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Getting Emotional About Boobs: An analysis of debates about Page 3 and their impact on British Feminism, 1986-1994.

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Introduction

'She objected to Eros showing his bum'[1]

In March 1986 the *Sun* printed a cartoon of Labour MP Clare Short clothing a statue of a naked Eros with the above caption. Such a depiction typified the *Sun's* virulent attack on Short that branded her as prudish, a 'killjoy', and jealous.[2] The motivation behind this onslaught was the Indecent Displays Bill, also known as the 'Page 3 Bill'. This bill was introduced by Short in 1986 and aimed to make illegal the display of nude or partially nude women in newspapers.[3] Photographs of topless women, commonly known as Page 3, had become a British tabloid tradition, appearing in the *Sun* for the first time in 1970 and later being adopted by The *Daily Mirror*, The *Daily Star*, and The *Sunday Sport*.[4] Predictably, the feature caused controversy, which Short's bill brought out into the open. Women immersed themselves in the debate when they argued for or against the appropriateness of certain sexual images and questioned the practice of censorship. The bill elicited 5000 letters of support from women and in 1987 Short formed the Campaign against Pornography (CAP).[5] Subsequently, the Campaign against Pornography and Censorship (CAPC) and Feminists against Censorship (FAC) were both formed. The Page 3 issue had snowballed into a feminist debate about the sexual representation of women.

This dissertation seeks to use the Page 3 debate as a case study to explore feminist activism and divisions in Britain. It is widely agreed that by the 1980s the British Women's Liberation Movement (BWLM) had disbanded in its formalised, national sense.[6] The supposed 'sex wars' of the 1980s have been blamed for the demise of the WLM. These were a series of debates amongst feminists that discussed numerous issues relating to sexuality and sexual

[1] As quoted by Rebecca Loncraine, 'Bosom of the nation: Page Three in the 1970s and 1980s', in *Rude Britannia*, ed. by Mina Gorji (London: Routledge, 2007), pp.96-111 (p.109).
[2] Peter Chippindale and Chris Horrie *Stick it Up Your Punter! The uncut story of the Sun newspaper* (London: Faber & Faber, 2013) p.368.
[3] Hansard Parliamentary Debates (hereafter HC or HL DEB): 12 March 1986, vol. 93, cols. 937-40 <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1986/mar/12/indecent-displays-newspapers#S6CV0093P0_19860312_HOC_168> [accessed 12 January 2021]
[4] Clare Short, *Dear Clare: this is what women feel about Page 3*, ed. by Kiri Tunks and Diane Hutchinson (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1991), p.x.
[5] Barbara Norden, 'Campaign against Pornography', *Feminist Review*, 35 (1990), 1–8 (p.2).
[6] Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p.331.

activity.[7] While it was agreed that sexuality mattered why and how it mattered deeply divided feminists. Conversations about sexual oppression and sexual repression set the stage for feminist considerations of pornography. Page 3's explicit and erotic nature meant that it was often included in such debates. This dissertation will not engage in an evaluation of Page 3 as pornography, nor will it specifically assess the importance of the 'sex wars' to the demise of the BWLM. Rather, I will use the Page 3 debate as a case study to highlight the diversity of feminist thought in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The battles over Page 3 highlight that feminism was far from defunct after the 1970s and suggests a recurring conflict between British women about the meanings of the exposed female body. These contests reveal women as engaged and impassioned participants in the construction of sexual meanings. Three principal themes emerge when looking at the exchanges between feminists, politicians, and ordinary women about Page 3: violence, female bodily autonomy, and sexual agency.

Therefore, this dissertation uses a three-chapter structure to consider the key themes that emerged from the debate. Chapter One will assess disagreements about Page 3 and violence against women. It will demonstrate that, despite growing concern over the issue towards the ends of the 1970s, by the 1990s women were still unable to agree on the root or solution of this epidemic. Chapter Two will explore the attitudes towards the relationship between body image, self-esteem, and Page 3. This discussion will highlight that disagreements over female bodily autonomy were illustrative of the move from second wave feminism to post-feminism as the notion of 'choice' was emphasised by Page 3 proponents. Finally, Chapter Three will build on how the Page 3 debate was a window into the wider splintering of the WLM. This will be shown through a focus on the discussion around female sexual autonomy, which will highlight that tensions about sex did not go away in the 1990s, in fact they grew.

Consequently, this dissertation will reveal the significance of the Page 3 debate to wider conversations about feminism and female status, both at a personal and political level. In particular, this dissertation will trace the multifaceted understandings of sexuality at the end of the WLM. In doing so, it will aim to uncover the moment when the movement completely divided.

[7] Joni Lovenduski and Vicky Randall, *Contemporary Feminist Politics: Women and Power in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp.57-92.

Literature:

According to Joanne Meyerowitz, the 'proliferation in the mass media of sexual representations of women is […] among the most significant developments' in women's history, the history of sexuality, and the history of popular culture.[8] Yet, the phenomenon that was Page 3 and the campaigns that women waged for and against it is almost invisible in historical scholarship, creating a significant gap in media history and the history of British feminism.

Natalie Thomlinson describes the historiography of the British feminist movement in the latter half of the 20th century as 'meagre.'[9] There is evidence to this claim, many of the major writings on British feminism have been written by participants of the WLM, namely in the work of Lynne Segal, Sheila Rowbotham, Anna Coote, and Beatrix Campbell.[10] This blurs the distinction between primary and secondary sources, hence limiting possibilities of an objective analysis of specific opinions, events, and developments. Despite existing within a limited framework, studies that enhance understandings of British feminism have been conducted. Several historians readily agree that by the 1980s the movement was divided on issues of class, race, disability, and sexual politics. Eve Setch, Jeska Rees, and Sarah Browne's studies of the BWLM predominantly focus on the debates between radical and socialist feminists.[11] This thesis will continue in this narrative, striving to recover the debates over sexuality as accurately as possible using the case study of Page 3. Despite this increased emphasis on divisions, the exploration of pornography has been fundamentally ignored. Margaretta Jolly's oral history on the women's movement in Britain only briefly mentions the debates and Short's campaign.[12]

[8] Joanne Meyerowitz, 'Women, Cheesecake, and Borderline Material: Responses to Girlie Pictures in the Mid-Twentieth-Century US', *Journal of Women's History*, 8 (1996), 9-35 (p.9.)
[9] Natalie Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England*, 1968-1993 (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p.4.
[10] Lynne Segal, *Is the future female? Troubled thoughts on contemporary feminism* (London: Virago, 1987); Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation* (Oxford: Basil and Blackwell, 1987); Sheila Rowbotham, *The Past is Before Us: Feminism in Action Since the 1960s* (London: Thorsons, 1989)
[11] Eve Setch, 'The Face of Metropolitan Feminism: The London Women's Liberation Workshop 1969–1979', *Twentieth Century British History*, 13 (2002),171– 190; Jeska Rees, 'A Look Back at Anger: The Women's Liberation Movement in 1978', *Women's History Review*, 19 (2010), 337–56; Sarah Browne, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Scotland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016)
[12] Margaretta Jolly, *Sisterhood and After: An oral history of the UK Women's Liberation Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020) p.146.

