several paragraphs of written evidence. This was a key example of deflection in order to legitimise and justify; where positive behaviour was presented as justifying negative behaviour, or the accepted price that comes with it. This strategy has parallels with the discourse used by loyal Conservative Party members to justify negative aspects of Prime Minister Boris Johnson's behaviour. In this framing, as Moore notes, 'apparently allies of Johnson know that his infidelity is written into his "price" and his supporters won't mind' (Moore, 2018).

Strategy 17: Deflection to less regulated outlets, such as the internet, digital television and books

In another attempt to deflect, both Mohan and *The Sport* echoed Anna van Heeswijk's call for consistency in regulation across all media, but instead highlighted less regulated outlets. Whilst van Heeswijk repeatedly compared print media with a *more* regulated outlet, mainstream broadcast, Mohan and *The Sport* compared print media with *less* regulated ones, the internet, digital TV channels and books.

Mohan drew a parallel with unregulated online content in order to demonstrate how harmless print media was. He emphasised this in his written evidence, citing a quote from Germaine Greer which argued that digital television is far less regulated than print media. Mohan also twinned this argument highlighting less regulated media with another current moral panic – in this case social media and the impact it may have on children and adolescents. Mohan argued; 'As a parent myself I'm more concerned about images that my children might come across on the Internet or on digital devices'. *The Sport* similarly highlighted the internet as less regulated, arguing; 'Internet access allows individuals to view hard-core pornography and violent and extreme publications at any time and place.' *The Sport* also contrasted sexualised imagery with another less regulated outlet, books, arguing; 'There is no age restriction on the sale of books which contain explicit accounts of sex or which portray sexual violence.' This comparison with books enabled *The Sport* to argue that further restriction was unnecessary by drawing on a similar less regulated medium. This argument also served a second purpose for *The Sport*, connecting sexualised imagery to obscenity legislation and framing it as still under this jurisdiction. This point will be discussed in more detail in the analysis of moral discourses at the Leveson Inquiry in **Chapter Eight**.

Frame 4: Projection

Projection was identified in the analysis as a key framing strategy utilised by both *The Sun* and *The Sport* in an attempt to position the issue as one of misplaced interpretation. Key to this argument regarding sexualised imagery and Page 3 was asserting that critics lack a sense of humour. Other tactics noted in the analysis included trivialising and downplaying accusations and neutralising dissent by appealing to irony, humour and heritage. This approach also included efforts to shut down critique by mocking and bullying those who opposed the imagery.

Strategy 18: Men are objectified too

A key projection strategy identified in the analysis involved the familiar argument that men are objectified too. In this regard Mohan argued;

> *There was (…) a photo of three female jockeys and in the submission* [by Object and Turn Your Back on Page 3] *it says that we would never picture male sports stars in that way, and I disagree with that, (…), you can barely walk down the street without seeing a billboard of David Beckham in his underwear. Cristiano Ronaldo has posed in his underwear and we've carried those photographs.*

The example given referred to paid-for advertising as opposed to commissioned editorial. As established in the academic literature in **Chapter Three** this argumentation about men being objectified too fails to account for gendered power relations or the prevalence and cumulative impact of sexualised imagery of women and girls (Stoljar, 2000, p. 98; Madhok, Phillips and Wilson, 2013, p. 3).

In this regard, in a direct attempt to demonstrate that men are, or at least can be, objectified too, at the height of the action by Claire Short in the 1980s, *The Sun* introduced a fairly short-lived 'Page 7 fella'.

Moreover *The Sport* enclosed examples of mainstream fashion and style magazines which it argued featured images similar to those found in *The Sport*. In its explanation *The Sport* was clear that, in its view, this included images of men, as well as women, being objectified, sexualised and degraded.

Strategy 19: Invoking context to deflect, distance and divert

Mohan repeatedly used the notion of context, in an attempt to dilute and downplay the representation of women in *The Sun*, arguing;

> *you have to look at this in context (…) since I last appeared at the Inquiry, we've probably published more than 8,000 articles in the paper. We publish more than 100,000 a year. I've probably been editor overseeing over 250,000 articles a year. These do represent quite a small percentage.*

He also used this idea of context when seeking to deflect away from Page 3 and towards the women's issue charity and campaigning work carried out by *The Sun* stating: 'I think that it's

worth looking at Page 3 in a wider context, and in *the Sun's* context of women's issues that we cover.' When discussing the Kelly Brook piece Mohan stated;

> *I think this has to be put in context. This was on the Bizarre column, which is Gordon Smart, who you heard from. I mean it has a certain character to it (…)*

The Sport used a similar framing when defending a piece about Fiona Bruce, noting: 'The context of the article cited is misrepresented when reported in isolation.'

This strategy of contextual framing used by both *The Sun* and *The Sport* again constructed the idea that the issue was with those who were wrongly interpreting sexualised imagery. From this viewpoint if the imagery was assessed in a different context then it would no longer be a problem. *The Sport* similarly claimed that there was an issue of contextual interpretation when arguing that critique should be levelled across all aspects of culture, stating with regards to sexualisation that it;

> *requires a focus on a very wide range of everyday activities within society of which the print media is just one part (and by no means a part in which Page 3 imagery is a foremost concern).*

Strategy 20: Claiming to represent the working class

The Sun have long claimed to represent and champion the working class as a defence for Page 3 (and indeed in other regards), with the inference that those who critique the paper and the feature are snobs (Ross, 2008, p. 119). At the Inquiry Mohan referred to class directly and indirectly. The feature written by Germaine Greer is anchored in working class language and stereotypes, via her rendering of the Page 3 viewer as an 'odd-job man' who refers to his wife as 'her indoors', with the wife in turn referring to her husband as her 'old man'. Mohan also referred to *The Sun's* working class appeal when arguing that the paper performs a 'public duty' and a democratic function, stating that; '*The Sun* connects with the values, broad interests and obsessions of millions of ordinary working men and women every day.' Alluding to the reading ability or educational attainment level of the typical *Sun* reader, he stated that the paper 'distils complex important issues of public affairs, including politics, finance and law into concise, readable copy.' Interestingly Mohan demonstrated an awareness of this class argument when he proclaimed;

And the beauty of democracy – a fact that our critics occasionally forget – is that the vote of a van driver who reads the Sun carries the same weight as a banker who reads the Economist magazine. (In fact, the banker may well read the Sun, too, since the Sun has more ABC1 readers than the Telegraph and Guardian combined.)

Strategy 21: Humour, irony

Humour and irony have been long been noted as key strategies used to defend sexism in various forms. A typical discourse in response to women who critique sexism is; 'it's a bit of banter', or name-calling such as 'prude, frump and no-sense-of-humour' (Ross, 2008, p. 120). This inference that the issue is one of interpretation is linked to the idea of inevitable and intrinsic male sexual behaviour.

At the inquiry Mohan championed *The Sun's* relationship to humour stating that; '*The Sun's* humour and its light-hearted nature has really been key to its success, in my view'. In his written submission Mohan placed humour at the core of *The Sun's* values and framed the publication in loveable and harmless terms such as 'occasionally boisterous and often cheeky', and stated that 'The alchemy of successful tabloid journalism is achieving the balance of seriousness, mischief and wit that makes the conversation with readers sparkle.'

Mohan repeatedly invoked humour in his defence of sexualised imagery and the portrayal of women in the paper, referring to it as 'laddish humour', 'light-hearted fun' and stating in defence of a feature; 'it's meant to be humorous'. Elsewhere he downplayed allegations of sexism with responses such as 'I think it's an amusing picture', 'that was a cheeky interpretation', and 'tongue was firmly planted in cheek when that was written'. When asked to defend the term 'Mitchell Brothers' (a reference to the two-bald-headed protagonists in *EastEnders*, Phil and Grant Mitchell) as a metaphor for Kelly Brook's breasts he responded that it's a 'humorous term' and 'it's a comedy mechanism which some people may have found funny; some may not.' Similarly with regards to the piece about the Debenham's 'invisible shaping bum boosters', Mohan used the word 'simply' to diminish the accusation of sexism, stating; 'it was simply a feature where a new form of underwear was being road-tested by a female' and arguing that it was 'light-hearted', implying that anyone who objected to the piece was lacking a sense of humour.

The Sport also championed the role of humour in its titles arguing that they 'aim to inform, entertain and amuse.' Humour was used a key defence by *The Sport* with regards to allegations of sexism. For instance when arguing; 'The "nipple count" is humorous. It is not

harmful, demeaning or illegal' and with regards to a piece about the BBC presenter Fiona Bruce;

> *The comedic approach of The Sport to the world of celebrity is most certainly irreverent but not derogatory (…) The article is obviously intended to be humorous. No complaint was received from Ms Bruce or the BBC.*

The column by Chubby Brown was also defended by invoking humour, with *The Sport* stating: 'The item is obviously a self-deprecating joke i.e. the joke is on Brown.' *The Sport* referenced the support of the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) with regards to humour, alleging that the sole complaint about *The Sport* in the previous 18 months 'was about a satirical item (…) The PCC dismissed the complaint on the ground that it was obviously a joke.'

The argument from both *The Sun* and *The Sport* was that those who don't get the joke have no sense of humour, thus deflecting responsibility away from the publisher and projecting onto a presumably small number of people and their 'offended' interpretation. Mohan reduced objection to Page 3 on several occasions to people being 'offended'. This was a key concept in downplaying and minimising arguments against Page 3; taking objections out of the realm of prejudice and discrimination (where the 'perpetrator' is at fault) and putting them in the realm of offence (where the 'perpetrator' is potentially benign and the issue is with the person 'offended'). This approach of projecting onto those who critique the outlet and invoking humour has similarities with political gaslighting techniques in which opponents are mocked and bullied through the use of humour and jokes.

Strategy 22: Heritage

Another tactic utilised by Mohan was to invoke heritage. This is a familiar strategy used to justify institutions when they become outmoded. Mohan twinned this with the arguments about humour and harmlessness – the notion of Page 3 as silly and trivial. This argument was used to shut down debate about the worth, or otherwise, of the feature and instead argue for the status quo. Thus Mohan defended Page 3 in the following terms; 'this was first published 42 years ago', it is 'an innocuous British institution', and 'it's a part of British society'. As noted, Mohan quoted Germaine Greer, commissioned to write a piece in 2010 for the 40th anniversary of Page 3. This heritage framing invoking the 40-year legacy and anniversary of Page 3 to defend the feature contrasted with Mohan's first appearance at the Leveson Inquiry. Asked about his vision for *The Sun*, he emphasised his desire to present a paper that was fresh and relevant stating that he viewed the paper as;

> *celebrating modern life and that it's 2012, rather than pining for the fact that we wish it was 1955 again, which I think a number of other newspapers do. I think that I've made the paper more modern.*

A heritage argument was also used by Mohan to defend sexist language in the paper. When asked whether a piece about a woman romantically linked to Wayne Rooney was 'devoid of humanity' he stated; 'I think the word "tart" has been used in headlines referring to prostitutes for many, many decades.' This invocation of heritage was used as an avoidance strategy by Mohan who did not address the key concerns put by the feminist campaigners, that the woman in the piece was nameless while Rooney wasn't, and that there was inherent sexism and invasion of privacy involved in running a story about the woman's father.

Both *The Sun* and *The Sport* promoted the idea that whilst society had moved on their imagery had not. Mohan stated in his written evidence; 'While social mores have changed over the years, Page 3 has not' and quoted Germaine Greer who argued that the feature had not changed since its inception in November 1970. *The Sport* similarly argued; 'The ethos of *The Sport* titles has changed little over the last 26 years.' This presented the idea that as other aspects of culture had got more raunchy and pornified, the imagery in *The Sun* and *The Sport* had remained harmless and innocent. To work, this framing had to be positioned in relation to sexual explicitness, not sexism. This thus reframes the reality of structural inequality for women, which, as Williamson argues is; 'a sex war which at heart is about social, not sexual power' (Williamson, 2003). If viewed in comparison to the sexism and gender inequality of the 1970s, Page 3 would seem dated. Emphasising these images as sexual not sexist therefore enables a framing in which avoidance of sexism has a key function in perpetuating it.

Summary of the analysis

This chapter has analysed the evidence given to the Leveson Inquiry by *The Sun* and Sunday Sport Ltd and considered how their defence of sexualised imagery and media sexism was mobilised. Following the work of Gill and Billig (Billig, 1987, 1988; Gill, 2014) this chapter has considered expressions of sexism at the Leveson Inquiry in the particular neoliberal, postfeminist context in which this argumentation was situated.

The overall strategy used by both outlets has been identified in the analysis and theorised as a framework with four elements – denial, reframing, deflection and projection. Within these four frames, 22 sub-strategies and arguments were identified, demonstrating in detail the

kinds of justification used in defence of media sexism and the range and variety of sexism on display at the Leveson Inquiry. The analysis established that many of the ideas presented were demonstrated via familiar sexist arguments often articulated to justify sexism. However there were many new varieties of sexism on display at the Leveson Inquiry. This extensive repertoire of framings, defences and justifications included emphasising everything from heritage, harmlessness, and humour to a focus on agency, and the contention that men are objectified too.

The four step framework was identified in the analysis as follows:

1. Denial:

   In this framing both outlets asserted that criticism of sexualised imagery was misplaced and argued that it was not harmful or illegal. This framing included denial that objectification and media sexism exist and that media contribute to male violence. The outlets demonstrated this by arguing that the models have agency, co-opting the views of feminists and women in support of sexualised imagery and portrayals, and discrediting the evidence of the feminist campaigners. Key liberal notions of free speech, laissez-faire and free market choices were presented to argue against harm and in support of the status-quo.

2. Reframing:

   A reframing strategy was identified in the analysis in which both *The Sun* and *The Sport* repositioned sexualised imagery and presented narratives that rejected the critiques put forward by the feminist campaigners. Key to *The Sun's* reframing was the presentation of the Page 3 image as a desexualised, harmless crush. In contrast *The Sport* positioned its outlets as sexual but not *too* sexual, reframing the imagery away from pornography. Both outlets repositioned the imagery away from male violence against women.

3. Deflection:

   A key strategy used by both outlets was to deflect away from allegations of sexism, either towards other 'worse perpetrators' or towards other positive aspects of the organisation. This included deflecting to moral panics such as the sexualisation of children and size-zero models, as well as less regulated outlets such as the internet and books. Examples of positive behaviour included women's Corporate Social Responsibility work on issues such as domestic violence and breast cancer and an appeal to the idea of the newspaper as a

force for good fulfilling a democratic function. This deflection strategy also included claiming that unacceptable behaviour was in the past.

4. Projection:
   In this framing, critique of *The Sun* and *The Sport* was positioned as a matter of misplaced interpretation whereby the issue was not with the content of the newspapers but with those offended by it. Critics were mocked as having no sense of humour or being snobs. The analysis identified that key to this framing was the argument that *The Sun* and *The Sport's* representation of women was humorous, cheeky, normal laddish behaviour. Heritage was strongly evoked to argue that the long history of sexualised imagery indicates it is harmless, particularly in comparison to other more recent extreme content.

The analysis has demonstrated that elements of a classic liberal discourse were still evident in the defences of sexualised imagery and media sexism at the Leveson Inquiry. Central tenets of classic liberalism used by *The Sun* and *The Sport* to justify sexism included an emphasis on free speech (the reader decides), freedom of the press, civil liberties, the private sphere and laissez faire. This understanding in which no harm is caused and the activity is located in the private sphere was still a key argument against the restriction of sexualised imagery through state intervention.

The defences mobilised also reflected the particular local context (Gill, 2014, p. 121) of the Leveson Inquiry in which neoliberal preoccupations with individual choice and personal rights dominated. In this framing the sexual freedom and liberation of the (assumed) male consumer was promoted and male entitlement to sexualised images of women and male objectification of women was maintained as an inevitable, normal part of sexual behaviour.

This chapter has argued that both outlets demonstrated a highly sophisticated defence and a strategic articulation drawing on the work of lawyers and political communication and public relations experts. Similarities with corporate PR strategies and political gaslighting techniques were demonstrated, particularly through tactics such as accusing opponents of being delusional, attacking their credibility and questioning their version of reality, as well as approaches such as projecting, bullying, and mocking through use of humour and jokes. The four-step framework identified in this discourse consisting of denial, reframing, deflection and projection has similarities, for instance, with Lakoff's taxonomy of Trump tweets. In this classification Lakoff groups Trump's Twitter communications as falling into four categories – pre-emptive framing (be the first to frame an idea), diversion (divert attention from real

issues), deflection (attack messenger, change direction) and trial balloon (test public reaction) (Lakoff, 2018).

As noted in the four-step framework in this analysis, both Dominic Mohan and Sunday Sport Ltd drew on similar justifications. For instance, invoking humour, arguing for the agency of the models and appealing to a wider cultural failure across multiple media. However, the differing content of the two newspapers, and the differing way in which they were criticised by the Inquiry led to a difference in the directness and robustness of their responses.

In this respect, whilst Mohan appeared relaxed and laid back in his approach there was a boldness and intricacy in his narrative, and his evidence appeared to have been scripted and managed by a public relations team. A key objective was to distance *The Sun* from the allegations of sexism made by the feminist campaigners and instead promote other positive aspects of the brand. The timing of the Refuge letter being secured just days before Mohan's testimony was a key example of this calculated strategy. The lengths to which *The Sun* went to invoke wider Corporate Social Responsibility, highlighting numerous campaigns around women's issues such as domestic violence, rape and breast cancer, and the support of women, such as Germaine Greer and Sandra Horley the Chief Executive of Refuge, also demonstrates an in-depth strategy.

