

Catalogue of Criteria for the Classification of Sexist Advertising of the Watch Groups
against Sexist Advertising Graz, Salzburg and Vienna

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Catalogue of Criteria for the
**Classification
of Sexist
Advertising**

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Criteria for Sexist Advertising

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Criteria for Sexist Advertising

Introduction

Sexist advertising produces images of gender-related stereotypes and behaviour to socially devalue specific groups (women, men, transgender persons, homosexuals...) in relation to others. Sexism in legal terms is defined as discrimination based on gender, in other words, unequal treatment without objective justification. From a human rights perspective devaluing or stereotyping women in the media and in advertising constitutes outright gender discrimination.

Advertisers, advertising agencies and civil society are therefore called upon to respect human rights, as well as to challenge and change all advertising containing sexist, devaluing and discriminating images.

Advertising affects us

Advertising attracts attention and generates new customer needs while furnishing us with images of how we are supposed to be. It is not the advertised product as such which ultimately drives us to purchase it but rather the emotions, hopes and life styles linked to it. Advertising not only triggers consumer needs but also succeeds in conveying values, demonstrating behavioural patterns, as well as providing assistance and guidance. It uses cultural symbols which are easily grasped and by recomposing them actively shapes the way we as a culture and as individuals feel about life and our bodies. It knowingly or unknowingly has a bearing on our images and perceptions of women, men, girls and boys and their projection of reality, while constructing a model that is difficult to resist.

Advertising proposes beauty ideals and life styles, driving us to go on immoderate diets, subject ourselves to surgery and swallow anabolic steroids, proclaiming heterosexual relationships as the social norm. Perfection as suggested by advertising easily becomes a corset and in the worst case is detrimental to our health and makes us sick. Once we accept an ideal that we are unable to fulfil the difference we experience between that ideal and the way we see ourselves undermines our self-esteem and our positive attitude towards our body, even at primary-school age.

Below is a list of criteria to be condemned and avoided at all costs.

1. Gender Stereotypes and Gender Roles

1.1 Clichés about women and men

Advertising messages often resort to traditional gender clichés to portray women and men, which are then continuously repeated for a standardizing effect. Gender clichés reflect condensed, unrealistic, restricting or derogatory perceptions, past and present, of what we consider (or ought to consider) as “feminine” or “masculine”. This neglects the fact that gender perceptions, identities and realities are far more diverse and controversial than that.

For more information on gender clichés about women and men see page 22.



Sexist concepts of women: women are commonly portrayed in one of the two following ways: either in their traditional role as a mother (as natural, caring, helpful and supportive) or as the exact opposite, the object of desire, the “feminine” being a symbol of eroticism and female accomplice to man’s heterosexuality. Both of the above images of women in advertising are linked to beauty, youthfulness and fragility and serve as decorations for various products.

For detailed information on sexist concepts of woman in advertising see page 23.



Sexist concepts of men: Men are typically displayed as strong and dominant, affine to violence, power and influence, as conquerors of nature (men = technology, as experts, heterosexual and hormon-driven.)

For detailed information on sexist concepts of men in advertising see page 25.

Hier könnte Ihr
Beschwerdebild
stehen.

Omissions/blind spots on queer positions and options: Both of the above gender clichés consistently point to the supposed normality and naturalness of being a woman or a man, setting very tight standards in doing so. Homosexual love and sexuality are either totally excluded from advertising contexts or exploited as homosexual gender clichés using openly or covertly derogatory terms. Advertising messages are reduced to heterosexuality revealing in no uncertain terms what is to appear as ‘welcome’, ‘normal’ and ‘desirable’ in public.

For detailed information on queer positions in advertising see page 27.

1.2. Prejudices against women and men

Based on the gender clichés sketched out above new and old prejudices against women and men continue to evolve and are enacted in advertising contexts. Here are some examples:

- Portraying women in subordinate roles, as being supportive, weak, poorly, frail, prone to physical shortcomings (bloating, heartburn, incontinence, weight and skin problems), or as prissy, spoilt creatures of luxury, as young, slim, thin and beautiful at any rate.
- Portraying men as rational breadwinners, insensitive, oblivious to health issues, heterosexual, hormon-driven, handy about the house yet clumsy with chores, know-alls or simple creatures, bigger, set to be men from the day they are born, or as hen-pecked.



1.3. Women and men in the working world

The public sphere is still considered a man's domain while women are generally relegated to private life. Women are usually portrayed as being less intelligent and dependent on men. Gender equality is called into doubt. Women in particular but sometimes men too are pictured in derogatory ways.



- Women and men are shown in their traditional professions. Here are some examples: Men are seen performing physical work (they are physically strong) and technically well versed. They perform as engineers, technicians, in managing positions, etc. The women shown doing professional work usually perform as subordinate service providers, assistants to men, secretaries, nurses or sales assistants.
- Men in the working world are portrayed as actually working while women merely occupy themselves.
- Images and words are chosen so as to undervalue the work women do.
- Men appear as the experts women seek advice with.
- There is a general tendency to cast men in the role of breadwinners (as maintaining their family) and to depict women as earning a little bit on the side only.

1.4. Women and men doing household chores

- Women are shown engaging in household activities. They are the ones advertising household and food products, both of which are charged with images of femininity. Images and words suggest that women find fulfilment in the home because of the advertised products. The latter are invented and developed by experts, men in fact, who enter the scene to enlighten women about the merits of new products, amongst others.

- Housework as shown here is either obsolete, after all the advertised products take care of that, or is a real pleasure to perform. The products are frequently endowed with male symbols (e.g., male cartoon characters as muscular and strong little helpers).

- Advertising leads us to assume that women find fulfilment and recognize themselves in their role as wives, mothers and homemakers. The burden of their multiple roles in society is romanticized and women are perceived as putting the needs of men above their own.

