Depictions, Perceptions and Harm

A report on gender stereotypes in advertising

ASA

Contents

A summary of this report and links for getting help on your advertising can be found at http://www.asa.org.uk/gender.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

- The Committees of Advertising Practice (CAP) author the UK Advertising Codes and the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) independently administer them to ensure advertising remains responsible benefitting people, business and society in general.

- This report considers whether, in line with their regulatory objectives, CAP and the ASA are doing enough to address the potential for harm or offence arising from the inclusion of gender stereotypes in ads.

- The report takes into account a wide range of academic, regulatory and public policy information, and the views of interest groups, advertising industry representatives and the general public in support of its objectives and findings.

Gender stereotypes

- For the purpose of this report, gender stereotypes are said to relate to body image, objectification, sexualisation, gender characteristics and roles, and mocking people for not conforming to gender stereotypes.

- Gender stereotypes have the potential to cause harm by inviting assumptions about adults and children that might negatively restrict how they see themselves and how others see them. These assumptions can lead to unequal gender outcomes in public and private aspects of people's lives; outcomes, which are increasingly acknowledged to be detrimental to individuals, the economy and society in general.

- To this end, ads that feature gender stereotypes have the potential to cause harm by contributing to unequal gender outcomes, although advertising is understood to be only one of many different factors that contribute, to a greater or lesser extent, to unequal gender outcomes.

Key findings

- Evidence presented in the report indicates support for the ASA's track record of banning ads that objectify or inappropriately sexualise women and girls, and ads that suggest it is acceptable for young women to be unhealthily thin.

- However, the evidence suggests that a tougher line needs to be taken on ads that feature stereotypical gender roles or characteristics, which through their content and context may be potentially harmful to people. This includes ads that mock people for not conforming to gender stereotypes.

- It would be inappropriate and unrealistic to prevent ads from, for instance, depicting a woman cleaning, but new standards on gender stereotypes might elaborate on the types of treatments that might be problematic – for example:

An ad which depicts family members creating mess while a woman has sole responsibility for cleaning it up.

An ad that suggests an activity is inappropriate for a girl because it is stereotypically associated with boys or vice versa.

An ad that features a man trying and failing to undertake simple parental or household tasks.

Next steps

- CAP and the ASA consider the report provides an evidence-based case to strengthen their regulation on the use of gender stereotypes in ads, which through their content and context, might be potentially harmful to people.

- In line with their objectives to deliver transparent and accountable regulation, this change is most effectively delivered through standards that are easy to understand and easy to implement.

- Responding to evidence in this report, CAP will develop new standards on ads that feature stereotypical gender roles or characteristics, which through their content and context, might be potentially harmful to people. This includes ads that mock people for not conforming to gender stereotypes. CAP will also use the evidence in this report to clarify standards that reflect the ASA's existing regulatory position on ads that objectify or inappropriately sexualise women and girls, and ads that suggest it is acceptable for young women to be unhealthily thin.

- CAP will report publically on its progress before the end of 2017 and commits, as always, to delivering training and advice on the new standards in good time before they come into force.

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to UK advertising regulation

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA)

The ASA is the independent body responsible for administering the CAP and BCAP Codes and ensuring that the self-regulatory system works in the public interest. The Codes require that all advertising is legal, decent, honest and truthful. The ASA assesses complaints from the public and industry. Decisions on investigated complaints are taken by the independent ASA Council. The ASA Council's rulings are published on the ASA's website and made available to the media. If the ASA Council upholds a complaint about an ad, it must be withdrawn or amended. An Independent Review Procedure exists for interested parties who are dissatisfied with the outcome of a case. CAP conducts compliance, monitoring and research to help enforce the ASA Council's decisions. Information about the ASA is available at www.asa.org.uk.

The Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP)

CAP is the self-regulatory body that creates, revises and enforces the UK Code of Non-broadcast Advertising and Direct & Promotional Marketing (CAP Code). The CAP Code covers non-broadcast marketing communications, which include those placed in traditional and new media, promotional marketing, direct marketing communications and marketing communications on marketers' own websites. The marketer has primary responsibility for complying with the CAP Code and ads must comply with it. Ads that are judged not to comply with the Code must be withdrawn or amended. Parties that do not comply with the CAP Code could be subject to adverse publicity, resulting from rulings by the ASA, or further sanctions including the denial of media space. CAP's members include organisations that represent advertising, sales promotion and direct marketing and media businesses. Through their membership of CAP, or through contractual agreements with media publishers and carriers, organisations agree to comply with the Code so that marketing communications are legal, decent, honest and truthful, and consumer confidence is maintained. By practising self-regulation, the marketing community ensures the integrity of advertising, promotions and direct marketing. The value of self-regulation as an alternative to statutory control is recognised in EC Directives, including Directive 2005/29/EC (on misleading advertising). Self-regulation is accepted by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the courts as a first line of control in protecting consumers and the industry. Further information about CAP is available at www.cap.org.uk.

The Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice (BCAP)

BCAP is the regulatory body responsible for maintaining the UK Code of Broadcast Advertising (the BCAP Code) under agreement with the Office of Communications (Ofcom). Ofcom has a statutory duty, under the Communications Act 2003, to maintain standards in TV and radio advertisements. In 2004, Ofcom entrusted BCAP and the broadcast arm of the ASA with the regulation of broadcast advertisements in recognition of CAP's and the ASA's successful regulation of non-broadcast marketing for over 40 years, and in line with better regulation principles. The BCAP Code regulates all advertisements on television channels and radio stations licensed by Ofcom and all advertisements on Sianel Pedwar

Cymru (S4C) and S4C digital, including teleshopping channels and any additional television service (including television text services and interactive television services). The BCAP Code is enforced against Ofcom-licensed broadcasters, S4C and S4C digital. Broadcasters are required by the terms of their Ofcom licence, and for S4C by statute, to adhere to the standards set out in the BCAP Code. BCAP members include broadcasters and trade associations representing advertisers, broadcasters and agencies. BCAP must seek advice on proposed Code changes from an expert consumer panel, the Advertising Advisory Committee (AAC). Under Section 324 of the Communications Act 2003, BCAP must consult on proposed Code changes. BCAP strives to ensure that its rule making is transparent, accountable, proportionate, consistent and targeted where action is needed, in accordance with the Communications Act 2003. Ofcom must approve Code changes before BCAP implements them. Further information about BCAP and the AAC is available at www.cap.org.uk.

Funding

The entire system is funded by a levy on the cost of advertising space, administered by the Advertising Standards Board of Finance (Asbof) and the Broadcast Advertising Standards Board of Finance (Basbof). Both finance boards operate independently of the ASA to ensure there is no question of funding affecting the ASA's decision making. Information about Asbof and Basbof is available at www.asbof.co.uk and www.basbof.co.uk.

The report

In April 2016, the ASA initiated a project to test whether the UK Advertising Codes and the ASA's enforcement of them in relation to gender stereotypes in ads take proper account of the relevant evidence base, including the views of the general public.

This report pulls together the strands of work undertaken during the course of this project in order to consider whether there is a case for change. It sets out in seven sections:

Section 1: The existing Code standards and the line drawn under them by ASA rulings and considers both in relation to the evidence gathered during the course of the project.

Section 2: The broader contemporary legislative and public policy context, which has developed over decades and, today, positively emphasises the pursuit of equality in the UK.

Section 3: Advertising industry initiatives on gender stereotyping in ads.

Section 4: Policy and practice of international Advertising Regulatory Bodies (ARBs)

Section 5: Evidence from academics and special-interest groups, including about the role of advertising in depicting and reinforcing gender stereotypes.

Sectoion 6: Stakeholer input - key learnings from the ASA call for evidence and four ASA seminars with a variety of expert stakeholders, including academics, commentators and industry representatives.

Section 7: Headline findings from public opinion research to explore the public's views on the types of advertising treatments that might be likely to be problematic. The full research report is available here.

Project background and overview

In 2012,the ASA conducted research into harm and offence in ads, which identified gender stereotyping as an issue of concern for some participants.

More, recently the public response to the 2015 'beach body ready' ad included 380 complaints to the ASA and extensive coverage in the press and on social media. The ASA upheld complaints about that ad on the basis of the health and nutrition claims it contained, but the strength of feeling about the image juxtaposed with the strapline further supported the need for a strong, well-evidenced ASA position in future similar cases.

In April 2016, the ASA launched a project into gender stereotyping in ads to test whether the UK Advertising Codes and the ASA's enforcement of them take proper account of the relevant evidence base, including the views of the general public.

The project identified six categories of gender stereotypes: body image, characteristics, objectification, roles, sexualisation, and mocking those who do not conform to stereotypes. It considers the position of both the ASA and CAP on these categories in relation to adults and children.

The project comprised three main phases:

- Desk research and analysis of existing literature about gender stereotyping in advertisements
- Seminars with a range of expert stakeholders to explore their views
- Research into public opinion

What are gender stereotypes?

A stereotype is defined as "a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing"[1]. Walter Lippmann introduced the concept of social stereotypes in his book Public Opinion, where he explained that public opinion is formed and manipulated by external information which creates "pictures inside the heads of these human beings, the pictures of themselves, of others, of their needs, and relationships"[2] and that "the pictures inside people's heads do not automatically correspond with the world outside"[3]. A gender stereotype is, therefore, an image or idea of a group or individual based on their gender.

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[1] https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/stereotype
[2] W. Lippmann, *Public Opinion,* Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1998, p. 29.
[3] *W. Lippmann,* Public Opinion, *Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1998, p. 31.*

The use of stereotypes in general can be a useful creative device for advertisements which seek to engage with and influence a target market in a short space of time. This report is concerned specifically with the use of gender stereotypes and whether there is potential for the depiction of gender stereotypes in advertisements to cause harm or widespread offence.

The evidence section of this report demonstrates that much of the research relevant to gender stereotypes relates to women and girls. This is likely to be a reflection of recognised historical inequalities between the sexes. These inequalities have begun to be addressed in the last 50 years but still pervade many aspects of society. The evidence supports a view that women and girls remain disadvantaged in many spheres of their lives.

However, society has also begun to recognise how gender stereotypes can reinforce certain expectations and behaviour that can have a negative effect on men and boys. This small, but growing body of evidence demonstrates how ingrained expectations placed on men and boys can lead to harm. For example, stereotypes that imply men should be physically strong, unemotional and capable of being the main breadwinner in a family are linked to outcomes such as depression and suicide, and potentially limit men from playing a full and active role in family life. There are also strong indications that men and boys are increasingly experiencing harm as a consequence of pressure to achieve a certain body image – reflecting the longstanding experiences of women and girls.

Gender stereotypes do not exist in isolation from each other. 'Male' and 'female' stereotypes can reinforce each other – if men are strong and aggressive, women must be weak and passive; if men are successful in their careers, women should be caregivers and home-makers; and if women are emotional, men are stoic. In all these examples, the 'female' stereotype tends to be less valued by society and the 'male' stereotypes are generally considered aspirational, but the consequences can be harmful for all. Overly simplistic stereotypes can create expectations of how individuals should look or behave according to their biological sex in a very limited and defined binary framework, without acknowledging the natural diversity of individual characteristics. Those stereotypes can also be problematic for individuals whose gender identity, for example, does not conform with expectations of their biological sex.

Characteristics such as age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation, as well as other elements such as socio-economic and cultural backgrounds are attributes that make up an individual's unique identity. The experience of any challenges faced by an individual who possesses a number of the above characteristics may be different to those of their peers who share, for example, only one or two of those same characteristics. For instance, the prejudices faced by an individual who is gay, disabled and of a minority ethnic group may be different to those experienced by another who is of the same ethnicity, heterosexual and non-disabled. Therefore, depictions of stereotypes that are based on more than one of those characteristics, or 'intersectional identities', could amplify their harmful impact on a given group or individual to which those characteristics apply.

To solely examine gender stereotypes without taking heed of stereotypical elements based on other characteristics that might come into play risks overlooking the impact, or harm, to individuals who might also share those aspects in their identity. Within a scope that

includes all adults and children, the project has sought to engage with stakeholders who represent diverse backgrounds and interests to ensure that the project recognises and represents views that are reflective of today's society. This approach acknowledges that in addition to gender, stereotypes relating to other characteristics and aspects of an individual's identity exist, and are often interconnected.

Some intersectional identities, for example, gender in relation to sexual orientation or race, were discussed in more depth than others in input from stakeholders as set out in this report. However, the report also signposts any potential strands that the ASA may wish to examine in future projects.

In addition to this, in 2017 the ASA and CAP will carry out a review of how it meets its obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty and what further steps can be put in place to achieve those obligations. This will provide an opportunity for the system to consider its approach to all protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010.

KEY LEARNINGS

The key learnings and headline point from each of the following sections are summarised below:

1. Existing CAP and BCAP rules and ASA interpretation

> **The evidence gathered over the course of the project reminds us of the value of giving particular weight to the perspective of those depicted or represented in ads.**

The UK Advertising Codes include rules that prevent ads from causing harm and serious or widespread offence and require them to be socially responsible. The CAP Code invites particular care to avoid causing offence on the grounds of gender. But the rules do not specifically address gender stereotypes.

The ASA is used to navigating the concept of offence in its investigations. Ads are not necessarily a problem if, in the ASA's opinion, they do not offend against prevailing standards in society and fall below a 'serious offence' threshold, but they might be problematic if they depict or represent a specific group of people in a way that is offensive to that group.

The ASA has ruled against ads that objectify or inappropriately sexualise women and girls, and ads that suggest it is acceptable for young women to be unhealthily thin, usually using rules on offence and social responsibility.

The ASA has typically decided that depictions of stereotypical gender roles or characteristics or ads that mock people for not conforming to a gender stereotype are unlikely to cause harm, serious or widespread offence, or be otherwise socially irresponsible

This report indicates that ASA decisions relating to body image, sexualisation and objectification are broadly in the right place, and that it would be helpful for its existing position to be formalised to reflect the evidence base. But, the research and other factors presented here indicate that it is necessary to introduce tougher standards to restrict some ads that depict stereotypical gender roles and characteristics, or which mock people for not conforming to gender stereotypes, because of their potential to cause harm.

Clarifying new standards to help advertisers avoid unacceptable gender stereotypes would enable CAP to fulfil a primary objective: to set standards that are easily understood, easily implemented and easily enforced. By doing so, CAP provides greater certainty for advertisers that their published ads comply with the UK Advertising Codes and do not fall foul of ASA rulings.

Read more in Section 1: UK advertising policy and practice in relation to gender stereotyping.

2. Legislative and public policy context

There is significant evidence that gender inequality leads to real-world harms for adults and children. These unequal outcomes might affect different people in a variety of practical, social, emotional and economic ways.

EU and UK laws actively support the pursuit of equality and prevent discrimination on account of gender. Developing international and UK policy on equality acknowledges the potential for gender stereotypes to lead to harmful outcomes and, in many cases, acknowledges the role of advertising alongside other factors in reinforcing these stereotypes.

The ASA and CAP are accustomed to balancing advertisers' right to commercial freedom of expression against evidence linking advertising with the potential for harm. Both might take into account relevant external factors in achieving this balance, including prevailing public policy and standards in society. This project has taken place against a backdrop of considerable political and public support for greater equality within UK society, and growing consensus to support positive action which identifies inequalities and addresses them.

In the UK, the ASA and CAP work against the backdrop of the UK Equality Act 2010 which prohibits discrimination of named protected characteristics.

Read more in Section 2: Legislative and public policy context.

3. Advertising industry initiatives

A number of advertisers have begun to identify the commercial advantages of rejecting gender stereotypes in favour of depictions that more accurately reflect their consumer base.

There are a significant number of initiatives within the advertising and communications industry to support greater gender equality at a corporate level.

There have also been a number of recent advertising campaigns which have sought to support gender equality and challenge stereotypes.

Standards intended to prevent unacceptable gender stereotypes in ads would complement such initiatives undertaken by the advertising and communications industry.

Read more in Section 3: Advertising industry initiatives.

4. International advertising regulation

Other Advertising Regulatory Bodies (ARBs) have developed and enforced rules and guidance to prevent the depiction of harmful stereotypes.

A number of ARBs, outside the UK, use dedicated standards to help prevent the depiction of potentially harmful gender stereotypes in advertising. Easy-to-understand, and easy-to-implement standards can help advertisers and the ASA identify and tackle those gender stereotypes that have the potential to cause harm.

The report considers the positions of 28 countries on the portrayal of gender in advertising. Out of those 28 countries, 24 restrict gender stereotypes in advertising through legislation or through a regulatory body.

Read more in Section 4: International advertising regulation.

