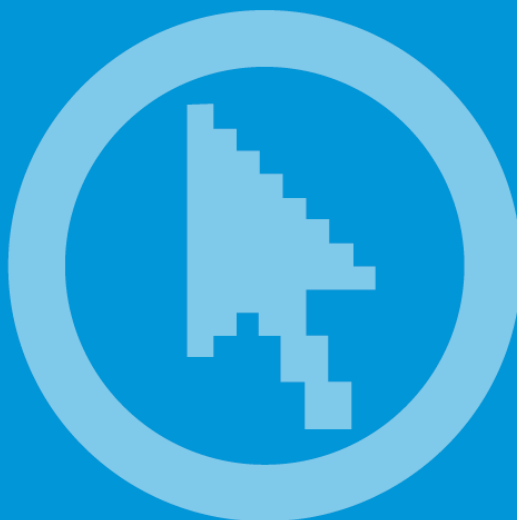


What About **Women?**



ELECTION 2010 - WHAT ABOUT WOMEN?

CULTURE, MEDIA AND PUBLIC ATTITUDES BRIEFING



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Culture, Media and Public Attitudes

What About Women is a Fawcett led coalition of over forty organisations and thousands of individual women and men that have come together for the General Election to ask the political parties ‘*what about women?*’

Purpose of this briefing

This briefing gives some background information on the issues behind the *What About Women* campaign questions on **culture, media and public attitudes**. It also includes a number of policy options from Fawcett and other *What About Women* campaign partners working on culture, media and public attitudes. Links to further information can be found at the end of this briefing along with details of our partner organisations.

Women are not a homogeneous group and the impact of the media and cultural attitudes to and expectations of women will depend on a wide range of factors including social class, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, disability, religion and caring responsibilities.

The questions

Our media and cultural representations of women have a huge impact on how girls and women are viewed and view themselves and on public attitudes about women and women’s equality. Government and schools have a duty to use education to tackle all forms of prejudice and discrimination in generations to come.

- **How will you encourage media and cultural institutions to tackle gender stereotypes and project positive images of women?**
- **How will you address damaging representations of women in internet, print and web media?**
- **What will you do to ensure education plays its part in educating young people about gender equality and tackling negative stereotypes and beliefs about women and men amongst boys and girls?**

Some key issues for women

Equality between women and men will not be achieved by legal change alone. Our media and cultural representations of women have a huge impact on how girls and women are viewed and view themselves and on public attitudes about women and women’s equality. From the effects of celebrity culture and beauty advertising on young women’s and girls’ body image, to the stereotyped portrayal of rape victims, to a chronic under representation of female news subjects, our attitudes are moulded by cultural representations of women.



Why encourage media and cultural institutions to tackle gender stereotypes and project positive images of women?

Women continue to be predominately represented in passive and stereotyped roles in film and television. This extends beyond fictional representations to news media – women are far more likely to be shown as victims and far more likely to be referred to in terms of their age, physical appearance, or family role than men. Women are also less likely to appear in important roles behind the scenes.

- 19% of women news subjects are portrayed as victims compared to 10% of male news subjects.¹
- 84% of women news subjects are identified by their family status, compared with 16% of male news subjects.²
- 83% of 'experts' cited in news stories are men.³
- In 2006 only 38% of journalists in the UK were women and the gender pay gap in the industry was over 20 per cent.⁴ This places the UK amongst the worst in Europe for gender equality in journalism.⁵
- In 2008 only 17.3% of writers for UK film releases were women and only 11.5% of directors of UK releases were women.⁶

Why address damaging representations of women in internet, print and web media?

Women and girls are bombarded daily by sexualised advertising that objectifies women's bodies in order to sell products, sexualised clothing marketed at primary age children and by demeaning images of women as sexual objects in lads' mags and tabloid newspapers. This affects both women's and girls' self image and society's perception of women in general.