- Women in the home are increasingly placed in an erotic context to please the heterosexual male gaze and also because they themselves are turned on by the products and chores they perform.

- Narrow range of household chores involving men, e.g. taking out the rubbish.

- Men performing household chores are either depicted as unwilling, clumsy or being all thumbs. At the same time, however, they appear as exceptionally efficient and competent cooks. The message conveyed is that they are as good as, if not better than women at cooking and similar activities.

- Advertising suggests that male dominance is legitimate, questions the masculinity of men who do not conform with this stereotype.



1.5. Women and men in private life

- In private life women are shown in the family or with their “best friend”.

- The private lives of men seem to be more diverse. They engage in family life along with a variety of leisure time activities and sports. Worn out from their own working life they indulge in relaxing breaks.

- Men pursue gender-stereotyped hobbies to steel their hard muscular bodies (e.g. football, weight training, gym, running, etc.). These pictures indirectly convey the message that men have to be interested in sports.

- Leisure time activities women engage in typically include, such as shopping, activities related to their looks and gossip.



1.6. Modernized gender roles

The depiction of genders at a first glance is undergoing changes. Superficial adaptations in the way women and men are depicted are to create the impression that advertising mirrors cultural mutations and is therefore up-to-date. On closer inspection, however, we note that the ideological background has stayed the same. The traditional division of labour between the genders (man = career-oriented; woman = mother and homemaker), on the face of it, is proposed less rigidly, yet the images, as regards to content, in all subtlety have the same traditional effect as ever. Women are depicted in traditionally “non-feminine” and highly prestigious roles (e.g. as managers, doctors, technical experts) yet their body language, clothing, hairdo and makeup are chosen and arranged in such a way as to repeat and intensify the old role clichés (weakness, submission, dependence, sexuality, beauty). Advertising for hair spray: a senior manager steps out of a private jet, in her mind running through the list of cities she has been travelling to on business. Her first thought as she steps out goes to her hair and whether it will hold up.



- Prestigious male role patterns are acted out or copied (imperfectly).

- Men in the “updated” version tend to be belittled and are given weaker roles. As soon as they are actively concerned about their health they are laughed at by other men, they are egged on to perform rituals that will forge their identity and give them back the respect of other males, e.g. margarine commercial for Becel or the banking commercial where a man takes care of the children at Christmas, decorating the Christmas tree with bank books.

- While well-trained male bodies are an indication that men increasingly take care of themselves, achievement and dominance still prevail as male images.

1.7. Men – women relationships

Couples depicted as “man – woman relationships” are taken as a matter of course (heterosexuality as the norm = heteronormativity), suggesting that other forms of relationships and desire simply do not exist. Relationships are displayed in line with traditional gender hierarchies and role images. Heterosexual partnerships are shown to be essential for a happy life.



Regardless of the fact that couples in real life dispose of different age constellations and statures those in advertising invariably show the man as the older and taller.

Women are always more scantily clad than men.

Men are depicted in dominating and ruling positions, e.g. flanked by two women.

Gestures are employed to stylize women's dependence on men, e.g. a woman holds onto a man, possessive gestures ...

Men are seen standing secure and with their legs apart, women bearing a friendly smile, men without expression.



Women in couples are treated as infants: men lift them up and carry them (even against their will, which they acknowledge with a smile to show they are having fun).

A man looks at the world, the woman looks up to the man.

Men are forced into their role of “superiority”. The reward awaiting them is a gain in status symbolized by an attractive woman at their feet. The image defies any fear of failure men may have.

1.8. Homosexuality

Gay, lesbian or bisexual life and relationships, as a rule, are not portrayed. Homosexuality, where shown, is met with the following sexist treatment:

- Derogatory or caricaturing images of gays, e.g. through oversexualizing or (exaggerated) use of feminine symbols to deprive men of their maleness (“drag-queen cliché”).
- Derogatory or caricaturing images of lesbians, e.g. through oversexualizing or (exaggerated) use of male features to deprive them of their femaleness, or by showing lesbian couples where one or both women appear sexualized and facing the (male) observer.
- Lack of images showing homosexual people in everyday life situations.



1.9. Families

Images of families reflect the traditional roles allocated to each family member (products for small children: the mothers and carers shown are exclusively women, they are the ones changing diapers and feeding the babies...). Women are responsible for the home and everyday activities while men/fathers take care of the extras (play, success,...).

- Traditional families consist of: father, mother and child(ren), fathers not having to be present, or walking in the door as “visitors”.
- Patchwork families rarely feature, rainbow families remain invisible.
- Single mothers or fathers do not appear in positive roles either.



2. Sexualization

In keeping with the motto “sex sells” sexualized depictions of women and men continue to be the most visible form of sexist advertising. Female bodies in particular are the victims of sexualization, displayed as they are as universally applicable advertising instruments and put on a par with consumer products. More recently the odd male body has also been exploited as such.



2.1. Criteria for sexualizing advertising:

2.1.1. Bodies as universally applicable advertising instruments

Women (and sometimes men too) are reduced to their sexuality. Products are sexualized using visual and textual connections in each case. This is usually accompanied by degradations of women or men through visual and textual arrangements, either directly and openly or through associations (through implied fantasies). The female or male sexuality employed for the purpose is commercialized, while gender-neutral products (anything from shares to garden fences) are emotionalized.



Salacious comments about men as the “new” objects of sexual desire also count as sexist. Sexist depictions of men do not justify sexist depictions of women.

Sexualized images of women are interpreted as “women’s liberated sexuality” in an effort to legitimize their use.

Children and adolescents (below the age of 18) are shown in sexualized ways.