5. Evidence from academics and interest groups

Evidence demonstrates that reinforcing and perpetuating traditional gender roles can lead to suboptimal outcomes for individuals and groups in terms of their professional attainment and personal development.

The weight of evidence suggests that, wherever they appear or are reinforced, gender stereotypes can lead to mental, physical or social harm which can limit the potential of groups and individuals.

Research concludes that advertising can reinforce particular gender stereotypes which contribute to widespread assumptions and expectations about how people should look or behave according to their gender, and that these can become internalised.

Overall, young children appear to be in particular need of protection from harmful stereotypes as they are more likely to internalise the messages they see. However, there is also significant evidence of potential harm for adults in reinforcing already internalised messages about how they should behave and look on account of their gender.

Advertising is one of many factors that contribute, to a greater or lesser extent, to unequal gender outcomes, alongside the role played by some parents, schools and employers, and aspects of particular cultures, communities and demographics. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of ads do not include gender stereotypes that are likely to cause harm, or serious or widespread offence.

Read more in Section 5: Evidence from academics and interest groups.

6. Stakeholder input – submissions and seminars

A significant proportion of stakeholders have put forward strong, evidence-based views in submissions and at seminars about the potential for gender stereotypical depictions in ads to be linked to real-world harms and inequalities.

Stakeholders consistently raised the potential cumulative effect of ads which are not individually problematic, but add to an overall expectation of gender norms in terms of looks or behaviour.

At the seminars, stakeholders in support of change spoke of real-world harms relating to the perpetuation of inequality. Those who were less supportive of change spoke of the philosophical 'right to offend' or their preference for less regulation and space for market forces to develop. Advocates of free speech also raised the 'right to offend' in the context of the seminar discussions.

Free speech and liberty to offend does not correspond with a right to cause harm. As the evidence links the depiction and reinforcement of stereotypes to unequal outcomes and real-world harms for men and women, it could be argued that the right to offend does not apply. Generally, CAP recognises that the persuasive nature of advertising means that even if the role it plays is relatively small, albeit material, compared to other influences, it is proper for the advertising regulator to enforce specific standards to prevent linking advertising with harmful outcomes – for example, on the advertising of foods high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS), alcohol and gambling products.

Read more in Section 6: Stakeholder input: seminards and submissions.

7. Public opinion research

Gender stereotyping in ads has the potential to harm and offend, which could have serious implications for children and young people in particular. The participants believed that the advertising industry has a responsibility to the general public, but should not lose its creativity.

The research considered public attitudes towards gender stereotyping in ads. It found that attitudes were influenced by personal beliefs, strength of identification with the role being depicted and the resonance of the scenario depicted.

Gender roles and characteristics portrayed in advertising were generally perceived to be dated and not reflective of modern society. Portrayals did not always reflect real life experiences or lacked diversity and because of this were perceived to potentially limit future

aspirations. Women and teen girls in particular expressed concern at the potential future impact of advertising in terms of perpetuating stereotypical messages over time.

The use of gratuitous nudity or emphasised sexualisation in ads was not considered acceptable and offered the potential for harm. It was evident that some young people in the research were impacted negatively by viewing this type of advertising.

Participants felt that the amount of advertising and the frequency with which they were exposed to advertising across different platforms impacted their attitudes and/or behaviour. However, they also believed other platforms such as social media were often more problematic in terms of their content.

Participants felt that the advertising industry had a responsibility to the general public and a duty to ensure young people's anxieties were not exacerbated by advertising. There was a general agreement that some advertising treatments featuring gender stereotypes have the potential to harm and offend. However, they did not want the advertising industry to lose its creativity.

Read more in Section 7: Public opinion research.

SETTING THE SCENE

SECTION 1: UK ADVERTISING REGULATION POLICY AND PRACTICE IN RELATION TO GENDER STEREOTYPING

> **The evidence gathered over the course of the project reminds us of the value of giving particular weight to the perspective of those depicted or represented in ads.**

The UK Advertising Codes include rules that prevent ads from causing harm and serious or widespread offence and require them to be socially responsible. The CAP Code invites particular care to avoid causing offence on the grounds of gender. But the rules do not specifically address gender stereotypes.

The ASA is used to navigating the concept of offence in its investigations. Ads are not necessarily a problem if, in the ASA's opinion, they do not offend against prevailing standards in society and fall below a 'serious offence' threshold, but they might be problematic if they depict or represent a specific group of people in a way that is offensive to that group.

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Clarifying new standards to help advertisers avoid unacceptable gender stereotypes would enable CAP to fulfil a primary objective: to set standards that are easily understood, easily implemented and easily enforced. By doing so, CAP provides greater certainty for advertisers that their published ads comply with the UK Advertising Codes and do not fall foul of ASA rulings.

Existing Code rules

The CAP and BCAP Codes do not include specific rules relating to gender stereotypes although general rules do allow the ASA to consider ads that might be socially irresponsible, offensive or harmful. Complaints about gender stereotypes are usually considered under the following rules, the interpretation of which is supported by CAP

Advice Online[4] guidance (for non-broadcast advertising) that draws together lessons from precedent ASA rulings.

These rules can be divided into those that deal with offence and those that deal with harm. Offence can generally be understood as the contravention of accepted moral, social or cultural standards, which some may consider upsetting or insulting. Harm refers to the real-world social, moral or physical damage that is linked to certain forms of content or portrayal. Responsibility, in the context of the Codes, refers to the obligation of advertisers not to cause harm and serious or widespread offence.

CAP Code

> **1.3** *Marketing communications must be prepared with a sense of responsibility to consumers and to society.*
>
> **4.1** *Marketing communications must not contain anything that is likely to cause serious or widespread offence. Particular care must be taken to avoid causing offence on the grounds of race, religion,* **gender** *[emphasis added], sexual orientation, disability or age. Compliance will be judged on the context, medium, audience, product and prevailing standards.*
>
> *Marketing communications may be distasteful without necessarily breaching this rule. Marketers are urged to consider public sensitivities before using potentially offensive material.*
>
> *The fact that a product is offensive to some people is not grounds for finding a marketing communication in breach of the Code.*
>
> **5.1** *Marketing communications addressed to, targeted directly at or featuring children must contain nothing that is likely to result in their physical, mental or moral harm.*

BCAP Code

> **1.2** *Advertisements must be prepared with a sense of responsibility to the audience and to society.*
>
> **4.1** *Advertisements must contain nothing that could cause physical, mental, moral or social harm to persons under the age of 18.*
>
> **4.2** *Advertisements must not cause serious or widespread offence against generally accepted moral, social or cultural standards.*

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[4] https://www.cap.org.uk/Advice-Training-on-the-rules/Advice-Online-Database/Offence-Sexism.aspx#.WK73JjuLS70
https://www.cap.org.uk/Advice-Training-on-the-rules/Advice-Online-Database/Offence-Use-of-Stereotypes.aspx#.WK73HjuLS70

4.8 *Advertisements must not condone or encourage harmful discriminatory behaviour or treatment. Advertisements must not prejudice respect for human dignity.*

5.5 *Advertisements must not portray or represent children in a sexual way. [Note: at the time of writing, this rule is subject to consultation, with the recommendation that both Codes should include a prohibition on portraying under 18s in a sexual way, with limited exceptions for public health campaigns].*

Positions established by ASA rulings

Prior to this project, the ASA database did not include a specific field for gender stereotyping, so complaints were logged under 'depiction of men' or 'depiction of women'.

In 2015 and 2016, the ASA considered a total of 1,378 cases (relating to 1,378 individual ads) that broadly related to the depiction of women, men or both. Some of these cases involved multiple individual complaints.

Out of these, 913 cases broadly related to the depiction of women and 465 cases broadly related to the depiction of men.

Since the launch of the project and the introduction of a specific 'gender stereotyping' tag on the database, the ASA has received complaints about gender stereotyping in relation to 116 individual ads – 83 of these cases related to women and 33 to men.

As mentioned above, this report identifies six categories of issues relating to gender stereotyping, some of which are inter-related. The distinctions between these categories, and the position that the ASA has taken on complaints in relation to them, will be discussed below, illustrative examples of ads that include depictions of these categories of advertising can be seen in the appendix to the public opinion research.

Gender roles and characteristics

Gender stereotypical roles are occupations or positions within the family or society that are usually associated with adults and children, which could encompass particular activities. For example, women might be portrayed in a domestic role, looking after children or doing housework, or in a caring profession such as nursing. Men might be depicted doing DIY or construction work, or as the breadwinner or key financial decision maker in the household. In ads that feature children, this could be reflected in depictions of girls playing with dolls and boys playing with trucks or construction toys.

Gender stereotypical characteristics are attributes or behaviours that tend to be associated with a particular gender. For example, women might be depicted as passive, emotional and supportive of men; while men might be shown as aggressive, dominant and incapable of expressing emotion. They could also include norms about physical appearance or mannerisms, or certain colours or clothes being codified as 'for boys' or 'for girls'. Clearly,

these categories can overlap and an ad that features stereotypical gender roles could also feature stereotypical gender characteristics.

Complaints about gender roles and characteristics have rarely been formally investigated by the ASA in the past. The project team was unable to locate any examples of such complaints being upheld. A search of cases resolved in 2015 and 2016 identified 35 complaints about depictions of men or women in stereotypical roles or displaying stereotypical characteristics[5]. None of these resulted in formal investigations. Three of the cases were considered by the ASA Council, who decided that there should be no additional investigation (No Additional Investigation after Council Decision – NAICD). In 2013, two ads portraying mums organising Christmas for their families were not upheld on the basis that they were not prescriptive about the role women should play in the home and reflected the reality for most households[6].

A search of complaints about toy ads resolved in 2015 and 2016 identified seven complaints about stereotypical depictions of girls or boys. The ASA considered that the issues identified by complainants did not warrant formal investigation under the Codes.

Mocking people who do not conform to gender stereotypes

Some ads aim to create humour by mocking people who do not conform to gender stereotypes. There are no specific fields on the ASA database associated with this category of complaint, so it has not been possible to locate precise numbers. However, the analysis identified several relevant cases. One complaint against a betting ad that depicted transgender people in a way that was considered to be negative and offensive was upheld[7]. Another ad in which a man was shown wearing women's clothes was not considered likely to cause serious or widespread offence because it was humorous and its mockery was not directed at transgender people[8]. An ad that made fun of a male character for liking a stereotypically feminine product and talking about his 'anxiety' was an NAICD case because it was likely to be seen as light-hearted. In a socio-cultural context in which heterosexuality is considered to be the norm, many portrayals of people who do not conform to gender stereotypes will also inevitably become bound up with stereotypes about sexual orientation, often with negative or demeaning connotations.

Objectification and sexualisation

These categories both broadly relate to how people's bodies and sexuality are displayed in advertising; they are closely connected but distinct from each other. Historically, women have often been portrayed as objects of visual pleasure for men, and images which objectify or sexualise women reinforce stereotypes of women as being passive and aiming

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[5] These numbers should be considered in the context of the limitations of the ASA's database system when it comes to labelling ads. New subcategories relating to gender stereotyping have only been applied to a small number of historical cases. Therefore, complaints about roles and characteristics were identified by searching using the subcategories 'depictions of men' and 'depictions of women', in combination with product categories which are stereotypically linked to either men or women or which have typically drawn these types of complaints, such as 'DIY', 'cars', 'cleaning products' and 'supermarkets'. For marketing to children, we looked at the categories 'food' and 'toys'. It is therefore possible that some relevant complaints have been inadvertently omitted. Labels for objectification, sexualisation and body image already existed on the system, so complaint numbers for those categories were easier to identify.

[6] https://www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/2013/1/ASDA-Stores-Ltd/SHP_ADJ_213056.aspx#.WK73d2YnwRY
https://www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/2013/2/Wm-Morrison-Supermarkets-plc/SHP_ADJ_213992.aspx#.WK73umYnwRY

[7] https://www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/2012/5/Paddy-Power-plc/SHP_ADJ_188096.aspx#.WLbbQWZvi71

[8] https://www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/2013/10/Unilever-UK-Ltd/SHP_ADJ_233943.aspx#.WLbbVWZvi71

primarily to attract and please men. It is less stereotypical for images to objectify or sexualise men, but some ads do include such depictions.

Objectification is the depiction of an individual in a way that focuses on their body, whether or not in an overtly sexual manner, and reduces them to a physical object. For example, obscuring a model's face and focusing on other body parts, depicting someone in a demeaning way, or including a sexualised image of a person in a way that is unrelated to the advertised product in order to draw attention to the ad are likely to be seen as objectification.

Sexualisation can be defined separately from objectification in that it refers more generally to the portrayal of individuals in a sexual manner. It can vary in its degree of explicitness. In some contexts, sexualised imagery may be considered acceptable. However, concerns often arise when it is used to depict people or situations where this type of approach is considered inappropriate or harmful – chiefly in ads that feature young people. These categories will frequently intersect; an ad that sexualises might also objectify.

Sexualisation can also differ from objectification in that those portrayed may display a controlled, authoritative or powerful demeanour. They may not be objectified, but they are still presented in a way that defines them by their sexuality, when this may be irrelevant to the product being advertised, or highly sexually explicit.

Complaints about objectification and sexualisation are regularly investigated or referred to the ASA Council with the recommendation that there should be NAICD. Ten ads were investigated on grounds of objectification in 2015–2016, and two were investigated for sexualising a model who appeared to be a child[9]. The ASA has generally taken a fairly strict line on ads where nudity and sexualised images of models are not relevant to the product being advertised[10], or where people are presented as sexual objects[11] – in most cases this will relate to women, but there has been one upheld ruling featuring men[12]. However, some have not been upheld where the images were considered to be mildly sexual, sensual or sexually suggestive[13]. ASA Council has tended to take a strict approach to ads that feature a model who appears to be a child and is portrayed in a sexual way[14], even if only to a mild degree[15]. CAP recently held a public consultation on the sexual portrayal of under-18s in advertising which resulted in the introduction of new rules

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[9] All of these related to women, though the ASA also received 13 complaints about the objectification of men in the same period - compared to 45 total complaints about the objectification of women.
[10] https://www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/2016/6/Tembe-DIY-Products-Ltd/SHP_ADJ_338748.aspx#.WK2h-DuLS71https://www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/2016/5/Signature-Creative-Solutions-Ltd/SHP_ADJ_336308.aspx#.WK79pGYnwRY
[11] https://www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/2016/6/Etesia-UK-Ltd/SHP_ADJ_316713.aspx#.WK2iATuLS71; https://www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/2015/3/Express-Newspapers/SHP_ADJ_293408.aspx#.WK764mYnwRY
[12] A11-176006 – no longer on ASA website. The complainant, who considered the ad was sexist and degrading to men, challenged whether it was offensive. The ASA noted Aaduki's response that the ad was meant to be suggestive and naughty but not obscene. We considered the image of the three men in their underwear and noted the man on the back right of the image wore underwear which was revealing and left part of his hips and pubic region on display. Although we noted Aaduki's argument that 'Aaduki Boys' has been used before in their marketing material and would be well known, nonetheless we noted that the ad was for multimedia insurance and that the image bore no relation to the advertised service. Further to this, we considered that the strapline "Can't see the wood for the trees" was an obvious reference to male genitalia which drew readers' attention to the men's groins. For these reasons, taking the image and the strapline together, we concluded that the ad had the potential to cause serious offence to some people. The ad breached CAP Code (Edition 12) rule 4.1 (Harm and offence).
[13] https://www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/2015/11/T-Brewer-and-Co-Ltd/SHP_ADJ_310996.aspx#.WK2heDuLS70
https://www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/2016/6/Fontem-Ventures-BV/SHP_ADJ_340739.aspx#.WK2h_TuLS70
[14] https://www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/2014/9/American-Apparel-UK-Ltd/SHP_ADJ_275883.aspx#.WK7wa2YnwRY
[15] https://www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/2016/3/Nobodys-Child-Ltd/SHP_ADJ_319888.aspx#.WK2ieTuLS70

prohibiting the sexual portrayal or sexual representation of under-18s (or those who appear to be under 18) in advertising [16].

There has been more tolerance for ads where partial nudity is relevant to the product, such as lingerie and swimwear. A degree of sexualisation has been accepted in ads for adult entertainment services, including strip clubs, given the nature of the services, but they have been found in breach when the images are considered overtly sexual[17] or when they objectify women by depicting them as passive or in a demeaning way. The ASA must have regard to the context within which an ad appears, and it is likely to be more accepting of sexualised (as distinct from objectifying) images where the target audience may be less likely to be offended by the sexualised tone of the ad[18].