- Research from the Children's Society has shown that dissatisfaction with their appearance is the single biggest cause of unhappiness among girls aged 10-15. 21% of girls are unhappy with their appearance compared to 14% of boys.⁷
- Media was rated as one of the earliest influences on beauty and body image by 27% of 15-17 year olds.⁸

¹ Natasha Marhia, *Just Representation? Press reporting and the reality of rape*, The Lilith Project, 2008.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ EFJ Survey: *Women Journalists in the European Integration Process*, by Annegret Witt-Barthel, European coordinator of the IFJ Gender Council (2006) <http://europe.ifj.org/assets/docs/118/144/bad0a76-d2b7b90.pdf>

⁵ EFJ Survey: *Women Journalists in the European Integration Process*, by Annegret Witt-Barthel, European coordinator of the IFJ Gender Council (2006) <http://europe.ifj.org/assets/docs/118/144/bad0a76-d2b7b90.pdf>

⁶ UK Film Council statistical Yearbook 2009, tables 21.10 and 21.11

⁷ The Children's Society, *Understanding children's well-being: A national survey of young people's well-being*, 2009.

⁸ N. Etcoff, S. Orbach, J. Scott, H. D'Agostino, *Beyond stereotypes: Rebuilding the foundation of beauty beliefs*, February 2006.

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- 29% of 11-16 year old girls said they are 'not very happy' or 'not at all happy' about the way they look.⁹
- 21% of 11-16 year old girls would like to change their appearance to be thinner.¹⁰
- A report by the American Psychological Association, examining virtually every form of media, has revealed that the proliferation of sexualized images of women and girls is linked to common mental health problems such as eating disorders and depression.¹¹
- 12% of all websites are pornography sites and 25% of all search engine requests are for pornography.¹²
- 26% of trade union branches have received enquiries from members who have been exposed to the sex industry, including pornography, at work.¹³
- 83% of single parents say that the media represents them in a negative light.¹⁴

Why educate young people about gender equality and tackle negative stereotypes and beliefs about women and men and amongst boys and girls?

A worrying minority of people still hold outdated views on apportioning blame in rape cases where a woman has been drinking or flirting. Media reporting of rape also disproportionately focuses on false allegation stories.¹⁵ These attitudes and news stories can create a culture of disbelief in which victims and survivors are less likely to report crimes, or juries to convict sexual offenders. Negative and stereotyped attitudes to women and girls begin at a very young age and they are not being addressed sufficiently in the education system.

- 36% of British adults believe that a woman is at least partly responsible for being raped if she is drunk.¹⁶
- 20% of people believe that it is acceptable in some circumstances for a man to hit or slap his wife or girlfriend in response to her being dressed in sexy or revealing clothes in public.¹⁷
- 25% of young men believe that women 'often' provoke violence by nagging.¹⁸
- 77% of young people feel they do not have enough information and support to deal with physical or sexual violence.¹⁹
- Education has an important role to play in providing non-stereotyping careers advice to girls and boys.

⁹ *Girls Attitude Survey 2009 – 11-16a*, ChildWise and GirlGuiding UK, July 2009.

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¹¹ American Psychological Association, Report of the APA Taskforce on the Sexualisation of Girls, 2007.

¹² *Object, Joining up the dots: why urgent action is needed to tackle the sexualisation of women and girls in the media and popular culture, May 2009, referencing English, B. (2005, May 12), 'The secret life of boys: Pornography is a mouse click away, and kids are being exposed to it in ever-increasing numbers,' The Boston Globe.*

¹³ Fawcett Society, *Corporate Sexism: The sex industry's infiltration of the modern workplace*, September 2009.

¹⁴ Gingerbread, *Survey of Members*, 2008.

¹⁵ Natasha Marhja, *Just Representation? Press reporting and the reality of rape*, The Lilit Project, 2008.

¹⁶ Home Office/ Ipsos Mori, 'Violence against women opinions survey,' Feb 2009.

¹⁷ ibid

¹⁸ NHS Scotland, *Young People's Attitudes towards gendered violence*, 2005.

¹⁹ ICM poll, November 2006, commissioned by EVAW: A survey of 16 – 20 year olds in the UK and Wales.



- *An Equal Opportunities Commission study found that Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Caribbean origin girls believe that their careers advice had not opened their eyes to a full range of jobs and careers.²⁰*
- *76% of girls and 59% of boys would be more interested in a non-traditional sector if they could try it before making a final choice.²¹*

'There was quite a lot of low-level sexual bullying in the corridors that we were completely unaware of as a school. Some of the Year 10 girls, especially, began to say "I'm sick of boys touching my bum all the time – they've got no right to".'

