A guide to progressive gender portrayals in advertising

The case for unstereotyping ads
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background: gender bias and representation in advertising</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why does this matter?</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A social case for change</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy implications</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A business case for change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An industry on the move</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to un stereotype ads</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lessons from some leading brands</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contagious case studies</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: ANA, Alibaba, AT&T, Cannes Lions, Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, Diageo, Facebook, Google, IPA, Interpublic Group, J&J, Mars, Mattel, P&G, Publicis, The Female Quotient, Twitter, Unilever, WFA, WPP; Visit unstereotypealliance.org

*"LikeaGirl", Always (Procter & Gamble), 2014*
Introduction

At the Cannes Lions Festival 2017, UN Women and a number of leading voices in the marketing and advertising industry including WFA,1 founded the Unstereotype Alliance.2 The Alliance recognises that advertisers and creatives have the power to influence culture and society in a positive way through how people are portrayed in advertising and marketing. The initiative was born from the belief that we need a new, unprecedented agenda for the industry that breaks down outdated and harmful stereotypes about men and women and helps to create a world with unlimited possibilities. As part of WFA’s commitment to the Alliance we have developed this short guide which we hope will build awareness for the movement among our corporate members around the world, our national advertiser associations in 60 countries on six continents and the tens of thousands of brands represented by them at local level.

“I wholeheartedly welcome WFA’s efforts to help spread the message of the Unstereotype Alliance. We’ve started to see real progress but it doesn’t yet go far enough or wide enough. Our job won’t be done as long as ads still diminish or limit the role of women and men in society. I hope that this WFA guide can share knowledge and insights across global brand owners, and critically, to their 60 national advertiser associations so that they can see why this is no longer just a social imperative but a business one. This is exactly the kind of collective, cross-sector collaboration that is needed and which I hope leads to sustained transformation across our industry.”

- Keith Weed, Chief Marketing and Communications Officer, Unilever

“We know that harmful stereotypes of both women and men have a deep impact on how we see and treat each other. Intentionally changing those images has huge potential to positively transform our culture and bring us closer to true, inclusive equality. UN Women applauds the work of WFA to bring this to life, redefining how the industry shows who people are, not just what they are. This change will help us to collectively realize the promise of the Sustainable Development Goals – to leave no one behind.”

- Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women

This guide aims to illustrate how the advertising industry needs to move with the times in terms of gender portrayal in advertising. And it is not just “a nice to do”. There are compelling social and policy-based reasons why the marketing industry needs to evolve. Critically, there is also a very compelling business case for why industry must act.

“We applaud the efforts of the WFA in helping to move forward the important goals of the Unstereotype Alliance. Taking on stereotypes in advertising is both an important and challenging effort that requires participation from many sectors including agencies, clients and trade groups. In order to make real change that will ultimately influence cultural norms and society’s views, we need to commit resources and expertise to this key initiative. Like us, the WFA understands that the elimination of stereotypes in advertising is essential to successful and meaningful advertising and marketing.”

- Michael Roth, Chairman and CEO, Interpublic

This is only the beginning of a global movement. But some industry leaders have already made great progress in terms of addressing gender portrayals in their own marketing communications.

They have also comprehensively researched and developed a strong understanding of how ‘unstereotyping’ – the use of messages that don’t confine either gender to a traditional or limited role but instead show them as progressive and modern, authentic and multidimensional – can have both a positive impact on both society and on the company bottom line. It is our ambition as WFA to help gather insights and share best practices across the broader marketing industry.

“Our industry needs to be brave enough to depict society in a realistic way rather than reinforce potentially harmful stereotypes. We’re witnessing a broader movement; it’s time for the marketing industry to play its part in promoting and reflecting diversity and equality in all its different facets and guises and at a global level.”

- David Wheldon, CMO RBS and WFA President

Of course, addressing gender stereotypes is only the first step. Going forward, it is our ambition to address other dimensions of identity too. Gender stereotypes do not exist in a vacuum but are rather often intertwined with others around race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical ability, class and education.

We welcome any comments you may have and will endeavour to incorporate your feedback into our next edition. In the meantime, I sincerely hope this inspires you to challenge yourselves and the status quo for the benefit of society, our industry and our businesses at large.

Yours sincerely,

Stephan Loerke
WFA CEO
The issue of gender equality has never been more in the spotlight in so many countries around the world. Initiatives such as #metoo, #timesup and #balancetonporc are symptomatic of a movement towards greater gender equality.

According to the World Bank\(^3\), over the past two years 87 legal changes towards gender equality have been made in 65 countries worldwide. In January 2018, Iceland became the first country in the world to make companies prove they are not paying women less than men for the same work. The UK, Denmark and Finland are taking similar measures. In March 2016, the US launched a “U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls.” Today, there is an impending Equality Act\(^4\).

Real change is in the air. But is this a reflection of what’s going on in the advertising industry?

The ad industry has in the past been afflicted by age-old stereotypes perpetuated by series such as Mad Men, where male dominance is rife and women assume the role of subordinates in the workplace – an image reinforced by many of the ads that came out of Madison Avenue in the 1960s.

Today many of us witness – with no small degree of incredulity – compilations of misogynist ads from the 1940s, 50s and 60s\(^5\).

But are we conscious that many of the ads our industry produces today still communicate and reinforce, often in more subtle ways, those very same messages?

