

# Gender stereotyping

A consultation on CAP and BCAP's proposal for a rule and guidance to address the use of gender stereotypes in advertising

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## 1. Executive summary

In July 2017, the ASA, the independent body that assesses advertisements to ensure they comply with the UK Advertising Codes, published “[Depictions, Perceptions and Harm](#)” (henceforth “the ASA report”), which examined evidence from numerous sources on the potential effect of gender stereotypes depicted in advertising. There is a summary of this report available on the [ASA website](#).

CAP and BCAP, the authors of the Codes, publicly welcomed the report, which they consider makes an evidence-based case for regulatory change. In December 2017, CAP and BCAP undertook to develop, and propose through public consultation, a new rule and guidance on ads that depict gender stereotypes.

The ASA already applies CAP and BCAP rules on offence and social irresponsibility to ban ads that include gender stereotypes on grounds of objectification, inappropriate sexualisation and for depicting unhealthy thin body images. Evidence in the ASA report broadly supports ASA interventions on these grounds, but also presents, in the view of CAP and BCAP, a persuasive case to restrict ads that portray certain gender stereotypical roles and characteristics. These are ads that have potential to cause harm by playing a contributory role in restricting people’s choices, aspirations and opportunities, which can lead to real-world harm in the way people interact with each other and the way they view their own potential. The evidence suggests that tackling these stereotypes can help progress equality of opportunity, which is associated with significant physical, emotional and economic benefits.

The evidence indicates that some groups such as children might be more vulnerable to internalising potentially harmful stereotypes, but that all members of society are likely to be affected to a degree.

Advertising is obviously not the only influence that can reinforce gender stereotypes, but CAP and BCAP consider the evidence indicates it does play a role. Their proposed new rule and guidance are intended to respond proportionately to the potential for harm that can arise from the depiction of these kinds of stereotypes in advertising. The new rule is also intended to give a clearer basis on which to restrict ads that include potentially harmful or seriously offensive depictions of gender stereotypes on the grounds of objectification, inappropriate sexualisation and for depicting unhealthy thin body images.

The evidence does not demonstrate that the use of gender stereotypes is always problematic, nor that the use of seriously offensive or potentially harmful stereotypes in advertising is endemic.

As part of its process, CAP and BCAP pre-consulted advertising practitioners to help meet objectives that rules and guidance should be easily understood, easily implemented and easily enforced. As a routine part of the process, a consumer perspective was also sought from the [Advertising Advisory Committee](#).

CAP and BCAP consider the case for a new rule and guidance on ads that depict gender stereotypes is persuasive. They seek respondents’ views on whether the proposed rule and guidance are necessary and offer the appropriate means of delivering change in a transparent, proportionate, targeted and helpful manner. Respondents are asked for their views on the rule and on the contents of the guidance, as set out in Annex 1.

The consultation will close at 5pm on 26 July 2018. For full details of how to respond to the consultation, please see below.

## 2. Introduction to UK advertising regulation

### 2.1 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 (the 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 their 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 Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), or further sanctions including the denial of media space.

CAP's members include organisations that represent advertising, promotional and direct marketing and media businesses. Through their membership of CAP member organisations, or through contractual agreements with media publishers and carriers, those 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 unfair business to consumer commercial practices). 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](http://www.cap.org.uk).

### 2.2 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 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, Sianel Pedwar Cymru (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](http://www.cap.org.uk).

### 2.3 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](http://www.asa.org.uk).

### 2.4 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](http://www.asbof.co.uk) and [www.basbof.co.uk](http://www.basbof.co.uk).

### 3. Regulatory framework of the BCAP Code

#### 3.1 Communications Act 2003

The [Communications Act 2003](#) (the Act) sets out provisions for the regulation of broadcasting and television and radio services, including provisions aimed at securing standards for broadcast advertisements. The most relevant standards objective to this consultation is:

[319\(2\)\(h\)](#) that the inclusion of advertising which may be misleading, harmful or offensive in television and radio services is prevented.