Where historians do substantially focus on debates over pornography works tend to concentrate on America.[13] As such, I have been inspired by the American historiography on the subject which has sought to critically examine the place of pornography within feminist discussions of this era. Carolyn Bronstein has produced the most comprehensive account of the evolution of the American anti-pornography movement. She states, 'anti-pornography was a complex and multi-faceted movement.'[14] Bronstein's emphasis on diversity rings true to anti-pornography groups in Britain who similarly held contrasting ideas and goals. Julia Long's *Anti-Porn: The Resurgence of Anti-Pornography Feminism* serves as a partial corrective to these shortcomings. The book offers a seemingly in-depth history of debates around pornography in the UK. However, Long positions herself as an 'insider', as someone who possesses a zero-tolerance approach to pornography, meaning the book fails to generate an impartial account of feminist perspectives on pornography.[15]

Page 3 provides an important case study to explore the disagreements which unfolded between women about the significance of the exposed female body and sexuality. Despite holding claims to have 'changed British newspapers, and society, forever', the current literature written on Page 3 remains rather limited.[16] Rebecca Loncraine has written the most substantial account of Page 3 in the 1970s and 1980s, she assesses the ways in which the feature contributed to contemporary debates about nudity in public culture.[17] By demonstrating the significance of the debates to British feminism, my dissertation will extend the findings of Loncraine. Historical perspectives of the British press have referenced the feature in discussions about gender and sexuality.[18] Notably, Adrian Bingham has examined the growth and evolution of the pinup, the eroticised cartoon strip, and the Page 3 girl, insisting that the press has contributed to the sexualisation of the female body. [19] Although useful his data cannot

[13] Carolyn Bronstein and Whitney Strub, *Porno Chic and the Sex Wars: American Sexual Representation in the 1970s* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2017); Lisa Duggan and Nan D. Hunter, *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
[14] Carolyn Bronstein, *Battling Pornography: The American Feminist Anti-Pornography Movement, 1976-1986* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) p.5.
[15] Julia Long, *Anti-Porn: The Resurgence of Anti-Pornography Feminism* (London: Zed Books, 2012), p.8.
[16]Rhian Sugden, 'How Page 3 changed British newspapers, and society, forever – and the shy, modest man behind the camera', *Sun*, 18 November 2019 <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/10352561/how-page-3-changed-british-newspapers-and-society-forever-and-the-shy-modest-man-behind-the-camera/ > [accessed 2 March 2021].
[17] Loncraine, pp.96-111.
[18] Adrian Bingham and Martin Conboy, *Tabloid Century: The popular press in Britain, 1986 to the present* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015); Chippindale and Horrie, pp.49-70.
[19] Adrian Bingham, *Family newspapers?:Sex, Private life, and the British popular press 1918-1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

be used to argue that it caused splits and divisions amongst the British population. This dissertation seeks to trace these divisions, thereby deepening our understanding of the historical importance of conflicts over sexual imagery, sexuality, and female status in Britain.

Methodology and Terminology:

The wave metaphor dominates narratives of feminism, despite regular questioning by feminists who fear it offers a historically reductive and simplistic view of women's activism.[20] Scholars worry that the metaphor creates the perception that feminist activism is a singular phenomenon united around a set of ideas, political beliefs, strategies, and tactics.[21] However, it remains almost impossible to discuss feminist history without 'talking in waves' and it often provides a useful way of thinking through the chronology of feminism.[22] Therefore, this dissertation will not neglect the use of the wave metaphor, rather it will suggest that a more fluid use of the term, that privileges continuity, diversity, and multiplicity, is increasingly important. For the purpose of this dissertation I will define a feminist as someone who recognises that women are treated differently to men in a way that is detrimental to them and hence advocates for the equal status of women.

The source base for this dissertation is largely from the book *Dear Clare…this is what women feel about Page 3***,** which includes 250 letters addressed to Short from members of the public expressing their feelings about Page 3. The letters highlight that feminist sex debates were incorporated into women's everyday thoughts, providing evidence that the personal truly was political. However, it is impossible not to be guided by the editor's curation, Short, Kiri Tunks, and Diane Hutchinson were all part of the CAP, therefore it is likely they included letters that served an ideological function. The collection nonetheless provides ample material and helps to reclaim the voices of ordinary women.

By 1986 Page 3 was an established feature of the tabloid press and British culture.[23] Consequently, the press could not help but acknowledge and involve itself in debates about the

[20] Thomlinson, p.13; Stacy Gillis and Rebecca Munford, 'Genealogies and generations: the politics and praxis of third wave feminism', *Women's History Review,* 13 (2006), 165-182.
[21] Linda Nicholson, 'Feminism in "Waves": Useful Metaphor or Not', *New Politics,* 12 (2010) <https://newpol.org/issue_post/feminism-waves-useful-metaphor-or-not/> [accessed 12 April 2021].
[22] E. Evans and P. Chamberlain, 'Critical Waves: Exploring Feminist Identity, Discourse and Praxis in Western Feminism' *Social Movement Studies,* 12 (2015), 396-409 (p.396)
[23] Loncraine, p.105.

feature. Access to British media archives and newspapers has therefore been invaluable in gaining insight into the public perceptions, as well as contemporary impressions of the actions and statements of those involved. The highly subjective nature of newspapers means there are often reservations about using them as material, however the essence of this dissertation makes this less of an issue as it is opinions and biases which I am looking to access. To some degree, conversations about Page 3 arose from debates in Parliament and Short's Indecent Displays Bill. Hence, I have also used Hansard to look at the record of what was said in Parliament about decisions to potentially ban Page 3. In doing so I have been able to highlight the variety of motivations in the debate.

To complement these sources, academic texts produced by feminist scholars during this period will also be examined. Thomlison criticises published texts for offering a limited voice, which was largely that of white middle-class women who were educated enough to publish their thoughts.[24] While this limitation must be engaged with critically, these sources remain instrumental in this research in offering an in-depth exploration of many of the topics only briefly discussed elsewhere.

The tensions between the political and the personal at the heart of feminist sexuality debates can be seen in these sources; some were written for a broader audience or with a political aim in mind, while others were essentially just women communicating amongst themselves. Although very different, they all show women thinking, discussing, and forming their ideas about pornography, sexuality, and women's position more generally.

[24] Thomlinson, p.8.

Chapter One: Harmful Fun?