On the whole, the advertising industry has struggled to portray both women and men proportionally and realistically. We are still seeing women and men depicted in outdated, unacceptable ways, even if gender stereotypes are now often presented in a more subtle manner.

It is very clearly time to shed any anachronistic perceptions and for the industry to take a leading role to ensure that advertising has a positive rather than negative impact in terms of representing and promoting gender equality in society.

Research\(^6\) by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media and J. Walter Thompson presented at the 2017 Cannes Lions found that 85% of women say film and advertising need to catch up with the real world.

The study, which is based on analysis of more than 2,000 English-language films from the Cannes Lions Archive from 2006 to 2016, with a focus on winning and shortlisted entries, also found no evidence of change between 2006 and 2017.

There are twice as many male actors in ads as female actors

- 25% of ads feature men only, while only 5% of ads feature women only;
- 18% of ads feature only male voices, while less than 3% of ads feature only female voices

Source: Gender Bias in Advertising, Research, Trends and New Visual Language

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Further analysis demonstrated that women were still clearly second best in more subtle but important ways. In the field of humour, for example, men were more likely to be funny as well as likely to be objectified with one in ten female actors shown in sexually revealing clothing – six times the number of male actors – and when it comes to intelligence, men are 62% more likely to be shown as inherently intelligent characters, such as a doctor.

Other measures on age, location and work followed a similar pattern, underlining the ongoing pervasiveness of gender inequality in advertising.

Similar issues have also been highlighted by Unilever, with 40% of women not relating at all to the women they see in ads, according to a year-long audit of the advertising industry in 2015.

Women don’t identify with what they see in ads

• 30% felt that advertising shows women as perceived by men;
• Just 3% of women were portrayed as aspirational or in leadership positions;
• Only 0.03% of women were portrayed as funny; and
• Only 1% of women were portrayed as heroes or problem solvers

Source: Unilever CMI research studies

While women are clearly the most impacted group when it comes to gender bias, it affects men too. Many men are also often uncomfortable with the way they are portrayed. A study by fashion brand Jacamo found that 52% of UK men don’t feel represented in ads.

Research by Unilever found that men were often limited to basic characteristics based on a stereotype of tough, rugged men who were highly heterosexual, homophobic and often aggressive.

The truth is that gender bias still makes it to the screen, billboard and banner ad. The research underpins the need for initiatives such as the Unstereotype Alliance to transform the ads we still see in commercial breaks, in the street or while browsing the web.
A social case for change

“Stereotypes reflect deep-rooted ideas of femininity and masculinity. Negative, diminished conceptions of women and girls are one of the greatest barriers for gender equality and we need to tackle and change those images wherever they appear. Advertising is a particularly powerful driver to change perceptions and impact social norms.” - Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women and Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations

In 2017, Science Magazine published a study looking at the age at which girls begin to think that they are less intellectually brilliant than boys. The researchers looked at 400 children from a variety of backgrounds and concluded that this perception starts to take root at the age of six.

The US study told two stories to children between the ages of five and seven. One, they explained, was about a “really, really smart” person; the other, a “really, really nice” one. Afterwards, the children were asked which story was about a girl, and which was about a boy. At five, the boys were sure the “really, really smart” character was a boy, and the girls were certain it must be a girl. By six, however, the girls had changed their minds. Over time, they became about 20% less likely to say that the person could be female.

The Unstereotype Alliance Manifesto states that “stereotypes are everywhere, we can’t escape them. It’s that unconscious bias we place on things before we even know it, that is why they can be harmful.” It’s that unconscious bias that lies at the root of the problem and which is so important to try and address.

A father and son are driving in a car and get into an accident. The father dies and the son is rushed into hospital. The surgeon sees the boy and says “I cannot operate, this is my son. Who’s the surgeon?”

A significant percentage of respondents do not think that the surgeon might be the boy’s mother on account of unconscious gender bias

The potential damage caused by gender stereotyping not just by the advertising industry but by media as a whole and society at large has long been recognised.

An Eurobarometer poll (November 2017) suggests that women were more likely than men to think there is a problem with the way women are presented in the media and advertising (59% vs 48%), and to feel that this problem needs to be addressed (45% vs 33%). More than four in 10 men think there is no problem, compared to one third of women (44% vs 33%).

Why does this matter?

The failure of the advertising industry to always reflect society matters for multiple reasons and has important consequences.

As many companies and industry initiatives are now showing, getting it right can lead to a competitive business advantage.

Research by major FMCG companies has found that as many as three in four women consider themselves the primary shopper in their household and that two thirds of consumer spending is controlled by women. Advertising that undermines or offends its core demographic not only defies good sense but can also prove counterproductive.

Furthermore, getting it wrong can result in consumer backlash and reputation loss that can be hard to overcome.
Such findings are backed up by multiple other studies. Research for Dove highlights the pervasive impact that media portrayal can have on women. The Dove Global Beauty and Confidence Report 2016 found that when women don’t feel good about the way they look, nine out of 10 women and eight out of 10 girls will opt out of important life activities such as engaging with friends and loved ones.

The same report found that eight in 10 women and girls feel under pressure to never make mistakes or show weakness, while seven out of 10 women and girls believe media and advertising set an unrealistic standard of beauty most women can’t achieve.

Additionally, seven in 10 women and girls wish the media did a better job of portraying women of diverse physical attractiveness.

Evidence is also emerging about how perceptions of modern masculinity are changing.