Animalizing women and men (in different forms)

- staging women as animals or sexualized compositions of women and animals.
- depicting men as driven by instinct: men as animals, ever ready and potent.

Putting women and men on a par with products and consumer goods, also in combination with female and male sexuality

Women are portrayed and treated like consumer goods and the goods too appear to be like women: Young, beautiful and unused.

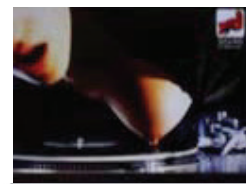
Women and men in their role as eye-catchers are awarded a purely sexualized (decorative) function. (Half-) naked bodies or body parts appear to have no direct connection with the advertised product.

□ Aestheticized naked women stretched out in front of a product succeed in making both the product and themselves “desirable”. Scenes like these and the way images and text are combined suggest that women are commodities – to be purchased like the products advertised.

□ Women put on a par with advertised products also have the effect of raising a man’s status. Images such as that of a man flanked by two women rely on the feudal assumption that women belong to men.

2.1.2. Sexualizing body parts

□ Women are not seen as a whole but only in parts. The body parts most frequently displayed are the sexualized ones, the so-called “female charms”: a woman’s breasts, her legs, lips apart, her hair blowing in the wind ... the fact that only parts of a woman are of interest further adds to her degradation, reducing her to these parts and turning her into an object.



□ Men are rarely “carved up” like this and where they are, as in the case of six-packs, it is usually to emphasize their muscle power as an expression of maleness, attractiveness and status.

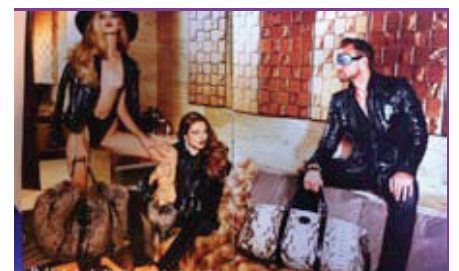
2.2. (Soft)porn aesthetics

Sexualization, availability and degradation of women, and sometimes men too, is often corroborated by pornographic aesthetics, pornographic style devices and pornographic perspectives. Sex and women are portrayed as available for sale and chains of associations are triggered accordingly. Soft porn commercialisation of mostly female bodies in public space bears the risk of having a model effect, creating a climate conducive to lowering the threshold for harassment.

□ Pornographic style devices include elements typically used in pornography, such as table dances, striptease, prostitution, models licking their lips, crouching on the ground, views of their genital zones, their behind, their breasts ...



□ Fetishes from torture chambers, perpetrators in uniform, female slaves in chains or lecherous mistresses still looking for their masters, fashionably arranged dead female bodies



2.3. Advertising sexual services

Advertising sexual services, if admissible, counts as sexist if

- bodies, body parts, female or male sexuality are exhibited indecently and in degrading ways.



- When assessing advertising as to its indecency particular attention must be paid to the medium employed, the placing, surroundings, potential target groups and persons inadvertently reached (e.g. contact magazine vs. billboard advertising for brothels in public space, on the way to school...).

Advertising which promotes behaviour conducive to impairing the health of the service providers or restricting their freedom of choice is also considered sexist. This includes, particular:

- advertising for unsafe sex practices as these pose a risk for the health of the service providers
- advertising so-called "specials", e.g. "two for the price of one", "all you can...", "flat rates" or "girl of the week". Such advertising puts the service providers under pressure to offer their services at special prices, or to offer all the services a person might require, thereby restricting their own freedom of choice.

3. Bodies and Style Devices

3.1. Body images and manipulation

Advertising consciously applies body images to promote products. These images reflect a narrowly defined beauty ideal for women or men and are often artificially modified or distorted. Women tend to be depicted as excessively slim and childlike while men are regarded for their muscles.



By the same token advertising delivers the message

that to some degree at least we are all able to determine the shape of our bodies and meet the supposed ideal: by regulating our food intake (to the extreme), pursuing sports activities (to the extreme) or by subjecting ourselves to plastic surgery. The body image thus aspired to is increasingly seen as a status symbol setting apart the privileged from the disadvantaged social brackets, i.e. the healthy from the sick, the rich from the poor, the young from the old. Bodies that do not meet the supposed ideal are either degraded or not shown at all. Body images like these have the power of putting us under pressure to meet the ideals depicted. They can easily distort a person's self-perception, especially that of young people, young women in particular, incurring serious health issues at various levels in the extreme case.

3.1.1. Stereotyped body ideals are therefore among the most crucial criteria for sexist body depictions

- Sexualization

- Women are shown as young and (extremely) thin in an idealized and derogatory way. Their bodies are silky smooth with the exception of long, thick and shiny hair.

- Images of extremely underweight and pale women are associated with inferiority, lack of power or strength.

- Women are given infantile or childlike features, particularly so because of the belittling “baby schema” employed, e.g. big eyes, childlike mimics, gestures or posture.

- Men appear as strong and muscular. Ideally they are associated with strength, superiority, power, experience, control, muscle power, readiness to use violence, and “maturity”.

- Everyone has to identify with one of the two genders, there is no place of equal value for people between the genders or for transgender persons.



3.1.2. Bodies as “doable” status symbols

- Images of women or girls which lead us to believe that attaining to a standardized beauty and weight ideal is crucial if they want to be successful in their careers and live a happy life.

- Images of men or boys which lead us to believe that attaining to a standardized beauty ideal with the help of excessive sports, body-building supplements, training programmes is instrumental if they want to live a happy life.

- Images of underweight women, i.e. women with a BMI of clearly less than the critical value of 18.5 (or 15% below the average weight).

- Images or messages condoning behaviour or body shapes which are detrimental to health. This is true in particular for images or messages related to body weight in connection with bulimia, anorexia, obesity, excessive sports.

