



## TACKLING HARMFUL GENDER STEREOTYPES IN ADVERTISING

### NATIONAL EDUCATION UNION RESPONSE

24<sup>th</sup> July 2018

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#### **Introduction**

1. The National Education Union (NEU) brings together more than 450,000 teachers, lecturers, support staff and leaders working in maintained and independent schools and colleges across the UK.
2. We welcome the opportunity to respond to this inquiry on tackling harmful gender stereotypes in advertising. We believe the new guidance will strengthen the ability of CAP, BCAP and ASA to restrict advertisements that portray boys and girls and men and women in stereotypical roles that harm their self-worth and aspirations and ultimately harm progress towards gender equality.
3. We particularly welcome the way in which the guidance has addressed the vulnerability and susceptibility of children and young people to advertisements which promote harmful stereotypes. More could be done, however, to highlight the intersections between gender stereotypes, race, sexuality and gender identity (see below).
4. We would welcome more information about any plans CAP, BCAP or the ASA has to monitor the impact and effectiveness of the new guidance. We think it will be important to raise awareness of the new rules so that people feel empowered to make complaints about advertisements they perceive as breaking the new rules.

#### **Consultation Questions**

**Do you agree with CAP and 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.**

1. Yes. We support the introduction of rules 4.9 and 4.14 that marketing communications and advertisements must not include gender stereotypes that are likely to cause harm, or serious or widespread offence.

2. Our own research “It’s Just Everywhere<sup>1</sup>” shows that gender and sexist stereotypes are pervasive<sup>2</sup> throughout a pupil’s school-life and that this can have harmful effects on their self-confidence, opportunities and relationships with others. For instance, students raised concerns about the school activities that they are, or are not, allowed to participate in: some girls said they were not allowed to play football; some boys said they found it difficult to do artistic activities/ subjects like dance and drama because of the perception that it is not a ‘boys’ subject. Stereotypical ideas around what boys and girls should do clearly limit their opportunities and development. As such, we particularly welcome the guidance given on ‘scenarios aimed at or featuring children’ – which seeks to stop ads which portray certain activities, play or careers as inappropriate for one gender or another.
  
3. Of concern to the NEU is also how gender stereotypes can create an environment in which sexual harassment and sexual violence is allowed to flourish and become normalised. In our research over a third (37%) of female students at mixed- sex schools have personally experienced some form of sexual harassment at school and almost a quarter (24%) have been subjected to unwanted physical touching of a sexual nature while at school. This has a huge impact on girl’s confidence and self-worth. It also highlights the need for this guidance to be seen as part of a wider attempt to address advertisements that fuel young girls’ objectification and sexualisation and that feed into stereotypes of what it means to be a girl/boy and woman/man.
  
4. We welcome the focus on tackling advertising that promotes the idea that idealised, gender-stereotypical physical appearance of a particular body shape is necessary for social, romantic or emotional welling or which suggests appearance should be prioritised at the expense of other qualities in order to gain the acceptance of peers. There is increasing evidence that many children and young people are affected by negative body image. The APPG on Body Image heard evidence that girls as young as five were worrying about their size and appearance<sup>3</sup>. Girlguiding research<sup>4</sup> shows that 47% of girls aged 11-21 say the way they look stops them from doing everyday things they’d like to do and that from as young as seven, girls say they feel embarrassed and ashamed of how they look. Challenging gender stereotypes is intrinsic for the promotion of positive body image. We believe this new guidance can play an important role in limiting the production of problematic and stereotypical ideas around body image for children and young people.

**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.**

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<sup>1</sup> National Education Union and UK Feminista (2017) “*Its Just Everywhere*” A study on sexism in schools – and how we tackle it. Available online at:[https://www.teachers.org.uk/sites/default/files2014/ije-2-pages-per-view\\_final-06.12.17.pdf](https://www.teachers.org.uk/sites/default/files2014/ije-2-pages-per-view_final-06.12.17.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> A quarter (25%) of all secondary school teachers say they witness gender stereotyping and discrimination in their school on a daily basis, and a further 26% say they witness it on a weekly basis.

<sup>3</sup> Please see the APPG on Body Image (2012) *Reflections on body image*, YMCA. Available online: <http://www.berealcampaign.co.uk/help-and-resources/2014/09/19/appg-reflections-on-body-image/>

<sup>4</sup> Girlguiding (2016) *Girls’ Attitudes Survey*, Girlguiding. Available online [here](#).

1. Yes we agree with the wording of the proposed new CAP and BCAP rules.

**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.**

1. Yes. We particularly welcome the principle that ‘unacceptable depictions are unlikely to be mitigated by the use of humour or ‘banter’ as this is a common way sexism is justified, normalised and accepted. We also think the inclusion of scenarios are helpful for clarifying what is and what is not acceptable.
2. We are pleased to see a whole section on advertisements aimed at or featuring children as well as advertisements aimed at or featuring potentially vulnerable groups, including young people. We agree that ‘young people appear to be in particular need of protection from harmful stereotypes as they are more likely to internalise the messages they see’ - hence why it is so important to focus on these groups in the guidance.
3. One area where there could be improvement is to highlight the ways in which gender stereotypes intersect and reinforce stereotypes about race, sexual orientation and gender identity. It would be helpful to include further examples of these intersections in the guidance.
4. For example, CAP/ BCAP could show how LGBT+ people are harmed by gender stereotypes by highlighting the concerns identified with the “Spot the stallions from the mares!<sup>5</sup>” advert. Similarly, further examples featuring protected characteristic groups could be inserted within the section ‘scenarios featuring people who don’t conform to a gender stereotypes.’ LGBT+ people, as well as other groups, can be perceived as not conforming to gender stereotypes and this can lead them to be depicted in harmful and discriminatory ways (the idea that gay men are not ‘masculine’ enough, for instance).
5. It would also be helpful to link the guidance to current CAP or BCAP rules which cover protections on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity – including CAP Rule 4.1.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.asa.org.uk/rulings/paddy-power-plc-a12-188096.html>