

Written evidence submitted by Not Buying It (MISS0021)

https://committees.parliament.uk/call-for-evidence/93/changing-the-perfect-picture-an-inquiry-into-body-image/?fbclid=IwAR2H2MYo8sNW7CKMqpWjAyh7fx5wNlFJcfwTje4X_YD9pntDNHpdIEhdJA

Not Buying It challenges commercial sexual exploitation (the porn and sex trade) - our work being heavily informed by survivors.

This includes women who have worked in porn and all forms of prostitution (on and off street prostitution, escorting, massage parlours, saunas, 'sugaring', 'rooms for sex', lap dancing, webcamming, intimate image exchange etc).

As such we represent some of the most marginalised in the community - women with prior and ongoing vulnerabilities – including abuse, disability and poor physical/mental health (often starting in childhood). In addition, ethnic minority women are particularly over represented, and maltreated, in the porn/sex trade.

We are concerned that neither the porn or sex industry nor traditional or social media's whole sale promotion, misinformation and glamourisation of these industries are even mentioned in this inquiry.

The women and girls most likely to end up in the porn/sex trade are also some of the most likely to suffer crippling body image issues – in part because of the messages peddled by these industries and the mass media alongside the fashion and beauty industry.

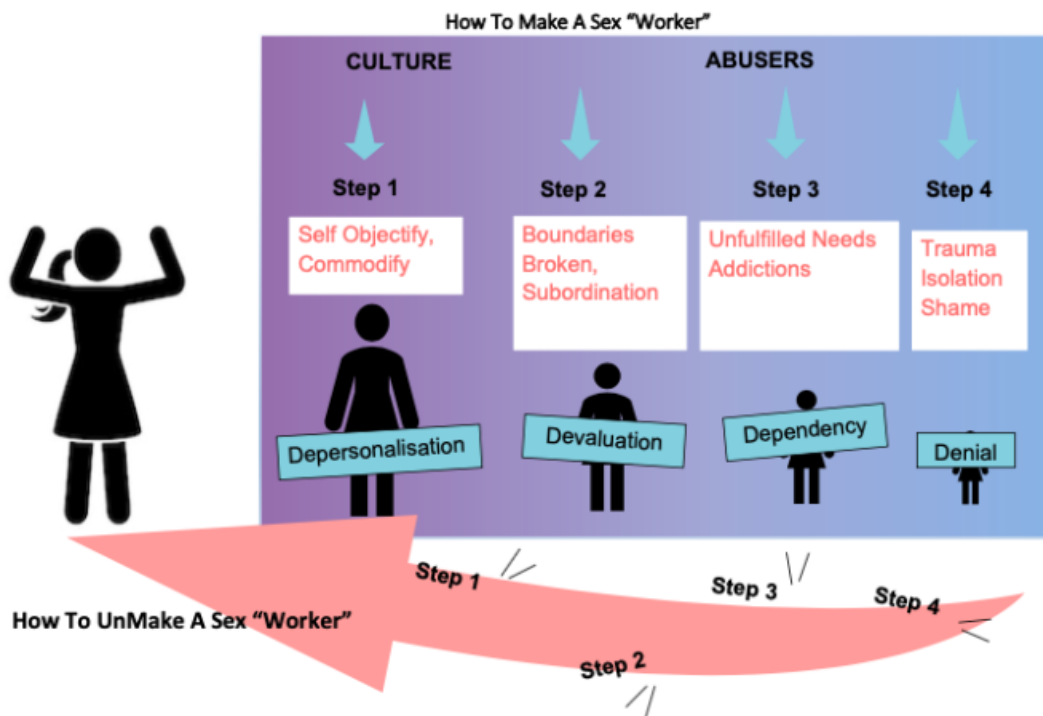
Pornography is not even mentioned in this inquiry. Yet nothing is having greater impact on our society than the porn that saturates it and in which we are allowing our children to grow up. Statistics vary but it is likely that the overwhelming majority of under 16s have viewed porn, often on a regular basis. Some studies suggest a high proportion of pre-teens view porn, many regularly. Even for those who do not view porn, its message is everywhere because our culture is steeped in it.

The harmful messages are not merely restricted to promoting poor body image, of course – they go far beyond that. But their effect on body image is equally profound. It is a direct

result of pornography that pubic hair in women is now viewed as ‘disgusting’ and that women’s genitals are deemed ‘in need of surgery’ in order to resemble the surgically altered genitals of the women in pornography. The porn/sex trade, including strip clubs and ‘lad’s mags’ have contributed to underage girls finding their bodies ‘disgusting’ – desperate for botox, breast implants, lip plumper and other ‘corrective’ surgery.