- Advertising for plastic surgery (“cosmetic surgery”) without medical indication (e.g. breast enlargements using implants or liposuction), promoting stereotyped body images.



- Distorted or modified depictions of bodies or body parts, especially where there is no mention that they have been modified and are no accurate reflection of reality.
-
- Depicting overweight persons counts as sexist if it is done in a derogatory way or if the message conveyed is that not attaining to a beauty or weight ideal is to a woman's detriment.
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3.2. Body language

Body language is often considered the tertiary gender feature. It expresses and construes gender symbols. These symbols are exclusive in the sense that they are only taken seriously when employed by either men or women, as the case may be. A woman availing herself of power gestures with a male connotation will not be taken seriously in her femaleness, rather it will be felt as an irritation. A man assuming gestures of submission with a female connotation will be deprived of his maleness. These body language signs of masculine power gestures and feminine gestures of submission and instability have nothing to do with the biological differences of male and female genitals. If a man assumes the unstable posture frequently witnessed in women, even the strongest of men will be conquered effortlessly by the weakest of women. Body language is expressed in different gestures and combinations.



3.2.1. Sitting postures

- Exhibiting men sitting comfortably and dominating space, their body language a sign of self-confidence, self-satisfaction and magnitude (sitting with their legs apart, their gestures expansive). Images like these are used especially in combination with men of limited social prestige (young men, men from lower social brackets, rarely politicians or experts)
-
- Showing men with their legs apart is not considered sexualizing (as it would be with women) but rather as an expression of their space-filling expansiveness.
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- Women are pictured sitting uncomfortably, their posture narrow, hands often hidden and legs crossed.
-



3.2.2. Smiling

In advertising images women are seen smiling far more often than men. In this context smiling can take on different forms:

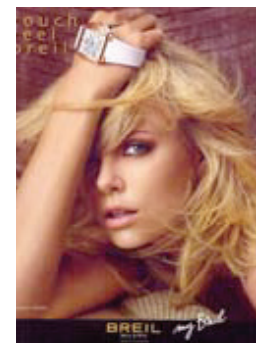
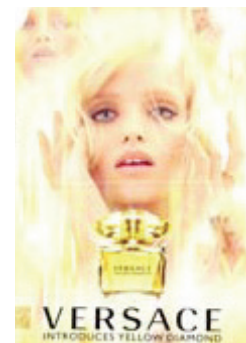
- Innocent, submissive and friendly smiles as symbols of femininity.
- Women are pictured smiling for no apparent reason: they might be embarrassed, threatened or exposed to an attack.
- Women smiling as a service to others, smiling to express their submissiveness.
- Men are pictured smiling to express their self-confidence, self-satisfaction and superiority.



3.2.3. Glances, mimics, head posture

Glances are instruments of power and self-glorification. The following elements of body language are employed in the course:

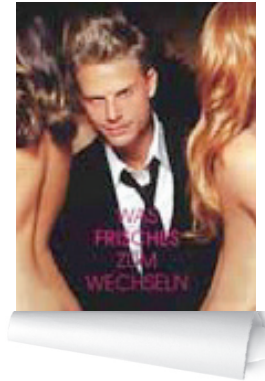
- Showing a woman's gaze from the corner of her eye, from the side, her head bent to one side, making her appear insecure.
- The posture of the head reveals the throat, as a gesture of submissiveness and erotic availability.
- Women will look the observer straight in the eye only for the purpose of their sexualization: women as objects may sport inviting glances.
- A woman's gaze is full of adoration and admiration, but never acknowledgment, denying her the competence to acknowledge.
- Male gazes are granted little facial expression for fear of risking emotion. Masculinity clearly comes alive in a man's concentrated visionary look. The only emotions men are allowed to show are negative ones, such as rage, anger and aggression.
- Male gazes are disparaging. Yet sometimes females can be portrayed looking disparaging too, arrogant, aloof, laced with emotional distance, like those of the coveted and unattainable goddesses with their cruel intentions.
- The communicating gaze of model and photographer interacting, which is reflected in the consumers' line of vision and the way they are appraised ...



3.2.4. Touch

Persons of superior status, for the most part men, are vested with the privilege of touching, the exception being nursing or service-providing activities.

- Men touching women, the touches implying that women are “prevented from leaning”, their mobility restricted, and that men are touching to protect.
- Gestures of superiority expressed through male touches (e.g. men supporting, lifting and carrying women).



3.2.5. Women and men touching themselves

Women touching themselves as an expression of weakness, timidity and insecurity.

- Men touching themselves, usually on the back of their heads or the chin, as an expression of thinking.



3.3. Style devices

All of the style devices listed below count as sexist or derogatory **only in combination** with the bodies and products staged. In other words, the camera moving from the top down suggests what is visually comprehensible yet only the content of the shot conveys its actual meaning.

3.3.1. Using style devices

Voices are among the principal vectors for conveying messages, as voice-over from the off or as brain-over, i.e. as authorities of creation.

- Voices allocated to men in voice-dependent advertising (i.e. TV or radio commercials) are traditionally matter-of-fact while those of women are charged with emotion (sexy and seductive, nerve-racking and annoying, questioning and advice-seeking).
- Listening references are sexualized as made evident by the sexist use of voices, i.e. women taking on animating or emphatic tones of voices or pitches, which are interpreted as sexually charged.

3.3.2. Camera perspectives and camera moves

Camera perspectives or camera moves downwards from above (birds-eye perspective) are intended to show the superiority experienced by the observer. The other way round, i.e. the camera moving upwards from below, indicates a voyeuristic perspective or low rank (frog perspective).