'Freedom for all women from intimidation by the threat or use of violence or sexual coercion regardless of marital status and an end to the laws, assumptions and institutions which perpetuate male dominance and aggression to women.'[25]

This goal was made the seventh demand of the BWLM at their final National Conference in 1978. It was the first time that feminists in Britain specifically set out to address and confront the issue that was violence against women. Consciousness-raising groups had exposed the prevalence of domestic and sexual abuse against women.[26] This demand sparked a huge debate with disagreements unfolding between feminists about the nature and causes of violence against women.[27] The drama and eventual passing of the seventh demand had obvious implications for the development of discussions about pornography. Feminists began to ask where men learnt the attitudes and behaviours that contributed to a culture of violence against women. They turned their attention to the role of the mass media in constructing certain 'truths' about women and men, sex and power, aggression and sexuality. If the media was part of the problem of male violence, they contended, it would also have to be part of the solution.

Bronstein's study of the anti-pornography movement in America asserts that one of the biggest debates within feminism was whether pornography caused gendered violence.[28] Adopting Bronstein's perspective, this chapter will examine the debates surrounding Page 3 and its connection to violence against women. Firstly, it will look at how arguments about violence against women and Page 3 unfolded in parliament with a particular focus on Short's 1986 and 1988 Indecent Displays Bills. Secondly, it will examine the debates amongst women who used personal experiences to highlight the links versus those who suggested an overemphasis on sexual images was counterproductive to the feminist battle against gendered violence. The argument is twofold. Firstly, this chapter argues that embedded in the debates were political agendas, highlighting that the issue struck a chord for people outside of the mainstream feminist movement. Secondly, it will argue that debates about Page 3 were inextricably linked to wider disagreements amongst feminists about the nature, causes, and

[25] Rees, p.348.
[26] Long, p.16.
[27] Rees, p.347.
[28] Bronstein, p.6.

solutions of violence against women. This analysis thus seeks to demonstrate that debates about sex and violence extended into the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Short's bills offer a good starting point for this argument. Her attempts to prohibit nude or partially nude photographs of women from newspapers were largely driven by a belief that the images perpetuated violence against women. In Short's 1986 speech to the House of Commons she highlighted the argument stating, 'there is some connection between the rising tide of sexual crime and Page 3.'[29] Hence, Short marked the images as potentially dangerous and inciting violence. Such a view had been championed by radical anti-pornography feminists in the US, namely Catharine Mackinnon and Andrea Dworkin, who believed that any imagery that is potentially stimulating to men constitutes an active and oppressive threat to all women.[30] A perspective summarised in Robin Morgan's phrase: 'pornography is the theory, and rape is the practice.'[31] The work of American anti-pornography feminists gave credence to British feminists, like Short. Before the introduction of Short's bill she conferred with Dworkin about legislation on the subject of pornography.[32] While other feminist activists had expressed concern about the sexual repression that might result from endorsing censorship as a remedy for gender inequality Short embraced the notion of government intervention.[33] Her career as an MP and the work of Dworkin and Mackinnon likely provided the main impetus for Short's decision to take the issue to parliament. It is without a doubt that the work of Dworkin and MacKinnon was one of the main theoretical frameworks and incentives for those who connected Page 3 and violence and the subsequent backlash by those who were against censorship.

The proposed legislation brought radical and controversial feminist issues into parliament, highlighting that parliament was a site that offered opportunities for feminist action and debates. In 1988 Short reintroduced the bill maintaining the argument that the photographs helped 'to create a sexual culture that encourages sexual assaults on women.'[34] Although they

[29] HC DEB: 12 March 1986, vol.93 cols.937-40
[30] Mandy Merck, 'From Minneapolis to Westminster', in *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate*, ed. by Lynne Segal and Mary McIntosh (London: Virago, 1992), pp.50-65 (p.54).
[31] Robin Morgan, *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist* (New York: Open Road Media, 2014) p.280.
[32] Merck, p.54.
[33] Rowbotham, p.254.
[34] HC DEB: 13 April 1988, vol.131 cols.168-72 < https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1988/apr/13/indecent-displays-newspapers#S6CV0131P0_19880413_HOC_146> [accessed 21 March 2021].

were not passed Short's bills opened a Pandora's box, revealing ideological divisions that would intensify in the following years and splinter the women's movement into competing factions.

Short's proposals were met with stark opposition from Conservative party members, who refused to accept the claim that the pictures had the potential to incite abuse. Conservative MP Robert Adley, for example, claimed: 'There are few pleasures left to us today. One that I enjoy is sitting in an underground train, watching the faces of the people who are pretending not to be looking at Page 3.'[35] In making this comment and presenting Page 3 as a harmless source of fun, Adley undermined attempts to take criticisms seriously. In 1986 Virginia Bottomley (Conservative MP) stated: 'what appears on Page 3 of the *Sun* may not be to everyone's taste, but they are fairly friendly pictures.' [36] Bottomley's suggestion unequivocally subverted the argument that Page 3 perpetuated violence against women. The enthusiastic support of such Conservative party members seemed somewhat paradoxical given the Thatcher administration's repudiation of permissiveness. Page 3 had its origins in the permissive society. In 1970, the *Sun* defended it through the claim that 'The Permissive society is a fact, not an opinion. We have reflected the fact where others have preferred to turn blind eyes.'[37] The close relationship between the Conservative party and the tabloid press complicated Short's attempts to object to Page 3. As Helena See has argued, tabloid support was integral to electoral success in the 1980s and early 1990s. [38] Through maintaining the suggestion that the photographs were 'friendly' and a source of 'pleasure' Conservative party members were able to undercut claims that Page 3 was overly erotic, pornographic, or inherently dangerous. Whether rooted in a sincere belief about Page 3's harmless nature or the result of a complicated political relationship, the Conservative party's pronouncements about Page 3 were almost uniformly positive. It is within this context, therefore, that we should consider the political agendas amongst these debates and the multiplicity of motivations.