Canadian yoga apparel brand Lululemon surveyed more than 2,000 Americans to discover their attitudes towards masculinity. The results showed 24% of respondents had changed their view of masculinity over the past five years, 44% said society was now more open and accepting with regards masculinity, and 35% said being mentally strong is one of the biggest pressures facing men today.

Unilever’s Man Box study, which looked at men in the US, UK and Mexico found that social pressure was influencing their ability to talk about their issues, their self-image and their behaviour.

Between 2015 and 2016, around a third of complaints considered by the UK’s Advertising Standards Authority about the depiction of gender concerned problematic depictions of men.

As these examples show, gender identity is changing, however advertising has probably not changed enough.

**Reported social pressure to fit into the man box**

Percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree that “Society as a whole tells me that...”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pillar 1: Self-Sufficiency</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>Mexico</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A man who talks a lot about his worries, fears, and problems shouldn’t really get respect</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men should figure out their personal problems on their own without asking others for help</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pillar 2: Acting Tough</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>Mexico</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A guy who doesn’t fight back when others push him around is weak</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guys should act strong even if they feel scared or nervous inside</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pillar 3: Physical Attractiveness</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>Mexico</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is very hard for a man to be successful if he does not look good</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women don’t go for guys who fuss too much about their clothes, hair and skin</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A guy who spends a lot of time on his looks isn’t very manly</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pillar 4: Rigid Masculine Gender Roles</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>Mexico</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is not good for a boy to be taught how to cook, sew, clean the house, and take care of younger children</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A husband shouldn’t have to do household chores</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men should really be the ones to bring money home to provide for their families, not women</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pillar 5: Hetrosexuality and Homophobia</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>Mexico</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A gay guy is not a “real man”</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight guys being friends with gay guys is totally fine and normal (positive statement)</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pillar 6: Hypersexuality</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>Mexico</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A “real man” should have as many sexual partners as he can</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A “real man” would never say no to sex</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pillar 7: Aggression and Control</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>Mexico</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men should use violence to get respect, if necessary</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A man should always have the final say about decisions in his relationship or marriage</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If a guy has a girlfriend or wife, he deserves to know where she is all the time</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sourced by WFA from The Man Box: A Study on Being a Young Man in the US, UK, and Mexico, March 2017
While a growing number of countries have legislated for equal pay, equal opportunity and against discrimination, harmful stereotypes across the media landscape, not just in advertising, make it harder to smash the cultural ceiling that is often placed on women.

Gender portrayal of women and men in advertising is something that has not been regulated until relatively recently. Many countries do have non-discriminatory provisions in place but the number of countries with more detailed guidance and rules remains relatively limited.\(^14\)

The International Chamber of Commerce Code on Advertising and Marketing Communication Practice\(^15\), which, globally, forms the basis of local ad standards, stipulates 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”.

Advertising standards bodies and industry self-regulatory organisations (SROs) are taking increasing action to ensure advertising respects healthy and progressive gender portrayal.

### Why does this matter?

In Europe specifically, as early as 2008 the European Advertising Standards Alliance (EASA), a network of 27 SROs and 14 industry bodies committed to effective advertising standards in Europe and beyond, highlighted that the industry must ensure that women and men are portrayed responsibly in advertising.

In a 2009 paper, EASA identified a number of sensitive matters in areas which appeared to have been the most problematic and therefore require attention. These include stereotypes of role (e.g. suggesting that household tasks are a ‘woman’s work’), nudity and sexual innuendo (blatant or gratuitous use of nudity in contexts where it has little or no relevance to the product advertised), exploitation as sex objects, denigration (when one sex is portrayed as generally inferior to the other), language and the use of specific features, such as humour.

A failure by industry to properly address the issues can lead to statutory regulations. Cities such as London have taken action to ban sexist advertising and are regulating outdoor much more closely. Paris recently took action after public outrage at Yves Saint Laurent ads that portrayed women in an apparently misogynist and humiliating way.

Other cities are also looking at similar steps, especially in Europe, following an initiative by the European Parliament calling for cities to sign a “charter of commitment against sexist advertising”.\(^17\)

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### Table: Gender sensitivity in advertising

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REGULATION</th>
<th>SELF-REGULATION</th>
<th>GUIDANCE</th>
<th>NO RULES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No gender discrimination in ads</td>
<td>Portrayal of gender in advertising</td>
<td>ICC code in full or as basis / or similar</td>
<td>Specific rules re. gender stereotypes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium, France, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, UK</td>
<td>Norway, Spain</td>
<td>Australia, Bulgaria, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, UK</td>
<td>Finland, Ireland, Germany, India, Italy, Austria, South Africa, New Zealand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sourced by WFA from ASA’s Depictions, Perceptions and Harm: A report on gender stereotypes in advertising, July 2017.
The EU has published six reports\textsuperscript{18} in the last 10 years calling for action to combat sexist representations of people in media and advertising. The latest\textsuperscript{19}, from March 2018, calls for action for more equal advertising, but also acknowledges that “advertising can be an effective tool in challenging stereotypes”.

In Australia, the advertising standards code of conduct was updated\textsuperscript{20} in order to strengthen the rules on sexual appeal, prohibiting advertisements which could be seen to be exploitative or degrading.

In France, the advertising industry standards body (Autorité de Régulation Professionelle de la Publicité – ARPP) developed a code to prevent any depiction or representation of men or women which do not respect “the dignity of the human person”.

