

## Scottish Women's Convention response to:

### The Committee of Advertising Practice and Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice's Consultation on the Sexual Portrayal of under-18s in Advertising

January 2016

#### The Consultation

This consultation outlines proposals to introduce new rules prohibiting the sexual portrayal or sexual representation of under-18s (or those who appear to be under 18) in advertising. It is being carried out by CAP and BCAP.

- The Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) is the author of the UK Code of Non-broadcast Advertising and Direct and Promotional Marketing (the CAP code).
- Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice (BCAP) is the author of the UK Code of Broadcast Advertising (the BCAP code).

CAP and BCAP consider that premature sexualisation and its links to harm mean that new rules are a necessary and proportionate strengthening of existing rules to protect the welfare of under-18s. CAP and BCAP's proposal is about the potential for some adults to view under-18s in general as sexual beings or the potential for under-18s to be pressurised to view themselves as sexual beings. The proposal is also concerned with the protection of the individual models featured in advertising.

At present, BCAP Rule 5.5 states that '*advertisements must not portray or represent children in a sexual way*'. For the purposes of the BCAP code, a child is anyone under the age of 16. There is no equivalent CAP code rule to this. The proposed rules would mean that in cases where those featured were under 18, and portrayed in a sexual way, the degree of sexualisation or any aggravating factors, such as vulnerability or coercion, would not be assessed. Any sexual portrayal – however mild – of someone under 18 would automatically breach the Codes.

Similarly, the proposed rules would not allow for mitigating factors to be taken into account. Such factors might include sexual imagery in a broadcast ad being fleetingly shown or being tangential to the main narrative of the ad; or in a non-broadcast ad, sexual imagery not being a significant feature.

#### 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 the sexual portrayal of under-18s in advertising as outlined below.

**Do you agree or disagree with the introduction of CAP Rule 4.6 and BCAP Rule 4.4?  
Please provide any relevant evidence or reasoning in support of your answer.**

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) has long been concerned by the sexualisation of young women in the media. The organisation therefore welcomes the opportunity to comment on proposed new rules around the portrayal of under-18s in advertising and marketing communications. The SWC believes that the sexualisation of young women is a form of Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) and is, as such, both a cause and consequence of gender inequality.

The female body and outdated ideas as to women's place in society are exploited by advertising, primarily in order to make money for multinational companies. They sell not just a product, but a lifestyle for consumers. Women's worth is determined by their physical and sexual attractiveness, as well as their ability to attract a man. When that is combined with so many objectifying comments and images of idealised beauty, it can be toxic.

*"The way in which young women are portrayed in the media is so damaging - it's as if you only have worth if you're strutting about in a bikini or underwear. It sends a really negative message about what's really important."*

Too many images used in advertising, particularly in print media and on billboards, have a strong focus on the way a woman looks, how she acts and what she wears. There are few which promote positive female role models, concentrating on unrealistic and potentially harmful body images instead of, for example, professional or sporting abilities.

The increased sexualisation of young women is an example of gender inequality with pressure to conform, commercialism and social media all acting as contributing factors. Many young women have spoken about the difficulties in challenging stereotypical and unrealistic images presented in the media, as well as peer pressure to conform. The increased use of social media perpetuates views of how young women should look and act. It also allows anonymous comments and images to be posted of impressionable and vulnerable people. This is having a detrimental impact on young women.

The media has a huge role to play in the prevention of VAWG. There is continuous use of sexualised images in advertising, which promote women's bodies as nothing more than commodities. The proposed changes to CAP and BCAP rules have the potential to make a difference by not allowing advertisers to use any kind of sexualised image of a person under the age of 18.

*"The media in general presents a really skewed view of sex and sexual relationships. If these rules were changed, there would be fewer instances of the use of hyper sexualised adverts. This could, in turn, change young people's perceptions on a range of factors such as, for example, the portrayal of women and healthy relationships."*

Many adverts for products aimed specifically at men, such as computer games, magazines and aftershave, objectify women's bodies. They are often extremely sexist, but because they are seen in so many places, it becomes normalised and people become used to this as the norm.

*“In some cases women are completely naked. We don’t use men’s bodies in that way.”*

The idea that the ‘perfect woman’ is one who can be dominated by a games console controller; or that the best way to test a deodorant for men is to see whether a picture of a half naked young woman bent over an oven can make him “lose control”, are just some of the examples of adverts which have been in the public domain. Many companies consistently use inappropriate, highly sexualised images in order to sell basic items of clothing such as socks and shirts.

*“I fail to see why big companies think showing women as nothing more than sexual objects is a sensible way to advertise their products. The sad thing is, it’s now so normalised and accepted that people don’t get offended any more. They’re so used to seeing this type of image. Yet so often women who breastfeed in public are subject to abuse. It’s not right.”*

Images used in advertising are seen to enforce the idea that women have to be constantly performing in order to be valued. For example, an advert for a camera showed two women in their underwear cavorting on a bed. This image had no correlation to the selling of the product.

*“More often than not there’s no connection between how products are being advertised and the item which is actually being sold.”*

There is a real blurring of lines between adult and child in many images which are used in advertising. Women have expressed their views on the importance of stricter regulation of the use of this type of image.

*“It’s not just desirable to look like a teenager – some companies are using models as young as 4 to sell products such as makeup.”*

The SWC would also like to see further examination of the rules which pertain to advertising aimed at young children. Products are often hyper-sexualised. Dolls aimed at young girls are often disproportionate to what real women look like, with cinched in waists, enlarged breasts, big hair, false eyelashes and painted nails. Even toy horses are sexualised, wearing high heels, fake hair and jewellery. These toys are constantly advertised on television, in newspapers and magazines, aimed specifically at young girls. This has the potential to be extremely damaging, skewing their image of what girls and women should look and act like, as well as creating and promoting unrealistic expectations for boys and men.

### Conclusion

The SWC fully supports proposals to change CAP and BCAP rules. The normalisation and subsequent societal acceptance of the hyper-sexualised presentation of women in advertising, as well as the reinforcement of stereotyped views of gender roles and gender specific marketing to children, is a contributing factor to deep rooted gender inequality within society.

As long as this is allowed to continue and women are allowed to be presented as 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.

*“We do not have to be depicted in a picture to be objectified. We are objectified simply by being women in a society where images like this are normal, accepted and widespread.”*

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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 mental health in Scotland.

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