Dominic Mohan's overall approach was to downplay the significance of Page 3 and instead position the feature as silly, funny and harmless. The nature of Page 3, the curiously desexualised 'girl next door', as established in **Chapter Three** (Ross, 2008), was key to Mohan's strategy. Mohan emphasised the idea of Page 3 as desexualised and denied any link to male domination, power and violence. Mohan maintained a complete avoidance of, and refusal to engage with, or even mention sexism or objectification throughout the hearing, even when these charges were directly and repeatedly put to him. Mohan used the word 'sexist' once, and that was in denial. This was the only instance of the words sexist or sexism that either Mohan or *The Sport* used.

In contrast Sunday Sport Ltd's approach was one of open attack. In this regard the critiques put to *The Sport* at the inquiry were harder to justify, especially given that the organisation was not able to draw on benevolent behaviour in other areas, such as campaigning features on breast cancer or domestic violence. Additionally *The Sport* titles consist almost entirely of sexualised imagery and sport. Thus whilst *The Sun* was able to position Page 3 as silly and harmless – at once deflecting accusations of being either sexual or sexist, without directly

mentioning either – *The Sport* instead argued that its titles *were* sexual, but within the acceptable, legal parameters of obscenity law; sexual but not *too* sexual, and anything *but* sexist or sexualised, with an emphatic denial of both. The majority of the legal response put forward by *The Sport* thus attacked the witnesses' credibility and reliability in order to undermine them, and concepts such as objectification and sexualisation were openly referred to and directly refuted.

Key Findings

That the Leveson Inquiry captured sexist argumentation in such detail was important as it offered an opportunity to analyse the varieties of sexism in public debate and identify precisely how they work. The analysis in this chapter is significant for those who study and critique media sexism because it reveals that far from decreasing or improving, the range of sexist argumentation in public debate is expanding and developing. Thus the framework identified in this chapter demonstrates that sexism and objectification are still flourishing, albeit present in new varieties and via complex, sophisticated strategies. For instance, projecting onto and attacking those who critique Page 3 has long been a central tactic when defending the feature and this type of imagery. Ross identified six reasons 'to repel criticism' of Page 3, carried out as a kind of bullying or 'name-calling' of those who criticise Page 3, with six labels typically applied; jealousy, man-hater, spoilsport, cultural dinosaur, no sense of humour and snobbery (Ross, 2008, p. 119). Mohan's emphasis in this regard at the Inquiry was on humour or lack of humour and to a lesser extent snobbery (the inference that *The Sun* and Page 3 are read by working class people and critics are therefore snobs.) These were just two of the strategies used by *The Sun* and Sunday Sport Ltd to defend sexualised imagery and media sexism in their outlets. This chapter has identified that whilst still present these strategies and justifications have evolved and expanded to encompass many more argumentations.

Viewed from a PR perspective three of the tactics; reframing, projection and deflection, demonstrated a defensive acknowledgement that sexualised imagery is unacceptable. For instance one of the most striking aspects of the analysis was the extent to which both *The Sun's* Dominic Mohan and *The Sport* co-opted and redeployed the arguments and viewpoints of women and feminists in order to use them against the feminist campaigners. This included everyone from Germaine Greer to photographer Alison Jackson, to women's aid charity Refuge and Feminists Against Censorship.

These excessive gymnastics performed by *The Sun* and *The Sport* to avoid, deny, sidestep and silently fail to acknowledge arguments about sexism demonstrate that it is still not acceptable to publicly admit to sexism. As argued by Douglas this is evidence of a kind of 'enlightened sexism', where the intent is the same, but the discrimination is 'just much better disguised' and 'more nuanced and much more insidious' (Douglas, 2010, pp. 10–11). This analysis has underlined the context of postfeminist culture in which sexism is acknowledged yet disavowed (McRobbie, 2009, p. 26; Gill, 2014, p. 110). This avoidance of sexism demonstrates the growing strength of a feminist human rights argument which asserts that sexualised imagery and media sexism are discriminatory. As sexism becomes less acceptable strategies to defend it become more elaborate and wide-ranging.

Furthermore this high-profile public critique of sexualised imagery indicated that media outlets could no longer continue to treat this as a trivial issue. This chapter argues that this highly defensive, reactive approach by both *The Sun* and *The Sport* indicates an industry under pressure. The collapse of the lads' mag sector and the end of Page 3 just three years later indicates the contextual backdrop to the Leveson Inquiry in which these outlets were being forced to adapt and evolve.

This chapter argues that the negative publicity and reputational brand damage caused by such a high-profile critique of Page 3 prompted a rethink of the feature by *The Sun* and its proprietor Rupert Murdoch. Additionally the forceful accusations and criticisms levelled at *The Sport* by the campaigners and the Inquiry clearly threatened its business model to the point where the outlet was at very real threat of closure due to potential reclassification as a top-shelf item.

Having analysed the evidence given by *The Sun* and Sunday Sport Ltd and identified the varieties of sexism mobilised at the Leveson Inquiry, this study will now move on to consider the dominance of a moral discourse at the inquiry. The next chapter, **Chapter Eight**, will consider moral discourses at the hearings and in the written evidence and final report of the inquiry. Interview data is also analysed in order to consider the strategies and tactics accounted for by key feminist campaigners when negotiating these dominant moral discourses.

Chapter Eight: Feminist responses to moral discourses in the Leveson Inquiry and report and beyond

Introduction

This chapter builds on the analysis carried out in **Chapters Six** and **Seven**. **Chapter Six** offered an analysis of feminist discourses in the written and oral evidence of four campaigners at the Leveson Inquiry. **Chapter Seven** deconstructed and analysed the variety of justifications used by both *The Sun* and *The Sport* to counter allegations of sexism, many of which were anchored in liberal understandings of the visual representation of women. This chapter moves on to analyse moral discourse about taste and decency found in the evidence given by *The Sun* and *The Sport*, and in Leveson's final report.

The aim of this chapter is to address RQ1 and identify and analyse moral discourses at the Leveson Inquiry and in the Leveson Report. This chapter also addresses RQ2 and sets out to uncover how feminist campaigners at this point in time accounted for their strategies and tactics when negotiating dominant discourses about media sexism and sexualised imagery. In particular this chapter considers feminist responses to some of the key the arguments used by *The Sun* and *The Sport* identified in **Chapter Seven**, as well as the moral framings identified in this chapter.

This chapter is formed of two parts. In Part One, moral discourses are identified and analysed in the evidence given by *The Sun* and *The Sport* and in Leveson's Report. The second part of this chapter draws on analysis of interviews with five feminist campaigners, including two who gave evidence at the Leveson Inquiry. As discussed in the methodology in **Chapter Five**, this analysis acts as a kind of triangulation of the findings in the first two textual analysis chapters, as participants reflect on the tactics and strategies they used to overcome obdurate liberal and moral discourses.

Particular attention will be paid to how feminist campaigners engaged with moral discourses, such as complex debates about harm to children, which involved the risk of being dismissed and discredited as moral crusaders, or as *The Sport* inferred, quoting Wilson; 'a new moral purity movement' (Wilson, 1993, p. 28). This chapter will argue that the campaigners and activists interviewed for this thesis were acutely alive to the complex territory of the moral right discourse and the battle over taste and decency, and, as will be demonstrated, developed

various approaches and tactics to overcome this issue. This was challenging work for many reasons, as will be discussed.

Part One: Taste and decency argumentation at the Leveson Inquiry and in the Leveson Report

As established in **Chapter Four** and **Chapter Six**, much of the argumentation mobilised by *The Sun* and *The Sport* at The Leveson Inquiry drew on liberal understandings rooted in notions such as free speech, the private sphere and civil liberties. This argumentation was theorised as a four step framework consisting of denial, reframing, deflection and projection and expressed via 22 sub-strategies used to justify and defend media sexism and sexualised imagery. This section will now go on to consider the ways in which the argumentation of *The Sun* and *The Sport* reflected moral discourses about sexualised imagery and media sexism. This analysis is underpinned by the conceptual framework established in **Chapter Four** which historicised entrenched notions of women's bodies as dirty, porous and in need of containment, and identified how this contributes to dominant understandings of women's bodies as indecent objects. Similarly although concepts of taste and obscenity remain ill-defined in UK legislation, the conceptual framework in this thesis established the continued dominance of the Obscene Publications Act (1959) in terms of how print media regulators frame the representation of women.

As discussed in **Chapter Two**, the 2003 *Communications Act* marked a key shift for both the broadcast and advertising industries, as legislation compelled them away from regulating against taste and decency and towards regulating against harm and offence. This reflects a departure from obscenity law towards regulating against discrimination in line with European human rights law (Millwood Hargrave and Livingstone, 2009, p. 27; Conboy, 2015, p. 89).

For instance, Ofcom's 2005 report notes in relation to changes in *The Communications Act*:

> In content regulation, the Act also supports a move away from the more subjective approach of the past, based on an assessment of taste and decency in television and radio programmes, to a more objective analysis of the extent of harm and offence to audiences (Ofcom, 2005, p. 15).

As print media was self-regulating there was no such similar shift by the PCC from taste and decency to harm and offence, and no compulsion in legislation for the PCC to change position. IMPRESS has gone on to adopt a framework that embraces a human rights based

understanding in relation to discrimination against groups. However, like the PCC, IPSO remains attached to a taste and decency framing in its Editors' Code, and has still not been compelled to shift position almost 20 years after this change was adopted in broadcast legislation and advertising regulation. The 2020 Editors' Codebook states that: 'Freedom of expression must embrace the right to hold views that others might find distasteful and sometimes offensive' (IPSO, 2020, p. 96). In a written submission to the Editor's Code Committee in 2019, The Media Reform Coalition argued that this intransigence means that; 'In practice, instead of guarding against discrimination it legitimises discrimination' (Media Reform Coalition, 2019a, p. 2).

There have also been considerable changes with regards to obscenity law. In January 2019, for instance, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) announced that obscene publications depicting consensual sex acts would no longer be subject to prosecution via *The Obscene Publications Act*, rendering the act almost entirely void. Thus obscenity law remains on the statute but is mostly redundant – finally liberalised and placed firmly in private sphere following the vision of The Williams Committee Report of 1979. A spokesperson for the CPS stated: 'It is not for the CPS to decide what is considered good taste or objectionable' (Waterson, 2019).

Emphasising this, data released by the Crown Prosecution Service shows the number of offences prosecuted under *The Obscene Publications Act* remains low over recent years. Numbers of defendants found guilty stand at 26 (2015-16), 36 (2016-17), 51 (2017-18) and 54 (2018-19). Comparatively the number of offences prosecuted under *The Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008* (63), possession of extreme pornographic images, stood at 1,737 (2015-16), 1,929 (2016-17), 1,542 (2017-18) and 1,075 (2018-9) (Crown Prosecution Service, 2019b, p. A53).

UK obscenity law has therefore shifted so far in the past few decades that it is almost impossible to imagine any article or image published by a print newspaper being classed as tasteless or indecent. Obscenity law prosecutions are now far less focused on publishers and producers. Instead law in this area encapsulates issues of private possession, particularly with regards to child pornography and extreme pornography (Edwards, 1998; Rowbottom, 2018). Rowbottom also notes a change in the type of content captured by the law in this area, which has seen 'a shift away from a broad offence focusing on obscene content, to the reliance on provisions that target a narrower range of content' (Rowbottom, 2018, p. 24). This is typically in relation to the possession of indecent images of children.

Thus any such defence of sexist imagery in print media as a matter of taste and decency as framed in obscenity law is meaningless, as no image or text in a UK newspaper could currently conceivably be prosecuted on the grounds of taste and decency. In this gap print media has free rein to publish discriminatory images of women and other groups and communities without sanction. The sole arbiter is the editor, as IPSO states that; 'issues of taste and decency should be a matter for editors' discretion' (IPSO, 2020, p. 96). As this chapter will go on to argue, this archaic framing allowed *The Sun* and *The Sport* to resist arguments about discrimination and keep aspects of the debate in the realm of taste and decency.

Use of obscenity law as a back-stop

Much of the argumentation put forward by both *The Sun* and *The Sport* used obscenity legislation as a form of denial of wrongdoing, reinforced by the idea that if something is legal it is therefore unquestionable. This appeal to the law is consistent with academic analysis in which law is revered in society and reflected in perceptions of it as rational, impartial and unemotional (i.e. implicitly male), an understanding in which law 'both institutionalizes the power of men over women and institutionalizes power in its male form' (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 238).

Then editor of *The Sun*, Dominic Mohan, for instance, stated at the inquiry; 'It's obviously legal. We're allowed to publish those images.' In this way, obscenity legislation and ideas and language rooted in this legislation were used as a kind of back-stop grounded in law.

The Sport directly cited obscenity law at length in their defence, arguing that this was the basis on which the imagery should be assessed by Leveson;

> *The conventional approach to determining whether sexual images are acceptable is within the context of the law on obscenity. (…) Whether an image falls foul of the law is assessed by juries by reference to 'the current standards of ordinary decent people'.*

The Sport also argued that the women's organisations which gave evidence at the Leveson Inquiry held marginal views which were not indicative of the aforementioned 'current standards of ordinary decent people', claiming that: 'Radical feminists reject society's traditional standards regarding what qualifies as obscene or indecent.' This framing follows Mackinnon's observation that the law privileges the male point of view as the normative position (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 238).

For *The Sport* this use of legality as a defence centred on arguing forcefully that *The Sport* was not sexually explicit, 'hard core', extreme or fetish, and therefore did not qualify as pornography or obscene material that should be regulated. *The Sport's* response stated;

> *The Sport titles publish page 3 imagery, that is to say, images of topless glamour models. These images are not sexually explicit. The titles do not publish any 'hard core', extreme, or fetish images. The Sport is very much at the least extreme/lowest end of the scale in terms of sexual imagery*.

Another strategy used by *The Sport* to focus the debate within the bounds of obscenity law was to draw parallels with the content of its own outlets and the content, and therefore regulation of, literature, in order to advocate for a similarly deregulatory approach. As noted in **Chapter Four**, historically literature was the primary focus of obscenity legislation, and is a medium which has evolved from being heavily restricted to relatively unregulated. Whereas the prevailing narrative is that the internet and other digital products, outlets and devices need more regulation, the legal precedent regarding books and literature is that they have been intensely scrutinised and been found to be acceptable without regulation. Aligning the material found in *The Sport* with extreme or explicit material found in books in this way was a compelling argument. This allowed *The Sport* to situate its titles alongside literature in the increasingly unrestrictive and ill-defined realm of obscenity law, arguing;

> *Top selling books, such as EL James's novel about sadomasochism, Fifty Shades of Grey (…) can be purchased by readers of any age. There is no legal requirement nor even a voluntary code by book retailers which requires such books to carry any warning sticker about "adult content" or to be displayed on the top shelf.*

The Sport also reinforced its argument by using privacy law to position the practice of 'upskirting' as a debate about legality, solely concerned with whether the photograph was taken in what is defined in privacy law as a private place. (As noted previously, since the inquiry 'upskirting' is now illegal.) Similarly with regards to advertising of pornography DVDs, sex web cams, sex chat lines and 'escort' services, referred to by *The Sport* as 'adult industry advertising', this was defended in *The Sport* titles on the basis that it was lawful.

Taste and Decency as an enshrined right

As noted in **Chapter Four**, obscenity legislation leaves the definition of taste and decency open to interpretation and wholly ambiguous – to be gauged based on what are interpreted as the

social mores of the day – what 'an ordinary decent man or woman would find to be shocking, disgusting and revolting' (Indecent Displays (Control) Act, 1981). This is subjective and open to interpretation. Taste is often conceived of discursively as similar to style or a sense of humour – something fluid and artistic which it is not possible or desirable to regulate. As will be discussed in more detail, this notion of taste performs such effective discursive work because it draws on reified discourses of individual freedom and personal choice upheld in current neoliberal preoccupations – 'the maximization of choice and self-fulfillment as the touchstone of political legitimacy and the measure of the worth of nations' (Rose, 1996, p. 164).

Despite the fact that the four women's organisations that gave evidence at the Leveson Inquiry underlined several times, in both their oral evidence and written submissions, that their objections and critique of media portrayals of women were not about taste and decency, for Mohan, *The Sport* and Leveson in his report, images of were women were referred to in relation to taste.

Germaine Greer's feature written to celebrate the 40th anniversary of *The Sun's* Page 3, and cited by Mohan in his written evidence, used the even stronger moral idea of disgust. As established in **Chapter Four,** this moral language locates the idea of sex, and in particular women's bodies, as something dirty to be controlled and bounded in. Greer positioned a morally pure Page 3 in comparison to other more extreme publications stating; 'Other publications have tried to out *Sun* the *Sun* by printing more revealing images only to succeed in *disgusting* much of their readership' (Emphasis added).

Similarly Mohan placed Page 3 within the moral confines of taste and decency on two occasions at the hearing, stating; 'Well I think Page 3 is a matter of taste', and then when asked by Jay about the pieces in *The Sun* cited by Object, Mohan responded: 'Well, a number of them I don't believe are in bad taste.' In his report, Leveson was broadly in agreement that these images should be seen as an issue of taste and decency stating: 'Furthermore matters of taste and decency are outside the code and properly should be' (Leveson, 2012b, p. 661), and later;

> *This material is offensive to many, but an issue does arise for consideration as to whether a regulator of a free press which is entitled to be tasteless and indecent should be intervening in this sort of area* (Leveson, 2012b, p. 661).