- Gender hierarchies among men and women are often conveyed this way: female eyes looking upwards from below indicate adoration and admiration, accompanied and reinforced by the camera.
- Women are often reduced in size by the camera perspective and weakened by the composition of the images.
- The camera perspective is used to reinforce the sexist or traditional gender arrangement, frequently putting women in the frog perspective and men in the birds-eye perspective.



3.3.3. Positioning objects

The way models handle relevant products, how they present the commodities and services advertised in relation to their own bodies (e.g. Axe deodorant) may have strong sexist connotations.

- It is fair to say that, with a few exceptions only, all objects placed between the legs, the teeth or in the mouth stir up sexual associations. The extent to which they do may vary depending on the content and accounts for such advertising either being considered sexualized and sexist or not.



3.3.4. Pixel bodies

Photo editing programmes being common practice these days, naturally all pictures of bodies in advertising photography are edited and become effective in manipulative ways.

- Sexist pixel practices are employed for instance to magnify women's breasts, lengthen their legs, to enhance male muscles or modify hairlines.

3.3.5. Colors

Colors and the symbolic effect of the observer perspective are analyzed in many different and confusing ways. The use of colors is highly relevant, especially in advertising. Again this needs to be analyzed and assessed with specific examples and should only be seen as one of many elements in the composition as a whole.

- Gender clichés are often reinforced through colors traditionally associated with one or the other (pink and pastels as typically “girly colors”, shades of blue, grey or green as “boy colors”).

- As a rule, women are awarded a wider range of colors, many of them signal colors (such as the strategic use of red as a stimulator and symbol of love, of blood, of passion) while male models are granted a continuation of the “boy colors”.

- Men tied into “funny” or derogatory compositions are complemented by the apposite colors (“atypical” and conspicuous signal colors).

3.3.6. Spaces and surroundings

These too are elements intertwined with others and may only be recognized and assessed as part of the overall context.

- Wherever the composition of images and symbols reveals gender explicit settings considered typical for either women or men (e.g. tacky girls’ rooms, chaotic boys’ rooms, romantic country house atmosphere for women’s gossip, sober offices and board office atmosphere...) the style elements used are seen to emphasize typifying efforts.

- Spaces and surroundings known to create sexism are easily identified in images and scenes alluding to prostitution and subculture dancing, such as table dance or pole dance, disco chatting-up atmosphere ...

3.3.7. Musical arrangements, sound

- Whenever sexualized music arrangements are employed (sex noises, moaning, music imbued with eroticism) to break taboos and arouse attention they bear a sexist emphasis which, again, may only be assessed in the context of other style elements and visual messages.

3.3.8. Clothes

Female and male clothing is also regarded a style device used in sexualizing and in derogatory ways or to express dependencies and role clichés.

- Female clothing: women are dressed in ways unsuitable for the situation or position to compromise their role. Women are more scantily clad than men (wearing miniskirts and t-shirts in winter vs. men wearing suits and ties at the height of summer).

- Women’s high heels are meant to symbolize a lack of stability while the question remains as to whether their purpose is to serve the women’s mobility.

- Girls are shown wearing clothing unsuitable for their age or the situation they are in.

- Male clothing: their clothing indicates that they are well positioned and professional and the more they wear the higher their status. Men are usually depicted wearing a suit and tie.
-
- Boys also wear suits and ties as a status symbol which is unsuitable for their age and the situation they are in.
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4. Trivializing violence, especially violence against women

Sexism in advertising takes on many forms especially regarding violence. Most recently violence in advertising, especially violence against women, is sold as being aesthetically pleasing, cool and full of power. Men are granted a subtle willingness and permission to exert violence in this context, a fact considered very manly. Women, on the other hand, are staged as submissive and passive victims suffering violence, as objects of desire in an archaic world of male rivalry or as instigators of violence. Typical forms of sexualized violence against women are those considered legitimate and conducive to raising male status. Depictions of reverse situations, however, are neither compatible with our general understanding of gender democracy. The following criteria are relevant for assessment:



- Situations depicting violence as a cultivated, aesthetically chic gesture (something sophisticated) or an element of amusement used to seek recognition among the spectacle and fun aficionados. Trivializing violence covers up the fact that the latter constitutes an infringement of human rights and a form of gender discrimination typically apparent where violence or sexualized violence against women is displayed.
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- Images and statements containing brutal, aggressive and asocial behaviour or encouraging such behaviour.
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- Pictures of rape, torture or femicide.
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- Images staging readiness to be violent as a desirable male characteristic. This includes both readiness to be violent towards other men (such as armed "cowboy maleness") and sexual violence particularly against women.
-
- Images containing female role models that suggest submission, sufferance, willingness to act as accomplices, instigators and objects triggering male violence.
-
- Pictures revealing homophobic or transphobic violence employed to reinstate heteronormative symbolic order.
-

5. Sexism and Multiple Discrimination

Gender is by no means the only ground to stress or justify inequality among people. Others typically include age, ethnicity, migration background, religion, impairments, disease, economic situation (poverty). Pictures of women and men in advertising not only must be free of sexism but also free of discrimination on any of the above reasons. Some characteristics frequently appear in connection with either women or men, thereby creating multiple discrimination. This is true, amongst others, for the following categories: age (elderly people, children and adolescents), sexuality, ethnicity, migration background, religion.



The following is a list of criteria for determining multiple discrimination in advertising:

Elderly people

- Elderly people, women in particular, are depicted in derogatory and lacking ways, as superficial, naive, incompetent, unintentionally funny in a manner reminiscent of small children. Age is seen as a flaw, especially where women are concerned, as a loss of beauty and attractiveness.

- Age in the case of men is viewed as a gain in maturity.

- Disease and physical weakness often appear to be the all-determining factors for elderly people, again more so for women than for men (e.g. talking about laxatives during a family outing ...)