The Act requires Ofcom to set and, from time to time, review and revise, a Code containing standards for the content of broadcast advertisements carried by TV and radio services licensed under the Broadcasting Acts [1990](#) and [1996](#). Ofcom has contracted out the setting of advertising standards to BCAP under the [Contracting Out \(Functions Relating to Broadcast Advertising\) and Specification of Relevant Functions Order 2004](#). That function is exercised in consultation with and agreement of Ofcom.

## 4. Gender stereotypes in advertising

This section highlights evidence presented in the ASA report, “[Depictions, Perceptions and Harm](#)”, that persuaded CAP and BCAP to develop, and propose through consultation, new standards on gender stereotyping in advertising. Respondents are urged to consider the report [in full](#).

Advertising often uses a variety of stereotypes, including gender stereotypes, in order to engage with consumers. Depicting gender stereotypes is often a benign way to achieve consumer engagement, but in some cases the depictions can reinforce perceptions about how people should look or behave because of their gender which can in turn reinforce real-world harms or inequalities.

The ASA report makes clear that potentially harmful or seriously offensive depictions of gender stereotypes are not rife within advertising, and advertising is not the only influence which reinforces perceptions of gender stereotypes within society. However, that report enables CAP and BCAP to take an evidence-based, proportionate position on the specific issues raised by research, stakeholders and the public to prevent ads from depicting the kinds of gender stereotypes that could be linked to unequal or harmful outcomes for adults and children.

There is not one piece of evidence on which the case for change is predicated, rather a combination of contextual, academic, stakeholder-generated and qualitative evidence which builds up a picture of the case for change. The evidence helpfully draws out specific depictions and treatments which are more likely to be linked to harmful outcomes.

The ASA report identified six categories of gender stereotypes:

- **Roles:** Occupations or positions usually associated with a specific gender
- **Characteristics:** Attributes or behaviours associated with a specific gender
- **Mocking people for not conforming to stereotype:** Making fun of someone for behaving or looking in a non-gender stereotypical way
- **Sexualisation:** Portraying individuals in a highly sexualised manner
- **Objectification:** Depicting someone in a way that focuses on their body or body parts
- **Body image:** Depicting an unhealthy body image

The ASA report concluded that the ASA’s existing position on sexualisation, objectification and body image was broadly in the right place; while the ASA has previously considered complaints under general offence and social responsibility rules, the evidence suggests it may be appropriate in the future to consider depictions of those kinds of stereotypes through the prism of harm. CAP and BCAP have updated their [Advice Online](#) to ensure they reflect the evidence base set out in the report.

The ASA report found that more needed to be done on gender stereotypical roles and characteristics portrayed in ads. The evidence indicates that the potential for harm arises where gender stereotypes contribute to widespread assumptions and reinforce expectations about how individuals should look or behave according to their gender. For example, a stereotype that women should prioritise appearance over other factors in their life might limit women’s career potential, while a stereotype that implies men should not talk

about their emotions might prevent men from seeking support for mental health issues. The weight of evidence suggests that, wherever they appear or are reinforced, certain gender stereotypes can lead to mental, physical or social harm which can affect how people interact with each other and the way they perceive themselves.

As well as limiting people by presenting them with a specific set of acceptable behaviours, there can also be harmful outcomes for those who do not conform to stereotypes. Depictions that mock people for not conforming can reinforce the perception that conformity is the preferred option, leading to those who do not conform facing bullying and harmful discrimination in many areas of their lives.

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, and how adults in turn reinforce those perceptions for children. The evidence base also indicates that young people and new mothers could be potentially vulnerable to some gender stereotypes. The proposed guidance illustrates the kinds of treatments that are likely to be unacceptable in relation to these groups.



## 5. Legal context

### 5.1 Human Rights Act 1998

To the extent that they are UK public authorities, the Human Rights Act 1998 requires the ASA, BCAP and CAP to comply with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

Article 10(1) of the ECHR protects the right to freedom of expression, including commercial freedom of expression (for the purposes of this consultation, the right of companies to advertise legally-available products and services).