Leveson again indicated the obduracy of a taste and decency framing when he defended the evidence given by Dominic Mohan, stating in his report;

> *Dominic Mohan, the editor of The Sun, made a spirited defence of Page 3. He is not to be criticised for doing so, and many will feel that Page 3 of The Sun raises a taste and decency issue and none other* (Leveson, 2012b, p. 662).

At the Leveson Inquiry the barrister Robert Jay described the idea of taste and decency and issues of sexism in the Press Complaints Commission's Editors' Code as two lines falling on either side of a divide. He noted;

> *issues of taste and offensiveness fall on one line of the divide in the code, but is it not at least arguable that this* [coverage of Pippa Middleton's bottom] *falls on the other line?*

Mohan later repeated this metaphor when he referred to having 'crossed the line' regarding taste and decency. This idea of an imaginary line between acceptable and unacceptable, good and bad is notable for its lack of definition, yet sense of immovability.

Taste and decency as a human right; reversing the accusation of discrimination

The Sport went further still and presented a much stronger case for taste and decency. As with the emphasis on sexualisation, *The Sport* established that it was absolutely critical that the images in its papers were framed as sexual. Maintaining that images of women, naked, partially naked or clothed, were part of the sexual act or the sexual behaviour or activity of a man, formed the basis for a claim of taste and decency. *The Sport* attempted to nullify the critique of its outlets by arguing that the images were only a matter of taste, stating that the issue 'essentially comes down to <u>differences in taste</u>' (Emphasis added). This was reiterated on a second occasion by *The Sport* with the argument that;

> *As with so much of what has been criticised in The Sport, through the evidence of Ms van Heeswijk and in the Rule 13 Letter, it ultimately boils down to a <u>matter of taste</u>. Censorship on grounds of taste is obviously indefensible in a free society and incompatible with Article 10 of the ECHR* (Emphasis added).

The argument that any attempt to critique or remove the images would be a breach of Article 10 (freedom of expression) of the European Convention of Human Rights was particularly striking in this context. This conjured a human rights clash between Article 10 (freedom of expression) and Article 14 (discrimination). Thus for *The Sport's* argument to have traction and in order to invoke Article 10, it was critical that the charge of discrimination was refuted and

reframed as an issue of taste and decency whereby the outlets were being discriminated against, not the women represented in them or reading them.

Taste and decency as a legal defence for sexual images

In comparison *The Sun's* insistence that Page 3 was not sexual and was merely an innocuous and harmless image of a smiling, attractive woman appeared to be a difficult argument to counter. As Martinson notes, these images in the mainstream are harder to challenge when they are not classified as sexual, due to arguments such as; 'With much more pornographic, violent images available elsewhere, where's the harm?' (Martinson, 2013, p. 10). However *The Sun's* claim that the Page 3 image was at once *not* sexual, yet *was* an issue of taste was less compelling, as unlike the argument made by *The Sport*, this claim of *The Sun's* had no basis in legislation. To draw on protection from obscenity law these images had to be defined as sexual. Instead Dominic Mohan conjured a subjective notion of 'bad taste' which inferred a reference to aesthetic, similar to a garish pair of curtains. Furthermore Mohan only referred to taste when under the pressure of cross examination at the inquiry. This framing does not appear in his written submission indicating that *The Sun* were aware of the weakness and inconsistency of this argument. Not only was the argument unconvincing, the insistence by *The Sun* that the images were not sexual enabled a counter-rhetoric relating to equality and discrimination to be more easily put. If the images are not sexual this permits a counter-claim that they serve to uphold outdated gender and power relations – i.e. they are sexist. However *The Sun*'s brand as a 'force for public good' and a 'family newspaper' could not be reconciled with a claim that the images were either sexual or sexist – so both had to be publicly disavowed by Mohan.

The Sport was not restricted in this sense and advocated classification of its outlets with other 'less extreme' titles such as lads' mags which also featured images of naked women for titillation. *The Sport* recognised that by defining the images as sexual it could draw on historic obscenity law framing and the concept of taste and decency. *The Sport* therefore put forward a much simpler argument. By insisting that the images *were* sexual and thus in the realm of obscenity, a taste and decency argument was far more effective at rebutting the critique made by the feminist campaigners. In this way, sexual imagery could be protected as legal and beyond critique, as long as it was kept in the appropriate place and communicated to the appropriate audience.

Taste and decency or discrimination? Inconsistency between racism, transgenderism and sexism

The inconsistency of the taste and decency argument as demonstrated at the Leveson Inquiry was evident in the differentiation in Leveson's Report between sexism as an issue of sexual imagery and racism as discrimination. Whilst Leveson argued in his report that the press was 'entitled to be tasteless and indecent' with regards to women, he stated that while a newspaper has the right to be racist in theory, 'most people' would advocate for some kind of regulation of this racism, even without a first party complaint. Thus Leveson made a direct comparison between sexism and racism and positioned the two differently. He argued;

> *On the other hand, most people would argue that obviously racially offensive material, which on one level might be said to be partisan in tone and content and therefore defensible as falling within the prerogative of a free press, should be capable of being the subject of regulatory comment notwithstanding the absence of an obvious first party complainant. It must be recognised, however, that there are many cases along the spectrum where reasonable people will disagree* (Leveson, 2012b, p. 661).

The last line includes an acknowledgment that there is a spectrum of cases in terms of racism and not everyone will agree on every case – some may be more or less severe than others. That Leveson drew a distinction between racism and sexism and seemed to suggest that the harm of racism would be acknowledged by 'most people', yet the harm of 'material which is pornographic and demeaning to women' would not be universally acknowledged as harmful to women is significant. These norms are presented as facts, but more accurately would be described as being based on a subjective assessment of current societal norms.

As discussed in **Chapter Two**, The former Press Complaints Commission (PCC) made a very similar distinction between sexism and racism as evidenced in the explanation of its rulings. The PCC's position on taste and decency was summarised in this statement on its website:

> *Questions of taste and decency are always highly subjective, and if the PCC were to have to decide whether something was 'tasteless' or 'offensive', it could become a moral arbiter, thereby inhibiting newspapers' right to free expression* (PCC, 2012).

This explanation notably twinned a moral discourse about taste and decency with aspects of a liberal discourse, as discussed in **Chapter Seven**.

Dominic Mohan articulated a similar inconsistency when discussing *The Sun's* coverage of transgender people. Whilst he classified Page 3 as a matter of taste and did not acknowledge

sexism or discrimination in relation to *The Sun's* portrayal of women, he did acknowledge discrimination with regards to transgender people, agreeing that there was wrongdoing and a violation of the code in this coverage. Barrister Robert Jay asked Mohan to compare the accusations against *The Sun* querying;

> *I've given you three examples. We've got the Page 3 example, Mr Mohan. We've got the examples which Object refer to, (…) and we've got the Trans Media Watch example. I'm not saying they fall on a spectrum. Do you see those examples as being, in effect, the same or do you see differences between them? And if so, what are the differences?*

Mohan responded;

> *Well, I think Page 3 is a matter of taste. Obviously I think with someone with transgender issues we've crossed the line in terms of the code.*

This chapter has thus established that a complex taste and decency framing was still present in the Leveson Inquiry discussions about the portrayal of women. Furthermore the analysis has demonstrated how this is mobilised to render sexism impermissible as a form of discrimination.

Part Two: Feminist resistance to sexism and misogyny: Reflecting on, and accounting for, campaign tactics and strategies

Having identified the dominant liberal and moral discourses at the Leveson Inquiry and in the Leveson Report, this chapter now moves on to consider the feminist tactics and strategies used to resist these arguments. Drawing on five interviews, this section analyses how feminist resistance was mobilised and how campaigns to critique media sexism were accounted for by some key actors in this sphere. This analysis pays attention to what Newman terms 'landscapes of antagonism', in particular the ways in which neoliberal and postfeminist logics at this point in time made resistance and critique 'both more difficult and potentially dangerous' (Newman, 2012, p. 168).

Challenging the most frequent and obdurate liberal arguments

When asked to account for the most frequent and difficult arguments to overcome with regards to sexualised imagery and media sexism, the campaigners interviewed for this research cited several of the strategies identified in **Chapter Seven** and used by Dominic

Mohan of *The Sun* and of Sunday Sport Ltd. Participants indicated that arguments used by organisations such as *The Sun* and *The Sport* to justify media sexism frequently emerged from a classic liberal understanding of free speech, free markets and personal liberty. This analysis demonstrates how difficult these arguments were to counter in the context of a neoliberal culture in which individualism and choice dominate. As Rose asserts; 'the terms that are accorded so high a political value in our present – autonomy, fulfillment, responsibility, choice' (Rose, 1996, p. 152).

Lucy-Anne Holmes, who founded the No More Page 3 campaign in August 2012, noted that even though she was determined not to frame the campaign about Page 3 as a ban and did not use the word ban, a free speech framing by her opponents was persistent, and a tactic that she found 'annoying' and hard to deal with. She states;

> *It tended to be quite a male argument (…) men of a certain age. And even people who you might hope would be a bit more understanding [would say] – 'You're trying to ban it,' or 'I'm not going to interfere with that, because that's press freedom'* (Lucy-Anne Holmes).

Heather Harvey, former research and development manager at Eaves Housing who was one of the women who gave evidence at the Leveson Inquiry, agreed that she also frequently encountered shutdowns about free speech and censorship, which she felt had the effect of silencing women and curtailing their freedom of expression. Like Holmes she found this particularly disappointing from liberal, left-wing men;

> *This is a massive problem for us as the women's sector because those are the people who should be our natural allies; human rights and freedom of expression defenders, the liberal left. But they still reflect all of those hierarchies around male power which means that they are not helpful to us on that, they're actually part of the problem* (Heather Harvey).

However Holmes felt that adhering to a straightforward appeal for the feature to be discontinued was a key strength of the No More Page 3 campaign and rendered free speech arguments less effective. She explained her approach to the campaign and the nuance in her argument;

> *I was just like 'Well, if you don't want somebody to do something, you ask them not to do it.' You don't go to that person and say 'Make that illegal.' It was just like 'I'm going to ask that person repeatedly not to do it!' It didn't really occur to me to go [for a ban via legislation] (…) It would have been an easy thing for the press to go 'Oh, well, we can't possibly…'. Whereas actually this wasn't a ban, and that became a big thing that was on our side* (Lucy-Anne Holmes).

This account demonstrates the differing approaches and tactics of feminist campaigners at the time. No More Page 3, as demonstrated, used their vocal desire not to change legislation as part of their campaign strategy. Other organisations, such as Object, had a key remit as a lobbying organisation to effect change through legislation. In common with No More Page 3 however, Anna van Heeswijk, Campaign Manager for the women's organisation Object, who was one of the women to give evidence at the Leveson Inquiry, explained that she countered these frequent and vociferous challenges about free speech by focusing on practical solutions with;

> *(…) what we saw as quite common sense solutions, because we could just easily say 'This isn't about censorship, it's about consistency', 'This isn't about censorship, it's about adequate regulation', 'This isn't about censorship, it's about upholding equality legislation.' That's why it was always so important to have practical solutions to be able to counter those sort of arguments* (Anna van Heeswijk).

Lucy-Anne Holmes talked about frequently encountering the free market argumentation noted in the discourse of *The Sun* and *The Sport* at the Leveson Inquiry in **Chapter Seven**, of 'if you don't like it don't buy it', when campaigning against Page 3, as well as arguments about the agency of female models, which were often class-based. She recalled the elements of this argumentation and how forcefully it was expressed;

> *'What right have you got to deny a working-class woman a way to make a living?' That was spat at me. People argued that I was taking away a freedom or a right (…) The other one I got was 'If you don't like it, don't buy it.' That's the one that just got everywhere. I got that again and again and again* (Lucy-Anne Holmes).

Rebecca Mordan is a feminist campaigner who reestablished the London Reclaim the Night in 2004 with academic and feminist activist Dr Finn Mackay, and runs a feminist theatre company, Scary Little Girls. Mordan takes part in live panel discussions and debates about sexism, pornography and prostitution and is a regular guest commentator in debates on Sky

News and BBC London radio. Mordan agreed that arguments about the agency and choice of the women were frequent and difficult to counter;

> *It's this thing of, 'Well I don't want take away that woman's right to get her tits out, if she wants to.' That's quite complicated to argue against, because it's again someone trying to give you a very simple shut down when the argument needs to be much broader and more contextualised. So of course you've got to argue, 'What is choice?'. You've got to argue that economics are part of coercion, which I believe they are. If it's a good job that people want, men do it. And if it's a shitty job that no one wants, women have to do it. And that speaks for itself doesn't it? That speaks volumes.* (Rebecca Mordan)

Holmes recalled that a class-based challenge was also mobilised by *The Sun* in an attempt to discredit No More Page 3 and pit the campaigners against the Page 3 models;

> *The Sun kept saying 'A load of middle-class women, they've never read The Sun.' And that was such crap. It's almost a shame that I sound so middle-class, because I did grow up with The Sun* (Lucy-Anne Holmes).

Anna van Heeswijk also experienced this discrediting counter-claim throughout her time with Object, when campaigning on issues including lap-dancing clubs, lads' mags and Page 3. She noted that in order to deflect away from the behaviour being highlighted by Object, their opponents would try to create scenarios so they could allege that feminist campaigners were attacking or patronising other women;

> *One of the most common tactics of the industry would be to try and make it look like it was an issue that was women pitted against women (…) (…) it wasn't ever our position to (…) try to argue against individual women who, whatever their reasons are, have ended up, on Page 3 or whatever* (Anna van Heeswijk).

Van Heeswijk also noted that mainstream media, particularly broadcast outlets, would perpetuate this situation and try to create 'catfights' between women as a kind of spectacle. This tactic has been noted in the literature as a practice which 'minimizes serious discussion of feminist concerns' (Baker Beck, 1998, p. 145). As van Heeswijk noted;

(…) interviewers would try and pit you against the women. We always tried to take a firm stance that we wouldn't be drawn into that, but that was probably the most difficult thing to handle (Anna van Heeswijk).

Heather Harvey also described her experiences of other women being used against her to defend sexism. This was the tactic of using women as an alibi in the denial framing used by both *The Sun* and *The Sport* at the Leveson Inquiry and noted in **Chapter Seven**;

They try to use women to shout down other women. Things like – 'Well this woman doesn't mind it, this woman thinks it's okay, this woman's got a sense of humour, this woman has written this.' As though all women are homogenous and we therefore have to go with whoever they are choosing to cite because it suits them (Heather Harvey).

Campaigners identified other deflecting and bullying tactics used by their opponents, for instance through familiar name-calling such as 'You're just jealous because you're fat and ugly.' As Mordan noted recalling some of the attacks on her;

Making you feel like you're ugly and stupid is really easy to do around Page Three. 'Oh don't be such a prude. Oh, you just wish you had that body. Oh, you're just trying to make women feel guilty when sex is perfectly natural.' Men will go 'Oh you're just jealous because you don't like yourself'. You get that a lot when you are young. All of those things are part of a society that makes women feel ugly in order to shut them up as a first bastion of attack, and then it makes them feel frightened, and then it sometimes attacks them, if they still haven't shut up by then (Rebecca Mordan).

She was so frequently labelled a prude when debating media sexism and pornography that Rebecca Mordan took a pro-sex anti-porn cabaret to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2008 as a direct response. As she explains;

We [Mordan and her co-creator Kate Kerrow] were very struck by the fact that every time we said we didn't like porn, people thought we didn't like sex. They were like 'Oh my gosh! You're a prude!' Or they were sorry for us, you know, 'Oh no, it must be awful to not like sex.' I weirdly found that I talked more about what an active sex lover I am, and how much I enjoy my sex life on anti-porn panels than I've talked about it almost anywhere else. So the show was a fun way of saying, 'You can love sex. Sex is fantastic. And porn is part of rape culture' (Rebecca Mordan).

Mordan also identified the use of humour and irony as a shutdown, as highlighted in the argumentation of Dominic Mohan in **Chapter Seven**, stating that she frequently encountered responses such as;

> *'Oh come on love! It's only a joke!' It's that thing of making sexist jokes and then saying, 'I was just being ironic'. That idea of a humourless feminist. It's such a traditional, old fashioned thing* (Rebecca Mordan).

Heather Harvey described similar attacks and shutdowns that she encountered;

> *There's all the silencing stuff around 'You're a humourless, frigid, man-hating, lesbian, feminazi.' There's a lot of that. There's 'It's just banter. It's just banter'. All of that happens all the time. Even when you're trying to have a serious discussion* (Heather Harvey).

Deflection was also frequently noted via a strategy of drawing attention to other 'worse perpetrators' (such as online pornography), which were discursively framed to dismiss the campaigner's efforts as pointless. Holmes noted;

> *People were like 'What's the point? You go on the internet and you see all this stuff [porn], so why are you worried about Page 3?' We got that quite a lot. We got 'I think women's mags are worse, or the Daily Mail's worse'* (Lucy-Anne Holmes).

This deflecting counter-rhetoric was also framed as an appeal to 'focus on something more important'. For Lucy-Anne Holmes this was typically Female Genital Mutilation (FGM):

> *It would be 'Why don't you do something about FGM?' I remember the deputy editor of The Sun used to come up on Twitter, and he would always go and do something about FGM* (Lucy-Anne Holmes).

Campaign tactics and negotiations against a taste and decency argumentation

The campaigners interviewed for this study were aware of the entrenched issue of obscenity law when critiquing and resisting media sexism. For many of them taste and decency was the most obdurate issue and required the most complex argumentation and negotiation. Various strategies to tackle a taste and decency argumentation were accounted for. This resistance

involved thoughtful resolution and nuanced and tactical approaches and was complicated work.