- Elderly people are denied fulfilled and self-determined sexuality.

Children and adolescents

- Sexualized images of children and adolescents (below the age of 18).

- Gender differences construed through clothing, haircuts, non-verbal behaviour, difference in size, starting from very early on.

- Girls are associated with being small, weak, submissive and passive (e.g. shown as being unable to react to threats) or as openly displaying their emotions (e.g. smiling, being visibly surprised, fear or slackness, innocent looks, eyes wide open)

- Girls are seen preparing for their life as wives and mothers in keeping with the traditional role models.

- Boys are associated with assertiveness, aggressiveness, rationality and leadership. Boys are seen preparing for their "career" and their life as family providers/breadwinners in keeping with the traditional role models.

- Boys are depicted as sources or causers of dirt and chaos.

- Boys, unlike girls, are more often shown outside the home, engaging in sports, etc.

- Boys and girls are assumed to be heterosexual, heterosexual partnerships being presented as the only model for development. Homosexual life styles are marginalized or hidden altogether.



Sexuality

- Lesbian women, gay men and transgender persons are portrayed in sexualized or derogatory ways (see above concepts of women and concepts of men).

Ethnicity, Migration, Religion

- Persons, women in particular, of "non-white" appearance or wearing clothing typically associated with migrants, specific ethnic or religious groups, are portrayed in sexualized or derogatory ways.



Impairment

- Persons, women in particular, afflicted with impairments are portrayed in sexualized or derogatory ways.

Poverty

- Persons, women in particular, affected by poverty are portrayed in sexualized or derogatory ways.

Clichés about Women and Men

Advertising aims at rapid success in selling and therefore has to be fast and easy to grasp. To this end it avails itself of simple, highly formalized and ritualized images. This is precisely where the gender dilemma sets in, because the perception of femaleness and maleness is deeply rooted in our culture and gender being the very difference that makes the difference. Research has it that the way women and men present themselves and interact with each other has nothing to do with their biological constitution. Women and men enact their gender in accordance with their own culture and comply with culturally reshaped, socially accepted hegemonial codes of society, submission gestures, man-woman models, mother-father-child complexes, etc. Advertising feeds into these symbols, picking up and reorganizing already ritualized behaviour. Men and women are portrayed in simplified ways and, what is more, in ways of how they really ought to be. This additional information transported by the media builds on the familiar and is easily digested. Advertising wants to be just that which is why it strives to uphold the two-sex system, serving as a measure of the social significance of gender types in doing so.

Naturally, this has repercussions on individuals and society as a whole. Women and men alike are in pursuit of beauty to be desirable in heterosexual partnerships, driving many of them to anorexia, the gym or plastic surgery. Walking beauty ideals and ritualized role models are only the tip of the iceberg.

Science first turned a keen eye on advertising in the 1960ies. The focus back then was on analyzing the depiction of women in advertising. More recently, starting in the 1990ies, male images have also come under scrutiny. The resulting scientific analyses bear witness to the continuous use of stereotype images in traditional advertising.

While women from the 1920ies onwards up until the 1970ies were staged as caring homemakers and mothers they now pose as sexual objects, young, beautiful, desired and reduced to passive, servile, provocative or aesthetic actions.

Men, then and now, are still portrayed as heads of the family, technical experts, successful, rational and active at all times. Their place is where they are seen, where they earn money to provide for their family, climb up the career ladder, enjoy their leisure time and seek adventures.

By the 1990ies at the latest a new complementary distinction proliferates among the stereotype images. Women are depicted as assertive, fulfilled, idlers and seducers at the same time, seducing without giving in to seduction. They increasingly go out, venture forth into public space, have a job and a career of their own. While beauty continues to be interpreted as "female beauty", men are increasingly subjected to its dictate: maleness and male beauty are symbolized by the perfect athlete's body endowed with six-pack, excessively enhanced muscles, hairless and well-shaped chest.

Yet irrespective of how women and men are portrayed in advertising the underlying gender stereotypes have hardly changed. Women are still dependent, understanding and emotional, attributes notably apparent in the concepts of warmth and expressiveness (femininity and community spirit).

Men, quite the other way, are independent, dominant and full of determination. These attributes are derived from the concepts of competence and instrumentality (masculinity and self-assertion). Reducing advertising to a two-sex

system complete with the classical female and male stereotypes in no way reflects the wide range of gender identities, behaviour and life styles. The reality of life is far more diverse and contradictory than advertising leads us to believe.

Gender concepts and sexism in advertising

For Janet Swim and Bernadette Campbell sexism (gender bias) refers to gender-based stereotypes, affects and behaviour resulting in different social statuses for men and women. Sexism research builds on the concept of traditional sexism (also known as open sexism). There is a case for open sexism whenever gender differences are emphasized in a way compatible with the stereotypes, whenever it seems apparent that women are considered inferior to men, whenever traditional gender roles are favored. More recent concepts refer to modern sexism (e.g. denying continued discrimination against women) or the theory of ambivalent sexism (e.g. men presenting themselves in a pro-woman attitude). What all of the above sexism have in common is their open or covert/coded devaluation of women in comparison to men or vice versa.

When examining sexism in advertising it is important to address images and depictions of women and men, of femaleness and maleness, to lay open and make the public aware of gender clichés, stereotypes and questionable portrayals of women and men. It should be noted in the context that gender images in advertising have changed over the years. Depicting women as carers and men as patriarchs is no longer a matter of course and in fact has given way to far more diverse ideas. So, potentially there is now a wider range of female and male images.

Unfortunately though, images of modern women and men reflecting a balanced gender relation are far from selfevident as a whole.