Body image

Complaints about ads that are claimed to promote an unrealistic body image are investigated and frequently referred to Council with an NAICD recommendation – i.e. complainants have not identified a breach of the Code and the ads should not be subject to formal investigation. These generally relate to ads for weight-loss products or clothing. In 2015–2016, complaints about three ads that were considered to promote unhealthy body image were formally investigated, and eight were NAICD[19].

Complaints about ads featuring overly skinny models have, in general, been upheld where the images suggest that being unhealthily thin[20] is somehow glamorous or otherwise desirable. However, some cases have not been upheld in instances where the model was thin but didn't appear unhealthy or underweight[21], or where the impression of thinness was clearly caused by a particular pose or styling[22].

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[16] https://www.asa.org.uk/news/consultation-to-introduce-new-rules-on-the-sexual-portrayal-of-under-18s-in-advertising.html
[17] https://www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/2013/2/For-Your-Eyes-Only-Ltd/SHP_ADJ_215990.aspx#.WK7ytGYnwRY
[18] https://www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/2015/10/News-UK-and-Ireland-Ltd/SHP_ADJ_299680.aspx#.WK7w9WYnwRY
[19] Again, these all related to women. We identified three complaints about male body image in the same period, versus 44 total complaints about the depiction of women in this category.
[20] https://www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/2015/6/Yves-Saint-Laurent-SAS/SHP_ADJ_292161.aspx#.WK70TWYnwRY
https://www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/2015/6/Yves-Saint-Laurent-SAS/SHP_ADJ_292161.aspx#.WK70TWYnwRY
[21] https://www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/2014/5/Yves-Saint-Laurent-SAS/SHP_ADJ_259719.aspx#.WK704GYnwRY
https://www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/2016/9/People-Tree-Ltd/SHP_ADJ_345065.aspx#.WK718GYnwRY
[22] https://www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/2013/2/The-Conair-Group-Ltd/SHP_ADJ_214398.aspx#.WK71qmYnwRY

SECTION 2: LEGISLATIVE AND PUBLIC POLICY CONTEXT

There is significant evidence that gender inequality leads to real-world harms for adults and children. These unequal outcomes might affect different people in a variety of practical, social, emotional and economic ways.

EU and UK laws actively support the pursuit of equality and prevent discrimination on account of gender. Developing international and UK policy on equality acknowledges the potential for gender stereotypes to lead to harmful outcomes and in many cases, acknowledges the role of advertising alongside other factors in reinforcing these stereotypes.

The ASA and CAP are accustomed to balancing advertisers' right to commercial freedom of expression against evidence linking advertising with the potential for harm. Both might take into account relevant external factors in achieving this balance, including prevailing public policy and standards in society. This project has taken place against a backdrop of considerable political and public support for greater equality within UK society, and growing consensus to support positive action which identifies inequalities and addresses them.

UK context

The Equality Act 2010 prohibits discrimination by reference to nine protected characteristics, being "*age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation*".

The Public Sector Equality Duty[23] requires that organisations that exercise a public function, which relates to at least some of CAP, BCAP and ASA's main responsibilities, have due regard to "the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic". (Note: this is separate from being a 'public authority' for the purposes of the Freedom of Information Act.) The ASA and CAP aim to meet the Duty through the programme of work described under its Equality Diversity and Inclusion strategy and is about to commence further work in 2017 to further embed the principles encompassed in the Duty in its work.

There is increasing awareness of real-world harms that arise from gender inequality, which often attracts significant political and NGO attention. Examples include, but are not limited to, the gender pay gap[24], unequal representation of women on boards[25], mental health issues arising from body image issues in children and young people[26], male suicide statistics [27] and femicide statistics[28].

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[23] https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/public-sector-equality-duty
[24] http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/policy-research/the-gender-pay-gap/
[25] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/482059/BIS-15-585-women-on-boards-davies-review-5-year-summary-october-2015.pdf
[26] *http://www.overcoming.co.uk/single.htm?jpg=8580*
[27] *http://www.samaritans.org/about-us/our-research/facts-and-figures-about-suicide*

Criminal offences motivated by the victim's gender are not among the five strands of hate crime currently monitored by the Home Office[29]. However, Nottinghamshire Police recently elected to record crimes motivated by discrimination against women and girls as hate crimes[30], and there are signs that other forces may be following suit[31]. While gender hate crimes do not constitute a new category of offence, recording such incidents as hate crimes allows police forces to: recognise the impact that they have on women's lives; encourage women to report sexist abuse; and monitor numbers.

A 2016 poll of 1000 British parents found that a significant majority wanted marketers to stop pushing gender stereotypes[32]. In the same year, the Institute of Engineering and Technology put out a press release using parents, retailers and search engines
to 'rethink the pink' when considering children's Christmas presents, noting that: "The marketing of toys for girls is a great place to start to change perceptions of the opportunities within engineering. The toy options for girls should go beyond dolls and dress up so we can cultivate their enthusiasm and inspire them to grow up to become engineers"[33]. This view has also been reflected in work done by 'Let toys be toys', which takes the position that: "the stereotypes we see in toy marketing connect with the inequalities we see in adult life"[34]

In its 2014 strategy for preventing violence against women and girls, the Scottish Government considered that it was vital for media to challenge inaccurate portrayals of women and girls[35].

The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) conducts research every five years, which looks into gender representation in the media, and specifically in news reporting, in over 100 countries. Their research examines the overall presence of women in different news media, the proportion of women featured in news stories differentiated by topics, the frequency with which women appear across a range of new stories, and the functions that the women perform in news stories. The most recent UK research in 2015 found that women's contribution as experts (20%) and as spokespeople (25%) in news stories were considerably lower than their male counterparts. Women were mostly called upon to voice popular opinion (25%) or speak from their personal experience, for example, as eye witnesses. They also found that only 20% of sources and subjects of political news were women. Their findings also showed that the occupations of women sources in news stories were mostly health, social or childcare workers, office, service or non-management workers, students and pupils, homemakers or parents, and as a member of the royal family, as opposed to occupations within the fields of academia, science, business, media, law and sports[36].

Many UK politicians have registered an interest in the long-term effects of gendered advertising, particularly on children. A panel discussion at the 2016 LEAD conference discussed a preference for self-regulation to be forward-looking, with Chi Onwurah saying: "Pink is a fantastic colour – but when it is the sole colour used to market to women and

[28] http://www.lwa.org.uk/understanding-abuse/statistics.htm
[29] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2015-to-2016
[30] http://www.nottinghampost.com/nottinghamshire-police-makes-harassment-of-women-a-hate-crime/story-29507430-detail/story.html
[31] https://northyorkshire.police.uk/news/misogyny-recognised-hate-crime-wednesday-10-may-2017/
[32] https://www.marketingweek.com/2016/09/15/british-parents-call-for-marketers-to-stop-pushing-outdated-gender-roles/
[33] http://www.theiet.org/policy/media/press-releases/20161206.cfm
[34] http://lettoysbetoys.org.uk/why-it-matters/
[35] http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0045/00454152.pdf (p.18)
[36] http://cdn.agilitycms.com/who-makes-the-news/Imported/reports_2015/national/UK.pdf

particularly girls and it's then identified with cooking and dolls and that becomes the careers girls aspire to, it changes society"[37].

It is difficult to find reports that argue in favour of gender stereotypes or inequalities. Some organisations representing 'Men's Rights Activists' argue that women benefit disproportionately from greater equality and that men suffer emotionally and financially as a consequence[38]. Some of the examples given by these organisations such as a dearth of men in caring professions , particularly teaching, and rising rates of male depression and suicide, reflect and support arguments for rejecting stereotypes that equate certain careers with a specific gender, or imply that it is more acceptable for women to express emotion than men. Other examples given by these organisations, such as assertions that the gender pay gap has been closed or that women are now over represented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education and careers, are not supported by evidence[39].

The newly-formed 'Men and Boys Coalition' is a network of organisations, academics, journalists, professionals and leaders committed to highlighting and taking action on the gender-specific issues that affect men and boys. This organisation distances itself from the narrative of 'Men's Rights Activists' and aims to create a positive narrative about the role of men and boys in society, and lobbies for more support in areas where men and boys experience inequalities. This coalition considers that "one-sided portrayals of men, boys and fathers, have a damaging impact on the way individual men and boys see themselves and also on the way they are seen by society"[40].

The devolved nations have all launched strategies in relation to gender equality. The Scottish Government[41] has put forward a number of measures to remove social barriers faced by men and women. These include a commitment to achieving a gender balance on public and private boards by 2020, an increase in childcare provisions and a proposal to lower the threshold from 150 to 20 employees within public authorities that are required to publish gender pay gap information. The Welsh Government[42] published a series of equality objectives to ensure progress in advancing equality and inclusion for all protected groups, which included delivering a more diverse pool of decision makers in public life, addressing barriers to engagement and reducing the causes of employment, skills and pay inequalities related to gender. The Northern Ireland Executive's 2006–2016[43] strategy's objectives included a commitment to improve protection against discrimination by improving legislative measures, achieving a balance between men and women in representation and participation, and identifying and mitigating structural inequalities which create gender inequality.

These issues arguably evidence a critical level of concern about gender, and the factors that may contribute to the development of boys and girls and different outcomes for them as

[37] http://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/conservative-mp-speaks-against-trumpification-advertising/1381291
[38] http://mra-uk.co.uk/?page_id=22
[39] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-gender-pay-gap;
http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/girls-stem-these-figures-show-why-we-need-more-women-science-tech-engineering-maths-1540590
[40] http://www.menandboyscoalition.org.uk/
[41] https://beta.gov.scot/policies/equality/gender-equality/
[42] http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/equality/160310-equality-objectives-2016-20-en-v1.pdf
[43] https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/ofmdfm_dev/gender-equality-strategy-2006-2016.pdf

men and women. Many would argue that 'equality' or, rather, the unfairness of inequality lies at the heart of the stated concern.

Since announcing this project, 25 MPs and MSPs have expressed their support either in meetings or in writing.

European context

A report by the Council of the European Union in 2008 stated that: "gender stereotyping, perpetuated, amongst others, by advertising is the most persistent case of inequality between men and women".

A 2009 report by the European Commission considered that: "the media, including the advertising industry, should be encouraged to transmit non-stereotyped images and content, in particular of women in decision-making positions"[44]. In 2012, an EU parliament report into eliminating gender stereotypes[45] considered that "gender discrimination in the media, communication and advertising is still frequent and facilitates the reproduction of gender stereotypes … children are confronted with gender stereotypes at a very young age through role models promoted by … advertisements … which have implications for the rest of their lives and their future aspirations" and "stresse[d] that advertising often conveys discriminatory and/or undignified messages based on all forms of gender stereotyping, which hinder gender equality strategies; calls on the Commission, the Member States, civil society and advertising self-regulatory bodies to cooperate closely in order to combat such practices, notably by using effective tools which guarantee respect for human dignity and probity in marketing and advertising".   In 2015, the European Commission ran a consultation to inform its ongoing policy on equality between men and women[46].

The Audiovisual Media Services Directive requires that AV commercial communications do not "include or promote any discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, nationality, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation". Subsequent monitoring of the implementation of these provisions in 2015 indicated that stereotyped representations of gender roles were present in 21–36% of advertising spots, and that more work needed to be done[47]. Similar reports note that it has proved difficult to implement the provision of the Directive that aims to challenge gender stereotypes[48].

Global context

The United Nations considers that "a gender stereotype is harmful when it limits women's and men's capacity to develop their personal abilities, pursue their professional careers and make choices about their lives and life plans"[49], and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) provides in its article 5 that "State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to modify the social and cultural patterns of

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[44] *European Commission, Equality between women and men, 2009, p. 9*
[45] *http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A7-2012-0401+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN#title3*
[46] *http://ec.europa.eu/justice/newsroom/gender-equality/opinion/150421_en.htm*
[47] *http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2015/571329/EPRS_BRI(2015)571329_EN.pdf p.9*
[48] *https://epthinktank.eu/2014/03/25/the-avmsd-implementation-and-future-perspectives/*
[49] *http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WRGS/Pages/GenderStereotypes.aspx*

conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customs 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"[50].

Economic context

A 2016 McKinsey report[51] found that bridging the UK gender gap in work could add £150 billion to the UK economy by 2025, while a CBI report[52] in the same year indicated that "increasing female employment and productivity to the levels of men ... is estimated to be worth 35% of GDP". The Women in Work Index by PWC analyses the financial gains achieved by utilising women's potential across countries that belong to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); its latest report places the UK in 13th position in relation to other countries – the top three are Iceland, Sweden and Norway.[53]

A report by the European Institute for Gender Equality published in March 2017 found that greater gender equality would generate economic growth for the EU and benefit individuals and society at large[54] – forecasting that greater equality could increase GDP per capita by up to 10% by 2050.

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[50] http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WRGS/Pages/GenderStereotypes.aspx
[51] http://www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/women-matter/the-power-of-parity-advancing-womens-equality-in-the-united-kingdom
[52] http://www.cbi.org.uk/time-for-action-/Introduction.html
[53] http://www.pwc.co.uk/services/economics-policy/insights/women-in-work-index.html
[54] http://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/mh0217174enn_web.pdf

SECTION 3: ADVERTISING INDUSTRY INITIATIVES

A number of advertisers have begun to identify the commercial advantages of rejecting gender stereotypes in favour of depictions which more accurately reflect their consumer base.

There are a significant number of initiatives within the advertising and communications industry to support greater gender equality at a corporate level.

There have also been a number of recent advertising campaigns which have sought to support gender equality and challenge stereotypes.

Standards intended to prevent unacceptable gender stereotypes in ads would complement such initiatives undertaken by the advertising and communications industry.

The advertising industry has taken steps towards addressing the issue of gender stereotypes, introducing various initiatives independent of regulation. Some brands have invested in their own research and have acted constructively on it to more closely reflect the way consumers really live. The changes that have been made have been both internal, in terms of organisational structure, and external, in terms of the ads being produced.

Broad initiatives

Organisations within the industry have acknowledged the importance of addressing gender imbalance at leadership levels. As brands recognise the need to change the way they understand, and in turn depict gender, in order to remain relevant to consumers, the importance of collaborating with people with different experiences and perspectives becomes paramount. This has resulted in various sectors of the industry making an increased commitment to the diversification of their workforces and attempting to achieve gender balance at higher levels. For example, the Sky50/50 and Women in Leadership initiative aims to make Sky a more inclusive employer by ensuring that half of their senior leaders are women; they currently represent a third. Sky have explained this commitment in terms of the benefits to their business, "[a gender balanced leadership team will] better reflect our customers, draw on different and varied experiences, and have diverse ideas and opinions"[55]. UK magazine publisher Hearst has launched a website which aims to empower women by celebrating their achievements[56], while Channel 4 has published a Diversity Charter in which it commits to reflecting the diversity of Britain today both on screen and within its organisation[57].

This industry-wide initiative is also supported and promoted by gender-diversity organisations that offer assistance to agencies to tackle gender imbalances in their recruitment processes. The Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA), for example, has a programme to increase diversity in advertising agencies, including specific targets on

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[55] https://corporate.sky.com/bigger-picture-2015/responsible-business/people/women-in-leadership
[56] http://empowering.hearst.co.uk/
[57] http://www.channel4.com/media/documents/corporate/26509_C4_DiversityReport2017_FINAL_27.02.17.pdf

gender equality[58]. Creative Equals also operate various schemes to preserve and develop diversity within the industry, such as their 'returnship' programme, which is designed to offer opportunities to women to return to the industry after they have had children.[59]

The Advertising Association LEAD conference in 2016 hosted a lively discussion panel that considered body image as well as the wider role of advertising in encouraging diversity.

The Advertising Association's Body Image Group has provided a forum for a number of companies, including L'Oreal, Unilever, P&G and Boots, and various other organisations and trade bodies, such as ISBA and the IPA, to engage with the YMCA's 'Be Real' campaign.

The Be Real campaign aims to change attitudes to body image, and was formed in response to the Reflections on Body Image report from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Body Image. It was founded in partnership with Dove and many businesses, such as New Look, Superdrug and bareMinerals, have committed to the Body Image Pledge[60] which sets out how organisations can bring about responsible change in their approach to body image issues. Credos highlighted the importance of tackling body image issues at younger ages. This led to a collaboration between Credos, Media Smart and the Government Equalities Office to produce teacher resources on body image and advertising. These materials are aimed at primary school children, and in light of the *Picture of Health* research by Credos[61], they have also produced some resources aimed specifically at boys.

