

**Scottish Women's Convention response to:
The Advertising Standards Authority Consultation
"Tackling Harmful Gender Stereotypes in Advertising"**

July 2018

The Consultation

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) – the body that administers the UK Advertising Codes – published a report last year – *Depictions, Perceptions and Harm* – which provided an evidence-based case for stronger regulation of ads that feature certain kinds of gender stereotypical roles and characteristics. These are ads that have the potential to cause harm by contributing to the restriction of people's choices, aspirations and opportunities, which can affect the way people interact with each other and the way they view their own potential.

The consultation lays out a new rule to tackle harmful gender stereotypes in ads, as well as on guidance to advertisers on how the new rule is likely to be interpreted in practice. The consultation proposes the introduction of the following new rule to the Advertising Codes which will cover broadcast and non-broadcast media:

Advertisements must not include gender stereotypes that are likely to cause harm, or serious or widespread offence.

The ASA already applies rules on offence and social responsibility to ban ads that include gender stereotypes on grounds of objectification, inappropriate sexualisation and depiction of unhealthily thin body images.

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded to engage with women throughout Scotland in order that their views might influence public policy. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of Parliamentary, Governmental and organisational consultation papers at both a Scottish and UK level.

The Scottish Women's Convention engages with women using numerous communication channels including Roadshow events, Thematic Conferences and regional contact groups. This submission provides the views of women and reflects their opinions and experiences in a number of key areas relevant to the issues around gender stereotyping across all mediums in society.

Questions 1. Do you agree with CAP & BCAP's proposal to introduce a new rule and supporting guidance into the Advertising Codes? Please include relevant evidence to support your view, whether you agree or disagree with the proposals.

Supportive. The proposal to introduce both new rules and supporting guidance in order to challenge continued gender stereotyping is commendable and conducive to the eradication of gendered inequality. The societal preoccupation with idealised body images, intensified by ongoing media exposure and the rise of digitalisation has left many women, particularly younger women, suffering from mental health issues.

"It's worse now because of the likes of Instagram and other social media platforms."

The steps taken can be seen as long needed action that can make a contribution to the elimination of gendered stereotypes, particularly in relation to the health and wellbeing of women.

Whilst advertising may not be the only cause of enforcing gender stereotypes, it can also be a powerful contributing factor in purporting idealised images which not only affect the ways in which women view themselves in a detrimental manner, but also as a prerequisite to objectification and in some cases gender-specific violence.

In addition, proposals around prohibiting characteristics being associated explicitly with one gender is welcomed, particularly around the likes of children's toys. Gender streaming starts from an extremely young age and can be incorporated into children's lives at the detriment of their own wellbeing and their future.

"You're taught to learn how to do a certain thing or portray yourself in a certain way to attract someone."

The presence the media has in our society and everyday life means that what is broadcast has a profound effect on the way individuals reflect themselves. This goes far beyond what is broadcast. It is also a major issue in terms of advertising.

Product selling across a range of mediums often excludes women, despite the higher buying power they possess. When shown, this often results in stereotypes negating the female position to that as care provider and occupying a solely domesticated setting. A problem at such a wide societal level is not only endemic to females, but also affects boys, projecting a stereotypical image of female omission and reinforcing stereotypical concepts about gender equality which then becomes normalised.

"You need to engage both girls and boys if you want to see a change."

2. Do you agree with the wording of the proposed new CAP and BCAP rules? If not please include suggestions for how the proposed rules could be improved to achieve the aims set out in this consultation.

The guidance should be looked upon by those it is intended for as a positive step forward in their societal role to eliminate harmful stereotypes that are indicative of gender inequality

and cultivate an image of the feminine ideal from a young age. It is welcomed that the proposed new CAP and BCAP rules note the detrimental impact that negative images can have on not just health but limitation of aspirations, both personally and professionally. The interrelation of consequences associated with the exposure to negative depictions can have a severe toll on all aspects of life and should be emphasised in order to further alleviate gender inequality.

It should be communicated and stressed that what is put in place is there in order to challenge standardised norms around the likes of gender and femininity in order to bolster societal and cultural understanding. Adverts that break ground in challenging perceived cultural norms have been widely praised by women and can contribute heavily to a company's success both economically and culturally.

"It's going back to that same stereotype that women have to look a certain way and men don't."

The fact that the guidance states that the proposals rely on contextualising the situation when considering further action in cases where gender stereotypes are at play is seen as useful to advertisers. However, there was a caveat that the wording could go further in terms of encouragement in promoting advertisements that destigmatise non conformity to proscribed stereotypes.

Additionally, in relation to the way stereotypes are portrayed, more should be communicated around hyper sexualised portrayals of women in adverts that can contribute to the ways in which women view their own bodies in a negative fashion. Determining women's worth by their physical and sexual attractiveness can be extremely toxic. The concentration on unrealistic and potentially harmful body images with a strong focus on physical appearance play a contributing factor and should be looked upon as such in guidance as an example of gender inequality. Many young women have spoken about the difficulties of challenging stereotypical and unrealistic images presented in the media, as well as peer pressure to conform.

"In the media it's more about appearance than achievement."

The media has a huge role to play in the prevention of VAWG and the portrayal of women's bodies as commodities. This should be emphasised within guidance in order to underscore the importance of promoting gender equality across all levels of society.

[3. Do you consider the draft guidance to be clear and practicable? If not please include suggestions for how it could be improved to achieve the aims set out in this consultation.](#)

The draft guidance in its current format is clear and coherent with sufficient guidelines in which advertisers can appreciate the duty to reduce harm and gender stereotyping. The fact that the guidance also includes sufficient information around not just generic stereotypes but also extended guidance prohibiting mockery of failure to conform to a specific stereotype. Given the current rise in hate crimes across the country, advocating for this is seen as a beneficial step in improving the representation of all protected characteristics.

Conclusion

The SWC welcomes the opportunity to comment on and have women's voices heard in relation to the proposals for establishing a new rule and guidance concerning portrayals of gender stereotype in advertising and recognising the potential harm that these may cause. In order to bolster equality at a societal and cultural level, attention must be made in order to stop the normalisation of typical gender narratives that seek to emphasise the conformity to a specific form of identity.

For further information, please contact

The Scottish Women's Convention

Email – info@scottishwomensconvention.org

Telephone – 0141 339 4797

www.scottishwomensconvention.org

The Scottish Women's Convention engages with women using numerous communication channels including Roadshow events, Thematic Conferences and regional contact groups. This submission paper provides the views of women and reflects their opinions and experiences in a number of key areas relevant to gender stereotyping.

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