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books

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# PORN PANIC!

SEX AND  
CENSORSHIP  
IN THE UK



and one showing 'objectified' men. Even the *Daily Mail* noticed the hypocrisy:

Intriguingly, an almost exact mirror-image version of the same advert – this time featuring a woman driver surrounded by a group of hunky, scantily clad, bare-chested and gyrating men as if in a scene from the Full Monty – received nearly a million online 'hits' but no complaints and is therefore free to continue to be aired unchanged, the ASA confirmed.<sup>68</sup>

Orwell fans might recognise the doublethink here. The right of women to appear as unashamedly sexual beings was being attacked by an unelected bureaucracy in the name of 'combatting sexism'. In 1984, the English Socialist Society had a slogan: War is Peace; Freedom is Slavery; Ignorance is Strength. To this, we might add: Oppression is Liberation.

But this power to censor-by-complaint was not enough for the moral entrepreneurs. Object began a campaign for 'sexist' ads to be made illegal across the European Union, with a petition at [change.org](http://change.org) stating:

The media have a great responsibility in promoting equality between women and men. For too long, the representations of women have been misused by the media advertising; we continue, as people working for equality, to fight against stereotypes. More and more often and louder, we say NO to sexist advertising!<sup>69</sup>

### **Women's Rights: Not For All Women**

One of the ironies of opposing sexual expression from a feminist standpoint is that most of the money to be earned from it is earned by women. Not only is there far more work for women in pornography, modelling and striptease, but women in these fields are far better paid than men. Despite popular mythology (much of it

created by anti-sex campaigners) that depicts sex-related work as male-run and exploitative, the business of sex has mostly been dominated and run by women throughout its history. Anti-sex feminists tend to say “women shouldn’t have to earn money from sex”, but this is a straw-man argument: nobody is suggesting this, and women do not *have* to earn money from sex: but they can, if they choose. The anti-sex message is really: “women shouldn’t earn money from sex under any circumstances”.

Various female friends and acquaintances that I have met during my work in the porn industry and my sexual-freedom activism have created for themselves lifestyles of which many men would be envious – myself included. There is the friend who funded years of world travel by working as a stripper, and never having to do any work she did not enjoy. The woman who spent several years travelling, partying and selling sex from time to time when the cash ran out. The 23-year-old graduate who moved to London and earns a six-figure income as a sex worker, and whose ‘business plan’ involves becoming mistress to a rich man who will buy her a flat. The pornstar who paid her way through university. The pornstar who owned a London flat, before retiring in her early 30s to start a family. The various pornstars who can afford to spend months at a time partying in Ibiza or Thailand. The older women who worked in the phone-sex business in the 1990s, and their younger equivalents who do webcam work today, for whom ‘going to work’ means putting on some make-up and switching on their PC.

The downside for all these women is that the work usually has to come to an end. Few that I have met in these industries intend to keep doing sex-related work beyond 40 (though there are exceptions). I have seen the sadness of strippers and pornstars who have to quit the job they loved for something they often do not: the horror of the ‘nine to five’ haunts them. But this is the downside of having choice, not (as some try to claim) of coercion.

sexual (or 'sexist', in the eyes of morality campaigners) cartoon pictures of women, and the Big Panic, triumphant in its recent humbling of O'Reilly and Blanc, prepared to take its third scalp.

However, this time, the attack was ill-chosen. Forced to apologise on TV, with his supportive team sitting by, and now wearing a drab hoodie, Taylor burst into tears. The greatest moment of his life had become one of his worst. Public support for him rallied. The moralists were forced even further onto the back foot when it emerged that the shirt had been made by a female artist friend of Taylor's, who came forward to express puzzlement that her art might be considered sexist. For a moment, the crusaders were exposed as authoritarian bullies.

The backfiring of Shirtgate created a temporary pause in the Big Panic, and revealed a basic truth. Most people appeared to have no objection to the kinds of expression that were now being presented as sexist. The panic was driven by small, well-organised groups that had become adept at whipping up moral outrage in regular bursts. Online petitions take seconds to sign. Even 150,000 people signing a petition represented less than a quarter of one percent of the UK population. One person making a complaint to Ofcom or the ASA represented nobody but themselves.

The authoritarian, bullying climate was noticed by an older generation of feminists. Of all the journalists who might flag up the problem of what I call the Big Panic, Julie Bindel was one I would have least expected to intervene. Bindel, a veteran radical feminist, and vociferous anti-porn and anti-prostitution campaigner, may not have been considered a natural friend of free expression, especially of the 'lad culture' variety, but she turned on those who had attacked Dapper Laughs, Julien Blanc and Matt Taylor, blaming them for doing damage to the feminist movement. In a *Guardian* piece with the title "Feminism is in danger of becoming toxic", she wrote:



The current climate of McCarthyism within some segments of feminism and the left is so ingrained and toxic that there are active attempts to outlaw some views because they cause offence. Petitions against individuals appear to be a recent substitute for political action towards the root causes of misogyny and other social ills. Petitions have taken over politics.<sup>71</sup>

### **Tyler, The Creator**

Possibly, Britain's Home Secretary Theresa May had been gratified by the acclaim she had received for banning Julien Blanc from Britain. This episode provided a valuable lesson for right-wing authoritarians like May: so long as acts of censorship are dressed up in the right language, nobody with any clout will oppose them.

The next ban of an 'unsuitable foreigner' was a breathtakingly pointless piece of cultural (and probably racial) bullying. Tyler, The Creator, a young, black American hip-hop artist, was barred from the UK (where he had been planning to tour) in August 2015. The basis of the ban was that he had written and performed misogynistic and homophobic lyrics several years earlier, at the age of 18. There could have been no serious suggestion that Tyler was any kind of threat to anyone – especially since his lyrics were no longer of the crude kind that had once caused offence. But now, his mere physical presence was deemed to be a significant enough problem that he should be barred from entering the country.

The smell of witch-hunt was again in the air. Some primitive human fear instinct had elevated a young man who had once penned some unpleasant words to the status of kryptonite; merely being in his presence might turn young British men into violent rapists and homophobes! The 'rape culture' meme came into play. While rape is measurable, rape culture is not. It is the superstitious idea that rape somehow hangs in the air and infects