Nonetheless, the belief that Page 3 incited violence against women had a unique influence over public opinion. Many female members of the public wrote letters avidly

[35] HC DEB: 12 March 1986, vol.93, cols. 939-40
[36] HC DEB: 24 January 1986, vol.90, cols.556-619 <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1986/jan/24/obscene-publications-protection-of#S6CV0090P0_19860124_HOC_81 > [accessed 21 March 2021].
[37] As quoted in Bingham, *Family Newspapers*, p.222.
[38] Helena See, 'Guardians of the Public Sphere? Political Scandal and the Press, 1979-97', *Twentieth Century British History*, 21 (2013), 110-137, (p.111).

supporting Short's claims and suggested a direct link between Page 3 and their personal sexual assault. The letters stress that women were deeply motivated by their individual experiences to provoke change. One woman wrote: 'I personally have been subjected to sexual harassment at work. I was forced into a corner […] and asked if I looked like the Page 3 girl thrust under my nose.'[39] Through composing these letters and relating their assault to Page 3 women provided necessary evidence for anti-pornography feminists who drew links between sexual imagery and violence. Another woman recounted that during her assault the perpetrator 'repeated over and over what a great Page 3 girl he thought I would make. He seemed to have a fixation about breasts.'[40] The readiness to share intimate details of their assaults suggests women had a genuine desire to ban Page 3. This is highlighted through her statement: 'I have never told anybody about this.'[41] She thus captured the notion that Short's bill encouraged women to open up about violence they had encountered. This particular woman wrote that as a result of her assault she had 'come to despise the dumbness and naivety of women like Samantha Fox.'[42] This statement of disgust towards the Page 3 models critically reveals the judgement which often accompanied anti-Page 3 points of view. Such contemptuous denouncements of Fox played into stereotypes of glamour models as unintelligent, which created greater hostility between the women who modelled and feminists. Ridiculing the glamour models was a way to gain superiority over the image.

Anti-censorship feminists challenged the perception that Page 3, and pornography more generally, could be blamed for acts of gendered violence. They urged that banning pornographic features could misdirect people's attention from the genuine causes of violence. Elizabeth Wilson, a pioneering figure in the FAC, denied that pornography caused crimes against women and warned that this accusation was 'to let men off the hook.'[43] In this she argued that men should be held fully accountable for acts of violence against women. The language of Wilson is reminiscent of revolutionary feminists who saw rape as a product of gender relations in a patriarchal society.[44] The decision to hold men fully accountable, and ignore sexual images as a factor, was illustrative of this position. Mary Hayward reinforced the idea, stating that by blaming erotic images you encouraged 'offenders to put the blame for what

[39] Short, p.68
[40] Short, p.96
[41] Short, p.96.
[42] Short, p.97.
[43] Peregrine Worsthrone, 'The great lesbian pornography debate', *Sunday Telegraph*, 5 August 1990, p.17.
[44] Browne, p.141.

they have done on someone else[…]rather than accept responsibility for their actions.'[45] Both, Wilson and Hayward, were concerned that censorship would misdirect people's attention from the genuine causes and agents of violence and abuse. This highlights a profound split between anti-pornography and anti-censorship feminists. While they agreed on the seriousness of gendered violence the roots of the epidemic were far from the same.

The lack of explicit images, unvarnished sex acts, and violence did not matter. Women argued that they were more likely to experience harassment due to Page 3's acceptability and prominence. These women suggested that the fact that Page 3 had become such an ingrained part of British society made it more dangerous because the depiction of submissive and available women was 'spread all over the place.'[46] Teresa Stratford drew on the entrenched nature of Page 3, going as far to say that by the 1980s it was an 'institution.'[47] Popular columnist Bel Mooney explicitly positioned herself as seeing Page 3 as harmful. In an interview published in *The Times* Mooney stated, '"I do think that Page 3 is possibly, potentially, more damaging than hard cord porn because it is as ubiquitous as sliced bread, and it's bad for you."'[48] Expressing her objection to Page 3, Mooney drew upon the fact that tabloid newspapers were read widely and regularly. In 1987 The *Sun* had an approximate daily readership of 3 993 000.[49] Hence, Page 3 differed from other forms of pornography because such a large proportion of the population was exposed to these images daily. Because it was so pervasive in everyday life, much of the British public engaged with the debate in ways that they might not have in regards to other feminist issues.

Despite the strong assertions made by anti-Page 3 advocates many women refused to concentrate too much on pornography as the cause of violence against women. In her examination of the pornography wars in Britain Long argues that anti-censorship feminists considered focussing on pornography a 'distraction' from the more serious issues of discrimination.[50] The statements of those who were against banning Page 3 reaffirm Long's observation. They suggested anti-censorship voices were unconvinced by research findings

[45] Mary Hayward, 'Pornography and the dangers of censorship', 4 December 1989, p.18.
[46] Short, p.92.
[47] Teresa Stratford, 'Page 3 – dream or nightmare?', in *Out of Focus: Writings on Women and the Media,* ed. by Kath Davies, Julienne Dickey and Teresa Stratford (London: Women's Press, 1987), pp.57-62 (p.57).
[48] Catherine Bennett, 'Putting porn in its place', *The Times*, 11 March 1988, p.18.
[49]Alanah Reid, 'A History of the *Sun'*, *Historic Newspapers* (2020) < https://www.historic-newspapers.co.uk/blog/sun-newspaper-history/ > [accessed 14 April 2021].
[50] Julia Long, *Anti-Porn: The Resurgence of Anti-Pornography Feminism* (London: Zed Books, 2012), p.65.

that indicated links between exposure to soft-porn and violence against women. In an article about soft porn Mary McIntosh, a central participant of the FAC, argued that pornography was not the 'root cause of oppression' and suggested that eliminating it would not 'reduce the amount of violence against women.'[51] McIntosh refused to place responsibility for violence with sexualised images of women and stated that the real problem which needed addressing was 'the pattern of social relationships in which men are dominant and privileged.'[52] In this, she suggested that pornography reflected society rather than constituted it. A leaflet published by the FAC in 1989 added weight to this perspective, stating:

> We need an analysis of violence that empowers women and protects them at the same time. We need a feminism willing to tackle issues of class and race and to deal with the variety of oppressions in the world, not to reduce all oppression to pornography.[53]

For the FAC the decision to focus solely on pornography seemed reductive. It was violence, not Page 3 that should be eradicated. As we have seen, the nature and causes of violence against women had caused divisions in the movement before. That disagreements such as these were still being brought up at the end of the 1980s is evidence of the continuity of these debates.

Overall, this chapter established the intense disagreements between women over whether Page 3 caused violence against females. In looking at the personal and political sides of both arguments, significant light has been shed on the reasons women had such differing opinions. Debates in parliament reveal the range of incentives behind arguments for and against Page 3, namely political. Women who had personal experience of sexual assault drew on these as evidence, highlighting the impassioned response to Short's bill. On the other side of the debate, feminists argued that to say Page 3 caused gender-based violence was an oversimplification and implied that efforts to combat pornography detracted from legitimate concerns. Thus, it is clear that Page 3 was a deeply divisive issue.

[51] Maggy Meade-King, 'Should pornography come off the top shelf?', *Guardian*, 15 February 1990, p.38.
[52] Meade-King, p.38.
[53] Gillian Rodgerson and Linda Semple, 'Who Watches the Watchwomen? Feminists against Censorship', *Feminist Review*, 36 (1990), 19-24, (p.22).

Chapter Two: Whose body, whose choice?

