

Submission by [Not Buying It](#) to press regulator, IMPRESS Code Consultation.

Draft IMPRESS Codes referred to here can be seen here: www.notbuyingit.org.uk/ImpressDraftCodes

[Not Buying It](#) challenges the sexual objectification of women because of the harm associated with it.

1 Key Points

Overview

- This is a unique & unprecedented opportunity to finally ensure a Socially Responsible Press
- But the codes seem little different from existing Editors' Code of Practice as used by IPSO
- How then is there any real likelihood of any meaningful change?

Codes need to be more extensive

Appropriate interpretation of the codes is also sorely needed

Improved Codes

- Have human rights groups fed into these codes?

There must be codes on content in terms of Social Responsibility and Child Appropriateness, as for all other regulators of non-age restricted material

- Incitement to Hatred is welcome but likely to be too strong a term to be meaningful

There must be codes for the press not to promote stereotypes or harmful attitudes

Included in this must be the ability to challenge inappropriate imagery and advertising

Stereotyping effects all members of the group stereotyped thus any member of the public or their advocate should be able to challenge this

Adjudication

- The adjudication panel includes journalists – should it?
- Should it not then also include advocates of those harmed by the press?
- Why are there no human rights advocates with understanding of harm of media stereotyping?

A compromise could be a long term advisory panel including women's/race rights groups etc & advocates of those harmed by the press to inform the panel

2 Why Change is Needed

For Women

- Have women's groups responded to IMPRESS consultation on its codes or has Impress actively sought out the views of women's groups?
- If not, it is urgently needed particularly as the press has a long history of appalling representation of, and attitudes towards, women which deeply influences social attitudes

For Children

- Contents of some press raises real issues of child protection (all of The Sport, 'Page 3', sexualised content both in print and on line). Newspaper content (especially the visuals, need to be appropriate for children). This is particularly the case when:
- **2/3 of 8-9 year olds read newspapers**, this figure rises to nearly 1/2 of older children
- **50% of boys** say newspapers are their *preferred reading material* outside of the classroom

For Minority Groups

- Has IMPRESS specifically sought input from minority groups – ethnic minority, immigrants, LGB, transgender or disabled communities?
- If not, this urgently needs to be done and their concerns addressed in any codes issued

For Press Social Responsibility

The media has *huge* power to influence public opinion and attitudes. And discrimination and violence against 1 in 3 women in the UK happens because of the attitudes of our boys and men. This is recognised through a large body of research, in international treaties and by countless Government and Party Political documents.

Yet we saturate boys from the day they are born in a culture that endlessly objectifies women and girls and gives them a sense of disrespect, 'ownership' and sexual rights over silly, submissive, inferior females.

Until the media stops this behavior we will never see a decline in these attitudes and we will not see any reduction of the 10 million women in the UK who experience male violence.

Given this epidemic of violence, one of the key roles of all media, including the press, is to stop promoting, encouraging and condoning harmful social attitudes.

Other media bodies, although far from faultless, do at least have specific codes on social responsibility and child appropriate content. The press for some reason has traditionally been deemed 'untouchable' on this matter and hence is by far the worst offender in this area – with imagery and content that would never be allowed on such a mainstream, child accessible platform by any other regulator.

An absolute requirement for social responsibility needs to be written into any codes regulating the press, preferably as a distinct element or as part of the press' need to 'ensure the public interest'.

3 What Needs to Go

We touch here only on the most obvious examples of press objectification and stereotyping of women. If IMPRESS cannot see an end even to this, then IMPRESS is no better than IPSO or the PCC before it on these issues. And how can the public have any faith the press is being any better regulated if the most obvious, and graphic, examples of ineffectual regulation remain?

Page 3

Page 3 in print and Online. This has no business in a newspaper and never did. This is not 'freedom of the press' or 'freedom of expression'. This is freedom of profit with a large dose of misogyny thrown in. It is actually against the public interest because of the attitudes it heralds and is **totally unsuitable for children**.

Gratuitous Sexual Content

Gratuitous, Sexualised Images of Women as Covers and Content typical of The Star, Sun and Daily Mail in particular. Often these are linked to stories of rape, murder and even child kidnapping.



The Sport

This would be deemed 'post watershed' material by any reasonable person and should never have been sold as a newspaper. It exemplifies the industry at its misogynistic worst, discrediting the press in its entirety. Any decent regulator needs to ensure that its codes and their interpretation stops the Sport in its tracks from masquerading as a 'newspaper'. The Sport online is at least restricted to subscription viewers, why is the print version sold on the bottom shelf as a newspaper?

