

LADS' MAGS.

By Sofie from London

To write this article, I decided to go and buy some lads' mags; they've become a byword for sexism and I wanted to see for myself quite how bad they are. I wasn't disappointed — both the notoriously crude cheaper weeklies like *Nuts* and *Zoo*, and the glossier monthly "lifestyle" magazines like *FHM* and *Loaded* are plastered from with representations of women that could have walked out of a *Carry On* film. We're all either the butt of sexist jokes or reduced to a perfect tanned and toned figure.

And it's not just the pictures; *Zoo* magazine has caught media attention with competitions to win your girlfriend a boob job, by offering men the chance to apply to have sex with a virgin glamour model. Lads' mags are clearly incredibly sexist.



But alongside what these magazines say to men about women, they say something about men and masculinity too. Women might be breasts and legs and fluff between the ears, but men aren't any more three-dimensional.

EMAP, the media giant which publishes *FHM* and *Zoo*, also owns *Heat*, *Grazia* and *New Woman*

magazines. The laddish identity it creates for young men helps it sell huge chunks of advertising space to beer companies in much the same way that its appearance-is-everything women's magazines are a big source of income from make-up advertisers. For years, feminists have been showing how magazines perpetuate sexist stereotypes, with women's lifestyle titles telling us to keep thin and

Disagreements within the Pankhurst family resulted in a huge divide in the WSPU. Sylvia Pankhurst is known for her initial work alongside her mother, Emmeline, and sister, Christabel. But she did not remain convinced of the ideals of WSPU. Having adopted many of her father's socialist ideas, she became active in the Labour Party. She also became a friend of Keir Hardie who helped her to establish the East London Federation of Suffragettes.

Emmeline and Christabel's conservative ideas led them to appeal to middle-class women rather than to workers.

please our men, and men's titles turning us into hyper-sexed brainless bimbos. It's time we started talking about how these magazines stereotype and influence men. The guys who buy *Nuts*, *Zoo* and *FHM* aren't all the dribbling, emotionless Neanderthals they're made out to be. Sexists are made, not born.

Basically all of Britain's media is sexist. I can't remember the last time I went to see a film that didn't have some irritating stereotype of the typical woman in it. Advertising across billboards, TV and newspapers colludes to tell us that all women look a very specific way. And while lads mags are one of the most shocking examples of a society which still sees women as a one-dimensional schoolboy fantasy, I think they're sometimes scapegoated because they're explicitly sexual in a way other sexism isn't. Anti-lads' mag activism is becoming a big deal on university campuses. Young women are understandably angry at being confronted with this sexist rubbish every time they enter their uni shops, and are carrying out direct actions like stickering. But there's an uncomfortably moralistic undertone to some of these actions. There are references to banning 'sexual publications' on campus.

I think these campaigns get it wrong. First of all, as socialists, we are for freedom of speech, even for sexist magazines. But also, these kind of campaigns miss an opportunity to say something about the massive commercialisation of sexuality and the reasons EMAP and others might be interested in that. They don't talk about capitalism, and they don't have any answers. Putting white covers over lads mags, or sticking them on the top shelf won't challenge any of the content and seems motivated by the view that men are irredeemable, and the only solution is for women not to have to be confronted with any evidence of their sexist natures.

Instead, lets call lads' mags out for what they really are; a very canny attempt by capitalist corporations to construct, own and sell a narrow masculinity in the same way they've constructed, owned and sold femininity since women's media were created. The fact that young men want to look at pictures of naked women is not the problem; the problem is the way these pictures are part and parcel of a lifestyle sold by sports channels, beer companies and Topman.

The start of the First World War, and the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia sharpened disagreements between the Pankhursts. Emmeline and Christabel's move towards conservative politics went hand-in-hand with the patriotism surrounding World War One resulting in the renaming of the WSPU's magazine to "Britannia", and suspension of their fight for the women's vote in favour of the war effort. By contrast, Sylvia Pankhurst viewed War as a means of dividing and suppressing the working class on a global scale, and chose to join others in the Labour movement by adopting an anti-war position.