'The ideal body is also evidence of pure devotion to an aesthetic ideal of sexuality, a very limited aesthetic ideal.'[54]

Concerns about the norms of appearance were prevalent in 1980s feminist discussions.[55] There was a growing consideration that the female, and particularly the feminine, body could influence a woman's sense of self, especially her image and identity. Rosalind Coward, for instance, published *Female Desire* in 1984. The book argued that the scrutiny of women's appearance amounted to social and sexual control in a patriarchal society and that insecurity about looks generated widespread anxiety and a sense of inadequacy in women. She observed that the images of women in the 1980s connoted sexual arousal and were essentially derived from pornography.[56] As the decade progressed into the 1990s arguments developed and some feminists suggested that women should not be excoriated for a pleasure or pride in personal appearance. The aesthetic nature of Page 3 meant that such topics were present in the debate.

This chapter aims to explore the discussion about Page 3 and female bodily autonomy, considering both sides of the argument. The contention of this chapter is that such differing opinions were illustrative of the move amongst many women to a post-feminist way of thinking, which suggested that gender equality had largely been achieved. The view that Page 3 damaged women's sense of self was widely held by feminists who feared that it commodified a particular standard of beauty. This argument was reminiscent of a wider second wave feminist view that saw indulgence in appearance as a form of 'false consciousness.' While some feminists pertained that Page 3 had negative consequences for female confidence, other women especially the models themselves found Page 3's celebration of beauty empowering. Although these women did not always identify as feminists their active role in the feature and subsequent contribution to the debate means they provide a valuable contribution to understanding perceptions of female bodily autonomy during the period. By exploring these competing perceptions of the sexual politics of appearance this chapter hopes to further nuance the history

[54] Rosalind Coward, *Female Desire: Women's Sexuality Today* (London: Paladin, 1984), p.45.
[55] Carol Dyhouse, *Glamour: Women, History, Feminism* (London: Zed Books, 2010), p.123.
[56] Coward, p.59.

of the women's movement during this period and highlight that 'feminist' or not women engaged in discussions about female status.

It was widely believed that Page 3 created a standard of beauty. Women criticized the photographs for framing a specific and largely unattainable look as ideal beauty. Tunks and Hutchinson stated the limitations of this standard: 'a woman must either conform to a male defined stereotype - cute, thin, leggy, blonde, busty - or be dismissed as deviant from this cultural form.'[57] Tunks and Hutchinson described the limited ideal that women must follow to meet the dictates of femininity. Their criticisms of the image reflected the academic consensus that women should not be restricted by the standards which were constructed by men to serve men's interests. In 1975 Laura Mulvey coined the term the 'male gaze' to explain how a woman will always be the passive object of the active heterosexual male gaze. In this Mulvey emphasized the fact that women judge and create themselves based on their perceptions of men's desires.[58] Mulvey based her theory on Hollywood cinema, but the concept was used extensively by feminists to expose the hierarchies of gender representations in all media.[59] The adjectives used by Tunks and Hutchinson to describe this ideal highlighted the argument that Page 3 presented an image of female beauty which was usually unattainable and highly idealistic. Thus, they established that another motivation for those against Page 3 was the feeling that it restricted women by allowing them only one way to be beautiful, and hence accepted.

However, while many feminists agreed that Page 3 reinforced ideals that made women feel inferior this did not always mean they agreed that it should be removed. Melissa Benn, for example, noted how the feature distorted views of what a 'normal' female body looks like, which in turn put 'enormous pressure on women battling with an already frail sense of self and sexuality.'[60] In this, she agreed that the images often lead to negative self-image as women strove to meet this largely unattainable body type. However, Benn also stated that she could 'not support' Short's bill 'because it sought to deal with women's degradation through censorship – a mechanism which has a notorious capacity to rebound on its maker.'[61] It is clear

[57] Short, p.108
[58] Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16 (1975), 6-18.
[59] Joelin Quigley Berg, 'Issues of harm and offence: The regulation of Gender and Sexuality portrayals in British Television Advertising' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 2015) p.81.
[60] Melissa Benn, 'Page 3 - and the campaign against it' in *Feminism and Censorship: The current debate*, ed. by Julienne Dickey and Gail Chester (Dorset: Prism Press, 1988), pp.26-35 (p.33).
[61] Benn, p.26.

that for feminists, like Benn, their disapproval of censorship outweighed their knowledge of the individual damage features such as Page 3 could create. As such, Benn implied that the solution to female insecurities could not be a method that often-had counterproductive effects and repressed women even further. Similarly, the anti-censorship feminist writer, Julienne Dickey, stated the difficulties in banning something on the basis that it contributed to women's 'negative self-image.' She posed the question 'Do Page 3 pictures and pin-ups teach us more about our role vis-a-vis men than the more commonly clothed representations of heterosexuality?'[62] In this, Dickey conveyed the difficulties in deciding what is harmful and what is not. In defining what was 'good' and 'bad' Dickey feared that feminists were engaging in moralising. So, while feminists acknowledged that media sexism contributed to low levels of self-esteem, they did not unanimously agree that this was grounds for Page 3 to be banned.

In seeking to deconstruct erotic images in the British press, women wrote letters expressing their concern that Page 3 fostered negative relationships between women and girls about their bodies. Mothers saw Page 3 as especially harmful to their daughters. One woman blamed semi-nude photographs for her child's anorexia:

> She had been terribly shocked at the age of about 12 or 13[…]seeing a grey-haired man[…]looking at magazine pictures of nude girls[...]This was one of several incidents which led her to becoming anorexic at 14.5-and losing the rest of her childhood.[63]

The emotive language and severe accusation made by this woman emphasises that complaints about Page 3 often came from a genuine place of concern. This motherly instinct is replicated by other women who used maternalistic phrases like 'I am the mother' and 'my son' to begin their letters and bolster their role as protectors.[64] In a similar way, a teacher noted that 'girls frequently (and maybe subconsciously) compare their looks and figures with the models in the tabloids.'[65] These women articulated their anxiety that Page 3 could have damaging effects on the private behaviour of young girls and their perception of themselves. Placing emphasis on the corruption of youth raised the stakes by framing Page 3 as a threat to Britain's future generation. While these women deplored the role beauty played in women's lives other

[62] Julienne Dickey, 'Snakes and Ladders', in *Feminism and Censorship*, ed. by Dickey and Chester (Dorset: Prism Press, 1988), pp.165-179 (p.167).
[63] Short, p.113.
[64] Short, pp.82-84.
[65] Short, p.81.

feminists rejected this notion suggesting that refusing to take pleasure in one's appearance could also be harmful. Rowbotham stated that 'the denial of delight in the body and appearance can limit as much as being defined only by one's looks and dress.'[66] This suggests that Page 3's support for female beauty was not inherently incompatible with some forms of feminism.