In 2016, the European Advertising Standards Alliance (EASA) held a gender awareness raising session during its bi-annual meeting in Bucharest. The European Association of Communications Agencies (EACA) has also been actively working on gender, and in 2016 published its statement on Gender Portrayal which committed not to discriminate on the basis of gender, or perpetuate stereotypes which contradict the evolution of society[62].

US advertising agency Badger & Winters, conducted a quantitative research involving 3,000 online interviews with consumers in the US aged between 13 and 74 years of age, looking at over 15,000 ads[63]. The objective of the research was to examine the impact of objectification of women in advertising on advertisers' reputation, and also on consumers' purchasing decisions. The research found that objectification in advertising had a notable negative impact on both the brands' reputation, as well as consumers' purchasing decisions. Whilst the research was conducted in the US, those findings could potentially be transferrable to the UK context given the nature of the issues and international nature of some ad campaigns. The agency also launched an anonymous campaign '#WomenNotObject'[64] in 2016 calling on the industry to stop objectifying women in advertising. They also created four 'filters'[65] for the industry to consider when identifying objectification in advertising.

[58] http://www.ipa.co.uk/page/ipa-gender-and-diversity-targets-and-figures-for-the-uk%E2%80%99s-biggest-advertising-agencies#.WLatt2_yg8Y
[59] http://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/creative-equals-unveils-returnship-programme-creative-women/1413516
[60] http://www.berealcampaign.co.uk/assets/filemanager/images/general/Body%20Image/Be%20Real%20Body%20Image%20Pledge.pdf
[61] http://www.adassoc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Picture-of-health_FINAL.pdf
[62] http://media.wix.com/ugd/4a7b21_831f307c657f409dbe85b809d3f3458a.pdf
[63] https://www.badgerandwinters.com/objectification-of-women
[64] http://womennotobjects.com
[65] http://womennotobjects.com/what-is-objectification/

At the beginning of 2017, two major advertising industry awards indicated they will not recognise work that: "objectifies or perpetuates negative and harmful inequalities related to gender"[66].

Initiatives relating to the creative content of ads

UN women has recently launched its 'Unstereotype Alliance', which will challenge gender stereotypes in advertising on a global scale. Supporters of this initiative include advertising industry companies such as Unilever, P&G, WPP, Diageo, Google and Facebook.[67]

Many advertisers have taken a new approach to the depiction of genders that seeks to empower viewers, particularly women. In its recent work to 'unstereotype' its ads, Unilever suggested that: "Advertising holds back progress when it relies on gender stereotypes"[68]. Since launching its research, Unilever has run a new campaign for Lynx which moves away from its previous stereotypical depictions of men and features a diverse range of male characters.[69]

Sport England has been running its successful 'This Girl Can' campaign since 2015 and has published some of its own research, which highlights the importance of engaging with women's lived experiences when representing and communicating with them[70]. Similarly, Sanpro brand Always has challenged a well-known sexist idiom by producing campaigns with the strapline 'Like a Girl'[71], which featured girls and young women demonstrating their strength and abilities, while Dove's 'Real Beauty' campaign[72] features a diverse range of body shapes and ethnicities. A 2016 TV ad by clothing brand H&M challenged stereotypical depictions of women by featuring a diverse range of female characters[73].

A 2016 report by Lloyd's banking considered whether advertising was accurately reflecting the diversity of modern society. It included research into the representation of different ethnicities, non-traditional families and older people, as well as gender representation. In relation to women, the report notes that "only 33% of the people featured in advertisements [considered in this research] were women. In the advertisements we analysed, women rarely occupied positions of power and when they did the role was often linked to seduction, beauty or motherhood"[74].

Not all ads that seek to address equality issues have been well-received by the public[75], and some have attracted significant criticism, often in social media. Additionally a number of ads have been pulled in the last year after consumers have objected to their representation of gender stereotypes.

[66] http://adage.com/article/agency-news/ad-club-andy-awards-shows-ban-gender-bias/307918/
http://adage.com/article/agency-news/cannes-bannes-gender-bias-womennotobjects/307847/
[67] http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2017/6/press-release-in-cannes-un-women-ed-calls-to-eliminate-gender-stereotypes-in-advertising
[68] http://www.thedrum.com/news/2017/01/18/unilever-advertising-holds-back-progress-when-it-relies-gender-stereotypes
[69] http://www.thedrum.com/news/2016/07/13/boy-can-brands-gender-and-new-masculinity
[70] https://www.sportengland.org/media/10083/insight_go-where-women-are.pdf
[71] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N433aXwj59E
[72] http://www.thedrum.com/news/2015/04/08/unilever-rolls-out-latest-dove-body-image-campaign-choose-beautiful
[73] https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/sep/28/hm-advert-diversity-ad-women
[74] http://www.lloydsbankinggroup.com/reflectingmodernbritain
[75] http://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/wrangler-ads-focus-womens-bums-sparks-false-feminism-criticism/1409849

It is clear that the advertising industry has made some positive, independent steps to challenge gender stereotypes and inequalities in a constructive and evidence-based manner. Those advertisers who have depicted their consumers in a way that more closely resonates with their lived experiences report positive responses to those campaigns.

SECTION 4: INTERNATIONAL ADVERTISING REGULATION

> **Other Advertising Regulatory Bodies (ARBs) have developed and enforced rules and guidance to prevent the depiction of harmful stereotypes.**
>
> A number of ARBs, outside the UK, use dedicated standards to help prevent the depiction of potentially harmful gender stereotypes in advertising. Easy-to-understand, and easy-to-implement standards can help advertisers and the ASA identify and tackle those gender stereotypes that have the potential to cause harm.

This section of the report considers the positions of 28 countries on the portrayal of gender in advertising. Out of those 28 countries, 24 restrict gender stereotypes in advertising through legislation or through a regulatory body.

See Annex A for more detail about the wording of the rules by other ARBs which are designed to address gender stereotyping.

Countries that regulate gender stereotypes in ads using a legislative framework
Six[76] **countries** have in place some form of legislation, such as equality legislation for example, which prohibits gender discrimination in advertising in general terms.
In addition to these, **two countries** have in place legislation which specifically addresses the portrayal of gender in advertising:
Norway[77]
Section 2 of the Marketing Control Act states "The marketer and the designer of the marketing shall ensure that the marketing does not conflict with the equality of the sexes and that it does not exploit the body of one of the sexes or convey an offensive or derogatory appraisal of women or men".   The Forbrukerombudet (the Consumer Ombudsman) is responsible for enforcing the Act and has produced guidelines[78], including case studies, to provide context for the legislation and to aid compliance.

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[76] *Belgium, France, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland*
[77] *Norway does not have an SRO, nor is it an EASA member. Advertising is statutorily regulated by the Forbrukerombudet, the Consumer Ombudsman*
[78] *https://forbrukerombudet.no/english/guidelines/guidelines-on-sexist-advertising*

The prohibition of sexist advertising was incorporated into the Act when Norway's Gender Equality Act came into force in 1978. The objective of the law is "to promote equality between women and men, and in particular to improve the position of women". As part of that objective, it is intended to address depictions of gender roles, which are "particularly biased or derogatory …", and gender characteristics, "ascribed to one gender … that are seen as unfavourable …". In respect of the latter, the guidelines note that the "determining factor is not what the advertisement expresses in isolation, but how it is perceived by the general public, bearing in mind widespread perceptions of gender roles".

The guidelines note that "It may often be the case that it is the sum of individual advertisements that is questionable with regard to gender equality. However, [the law] applies to the individual ad or advertisement campaign". The guidelines also state at 2.1 "Particularly intrusive advertising" that "An intensive ad campaign that is wide-ranging and long-term may therefore be assessed more strictly than advertising of more moderate means. In this regard, the particular means used to spread the message of the advertisement may be significant".

Spain

Legislation[79], intended to address the issue of violence against women, bans the use of a woman's image in a humiliating or discriminatory way, either by using specifically or directly their body, or parts of their body as an object, not linked to the advertised product, or by using a woman's image associated with stereotyped behaviours.

In 2015, an ad for a cleaning product was banned in Spain for depicting multiple images of women using the product while not including any images of men cleaning[80].

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[79] http://justiciadegenero.com/en/organic-law-12004-of-28-december-on-integrated-protection-measures-against-gender-violence-spain/
[80] http://www.thedrum.com/news/2015/12/11/sexist-cillit-bang-advert-banned-showing-only-women-doing-cleaning

Advertising regulatory bodies that use rules to regulate gender stereotypes in ads
12 ARBs[81] either apply the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Code of Advertising and Marketing Communication Practice in full or have used it as a basis for their own Codes. Article 4 of the ICC Code, "Social responsibility", states that "Marketing communications should respect human dignity and should not incite or condone any form of discrimination, including that based upon race, national origin, religion, gender, age, disability or sexual orientation". Otherwise, ad rules cover general taste and decency and social responsibility themes. Similarly, the Advertising Standards Board of Australia applies a similarly worded rule. Section 2.1[82] of the Australian Association of National Advertisers' Code of Ethics states "Advertising of Marketing Communications shall not portray people or depict material in a way which discriminate against or vilifies a person or section of the community on account of … gender …". In February 2017, that body upheld a TV ad, for a car repair company, which portrayed women as 'bimbos' and which objectified them by focusing on their cleavage and bottoms.[83]
Eight ARBs have specific rules in self-regulatory Codes:
Finland[84]
The Council of Ethics in Advertising (MEN) applies the ICC Code but also applies the principles of good marketing practice which states that an ad will violate good marketing practice if it portrays a man or woman as a sex object, or a person's sexuality is depicted in a degrading, disparaging or defamatory manner. Equally problematic are ads which claim or imply that the role of one sex is socially, economically or culturally below that of the other, or if they maintain stereotypical ideas on what is typical or characteristic of men or women, their personalities, or work performances. In 2016, a complaint about an online toy retailer was upheld because, by recommending dolls for girls and car tracks for boys, it was considered to be discriminatory.[85]
Ireland[86]

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[81] *Bulgaria, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain*
[82] *http://aana.com.au/content/uploads/2017/02/AANA-Code-of-Ethics.pdf*
[83] *https://adstandards.com.au/cases/2017/February - Ultratune 0042/17*
[84] *http://kauppakamari.fi/lautakunnat/men/*
[85] *http://kauppakamari.fi/statement-archive/men-22016-lelujen-mainostaminen-stereotypia/*
[86] *http://www.asai.ie/*

The ASA Ireland (ASAI), which has based its self-regulatory Code on the ICC Code, has a specific rule[87] about equality between men and women which states "ads should avoid gender stereotyping and any demeaning of men and women".

Germany

Germany's Code of Conduct on Personal Denigration and Discrimination[88] states that advertising – and especially advertising to minors – must not give the impression that specific persons are inferior, or can be subjected to arbitrary treatment in the community, the workplace or the family.

Moreover, "representations and claims must be avoided if they discriminate [against] any person by virtue of their gender… denigrate persons solely because they do not correspond to the prevailing ideas with regard to their appearance, behaviour, sexual orientation, characteristics or ways of life … or that persons are equated with objects [or reduced to] their sexuality…".

During 2016, the German regulatory body recorded a 39% increase in complaints about gender stereotyping from 196 to 273 complaints (out of 441 individual ads). This represented 62% of cases.[89]

In 2016, the German regulatory body upheld a complaint about a poster, for aftershave, which featured the headline "REAL MEN SCORE", because it reduced the woman to her sexuality, focusing on the lower part of her body, and because it implied men were only 'real men' if they have sexual success.[90]

India

India deploys a rule which states that ads should not deride any gender[91].

Italy

Article 10 of Italy's Code of Marketing Communication Self-Regulation states that marketing communications should avoid any form of discrimination, including that of gender[92].

Austria

The Austrian advertising code stipulates that advertising must not discriminate on the basis of gender and gives examples of what that discrimination might look like, for example, "a degrading representation of sexuality is conveyed or the person is reduced to their sexuality". The ARB has also developed several "Special

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[87] http://www.asai.ie/asaicode/section-3-general-rules/
[88] http://www.werberat.de/herabwuerdigung-diskriminierung
[89] The ARB attributes this increase in complaints to the intensive social debate on gender equality, as well as to the activities of activists on social media - https://www.werberat.de/content/jahrbuch-deutscher-werberat-2017-erschienen-werberat-legt-jahresbilanz-vor
[90] https://www.werberat.de/die-2010er
[91] https://www.ascionline.org/images/pdf/code_book_revised_as_on_23rd_jan_2017.pdf
[92] http://www.iap.it/about/the-code/?lang=en&lang=en

Provisions", though these relate only to women, such as "advertising should not contain anything which contradicts the modern image of women…".

Austria's Anti-Sexism Council

The Österreichischer Werberat[93] (ÖWR) seeks advice from an Anti-Sexism Council, consisting of two experts in gender affairs. The experts give their independent (and non-binding) view in each case where gender discrimination is raised and this can be considered by the jury members when making their decisions.

South Africa

The Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa's (ASASA) Code of Practice states at 3.5 "Gender stereotyping or negative gender portrayal shall not be permitted in advertising, unless in the opinion of the ASA, such stereotyping or portrayal is reasonable and justifiable in an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom".[94] In March 2014, the ASASA upheld a complaint about a TV ad, for car insurance, because it was sexist and perpetuated misconceptions about men as irresponsible or bad drivers.[95]

New Zealand

The Advertising Standards Authority of New Zealand's Code for People in Advertising states "Stereotypes may be used to simplify the process of communication in relation to both the product offered and the intended consumer. However, advertisements should not use stereotypes in the portrayal of the role, character and behaviour of groups of people in society which … is reasonably likely to cause serious or widespread offence, hostility, contempt, abuse or ridicule" [96].

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[93] http://www.werberat.at/
[94] http://www.asasa.org.za/codes/advertising-code-of-practice/section-ii-general
[95] The ad depicted an animation of a male and female beside their cars. The male was shown jumping into the car through an open window; the woman got into the car using the door as normal, The male cartoon shows the man performing 'donuts' with his vehicle, eventually crashing it into a wall, whereas the female driver simply drives off in a normal fashion.
[96] http://www.asa.co.nz/codes/codes/code-for-people-in-advertising/

Advertising Regulatory Bodies that use guidance to regulate gender stereotypes in ads
Six ARBs have published guidance intended either to be read alongside rules and legislation, or intended as a standalone document:
Belgium
Jury voor Ethische Praktijken inzake Reclame / Jury d'Ethique Publicitaire (JEP) issued its guidance on "Portrayal of the Person"[97] in 2002, which prohibits discrimination and limits stereotyping. In early 2017, the Belgian regulator upheld a complaint about an ad for a recruitment company showing a girl with cleaning equipment and the text "dare to realise your dreams – become a domestic aid", on the basis that the image reinforced a sexist stereotype, namely that cleaning services are essentially offered by women, and that the ad contributed to the perpetuation of social prejudices in this respect.[98]
Bulgaria
The National Council for Self-Regulation[99] issued a special recommendation on the use of sexual stereotypes in advertising in 2011. It states that advertising, among other things: • should avoid open or hidden suggestions of gender-based subordination, sexual violence and sexism; • must not demean in any way the human body or parts of it, presenting them only as an object of pleasure; • should refrain from showing people of both sexes in extraneous social roles, creating degrading and humiliating associations.
Canada
Advertising Standards Canada advises that Standards Councils should refer to the principles expressed in the "Gender Portrayal Guidelines"[100] when considering consumer complaints about advertising. The guidelines consist of six points to consider, including that in terms of 'decision making', women and men should be portrayed equally as single decision makers for all purchases including big-ticket items.
France
Autorité de Régulation Professionnelle de la Publicité's "General Recommendations Guidance Note"[101] prohibits discrimination or demeaning stereotypes. However, the

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[97] http://www.jep.be/sites/default/files/rule_reccommendation/voorstelling_persoon_fr.pdf
[98] http://www.jep.be/fr/nouvelles/forem-11-01-2017-decision-de-modificationarret
[99] http://www.nss-bg.org/en/read.php?id=17
[100] http://www.adstandards.com/en/Standards/genderPortrayalGuidelines.aspx
[101] http://www.arpp.org/nous-consulter/regles/regles-de-deontologie/image-et-respect-de-la-personne/

guidance also covers taste and decency issues and depictions of violence so does not appear to have been drafted specifically to address concerns about gender portrayal in advertising.

Sweden

The **Reklamombudsmannen**[102] applies the ICC Code but has developed criteria to help it determine whether an ad is considered to discriminate against a gender:

- An ad portrays men or women as sex objects in a way which is offensive (objectification).
- An ad portrays men or women in a stereotypical way in terms of gender roles and where men or women are represented in a degrading way (stereotyping).
- An ad that is discriminatory or degrading in any other way.