Perhaps reflecting the complexity of the taste and decency argumentation and how difficult it is to counter, the feminist campaigners rarely referenced it in their oral and written evidence to the Leveson Inquiry. As discussed in **Chapter Six**, this included one brief mention of taste at the hearing by Jacqui Hunt of Equality Now and two brief mentions in the written evidence of Object and End Violence Against Women (EVAW) respectively.

Campaigners were clear in interviews that taste and decency dominated the issue of media sexism and discrimination and required complex negotiation and strategising. The next section will therefore move on to consider feminist campaigner's accounts of why this taste and decency argumentation was so difficult to overcome.

Women and discrimination – arguing for inclusion

Many of the campaigners interviewed for this study revealed that the reason a taste and decency framing was so difficult to overcome was that before they could even begin to articulate a compelling argument to counter it, first they had to establish that media sexism *was* an issue of discrimination. *Guardian* columnist Suzanne Moore, who has written about women's issues from a feminist perspective for over 30 years, argues that even the general category of press ethics is often not extended to the portrayal of women. She notes;

> *Obviously I think that ethics would involve the representation of women. I think a lot of people in journalism think ethics is something completely different. Ethics is over here about sources and all that stuff* (Suzanne Moore).

For Moore this annexing of women into a taste and decency category results in an abstraction. She argued that this dislocates what is an issue of discrimination away from arguments about structural inequality for women, and that this framing is itself a form of objectification;

> *It's just matter of objects, then, isn't it? Tasteful objects. It's also about women having no agency, and their representation as passive, and then you decide whether you think it's tasteful or not. That that image has no interaction with how women might actually lead their lives* (Suzanne Moore).

In contrast Moore recalled the clear link made between Page 3 and women's lives in the campaign led by Clare Short in the 1980s:

> *I remember when Claire Short did the Page 3 thing some of the letters she had were really sad. Women who'd had a mastectomy, or their husbands didn't like them but they liked Page Three. Clearly the images were upsetting women. What about taste? Actually what about the impact that it's having on their lives?* (Suzanne Moore).

Reconnecting this link between the portrayal of women and their lived experience draws on feminist understandings established in **Chapter Four**, particularly Nussbaum's notion in which objectification involves a 'denial of subjectivity.' (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 257) This difficulty in naming discrimination against women demonstrates just how challenging the postfeminist context was at this point in time for the feminist campaigners working on these issues. Anna van Heeswijk, for instance, explained that a basic goal of her campaigning was to first establish acceptance that women were discriminated against, noting:

> *I don't know that it's always acknowledged that women are an oppressed group. Even that in and of itself, you know, women are a group that are discriminated against, I think isn't acknowledged* (Anna van Heeswijk).

Van Heeswijk recalled demonstrating the idea of women as an oppressed group in very basic terms when challenging the former chair of the Press Complaints Commission, Lord Hunt, in a meeting following the Leveson Inquiry. On being presented with a copy of *The Sport*, Hunt stated that he was shocked by the contents, despite the fact that the paper was regulated by the PCC at the time. Van Heeswijk recalled that when pressed, Hunt responded with a taste and decency framing;

> *His response was 'It's difficult, isn't it, because there are always issues to do with taste and decency, and what can you do about that?'* (Anna van Heeswijk).

Van Heeswijk accounted for her strategy when confronted with this kind of taste and decency discourse. She described how she urged Hunt to consider his argument in the context of other groups who are discriminated against:

> *I do remember saying to him – 'pretend there's another group that's discriminated against in society. If you had the first ten pages of a newspaper just be pictures of them*

> *naked and endless derogatory comments made about them, in often submissive poses, and the last few pages were the privileged group in that society all clothed and as active citizens, would that be considered an issue of taste and decency, or would that be an issue of discrimination?'* (Anna van Heeswijk).

She then recalled his response;

> *He couldn't quite answer it, I don't think. But it just went to show that that was the argument that we had to make. Any other group and it would have been considered an issue of discrimination and yet it's not about women* (Anna van Heeswijk).

The challenging work involved in repositioning unyielding dominant discourses is reflected in the observations of Stuart Hall who argued that;

> changing the terms of an argument is exceedingly difficult, since the dominant definition of the problem acquires, by repetition, and by the weight and credibility of those who propose or subscribe it, the warrant of 'common sense' (Hall, 2005, p. 77).

Reframing taste and decency as an issue of harm and discrimination

For Object's Anna van Heeswijk, combatting this entrenched taste and decency discourse so that a narrative about media sexism as discrimination could be heard involved articulating a debate about competing human rights. This was specifically in regard to the idea that other human rights may sometimes have precedence over, or involve a compromise on, freedom of speech. As she explained;

> *There are restraints on freedom of speech, and there are restraints within the editors' code in terms of what constitutes discrimination. So for us it was making the argument to say that this* [objectification] *is discrimination, and we all recognise that there is a limit on free speech when it's impinging upon other people's rights to freedom* (Anna van Heeswijk).

Rebecca Mordan explained that she took a similar approach;

> *You'll hear 'it's a right! It's a right!' as a way of shutting down the debate, which I think pales as an argument when you go; 'Yeah, along with all these other ones. And they're all equally valid.' We absolutely should have the right to freedom of speech, but it is*

> *one of an initial contract, a UN document, a contract for humanity that has 30 rights in it. It's not at the top. It's not a pyramid with that at the top. It's in a document with an equal set of things that we should be negotiating about for our human rights. It is one of them. And there are many others on there, including things like the right to live without fear of violence* (Rebecca Mordan).

Campaigner Martha Jephcott who has worked on the Nottingham misogyny hate crime initiative since 2015 viewed this situation in which campaigners had to argue for women's oppression to be considered as discrimination as symptomatic of the way that women are not trusted and believed, but instead blamed. She noted;

> *[Often] what 'erosion of rights' is code for is; 'you're too easily offended and my right to offend you is greater than your comfort'. It still comes from a place that looks to point the finger back at women for even trying to use their voice* (Martha Jephcott).

Heather Harvey made a similar point that all of these arguments which deny discrimination against women ultimately act to silence women and censor their speech;

> *Whichever way you try to raise issues of male violence against women, you get silenced. Whether it's individual libel cases, or whether it's called banter, or whether it's about censorship or if it's this or that. Whichever way you look at it, we're being silenced, and that's part of a broader patriarchal structure of not being allowed to call it out and name it, not being able to hold men to account, not being able to recognise that there is still inequality and that inequality is directly related to violence against women. It's where all of this fits in the bigger picture that for me is probably the most important thing* (Heather Harvey).

Navigating moral discourse and articulating arguments about harm to children

As established in **Chapter Seven**, the testimony of *The Sport* sought to discredit the feminist campaigners at length by labelling them as anti-porn moral crusaders. This demonstrates that there was a real danger for the campaigners that their voices could be silenced by this discrediting unless they negotiated moral argumentation with care. The analysis in this study demonstrates just how difficult it was for the argument that sexism is discrimination to be heard in this particular postfeminist, neoliberal context. As the analysis in this chapter will now go on to demonstrate, when challenging taste and decency arguments the campaigners were aware of the difficulties in navigating this tricky territory, particularly around harm to children.

Many campaigners understood that they were operating in a context that required them to frame issues in moral terms, even using arguments they were uncomfortable with or didn't agree with, in order to orient to the dominant discourses at that time and ensure that their arguments were heard. The campaigners revealed the fraught complications involved in articulating their messages and accounted for various strategies and tactics that they used to resist this obdurate moral argumentation.

For instance, Lucy-Anne Holmes was keen to avoid language that she felt might be perceived as passing judgement on Page 3 models, or that could be interpreted as being prudish or anti-sex. In this regard there were certain words she didn't use during No More Page 3 campaign. She explained:

> *We never say 'demeaning', we never say 'degrading'. There are never any judgments. If you want to do that, fine, fill your boots. It's just about where that picture's going. It's not about glamour pictures, it's not about being in the sex industry, it wasn't anti-sex work* (Lucy-Anne Holmes).

Not all feminist campaigners modified their language to this extent however. At the Inquiry, for example, the word degrading was used three times (Anna Van Heeswijk, Object), demeaning once (Jacqui Hunt, Equality Now), inappropriate twice (Marai Larasi, End Violence Against Women Coalition) and obscene once (Heather Harvey, Eaves). Some other campaigners were open about their refusal to modify their language – even when they knew it had moral right connotations. Feminist campaigner Rebecca Mordan explained that she refused to modify her language or censor herself in order to avoid accusations of prudery or a moral crusade:

> *I do sometimes use the word demeaning. I do think these things are demeaning to women and I wouldn't shy away from saying that. I think that's* [Page 3] *incredibly degrading. I feel sorry for her and I feel sorry for all of us. I'm not frightened of using what now seems like quite old-fashioned radical feminist language, because it's still bloody true!* (Rebecca Mordan).

Some campaigners such as Heather Harvey were very uncomfortable using any arguments that could be interpreted as moralistic, particularly those that foregrounded harm to children. Harvey explained that she would prefer not to use arguments about children at all;

It is really problematic for me because I definitely don't like using the children stuff as the hook for what as far as I am concerned we're campaigning around, which is violence against women and abusive male violence practices. Going down the children's route, I kind of resent it, because it's not about whether you're under 18 or whatever as to whether this is harmful and inappropriate. It's about lack of respect and equality and discrimination because you're female, or because you are relatively less powerful, and I would like to always situate it in that kind of rights and power type analysis which doesn't depend on how old you are (Heather Harvey).

However whilst she was very conflicted about this issue, Harvey did recognise that this kind of argument was sometimes necessary, stating;

I don't know what the answer is to this, because I can see the need to get a big buy-in, but I have question marks about where you draw the line and what your ethics are in terms of your overall campaigning message. The top shelf and the watershed stuff for me is pretty much nonsense, compared to the broader campaign that we're having around pornography and representations of women. But if we'd only focused on women and pornographic representations of women as being a silencing, intimidating tactic that excludes women from the public space, we would have had probably a lot less support than the fact that we were able to bring in all the stuff around children and the top shelf. It's much easier to get people onside by going through the children's route, but it's a really, really complicated thing, and it needs a lot of thought when you're doing it (Heather Harvey).

Harvey also made a connection with religious groups, explaining that as Eaves Housing's campaigns often focused on prostitution this frequently led to problematic situations;

What about church groups? I mean this is a really *difficult thing for us. I don't want to be bedfellows with very conservative, fundamentalist, religious, restrictive, family policy type organisations. That's not what I'm looking for, but the minute you're in that camp around prostitution abolitionism, and pornography and disrespectful language towards women, you're very easily shoved into the same bed as religious fundamentalists, and that's used against us, which is the same with children's stuff.* (Heather Harvey)

Similarly indicating what a fraught position this was for her to maintain, Lucy-Anne Holmes explained how careful she had to be when capitalising on a moral framing if it furthered her campaign. Sometimes orienting towards moral discourses would offer leverage to the No More Page 3 campaign, but this position had to be carefully negotiated to avoid negative connotations that might have jeopardised the campaign if the moral position had been overstated.

Acknowledging the vast task involved in challenging this dominant moral discourse, Lucy-Anne Holmes explained that despite her personal reticence around certain words she viewed her group as a 'broad church' and was pragmatic about disparate views and positions being expressed on behalf of the No More Page 3 campaign. In this regard she did allow views that may have had a moral right association to be used by campaigners, even if they were views that she didn't hold herself and wouldn't express personally:

> *All that I think that we did was create a platform [the No More Page 3 Campaign], so people were going to come on it for different reasons from you. I knew that there were some people who would be coming on who were anti-nudity, or this and that and the other, things that I don't agree with at all* (Lucy-Anne Holmes).

However when discussing Page 3 in relation to children, Holmes was aware that this was problematic and did take proactive steps to ensure that the campaign was not overly focused on this area:

> *I had to be quite careful at one point, I remember, because it felt like a lot of the stuff that we were sharing was about kids. And it was like 'Hang on, we're grown women. We don't want this. Let's not make it about kids.' (…) I didn't want it to be a 'Keep this away from the kids!' campaign* (Lucy-Anne Holmes).

Holmes expressed how finessed this position was, explaining that whilst avoiding a discourse about the 'damage' of these images to children, she did try to articulate a more nuanced argument about harm to children. This was specifically in relation to women as role models and how this might impact on children's perspective of their own, and others, future capabilities and limitations. Holmes explained that this position was clearly delineated from a moral argument about protecting children from sexual imagery. This kind of argument was used by the feminist campaigners to push back against a moral framing, as Holmes explained;

> *I do have a problem when you've got girls and boys growing up, and this is what you're telling them about what it is to be a woman and what it is to be a man, and it's so different* (Lucy-Anne Holmes).

She explained how she articulated her position with regards to children and Page 3, using an argument that asked;

> *'What is that saying? What is that teaching girls about their place in society?' It wasn't 'Oh, I don't want my children to see it', it was 'What is this, drummed in repeatedly?' It was the normalisation, and that it was in a newspaper* (Lucy-Anne Holmes).

Rebecca Mordan was clear that she did not avoid talking about harm to children, and said she would make similar arguments about issues around role models for girls and young women. She explained;

> *I'm often asked to talk about the effects of sexism on children, and I don't avoid talking about it. I think it's really important to talk about it. To me it's all connected. My problem with Page 3 is younger, less powerful women looking at a certain very narrow set of beauty roles defined by men* (Rebecca Mordan).

Anna Van Heeswijk of Object discussed a similar framing to Holmes and Mordan with regards to harm to children and attempted to draw a distinction between a moral right and a feminist framing. Reinforcing the argument that she presented at the inquiry, van Heeswijk explained that she tried to communicate the harm of the images in many different ways and to many different people, with children being just one constituency to which that harm was relevant. Her aim was to push the argument back to the language of human rights and away from a moral framing to ensure that her discourse couldn't be repositioned and discredited as a moral crusade. She explained her position with regards to children and Page 3 and how this argument was constructed in terms of language use and discursive expression;

> *We didn't* not *talk about the harms that it has on younger people, but we talked about it much more in terms of 'sexism is harmful for everyone.' We tried to put things within a broader, bigger perspective of harm, and that's where human rights language came into it. It wasn't just 'We don't like it'. We really tried to make sure we steered clear of anything that could be considered moralistic. Anything that could lead people to*

> *believe that the main issue was something related to taste and decency* (Anna van Heeswijk).

Indicating this pragmatic approach, Anna Van Heeswijk's evidence at the inquiry emphasised a feminist or human rights discourse around objectification and media sexism, but also drew on elements of a moral discourse. There was a focus on age-related zoning of pornographic material and the television watershed, both typically associated with a moral conservative position and reflected in obscenity legislation. Again, orienting to a moral context by capitalising on current preoccupations with issues such as sexualisation, van Heeswijk used terms such as 'child's eye level' and highlighted the easy accessibility of newspapers to children. As van Heeswijk explained, this use of zoning and the watershed was part of the solutions-based practical approach of Object's campaigning, which did not necessarily always reflect the organisation's overall goals. Van Heeswijk asserted that arguments about zoning, the watershed and child's eye level were deployed carefully as part of a wider point about the normalising effect of the images being on display in the mainstream. Discussing the argument to bring print media in-line with the broadcast watershed van Heeswijk explained how this was navigated via an approach where any small resistance or change was valid;

> *These kind of arguments obviously allude to the age of the viewers, which I think is important, but I do think it was always contextualised as protecting a mainstream space so that it isn't just filled with misogyny (…) I think there is a difference of if you're bombarded with something everywhere all the time, compared to if there's a space without it* (Anna van Heeswijk).

For van Heeswijk sometimes pragmatically communicating a message she was slightly uncomfortable with, or which may then have been used by detractors to accuse her of a moral crusade, was necessary in the pursuit of eventual change. She explained with regards to the watershed;

> *It's not an end goal, because it wouldn't be okay if after 9pm it suddenly came back, all of it (…) I do think there's something harmful about it just literally being the wallpaper of your life, in terms of women and girls feeling so overwhelmed by it. That at least there is a message saying 'No, this is not okay, this is not acceptable, this is not right, and there is something that we can do about it.' It's a first step, but it's an important first step* (Anna van Heeswijk).

This type of pragmatic positioning in which feminist campaigners moderated their approach to fit the context, and tapped into current public preoccupations and moral panics, was epitomised by van Heeswijk at the Inquiry. Drawing attention to the fact that the submissions presented by the women's groups were restricted and covered up ahead of distribution at the hearing, she noted that; 'They were censored for adults within this hearing when in fact they are freely available in mainstream newspapers which are not age-restricted' (Anna van Heeswijk).

'A way in, to look for a way out': The tactical strategy of small wins in pursuit of a bigger goal

A key strategy identified in the analysis, and particularly used by the organisation Object, involved focusing on a small, immediate changes that might trigger an overall bigger goal of the organisation. Inconsistencies, loopholes and very practical solutions were identified and targeted and would often lead to small successes in this way. Van Heeswijk explained how this strategy worked;

> *That was always a key element of it: what is something we can focus on for an achievable win? Which might not be your ultimate goal, but is something we think is achievable, and then use the focus on trying to make that change to make all of your other arguments as to why an even bigger change is necessary* (Anna van Heeswijk).

Van Heeswijk explained that this type of argumentation would often result in an ultimate goal of the organisation being achieved without it ever having to be articulated, noting:

> *We always would find a way in, to look for a way out, you know? A specific change that could be made, so that we wouldn't have to just fall back on 'We don't like it, let's ban it.' (…) All of these things, you see them as first steps. They're not ends in and of themselves, but they're really important first steps* (Anna van Heeswijk).