However, letters were written to Short which further evidence how criticisms of Page 3 were intimately bound to wider anguish about women's preoccupation with appearance and desire for male approval. In their attack on Page 3, women expressed their body dissatisfaction and highlighted its negative impact on interpersonal relationships. One woman stated that she felt 'fat, ugly, and unwanted as [her] boyfriend secretly eyes up Page 3 as if to say, "This is my kind of dream girl, not you."'[67] This individual expressed feelings of hurt, inadequacy, and jealousy at the site of the photographs. Earlier in the letter she proclaimed, 'I am not a raving feminist', making it clear that the issue politicised many women by touching on their personal feelings of insecurity and inferiority.[68] The comment made by this woman was not atypical of those who wrote to Short.[69] Statements like these were a way of speaking about feminism without rigidly identifying with it.[70]

Carol Dyhouse argues that feminists encounter a problem when British women are pleased to aspire to glamour modelling.[71] The language of Page 3 models validates Dyhouse's assertion, as the models frequently claimed that they experienced pleasure, agency, and even empowerment through their work. In February 1986, the *Birmingham Evening Mail* published an article that quoted Page 3 models defending their work. One model, Janine James, stated, 'I'm proud that I am able to make the best of my assets and that seven million people agree.'[72] If we take James' reference to her 'assets' to mean her breasts, which given her job as a topless model and the context of the article is likely, then the account clearly demonstrates a confidence in displaying her own feminised body. Similarly, another model stated, 'I thoroughly enjoy my

[66] Rowbotham, p.259.
[67] Short, p.112.
[68] Short, p.111.
[69] Short, p.5.
[70] Christine Griffin, '"I'm not a Women Libber, but…" Feminism, conscious and identity', in *The Social Identity of Women,* ed. by Suzanne Skevington and Deborah Baker (London: SAGE Publications, 1989) pp.173-193 (p.180).
[71] Carol Dyhouse, *Girl trouble: Panic and progress in the history of young women* (London: Zed Books, 2014), p.232.
[72] Sue Evison, 'Page 3 girls hit back at MP', *Evening Mail,* 15 February 1986, p.4.

work, earn a good living from it, and don't feel at all degraded.'[73] The perception that Page 3 demeaned women was debunked by this model who positioned her work as a root to individual achievement. Modelling was considered a lucrative profession and offered the lure of success. Such statements make it clear that proponents of Page 3 were unashamed to associate their successful careers with a superficial physicality. Though the selection of featured quotations in part undoubtedly reflected the interests of the newspaper the opinions of these women must not be undermined. The ubiquity of such statements demonstrates a genuine belief that Page 3 modelling was a sought-after career that had the capacity for autonomy. These women did not consider the limitations of the 'pleasure' and 'power' that the photographs offered or whether they contributed to women's condition of subordination.

Furthermore, models often reasoned that women should have the right to freely choose topless modelling as a legitimate occupation. This rhetoric reflected that glamour modelling allowed a woman to express agency in a country with an inadequate supply of well-paid jobs for women and insufficient social security. In 1992 the *Sun* published an article titled 'Here's how Page 3 will look under Kinnock' which quoted the model Kathy Lloyd: ''I'd cry my eyes out if they gave Page Three the boot[…]I love my job and there's nothing I'd rather do. Labour don't have the right to tell me what I can and can't do.'[74] Her passionate response implies that she genuinely enjoyed her job. The model's emphasis on freedom of choice is illustrative of a broader post-feminist sensibility which stressed the importance of '"being oneself" and "pleasing oneself."' [75] As Patricia Holland identifies 'Page 3 was postfeminist before its time.'[76] Indeed, the attitudes of the models display a distinct move from second wave feminism towards post-feminism as they relish and find agency in the display of their bodies. Crucially, this indicates that in the period there was not a clear understanding of what gave women power over and confidence in their bodies.

While proponents were eager to make clear that Page 3 models exercised their autonomy and independence through modelling Short maintained her stance that the feature was degrading. In fact, Short found it depressing that for young working-class women 'this

[73] Evison, p.4.
[74] 'Here's how Page 3 will look under Kinnock', *Sun*, 9 April 1992, p.3.
[75] Rosalind Gill, 'Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10 (2007), 147-166 (p.153).
[76] Patricia Holland, 'No more page 3? Sexualisation, politics and the UK tabloid press', in *Journalism, Gender and Power*, ed. by Cynthia Carter and others (London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2019), pp.174-188 (p.182).

was the one opportunity they felt that culture offered to them.'[77] Clearly, Short's comment had as much to with politics as Page 3 itself. Her analysis provided a critique not only of Page 3 but also of the state of working-class women's career opportunities. As many activists had done throughout the second wave, Short implicitly demanded that working-class women should have equal opportunities to advance, adding an important and incredibly significant subtlety to the debate. In this Short blatantly rejected the argument that women could aspire to glamour modelling, portraying a deeply judgemental and supercilious attitude towards the career and the model's themselves. While not deliberate this blatant disapproval inevitably heightened tensions. As we have seen it was not uncommon for the models to retaliate. Suzanne Mizzi stated, 'I'm not bothered by hard-line feminists. They're just jealous of women who can show their bodies.'[78] For Mizzi, the feminist critique of Page 3 stood in the way of women's pleasurable agency in displaying their bodies. The accusation is illustrative of the antagonism which grew between the models and those who opposed Page 3. The dismissal of feminists by Mizzi is reminiscent of the era of post-feminism which argued that women had achieved huge advances towards equal opportunities with men and hence there was little need for feminism.[79]

To summarise, women were greatly divided about the relationship between body image, self-esteem, and Page 3. Anti-Page 3 feminists highlighted that the feature enforced a male standard of beauty and hence caused increased body dissatisfaction amongst women. While those who were against censoring Page 3 images used the language of 'agency', 'choice', and 'empowerment' to forward their argument. The attitudes of the models, who found their work both fulfilling and liberating, demonstrated a challenge to older second wave feminist attitudes about appearance and beauty, highlighting that this was a moment where post-feminist ideals began to rise up against older ideas about bodily autonomy. Building on this, the following chapter will look at debates about female sexual autonomy to further explore how discussions and tensions between women grew in the 1990s.

[77] Short, p.22.
[78] 'Men's Lib', *Daily Mirror*, 8 December 1986, p.15.
[79] Angela McRobbie, 'Post-feminism and popular culture', *Feminist Media Studies*, 4 (2007), 255-264 (p.255).

Chapter Three: What's sexy about sexual freedom?

'Women must humanise the penis, take the steel out of it and make it flesh again […] the cunt must come into its own.'[80]

Writing in 1970, Germain Greer highlighted a priority of the women's movement from the late 1960s: the sexual agency of women. Indeed, Coote and Campbell claimed 'the relationship between sex and power lies at the heart of the struggle for women's liberation.[81] The 'sexual revolution' of the 1960s had given rise to widely held notions of female sexual empowerment. However, amongst feminists there was a growing suggestion that instead of empowering women, the 'sexual revolution' had fundamentally betrayed them.[82] It was considered essential that women were able to make sexual choices according to their own will, free from social expectations or coercion. While it was agreed that sex mattered how women could be sexual agents deeply divided feminists. Debates over the route to sexual equality set the stage for feminist considerations of pornographic features like Page 3.