Article 10(2) of the ECHR allows for restrictions on freedom of expression, but requires that these are “*prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, ... for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, ...*”.

Non-statutory rules, such as those contained in a regulatory code, can be so prescribed, providing they have some legal basis, are clear and accessible, and are subject to review by the courts..

### 5.2 Communications Act 2003

In respect of the BCAP Code, section 319(1) of the Communications Act 2003 requires “*OFCOM to set, and from time to time to review and revise, such standards for the content of programmes to be included in television and radio services as appear to them best calculated to secure the standards objectives*”. The standards objectives include at section 219(2) “*(h) that the inclusion of advertising which may be misleading, harmful or offensive in television and radio services is prevented*”. Section 219(3) requires that such standards must be contained in one or more Codes (i.e. not simply in guidance), and section 219(4) requires that “*In setting or revising any standards under this section, OFCOM must have regard, in particular and to such extent as appears to them to be relevant to the securing of the standards objectives, to each of the following matters - (a) the degree of harm or offence likely to be caused by the inclusion of any particular sort of material in programmes generally, or in programmes of a particular description; ...*”. “*Programme*” is defined to include advertising (Section 405). Ofcom has contracted out (under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994) its functions relating to the setting, reviewing and revising of standards codes for broadcast advertising to BCAP.

### 5.3 Equality Act 2010

To the extent that they exercise functions of a public nature, BCAP and CAP must, under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 “*have due regard to the need to ... (a) eliminate discrimination ...; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; ...*”.

### 5.4 Summary

Any restriction on advertising must be “*necessary in a democratic society*” for one of the legitimate aims listed in Article 10(2) of the ECHR. The Communications Act requires BCAP to prevent advertisements from containing material that may harm, mislead or offend. Based on the evidence within the ASA report, a restriction on gender stereotyping that aims to meet a statutory duty under the Equality Act provides a further rationale.

This restriction must satisfy a pressing social need in a proportionate manner, for the protection of health and morals and the prevention of harm or serious or widespread offence. CAP and BCAP consider that the legitimate aim of the proposed restriction is the protection of adults and children from gender stereotyping in advertising that, in context, is likely to limit their potential in life and reinforce harmful expectations.

## 6. CAP and BCAP's decision to consult

The ASA report sets out the ASA's existing approach to considering complaints about gender stereotypes in ads. It notes that the ASA has a clear position on gender stereotypes that objectify or sexualise and feature unhealthily-thin body images, and a less-developed position on depictions of gender stereotypical roles and characteristics, and depictions that mock people for not conforming to stereotype.

The evidence indicates that depicting some kinds of gender stereotypes can reinforce potentially harmful or seriously offensive outcomes, but that advertising is not the only influence which contributes to those outcomes. In the light of this, the Committees consider that introducing a new rule with detailed supporting guidance would help advertisers to ensure that their ads do not include content which has the potential to harm or seriously offend.

ASA investigations into gender stereotypes are usually considered under the following rules, the interpretation of which is supported by CAP Advice Online<sup>1</sup> guidance (for non-broadcast advertising) that typically 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, or 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.*

*4.6 Marketing communications must not portray or represent anyone who is, or seems to be, under 18 in a sexual way. However, this rule does not apply to marketing*

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<sup>1</sup> <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>

*communications whose principal function is to promote the welfare of, or to prevent harm to, under-18s, provided any sexual portrayal or representation is not excessive.*

**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.*

**4.4** *Advertisements must not portray or represent anyone who is, or seems to be, under 18 in a sexual way. However, this rule does not apply to advertisements whose principal function is to promote the welfare of, or to prevent harm to, under-18s, provided any sexual portrayal or representation is not excessive.*

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

## **7. Proposed rules**

CAP and BCAP intend their rules to be easily understood, easily implemented and easily enforced. To better assist advertising practitioners to tell apart acceptable gender stereotypes from those that may be unacceptable in ads directed to a UK audience, and to assist the ASA in further developing its position on gender stereotypes in ads in line with findings in the ASA Report, CAP and BCAP consider a new rule and supporting guidance are necessary.