But there is pressure to go further and a November 2017 report by the French broadcast watchdog (Conseil Superieur de l’Audiovisuel – CSA), confirmed that too many stereotypes were still prevalent in ads. 82% of so-called experts in ads were males while women were still typically being sexualised\textsuperscript{21}. This is why together with the CSA, the whole ad industry signed a charter in March by which they commit to take further actions to tackle stereotyped and sexist ads\textsuperscript{22}.

Like many other self-regulatory organisations, the Swedes apply the general ICC rule against gender discrimination and include additional criteria about objectification and denigration. The local SRO organizes training for marketers on how to interpret the code twice a year and they claim to have witnessed a major evolution in how people are portrayed in ads. A lot of pressure remains however in a country which is extremely sensitive to gender stereotypes and where 50% of all complaints to the SRO are still about gender.

Political pressure is high – and increasingly so since regulators are starting to understand the economic gains that come from a society and an economy that is truly gender neutral are huge.

According to McKinsey\textsuperscript{23}, if women played identical roles to men in the labour force – employed at the same rate, for the same number of hours, in the same industry sectors – it would add up to US$28 trillion, or 26%, to global GDP by 2025. This impact would be roughly equivalent to the size of the combined Chinese and US economies today!

However, regulating gender portrayal is tricky. Identifying a stereotype is a subjective exercise so developing detailed statutory rules can be hard to implement and enforce.

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\textsuperscript{18} EPRS | Gender equality in the media and digital sectors, Mar 2018;
\textsuperscript{19} European Parliament | Report on gender equality in the media sector in the EU, Feb 2018, p.12;
\textsuperscript{20} AANA | Sexual appeal in advertising: Code of Ethics evolved, September 2017;
\textsuperscript{21} CSA | Représentation des femmes dans les publicités télévisées, October 2017;
\textsuperscript{22} New Zealand Herald | France wants a stop to sexist stereotypes in advertising, 7 Mar 2018;
\textsuperscript{23} McKinsey Global Institute | The power of parity: How advancing women’s equality can add $28 trillion to global GDP by 2025.
Why does this matter?

A business case for change

Communication is the true outward expression of a company, its beliefs and its culture. Gender-neutral or gender-equal companies and brands are likely to benefit hugely from expressing progressive attitudes in their advertising.

Firstly, because when it comes to women, they make a huge number of purchase decisions, particularly when it comes to fast-moving consumer goods. According to Mars, not only are 70% of all brand purchasing decisions made by women but 75% of women identify themselves as the primary shopper for their household. Moreover, the World Economic Forum has identified that 64% of all consumer spending is controlled by women.

Secondly, and more broadly, consumers are increasingly looking to companies to make a positive difference in society. Delivering a progressive, gender-neutral message is one clear way of meeting that demand.

At Unilever, they have seen a 25% more branded impact and engagement with their unostentatious and progressive ads. This is not only a moral imperative, it’s a business priority.

Research by the US-based ANA in the framework of their #SeeHer initiative found that brands that deliver progressive ads have been shown to be associated with a higher purchase intent of more than 25% for all consumers and 45% for women only.

Finally, the offshoot of getting it wrong can be detrimental to brand reputation. In an ultra-connected world where consumers voice their opinions on brands around the clock on social media, a poorly-thought through, ‘tone deaf’ campaign can have a negative long-term impact on a brand’s reputation.

Brands under fire

- Controversial US retailer American Apparel has not only regularly broken advertising rules for using exploitative images of young women, but has also come under fire after asking its employees to wear t-shirts and button pins which read ‘ask me to take it all off’ during the store’s Black Friday sales. In 2017, the brand announced that it is shutting down all US stores.

- Protein World’s controversial “beach body ready” campaign – the weight-loss ads featuring a bikini-clad model sparked a huge backlash over alleged “body shaming” including a protest in London’s Hyde Park and a petition on Change.org that attracted more than 70,000 signatures.

- An Yves Saint Laurent campaign came under fire during Paris Fashion Week for promoting “porno chic,” with ads that show an underweight model in fishnet tights opening her legs for the camera.

- In the UK, Gap Kids sparked fury after an advert referred to boys as ‘scholars’ and girls as ‘social butterflies’.

- Bic was forced to apologise and quickly remove its #HappyWomensDay ad on Facebook in South Africa in 2015, after the tagline ‘act like a lady, think like a man’ caused social media outcry over its sexist undertones.

- In Singapore, Burger King ran a suggestive ad for something called the Super Seven Incher. The copy: “Fill your desire for something long, juicy and flame-grilled” and the suggestive image received significant negative press.

70% of all brand purchasing decisions are made by women
75% of women identify themselves as the primary shopper for their household
64% of all consumer spending is controlled by women
The marketing industry is not standing still and a number of
industry-wide initiatives are already under way.

A key element of the Unstereotype Alliance is that its
members – which include leaders across business,
technology and the creative industries – commit to
developing progressive brand content in line with
a set of principles that all participating organisations
pledge to respect.

These principles include depicting people as empowered
actors, refraining from objectifying people and
portraying progressive and multi-dimensional, rather than
vacuous, personalities.

The second element is that signatories pledge to create
a workplace and business culture within the advertising
industry where women are better represented and more
involved in the creative process. Both objectives will be
regularly monitored and progress will be reported on publicly.

In the US, the Association of National Advertisers-
led #SeeHer has worked to demonstrate that gender
representation is actively impacting ad effectiveness
and business results.