This chapter argues that disagreements about sexual autonomy and Page 3 further demonstrate the recurrent divide in the women's movement during this period. The connectedness of this debate with the underlying rifts about sexuality will be established. Opponents to Page 3 highlighted that the images portrayed women as sexual objects, whereas anti-censorship feminists noted the dangers of limiting sexual material in an already sexually illiberal society. This contributed to Page 3 challengers being marked as modest and old-fashioned. Proponents of Page 3 were keen to establish themselves as the opposite – progressive and sexual. Disagreements about sexual autonomy and Page 3 further demonstrates that tensions about sex did not go away in the 1990s, rather they became more pronounced.

Firstly, it must be identified how a large majority of feminists, both in favour and in opposition to banning Page 3, recognised that it sexually objectified women. 'Objectification' was a critical concept for feminists, broadly speaking it was understood as regarding someone as an instrument to be used or looked at by others, usually men. Strong opponents of Page 3

[80] Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, (London: Paladin, 1971),
[81] Coote and Campbell, p.211.
[82] Sheila Jeffreys, *Anticlimax: a feminist perspective on the sexual revolution* (North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2011), p.90.

stressed that it must be abolished as it made it socially acceptable to view women as sex symbols. *Guardian* journalist Deborah Bennison described the type of woman that made her 'angry': 'those who allow their bodies, clothed, naked, or semi-naked to be used.'[83] The comment suggests an underlying distaste amongst some women active in the movement towards women seen to be colluding with female oppression. Bennison argued that these women projected a message about their bodies which said, 'Please use it for sexual gratification as you require, please use it to exercise power and control.'[84] Thus positioning Page 3 as an expression of male autonomy. Bennison's repetition of the word 'use' stressed her opinion that the photographs commodified female bodies by placing them in the possession of male readers. This sentiment can also be found in an interview with Geraldine Leale who had worked as a Page 3 model. Leale said that although, at the time, she had not seen her work as a 'big deal', she realised that it gave men the impression that they were saying, 'I'm the girl next door – and I am available.'[85] It was somewhat atypical for the models themselves to denounce their work. Leale had left the industry before this interview, suggesting that once the perks of the work had gone the models became more aware of the potential negatives. Leale believed that Page 3 reproduced sexist attitudes as men interpreted the new climate to mean that women were always sexually willing. Leale's statement foregrounds how critics of Page 3 viewed the photographs as synonymous with the fulfilment of male sexual desires in a male-dominated, patriarchal society.

While aware of the sexism present within features, like Page 3, feminists noted their concerns over censoring such images. Some activists felt the attempt to restrict erotic images was an untenable position given the goals of the movement. Rowbotham stated, 'A feminist challenge to images we perceived as oppressive and degrading could simply look like an attempt to suppress women's sexuality.'[86] The feminist movement had worked long and hard to liberate women sexually; the promotion of censorship of sexual images seemed to many a step back. Linda Semple, who spearheaded the FAC, similarly stated: 'it would be much better to have a critique of all that sort of journalism, not just Page 3.'[87] Semple recognised a problem

[83] Deborah Bennison, 'I don't think rape is an issue just about a few pathological maniacs…' *Guardian*, 27 March 1986, p.13.
[84] Bennison, p.13.
[85] Miranda Ingram, 'Men just see sex without a hint of love or romance', *Daily Mail*, 4 June 1988, p.
[86] Rowbotham, p.249.
[87] Meade-King, p.38.

with the representation of females but advised that feminists must look critically at all forms of media, rather than only material which was seemingly erotic. She went on to state:

> We are against more censorship than there already is, more legislation, more power being given to the establishment bodies. We think these campaigns are forgetting one of the main points of the women's liberation movement, which is the right of women to make their own sexual definition.[88]

Semple believed that feminists should not try to enforce a correct way to think, feel, or behave sexually. Her view was illustrative of feminists who had a deep distrust of the establishment. Under Margaret Thatcher, the 1980s had seen a return to a belief in traditional Victorian values and rejection of the permissive society.[89] Feminists voiced concern that legal measures, could easily be turned against women and other socially marginalised groups. Women simply did not have enough political power that legal remedies would be used in ways that benefited rather than harmed them. This illustrates a grave concern amongst anti-censorship feminists that banning Page 3 and pornography, in general, denied women the right to pursue their own sexual ideals. Therefore, it is clear that there was not a united front between women despite the shared goal of ending female sexual objectification, hence highlighting the divisions within the women's movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Those in favour of banning Page 3 argued that it reinforced a sexual double standard, noting the unequal representation of men and women in the media. For example, one woman wrote: 'One never sees Samantha Fox ogling a man, she is there to be chosen, not to choose!'[90] This woman reinforced the idea that a sexually equal society could only exist if men and women were presented in the same way. She highlighted that Page 3 gave men permission to view and treat women as sexual objects. Additionally, her statement rejected the notion that the models, themselves, could have agency a point often stressed by those against banning Page 3. Similarly, The Luton Women's Action group, which was dedicated to monitoring the media, insisted that Page 3 enforced a misogynistic paradigm. The group addressed a letter to the Labour MP Joe Ashton, who in 1986 wrote an article for the *Daily Star* entitled 'Here's Why a Ban on Bare Boobs Wouldn't Cut the Rape Rate', in which they asked: 'I wonder how you would cope with a bunch of men looking at your 'chipolatas' and 'bananas'?'[91] In this letter the author

[88] Meade-King, p.38.
[89] See, p.111.
[90] Short, p.45.
[91] Short, p.59.

highlighted the apparent hypocrisy of male proponents of Page 3 who likely would have disapproved of equivalent photographs of men. The eighties did see a phase of Page 7 fellas – photographs of topless men – but the images were considerably more 'conservative' and men's buttocks were rarely revealed.[92] The use of food metaphors to refer to male genitalia acknowledged the captions that accompanied the photographs - the models were often referred to as food, for example 'Tasty Tracey Elvik' or 'Luscious Linda Lusardi'.[93] The comment demonstrates contempt for both the photographs and the words that came alongside them.