This analysis demonstrates the nuanced and successful strategies used by feminist campaigners to make changes in a postfeminist, neoliberal environment heavily stacked against them. Noting that Object, a very small organisation, achieved two changes to the law and several policy changes in a short space of time, Van Heeswijk talked about this very considered strategy as being a 'clever approach' that is more 'effective'. She explained that all the available arguments would be used in order to raise awareness of the issue as a whole but

that; ‘It's not pretending not to want to do something, it's finding a way that that could actually be achieved. That's common sense’ (Anna van Heeswijk).

Van Heeswijk demonstrated how this worked by discussing the campaign against lads’ mags and the strategy used by Object to effect seismic changes without openly advocating for them;

> *In terms of lads' mags, I remember doing an interview for the BBC with Piers Morgan and him saying […] that if they were to be sold, they would need to be covered up and placed on the top shelf, and that would effectively mean the end of lads' mags. We were aware that it would have that effect, but we never had to cut across him with a crass thing of ‘Let’s just ban it’* (Anna van Heeswijk).

Similar to Lucy-Anne Holmes of No More Page 3, Van Heeswijk was concerned with accessibility and saw this approach of articulating small, common-sense practical solutions as key to winning people over who weren’t necessarily feminist or informed on the issues:

> *The inconsistency and the fact that this makes absolutely no sense resonated with people, even if at that point they weren't necessarily on-board with all of the feminist arguments. But it also then could lead them to start seeing some of the arguments, as well* (Anna van Heeswijk).

In this way she explained that this kind of small-steps campaign also served an awareness-raising purpose. Using this approach Object attempted to gradually change attitudes in order that they could build up to campaigning for bigger changes. She observed that once a small shift had been successfully communicated;

> *then people actually can notice the difference when they see it and may actually find that they're quite shocked by it. Or they can see the harm in it more* (Anna van Heeswijk).

This notion of ‘quick wins’ and getting a swell of support from the general public was something that Heather Harvey similarly spent a lot of time considering with regards to how far to compromise when using arguments about harm to children. As noted previously, however, this was something she felt very conflicted about, as she explains;

> *When you're trying to campaign and you're trying to get change, how do you decide what to ask for and what to go for, and what compromises to make or what constitutes a success? I always found that a really, really challenging question. In terms of quick wins or more palatable campaigning that more people can get behind, you do sometimes have to make a compromise and think, well if we go in through the children's route then nobody can complain about that. It's a constant trade off. You're thinking, 'Well we could get more people to support this campaign', and obviously that's important if you're trying to achieve a goal and let MPs know that loads and loads of people think this is totally unacceptable. The more people you can get on your side the better* (Heather Harvey).

Considering language, tone and approach – accessibility versus directness

Tone and approach was something that Lucy-Anne Holmes considered key to her campaign against Page 3. She too chose to take a 'common sense' approach instead of, as van Heeswijk described it, a 'crass', or blunt one. When she began the campaign Holmes did not view what she was doing as feminist, and recalled going on a journey of discovery. As a result her approach was to be warm and welcoming, and her desire was to appeal to people like herself who would not consider Page 3 an issue until prompted and encouraged. This deliberately unthreatening approach was described by Holmes as more appealing than the 'shouting and disagreements and stuff within feminism'. Holmes explained that this meant that she pitched her messages to a mainstream non-feminist audience who were coming to the issues for the first time:

> *I was very new to feminism, and it didn't really strike me that this* [No More Page 3] *was particularly feminist. […] I wanted to make this accessible. […] I was aware that a lot of people might not have thought about it, and I wanted to make it easy* (Lucy-Anne Holmes).

Holmes used her developing awareness as a strength of the campaign, and explained that she was able to bring an accessibility precisely because she herself still had a 'foot in both camps'. Thus she was able to understand the mind-set and argumentation of those who had yet to be alive to the issues, as she explains;

> *I was aware from early on that for a lot of people, they hadn't thought about it. One thing that we'd always taken for granted, was that people would want to hide breast-feeding. So then to say, albeit it made them uncomfortable, 'Why are we doing that*

[hiding breastfeeding] while we're showing teenage boobs?' And people would be like 'Oh yeah! I haven't really thought about that.' There were quite a few things that were big wake-ups for me (…) So I felt because they'd been such wake-ups for me, that they might have that effect for somebody else (Lucy-Anne Holmes).

For Holmes the tone she settled on was 'warm' and 'light'. She explained that she tried different approaches, with a fact-based campaign about violence and sexual assault sitting uncomfortably with her:

I remember writing two things for the petition, one was 'These are sexual assault statistics', it was quite a hard read, it was more of a serious, sombre piece (…) it was fine (..) but it didn't feel right. I wanted it to be more like pointing to the absurdity, and to go for something warm and light, and have a real voice (Lucy-Anne Holmes).

Rebecca Mordan said that she would never change the words or the language she used when engaging in debates about sexism, but she was similarly very conscious of modifying her behaviour in terms of how she used her face and body, the tone of her voice and what she wore. She linked this to her training and work as an actor, director and scriptwriter (something she has in common with Lucy-Anne Holmes who also trained and worked as an actor.)

I haven't ever changed my arguments if I felt them to be valid, but I've changed how I put them across. I'm quite conscious about the story I'm telling with my physicality and with my manner. It's whatever I wear, it's how I use my face when I'm speaking, how I use the tone of my voice. I'm aware of all the elements of the story, and I think that's the stuff that I monitor and try to adapt to different circumstances. These are not things I feel particularly proud of, I capitulate a bit with some of this. I also think it would be nice to be in a world where I didn't actually have to bother to factor this into my arguments (Rebecca Mordan).

Crucially when she engages in debates Mordan said she works actively to reverse negative stereotypes of what it is to be a feminist and instead provide a positive image of feminist campaigning;

I try never to seem dour. I try to buck the stereotype of, 'serious, campaigning, activist, humourless feminist'. I always work quite hard to make it look like you might actually want *to be a feminist. Like my life might be quite good. As an incentive for people to*

> *bother to argue about this stuff, or to make changes, or to give up the approval of certain men. I think it should look like it's fun over here. I think it should look like feminism gives you permission to have fun. I think there's this way of being able to combine saying, 'Yes, be angry. If you're not angry, you're not paying attention. And yeah these things are wrong. Let's talk about how ridiculously wrong this stuff is.' But sometimes I'm also just trying to make being cross about something look like a positive thing to do* (Rebecca Mordan).

Naming male violence against women

Naming male violence against women was another area of complexity for the feminist campaigners. As established in **Chapter Seven**, links between media sexism, objectification and sexualised imagery were strenuously denied by both *The Sport* and *The Sun*. *The Sport* openly annexed male violence against women away from objectification and lexically invisiblised male violence against women as an issue of 'anti-violence'. When campaigning on this issue women are typically drawn into a cause and effect paradigm, as argued in **Chapter Three**; a position which is very difficult to navigate. Naming male perpetrators in a postfeminist neoliberal context was fraught with the risk of being silenced as 'man-hating', as Ross notes, a term that has long been used to shut-down women who critique media sexism, or indeed any kind of sexism (Ross, 2008, p. 19). Elsewhere Coy and Garner note that in the public policy sphere action on male violence against women has been displaced by panic about the sexualisation of children. In this way the state has transformed responsibility for male violence into a neoliberal imperative that parents are personally responsible for protecting their children (Coy and Garner, 2012, p. 292). This postfeminist context in which the fact of women's oppression and discrimination was denied, therefore demanded complex negotiations and strategies in order to be heard.

This analysis has demonstrated that the campaigners employed different tactics to avoid alienating their audience by being too openly critical of men. How direct and explicit to be about male violence against women, and how to negotiate this territory, was something that all of the campaigners were alive to. As discussed in **Chapter Six**, at the Inquiry both Marai Larasi of EVAW and Heather Harvey of Eaves articulated an unusually direct feminist discourse about violence against women, given the postfeminist context they were operating in, in which they repeatedly, explicitly named men as the perpetrators of violence, with Larasi even naming patriarchy in relation to this violence.

However the language used by the women at the inquiry was less direct, perhaps reflecting a need to be pragmatic in a postfeminist context. None of the women used the phrase '*male* violence against women' during the hearing. Given that Jacqui Hunt's organisation Equality Now was mainly concerned with the state's obligations in international law it is unsurprising that she did not name men in her analysis and instead referred to abstract terms such as 'elimination of discrimination against women.' Anna van Heeswijk used similarly dislocated phrasing including 'acts of violence that she was subjected to' and 'these kinds of violent acts'.

Some of the articulation deployed by Larasi and Harvey was also surprisingly unspecified in this regard. Larasi used phrases such as 'on preventing violence against women as well as addressing it', 'in the violence against women field' and 'which works against violence *around* black and minority ethnic women and girls'. The word 'around' in final the sentence above for instance rendering male violence as something like air or water; a substance floating around, controlled by no-one, lacking perpetrators or responsibility. Harvey similarly was very clear about naming male perpetrators and placing responsibility for violence squarely with men, but used ambiguous phrasing when she said she 'works on all forms of violence against women' and 'cases of violence against women and across all forms of violence against them'. Given that both Larasi and Harvey were so unequivocal when demonstrating that responsibility for male violence was with male perpetrators, this modified language use indicates a strategy of pragmatism in a postfeminist context.

When recalling giving evidence at the Leveson Inquiry, Heather Harvey said she surprised herself with how open and direct she was about violence against women. She explained that this was due to a combination of nerves and the need to articulate herself under pressure, as well as the strength of her feeling about the issues;

> *If I'm really honest I didn't intend to do that at all. I intended to be quite professional, and careful, and all those things. but I just felt I had to say so much in such a short time. And I was quite emotional about it. I felt very strongly about it. So I'd love to say I carefully decided to call it out, but actually I was just really struggling to get the words out, to really get it across and I thought, 'I'm not mincing my words, I haven't got much time and I just I'm just going to spew it all out there'* (Heather Harvey).

Whilst she may not have intended to be this direct, Harvey did feel that it was necessary to speak openly and expose the reality of what was happening to many women and girls as she explains;

> *You can't talk about sex work or being involved in prostitution by dancing around, you have to call it out. You have to say – 'You're not the one kneeling in the cold, in the mud, in the rain, on the floor having to suck the dick of a stinky, smelly man.' Now that's a horrendous way to talk and it's quite shocking and lots of people don't like that, but you sometimes have to get people to see that this is what goes on. And the sorts of comments that women were getting [online], like 'I know where you live and you should be raped backwards with a toilet brush'. The things that I said in there [in the courtroom at The Leveson Inquiry], they were things that were being said to women and so, it felt necessary* (Heather Harvey).

Reflecting the complex strategies employed by the feminist campaigners in relation to naming male perpetrators and male violence against women, Lucy-Anne Holmes explained the approach that she took when campaigning against Page 3. Holmes was careful not to make big assertions about sexual imagery and violence in relation to cause and effect, but preferred to indicate a spectrum from Page 3 to physical violence and sexual assault. She explained the oblique way that this was messaged:

> *I started talking about an incident that I hadn't even thought about, or ever really spoken about, that happened to me. A sexual assault incident. And then I sort of talk about that, and then I just say 'I'm not saying… but is it sensible, in light of these statistics, to be showing women in this way?'* (Lucy-Anne Holmes).

Van Heeswijk also noted that Object had a similar caution around violence and cause and effect and explained Object's strategy of highlighting cultural and attitudinal links to male violence against women;

> *We always tried to be careful not to make too big a jump, to try and substantiate what we were saying, and back it up with research. But you're always very clear that these attitudes that are normalised and promoted by a sex object culture are the attitudes that underpin inequality and violence against women. That they're very much associated with those actions. So I think that was always central to all of our campaigns* (Anna van Heeswijk).

Martha Jephcott, who worked on the Nottingham misogyny hate crime campaign, understood the complexities of addressing male violence against women in public debate. She explained

that although she was aware that open discussion of male perpetrators could lead to hostility, articulating a position that clearly named male violence against women was important to her. This was something she was determined not to conceal or tone down, even though she did tailor her approach to different audiences and contexts, as she explained;

> *I made a very conscious decision at the beginning that I was going to try and stay true, and that this was about men's violence against women, and as much as it was going to benefit the work I was going to stick to that principle. But I absolutely changed how that was packaged depending on the audience* (Martha Jephcott).

In this regard Jephcott attuned her communication to pre-empt claims that she was 'man-hating' or attacking men, describing her approach as 'wary', and this was reflected in the language she used about perpetrators;

> *For police officers it was a question of – this is everyone versus perpetrators. And that's completely true – this isn't men versus women. And being a young feminist stood up in front of really experienced police officers, getting them on board to that idea was really, really key. That message also worked really well for the media.* (Martha Jephcott)

Jephcott recalled that encouraging people to reflect on their own culpability was also a hard message to deliver, but that she didn't avoid this topic either, noting;

> *What's much more difficult is to say, 'Where are you culpable in this?' 'Where do you limit the women in your lives?' 'When do you not listen to the women in your lives that you care about?' Because we all do it. You know, I do it. It's ingrained in all of us. But that's a very, very difficult conversation to have. And it makes people very uncomfortable because we all have women in our lives that we love* (Martha Jephcott).

Reclaiming the feminist lexicon and an open feminist agenda

As well as modifying their behaviour and language use to mute signs that they were openly feminist, campaigners spoke about their efforts to reclaim an open and direct feminist language in their work as will now be discussed. This approach is consistent with analysis carried out by Chappell in Australia and Canada, which found that feminist activists adopt different strategies based on the 'political opportunity structures' available to them (Chappell, 2000).

Anna van Heeswijk of Object summed up the struggle to articulate a feminist discourse, yet still be heard in debates as;

> *(…) so booby-trapped. You really had to think through things not to just end up being dismissed. It felt like there was a lot to figure out about how to make the arguments, and make them clear, and make them accessible but not dumb them down* (Anna van Heeswijk).

The word feminist and whether to label the organisation as feminist was a key consideration for van Heeswijk, who explained that choices around this kind of language could make a real difference to the impact of Object's work and how their messages were received and heard;

> *Depending on the context of the situation, would be whether we described ourselves as a human rights organisation or a feminist organisation (…) I guess if you frame things in terms of 'This is an issue of human rights', it could be more palatable to certain audiences than getting their backs up straight away by hearing* ['feminist organisation'] (Anna van Heeswijk).

Interestingly at the Leveson Inquiry, van Heeswijk described Object as a human rights organisation – demonstrating the need to be accessible in this high-profile, postfeminist context. However reflecting this moment in time on the cusp of a resurgent feminism, van Heeswijk talked about the positive power of consciously reclaiming the feminist lexicon and using the word sexism, a word that she did not use at the inquiry, and how she felt excited to be part of the shift in bringing this word back onto the agenda. For van Heeswijk this was very considered work about how to make the arguments strongly; to distance herself from the pressure to appeal to the mainstream, but also to remain accessible and ensure that her arguments were not dismissed. As she recalled;

> *Publicly nobody ever used the word 'sexism'. It was always talked about as 'women's equality'. I remember saying 'I really think we need to start using words like sexism and misogyny' and at that point it seemed like a really radical thing to do. You'd be dismissed, and people wouldn't hear you, and you had to try to be more mainstream, to be in society. And actually we thought it was important to shift the debate that way* (Anna van Heeswijk).

Van Heeswijk's observations are reflected in the academic literature, in which it is noted that the period prior to the Leveson Inquiry in the 1990s and early 2000s was one of intense backlash when use of the term 'sexism' was elided and became 'unspeakable' as part of a postfeminist culture in which discrimination against women was denied (Williamson, 2003; Gill, 2011). In this framing 'sexism, and thus any need for feminism, is safely in the past, and feminists are tiresome and boring figures' (Gill, 2014, p. 118).

Heather Harvey did use the terms 'sexism' and 'sexist' at the Leveson Inquiry, albeit only three times. When considering why she had not used the term 'misogyny', Heather Harvey reflected the understanding discussed in **Chapter Six** of this thesis, in which sexism is seen as a more general term encompassing all sorts of discrimination, and misogyny is seen as something more direct and specific (Smith, 1996; Glick and Fiske, 1997; Mills, 2008). Harvey also cemented the idea that use of the word misogyny was not common and therefore not understood at this point in time, and therefore was not used by her the inquiry as she wanted her arguments to resonate with the wider public;

> *We just thought sexism was a clearer and better understood concept. Sort of simpler language in a way. I also think sexism is possibly slightly broader and about the stuff around equal pay, and all those other issues around sex discrimination. I think there is a bit more understanding of that. And it was important to us to situate it in a way that would be understood, but felt like it fitted on that continuum of violence against women and girls. I think misogyny is slightly more specific and it's much more resisted, if people even understand it at all* (Heather Harvey).

Reflecting on her campaigning, Martha Jephcott felt that some of the complex tactics she developed in order not to alienate men by signalling her message as too feminist, meant that she overlooked, or failed to focus enough on, whether the campaign messages were reaching women:

> *(…) in trying to not get this seen as a feminist agenda that could be easily written off, on reflection I feel I often missed the mark on engaging women. I think I was very, very, very keen to engage men and to buy men into this (…) so women bought into the idea that was put into the media of 'Wolf whistling's illegal now. If you report it you can't take a compliment. You're a square'* (Martha Jephcott).

In contrast, Anna van Heeswijk talked about the clarity she felt once she began to reclaim and use a more open feminist language;

> *I really remember the difference it made feeling freer to use the words that would come to your mind, instead of having to be careful around how I framed it all. I would feel like 'I can think more clearly'* (Anna van Heeswijk).