### **CAP rule 4.9**

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

See Advertising Guidance: “Depicting gender stereotypes likely to cause harm or serious or widespread offence”

### **BCAP rule 4.14**

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

See Advertising Guidance: “Depicting gender stereotypes likely to cause harm or serious or widespread offence”

## 8. New guidance

The draft guidance draws out the practical learnings from the report that identify the kinds of depictions which are likely to be problematic in ads. The guidance sets out the kinds of depictions that are likely to be a problem, noting that in some cases depictions of gender stereotypes will include overlapping categories. Each point of guidance is illustrated by practical examples.

CAP and BCAP have sought to strike a balance in providing guidance that reflects the detailed evidence base available yet allows sufficient flexibility for advertisers to promote their products and services, and for the ASA to consider each ad on a case by case basis when implementing new rules.

In implementing the new CAP and BCAP rules, the ASA is likely look to evidence of the types of harm that might be perpetuated by the depiction and reinforcement of gender stereotypes, for example by having particular regard to the perspective of those represented in ads rather than relying on whether a stereotype reflects a “generally accepted standard”.

The guidance uses neutral terms where the evidence relates to all people. Where the evidence base relates to specific elements which are more likely to be linked to harmful outcomes for men, women, boys or girls, this is reflected in the terminology.

The evidence base demonstrates that gender stereotypes that depict roles & characteristics or unhealthy body images, or that mock people for not conforming to gender stereotype can be harmful to men, women, boys and girls. The evidence base for gender stereotypes that sexualise or objectify tends to focus more on the potentially harmful effects on women than on men.

The draft guidance is attached in Annex 1.

### 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.
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.
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.

## 9. Responding to this consultation

### How to respond

CAP and BCAP invite written comments and supporting information / evidence on the proposals contained in this document by 5pm on Thursday 26 July 2018. Respondents submitting evidence may wish to consider CAP and BCAP's document which sets out their approach to [evidence-based policy making](#). Responses via the online form at <https://asa.org.uk/genderconsultation> are preferred. If you are unable to respond via the online form you may submit your response by fax to +44(0)20 7404 3404 or post to:

**Regulatory Policy Team  
Committee of Advertising Practice  
Mid City Place, 71 High Holborn  
London WC1V 6QT**

### Confidentiality

CAP and BCAP consider that everyone who is interested in the consultation should see the consultation responses. In their evaluation document, CAP and BCAP will publish all the relevant significant comments made by respondents and identify all non-confidential respondents. The evaluation and copies of original consultation responses will be published with the outcome of the consultation. All comments will be treated as non-confidential unless you state that all or a specified part of your response is confidential and should not be disclosed. If you reply by email or fax, unless you include a specific statement to the contrary in your response, the presumption of non-confidentiality will override any confidentiality disclaimer generated by your organisation's IT system or included as a general statement on your fax cover sheet. If part of a response is confidential, please put that in a separate annex so that non-confidential parts may be published with your identity. Confidential responses will be included in any statistical summary of numbers of comments received.

# Advertising guidance on depicting gender stereotypes likely to cause harm or serious or widespread offence



## Foreword

The Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) offers guidance on the interpretation of the UK Code of Non-broadcast Advertising and Direct & Promotional Marketing (the CAP Code) in relation to non-broadcast marketing communications.

The Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice (BCAP) offers guidance on the interpretation of the UK Code of Broadcast Advertising (the BCAP Code) in relation to broadcast advertisements.

Advertising Guidance is intended to guide advertisers, agencies and media owners on how to interpret the Codes but is not a substitute for those Codes. Advertising Guidance reflects CAP's and/or BCAP's intended effect of the Codes but neither constitutes new rules nor binds the ASA Councils in the event of a complaint about an advertisement that follows it.

For pre-publication advice on specific non-broadcast advertisements, consult the CAP Copy Advice team by telephone on 020 7492 2100, by fax on 020 7404 3404 or you can log a written enquiry via our [online request form](#).

For advice on specific TV advertisements, please contact [Clearcast](#).