In March 2017, an online ad for a fashion brand, was upheld for its stereotyped depiction of gender characteristics.[103]

In 2014, an online ad, for a 'service finder', depicted a woman dressed as a cleaner and a man dressed as a construction worker. The complaint was upheld for depicting a stereotyped view of gender roles.[104]

The United States of America

The US Children's Advertiser Review Unit Self-Regulatory Program for Children's Advertising (CARU) has in place guidelines[105] to ensure that advertising directed at children is not deceptive, unfair or inappropriate for its intended audience. In respect of gender stereotyping in advertising, the guidelines state at Section (C)(6) "Advertisers should avoid social stereotyping and appeals to prejudice and are encouraged to incorporate minority and other groups in advertisements and to present positive role models whenever possible". There is no equivalent guidance produced by the National Advertising Division (NAD) in respect of advertising generally.

In addition to the above, **four ARBs**[106] considered as part of this report have no legislation, rules or guidance relating to the portrayal of gender in advertising.

[102] http://www.reklamombudsmannen.org/
[103] http://reklamombudsmannen.org/eng/uttalande/bianco-footwear
[104] http://reklamombudsmannen.org/eng/uttalande/servicefinder
[105] http://www.caru.org/guidelines/guidelines.pdf
[106] Cyprus, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands and Turkey

NEW FINDINGS

SECTION 5: EVIDENCE FROM ACADEMICS AND INTEREST GROUPS

Evidence demonstrates that reinforcing and perpetuating traditional gender roles can lead to suboptimal outcomes for individuals and groups in terms of their professional attainment and personal development.

The weight of evidence suggests that, wherever they appear or are reinforced, gender stereotypes can lead to mental, physical or social harm which can limit the potential of groups and individuals.

Research concludes that advertising can reinforce particular gender stereotypes which contribute to widespread assumptions and expectations about how people should look or behave according to their gender, and that these can become internalised.

Overall, young children appear to be in particular need of protection from harmful stereotypes as they are more likely to internalise the messages they see. However, there is also significant evidence of potential harm for adults in reinforcing already internalised messages about how they should behave and look on account of their gender.

Advertising is one of many factors that contribute, to a greater or lesser extent, to unequal gender outcomes, alongside the role played by some parents, schools and employers, and aspects of particular cultures, communities and demographics. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of ads do not include gender stereotypes that are likely to cause harm, or serious or widespread offence.

Summary

This report assesses the evidence with the intention of isolating the role that advertising might play, if any, in contributing to harm associated with unequal outcomes for adults and children as result of their gender.

It is evident that the overwhelming majority of research and grey literature on this topic is motivated by a reasonable concern to better understand the causes of real-world, indisputable gender inequality – e.g. in relation to pay disparity and sexual violence. It is no surprise, therefore, that much of the evidence concludes that the status quo is not acceptable and changes should be implemented to address evident inequality.

The literature analysis consisted mainly of online searches using keywords (gender, media, advertising, nature, nurture, preferences, stereotypes, conformity, identity, popular culture, social media, body image, characteristics, roles, children, objectification and sexualisation among others). Literature was selected according to its relevance to the project – not by the conclusions it reached. Some literature was submitted by stakeholders. It is important to acknowledge that studies have their own limitations and many of the studies referenced in this section have used a specific sample. This means that results cannot confidently be

generalised more broadly than the samples used. They can, however, indicate issues which should be considered particularly where findings suggest preventable harm. Many studies support a number of others on the same or similar issue and where multiple studies find similar results these may be more confidently applied more broadly.

The literature gathered during this exercise suggests that there is no academic consensus regarding the origin of gender differences, and differences are likely to be a combination of innate differences determined by nature and those constructed by culture.

Although the literature does not confirm the extent to which advertising can influence viewers or its role in constructing gender stereotypes, it does indicate that the media (of which advertising is a sub-section) plays a role in reinforcing and encouraging conformity to these.

The evidence indicates that stereotypical representations, wherever they occur, may legitimise certain behaviour and attitudes, which can constrict people's choices (by generating self-constraint or constraints imposed by others). Accordingly, it links stereotypes with the potential for real-world psychological, physical, economic, social and political harm for individuals and groups. The literature suggests that broadening depictions of gender in advertising is likely to contribute to reducing harm.

Gender stereotypes and the nature/nurture debate

The nature/nurture debate explores the extent to which aspects of human behaviour are innate or acquired[107]. Gender stereotypes are specific differing sets of behaviours that people are expected to meet based on their gender. Proponents of the nature argument believe these differences are innate, resulting from pre-determined genetic differences, whereas the nurture argument asserts that these defined behaviours are constructed by the environment in which someone lives. The belief that gender stereotypes come from innate biological differences between the genders is sometimes used to support a view that these should not be challenged. However, the nature/nurture debate is one which is highly contested and unanswered; other academics believe that nurture is dominant whilst many assert that gender identity comes from a combination and interaction of the two. If stereotypes can have harmful effects, an argument that stereotypes are derived from entirely, or partly, innate factors does not seem to be a strong enough justification for ignoring this harm.

In Frank Browning's recent book *The Fate of Gender* (2016). He explores the complexity of gender and views gender as a changing phenomenon, arguing that "little in nature is fixed" and that there is an "uncertain dance between nature and nurture"[108]. He describes Anne Fausto Sterling as the academic who has probed the most deeply into biology, neurology and gender, and who takes the middle ground when considering whether it is nature or nurture that makes us male or female, asserting that it is a "combination of both"[109]. Browning explains that whilst sex and gender are generally seen as different things (sex

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[107] http://www.simplypsychology.org/naturevsnurture.html
[108] Frank Browning, *The Fate of gender* (London, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2016) p. 72.
[109] Browning, *The Fate of gender*, p. 264

being the biological category and gender a social construct), increasingly neurological researchers have begun to show that there is a much more flexible relationship between sex and gender that starts as early as conception and continues to change throughout life. He points out that for most of the developing world the first thing that happens when a baby is born is that they are biologically sexed as either boys or girls, and this label automatically fits them into a specific social group with its own stereotypes[110].

Cordelia Fine has also analysed multiple arguments on the nature/nurture debate and takes an agnostic view, criticising research that argues that biological differences between the minds of men and women are entirely innate, instead reviewing literature which also argues that cultural and societal beliefs contribute to gender differences, stating that "everything we do – be it math, chess, child care, or driving – we do with a mind that is exquisitely sensitive to the social environment around it"[111]. Eagly and Wood carried out a meta-analysis of the literature on nature/nurture and discussed research which has focused on one or the other. They highlight problems of focusing on one way of theorising gender at the expense of another[112].

Gender stereotypes and the media

There are multiple existing theories about the impact the media, and advertising in particular, may have on society and gender. The mirror vs mould argument contrasts two competing theories. According to the mirror argument, advertising reflects values that already prevail in a cultural context, conversely, the mould argument postulates that advertising moulds and impacts on the values of its target audience[113].

According to various theories on communication, repeated exposure to media content leads to the acceptance of its portrayals as representations of reality[114]. Cultivation theory focuses on the cumulative impact of television, and asserts that "continued exposure to its messages is likely to reiterate, confirm and nourish – that is, cultivate – its own values and perspectives"[115]. Social Cognitive Theory takes a more complex approach, and views the individual as malleable, stating that "cognitive, affective, and biological events; behavioural patterns; and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants that influence each other bidirectionally"[116]. Stereotypical representations of gender are prevalent in advertising and, as such, society is repeatedly exposed to these stereotypes which present a "single cultural picture, and reinforce certain cultural expectations"[117].

A Study by Public Interest Research Centre and WWF UK into the unconscious influence of marketing found that it is difficult to remove ourselves from the unconscious influence of

[110] Browning, *The Fate of gender*, pp. 263 – 264.
[111] Cordelia Fine, *Delusions of Gender* (New York, W. W. Norton, 2010), p. 39.
[112] *Alice H. Eagly and Wendy Wood, 'The Nature–Nurture Debates: 25 Years of Challenges in Understanding the Psychology of Gender', Perspectives on Psychological Science , Volume 8, Issue 3 (2013) p.10.*
[113] Yorgos C. Zotos and Eirini Tsichla,' Female Stereotypes in Print Advertising: A Retrospective Analysis', *Procedia - Social and Behavioural Sciences*, Volume 148 (2014) 446 – 454, p. 447.
[114] Shelley Grabe , L. Monique Ward and Janet Shibley Hyde,'The Role of the Media in Body Image Concerns Among Women: A Meta-Analysis of Experimental and Correlational Studies', *Psychological Bulletin,* Volume 134 No. 3 (2008) 460 – 476, p. 460.
[115] George Gerbner et al, 'Growing up with Television: Cultivation Processes' pp. 121-153 in Jennings Bryant and Dolf Zillman (eds.), *Media Effects: Advances in theory and Research,* 2nd edn. (Hillsdale NJ, Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002) p. 49 .
[116] Albert Bundura, 'Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication' pp. 121-153 p 121 in Jennings Bryant and Dolf Zillman (eds.), *Media Effects: Advances in theory and Research,* 2nd edn. (Hillsdale NJ, Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002) p.121.
[117] Bivins cited in Jane Marcellus, 'What's the harm in advertising stereotypes? ' in C. J Pardun (ed) *Advertising and Society: An introduction*, 2nd edn. (West Sussex, John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014) p. 124.

advertisements because these are so pervasive, and that "we may have little choice about whether or not we respond to advertising. If we see it or hear it – even if we are not consciously aware that we have seen or heard it – we process it, and there are limits to the extent to which we can choose whether it affects us or not" [118]. This research specifically recommends that the CAP Code should be amended, in order to take better account of advertising's effects on cultural values, recognising that advertising's impacts are often implicit, rather than conscious[119].

The real-world impact of stereotypes and their representations in the media

A large amount of research suggests that gender stereotypes can cause physical, mental, political and economic harm to individuals and groups.

Children

Children are considered to be more vulnerable to messages in the media and in advertising, as they do not have the critical skills to question or challenge. Cordelia Fine argues that "Contemporary advertising formats typically targeted at children are particularly likely to 'implicitly persuade'"[120].

Some research suggests that media portrayals influence children's expectations about appropriate gender behaviour, for example in terms of wanting to play with particular kinds of toys, which can have long-term impacts. There is evidence which suggests that children's play is central to learning and development[121] and that play with spatial toys correlates with spatial development[122]. The Institution of Engineering and Technology found that boys are almost three times more likely to receive a STEM toy for Christmas than girls[123], and stereotypical girl's toys focus on relationships, housework, beauty and fashion[124]. Spatial skills are essential for success in STEM areas and spatial play is a potential method for addressing the under-representation of women in these fields[125].

Research suggests that advertising has an impact on children's play and toy choices. The study by Pike and Jenning suggests that advertising has the potential to teach children about gender roles and gender appropriate play from ads. They suggest that exposing children to the depiction of non-traditional play in ads may lead to less traditional gender role attitudes and an increase in the choice of play for children[126].

Stereotyping can also lead to discrimination against those who don't conform. The National Union of Teachers (NUT) states that "The evidence of how gender stereotypes impact on

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[118] Public Interest Research Centre and WWF-UK, *'Think of me as evil? Opening the ethical debates in advertising', (2010)* p. 41.
[119] Public Interest Research Centre and WWF-UK, *'Think of me as evil?* p. 50
[120] Agnes Nairn and Cordelia Fine, 'Who's messing with my mind? The implications of dual-process models for the ethics of advertising to children', pp. 447-470, *International Journal of Advertising,* Volume 3, Issue 27 (2008) p. 447.
[121] Nareissa Smith, 'Built for Boyhood?: A Proposal for Reducing the Amount of Gender Bias in the Advertising of Children's Toys on Television', *Vanderbilt Journal of Entertainment & Technology Law*, Volume 17, Issue 4 (2015) p. 999.
[122] Jamie J. Jirout and Nora S. Newcombe, 'Building Blocks for Developing Spatial Skills: Evidence from a Large, Representative US Sample', *Psychological Science* Volume 26, Issue 3 (2015) 302 – 310, p. 302.
[123] http://www.theiet.org/policy/media/press-releases/20161206.cfm
[124] Nareissa Smith, *Built for Boyhood?* p. 991.
[125] Jirout and Newcombe, *Building Blocks for Developing Spatial Skills,* p. 302
[126] Jennifer J.Pike and Nancy A. Jennings, 'The Effects of Commercials on Children's Perceptions of Gender Appropriate Toy Use', Sex Roles, Volume 52, Issue 1 (2005) p. 90.

children and young people is stark and unequivocal"[127]. Stereotypical views of boys and girls in school prevail, and bullying in schools based on sexual orientation and gender identity that does not conform to these stereotypes is widespread. Girls at school associate appearance with success and the exclusion rate for boys is four times that for girls, as many boys feel that learning is not 'masculine'[127]. An American study found that some children assimilate gender stereotypes about intellectual ability – specifically that brilliance is a male attribute – as young as six. It also found that and that once these children had acquired this stereotype it shapes and influences their interests. They conclude that this is likely to limit the choice of careers available to children later on in life[128].

Roles

Research has found that exposure to traditional portrayals of women in advertising has been shown to result in a number of negative effects on female audiences and contribute to women's under-representation in STEM domains. Gender stereotypes, which are maintained in part by the media, are incompatible with STEM subjects, so women avoid these domains, thus perpetuating the stereotype[129]. Zawisza cites research which shows that exposure to traditional portrayals of women in advertising can have negative effects on female audiences including decreasing women's motives and ambition, attitudes to involvement in politics, performance on maths tests and preferences for leadership roles[130]. She found that, whilst there are ways to increase preferences for STEM domains for women, such as power postures, exposure to stereotypes is negative and neutralises any positive effects from these interventions[131].

Other research states that differences in ability according to gender may be perceived, or caused by external factors, rather than being accurate. Stereotype threat is a situation in which people are, or feel like they are, at risk of conforming to a stereotype about their group, whether or not this is true of them as an individual. Stereotype threat has been shown to reduce the performance of individuals who belong to negatively stereotyped groups, for example a girl's maths performance at school[132]. If negative stereotypes are present regarding a specific group, this awareness is likely to hinder their ability to perform at their maximum level, and thus reinforces the stereotype[133]. This may have a harmful impact both on individuals' own decisions, such as education or employment decisions, and on how they are perceived by others.

Unconscious bias results in people perceiving and behaving towards others in particular ways due to pre-existing expectations about individuals based on their identity. These biases can be caused or reinforced by repeated exposure to messages which create expectations and implicit associations at a subconscious level[134]. This can have negative

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[127] NUT, 'Stereotypes Stop You Doing Stuff', *The National Union of Teachers* (2013), p. 3.
[128] Lin Bian, Sarah-Jane Leslie and Andrei Cimpian, 'Gender stereotypes about intellectual ability emerge early and influence children's interests', *Science,* Volume 355, Issue 6323 (2017) pp. 389-391.
[129] M. Zawisza,A. Szymkow-Sudziarska, A. Golec de Zavala, & E. McKendrick, 'How to get women into engineering? The usefulness of power posture interventions in improving attitudes to STEM subjects – an experimental investigation'. *Unpublished manuscript.* (2016) p.3.
[130] Zawisza, et al, *How to get women into engineering.* p. 4
[131] Zawisza, et al, *How to get women into engineering.* p. 16
[132] Toni Schmader, 'Gender Identification Moderate Stereotype Threat Effects on Womens Math Performance', Journal *or Experimental Psychology,* Issue 38 (2002) p. 194.
[133] Toni Schmader, 'Gender Identification Moderate Stereotype Threat Effects on Womens Math Performance', p. 199.
[134] *https://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/199805/where-bias-begins-the-truth-about-stereotypes*

consequences for groups and individuals who are judged based on predetermined expectations[135].

It is commonly perceived that in advertising women are traditionally depicted as care-givers and occupying roles in the home, and men are presented as the breadwinners. The Mintel report found that 25% of men say they find it hard to identify with the men who are shown in adverts, whilst 22% say that men are too stereotyped in adverts. Many men feel alienated by the way their gender is portrayed, and 20% say men are portrayed as incompetent in the home[136]. Whilst there are now higher employment rates for women than there have been in previous years, women are still under-represented in senior and leadership roles.

Characteristics

There is an increasing body of literature which focuses on masculinities and the depiction of men in the media. The Samaritans report that three times as many men commit suicide as women and state numerous reasons, including stereotypical ideas of masculinity, for this figure. Emotional distress is seen to be a feminine trait and open discussion about male emotions is discouraged. Stereotypical representations of masculinity as being strong, in control and the breadwinner, clash with real men's experiences of modern life and lead to feelings of inadequacy and confusion[137]. The Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM) campaigns to reduce male suicide and runs a campaign called #mandictionary, designed to expose masculine stereotypes in advertising and encourage men to talk about mental health issues[138].