This redeployment and revivifying of feminist language accords with accounts of second-wave feminist additions and revivals of language, in which 'feminist linguistic innovations function to reinterpret and give a name to the experiences of women' (Ehrlich and King, 1994, p. 61). Similarly van Heeswijk's account echoes the findings of Mansbridge and Flaster who argued that words such as feminist and sexist, revivified by second-wave activists, and words such as sexual harassment, date rape and reproductive rights, coined by the second-wave feminist movement, 'facilitated new ways of thinking and acting' (Mansbridge and Flaster, 2005, p. 270).

Summary of the analysis

This chapter has analysed moral discourses at the Leveson Inquiry and in the Leveson Report, in particular the evidence given by *The Sun* and *The Sport*. Drawing on interviews with key actors in this sphere this chapter has demonstrated how five feminist campaigners accounted for the strategies and tactics they used to negotiate obdurate discourses about media sexism and sexualised imagery at the Leveson Inquiry and beyond.

The analysis in this chapter established that moral discourses were still evident at the Leveson Inquiry. The analysis highlighted as particularly significant *The Sport*'s argument that as the images in its titles were sexual they were an obscenity consideration only. *The Sport* thus used obscenity law as a kind of back-stop to assert that if something was legal it was unquestionable. Both *The Sun* and *The Sport*'s framing of sexualised imagery has been established in the analysis as an approach that can be summarised as anything *but* sexism. *The Sport* particularly emphasised the imagery as sexual and related to issues of sexualisation, obscenity and taste, and strongly rejected any association with sexism or male violence against women. This chapter argues that it was critical for *The Sport* to maintain this boundary as acknowledging sexism places the issue in the realm of discrimination and the conflict in the European Convention on Human Rights between freedom of speech and discrimination. This accords with Billig's contention that taking responsibility for prejudice is so unconscionable

that it must be denied, even by purveyors of extreme rhetoric such as the Far Right (Billig, 1988).

This denial by both *The Sun* and *The Sport* that the portrayal of women in their outlets was sexist demonstrates the culture of postfeminist disavowal in which debates about media sexism were situated at this point in time. This context, in which, as demonstrated in **Chapter Seven**, a complex and extensive variety of sexist justifications and defences were articulated with the support of sophisticated legal and public relations experts, presented an inordinately challenging environment for the feminist campaigners to negotiate. This was a genuine concern for the women who gave evidence as demonstrated by the argumentation of *The Sun* and *The Sport* in **Chapter Seven**. The women interviewed for this thesis revealed an awareness that attempts to resist media sexism in this context carried the risk of bullying, name-calling and vociferous attacks on their credibility. Their accounts demonstrated that in order to counter this hostile environment they adapted their campaigning through many different nuanced approaches and tactics. In particular, attempts to frame the campaigner's arguments as a moral crusade led to complex negotiations around issues such as harm to children and difficult decisions about how direct to be in their language and tone.

Some campaigners discussed the importance of reframing media sexism and sexualised imagery as an issue of discrimination as opposed to taste and decency. Further demonstrating the strength of this postfeminist culture of denial, establishing that media portrayals of women should be dealt with as an issue of discrimination, not of taste and decency, was a challenge for the campaigners to accomplish before they could even begin to articulate their key arguments.

Furthermore the campaigners then highlighted the difficulty, and importance of, arguing for a human rights framing with regards to media sexism, emphasising the harm of these portrayals and the methods they employed to challenge male free speech rights in human rights legislation. This is consistent with the noted increased dominance of a feminist human rights discourse as established in **Chapter Six**. For many of the campaigners, challenging the obdurate taste and decency argumentation and engaging with the dominant moral discourse carried the risk that their campaigns would be repositioned and dismissed as an anti-sex moral crusade. For some, such as Lucy-Anne Holmes of No More Page 3, strategies included avoiding topics or language that might have been associated with a moral right position, such as the use of words like demeaning and degrading, and not advocating zoning approaches such as age-restriction and removing imagery out of the sight of children.

Other campaigners were aware that they could carefully tap into moral preoccupations in order to leverage change, even when this involved suggestions they disagreed with or were uncomfortable with. Campaigners recounted pragmatic approaches in this regard, and The Leveson Inquiry demonstrated that Anna van Heeswijk's comparison of the 9pm watershed and sexualised imagery in newspapers was compelling. As noted in **Chapter Seven**, this threat of reclassification presented a serious challenge to *The Sport,* evidenced by its aggressive, rigorous response. This approach of campaigning for small changes to existing regulation or legislation was a successful activist, lobbying approach for Object in this regard.

Campaigners described how they took care to ensure that arguments about harm to children were nuanced and clearly framed within a feminist human rights discourse. For both Lucy-Anne Holmes and Anna van Heeswijk of Object there was an awareness that when discussing harm to children this needed to be positioned within a framework of harm to all, with a specific focus on equality impacts such as future career aspirations and relationship goals. Campaigners identified this as distinct from concerns legislated in obscenity law about depictions of the sex act being presented to children. Demonstrating differences in approach and strategy, other campaigners were aware of the fraught landscape and moral right associations when discussing harm to children, but refused to modify their language or avoid certain topics. Some such as Heather Harvey were very uncomfortable with engaging in arguments about harm to children as they wanted to focus on harm to women, and were wary of being framed as moralistic and aligned with conservative, religious groups.

The campaigners described similar complex negotiations around tone and language when it came to articulating a direct feminist agenda. This often resulted in challenging negotiations about whether to describe their organisations as feminist, whether to use words such as sexism and how direct to be about male violence and naming men as perpetrators. There were also more subtle judgements to be made about the tone taken and the arguments used, and campaigners described how they modified their approach for different audiences and contexts. For Lucy-Anne Holmes the No More Page 3 campaign was pitched as 'warm' and 'light' in an attempt to appeal to a mass audience who were not sympathetic to the campaign but could be persuaded. For Rebecca Mordan this was a deliberate strategy to modify her behaviour and present a fun and positive demeanour when campaigning.

Martha Jephcott who campaigned on misogyny hate, explained that the need to 'stay true' to a joined up discourse on male violence against women was critical to her approach. She felt

that softening the directness of her feminist strategy in order to avoid hostility as a response to naming male perpetrators was in hindsight a mistake. This approach was echoed by Anna van Heeswijk who spoke of a deliberate shift to a more direct and open feminist strategy which meant she felt 'freer' to speak her mind and make her arguments more clearly once she had decided to stop modifying her language.

Key findings

This analysis has argued that both *The Sun* and *The Sport*'s argumentation and the framing of Leveson's final report demonstrate that a moral discourse was still in evidence at the Leveson Inquiry where taste and decency was actively mobilised. The analysis in this chapter follows the work of Millwood, Hargrave and Livingstone, Conboy and Rowbottom (Millwood Hargrave and Livingstone, 2009; Conboy, 2015; Rowbottom, 2018) which indicates a general relaxation in obscenity law and a shift away from a taste and decency framing in most areas of the UK media, such as broadcast and advertising. However this analysis highlights an obdurate continuation in print media regulation which still upholds the right to be tasteless and indecent.

It is theorised that a taste and decency argumentation was so difficult for feminist campaigners to challenge because it was located both in historically dominant moral and liberal discourses and upheld in a neoliberal fetishisation of the individual – all of which privilege the male right to view sexual imagery and perpetuate media sexism. This triple entanglement of moral, liberal and neoliberal discourses made the arguments about media sexism and sexual imagery encountered by feminist campaigners at this time incredibly difficult to combat.

An inconsistency was also identified in the discourse at the Leveson Inquiry and in the adjudications of the former Press Complaints Commission (PCC) in how allegations of racism and sexism were dealt with. As noted in **Chapter Two**, in this regard the PCC did accept complaints about racism as discrimination on the grounds of group defamation, but not with regards to sexism. The portrayal and representation of women was instead viewed as an issue of taste and decency not discrimination.

The analysis in this chapter has demonstrated how attuned the feminist campaigners were to audience and context, and how they adapted their approach to fit particular local situations and points in time. Emerging out of a period of intense backlash marked by the hostile lad culture of the 1990s, the campaigners understood that it was sometimes necessary to modify

their language, tone and behaviour and use covert approaches in order to be heard successfully. The interviews conducted for this study have captured the accounts of feminist campaigners describing how they operated in these hostile contexts, and how they adapted and evolved their language use as conditions began to permit more direct feminist argumentation. This is significant as it contributes to academic understanding about a point in time when lexical choices and arguments being leveraged by feminists were changing and evolving. In this way the analysis has demonstrated how these feminist campaigners were part of a resurgent feminism which contributed to language such as 'sexism' and 'misogyny' re-entering public debate. This analysis has recorded the intricate work done by feminist campaigners to test out and refine this argumentation and to perform the complicated balancing act that Anna van Heeswijk described in which their communications were clear, accessible and yet not 'dumbed down'. In this regard this analysis follows the understanding of Newman and argues that in challenging these dominant discourses the work of feminist campaigners was 'performative as well as critical' (Newman, 2012, p. 4).

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

Having presented the analysis in the previous three chapters, this concluding chapter first offers a summary of the thesis and the key areas that this study aimed to address. An overview of the analysis chapters is then given, with an outline of the main arguments in relation to the research questions. The key findings of this study are highlighted and the achievements of the thesis are indicated. The chapter concludes by offering suggestions for future research and some final thoughts about the overall significance of this study.

Summary of the thesis

This thesis aimed to make an original contribution to knowledge in the feminist media studies field by providing the first significant study of the Leveson Inquiry hearings relating to discriminatory media representations of women. Drawing on both existing documentation and original empirical data, via interviews with feminist campaigners, this study sought to provide unique insights about the argumentation, decisions, strategies, communicative tactics and pragmatic choices taken to both defend and combat media sexism and public misogyny.

As the conceptual framework in **Chapter Four** established, debate about media sexism and sexualised imagery has historically coalesced around three key discourses – *moral*, *liberal* and *feminist*. Discourses about prejudice are not static, and the Leveson Inquiry represented a key opportunity to observe how the power balance between these three discourses is shifting and evolving. The aim of this study then was to examine a particular point in time in which both a feminist resurgence and intensified misogyny was becoming more apparent. In analysing the Leveson Inquiry this study thus set out to explore what these argumentations reveal about debates on media sexism, and how power works in, and through, language, media, legislation and the judiciary. While the current context in terms of the cultural and political climate has changed, it is still important to assess the critical moment in time before this intensification – both of misogyny and feminist resistance. This thesis therefore argues for the importance of the Leveson Inquiry hearings in terms of how we understand contemporary debates about media sexism and the portrayal of women.

This research aimed to answer three questions:

RQ1 What discourses are there in the Leveson Inquiry and Report that shape understanding of the representation of women in UK print media?

RQ2 How do feminist campaigners account for their strategies and approaches when critiquing discriminatory coverage of women in print media at the Leveson Inquiry and beyond?

RQ3 What are the implications of the Leveson Inquiry for academic understanding of representation of women in UK print media and parliamentary debate, lobbying and campaigning on these issues?

This chapter will now move on to offer a summary of the analysis carried out in the three chapters that make up the core of this study – **Chapters Six, Seven and Eight**.

Summary of the analysis

The nature and significance of feminist argumentations at the Leveson Inquiry

Chapter Six considered the evidence given by feminist campaigners at the Leveson Inquiry. The analysis paid attention to the postfeminist neoliberal context in which the feminist campaigners were situated and argued that this was a challenging and hostile environment in which to articulate resistance. The women's testimony was notable for a direct argumentation that named women and girls as an oppressed sex class and foregrounded structural inequality and the impact on women's lives. In particular the campaigners argued that print media perpetuated systemic, institutional sexism. The analysis demonstrated that the campaigners drew on the radical feminist discourses identified and established in the conceptual framework in **Chapter Four**, and it was argued that this directness in approach and language was rare in feminist campaigning at this point in time. However the analysis challenged the notion of a unified feminist discourse as it was demonstrated that the campaigners articulated a complex set of strategies. A mixture of both direct and covert tactics and approaches were identified in the language, tone and argumentation the feminist campaigners deployed in order to present a compelling case and ensure that they were heard at the Leveson Inquiry. It was argued that this was a key moment for feminist discourse on the public record at a point in time when lexical choices and arguments being leveraged by feminists were evolving following a period of intense backlash in the 1990s and early 2000s. In particular it was identified that the words sexism and misogyny were rarely used at the inquiry, and that this marked a key transition moment when these terms began re-entering the public discourse as part of a resurgent feminism.

The analysis identified several patterns and frames in the evidence given by the women. There were three key framing strategies used by the feminist campaigners at the Leveson Inquiry.

Firstly repositioning, in which the liberal notion of men's free speech to objectify women was transformed into a concern about the silencing women in public life; secondly an assertion that media sexism is an issue of discrimination and not taste and decency; and finally an emphasis on women and girls as an oppressed sex-class. These frames were evidenced with examples of media sexism in four key areas – women being silenced in public life; discriminatory and trivialising stereotyping of women; objectification as a discrete harm and its impacts; and the irresponsible reporting of violence against women. The women gave detailed evidence about media reporting of violence against women including; failure to acknowledge the frequency and commonplace nature of this violence; victim-blaming and justifying perpetrators; and trivialising and exoticising male violence.

As Leveson noted in his report, third party complaints were not typically admissible by the Press Complaints Commission, thus 'the Inquiry provided a first opportunity for a number of representative groups to express their concerns about discriminatory press reporting' (Leveson, 2012b, p. 660). This was significant. After effectively having been silenced for decades as no third party complaints were accepted by the regulator of mainstream newspapers, these women's organisations were finally able to speak out about discriminatory practices by newspapers to women as a group in a high profile legal setting. Indeed, as the women highlighted at the Inquiry, previous attempts to critique Page 3 over the past decades had resulted in harassment and humiliation with the tabloids deliberately ridiculing, bullying and seeking to silence anyone who opposed the feature, such as the MPs Clare Short and Harriet Harman. The inquiry and report could be interpreted as ground-breaking in this regard, by putting this coverage on the public record.

The evidence given by the feminist campaigners was wide-ranging and unequivocal. The submission by Object and Turn Your Back on Page 3, which presented and analysed coverage in the 'Page 3 tabloids' across one week, was compelling evidence which served to pre-empt any counter-claims that the examples given were 'one-off aberrations', and not representative or historical and dated.

Varieties of sexism mobilised at the Leveson Inquiry

Chapter Seven considered the evidence given by *The Sun* and Sunday Sport Ltd to the Leveson Inquiry. The analysis demonstrated that both *The Sun* and *The Sport*'s defence of sexualised imagery was anchored in classic liberal understandings of free speech and free market choices. Male entitlement to view sexual images of women was presented as a civil liberty advocated via a laissez-faire deregulatory approach.

It was identified that an extensive repertoire consisting of 22 arguments, defences and justifications was articulated by *The Sun* and *The Sport* when giving evidence to the Leveson Inquiry. These ranged from arguments about heritage, harmlessness, and humour to an emphasis on agency, and the contention that men are objectified too. One of the most striking findings was the extent to which both *The Sun* and *The Sport* co-opted and redeployed the arguments and viewpoints of women and feminists in defence of their sexist practices. Those cited included examples ranging from Germaine Greer to photographer Alison Jackson, to women's aid charity Refuge and Feminists Against Censorship.

Many of the ideas presented by *The Sun* and *The Sport* were familiar sexist arguments often articulated to justify sexism but there were also many new varieties identified. These framings, defences and justifications were theorised as a four-step framework consisting of; denial, in which the critique of sexism was denied by focusing on aspects such as the agency of the models; reframing, in which sexual imagery was repositioned as either desexualised (*The Sun*) or not illegally sexual (*The Sport*); deflection, in which critique was minimised either by highlighting worse behaviour elsewhere or positive behaviour at the newspapers; and projection, in which aspects such as humour and heritage were used to claim that the only issue was one of poor interpretation by critics.

Thus the evidence given by *The Sun* and *The Sport* demonstrated that sexism and objectification are still rife, albeit present in new varieties and via complex, sophisticated frameworks. In this regard the research established that far from decreasing or improving, the range of sexist argumentation on the public record at the Leveson Inquiry shows that it is expanding and developing in a more sophisticated and strategic way.

It was demonstrated that this argumentation was based in a postfeminist framing in which feminism is at once acknowledged and disavowed (Gill, 2007d; McRobbie, 2009). Both outlets presented sophisticated defences which demonstrated similarities with corporate and political public relations strategies and political gas-lighting techniques.

Moral argumentation at the Leveson Inquiry

Chapter Eight considered moral argumentation expressed at the Leveson Inquiry by *The Sun* and *The Sport*, and accounts of feminist responses to this argumentation gathered in the interviews with five feminist campaigners. It was established that a moral discourse about taste and decency is still found in discussions about sexualised imagery and the visual

representation of women. This was identified in the evidence given to the Leveson Inquiry by both *The Sun* and *The Sport*. This framing was found to be particularly obdurate in print regulation which still draws on an obscenity understanding despite other areas of the media having long moved on to an emphasise harm and offence as anchored in human rights law.

However the analysis demonstrated that despite an overall consistency, *The Sun* and *The Sport* displayed a difference of approach with regards to whether they positioned the images in their newspapers as sexual or not. For *The Sun* to maintain its brand identity as a compassionate, campaigning, humorous family newspaper and the Page 3 model as a harmless girl next door, this required the images to be desexualised. For *The Sport* to maintain its position off the top-shelf the images were presented as sexual but not *too* sexual or pornographic, thus not subject to regulation and an issue of taste and no other.