Male PSHE teacher (Challenging Violence, Changing Lives: Gender on the UK Education Agenda, Womankind Worldwide, 2007)

"When I think about careers education in school, I don't remember much. This is because there wasn't really any. In the last half year, I met reps from Connexions a couple of times but nothing really came of it - they suggested I go into hairdressing and into college for this. I don't remember anything else being offered to me."

Young woman, YWCA West Kent

Policies that could make a difference:

Policies proposed by Fawcett and other *What About Women* campaign partner organisations to challenge damaging and stereotyped images in the media and educate young people include:

Tackling media and cultural institutions

- Gender equality should be mainstreamed into media regulation, such as OFCOM and ASA, rather than setting standards solely according to obscenity and decency.
- Creation of a gender equality media watchdog, with the ability to award positive incentives for media representation of women.
- A strong media campaign on changing public attitudes to sexual violence, focusing on men as well as women.
- Create opportunities for women to progress in senior media positions, particularly as editors, directors and producers.
- Work to raise awareness of the negative effects of the objectification and sexualisation of women and girls in media and advertising.
- See also Object's charter for Media and Objectification for range of additional policy proposals in this area (<http://www.object.org.uk/index.php/home/3-news/89-press-release-object-supports-sexualisation-reviews-calls-to-regulate-lads-mags>).

²⁰ R Bhavnani, Moving on Up? Ahead of the Game: the changing aspirations of young ethnic minority women, Manchester Equal Opportunities Commission.

²¹ EOC, Fuller, Beck and Unwin, Occupational Segregation Working Paper Series 28, Employers, Young People and Gender Segregation (England) (2005)

In the education system

- Incorporate gender equality principles across the curriculum, not only in PSHEE.
- Encourage whole school investment in creating a culture where gender inequality against women is addressed openly and appropriately, with a strong lead coming from senior staff as well as individual teachers.
- Raise the status of PSHEE to a statutory foundation subject within the national curriculum, and incorporate media literacy into PSHEE classes, particularly focusing on stereotypes and women in advertising.
- Develop comprehensive guidance for schools on sexual bullying.
- Ensure that all schools have access to adequate advice and support to complete their Gender Equality Scheme, under the Gender Equality Duty.
- Encourage young men and women to explore non-traditional career options via work experience and incentives.

Article 5 of the UN Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women calls on states:

a) To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women

The Beijing Platform for Action, which was agreed by Governments around the world in 1995 states: The continued projection of negative and degrading images of women in media communications - electronic, print, visual and audio - must be changed. Print and electronic media in most countries do not provide a balanced picture of women's diverse lives and contributions to society in a changing world.



Further information and resources:

[The Fawcett Society](#)

www.fawcettsociety.org.uk

[Engender](#)

www.engender.org.uk

[Wales Women's National Coalition](#)

<http://www.wales-womens-national-coalition.org.uk/>

[Awareness raising campaigns:](#)

['This is not an invitation to rape me,'](#)

<http://www.thisisnotaninvitationtorapeme.co.uk/>

['My Strength,'](#)

<http://www.mystrength.org/>

['Pause Button,'](#)

<http://pause.nycagainstrape.org/>

[Home Office Violence Against Women Opinion Polling, February 2009,](#)

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/violence-against-women-poll.html>

[Challenging Violence, Changing Lives, Womankind Worldwide's UK Schools Programme](#)

<http://womankind.org.uk/uk-schools.html>

[Girls Shout Out! Girlguiding UK](#)

http://www.girlguiding.org.uk/about_us/girls_shout_out.aspx

[Case studies collected during our recent work can be found at:](#)

<http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=947>

http://www.amnesty.org.uk/news_details.asp?NewsID=16618

[Object](#)

<http://www.object.org.uk/>

[Pink Stinks](#)

<http://www.pinkstinks.co.uk/campaign.php>

[Women in Film and TV](#)

www.wftv.org.uk

[Bird's Eye View](#)

<http://www.birds-eye-view.co.uk>

Links to further information and resources can be found on the *What about Women* pages of the Fawcett Society website www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/whataboutwomen