Mocking for not conforming to stereotype

As well as limiting individuals by presenting them with a specific set of acceptable behaviours, there can also be harmful outcomes for those who do not conform to stereotypes. Bullying in schools is often based on (perceived) sexual orientation and gender identity that does not conform to these stereotypes[139]. Historically people who do not conform to gender stereotypes have faced discrimination in many areas of their life.

Identities that do not conform to stereotypes are sometimes presented in a humorous way when they are depicted in advertising. Often humour is seen as negating the impact that an otherwise harmful or offensive presentation might cause. It is unclear what effect humour has on the internalisation of messages. Some research, however, has suggested that exposure to sexist humour is linked to increased prejudice[140] and sexist views[141] about the subjects of the joke.

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[135] See John T. Jost et al, 'The existence of implicit bias is beyond reasonable doubt: A refutation of ideological and methodological objections and executive summary of ten studies that no manager should ignore', *Research in Organizational Behaviour* Volume 29, (2009), pp. 39–69.

[136] http://www.mintel.com/press-centre/social-and-lifestyle/over-one-quarter-of-males-agree-that-men-are-sexualised-in-adverts-just-as-much-as-women

[137] Samaritans research report 'Men, Suicide and Society' (2012) p. 10

[138] https://www.thecalmzone.net/mandictionary/

[139] NUT, 'Stereotypes Stop You Doing Stuff', p.3.

[140] Thomas E. Ford, Christie F.Boxer, Jacob Armstrong and Jessica R.Edel, ' More Than "Just a Joke": The Prejudice-Releasing Function of Sexist Humor', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin,* Volume 34, Issue 2, (2007) pp. 159 – 170.

[141] Kathryn M. Ryan and Jeanne Kanjorski, 'The Enjoyment of Sexist Humor, Rape Attitudes, and Relationship Aggression in College Students', *Sex Roles* Volume 38, Issue 9 (1998) pp.743-756.

Body image

Research has shown that images of an idealised standard of beauty presented in advertising can lead to self-esteem issues and body dissatisfaction in viewers [142]. Body dissatisfaction can lead to anxiety, depression, obsessive behaviours, self-harm and eating disorders[143]. The Credos consumer opinion research *Pretty as a Picture* focused on the impact of idealised imagery in advertising on body confidence of young women. It found that a significant number of girls do take inspiration from models in ads and that images of thin models can have a negative impact on self-esteem, making some young women more likely to diet, and aspire to look like the re-touched images they see. This can be the case even despite awareness that ads use airbrushing[144].

The All Party Parliamentary Group on Body Image reported in 2011 that body dissatisfaction contributes to various emotional, physical and societal problems, and that the media, advertising and celebrity culture is widely perceived to be the main social influence on body image despite the estimation that fewer than 5% of the population could ever realistically obtain the body ideals presented[145]. Grabe and Ward carried out a meta-analysis of various studies testing the link between media exposure and women's body dissatisfaction, and concludes that the "findings provide strong support for the notion that exposure to mass media depicting the thin-ideal body is related to women's vulnerability to disturbances related to body image"[146]. UK Feminista's report discussed how cosmetic surgery procedures increased between 2008 and 2010, and that this is due to advertising. Advertising portrays an ideal of beauty, increases visibility, portrays this ideal as achievable and thus normalises invasive, violent and unnecessary procedures[147].

As a response to their girls' attitude survey, which found that the self-esteem of young girls is damaged by idealistic images in the media[148], Girlguiding teamed up with other groups to develop the *Be Real Body Image Code* – a pledge to set out how media owners can set about change, portraying a diversity of bodies to improve body image amongst girls[149].

The majority of research in this area focused on female body image, however, some research has demonstrated a similar impact on male body image. The Mintel report observed that "advertising [was] increasingly promoting hyper-athletic bodies as a symbol of modern masculinity". Almost 50% of the men surveyed felt that being in good shape was a priority, compared to 38% who prioritised being in a long-term relationship, 23% prioritised having children and 18% prioritised being promoted at work[150].

Credos also carried out a piece of research called *Picture of Health* looking at body image and opinions of advertising of boys aged 8 to 18. The findings suggest that body image,

[142] The Children's Society, *The Good Childhood Report* (2016) p. 5 http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/resources-and-publications/the-good-childhood-report-2016

[143] Government Equalities Office, 'The Watched Body: Gender Roles, Body Image and Public Intrusions, Report of Academic Seminar 27 October 2014', (2014) p. 6

[144] Credos, *'Pretty as a Picture'* (2011) p.4. http://www.adassoc.org.uk/publications/pretty-as-a-picture/ p.4

[145] All Parliamentary Group on Body Image 'Reflections on Body Image: Report from the All Party Parliamentary Group on Body Image', (2012), p. 7.

[146] Shelly Grabe , L. Monique Ward and Janet Shibley Hyde, *The Role of the Media in Body Image Concerns Among Women*, p. 470.

[147] UK Feminista, *Cut it out*, (2012) p. 7.

[148] *Girlguiding UK, Girls Attitude Survey 2016* (2016). Available online at https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girls-attitudes-survey-2016.pdf

[149] https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/what-we-do/our-stories-and-news/news/be-real-body-image-code

[150] http://www.mintel.com/press-centre/social-and-lifestyle/over-one-quarter-of-males-agree-that-men-are-sexualised-in-adverts-just-as-much-as-women

dieting and extreme exercise is just as much of a concern with boys as it is with girls, but that boys do not speak about their concerns as much as girls. Boys feel less comfortable discussing body image issues, and a lot of boys are not aware of the level of image manipulation which is common in ads. Although not all boys felt that there was a perfect body type, of those who did, they felt this was achievable and a realistic target. Amongst other proposals about educating boys on media literacy and the importance of addressing body issues, they proposed that advertisers should "use a diversity of male body shapes and sizes to encourage more realistic aspirations among boys"[151].

A report by the Government Equalities Body argued that public bodies had a responsibility to query and challenge messages in the media which may cause harm, rather than putting responsibility on individuals to "remain impervious to the cultural messages that bombard them every day"[152].

Objectification and sexualisation

Women are regularly presented as passive and are often sexualised in ads, and in contrast many representations of masculinity are active and dominant. These representations have been linked to persistent domestic violence and male violence. Jackson Katz argues that hegemonic constructions of masculinity in magazine ads normalise male violence[153] and images of women as passive objects may normalise and thus legitimise objectifying behaviour, assault and violence[154]. Sexual images of women in advertising have been found to relate to attitudes supportive of sexual aggression and unsupportive of feminism[155]. Objectification and sexualisation of women in the media is seen to encourage men to view women as objects, and some argue that it can also cause women to self-objectify, viewing their own body from a third-person perspective[156].

Ward, Merriweather and Caruthers carried out a study testing media exposure, endorsement of traditional gender ideologies and attitudes towards women's bodies. Whilst the methodology used did not enable researchers to identify causality, they found that high media exposure is linked to an acceptance of the traditional belief that women are sexual objects whilst men are sexually driven, and to negative views towards childbirth and breastfeeding, with many feeling that breastfeeding interferes with sexual or marital relations[157].

Perceptions of women can have an impact on male behaviour towards women in many aspects of life. A study which exposed men to sexually objectifying adverts who were then asked to interview females posing for a job, recalled more about the women's appearance

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[151] http://www.adassoc.org.uk/publications/picture-of-health/ p. 23
[152] Government Equalities Office, *The Watched Body, p.6*
[153] Jackson Katz, 'Advertising and the Construction of Violent White Masculinity, on Gender Race, and Class' in Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez (eds) *Media: A Critical Reader,* 3rd edn (USA, Sage publications, 2011) p. 268.
[154] http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/who-we-are
[155] Natalie JU. MacKay and Katherine Covell, 'The Impact of Women in Advertisements on Attitudes Towards Women', *Sex Roles,* Volume 36, Issue 573 (1977) pp. 573 – 583.
[156] See Brit Harper and Marika Tiggemann, 'The Effect of Thin Ideal Media Images on Women's Self-Objectification, Mood, and Body Image', *Sex Roles*, Volume 58, Issue 9, 2008, pp. 649 – 657) p. 655.
[157] L. Monique Ward, Ann Merriwether and Allison Caruthers, 'Breasts Are for Men: Media, Masculinity Ideologies, and Men's Beliefs About Women's Bodies', *Sex Roles* Issue 55 (2006) pp.703–714.

than background, and rated them friendly, but less competent, unlike the control group who did not see the same ads[158].

Summary of relevant responses to consultation of the sexualisation of under 18s in advertising

In 2016, CAP & BCAP ran a public consultation on proposals to introduce rules prohibiting the sexual portrayal or sexual representation of under-18s (or those who appear to be under 18) in advertising[159].

Many of the relevant responses raised concerns regarding the impact of sexualized images on individuals and society that were directly relevant to gender stereotypes, and have therefore been considered in relation to this project. Many discussed the sexualisation of children as an issue related to wider gender inequalities in society. Those responses considered that sexualisation of children was inseparable from violence against women and girls (VAWG), body image issues, low self-esteem, and that sexualised images along with other stereotypical representations reinforced a narrow idea of what it means to be a girl.

Zero Tolerance[160], the Scottish Women's Convention[161], The Children's Society[162] and Girlguiding[163] all raised concerns that sexualised images of under 18's in advertising could normalise hyper-sexualisation and sexual objectification of women and girls, legitimise the view of women and girls as objects and contribute to violence against women and girls while supporting assumptions of male dominance, power and superiority. The Children's Society referenced research which, it believed, suggested that sexualisation in ads encouraged male viewers to internalise the notion of women as sexual objects and created a hierarchy within which women are viewed as subordinate and appropriate targets for sexual violence[164].

Whilst some of these contributions acknowledged the separation between sexualisation and objectification, they suggested that the two are frequently used in a way which means they cannot always be separated.

The Mothers Union referenced their own research which found that nearly seven in ten parents believe that advertising does have the power to cause harm to their children. Similarly, The Children Society stated that it was evident that advertising has a real impact on young people's lives, encouraging conformity to stereotypical ideas of what it means to be female, which generally has a strong focus on physical appearance. Girlguiding and The Scottish Women's Convention drew a link between women being portrayed as sexual objects in advertising and the emphasis on their appearance to the lack of attention on their skills and abilities, thus disempowering women and putting limitations on the types of roles which they have the opportunities to develop. The Scottish Women's Convention argued that "as long as this is allowed to continue and women are allowed to be presented as

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[158] *Ward et al. 'Breasts Are for Men' pp.703–714.*
[159] *https://www.asa.org.uk/resource/Sexual-portrayal-of-under-18s-in-advertising-consultation.html*
[160] *http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/*
[161] *https://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/*
[162] *http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/*
[163] *https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/*
[164] Lanis, K., & Covell, K. (1995). Images of women in advertisements: Effects on attitudes related to sexual aggression. Sex Roles, 32, 639–649.

nothing more than objects within advertising, women and men will never be considered equal. There needs to be more emphasis on what women can do, their skills and abilities, and much less of a focus on the way they are portrayed, as well as how they look, act and dress."

These responses supported the view that inequality can be perpetuated through the media. They demonstrated that different stereotypical representations can work together to build a complete picture of the individual or a group of people, and confine those people to behaviour and identities which fit within that picture.

Conclusion

There is no academic consensus regarding the origin of gender differences, and these are likely to be a combination of innate differences and those constructed by culture. The literature is not conclusive on the role advertising plays in constructing or reinforcing gender stereotypes and gender stereotypical behaviour, and advertising appears to be one of many influences, which may include other societal factors[165], psychological factors[166] and biology[167]. However, the media does appear to have a role in encouraging conformity to these.

Given their purpose, to convey characters and characterisations that are immediately familiar to the audience, stereotypical representations in advertising are oversimplified. Advertising legitimises certain behaviour and constrict people's choices within those that are presented as suitable for their group. The evidence indicates that normalisation of stereotypes can lead to real-world psychological, physical, economic, social and political harm for individuals and groups, and the literature suggests that broadening depictions of gender in advertising may contribute to reducing this harm.

It seems that there is no compelling literature which argues why the existence of gender stereotypes is either positive or entirely lacking in impact (positive or negative), or why a more gender diverse and inclusive advertising industry would be a bad thing. Arguments that stereotypes represent a natural and innate difference have been used by some to justify discrimination against subdominant groups. The literature suggests that gender differences are determined by an interaction of an individual's nature and nurture. This report, however, has found no reason as to why preventable harm would be justified, even if gender differences were partly or completely determined by nature.

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[165] For example see Amy Wharton, *The Sociology of Gender: An Introduction to Theory and Research* (Oxford, Blackwells Publishers, 2005).
[166] For example see Michael Kaufmann, *The construction of masculinity and the triad of men's violence* (Oxford University Press, 1987) accessed online at http://www.michaelkaufman.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Kaufman-1987-The-Construction-of-Masculinity-and-the-Triad-of-Mens-Violence-in-Michael-Kaufman-ed.-Beyond-Patriarchy-Essays-by-Men-on-Pleasure-Power-and-%E2%80%A6.pdf
[167] For example see J. Richard Udry , 'Biological Limits of Gender Construction', *American Sociological Review*, Volume 65, issue 3, (2000), pp. 443-457

SECTION 6: STAKEHOLDER INPUT – SUBMISSIONS AND SEMINARS

A significant proportion of stakeholders have put forward strong, evidence-based views in submissions and at seminars about the potential for gender stereotypical depictions in ads to be linked to real-world harms and inequalities.

Stakeholders consistently raised the potential cumulative effect of ads which are not individually problematic, but add to an overall expectation of gender norms in terms of looks or behaviour.

At the seminars, stakeholders in support of change spoke of real-world harms relating to the perpetuation of inequality. Those who were less supportive of change spoke of the philosophical 'right to offend' or their preference for less regulation and space for market forces to develop. Advocates of free speech also raised the 'right to offend' in the context of the seminar discussions.

Free speech and liberty to offend does not correspond with a right to cause harm. As the evidence links the depiction and reinforcement of stereotypes to unequal outcomes and real-world harms for men and women, it could be argued that the right to offend does not apply. Generally, CAP recognises that the persuasive nature of advertising means that even if the role it plays is relatively small, albeit material, compared to other influences, it is proper for the advertising regulator to enforce specific standards to prevent linking advertising with harmful outcomes – for example, on the advertising of foods high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS), alcohol and gambling products.

Call for evidence – summary of submissions

The press release announcing this project made a call for evidence. This did not represent a consultation, it was a call for interested parties to send in evidence and research that they already held which was relevant to the scope of the project. The announcement which marked the start of this project received considerable press and social media coverage. In response, the project team received 20 relevant submissions from the industry, interest groups and academics, as well as multiple submissions from the public. All but one of these 20 submissions raised concerns about gender stereotyping in general and the role of advertising, from either the stakeholder's own professional experiences or from research they had read or carried out themselves.

One respondent stated that advertising reflects what people want to see and this should not be interfered with. That submission argued that there is a difference between avoiding gender stereotyping which may constrain future development options for children and completely gender-neutral child rearing. It raised concerns that those with extreme views in the direction of gender neutrality may try to use any suggestions for change by the ASA as an opportunity to promote their own view of a gender neutral ideal society when, they understand, there is no evidence that the broader society wishes to become gender neutral.

Based on the lack of evidence the respondent had seen around any cumulative harm or offence caused by current depictions in advertising, they felt that the ASA was currently in the right place with its decisions, and that any change was unnecessary and potentially social engineering.

Most submissions explored whether gender stereotypes in ads cause harm, rather than whether they cause offence or are in line with public opinion.

One participant noted that the ASA appeared to be willing to uphold ads where there is the potential for harm, even when it doesn't have strong evidence of this harm. For example, a Gucci ad[168] was considered in breach of the Code because the image of the model suggested that being unhealthily thin[169] is somehow glamorous or otherwise desirable. However, the ASA had not upheld complaints against ads that promoted gender stereotypes, despite the concern they caused, because the evidence on their harm was deemed inconclusive. She considered that this was an inconsistent approach.

Not Buying It[170] felt that the ASA in its public function should be committed to promoting equality and 'good relations' between women and men under the Public Sector Equality Duty, and so ,asserted that there should be a much stronger human rights and harm-based focus in the ASA decision making process. Laura Bates[171] also focused on harm, suggesting it was necessary for the ASA to consider the potential for harm in relation to gender stereotypes in ads. She commented on ads which the ASA considered unproblematic because they were humorous, and pointed towards evidence which suggests that depictions of stereotypes, humorous or not, may cause harm.