Concepts of women in advertising

The range of female images in advertising has no doubt expanded. This does not mean, however, that anything much has changed in the underlying pattern of role expectations and ascriptions. The seven forms of representing women in advertising as proposed by Christiane Schmerl more than 20 years ago and listed below are still valid today. Added to which there are now fragmented depictions of women, parts of their bodies missing, as well as pornographically charged images. Imbued with new information on their cultural status women are still allocated their traditional place and reduced role.

Woman = sexuality: women are reduced to sexuality, to a role of seductress and seduced, of vamp and virgin in equal measure. The “female” is interpreted as a sign of eroticism, women being the motive and accomplice to male heterosexuality. By reducing women to sexuality it is possible to use female bodies at liberty and universally as objects of decoration.

Woman = product; product = woman: women are treated as commodities, women resemble commodities: young, beautiful and unused.

Household = woman: household, children, husbands – here is where women can play out their strengths to the full. Here is their place, here is where they know the ropes.

Typical woman! Women are ascribed specific features, big weaknesses, small vices: they are diligent, clumsy, naïve, they like to gossip.

Cosmetic constraints: women are prompted to always look beautiful for heterosexual men.

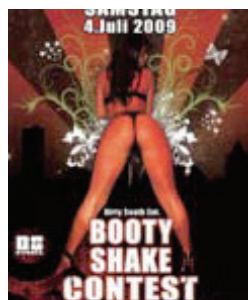
Emancipation: emancipation can be bought, e.g. a car, comfortable clothing.

Male cynicism: male jokes put women in their place.

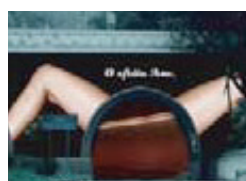
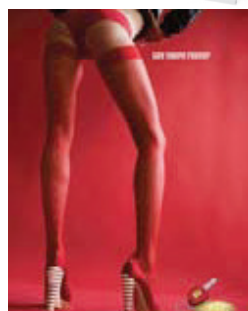
Examples of sexism in advertising



Women are clumsy in technical matters. Technical talent as a gender stereotype is a man's domain. Women by comparison are said to be clumsy and ignorant in technical matters. The advertising copy below puts women in their place in two ways. They are denied any experience with technical gadgets. Yet at the same time they are well versed in less complex matters – such as wrapping gifts. Gifts are either wrapped in shops or at home. Female hands, the sales assistant's or the homemaker's, are there to embellish the technical gadget.



Women as sexual objects, always available, ready for sex around the clock. Women are not subjects but objects, commodities with no will of their own, interchangeable at one's pleasure.



Women as fragmented bodies, always ready for sex. Women are reduced to body parts, stylized and ready for penetration. Fragmentation and pornographic elements are new sexist style devices for advertising.

Housewifization of professions: Technical careers are set aside for men. The advertisement shows a woman using a power line as a clothesline. Clearly this undermines her competence as a technical professional, allocating her the housewife role she can handle instead.

Men, masculinity and sexism in advertising

When examining sexism in advertising it is important to address images and depictions of men and masculinity. Again, we are called upon to familiarize ourselves with gender clichés, stereotypes and questionable male images. Recent decades in general have seen a change in the way male images are presented. Traditional images of men as patriarchs are no longer a matter of course and have given way to far more diverse forms. Potentially there is now a wider range of male images than before.

Unfortunately though, images of modern men reflecting balanced gender relations are far from selfevident as a whole. Men in advertising are still depicted in a way which reinforces traditional, gender-based distribution of labour. Performance, success and power are attributed to men, their readiness for violence is endorsed while they are subtly denied the ability to run the household. Added to which messages addressed at men avail themselves of sexualized images of women combined with images of dominant and eager men. Messages like these establish or reinforce patriarchal male attitudes in a male target group. Gender democratic, emancipatory and alternative male images are marginalized, as they are not considered the norm.

Two perspectives therefore need to be taken into account when analyzing sexist images involving men: one being sexism towards women, the other sexism towards men themselves. Both have a damaging effect in the sense that they either support structures conducive to putting women at a disadvantage in society or they increase the pressure on men to comply with traditional male standards in areas where men are seen to be at risk, e.g. in healthcare, alcohol consumption or propensity towards violence. Men who are unable or unwilling to meet these standards are marginalized, e.g. gay men, socially disadvantaged men, men objecting to violence.

Examples and photo gallery:

In advertising at least the following themes and focuses can be identified:

- Images of masculinity and messages to men which support sexism against women in advertising, making it appear as normal. Examples are images of scantily clad women employed for decorative purposes, triggering associations with men in more powerful and/or determining positions, often linked to suggestive or sexualizing connotations.



- Images may also allude to sexist biases, assuming that a lot of men have these without talking about them, except at the imaginary "regulars' table" or off the record. Such disclosure of "secret preferences" serves the purpose of attracting attention by involving the (re)production of sexist clichés and prejudices.



- Images portraying and epitomizing men as performance-driven dominant winners. Men are shown as career minded from childhood on. Images like these often insinuate superiority over other, devalued men or forms of maleness, or superiority over (young, attractive) women. Muscular, well-trained male bodies are frequently staged to lay claim to men's complete and utter performance and their "natural and indisputable male superiority", in some instances alluding to their willingness to engage violence.



Male images using or fulfilling male clichés, thereby proving and reinforcing them. These might include:



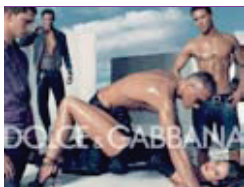
Portraying a strong link between masculinity and alcohol consumption in conformity with their role.



Images of men providing (hetero)sexual services, including homophobic images to set them apart, as well as images depicting men as a "simple-minded" group of people.