It is not good enough to leave this to 'discretion at point of sale'. Retail regulators, such as the NFRN (National Federation of Retail Newsagents) have no teeth and no understanding of the issues. Besides, this then shifts the focus onto small sweet shop owners not the porn barons who own such titles.

Ads for the Porn and Sex Trade

These are found in many national and local papers including the Metro, Evening Standard and Star. These should never be seen in a newspaper. If an individual were promoting these industries to a child it could be seen as a breach of the Serious Crime Act. How is it appropriate in a newspaper? How does this represent a responsible, ethical press acting in the public interest?

Again, there should be clear codes which stress that this discredits the press, that it is unacceptable, socially irresponsible, an issue of child protection and against the public interest. This is not some issue distinct from press accountability and for ASA consideration alone. The Metropolitan Police and Press Association certainly do not think so, they wrote to all editors half a decade ago urging them to stop carrying such ads.

4 Will IMPRESS do the Job?

A look at current IMPRESS Codes leaves many questions as to whether these can end even the worst excesses of press portrayal, in particular statements relating to:

'Public Interest'

This must acknowledge the huge power of the press to influence opinion and society and that it is in the public interest for the press to ensure a positive not negative effect on this. The need for Social Responsibility must be stressed under this or, preferably, distinct to this, to give this key role of the press the prominence it warrants.

'Free to be Partisan'



Partisan = 'prejudiced in favour of a cause'. Should the 'right' to be partisan be a key attribute of the press? Surely the key role of the press is to report the news factually and accurately without bias? This is particularly the case when the most-read, most influential press is run by large corporates, for-profit and headed by often right-wing billionaire businessmen (including pornographers). Freedom to be partisan then is clearly *not* in the public interest, it is in the interest of businessmen and often very much against the public interest/ public good.

Code 1. Accuracy (ie Ensuring the Truth)

Isn't this a key role of the press? Shouldn't there at least be recommendations for best practice particularly on issues where the truth has traditionally been heavily obscured by the press. 'Fake News' has been in the press since the first paper was printed. In real terms, how will this code be enforced any better than currently eg:

When reporting Domestic Violence to *not* refer to this as 'an isolated incident' but to give perhaps the stats on domestic violence.

Even more so when referring to rape, to end victim blaming and at very least give the stats on rape alongside articles (eg only 3% of rape reports are 'false reporting', lower than for any other crime; only 1% of rapists are believed to ever be brought to justice etc)

Women's groups have already written several excellent reports with practical recommendations as to how this could be implemented. Have these reports been considered?

Code 1 will often clash with the 'right to be partisan'. How will the regulator deal with this?

Code 3. Children

'I have to pre-read the paper as some pages are totally inappropriate for my son. I shouldn't have to do that!'
Almu

This section deals only with Press treatment of children, *not the child-appropriateness of what is published*. The fact that substantial numbers of underage children read newspapers, often encouraged to do so by educators, needs to be recognised. This includes both print and, perhaps most importantly, online press. As such the Press needs much ethics over child-appropriate content.

Code 4. Discrimination

4.1 Pejorative referral – could this include Page 3 and the countless other objectifying ways in which women are constantly referred to by much of the press both in print and on line? Could Page 3 possibly be interpreted as pejorative? Besides our understanding is that only the individual portrayed can complain under this code which obviously isn't going to happen!

4.3 Inciting Hatred

This is a very strong term, particularly legally – very hard, if not impossible, to take action on, making it near meaningless.

Surely the press should not be inciting *discriminatory, stereotyping and harmful attitudes or attitudes that encourage harassment or abuse* (see below).

4.4 Not to Actively Promote Stereotypes or Harmful Attitudes

There is no Section 4.4 but there should be.

Even if Section 4.1 could be stretched to include the worst examples of objectification, we do not think this is enough. We believe a section on discrimination needs to be much stronger, stating that **the press is not entitled to actively promote stereotypes or harmful attitudes through words or imagery and that anyone can complain about this**

Code 5. Harassment

Again this section refers only to harassment of an individual for the purpose of creating print material. However, the manner in which material is reported can clearly also constitute and lead to harassment particularly in today's social media-driven environment. **There must be codes that stress that the media must avoid reporting material in such an inflammatory manner that it is likely to lead to or encourage harassment, particularly social media abuse, by others.**