Launched as an industry response to the White
House’s concerns about the under-representation
of women in the fields of science, technology,
engineering and medicine, the ambition is to see a
20% increase in the “accurate portrayal of all girls and
women” in media by 2020.

The initiative builds on a potent, new, data-driven
methodology, called the Gender Equality Measure
(GEM), to identify and eliminate gender bias, which
can be applied at all testing stages.

Taking a different approach and building on the global
#MeToo and #TimesUp movements, the UK Advertising
Association’s #timeTo aims to take positive steps to
stamp out sexual harassment in the industry. #timeTo
will produce a best-practice Code of Behaviour for all
companies to implement.

In parallel, many brands are realizing the business
opportunity for companies that can demonstrate a real
commitment to equality.

General Mills and HP have both demanded greater
diversity on their agency teams as a condition of winning
business, with General Mills even going a step further
and stipulating that the competing agencies must be staffed
with at least 50% women and 20% people of colour within
their creative departments.

Cannes Lions and HP have launched a pilot mentoring
programme aimed at building and strengthening diversity
among creative talent in the advertising industry. Called
#MoreLikeMe, the initiative builds on HP’s marketing
diversity scorecard, which exists to support its roster of
agencies to increase the number of women and people
from ethnic minorities in creative and strategic roles.

This builds on previous initiatives at the Festival of Creativity,
including the introduction of the Glass Lion: The Lion for
Change, which has given an additional platform for those
brands that get it right when addressing gender inequality
or prejudice. The winner in 2017 was State Street Global
Advisors Fearless Girl statue in New York.

A new category of campaigns has now emerged; on the
female side these are referred to as ‘brand feminism’ or
‘femvertising’ – brands that sell empowerment to women –
and on the male side the desire to develop campaigns that
redefine modern masculinity as something in its own right
rather than in opposition to female stereotypes.

A good example of this has been the new Axe/Lynx
campaign Find Your Magic, which moves the brand away
from decades of objectification. It urges men to ditch
macho stereotypes and embrace a more enlightened
version of masculinity instead. Axe has always been
about attraction, and they haven’t moved away from
that. But they wanted to portray the genuine, relevant,
modern world of attraction – the true magic that happens
between two equals.
There are a number of steps that marketers can take to improve the way they and their brands address the issue of gender. In order to get the advertisements right, these steps need to take into account both the creative but also the right processes that lead to better unstereotyped ads.

1. **Encourage diversity in your teams**

   Stereotypes are often not just the product of lazy thinking but also cultural conditioning. By having diverse teams – both internally and externally – working on creative and brand issues stereotypes are more likely to be challenged during the development process and hopefully unconscious bias reduced. The end result should be a more powerful message based on a deep insight that resonates more effectively with the target audience.

   HP’s demand for a more diverse team to work on its account is an important step in the right direction. Ultimately the team that works on a brand should reflect the user and target base as they will be better positioned to spot opportunities and sensitivities.

   **ASK YOURSELF** Does my internal team and partner team at my agencies reflect my target audience?

2. **Track performance**

   Marketing is often about incremental gains and while everyone wants to see rapid progress across the board, consistent small steps from across the brand landscape will ensure we at least move in the right direction. #SeeHer’s GEM approach or Geena Davis’s research team both allow brands to use data to track gender approach as part of the pre-testing process. This allows brands to eliminate or improve elements that are likely to be damaging to their reputation before they are seen by the public.

   **ASK YOURSELF** How am I able to track improvements in gender approach? Speak to your research partners to identify clear metrics that can be monitored. What is the representation of women versus men in our ads? Are we testing our ads with an equal number of men and women, etc.?

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### Brands getting it right

**“Find Your Magic”, Axe (Unilever), 2016**

**“6 Pack Band”, Red Label (Hindustan Unilever), 2016**

**“Role Models”, Barbie (Mattel), 2018**

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Sources: *The Guardian* | Brewdog’s pink ‘beer for girls’ criticised as marketing stunt, 6 Mar 2018
Find your purpose

The process by which brands can develop an authentic purpose, that’s to say trying to uncover the underlying truth or thing that your brand stands for involves challenging many of the same issues and thoughts that can lead to damaging gender messages. Think Always #likeagirl, Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty or GoldieBlox’s empowering girls to problem solving. By working through the strategic process to identify where your brand can make a real difference to its supply chain, consumers or workers, you will be able to identify the structural challenges that stop your brand embracing and celebrating diversity.

ASK YOURSELF What does my brand stand for that benefits both men and women?

Think long-term

We live in a cynical age and as Brewdog recently discovered with its ‘pink beer for girls’ in the UK, simply launching a campaign that has its heart in the right place is not enough. Campaigners and consumers want to see real commitment that goes beyond a single message or a particular day. If you are clearly investing time and money in doing the right thing and can point to clear improvements you are more likely to avoid the hubris that can come with any mistakes. That’s what will differentiate a progressive brand from a brand with a progressive one-off campaign.

ASK YOURSELF Where do we want to be in the next three years on gender diversity and proper representation and build an action plan for improvement.

Go beyond marketing

Ultimately taking action on gender requires company-wide change not just small tweaks to the process. Getting this right means establishing a culture that is gender aware both for people internally and for external messaging. It’s no good having great marketing if your company is being castigated for failure to act on equal pay or poor professional development. And even if you’re doing great on gender-sensitive marketing, your efforts will be undermined if you ignore the other aspects of diversity (e.g. race, national origin, religion, age, disability or sexual orientation). Increasingly these measures should run right through the whole value chain so you will also need to tackle suppliers too.