Male role models denoting permission to exert violence, covertly or not: e.g. stylizing sexual violence against women, putting down men not willing to engage in violence.



Images of explicit violence against women, images that give rise to associations with acts of violence in no uncertain terms, e.g. rape.



Men shown as incompetent in activities “not in conformity with their role”, e.g. taking care of their own health, doing household chores, etc. Images like these usually offer women as the competent “supply sources”.

Queer positions, sexual orientation, gender identity and (hetero-)sexism in advertising

While it is important to address images and depictions of gender when examining sexism in advertising, it is equally important to address images and depictions of gender identity. Gender identity is one of several components in people’s personality. It not only includes a person’s biological sex and their gender role, but their sexual orientation and social gender too.

People’s sexual orientation refers to their mental, emotional and erotic attraction to others. Sexual orientation may be heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual. Gender denotes a person’s primary identification as either female or male, in other words, their self-perception. Femaleness and maleness are often described as mutually exclusive opposites. In reality, however, gender covers a wide continuum between the two poles of “female” and “male”. There are, in fact, many different forms of femaleness and maleness, and consequently there is a wide range of sexualities between the two poles.

Thus we are called upon to question both the female or male protagonists’ sexual desire, which in advertising is often implied only, and the unambiguous gender affiliation generally proposed by advertising. We need to identify and highlight clichés, stereotypes, as well as disputable images and messages. Recent decades have seen a considerable change in the way media portray gays, lesbians and transgender persons. Initially they used to not exist at all, before they were

granted their role as tragic, suicidal and pitiable “also-ran persons” who sadly failed to comply with hetero-normative normality. Images of gays were developed further, producing the laughable picture of an effeminate, styled, sensitive gay man prancing around in a feather boa. The very opposite also became a cliché, i.e. the sex-driven, genital-controlled gay donning a leather outfit, suffering ostracism, loneliness, HIV or AIDS as a punishment for being different.

Lesbians, on the other hand, continued to be marginalized, they rarely featured and where they did they were shown as man-hating women’s libbers, advocates of alternative movements, wearing leather jackets, beer bottle in hand, their hair cut short, deprived of any form of femininity. Some images would depict two women having fun with each other, intent on arousing the heterosexual male observer, inviting him to join them for a threesome. Such images are discriminating in the sense that the female couple is portrayed as incomplete to be made complete only by the addition of the man.

Transgender persons, in other words, persons whose self-perception deviates from their biological sex, are a fairly recent acquisition for the media and the few pictures we get to see are usually distorted: amazing curios or pitiable pictures of misery.

What does (hetero-)sexist advertising achieve?

Images of women and men shown in advertising may well be more diverse now than they were decades ago, yet they are still heterosexist, proclaiming heterosexuality as the norm and denying homosexual persons any role of equal value.

This may be explained, in part, by the fact that in a patriarchal structure men are superior to women, relationships being links between two people, where he is the superior and she the subordinate. The mere existence of gay and lesbian couples puts this hierarchy in human relationships into doubt, proving that relationships may also be interpreted as communities of two equal persons with equal rights who have to negotiate the sharing of tasks in accordance with their individual abilities instead of being able to or having to resort to traditional role patterns.

Love and desire in advertising is almost exclusively within the heterosexist domain: man desires woman, woman is desired by man. Children too are forced into traditional heterosexual corsets, their future heterosexual life styles are portrayed as being the norm. Being different, a man desiring men, a woman desiring women, does not feature and if so not as a person with equal rights but as a curio, a tragic figure and laughing stock, an unwelcome deterrent. Gay and lesbian couples are even harder hit because where they feature at all it is always in connection with their sexual orientation, which unlike heterosexual orientation is not shown as a matter of course but instead is explicitly addressed and therefore becomes an issue.

Families in advertising always appear in their classical father-mother-child constellation, alternative forms, such as patchwork or rainbow families, a reality in modern society, do not feature.

Which are the clichés?

In short, gay men are often denied their maleness, they are awarded female attributes, such as a particularly well-groomed appearance, language, way of talking, behaviour or typically female professions. They are associated with “female” topics, such as beauty, health, the home, décor and fashion. In some cases they are shown as sex-driven, unusual and either more or less perverse. Lesbian women are denied their femaleness, they are often depicted as unwomanly or even manly, or they are shown in erotic poses that are to attract the heterosexual observer.

Added to which some advertising messages are composed in such a way so as to let the target audience know in no uncertain terms that this is not how they want to or ought to be. Gay and lesbian life styles shown as deviating from the norm and inferior and are therefore marginalized.

When analysing heterosexual images in connection with gays, lesbians and transgender persons several perspectives should be taken into account: one is how they contribute to male and female sexism as a whole, and the other which sexisms actually refer to sexual orientation and identity. All are detrimental in the sense that they support structures of social discrimination and solidify the traditional roles ascribed to women and men while ostracizing and marginalizing persons with non-heterosexual orientation or not clearly identifiable belonging to one of the two sex poles, putting them under pressure to adapt to the heterosexual “majority culture”.

More specifically, at least the following issues can be identified in relation to advertising:

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- Images of women and men or messages to women and men which support sexism against women and men in advertising, implying that a heterosexual man’s superiority over a heterosexual woman is the norm.

 - Images of women and men which imply that all women and all men are heterosexual, fading out and marginalizing any other sexual orientation.

 - Images and attributes of gay men or lesbian women depicting them not as equal but in stereotyped and derogatory ways as deterrents or for the merriment of others.

 - Images of women and men showing only the most feminine of women and the most masculine of men, putting the observers under pressure to be equally feminine or masculine. These are often combined with a devaluation of persons who, because of their character, appearance, behaviour, voice, clothing, profession, etc., are more often than not found in the continuum between the genders.
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