The analysis demonstrated that a key strategy utilised by *The Sport* was to reverse and reframe accusations of sexism and position this as an issue of taste and decency whereby the outlets were being discriminated against, not the women represented or objectified in them. *The Sport*'s key aim in this regard was to ensure that the images were not described as sexist or framed in connection to male violence against women. This would take the issue into the realm of discrimination and human rights and the conflict in the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) between Articles 10 (freedom of expression) and 14 (discrimination). The analysis has thus demonstrated that referring collectively to 'the tabloids' or 'the redtops' is misplaced as there are key distinctions in their strategies and modes of address.

Feminist responses to moral argumentation at the Leveson Inquiry

Feminist campaigners were situated as operating in a postfeminist landscape, emerging from an intense period of backlash and 'lad' culture and on the cusp of a resurgent feminism. It was argued that this hostile context led to some tactical, pragmatic strategies utilised by the campaigners in which aims and approaches were sometimes covert. Interviews with feminist campaigners indicated that a moral taste and decency argumentation was a key area of obduracy and complexity for activists working on issues of media sexism. The analysis documented the complex negotiations undertaken by the campaigners when drawing on argumentation associated with a moral right position, including utilising notions such as zoning, harm to children and constructions such as the watershed and the top-shelf. It was argued that this was a pragmatic approach taken by some feminists in order to achieve change by tapping into moral panics and preoccupations, such as those around sexualisation and paedophilia.

Campaigners understood the risks of being associated with a moral right position and accounted for a variety of different approaches to deal with this challenge. This fraught territory led some campaigners to modify their language and behaviour, including avoiding certain words or topics, whilst others indicated they were aware of the complexity and risks associated with this argumentation, but refused to change their approach. The accounts given by campaigners demonstrated that they were careful about tone and accessibility. Many indicated that they thought it was critical to pay as much attention to *how* they delivered their messages in order to be 'heard' and not dismissed outright, as to the content of what they were saying. They were also alive to the hostile context they were operating in and sometimes adopted a cautious diplomacy, adapting their tactics and approach depending on the audience. For instance, some campaigners spoke of aiming for a warm and light tone and approach that appealed to the mainstream as opposed to a more strident articulation. Others emphasised a collaborative not combative position, while some spoke of the importance of humour and wit.

The analysis charted the nuanced strategies developed by the campaigners, highlighting the way that they unified several apparently contradictory approaches. For instance this study uncovered the ways in which campaigners repositioned ideas such as harm to children from a feminist perspective and articulated this as a structural impact in order to push back against the dominant moral discourse. In particular it was demonstrated that Anna van Heeswijk of Object's approach regarding the top shelf and the watershed, in which she focused on easy wins via 'common-sense' inconsistencies and loopholes, was a tactical and pragmatic strategy common to other campaigns carried out by the organisation. This strategy often led to small but significant policy and legislative changes.

The interviews indicated that campaigners were grappling with how direct to be about naming male violence, about whether to use words such as sexism and misogyny, and how direct to be about naming their organisations, and their intentions, as feminist. Some campaigners spoke of the point in time when they began to embrace a deliberate shift to a more open feminist language and strategy, and of naming and calling out oppression of women and its causes. This underlines the finding that the feminist argumentation at the Leveson Inquiry was situated on the cusp of a renewed feminist activism.

Feminist, liberal and moral arguments in the Leveson Report

Whilst scholars are agreed that Leveson could largely be summarised as a political failure (Gaber, 2013; Barnett and Townend, 2014; Ramsay and Moore, 2019), this thesis argues that for the women's organisations that gave evidence at the inquiry it certainly wasn't a failure in terms of feminist resistance. As this thesis has demonstrated and as so much other work corroborates (Long, 2012; Cochrane, 2013; Redfern and Aune, 2013) this upturn in open feminist campaigning and the move away from sexualised images in print media, including the demise of lads' mags, were both part of wider cultural shifts in terms of both a postfeminist sensibility (Gill, 2007d) and the computational turn. However this hearing at the Leveson Inquiry was still a significant moment on the public record for feminist campaigning, and arguably played a key role in visibilising feminist resistance after decades of backlash.

In his final report Lord Justice Leveson offered significant support to the feminist campaigners, carrying through both their language and their argumentation into his recommendations and clearly advocating for changes that would benefit women. In particular Leveson's framing of women as a group oppressed on the basis of their sex was highlighted. He also demonstrated support for the establishment of a third party complaints facility and emphasised that sexism and discrimination against women in mainstream media is problematic. Furthermore Leveson demonstrated his understanding of the campaigners' critique that the issue relates to media sexism and the portrayal of women in newspapers as a whole, not just representations on Page 3 or sexualised imagery (Leveson, 2012b, p. 665).

Leveson's support for the women in his report demonstrates the strength and robustness of the argumentation and language put forward by the feminist campaigners. However the analysis also indicated that the report utilised moral language and drew on obscenity law. When discussing media sexism Leveson also articulated support for a liberal position regarding free speech and the free market. Furthermore Leveson echoed the inconsistency found in press regulation historically in terms of framing media racism as an issue of discrimination but categorising sexism as an issue of taste and decency. Even whilst acknowledging this complexity the analysis still indicates that Leveson's overall support for the case made by the feminist campaigners was significant.

Thus the Leveson Inquiry was a significant moment for feminist campaigning and Leveson's bold findings in the report were a major victory for the feminist position. Successfully lobbying to speak at the Leveson Inquiry and put the issues about representation of women in UK print media on the record was seen as a major victory by Object's Anna van Heeswijk, as she explained;

> *When the Leveson inquiry came about, we thought, 'Perfect. Brilliant. This is our opportunity to take the tabloid press and the institution of Page Three, on, and we took it. We got invited to give oral evidence, which in and of itself was a huge achievement, because it obviously wasn't part of the initial remit whatsoever to be looking at sexism and the portrayal of women, and this was an opportunity for us to ensure that it was addressed* (Anna van Heeswijk).

Dominic Mohan being recalled to give evidence about Page 3 was also seen as significant by van Heeswijk;

> *Part of the evidence I gave said 'This is a missed opportunity. You should have asked the editors of the tabloid press these questions when you had them here. These are important questions.' And so the fact that he [Leveson] then recalled him [Mohan] on the basis of that, and actually put to him the arguments that we'd made, I think that was a huge achievement. I think that was the first time that an editor of The Sun was actually held to account in some way and made to justify Page Three and the portrayal of women within their newspapers. I thought the fact that he was recalled and he was being questioned on this was an historic moment and a great achievement* (Anna van Heeswijk).

Reflecting on giving evidence at the inquiry Heather Harvey agreed that it was a key moment for women's campaigning;

> *What we were saying, which is what we always say all the time, was given a bit more status than it otherwise would have had, because of the legal framework around it. I was pleased because I thought, 'Actually that's having an impact for other women.' They're noticing that normally you can't say this stuff without being completely pissed on, and actually we're being allowed to say it. Even if it's only for half a day, and even if loads of people are being allowed to say loads of other things. We are still being taken seriously. I was pleased to see that they'd retained comments about our evidence in the report. And I was pleased to see that it was touched on in the recommendations. However marginally – it was there* (Heather Harvey).

Van Heeswijk felt that the questioning of Dominic Mohan by barrister Robert Jay was not robust enough, but she agreed with Harvey that Leveson's report gave real support to women campaigning on media sexism;

> *He [Mohan] could have been questioned a lot harder. In that sense he was let off the hook. We could have been the ones questioning him, we could have grilled him much further, so that was a missed opportunity. But the fact that Leveson did actually refer to our evidence in the report and did acknowledge that there is a problem with the way these newspapers portray women was significant. Obviously he could have done a lot more and it would have been great if he had, but had our recommendations been implemented that would have been quite significant. The particular piece about being able to make complaints based on how a group was portrayed, that would have been very significant* (Anna van Heeswijk).

Both Heather Harvey and Anna van Heeswijk noted that there was significant, positive media coverage of their hearing, and several lobbying and influencing opportunities arose for these organisations as a result of giving evidence, including meeting with the PCC, Ofcom and the ASA. The groups continued to lobby the inquiry and submit further evidence after their hearing, such as a joint report by the four organisations which included a two-week content analysis of 11 UK newspapers (Eaves, Object, EVAW, *et al.*, 2012).

Summary of findings

Regulatory environment

By most accounts the outcomes of the Leveson Inquiry have been disappointing, with the majority of the British print media still self-regulating as they were prior to the inquiry. As discussed in **Chapter Two**, implementing Leveson has primarily been frustrated by the impasse that evolved with two regulators being set up – IPSO and IMPRESS – and the cancellation of part two of the inquiry. It therefore follows that legislative and regulatory developments regarding sexist and discriminatory representations of women in mainstream media have been slow.

There have been some shifts towards recognising and addressing discriminatory content relating to women in UK mainstream media since 2012, most notably with regards to violence against women. Campaign group Level Up successfully lobbied for press regulators IPSO and

IMPRESS to include new regulations in their codes regarding reporting on male violence against women, and new NUJ guidelines have also been introduced on this issue.

However with regards to the key recommendation made by the feminist campaigners at the Leveson Inquiry – that a third-party complaints facility be introduced to the regulatory codes – this has been adopted by IMPRESS but not by IPSO. As most national newspapers are now regulated by IPSO, or self-regulate, this does not represent a significant development. The current Conservative government has indicated that it has no will to take any kind of legislatory or regulatory changes forward with regards to the newspaper industry.

Given this stasis in both print regulation and legislation, evidence suggesting that discriminatory depictions of groups such as women has worsened in UK print media post-Leveson is unsurprising. Current press regulator IPSO, for instance received 2,000 complaints about the *Daily Mail's* Legs-It piece, but did not investigate as the complaints were all from third parties (Tobitt, 2018). Fenton similarly notes that former Chair of IPSO Alan Moses told a Home Affairs Select Committee that the regulator had received over 8,000 discrimination complaints in 2017 but only upheld one, again as they were inadmissible third party complaints (Fenton, 2018).

Whilst Lord Justice Leveson indicated in his report that he agreed with Anna van Heeswijk of Object that there was little to differentiate between *The Sport* and top-shelf pornography, he made no direct recommendation, and there has been no legislative or regulatory change in this regard. Similarly Anna van Heeswijk's suggestion that print media be subject to the same rules and regulations as broadcast media was rejected as too far reaching for Leveson to recommend or influence and has not been taken forward. Thus broadcast and advertising regulation regarding sexism and discriminatory representation of women remains far more stringent than either print or online.

This indicates that the dominant moral right and liberal framing of media sexism and public misogyny identified in the discourse at the Leveson Inquiry continues to prevail. Clearly, as this research has noted, women are being left off the agenda with regards to a discrimination framing, not just in print media regulation but in online regulation and codes used by social platforms, as well as in UK hate speech legislation. Failure to follow a discrimination framing is thus a departure from the provision in broadcast legislation, but consistent with a wider failure to uphold discrimination as a breach of women's human rights in both text and imagery across many outlets and platforms. Given that powerful press interests continue to control print

regulation via the Editors' Code it is unsurprising that this element of media reform and many others continue to be resisted. This also emphasises a political framing whereby the state cannot be trusted to regulate a 'free press'. This is consistent with the pattern of falling trust in authorities and public bodies, a key indicator of neoliberal dominance and its emphasis on the individual at the expense of the state.

Implications for the red top tabloids and lads' mag sector

Whilst acknowledging that the stereotypical and discriminatory treatment of women in mainstream media continues to flourish, the analysis in this thesis demonstrates that following the Leveson Inquiry media outlets were no longer able treat sexualised imagery as a trivial issue. This thesis argues that the negative publicity and reputational brand damage caused by such high-profile accusations of sexism triggered a rethink of the Page 3 feature by *The Sun* and its proprietor Rupert Murdoch and contributed to its demise. Moreover the forceful accusations and criticisms levelled at *The Sport* by the Inquiry threatened the outlet's business model to the extent that it was in real danger of closure due to reclassification as a top-shelf item.

There have been significant changes in the newspaper and magazine sector, with the removal of bare breasts on Page 3 in both *The Sun* (2015) and *the Daily Star* (2019), and the closure of all lads' mags by 2015, just three years after the Leveson Report was published. A continuation of *The Sun's* discourse at the Leveson Inquiry is evident in the organisation's unsuccessful attempts to rescue the Page 3 brand over the years following Leveson, with various reframings and repositionings, and repeated public pronouncements of the same argumentation delivered at the Leveson Inquiry. It is therefore argued that the complex strategies performed by *The Sun* and *The Sport* to avoid and deny accusations of media sexism confirm the extent to which it is not acceptable to publicly acknowledge and admit sexism.

Implications for feminist campaigning

This thesis argues that The Leveson Inquiry was a key moment in the decades long campaign to end Page 3 which eventually resulted in the end of bare-breasted women on Page 3 in both *The Sun* and the *Daily Star*. The Leveson Inquiry was significant as a rare moment of high profile visibility when feminist voices and feminist argumentation, disruption and resistance were heard and acknowledged on the public record. Feminist concerns were taken seriously both in the court room and in the subsequent report and media coverage.

By documenting and identifying different strategies and tactics used by feminist campaigners to critique media sexism and sexualised imagery, and documenting the varieties of sexism on the public record, this thesis has contributed to developing knowledge about strategies for feminist activism. Therefore by unpacking what sexism is and all the varieties of ways in which it operates, this research has indicated that as sexism becomes less acceptable, strategies to defend it become more elaborate and wide-ranging. This thesis illustrates the waning power of argumentation that places sexualised imagery as harmless, humorous and ironic. *The Sun* and *The Sport*'s avoidance of, and refusal to engage in, charges of sexism and objectification demonstrates that a feminist human rights discrimination argument is gathering pace.

However interviews with campaigners indicated that taste and decency was still entrenched and a key impediment to a feminist human rights discourse prevailing. By documenting mainstream media and regulatory responses to media sexism and discriminatory coverage of women in media, this thesis places these discourses in a neoliberal postfeminist context at a time of change and development for the mainstream print media.

Achievements of the thesis

This thesis offers a rare multi-dimensional view of the complex relationship between three key discourses about media sexism and public misogyny, considering not only feminist discourses, but also moral and liberal argumentations in defence of sexism and discriminatory media coverage of women.

This thesis contributes to academic understanding by capturing an important point of feminist resistance on the public record, highlighting a key moment where feminist campaigners sought to frame women and girls as an oppressed sex class, and to renew and return argumentation to issues of structural inequality and impacts on the lives of women and girls. In order to do this the work drew together debates across media regulation and legislation to offer a joined-up view of approaches to public misogyny and sexism, both online and offline and in verbal and written speech.

This research complements existing studies of the Leveson Inquiry, media regulation and legislation, analyses of sexualised imagery and the visual representation of women (Holland, 1998; Ross, 2008; O'Neill, 2013) as well as contributing to a growing body of feminist scholarship considering responses to public misogyny both on and offline, and potential regulatory and legislatory responses to sexism and public misogyny (Jane, 2014a, 2014b; Megarry, 2014; Cole, 2015; Vickery and Everbach, 2018).

Further research

As discussed in **Chapter Five**, one of the challenges faced whilst undertaking this study was access to documentation and interviewees. Whilst it would not have been possible to analyse more data in a thesis of this length and duration there are nonetheless several unexplored data sets that merit further study. When this thesis began the process of archiving and digitising the Leveson Inquiry was still in its infancy. As noted, several of the requests made to the National Archives and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport were declined. It was only towards the end of this thesis after escalating Freedom of Information requests to the Information Commissioner's Office that it became apparent that large parts of the Leveson Inquiry documentation was closed and therefore did not appear in searches of the National Archives databases. It can be requested and (potentially, if not sensitive) accessed, but not via the standard Freedom of Information request route. Documents that were therefore not accessible included the so-called 'bundles' of evidence referred to in the courtroom during the hearings, and the correspondence of the Inquiry, including the Rule 13 Letter sent to Sunday Sport Ltd. There may also be other documentation relating to these two hearings that can be accessed with more in depth requests. In December 2018 the Discover Leveson website launched, providing a more comprehensive, easily accessible archive of the inquiry. This website now also includes some, but not all, of the Leveson Inquiry documentation which was not accessible during this period of research. Studying these documents may lead to further insights about the media sexism debates at the Leveson Inquiry and beyond.

As noted, IPSO's lack of a third party complaints facility is a key focus of this study and continues to be an issue for lobbyists on press reform. Carney has carried out important work comparing IPSO and IMPRESS's Editors' Codes (Carney, 2017). However he does not cover the issue of a third party complaints facility. Carney notes that Laitila carried out a comparison of 31 national press codes across Europe in the 1990s (Laitila, 1995). This represents an opportunity to update Laitila's study and review European press codes, paying particular attention to third party complaints and discrimination.

Since this thesis began scholarship has increasingly focused on exploring the issue of misogyny hate and what kinds of regulation and legislation might be necessary or desirable in relation to speech (including representation in text and imagery) that silences and abuses women, particularly in the online sphere. For instance there is work paying attention to the particular challenges such as overseas jurisdiction, anonymity, toll on moderators, the volume of users and the volume/frequency and speed of posts (Bakalis, 2017; Riedl, Chen and Whipple, 2020). There is clearly much further work to be done examining the gaps and omissions with regards

to women across media regulation and legislation both off and online.

Furthermore as the UK's Law Commission consults on classifying misogyny as a hate crime this offers a key opportunity to continue tracing the dominant discourses around public sexism and misogyny, particularly with regards to articulations of feminist resistance. It will be interesting to examine the visibility of argumentation proposing that misogyny hate should encompass pornography as a form of discrimination against women, and whether the increasingly cemented zoning approach noted in this thesis continues to confine this to a protected realm of obscenity.