A number of submissions focused on advertising to children. Let Toys be Toys[172] shared its study of TV ads which found that the majority of ads show boys and girls playing separately and in stereotypical ways. They argued that marketing toys in gender-binary ways limits choices to the behaviours expected within these gender binaries.

Becky Francis[173] provided a study she had carried out on the relationship between gendered toy preferences and curriculum choices[174]. She found that toy preferences are highly gendered: boys' toys focus on technology and action, and girls' toys on care and stereotypically feminine interests. She argued that this may explain in part why educational choices remain so gender differentiated. She referenced research which showed that children are not initially aware that toys were gendered, but that they quickly came to learn that some toys were for girls and others for boys, and they then learned gender roles from these gendered toys.

The Children's Society's consultations with children and young people suggested that children have clear ideas about what it meant to be a boy or a girl. Many reported feeling under pressure to adhere to a specific image based on very traditional, stereotypical ideas,

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[168] https://www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/2016/4/Guccio-Gucci-SpA/SHP_ADJ_321743.aspx#.WK7JjjuLS70
[169] https://www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/2015/6/Yves-Saint-Laurent-SAS/SHP_ADJ_292161.aspx#.WK70TWYnwRY
[170] http://www.notbuyingit.org.uk/
[171] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laura_Bates
[172] http://lettoysbetoys.org.uk/
[173] https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/about/ioe-life/academics/becky-francis
[174] http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03054981003732278

with girls following a narrow gender view where their worth is almost entirely based on their physical appearance while boys often centre on their physical strength and dominance. The pressure to adhere to these stereotypes can have a huge impact on young people's mental health, self-esteem and self-confidence. Based on this, the Children's Society argued that children and young people should be protected from exposure to inappropriate and sexualised advertising, which often depicts an unhealthy representation of gender norms and relationships. They recommended that 'a child' is defined as under 18 years of age in line with the UNCRC and the Children's Act 1989, and that advertising should only be aimed at those of school age who have received appropriate personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE). They recommend that the ASA should carry out research to evaluate the appropriate age at which it is safe to have an ad seen by and aimed at children and gave the example of Sweden, where advertising directed at under 12s is banned.

The Young Women's Trust[175], Credos[176] and Girlguiding[177] submitted research, which asked women and girls how they felt about advertising and the impact it had on them. The Young Women's Trust carried out research with young women who were on low or no pay, and stated in their submission that these women worry about body image, tend to have stereotypical views about women's roles and are more likely to get stuck in low-paid work. They argued that advertising has a powerful role to play in challenging rather than engraining sexist imagery. The Girlguiding *Girls Attitude Survey 2015*[178] found that girls believed that advertising affected their education, aspirations, careers, body image and confidence, and their relationships. They felt that there was too much female nudity, too little diversity, too few positive female role models and too many traditional gender roles. Similarly, Credos submitted their research *Pretty as a Picture*[179] which found that a significant number of girls take inspiration from models in ads and that images of thin models can have a negative impact on self-esteem, making some of them feel more self-conscious, likely to diet, and aspire to look like the re-touched images they see.

Other submissions discussed the stereotypical depiction of roles and characteristics in advertising. Stonewall[180] argued that gender stereotyping and the inaccurate portrayal of LGBT+ people in advertising prevents young people from learning about the diversity of communities and LGBT+ people, and can fuel negative attitudes and bullying.

Fathers Network Scotland[181] observed the stereotypical representation of the family in ads, and that these depict families in which women are the sole care givers. They considered that this perpetuates an assumption which considers women indispensable, and portrays men as: an optional 'add-on' in family life; as completely invisible; or negatively. Fathers Network Scotland argue for the need for 'father proofing' advertising in the interests of children, men and women.

One respondent noted that the majority of deodorants for men have names like 'force' and 'power' whereas women's are called 'tease' and 'touch', and stated "Why are we still as an industry strongly suggesting to young men that they have to be domineering, powerful and

[175] http://www.youngwomenstrust.org/
[176] http://www.adassoc.org.uk/credos/
[177] https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/
[178] *https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girls-attitudes-survey-2016.pdf*
[179] http://www.adassoc.org.uk/publications/pretty-as-a-picture/
[180] http://www.stonewall.org.uk/
[181] http://www.fathersnetwork.org.uk/

aggressive or to young women that they have to be submissive or enticing when all they really want to do is have clean skin, clean hair …".

The Scottish Women's Convention[182] also observed that ads which perpetuate the idea that a woman's place is in the home are still common and contribute to gender inequality.

The Centre for Gender and Equality across all Media (GEM)[183] referenced a paper which reviewed seven studies on portrayals of women and men in British advertising and found that women are: depicted in dependent roles more often than men, in the home and with children; more likely than men to be advertising body products; and users of products, while men are cast as experts or authorities[184]. They identified a similar study which suggests that stereotypes are just as ubiquitous in children's ads[185], and this narrows girls' aspirations and encourages a preoccupation with appearance, and toys focused on shopping, childcare and princesses[186]. They discussed the content of ads and that it was important to consider not only what men and women are doing, but how they are depicted in relation to each other, as this turns different behaviours into power relationships and inequalities. They asserted that humorous content which is sometimes used to deflect criticism and condoned as 'banter' is also significant. Experimental psychological research on sexist jokes found that women respond more negatively than men[187], sexism is trivialised and inequalities presented as inevitable[188].

As well as roles and characteristics, some submissions raised concerns about sexualisation of women in advertising and the harm that this may cause. Zero Tolerance[189] campaigns against violence against women and girls (VAWG). It points out that the Scottish Government's strategy to eliminate VAWG acknowledges that the media has a role to play in this[190]. Ads promote the view that women are objects and passive and men are aggressors legitimise this view

Many of the submissions suggested that the ASA should consider how these ads can harm viewers, rather than focusing on offence, and the majority of submissions presented an argument that gender stereotypes are harmful and should be challenged. One submission questioned whether it was the responsibility of advertising to change representations, stating that advertising should reflect public opinion and argued that there was a lack of evidence to show that the public want change. However, the Fatherhood Institute[191] stated that advertising continues to depict old fashioned and outdated representations of gender In parenting and domestic work, and does not reflect current society. GEM argued that to the extent that ads may mirror society, they mirror a sexist and unequal one and this argument should not be used to defend or justify harmful representations.

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[182] https://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/
[183] http://genderequalmedia.org.uk/
[184] https://www.omicsgroup.org/journals/the-portrayal-of-men-and-women-in-british-television-advertisements-a-review-of-7-studies-publiashed-over-a-12-year-period-2165-7912.1000102.php?aid=2846
[185] https://www.degruyter.com/view/j/comm.2005.30.issue-1/comm.2005.30.1.73/comm.2005.30.1.73.xml
[186] http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/car.1094/abstract
[187] http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/bpl/pwqu/2002/00000026/00000004/art00073
[188] http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/psp/99/4/660/
[189] http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/
[190] http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0045/00454152.pdf (pg 18)
[191] http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/

Stakeholder seminars

In June 2016, the project team convened four seminars with expert stakeholders – three in London and one in Edinburgh – to discuss the categories of stereotypes that it had identified following a review of ASA rulings in this area and discussed examples of ads, in order to find out more about stakeholders' positions on the depiction of gender stereotypes in ads.

In total, 37 stakeholders attended these four seminars. Attendees represented a wide range of perspectives, including special-interest groups, academics, industry bodies, journalists and free-speech advocates. Some presented their own individual views, and others represented their organisations. Whilst the project team sought to invite a balance of views, because of the nature of the subject, the majority of expert stakeholders had a starting position of advocating change. See Annex B for full list of attendees.

Key points from the seminars include:

- The 'right to cause offence' – A free-speech advocate at a seminar spoke strongly about the 'right to cause offence' and said that different sections of UK society have radically differing views that influence how they perceive an ad. Several attendees said that offence is not in itself damaging and highlighted the need for evidence of harm.

- Wider impact of advertising – Overall, many attendees at these seminars considered that the wider issues and inequalities reflected and reinforced by stereotypes go beyond offence and can have a damaging or limiting effect on individuals and society in general. There was agreement that advertising was part of a bigger picture alongside other influences, but by the same token, a strong prevailing view that none of the issues relating to advertising take place in a vacuum. Within the context of evidence around gender disparity in education, work and pay, and stark data about levels of violence against women and girls, the potential for harm was considered more relevant than offence.

- Consumers may not recognise harm because certain negative stereotypes are so normalised – There was a view among many of the attendees that people are not aware of the extent of the influence that advertising has on them. Some participants thought that while ads depicting stereotypical gender roles might represent current social reality, that reality was itself reinforced and normalised by advertising, resulting in a cyclical effect.

- Stereotypes impact on all – Many attendees considered that stereotypical depictions of men and boys was equally harmful as those that affect women, whether they affect their body image or their mental health. Examples included stereotypes that women were sexual objects or naturally suited to menial or caring work, and men being macho and incapable of emotional expression. In some cases the stereotypical roles and characteristics of men and women were felt to be interdependent and indivisible. Some attendees felt that complaints about stereotyping of men may be lower because men are socialised not to show vulnerability and are uncomfortable with acknowledging that these types of portrayals affect them.

- Sexualisation/objectification of men – The seminars acknowledged that more ads were portraying men in an objectifying or sexualised way. Many participants considered that the objectification of men in ads was a relatively new phenomenon and should be seen in the context of the greater frequency and severity of ads objectifying women. Similarly, they argued that the objectification of women reflected the intrinsic gendered power dynamics in society and was linked to violence, while the same was not the case for men. However, some participants stated that whilst women had a long history of being objectified in advertising, this was not a justification for treating men in the same way

- Cumulative effect – Every seminar spontaneously raised the issue of the cumulative effect of ads that reinforce gender stereotypes, agreeing that individual ads weren't always problematic in isolation, but contributed to a wallpaper effect that could cumulatively be damaging. This was considered to be particularly the case for ads including depictions of gender roles, characteristics, objectification and body image. Most attendees – particularly those representing industry – acknowledged the challenges involved in regulating the cumulative effect, but agreed it was important to understand it better in the first instance.

- Impact on children – Whilst some attendees stated that, anecdotally, not all children conform to or are obviously harmed by stereotypes, on the whole there was particularly strong support for change in relation to advertising that depicts children in a gender-stereotypical way. Ads were perceived to present reality in contrast to the fantasy of children's TV programmes (although some felt that these could be more problematic than ads). Attendees considered that children were more susceptible to accept and internalise stereotypes at an age where they are unable to deconstruct them. Research showed that children start to consider their roles in society at a young age[192]. Attendees expressed concern that if young people thought they should conform to specific traditional roles and characteristics, this may impact on their educational choices, which in turn would impact their career options. The long-term consequences of this could disadvantage them financially and personally – they may rule themselves out of career options from a young age. Additionally, ads that depict children conforming to gender stereotypes were considered to reinforce parental expectations of how a boy or girl should behave in ways that could ultimately be similarly limiting.

- A binary view of the world – Attendees considered that many ads presented a very binary view of the world: that you were either 'pink' or 'blue'; 'passive' or 'active'; and that families tended to be quite formulaic – with a working Dad and put-upon mum as well as gender-stereotyped children. Many attendees felt that this didn't reflect modern life and didn't do justice to the increasing levels of equality and parity achieved by many households, nor to adults and children who don't conform to those stereotypes.

- Market forces – Some industry representatives preferred a 'market forces' approach rather than regulation, there was some discussion and split opinion amongst all stakeholders about whether advertising regulation was an appropriate tool to address the wider issues of inequality and whether there was sufficient evidence of

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[192] http://derby.openrepository.com/derby/handle/10545/304844

harm to justify regulatory intervention. There was some debate about the role of advertising and whether they should reflect the 'real world' or have a role in educating or progressing society – reflecting the 'mirror vs mould' evidence above. An industry representative indicated that moving away from 'boring' stereotypes could lead to better creative work from agencies.

- Industry initiatives – Some attendees acknowledged recent changes in the industries' use of stereotypes in ads, but felt that these were 'baby steps', these were the minority and did not go far enough or quickly enough to address the harm caused.

- Product development – In one discussion, in response to criticism of the introduction of pink construction and science toys 'for girls', an industry representative responded by noting that those products were designed to encourage parents to buy those categories of toys for girls, where they might not otherwise have done so. This led to some discussion about whether certain toys were perceived as 'for boys' or 'for girls' because of how they were marketed, or whether they were marketed that way due to children's actual preferences.

- Men's roles – Some attendees noted that creative treatments of men in ads often portrayed them as a 'doofus' dad who was incompetent at parenting and housework. They felt this represented a significant disservice to many men and families where childcare and housework was shared equally between mums and dads. This also reinforced the stereotype that women were more naturally suited to those roles than men.

- Challenging harms when necessary – Some attendees felt that even though a significant proportion of society might continue to conform to traditional stereotypes, it wasn't defensible for the ASA to reflect 'generally accepted standards' when it was commonly understood that our society is intrinsically, institutionally sexist. A number of attendees felt those 'generally accepted standards' should be challenged rather than mirrored.

- Harm from roles and characteristics – Attendees questioned why the ASA was not taking the same precautionary approach to harm that it had identified in relation to body image (e.g. upheld complaints against Gucci and YSL ads) caused by stereotypes of gender roles and characteristics. There was much discussion around how harm was defined and at what point the weight of evidence would tip policy towards regulatory intervention.

- Not conforming to gender stereotypes – Many attendees agreed that ads which mock those who do not conform to gender stereotypes can cause harm. One attendee stated that a significant proportion of bullying was due to children's perceived gender non-conformity. Another participant said that transgender people were invisible in advertising, except where they were portrayed in a pejorative way.

- Intersecting identities – Some of the participants commented on how gender stereotypes can interact with and reinforce discrimination on the basis of other protected characteristics, including age, gender reassignment, race, sexual orientation and potentially other factors such as socio-economic background. They made the point that advertising largely excludes the experience and perspective of certain groups, such as black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups and LGBT+ people. In ads that do portray such groups, gender stereotypes can be amplified by

other stereotypes, which might unhelpfully reinforce perceptions about that group. For example, representations of South East Asian women were felt to reinforce traditional stereotypes of Asian women, which depicted that group as being particularly submissive and subservient, sometimes in contrast to depictions of white women.

- Visibility of BAME groups – Some participants noted that people from BAME groups were rarely featured in ads. As a result, the message that people from these groups take away is either to internalise the message that they should look like or aspire to behave like the people they do see in ads who are not representative of them, or they simply don't relate to them at all. Participants considered this lack of visibility could further amplify groups' and individuals' expectations of how people of BAME groups should look and behave on account of both their gender and ethnic background.

- Deflecting with banter and humour – Many attendees felt that a context of banter or humour did not negate the potential for ads to promote harmful stereotypes, and in fact contributed to normalising them. When less-advantaged groups in society are the targets of humour, it can reinforce unequal power dynamics and be used as an excuse for bullying. Similarly, some believed that an element of fantasy was used as a 'get-out clause' by advertisers who depicted outdated gender roles.

- Many attendees felt that the general rules of harm, offence and social responsibility might be too broad for an issue like this – a dedicated section with specific rules may be warranted, as it is for sensitive sectors such as alcohol and gambling. Some industry figures, on the other hand, felt that guidance for advertisers might be more proportionate.

SECTION 7: PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

**Gender stereotyping in ads has the potential to harm and offend, which could have serious implications for children and young people in particular.
The participants believed that the advertising industry has a responsibility to the general public, but should not lose its creativity.**

The research considered public attitudes towards gender stereotyping in ads. It found that attitudes were influenced by personal beliefs, strength of identification with the role being depicted and the resonance of the scenario depicted.

Gender roles and characteristics portrayed in advertising were generally perceived to be dated and not reflective of modern society. Portrayals did not always reflect real life experiences or lacked diversity and because of this were perceived to potentially limit future aspirations. Women and teen girls in particular expressed concern at the potential future impact of advertising in terms of perpetuating stereotypical messages over time.

The use of gratuitous nudity or emphasised sexualisation in ads was not considered acceptable and offered the potential for harm. It was evident that some young people in the research were impacted negatively by viewing this type of advertising.

Participants felt that the amount of advertising and the frequency with which they were exposed to advertising across different platforms impacted their attitudes and/or behaviour. However, they also believed other platforms such as social media were often more problematic in terms of their content.

Participants felt that the advertising industry had a responsibility to the general public and a duty to ensure young people's anxieties were not exacerbated by advertising. There was a general agreement that some advertising treatments featuring gender stereotypes have the potential to harm and offend. However, they did not want the advertising industry to lose its creativity.