ASK YOURSELF How can I promote more positive, diverse portrayals of men and women internally and among suppliers?
“Johnson & Johnson Consumer has been implementing GEM scores into our advertising testing over the last nine months and we’ve learned that the main drivers of positive gender portrayal are very similar to the positive drivers of any good creative content: relevance and authenticity. That said, context is everything. Gender stereotyping codes are very culturally-driven so as a Consumer company with brands sold in over 140 countries, we have to be extra vigilant about local executions of global marketing campaigns.

Our Global Strategic Insights and Analytics team is training all of our regional partners around the world on GEM scoring, and in 2018 we will start reporting out the results internally every quarter. The plan is to extend GEM training to our marketing counterparts and agency partners. It’s crucial to ensure that all colleagues are attuned to the issue of gender stereotypes, especially those who are funding, testing or creating communications.

We have also developed resources on combatting Unconscious Bias in the workplace with a renowned Harvard professor. You can’t fight stereotypes in advertising without addressing the reality that the same issue exists within other spheres, including our own offices – and raising employee awareness is an important first step. In addition to conducting in-person training sessions for our people managers since 2016, this year we also rolled out online Unconscious Bias modules for all our employees around the world.

These two initiatives fit alongside others that ladder up to the same greater goal: ensuring that our consumers and our employees feel heard when they speak up, and see their true, best selves represented in everything we do.”

“We are strongest as an industry when we come together, as the Unstereotype Alliance demonstrates. This great work by WFA is an invaluable resource for all of us: from the junior marketer who wants to support the cause but isn’t sure how to get started, to the C-suite leader who has already given the green light to empowering ad campaigns and is ready to push the envelope even further. We’re in the middle of a cultural moment when real change is possible – and these guidelines from the WFA offer a clear roadmap of the intentional, inclusive actions that need to be taken if we truly want to make gender stereotypes in advertising a thing of the past.”

- Alison Lewis, CMO, Johnson & Johnson Consumer
Addressing gender stereotypes in advertising is just one part of the Diageo business strategy which is based, among other things on addressing gender equality and diversity in our workplace and in society. Fifty percent of our board, 40% of our executive team and 40% of the senior marketing community are women. As advertisers, we have the power to normalise gender and diversity through who we choose to show in our work, and how we choose to produce them.

There is a strong belief that this is genuinely good for business. In practice, this leads to natural engagement by employees, including marketers. The advertising industry broadly needs more female representation and that’s why Diageo supports the Free the Bid initiative guaranteeing women directors an equal opportunity to bid on commercial jobs in the advertising world.

We need to make the unconscious bias conscious; raising awareness internally about the need to identify and avoid unconscious gender bias is crucial to making a substantive difference. It’s not easy and not always consensual, but it’s very important to take a step back, and have the debate to help us reflect and understand our own unconscious bias. After a thorough semiotic analysis of all our ads, a dedicated training programme has been put in place in order help the 1200 marketers in Diageo understand and address the issue of unconscious bias as we create work.

We also need to measure our progress and now include measures to pre-test for progressive gender portrayal in our consumer research for advertising development. Three campaigns have already been tracked in this way. This allows us to track over time how we are improving, but also enables us to look at the interconnectivity between progressive gender portrayal and the overall strength performance of the work which will be captured in an annual audit internally to inform further learning.”
BRAND FEMINISM / We’ve broken down two ways in which brands are tackling feminism in their advertising: by empowering women and girls with positive messages and demonstrating gender inequality in society.

Empowering women and girls /
A range of brands are encouraging girls and women to develop a positive self-image through their communications. These brands encourage girls and women to take pride in themselves and not let societal pressure stand in the way of personal progress. Examples include: Dove (Real Beauty), Under Armour (I Will What I Want), Sport England (This Girl Can), Verizon (Inspire Her Mind).

Kenzo / My Mutant Brain
Luxury brand creates a cinematic short film to promote its latest fragrance, sets new standard for beauty advertising

Fashion company Kenzo created an arresting campaign to promote its new fragrance Kenzo World. My Mutant Brain sees the Kenzo girl (played by model, actress and ballerina Margaret Qualley) escaping from a boring black-tie event and breaking into a crazy dance around the venue.

RESULTS / The campaign gained more than 10 million views, reaching a viral status.

INSIGHT / Ads for fragrances tend to follow a tested but tired narrative: a woman (or man) wearing the perfume in an extremely glamorous situation. The luxury lifestyle is backed up by classical music and the ad finishes with a voice whispering the product’s name softly. So much so that Saturday Night Live has a history of parodying them.

Kenzo’s first perfume ad is the antidote to these stereotypes and shows that representing women as fearless, fun and brave resonates with its audience (and their wallets). ‘When we think about perfume campaigns, we think about a pretty girl with a bottle,’ the film’s star – Qualley – said in a statement. ‘This clip is exactly the opposite. It’s very multifaceted and different; it takes the spectator by surprise.’
REI / The Level Playing Field
Outdoor retailer seeks to advance gender equality with series of long-term pledges

In 2017, US co-operative REI encouraged its members to make the great outdoors ‘the world’s largest level playing field’ by committing to programmes championing gender equality. Initiatives ranged from creating new apparel to supporting non-profits that create opportunities for women outdoors.