The counter argument ran that banning Page 3 would be counterproductive. Anti-censorship feminists suggested that banning these photographs of women would not allow for an opportunity for women to eventually have an equivalent. A *Guardian* article quoted, Louise, a sex worker and part of the FAC, saying: 'When women can move on to acknowledge and honour the whore within themselves, then we are moving to a situation where women can produce their own pornographic material.'[94] Louise was particularly passionate in her feelings that women should explore an active, desire-driven sexual life. She argued that the way to eliminate inequality in the industry was by creating more opportunities for women in pornography. At their core, feminists who agreed with Louise, wanted to resist the stigmas associated with female sexuality, such as the idea that women do not like sex. Other feminists suggested that equality in the industry was close to impossible. This is particularly apparent in the writing of radical feminist Sheila Jeffreys who wrote that 'For women to find passive, objectified men sexy in large enough numbers[…] would require the reconstruction of women's sexuality into a ruling-class sexuality.'[95] For Jeffreys, the issue of female objectification was far greater than making a female equivalent as it would have involved a complete cancellation of the patriarchy. It is clear that women had very different visions of how men and women could be sexually equal.

Some women not only expressed their opposition to censorship but went as far as to dispute the suggestion that images, like those on Page 3, were only appealing to male audiences. Meyerowitz's discussion of pin-up photographs in an American context suggests that women often wrote letters rejecting the 'double standard in which men enjoyed sexual titillation while

[92] Loncraine, p.102.
[93] Stratford, p.60.
[94] Meade-King, p.38.
[95] Jeffreys, p.251.

women feigned sexual innocence.'[96] This argument can be applied to a British context; women frequently applauded semi-pornographic photographs thereby claiming their involvement in what they saw as sexual fun. Indeed, one woman responded to journalist Lynda Lee Porter's article, 'Why Clare Short is so right', stating 'I disagree with your article on sex magazines. I and all of my friends quite enjoy looking at these magazines.'[97] This statement of approval underlined a problem in assuming that Page 3 could not carry the potential for female pleasure. In the wake of the 'sexual revolution' women were eager to applaud the perks of the new sexualised society, which valued sexual pleasure as a primary source of personal happiness. In 1983 the cultural studies scholar Patricia Holland wrote the article 'The Page Three Girl Speaks to Women, too. A Sun-sational survey' which looked at Page 3 from the point of view of female readers. Holland suggested that Page 3 could be seen as directly addressed to women, as 'part of the *Sun*'s discourse on female sexuality which invites sexual enjoyment, sexual freedom and active participation in heterosexual activity.'[98] In this, she suggested that Page 3 could be a positive presence for women urging them to be proud of their sexuality and asserting them as active individuals. Therefore, these women demonstrated the problematic nature of suggesting Page 3 had no appeal for female readers.

Page 3 proponents used their support to emphasise their supposedly sexually liberal attitudes, which in turn meant that opponents were often branded as promoting repressive sexual mores. Women felt the need to defend their critiques of the institution and their support of sexual freedom. As scholars such as Coote and Campbell have noted, anti-pornography feminists had to be careful not to be viewed by other left-wing activists as 'being pressed into service with the Mary Whitehouse brigade.'[99] From the mid-1960s, Whitehouse campaigned against the British media on the grounds that it encouraged a permissive society. For this reason, women were anxious to try to distinguish their official positions from those held by the religious right. For instance, one woman wrote, 'I have no time for excessive prudery, nor do I have any objection to topless bathing or nudist camps.'[100] This suggestion that she has no problem with women showing their breasts demonstrates a desire to present herself as sexually liberated and progressive. Statements of defence were a common motif in the letters written to Short - another woman similarly finished her letter with 'Good luck, from one who is not a

[96] Meyerowitz, p.18.
[97] 'Pornography or freedom?', *Daily Mail*, 24 November 1989, p.38.
[98] Patricia Holland, 'The Page Three Girl Speaks to Women, Too', *Screen*, 24 (1983), 84-102, (p. 93).
[99] Coote and Campbell, p.219.
[100] Short, p.115.

prude.'[101] By firmly placing the anti-Page 3 struggle at odds with anti-permissive right-wing moralists, feminists were able to make clear that they were opposed to sexism, not sex. This critically reveals how anti-Page 3 supporters were characterised by their opponents, thus highlighting tensions.

This chapter has used the Page 3 debate to examine the disparity between feminist perceptions of sexual agency. It has shown that the failure of the 'sexual revolution' to deliver female sexual liberation motivated many women to identify features like Page 3 as a major cause of female oppression. On the other hand, fears that censorship would cut short the possibilities for increasing women's sense of sexual enjoyment and empowerment were also prevalent. Alongside exploring the contradictory approaches to sexual autonomy, the ways in which the opponents branded each other further revealed the antagonism which existed. Despite these divisions a shared commitment to ensuring the sexual agency of women makes it possible for us to speak of a dedicated and continuing feminist movement in Britain.

[101] Short, p.53.

Conclusion

This dissertation has explored the divisive issue that was Page 3. This issue has been excluded from traditional histories of feminist activism in Britain, thus presenting a clear opportunity to further nuance the history. Although analyses of the BWLM have emerged in recent years, few specifically study campaigns surrounding sexuality. This dissertation has consequently been an attempt to provide a necessary step towards understanding the topic. By examining the Page 3 debate, this dissertation has shed light on a conflicted climate dominated by two very different standpoints. Through looking at the arguments surrounding the justifications of this iconic page, it has shown how divergent and conflicting the feminist debate was. But most importantly, it shows that, irrespective of internal divisions, feminism was alive and well.

In this conflicted climate, three major themes have emerged. Firstly, (as explored in Chapter One) anti-Page 3 feminists insisted that sexual images encouraged violence against women. On the other side, anti-censorship feminists protested against an overemphasis on pornographic images asserting that it distracted from the more serious issues of discrimination. They disagreed over what constituted progress and dignity for women (as explored in Chapter Two), and they held contrasting views on the impact of shameless beauty on female confidence. Finally, (as explored in Chapter Three) they posited different criteria for what facilitated female sexual autonomy. While some women objected to Page 3 on the basis that it displayed women as objects to be sexually exploited by men, others insisted that sexual images offered sensual pleasure to women as well as men and championed freedom of speech. While these themes were often framed as an issue solely for individuals directly involved in the feminist movement, opinions such as those described in this dissertation highlight that the Page 3 issue forced the rest of the female population to engage in feminist thinking. These issues became ones that ordinary women could no longer ignore in the ways they may have previously done. The evidence highlights that entwined in all the debates were themes of political allegiance, personal experience, and individual taste.

This dissertation has used one example of mass-produced sexual material as a case study. Further research should be undertaken to contextualise the Page 3 debate within wider disagreements about the representation of women, female sexuality, and women's status within society.

This ideological split did not disappear. The emergence of Lads Mags; the growth of lap-dancing clubs; and the greater presence of pornography in the lives of many, driven by the internet, meant women remained in fiery discussions over the meanings of mainstream sexual depictions. In these ongoing debates, a long-standing rift endures, in new permutations, to haunt the British women's movement.

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