To read the full research report click [here](#).

The ASA commissioned research agency GfK to carry out qualitative research into public attitudes on gender stereotyping in ads. The sample for the research included pre-schoolers, tweens, teens and adults from a broad range of backgrounds. The research was conducted across the UK, with fieldwork in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The research involved participants reviewing a range of ads under the categories of roles and characteristics, objectification and body image. Some participants were also asked to undertake a pre-task and/or a post-task, eliciting their views on advertising outside of the research setting. Headline findings from the research are presented below.

Factors that influence attitudes towards gender portrayal in ads

The research report from GfK identified three primary factors that drive responses and reactions to gender portrayals in ads. These are:

- Reflecting personal beliefs and views – participants felt more positively about an advert where it echoed their personal beliefs or 'worldview', and more negatively where these were challenged. Personal beliefs and opinions about gender portrayal were shaped by social and environmental influences.

- Identification with the role or person depicted – participants typically felt most strongly about adverts that were targeted at people like them, or groups in society that they related to. For example, women with young children identified with adverts depicting new mums.

- Resonance of the scenario depicted – whether it was aiming to be a 'real life' scenario or a fantastical one. A 'real life' scenario that was felt to be over idealised or perfect was found to be more difficult to relate to.

A range of secondary factors were also identified by GfK. Whilst these did not emerge as strongly as the primary factors across the research, they could distract participants from an advert's message or reinforce emotional responses to an advert. The secondary factors were: understanding of the message; relationship with the brand or product; and components of the advert production.

These factors influenced participants' reactions to gender roles and characteristics in adverts, and sexualisation, objectification and body image in adverts. They were each looked at in turn.

Attitudes towards gender roles and characteristics

The use of gender stereotyping in adverts was spontaneously mentioned across the research. Those who completed a homework pre-task often commented that they have come across adverts that showed men, women or children in what was felt to be a 'dated' way (e.g. children playing with gender stereotypical toys, or women and men carrying out gender stereotypical roles).

Across the research, views regarding gender roles and stereotypes in advertising tended to focus on three broad themes:

- Relationships – the depictions of families in advertising was perceived as generally clichéd. The majority of adverts showed two-parent relationships with opposite gender parents as the norm, which was not seen as reflecting modern-day society – although some participants felt that the advertising industry was moving on from stereotypical roles. From homework pre-tasks, it was also evident that some adverts reinforce clichéd divisions of parental household responsibilities. Participants also considered the depiction of romantic relationships. Participants noted that in perfume

adverts, women were often shown in a submissive role and males in an assertive role.

- Roles and aspirations – children and the parents of pre-schoolers (and other parents across the research) believed that the depiction of boys and girls in advertising was stereotypical and cited several ways in which advertising did not reflect reality. For example, boys and girls were shown wearing gender-specific colours, and these colours followed through into the settings used in adverts. Another example related to girls being portrayed showing the caring aspects of their personalities whilst boys were usually depicted as more energetic and disruptive. Parents of pre-schoolers reflected that these depictions discouraged some children from expressing their personal preferences when playing with toys. In terms of the depiction of women, participants felt that they were shown in caring or service roles in the household. Participants were also aware that men may be portrayed using a narrow range of characteristics. For example, a husband was often shown as lazy, stupid or not taking responsibility for household tasks.

- Portrayal of the perfect person or scenario – participants thought it was appealing to see attractive 'perfect' people and situations in adverts. However, where participants strongly identified (themselves or on behalf of other groups in society) with the people or scenarios they began to feel that this type of portrayal could promote an unrealistic and unattainable lifestyle or image that could make more vulnerable groups in society feel negative about themselves. This was particularly the case where participants felt that an advert was targeting a specific group in society that was known to be vulnerable. For example, one advert for a pram identified a new mum as a style icon for her child. As one participant commented, "You're in a very vulnerable place when you have a baby and I would hate to think people are having that added pressure when there are so many more important things going on".

Attitudes towards objectification, sexualisation and body image in advertising

The use of objectification, sexualisation and the portrayal of body image in advertising was a topic of much debate across the research. Participants agreed that the adverts did not always need to be realistic and could be aspirational, but felt that care needed to be exercised when promoting messages that could be seen by vulnerable groups, including children.

Responses were broken down into three themes:

- Attractiveness – participants noted that adverts typically included 'young, good looking' people. This was particularly the case for adverts promoting luxury products. Many felt that adverts showed stereotypical and unrealistic body images – "They're always impossibly good looking aren't they". Participants noted that some adverts showed and ridiculed people who were not stereotypically attractive. Girls were aware that body images of females in adverts focused on being attractive. Whilst it was understood that these images were unrealistic and possibly fake, they acknowledged a certain aspiration to be more like the models. This could make girls feel more negative about how they look.

- Portraying the perfect body – participants frequently observed that adverts portrayed a perfect, idealised body or way to look. They queried the messages these types of adverts presented to society, tending to feel most strongly about the portrayal of the perfect body when they identified with the person shown in the advert personally or on behalf of other groups in society. The type of product being advertised also had an impact. For example, adverts for cosmetic procedures were considered to be potentially harmful because they could pressurise women into thinking negatively about themselves and that they needed these procedures to conform to the 'perfect body'. Some participants described experiences of friends and family feeling pressured to make changes to their body as a result of societal pressure from advertising and across other platforms. Teen girls in the research also felt that the more 'perfect' the body shown in an advert, the more people may feel negatively about themselves and want to change their own appearance. Participants tended to react positively to adverts that used more 'normal' looking people as this provided greater diversity of the types of bodies shown in adverts.

- Objectification and sexualisation – adverts were considered to be old-fashioned and dated where participants felt that they used the male or female body to appeal to the opposite sex. Some felt that this approach gave adverts a 'cheap' and 'tacky' feel. Participants considered various factors:

  - Nudity – women in particular felt their representations often contained nudity when it was not required and portrayals adopted physical perfection, were often oversexualised, and sometimes also objectified women. Girls were critical towards adverts that used nudity, "If they [boys] saw that they'd be fixated on the body… they'd judge anyone who doesn't look like that".

  - Pose – participants often had a negative reaction to adverts that showed a sexualised pose of the body which they felt was overly suggestive. For example, one showed a woman in a sexually provocative pose in a setting that some associated with a 'strip club'. Teenage girls believe that adverts using sexualised body poses could suggest to men that this was the way all women should and could look – promoting a negative cultural expectation where boys expected girls to behave in this way. They felt this could be harmful for girls.

  - Scenario and behaviour –resonance with the scenario depicted in an advert and personal acceptability of the behaviour portrayed had an impact on participants' views. A man dancing in underwear in a setting that was intended to be 'behind closed doors' was contrasted with a woman standing naked in front of a window where others may have been able to see her.

Harm and offence

GfK's report considers how participants viewed gender stereotyping in adverts in relation to harm and offence. This was in relation to individual ads considered in the research as well as the cumulative impact of gender stereotyping in ads. Overall, four broad areas of potential harm emerged across the research.

- Portraying the perfect person, scenario or body – portrayal of the 'idealised body' could impact on anybody who did not feel happy about their body. In particular, the

impact of these images on young people was of concern – and young people themselves talked of the impact they have: "It makes us feel more insecure about ourselves". And, in the words of another, "I'd literally love to look like that but it makes girls feel like they should become bulimic and anorexic because they feel ashamed of who they are".

- Gratuitous and unnecessary sexualisation and objectification of the body – this was often association with extreme levels of nudity that were not seen as necessary for the advert. It was one of the areas that led participants to discuss the placements of adverts.

- The use of stereotypical gender roles and characteristics – parents noted the stereotypes used in adverts aimed at children, with some mentioning their discomfort at the notion of limiting a child's options or suggesting certain 'normalised behaviour'. Adults across the research felt that the lack of diversity in gender roles and characteristics could be harmful to society in general by limiting the roles that people carry out and aspire to.

- Perpetuation of these messages and stereotypes over time – participants agreed that gender stereotypes existed and were perpetuated in advertising, as well as in wider life. There was a view among some that repeated exposure would desensitise people from gender stereotypes and portrayals, with others saying that repeated exposure would affect views, even if it is difficult to detect how and when this happens: "It kind of just gets into you and you don't realise it's getting into you but it does". For some teenagers, the cumulative impact of seeing the same images over time was a normalisation of these images, resulting in a belief that it is normal to have the perfect body.

Offence was seen to be highly individualised and would arise for two key reasons:

- Offence could occur if participants related to the role/people/scenario depicted and it strongly challenged their personal beliefs and opinions. Whilst participants often claimed not to feel personally offended by an advert, they did express offence on behalf of other groups in society. Some spoke about the levels of nudity in adverts being offensive and parents in particular felt that an advert which showed a woman in a provocative pose among childhood images had 'crossed the line'.

- Another key area for offence was if the advert ridiculed individuals or groups in society who do not conform to 'norms'. This could be based on age, attractiveness or personal interests/traits.

Industry responsibilities

Participants agreed that advertising plays a role in societal norms and expectations for gender roles, characteristics, behaviours and appearance – although participants did not reach a conclusive view on whether advertising mirrors or shapes societal views.

The research identified specific elements that might be helpful for CAP and the ASA to consider in the future:

- Consideration of where and when the advert is shown – participants identified this in relation to the potential for children or vulnerable groups seeing adverts that promoted the 'perfect body' or suggested that an inappropriate behaviour (e.g. showing male dominance over women) was acceptable.

- Avoiding ridiculing those who do not conform to stereotypes or norms – participants felt uncomfortable about adverts that mocked people for not conforming to stereotypes or norms, with the suggestion that those who do not conform are unattractive or should change their appearance or behaviour.

- Advertising the product in an appropriate way – most participants expressed dislike of sexualisation in adverts, particularly extreme nudity and sexually suggestive poses. This was especially the case where this type of gender portrayal was not seen as relevant to the product being advertised. Participants suggested care should be taken to advertise products appropriately.

- Avoid targeting vulnerable groups – there was specific concern that adverts could have a negative impact on vulnerable groups in society. They noted that some adverts specifically targeted groups in society that were known to be vulnerable, such as targeting new mums or teenage girls. It was agreed that advertisers should consider the impact that any promotion of the 'ideal' as a norm could have on these groups.

- Increased diversity – this included diversity of the types of people shown in adverts (e.g. body types and characteristics) and the diversity of the demographics of people shown in adverts (e.g. ethnicity, family make-up).

- Safeguarding creativity – participants were also keen to ensure that creativity in advertising was not stifled. This was also cited as important by those who felt that the advertising industry needed to move on from repeated use of predictable narratives and images.

CONCLUSIONS

CAP (author the UK Advertising Codes) and the ASA independently administer the Codes to ensure advertising remains responsible benefitting people, business and society in general.

This report considers whether CAP and the ASA are doing enough to address the potential for harm or offence arising from the inclusion of gender stereotypes in ads.

In order to consider that question in detail, both parties have considered the social, political and economic context around gender equality, noting evidence from all three spheres strongly suggests that many aspects of UK society remain unequal for men and women. The report collates evidence, the views of stakeholders and the findings of public opinion research to understand the role of advertising within that bigger picture in order to assess whether the position on regulating gender stereotypes is in the right place.

Gender stereotypes have the potential to harm by inviting assumptions about adults and children that might negatively restrict how they see themselves and how others see them. These assumptions can lead to unequal gender outcomes in public and private aspects of people's lives; outcomes, which are increasingly acknowledged to be detrimental to individuals, the economy and society in general.

To this end, ads that feature gender stereotypes have the potential to cause harm by contributing to unequal gender outcomes, although advertising is understood to be only one of many different factors that contribute, to a greater or lesser extent, to unequal gender outcomes. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of ads do not include gender stereotypes that are likely to cause harm, or serious or widespread offence. But some ads do, and, on the basis of this report and in keeping with their regulatory responsibilities, the ASA system is committed to affecting change.

While some categories of gender stereotypes are already addressed through existing rules, the evidence suggests that more needs to be done to tackle ads that include gender stereotypes that, subject to context and content considerations, have the potential to cause harm.

Advertising codes

The UK Advertising Codes include rules that prevent ads from being likely to cause serious or widespread offence and invites particular care to avoid causing offence on the grounds of gender. The rules do not specifically address gender stereotypes, which evidence suggests can contribute to unequal gender outcomes that are acknowledged to be detrimental to individuals, the economy and society in general.

The ASA has ruled against ads that objectify or inappropriately sexualise women and girls, and ads that suggest it is acceptable for young women to be unhealthily-thin, usually using rules on offence and social responsibility.

The ASA has typically decided that depictions of stereotypical gender roles or characteristics or ads that mock people for not conforming to a gender stereotype are

unlikely to cause harm, serious or widespread offence, or be otherwise socially irresponsible

This report indicates that ASA decisions relating to body image, sexualisation and objectification are broadly in the right place, and that it would be helpful for its existing position to be formalised to reflect the evidence base. But, the research and other factors presented in this report indicate that it might be necessary to introduce tougher standards to restrict some ads that depict stereotypical gender roles and characteristics, or which mock people for not conforming to gender stereotypes, because of their potential to cause harm.

Clarifying new standards to help advertisers avoid unacceptable gender stereotypes would help to fulfil a primary objective of CAP: to set standards that are easily understood, easily implemented and easily enforced. By doing so, CAP provides greater certainty for advertisers that published ads comply with the UK Advertising Codes and do not fall foul of ASA rulings.

The use of stereotypes in general are often used as a creative device for advertisements which seek to engage with and influence a target market in a short space of time and tend to feature individuals who represent their target market.   However, as this report demonstrates, some depictions of gender may reinforce stereotypical expectations of male and female capabilities and aspirations, or how people should look and behave as a result of their gender, with potentially harmful outcomes for groups and individuals. Challenging potentially harmful gender stereotypes may benefit individuals and society as well as resulting in positive consumer engagement for advertisers. This report identifies specific presentations of gender stereotypes that are likely to reinforce negative outcomes for groups and individuals.

Cumulative effect

Academic evidence and stakeholders have cited the cumulative effect of ads, which might not be considered to be a problem in isolation, but create an overall impression that reinforces potentially harmful gender stereotypes.

When identifying the potential for harm to arise from the cumulative effect of certain advertisements, it would be disproportionate to ban all ads that are relatively unproblematic when viewed in isolation. It would also be unusual and potentially anti-competitive for the ASA system to introduce arbitrary volume restrictions on certain types of advertisements. Where the system presently identifies the potential for harm to arise from cumulative exposure to certain types of advertisements, it acts by isolating and proscribing specific creative treatments which might contribute to an overall cumulative effect, based on the best available evidence; this mitigates that potential for harm.

For example, CAP acknowledges that even with targeting restrictions, under-18s might see alcohol ads, so they set standards which seek to prevent them from identifying with or aspiring to the scenarios depicted in the ad. In this way, alcohol ads are prevented from cumulatively presenting alcohol as being linked to outcomes such as social or sexual success, or sporting prowess.

Potential outcomes

The evidence presented in this report identifies numerous specific stereotypes that could be linked to harmful outcomes, so would provide a solid knowledge base for setting out the kinds of creative treatments that are likely to be problematic. A long-term effect of new standards should be to encourage creative treatments that challenge or reject particular stereotypes, which should diminish the cumulative effect of potential harm.

It would be inappropriate and unrealistic to prevent ads from, for instance, depicting a woman cleaning, but new standards on gender stereotypes might elaborate on the types of treatments that might be problematic — for example::

> An ad which depicts family members creating mess while a woman has sole responsibility for cleaning it up.

> An ad that suggests an activity is inappropriate for a girl because it is stereotypically associated with boys or vice versa.

> An ad that features a man trying and failing to undertake simple parental or household tasks

Next steps

- CAP and the ASA consider the report provides an evidence-based case to strengthen their regulation on the use of gender stereotypes in ads which, through their content and context, might be potentially harmful to people.

- In line with their objectives to deliver transparent and accountable regulation, this change is most effectively delivered through standards that are easy to understand and easy to implement.

- Responding to evidence in this report, CAP will develop new standards on ads that feature stereotypical gender roles or characteristics which, through their content and context, might be potentially harmful to people. This includes ads that mock people for not conforming to gender stereotypes. CAP will also use the evidence in thisreport to clarify standards that reflect the ASA's existing regulatory position on ads that objectify or inappropriately sexualise women and girls, and ads that suggest it is acceptable for young women to be unhealthily thin.

- CAP will report publically on its progress before the end of 2017 and commits, as always, to delivering training and advice on the new standards in good time before they come into force.

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