Representation of women in advertising

Clearinghouse Connector – March 2016

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Introduction

This Connector presents a selection of freely-available current research on the impact of advertising on women’s health and wellbeing. We present case studies where individuals and campaigns have taken action against ads, current examples of promising practice from around the globe, and the importance of women in the control and creation of advertising. We then cover the current policy landscape in Australia, and provide links to related websites for further exploration.

Advertising that represents women as commodities – and which objectifies and sexualises women – perpetuates and normalises degrading and disrespectful beliefs about the role and value of women, and undermines gender equity measures. This representation of women has negative impacts on the mental and physical health of women, and how women are perceived by society.

The research presented in this Connector explores the gap between standards that advertisers have set for themselves and the advertisements that appear. Promising practice from other developed countries demonstrates that there are various ways for governments at the state and national level to introduce regulation of advertising.

The Connector also presents research on the rise of online campaigns against sexist, misogynistic and objectifying ads that have appeared within the gap between industry guidelines, self-regulation and government oversight.

In gathering the research for this Connector, we have found limited publicly available academic resources. The majority of academic resources freely available to the public were produced prior to 2010, and have not been included in this Connector. However, there has been growth in practice-based reports and opinion pieces on the current state of advertising and strategies being used to end sexist advertising.
WHV thanks Dr. Lauren Rosewarne, of the University of Melbourne, for providing feedback for this Connector.

**Portrayal of women**

*Gender and advertising: how gender shapes meaning* *In: Controversies in contemporary advertising, 2nd ed.* Sage, 2014

*The dangerous ways ads see women* TEDx Innovations, 2015

*Clearinghouse Connector: Sexualisation of women and girls* Women’s Health Victoria, 2014

*Equal opportunity or objectification?: the sexualization of men and women on the cover of Rolling Stone* Sexuality and Culture, 2011

*Offensive marketing can work: but not if it vilifies women* The Conversation, 2015

**Health impact on women**

*Sexualised girls are seen as less intelligent and less worthy of help than their peers* The Conversation, 2015

*The effects on women from advertisements* Destructive Advertisements, 2010


*The media’s effect: media representation of the female body* The Sydney Feminists, 2014

*Sex and sexism in Australian alcohol advertising: why are women more offended than men?* Contemporary Management Research, 2011

*Self- and partner- objectification in romantic relationships: associations with media consumption and relationship satisfaction* Sex Roles, 2014

**Case studies**

*Ad watchdog in Australia a dismal failure* Collective Shout, 2014

*Community perceptions of exploitative and degrading images in advertising* Advertising Standards Bureau, 2013

*Ultra Tune discontinues ‘sexist’ advertisement following Advertising Standards Bureau review* ABC Online, 2016


*Rise of the feminist killjoy: why Paddy Power had to pull its misogynist advertising* The Conversation, 2014
Promising international practice

Advertising [Chapter] In: Making change: Nordic examples of working towards gender equality in the media NORDICOM. University of Gothenburg, 2014 – pp. 97-118

Women and girls as subjects of media’s attention and advertisement campaigns: the situation in Europe: best practices and legislations European Parliament, 2013

Gender-sensitive indicators for media: framework of indicators to gauge gender sensitivity in media operations and content UNESCO, 2012

Ad agency swears off crafting ads that objectify women Wall Street Journal, 2016

Social media campaigns that make a difference: what can public health learn from the corporate sector and other social change marketers? Public Health Research and Practice, 2015

Putting women behind the content


Gender matters: women in the Australian screen industry Screen Australia, 2015

60% of female marketers have experienced sexism in the workplace according to The Drum’s Women in Marketing research The Drum, 2015

This conference wants to reward advertising agencies that promote gender equality Girl Talk HQ, 2015

Australian guidelines

AANA code of ethics Australian Association of National Advertisers, 2012

AANA code of ethics practice note Australian Association of National Advertisers, 2015

Exploitative and degrading: key concepts Advertising Standards Bureau, 2015

Gender [advertising standards] Advertising Standards Bureau, 2015

Gender portrayal guidelines Victoria. Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2012
Policy development

Submission to the Australian Association of National Advertisers’ review of code of ethics Women’s Health Victoria, 2010


Submission to Australian Communications and Media Authority Contemporary Community Safeguards Inquiry issues paper Australian Association of National Advertisers, 2013


Related websites

Australian Association of National Advertisers Advertising regulation guide

Collective Shout

Advertising Standards Bureau Social media advertising

Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media

How our Clearinghouse can help you

Women’s Health Victoria’s Clearinghouse has a wealth of information on gender in health in various forms. Our experienced health and information professionals can assist you to access this information.

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