For clearance advice on specific radio advertisements, please contact [Radiocentre](#).

For the full list of Advertising Guidance, please [visit our website](#).



## Understanding this guidance

This guidance is intended to help advertisers comply with the requirements of CAP and BCAP rules in the way they depict gender stereotypes in advertisements.

A wide body of evidence including that summarised in the ASA report indicates that certain kinds of gender stereotypes can negatively reinforce how people think they should look and behave, and how others think they should look and behave, due to their gender. This can lower their self-esteem and limit their aspirations and ability to progress in key aspects of their personal and professional lives with harmful consequences for them and for society as a whole.

CAP and BCAP consider that, while harmful stereotypes are not endemic in advertising and advertising is not the only factor that reinforces these stereotypes, it is appropriate to restrict ads that include the kinds of stereotypical depictions highlighted in this guidance.

The guidance is intended to support the interpretation of CAP rule 4.9 and BCAP rule 4.14:

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

*See Advertising Guidance: “Depicting gender stereotypes likely to cause harm or serious or widespread offence”*

Subject to the guiding principles set out in the scenario categories in this guidance, neither the rule nor the guidance are intended to prevent ads from featuring:

- glamorous, attractive, successful, aspirational or healthy people or lifestyles;
- one gender only, including in ads for products developed for and aimed at one gender;
- gender stereotypes as a means to challenge their negative effects.

## Key factors guiding the ASA's assessment

In its consideration of complaints, the ASA will consider an ad's likely impact when taken as a whole and in context. That may depend on the medium in which the ad appeared, the audience and its likely response. The ASA is likely to consider stereotypes from the perspective of the group of individuals being stereotyped. Unacceptable depictions are unlikely to be mitigated by the use of humour or 'banter'.

The use of other stereotypes can compound the effect of gender stereotypes and increase the likelihood of harm and/or offence being caused by the depiction of gender stereotypes. Stereotypes associated with gender can include gender reassignment and sexual orientation; other stereotypes can include those relating to age, disability, race, religion, beliefs, marriage, civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity.

The ASA will take into account this guidance when it assesses ads that depict a gender stereotype. The scenarios set out in this guidance are non-exhaustive and intended to help explain the sorts of ads that are likely to breach CAP rule 4.9 and BCAP rule 4.14.

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### Note

This guidance covers categories of gender stereotypes, which – at the time of publication – are not reflected, or not reflected adequately, in past ASA decisions. The ASA has, however, ruled against other categories of harmful and/or offensive stereotypes associated with gender; these rulings are reflected in the following notes of guidance:

**Offence: sexualisation and objectification**

**Social responsibility: body image**

**Children: sexual imagery**

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# GUIDANCE

## Scenarios featuring gender-stereotypical roles and characteristics

Gender-stereotypical roles include occupations or positions usually associated with a specific gender. Gender-stereotypical characteristics include attributes or behaviours usually associated with a specific gender.

Subject to the overall presentation of the ad the following examples depict scenarios involving gender stereotypes, which are likely to be unacceptable under CAP rule 4.9 and BCAP rule 4.14:

1. An ad that depicts a man with his feet up and family members creating mess around a home while a woman is solely responsible for cleaning up the mess.
2. Ads that directly contrast male and female stereotypical roles or characteristics need to be handled with care. An ad that depicts a man being adventurous juxtaposed with a woman being delicate or dainty is likely to be unacceptable.
3. An ad that depicts a man or a woman failing to achieve a task specifically because of their gender e.g. a man's inability to change nappies; a woman's inability to park a car. General treatments such as 'so easy, even a man can do it' are likely to be unacceptable.
4. An ad that depicts a woman prioritising the application of make-up over being on time for a work meeting and is late for the meeting as a result. This doesn't prevent the depiction of a woman applying make-up at work. Care should be taken not to suggest in an ad that women should prioritise their appearance over their professional conduct in the workplace.
5. An ad in which a man is belittled for displaying emotional vulnerability.