In effect, our society has taken the place of abusers in that *it* now plays the first step in ‘grooming’ for the porn/sex trade (and other forms of abuse, including suffering from poor body image) in our girls. Equally it plays the role of grooming our boys – not only as consumers of these industries - but as abusers of women and girls.

This diagram sent to us by ‘Jade’, a survivor of the sex trade, helps demonstrate this:



This is exemplified by women in the strip industry (in which 'Jade' also worked) who routinely state it is their *choice* to self objectify and that 'they are objectified all the time anyway so they might as well make money out of it'. Yet it is well known that being objectified and self objectification is harmful, whether or not it is 'chosen' – with multiple issues relating to poor body image, poor mental, sexual and physical health^{1,2,3}. Sadly, the real question is how can any young girl *not* chose to objectify herself in modern day Western culture. Objectification, of course, is the basic premise of the entire strip industry. But this is also one of the reasons personal boundaries can then so easily be broken leading to the sexual contact and assault^{4,5,6} and further serious physical and emotional issues^{7,8} standard in this industry – like the rest of the porn/sex trade⁹.

Successive governments have failed to stem the porn/sex industries. The latest blow being the inexplicable withdrawal of age verification to protect our children from pornography.

Although work on improving advertising is welcome, this doesn't just pale into insignificance – it is using a band aid to treat a hospital full of patients needing open heart surgery.

Further, our dealings with the ASA¹⁰ show a profound lack of understanding or interest in the impact of objectifying ads or the harm of allowing the promotion of deeply damaging industries - even to our children. It has refused to end the (often graphic) advertising of the porn and sex trade in newspapers, such as *The Sport*. It has extremely confused perceptions of when advertising is, or is not, 'objectifying' - often giving opposing rulings on essentially identical ads. And still treats complaints as based on 'offence' rather than harm, both in its guidance and its interpretation of them. If taken to Judicial Review it would be shown to breach equality law time and again.

That is why we make the following recommendations:

Recommendations

- **Pornography and the normalising and promoting of the porn/sex trade** *has* to be specifically considered in this inquiry and all others in relation to violence against women and girls (VAWG), sex-based inequalities or similar issues if such inquiries are to be meaningful

- **Age verification** must be urgently introduced in order to try to counter young people's *en masse* exposure to the extraordinary harms (including poor body image) of pornography
- **Internet regulation** must be urgently introduced to curb the extreme abuse of pornography (of which promoting poor body image is the least of its harms) and to end all other objectification and sexualisation of women – directly leading to poor body image both in the women objectified and others (either through viewing it themselves or due to the resultant pressure by partners, peers and/or society).
- **The impact of wider media** equally needs to be considered in this inquiry and all others addressing VAWG or sex based inequalities. This includes the press/news/documentaries which often do little more than promote the porn/sex trade, alongside TV shows and films which still frequently sexualise and objectify women as well as promoting the porn/sex trade.
- **The impact of businesses based on sexual objectification or the selling of sex** (such as the strip industry, 'sugaring' etc) needs to be considered in this and all other issues relating to VAWG and sex-based inequality
- **The ASA:** It makes a mockery of ASA progress in addressing objectifying advertising when it allows The Sport - a newspaper - to host 1000s of ads (often graphic) for porn and prostitution. Or when it does nothing to stem newspaper/online ads for 'dating' (often with graphic imagery which are clearly a front for the sex trade) or online ads for 'rooms for sex' (despite this being illegal), sugaring, escorting or the rest of the sex trade (most using sexually objectifying imagery, all promoting harmful practices).
- **Training of all regulators and decision makers is urgently needed** by feminist organisations/survivors of abuse/their advocates as to the harm of businesses, advertising and messages that objectify or promote deeply harmful industries such as the porn/sex trade
- **Entitlement of human rights groups to legal aid to take regulators and other public bodies to court for breach of equality law.**

June 2020

References

¹ <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780120200801003>

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- ² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3508959/#B5>
 - ³ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/713840274?src=recsys>
 - ⁴ <https://www.notbuyingit.org.uk/sites/default/files/Sanders%20Initial%20Findings.pdf>
 - ⁵ <https://www.grand-island.com/Home/ShowDocument?id=10354>
 - ⁶ https://doi.org/10.1300/J013v31n01_06
 - ⁷ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/713840248>
 - ⁸ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01639625.1992.9967914>
 - ⁹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/842920/Prostitution_and_Sex_Work_Report.pdf
 - ¹⁰ <https://notbuyingit.org.uk/ads-publications/>