The Force of Nature campaign put women at the centre of all of REI’s storytelling efforts for the rest of the year. This included all marketing, social and media partnerships, and activity. It committed $1m to support organisations that provide opportunities for women in the great outdoors and invested in companies that are creating world-class outdoor gear for women. Finally it launched more than 1,000 events to get women active.

RESULTS / According to REI, the campaign attracted more than 341 million media impressions, and 45 million social media impressions.

INSIGHT / There are two specific elements that make this initiative so compelling: long-termism and transparency. By investing time, money and resources into championing this cause, REI can gain momentum as the campaign matures, rather than have to find another cause to get behind. Coupled with this is the level of transparency that REI displays throughout the campaign. The company proudly states that it has been championing women’s rights for eight decades, that women hold 40% of all senior leadership roles in the company and one third of the board of directors are women. This reinforces the idea that the way REI is run backs up the messaging.

Barbie / Blonde Ambition
How Mattel set out to demonstrate the doll’s relevance by embracing female empowerment and diversity

After 57 years and over 1 billion units sold, the world’s most iconic doll was in dire need of a makeover. Mattel felt Barbie was losing her appeal among a new generation of parents and therefore decided it was time to move past the luxurious but vapid lifestyle the 11.5-inch doll had been living for years.

This is when Mattel decided to expand the Barbie Fashionistas line in 2015 and 2016, by making it easier for girls to find a doll that looked just like them and, crucially, made Barbie inclusive and relevant in a 21st-century, multicultural world. The 33 new models of the 2016 line came with 30 possible hair colours, 24 hair styles, 22 eye colours, 14 face sculpts and seven skin tones. But most striking of all, girls have the option of playing with a Barbie with a little more meat on her. After years of being criticised for promoting an unhealthy body image, the doll finally has a fuller figure. Now, Barbie is available in a ‘curvy’, as well as a ‘tall’, ‘petite’ and ‘original’ body type.

Barbie is not only making its toys more inclusive, it is also becoming more inclusive in the targeting of its audience: after featuring a boy in an online video for a collectible Moschino Barbie in 2015, in 2017 it started reaching out to dads too.

INSIGHT / The combination of an empowering marketing message, backed by products bringing this message to life, has helped Barbie have much more resonance as a brand.
Many women in China face enormous pressure to marry young. In fact, if they are not married by the age of 27, they are labelled ‘leftover women’ (Sheng Nu). In a bid to see their offspring coupled-off, many families advertise their single daughters and sons in outdoor marriage markets.

Skin care brand SK-II has decided to stand up for leftover women with a campaign called Marriage Market Takeover, which included an online film showing the pressure that the single women face from their families. To help get this message across to their parents, it also orchestrated a take-over of the famous marriage market in Shanghai’s People’s Park. Instead of notices attracting potential suitors, the brand exhibited photographs of the single women accompanied with messages such as, ‘Even if I’m alone, I will be happy, confident and have a good life,’ and ‘I want to take time to find the right person.’ The film then depicts the parents’ emotional reactions to these posters.

**INSIGHT** / Even though the subjects of the film are Chinese, they are dealing with pressures that women across the world can identify with, which is why this content has the potential to appeal beyond China’s borders. In just one week the online video was viewed more than 1.7 million times on YouTube, even though the platform is unavailable in China. As a Japanese brand, available across the world, SK-II has a vested interest in creating content that makes it stand out globally.
Semcon / Re-search
Browser extension combats gender stereotypes in online search results
Semcon, a product development company, developed a browser extension to help prevent gender bias in image search results. Re-Search kicks in when a user performs an image search for certain professions, performing a parallel search for images that feature people of the sex less well represented in that profession and displaying the results in parallel windows.

INSIGHT / Semcon’s browser takes inspiration from the quote, attributed to children’s rights campaigner Marian Wright Edelman, that ‘you can’t be what you can’t see’. If image searches don’t show a diverse range of people performing jobs, then the imbalance within these professions is unlikely to change.

RESULTS / The extension was downloaded 1,500 times and that 300 suggestions for new professions to be added had been submitted. In the first two weeks of the campaign, traffic to Semcon’s website increased 400%. The company also says that employee engagement reached an all-time high in the wake of the campaign.

Godiva / One for me, none for you
Confectionery brand calls for an end to the Japanese custom of giving ‘obligation chocolates’ to colleagues on Valentine’s Day
On Valentine’s Day in Japan women are expected to give gifts not only to their boyfriends or husbands, but also to their co-workers. The treats gifted to colleagues are called girl choco, which means ‘obligation chocolate’. The tradition is a way of saying thank you and maintaining good work relationships.

To address the issue, in 2018 Belgian chocolate brand Godiva ran a full-page print ad asking executives to excuse their female staff from buying girl choco. The copy states that chocolates should be bought for loved ones and gifted to express love and affection, not to maintain good office manners.

INSIGHT / For a chocolate brand to urge people not to buy chocolate, especially at a time when sales increase significantly, is a bold move. However, the Godiva ad is likely to be much more memorable than a standard Valentine’s Day campaign. A number of national and international media picked up the story.

Semcon’s angle is that it needs more women in the male-dominated field of engineering because a more diverse workforce would improve its output. And by generating news stories about Re-Search, Semcon can push this message to any women in engineering looking for a job, and let them know that they would be valued at the company.
MODERN MASCULINITY / As ‘toxic masculinity’ is increasingly challenged and discussed in culture at large, the scrutiny that is more commonly being applied to women in ads is finally fixing its gaze on the depiction of men.