### Guiding principles

Ads may feature people undertaking gender-stereotypical roles e.g. a woman cleaning the house or a man doing DIY, or displaying gender-stereotypical characteristics e.g. a man being assertive or a woman being sensitive to others' needs, but they should take care to avoid suggesting that stereotypical roles or characteristics are:

- always uniquely associated with one gender;
- the only options available to one gender;
- never carried out or displayed by another gender.

## Scenarios featuring pressure to conform to an idealised gender-stereotypical body shape or physical features

Subject to the overall presentation of the ad, the following examples depict scenarios involving gender stereotypes, which are likely to be unacceptable under CAP rule 4.9 and BCAP rule 4.14:

6. An ad that depicts a person who was unhappy with multiple aspects of their life, then implies that all their problems were solved by changing their body shape alone to conform to gender-stereotypical norms, without addressing other aspects of their life. This does not prevent responsible ads for weight loss products or services<sup>1</sup>.

7. Where an ad features a person with a physique that does not match an ideal stereotypically associated with their gender, the ad should not imply that their physique is a significant reason for them not being successful, for example in their romantic or social lives.

### Guiding principles

Ads may feature idealised body shapes and physical features stereotypically associated with women (e.g. a small waist) and men (e.g. an abdominal ‘six pack’) but they should take care to avoid suggesting that an individual’s happiness or emotional wellbeing should depend on conforming to an idealised gender-stereotypical body shape or physical features.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.asa.org.uk/type/non\\_broadcast/code\\_section/13.html](https://www.asa.org.uk/type/non_broadcast/code_section/13.html)  
[https://www.asa.org.uk/type/broadcast/code\\_section/12.html](https://www.asa.org.uk/type/broadcast/code_section/12.html)

## Scenarios aimed at or featuring children

Subject to the overall presentation of the ad the following examples depict scenarios involving gender stereotypes, which are likely to be unacceptable under CAP rule 4.9 and BCAP rule 4.14:

8. Ads shouldn't explicitly depict members of a specific gender being excluded from or dismissive of an activity. This doesn't prevent an ad from depicting children undertaking an activity stereotypically associated with their gender, using colours, language, music or settings which are also stereotypically associated with that gender.
9. An ad that seeks to emphasise the contrast between a boy's stereotypical personality (e.g. daring) with a girl's stereotypical personality (e.g. caring) needs to be handled with care. Explicit labelling of children that contrasts stereotypical characteristics in a way that reinforces perceptions of what children can or cannot be, because of their gender, is more likely to be problematic.

### Guiding principles

Ads can be targeted at and feature a specific gender but should take care not to explicitly convey that a particular children's product, pursuit, activity, including choice of play or career, is inappropriate for one or another gender.

## Scenarios aimed at or featuring potentially vulnerable groups

Subject to the overall presentation of the ad, the following examples depict scenarios involving gender stereotypes, which are likely to be unacceptable under CAP rule 4.9 and BCAP rule 4.14:

**10.** An ad aimed at new mums which suggests that looking attractive or keeping a home pristine is a priority over other factors such as their emotional wellbeing.

**11.** An ad aimed at young people which implies that an idealised, gender-stereotypical physical appearance or particular body shape is necessary for social or romantic success, or which suggests they should prioritise appearance at the expense of other qualities in order to gain the acceptance of their peers. This does not preclude advertisements from featuring healthy, attractive or successful individuals or from depicting glamorous or aspirational scenarios.

### Guiding principles

Ads should be sensitive to the emotional and physical well-being of vulnerable groups of people who may be under pressure to conform to particular gender stereotypes.

## Scenarios featuring people who don't conform to a gender stereotype

Subject to the overall presentation of the ad, the following examples depict scenarios involving gender stereotypes, which are likely to be unacceptable under CAP rule 4.9 and BCAP rule 4.14:

**12.** An ad that belittles a man for carrying out stereotypically 'female' roles or tasks.

**13.** An ad that mocks groups or individuals for not conforming to stereotypical expectations of their gender.

### Guiding principles

Ads should avoid mocking people for not conforming to gender stereotypes, including in a context that is intended to be humorous.



**Committee of Advertising Practice**

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