Concluding thoughts

In the six years since this thesis proposal was submitted and the seven years since the conclusion of the Leveson Inquiry, much has happened to dramatically alter the landscape politically, culturally and socially in the UK and beyond. The focus of this thesis – how we talk about sexist representations and misogyny in media and public life – is one that has been unfolding and developing alongside this research. Key events in this regard pertinent to this study include the rise of the #MeToo movement, the murder of MP Jo Cox, the election of Donald Trump and Boris Johnson and the withdrawal of the UK from the EU. The feminist resurgence noted to have peaked post-Leveson around 2013 has continued to gather pace, whilst simultaneously the polarisation of politics and the emergence of the Far-Right across the world includes a renewed misogyny, particularly directed at women who have power, space and visibility in public and political life (Koulouris, 2018; Gallaher, 2020).

Increasingly then when it comes to women, there is a hardening divide between more open feminist challenge and more hostile misogyny. There are tensions and debates in the UK about how we define and deal with public sexism and misogyny, and a growing push for feminist understandings of sexism and misogyny to be upheld. This is exemplified by the Nottingham campaign for misogyny to be recognised as a hate crime and MP Stella Creasy's government-backed Law Commission review to consider extending hate crime legislation to cover misogyny.

McGlynn noted that in political and media debates about extreme pornography in 2005-2008 moral and liberal discourses held a 'tenacious grip' on public discourse (McGlynn, 2010, p. 193). Whilst feminist discourses were certainly not marginalised at the Leveson Inquiry, as McGlynn indicated in 2005-2008, this thesis has demonstrated that arguably moral and liberal discourses are still evident in debates about media sexism and sexualised imagery at the Leveson Inquiry.

This thesis has established that the Leveson Inquiry demonstrated proliferating forms of sexism. The repertoire used by *The Sport* and *The Sun* drew on classic liberal, moral and neoliberal understandings to uphold and protect the rights of men to view sexualised imagery and perpetuate portrayals of media sexism, at the expense of women's human right not to be discriminated against. Further this thesis has argued that neoliberalism dominated in discourses at the Leveson Inquiry – building on and shoring up both liberal and moral discourses via a logic in which (male) rights vanquish all. As the analysis has demonstrated in the discourse of *The Sun* and *The Sport*, the prevailing misogynistic male culture builds on a classical liberal ideology – of the individual male's rights in the private sphere, fused with an added layer of neoliberal ideology – reifying the choices and rights of the male individual above all else. Or, in other words, the classical liberal positioning which seeks to balance rights with harm has been solidified in a neoliberal position in which rights trump all. In this rights showdown, 'both popular feminism and popular misogyny tap into the neoliberal notion of individual capacity' (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

The Leveson Inquiry was a key moment for the visibility of a feminist human rights discourse about media sexism. Seven years later the landscape is one in which an intensified misogyny dominates public discourse. As noted, an inconsistency with regards to women and discrimination exists across all media regulation and online codes and policies (as is the case with most codes and rules on social platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, women/gender/sex/misogyny is not mentioned) as well as legislation on hate speech and hate crime. Race, religion, sexual orientation and identity are protected, yet women are not.

This thesis therefore argues for an urgency in following the articulations of the feminist campaigners at the Leveson Inquiry, and so many before them, in a revitalised feminist politics in which women are seen as a sex-class. As Lillian argues; 'If women are not a group, then group defamation is rendered impossible and the exercise of analyzing and responding to it becomes meaningless' (Lillian, 2007, p. 737).

If, as is looking likely, the UK moves away from its human rights obligations and commitments in European law, any small advances that have been made to foreground a human rights based analysis of discrimination against women will be halted, or worse, rolled back. Research scrutinising these developments will be critical in this regard, meaning that it is crucial that both scholarship and activism continue to pay attention to the regulation of discrimination against women both off and online.

Appendix 1: 10-year decline in national newspaper circulation by title, 2008-2018, %

National title	10-year circulation decline (weekday)
The Guardian	60%
Daily Express	52%
Daily Mail	40%
Daily Mirror	62%
Daily Star	46%
Daily Telegraph	56%
Financial Times	58%
The Sun	54%
The Times	30%

Source: *Overview of recent dynamics in the UK press market*. Mediatique for Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), April 2018

Appendix 2: UK newspaper circulations for October 2019

Publication	Total average circ. Oct 2019	Year-on-year % change	Bulks
Metro FREE	1,420,796	-2%	
The Sun	1,223,771	-13%	66,859
Daily Mail	1,136,247	-7%	
The Sun on Sunday	1,042,909	-13%	66,861
The Mail on Sunday	959,671	-8%	
London Evening Standard FREE	826,064	-4%	
The Sunday Times	655,618	-9%	51,148
Daily Mirror	463,256	-13%	
Sunday Mirror	378,239	-16%	
The Times	367,074	-13%	54,029
The Daily Telegraph	308,015	-14%	
Daily Express	302,690	-7%	11
Daily Star	292,395	-16%	181
Sunday Express	260,823	-8%	15
The Sunday Telegraph	246,797	-13%	
i	221,083	-8%	48,330
Daily Star – Sunday	174,309	-18%	
Financial Times	168,958	-7%	30,992
The Observer	160,068	-5%	
Sunday People	144,832	-18%	
The Guardian	128,492	-5%	

Source: ABC via Press Gazette

Appendix 3: UK newspaper website traffic for July 2019

Title	Total monthly unique visitors	% change month-on-month	% change year-on-year
Sun Online	33.87	2.4%	7.4%
Sun.co.uk	33.04	1.4%	8.1%
Mail Online and Metro	29.42	-3.0%	0.9%
ESI Media (Evening Standard and Independent)	26.34	-2.7%	-2.3%
Mirror Online	25.13	-1.4%	17.5%
Guardian	23.10	-2.6%	-4.9%
Express	22.08	-8.7%	51.7%
Dailymail.co.uk	20.24	-6.9%	-18.6%
Telegraph	20.02	-1.5%	-10.1%
Metro	19.66	0.1%	60.0%
Daily Star	7.10	-6.4%	27.9%
Times	5.57	-0.8%	13.8%
New York Times	4.17	-13.9%	-13.6%

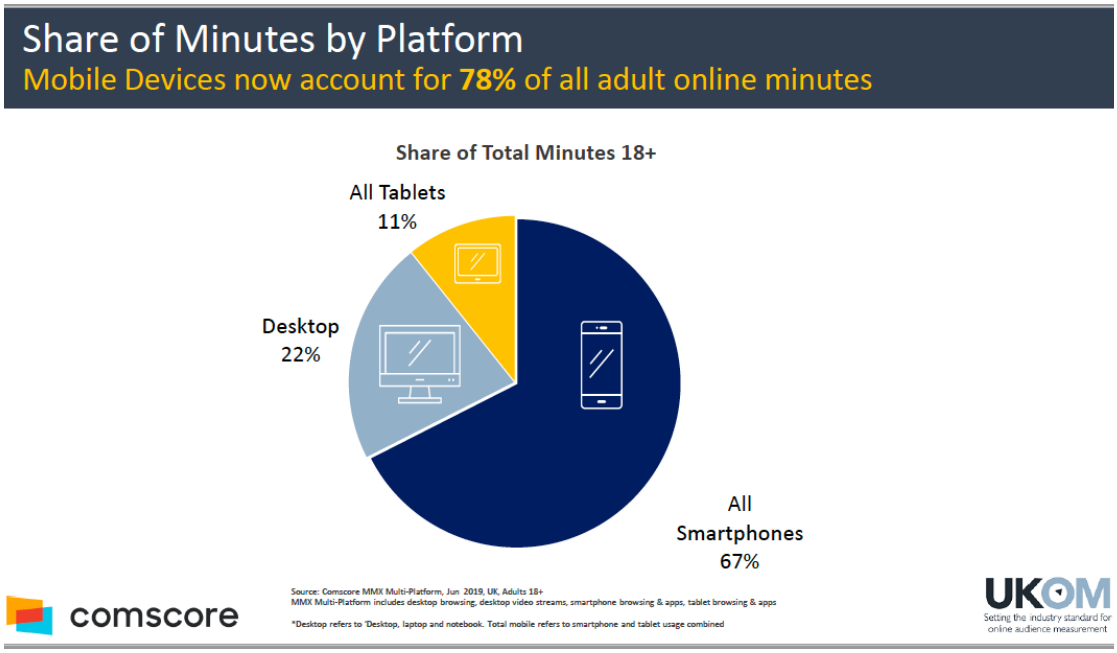
Source: Comscore via Press Gazette

Appendix 4: Men's magazine circulation for July-December 2018

Publication	No. of issues	ABC total (average per issue)	Year-on-year ABC total % change	Bulks	Free
Shortlist FREE	25	503,271	0%		503,271
Men's Health	6	146,785	-16%	1,753	56,994
GQ	6	110,063	-4%	15,910	16,886
The Jackal FREE	4	100,026	1%		100,026
Square Mile FREE	5	59,353	1%		59,353
Esquire	5	59,002	-6%	1,501	30,572
Wired	6	50,028	0%	5,416	3,141
BBC Focus	14	50,022	-6%		
Stuff	13	39,953	-27%		204
T3	13	38,076	3%	5,741	

Source: ABC via Press Gazette

Appendix 5: Share of minutes by platform



Source: Comscore UKOM Report: UK Digital Market Overview – June 2019

Appendix 6: Profile of Interviewees

1. Primary analysis interviews with feminist campaigners							
Name	Organisation(s) and Job title(s)	Date and time of interview	Interview duration and method	Age	Ethnicity	Education	Location
Anna van Heeswijk	Object Campaign Manager/CEO	13 March 2018, 11am	1 hour, 27 minutes. Face to face Audio recorded	36	Mixed heritage	BA, MA	London
Lucy-Anne Holmes	No More Page 3 Founder/activist, novelist, actor	7 March 2018, 3pm	1 hour 12 mins 54 seconds. Face to face Audio recorded	41	White British	BA, 2 year acting training	London
Martha Jephcott	Hollaback! Nottingham, Nottingham Citizens UK, Campaigner, Misogyny Hate Crime Trainer for Nottingham Police	25 April 2018, 4pm	1 hour 37 seconds. Face to face Audio recorded	24	White British	BA	London
Heather Harvey	Eaves Housing for Women/Nia Research and Development Manager	7 January 2019, 5.30pm	45 mins, 22 seconds Telephone Audio recorded	52	White British	LLB, MSc	London
Rebecca Mordan	Reclaim the Night/Scary Little Girls theatre company Founder/activist, Artistic Director, actor, scriptwriter	6 January 2019, 12.30pm	1 hour 38 mins, 52 seconds Telephone Audio recorded	41	White British	BA	London

2. Contextual Background interviews with MPs, politicians, media commentators, academics and regulators							
Name	Organisation(s) and Job title(s)	Date and time of interview	Interview duration and method	Age	Ethnicity	Education	Location
Jo Swinson MP	Liberal Democrat Party MP for East Dunbartonshire, Leader of the Liberal Democrats	24 May 2018, 4pm	15 mins, 44 seconds Telephone Audio recorded	38	White British (Scottish)	BSc	London
Jess Phillips MP	Labour Party MP for Birmingham Yardley	17 January 2019, 1pm	16 mins, 49 seconds Telephone Audio recorded	37	White British	BA, Postgraduate Diploma	London
Lexie Kirkconnell-Kawana	IMPRESS Complaints and Investigations Manager, Barrister (New Zealand)	16 January 2019, 4pm	32 mins, 32 seconds Telephone Audio recorded	28	White New Zealander	BA, LLB, MA LLM	London
Suzanne Moore	*The Guardian, The Sunday Times, The Daily Mail, The New Statesman* Journalist/columnist/commentator	24 April 2018, 4pm	1 hour 46 mins, 8 seconds Face to face Audio recorded	59	White British/American	BA	London
Professor Roy Greenslade	*The Guardian, London Evening Standard*, City University Professor/media commentator/journalist	6 December 2017, 11am	57 minutes, 55 seconds Face to face Audio recorded	70	White British	BA	London
Professor Brian Cathcart	The Independent, The New Statesman, Kingston University, Hacked Off Professor/media campaigner/journalist/ founder and former director of Hacked Off	7 December 2017, 1.30pm	1 hour 5 mins, 49 seconds Face to face Audio recorded	61	White British (Northern Irish)	BA	London
Professor Jane Martinson	*The Guardian*, City University, Women in Journalism (WiJ) Professor, journalist, former Head of Media at *The Guardian*	24 April 2018, 12pm	17 mins, 1 second Face to face Audio recorded	51	White British	BA, Postgraduate Diploma	London
Professor George Brock	City University, *The Times, The Observer* Professor, journalist	6 December 2017, 3pm	35 minutes Face to face Not audio recorded	66	White British	BA	London
Dame Vera Baird DBE QC	Labour Party Politician, barrister, academic, Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales, former Labour MP and Minister, former Solicitor General for England and Wales, former Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria	8 February 2019, 12pm	42 mins, 52 seconds Telephone Audio recorded	69	White British	BA, LLB	Newcastle

Appendix 7: Participant Information Sheet

CITY
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
EST 1894

Participant Information Sheet

Title of study: Obscenity versus objectification: A feminist reading of Leveson and its aftermath

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether you would like to take part it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?
This research is an analysis of the section of the Leveson Inquiry where women's organisations gave evidence about page 3 and the visual representation of women. I want to understand where we are in terms of media sexism. Does the demise of lads' mags and Page 3 mean that attitudes are changing for the better? Or does the explosion in online pornography and online misogyny such as extreme trolling and hate speech show that things are in fact getting worse?
This study is being undertaken as a PhD and is expected to be three to four years in duration.

Why have I been invited?
You have been chosen as one of the top 20 relevant people related to this topic. You have been selected on the basis of your personal experience of campaigning, legislating, working on and writing about this topic.

Do I have to take part?
Participation in the project is voluntary, and you can choose not to participate in part or all of the project. You can avoid answering questions which are felt to be too personal or intrusive. You can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What will happen if I take part?

- You will meet the researcher once in the first instance, follow up interviews may be requested
- The meeting will last approximately one hour
- It will be a semi-structured interview
- This study is an analysis of the texts that make up the Leveson Inquiry and Report plus interviews and media and parliamentary comment since 2012

- The research will take place in a quiet place directed by you – usually your office, workplace or a quiet café or hotel lobby located near to your home or work.

Expenses and Payments (if applicable)
Travel expenses may be available.

What do I have to do?
Verbally offer your views on this topic and give details of your experience relating to it.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
There are no foreseeable disadvantages or risks in taking part in this study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
This study may potentially benefit future feminist campaigning by informing policy and practice with regards to women's inequality. This study will contribute to knowledge and potentially contribute to social change by revealing and deconstructing unequal distributions of power and social access within society.

What will happen when the research study stops?
If the project is stopped your data will be destroyed. Hard copies of any data will be shredded and disposed of using the University's confidential waste management service. Electronic data will be destroyed using City University's Information Services system.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?
It is up to you how identifiable you wish to be. I will try my best to anonymise your participation, but due to your public profile it may not be possible to alter identifying features, which could lead to your identity being known to some. If anonymity cannot be guaranteed, you will be informed and given the chance to withdraw from the study if you want to be anonymised. Interviews will respect your privacy and cover issues relating to your public role only. The researcher (Katie Toms) will have access to your data and interviews may be accessed by a transcriber. After 10 years your data will be destroyed. Hard copies of any data will be shredded and disposed of using the University's confidential waste management service. Electronic data will be destroyed using City University's Information Services system.

What will happen to results of the research study?
The results of this study will be written up as a PhD thesis. They may also be published as academic journal articles and be presented as papers at conferences. A copy of the thesis and any other publications that feature the research will be emailed to you on completion.

What will happen if I do not want to carry on with the study?
You can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

What if there is a problem?
If you have any problems, concerns or questions about this study, you should ask to speak to a member of the research team. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this through City's complaints procedure. To complain about the study, you need to phone 020 7040 3040. You can then ask to speak to the Secretary to Senate Research Ethics

Committee and inform them that the name of the project is: Obscenity versus objectification: A feminist reading of Leveson and its aftermath.

You could also write to the Secretary at:
Anna Ramberg
Research Governance & Compliance Manager
Research & Enterprise
City, University of London
Northampton Square
London
EC1V 0HB
Email: Anna.Ramberg.1@city.ac.uk

City holds insurance policies which apply to this study. If you feel you have been harmed or injured by taking part in this study you may be eligible to claim compensation. This does not affect your legal rights to seek compensation. If you are harmed due to someone's negligence, then you may have grounds for legal action.

Who has reviewed the study?
This study has been approved by City School of Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Further information and contact details
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Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix 8: Participant Consent Form

Consent Form

Title of Study: Obscenity versus objectification: A feminist reading of Leveson and its aftermath

Please initial box

1.	I confirm that I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the participant information sheet, which I may keep for my records. I understand this will involve: • Being interviewed by the researcher • Allowing the interview to be audio-recorded • Making myself available for a further interview should that be required	
2.	This information will be held and processed for the following purpose(s): Completion of PhD thesis and publication of other academic research relating to this topic. I understand that I will be given a transcript of data concerning me for my approval before it is included in the write-up of the research. I understand that I have given approval for my name to be used in the final report of the project, and future publications. I understand that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed for information which I may disclose in the interviews.	
3.	I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.	
4.	I agree to City recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) set out in this statement and my consent is conditional on City complying with its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998.	
5.	I agree to take part in the above study.	

Name of Participant _____ Signature _____ Date _____

Name of Researcher _____ Signature _____ Date _____

When completed, 1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher file.

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