Celebrating more diverse masculine identities /
Brands are taking down such male stereotypes by celebrating more diverse masculine identities and championing behaviours that traditionally lie outside the ‘man box’.

Lululemon / Modern menswear
Canadian yoga apparel brand reaches out to men with stereotype-busting ad campaign

Lululemon’s first campaign for a male audience told stories of men who defy gender stereotypes. It comprised five online films about men that don’t conform to traditional male stereotypes: John Joseph, lead singer of the Cro-Mags and a vegan chef; Ibn Ali Miller, who has used his internet fame to spread messages of non-violence; Ojay Morgan, a hip-hop artist who is influenced by LGBT African American ball culture; Mark Healey, a surfer and advocate for the environment; and Orlando Cruz, the first openly gay professional boxer.

The films were ‘about celebrating the growing community of men living life as their true selves and representing their own definitions of masculinity and strength.’ They did not promote specific products but the campaign coincides with Lululemon releasing an expanded range of its ABC (anti ball-crushing) trousers.

INSIGHT / Changes in attitudes to masculinity are compelling advertisers to rethink how they portray men, just as feminism is transforming gender dynamics in marketing. Lululemon is a natural fit for a campaign dissembling traditional gender roles, since men who cling rigidly to historical gender roles may be reluctant to buy clothes from a brand known for making women’s yoga wear.
Championing behaviors that traditionally lie outside the ‘man box’

As well as supporting the idea that men can choose their own identities, brands are also championing behaviours that are not traditionally ‘masculine’. These range from behaviours that go against ‘lad culture’, such as showing emotions, to those that involve talking on traditional women’s roles in the home. Examples include Topman, Sleek, Hims, Dove, Pantene, Ariel.

Ariel / Dads #sharetheload
How a detergent brand increased sales in India by 76% by encouraging progressive gender roles

In 2016, Ariel launched an emotional online film in India challenging the fact that women do more housework. Dads #ShareTheLoad followed on from the P&G laundry detergent brand’s 2015 #ShareTheLoad campaign, which flagged up that despite most Indian women now working, they still bear the brunt of household chores, including laundry.

In the 2016 film, we see a mother racing around her home answering calls, dressing her children and tidying up while her husband sits on the sofa. Her father is watching her and appears to notice the inequality of the situation for the first time. He writes his daughter a letter of apology, saying, ‘I never helped your mum either and what you saw you learnt... Sorry on behalf of every dad who set the wrong example.’ He then vows to start helping his own wife with the chores.

INSIGHT / The detergent category is full of brands pledging that they will get your whites brighter than the next leading brand. Ariel has shunned those old category norms and opened up a conversational platform around gender equality in the home. This potentially gives it much more to talk about on an ongoing basis.
Contagious case studies in collaboration with Contagious I/O

Axe / Scent of a man
How Axe reinvented itself in order to appeal to the modern man

The so-called Axe Effect marketing strategy, devised by agency BBH in the mid-90s, propelled the Unilever personal care brand to become the number one men’s fragrance in the world but by 2009 growth and equity were falling.

A key insight was that advances in female empowerment had significantly altered the ‘mating game’. ‘It used to be about conquest,’ said Rik Strubel, global VP for Axe. ‘Now it’s about connection. We understood that something was out of touch that we needed to address.’

Recognising that its messaging was out of step with how real men were feeling, Axe radically overhauled its communications and Find Your Magic was born. The message was no longer ‘it’s in the can’ but rather ‘it’s in you’.

Axe introduced its new positioning as a 60-second film in January 2016 and then followed up by airing a 30-second version in the most testosterone-infused context imaginable: the 2016 Super Bowl. Amid commercials for beer and razors, Axe unleashed a rallying cry for guys to find their own personal unique selling proposition.

RESULTS / According to the brand, the campaign has improved sales, moved purchase consideration by 25% and increased overall positive sentiment from around 15% to 41%. The film has been viewed more than 39 million times online and the campaign has garnered more than 4 billion media impressions.
BRANDS ‘RISING FROM THE ASHES’ /
Many brands have been on the receiving end of public criticism and have had to reinvent their advertising from top to bottom in order to stay relevant.

Moving away from a “sex sells” mindset /
Some brands have been able to reinvent themselves in an authentic way and move away from the sexist advertising that they formerly embraced.

Skol / Reposter
Brazilian beer brand Skol enlisted six female artists to rework its old sexist ads and create new marketing assets for the brand, showcasing women as strong and independent.

The project encourages the public to alert the brand if they see one of its old adverts. Once they do, the company swaps them for the new ones. People can find more information about the artists on the campaign’s dedicated hub and even submit their own artwork and illustrations.

RESULTS / The agency reports that, so far, the campaign has resulted in 92% ROI. The campaign video has amassed 3.9 million views and generated 86% positive comments.

INSIGHT / While aligning your brand with feminism is a ‘safe’ purpose to adopt – it’s not an issue that people would argue against – if this change in messaging doesn’t appear to be authentic, consumers will see this just as an easy marketing tactic.

So rather than change all of its marketing messages from sexist to feminist overnight and risk appearing disingenuous, the brand admits its sexist past in a sincere way. This positions it as a company that has realised its past mistakes and truly wants to change for the better.

Having female artists at the heart of the project shows Skol as a brand that gives freedom to the consumer group it has objectified in the past. What’s more, by also getting customers involved to help clear its sexist past by reporting offensive ads, Skol is empowering the public to implement its new positioning.