

# EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2004



2009

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*Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality*

**2008/2038(INI)**

27.3.2008

## **DRAFT REPORT**

on how marketing and advertising affect equality between women and men  
(2008/2038(INI))

Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

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**CONTENTS**

	<b>Page</b>
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION .....	3
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT.....	7

## MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

### on how marketing and advertising affect equality between women and men (2008/2038(INI))

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the EC Treaty, in particular to Articles 2, 3(2) and 152 thereof,
  - having regard to the Community acquis in the field of women's rights and gender equality,
  - having regard to the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing on 15 September 1995 and its resolution of 18 May 2000 on the follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action,
  - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (A6-0000/2008),
- A. whereas socialisation is a process that forges identity, values, beliefs and attitudes that give the individual a place and role in the society in which he/she grows up; whereas identification is a key concept for understanding how this process works,
- B. whereas identification with a person or object is the next step to understanding how we become full members of society; whereas gender stereotyping in advertising is, in this context, an impediment to a modern and equal society,
- C. whereas stereotypes justify/corroborate conduct that is a vector for identification, such as the good mother (for women) and the breadwinner (for men),
- D. whereas advertising in all media is part of our daily life and sends out different messages; whereas these messages are designed to encourage us to buy different products; whereas advertising sends out signals about how to behave in order to be seen as successful and 'normal',
- E. whereas advertising often presents black-and-white situations in which women and men are given specific roles and attributed with qualities based on their gender,
- F. whereas gender stereotyping in advertising straitjackets women, men, girls and boys by restricting individuals to predetermined and artificial roles that are often degrading, humiliating and dumbed down for both sexes; whereas the nature of advertising also reinforces this negative impact as the message is constantly reiterated and reproduced,
- G. whereas gender stereotyping in advertising thus echoes the unequal distribution of gender power,
- H. whereas gender stereotyping in advertising not only restricts individuals to playing various

predetermined roles, but also *excludes* individuals who do not fit the norm, such as men and women with disabilities and non-heterosexuals,

- I. whereas gender stereotyping must be opposed at all levels of society in order to liberate women and men in both the private and public domains,
- J. whereas gender stereotyping is instrumental in segregating and differentiating between the sexes from a very young age; whereas this segregation/differentiation sets the tone for lifelong discrimination between the sexes,
- K. whereas all fields of advertising present a more or less blatant concept of what is 'masculine' and what is 'feminine' and that certain areas of society are 'naturally' weighted towards men or women; whereas this concept is counterproductive and goes some way to dividing the labour market into professions by gender, with women generally earning less than men,
- L. whereas the whole of society has to be involved in efforts to avoid the reproduction of gender stereotyping; whereas the responsibility for doing so should be shared by all parties from the cradle to the grave,
- M. whereas this is ultimately a question of knowledge, so we need to be informed about the consequences for all of us when artificial images reproduce prejudices on how we should act in order to be considered as a 'real' girl, lad, woman or man,
- N. whereas children are a particularly vulnerable group that places its trust not just in authority but also in characters from myths, TV programmes, picture-books, TV games, toy advertising, etc.; whereas children learn by imitation and mimicking what they have just experienced; whereas gender stereotyping in advertising is for that reason not just a restraint on individual development but also one of the direct causes of an individual being implicated from an early age in lifelong discrimination in which a person's gender dictates what is possible and what is not,
- O. whereas TV advertising is omnipresent in our daily lives; whereas, regardless of our age and gender, we are exposed to commercial breaks in daily TV programmes; whereas it is of particular importance that TV advertising be subject to ethically and/or legally binding rules to prevent adverts communicating gender stereotypes,
  - 1. emphasises the importance of giving women and men the same opportunities to develop as individuals regardless of gender;
  - 2. notes the continued widespread existence of male and female stereotypes despite various Community programmes to promote gender equality;
  - 3. stresses the importance of research into the link between gender stereotyping in advertising and gender inequality;
  - 4. calls on the EU institutions and Member States to benefit from, and disseminate, the aforementioned research and results thereof;

5. emphasises the importance of the Member States honouring the commitments they undertook through the European Pact for Gender Equality (March 2006);
6. reminds the EU institutions and Member States of the commitments made and guidelines adopted through various Community programmes and policy documents/guidelines focussing on gender equality;
7. notes the need for measures from an early age to eliminate male and female stereotypes;
8. notes the need to challenge traditional gender roles in order to achieve gender equality;
9. draws attention in particular to the need to eliminate messages conveying gender stereotypes from textbooks, toys, TV games and TV advertising;
10. stresses the importance of the role played by the media in creating and perpetuating gender stereotypes and calls on the EU institutions and Member States to comply with and/or establish ethical and/or legal rules on how persons of both sexes can and should be presented in advertising;
11. notes the need to conduct training and awareness training actions with media professionals on the harmful effects of gender stereotypes and good practice in this area;
12. emphasises the importance of supporting the education, training and employment of women to promote and ensure that they have equal access to all areas and levels of the media, supporting research into all aspects of women and the media, encouraging and recognising women's media networks, and developing regulatory mechanisms, including voluntary ones, that promote balanced and diverse portrayals of women by the media and international communications systems;
13. draws attention to the report entitled "Con la violencia hacia las mujeres no se juega" ('Violence against women is no game'), published in 2004 by Amnesty International in Spain<sup>1</sup>. The report shows how a stereotyped, sexist, and often degrading image of women is presented by the new electronic media. The report concludes that the majority of video games constitute one more element in the reproduction of discriminatory stereotypes against women that perpetuate and trivialise abuses against their human rights;
14. notes that the codes of conduct in the mass media and new information and communications technologies (ICTs) rarely include gender considerations and that is a problem that needs to be solved;
15. emphasises the need for good examples from a gender perspective in the media and advertising world in order to show that change is possible and desirable;
16. emphasises the need for an ongoing debate on the media and their role in creating and perpetuating gender stereotypes;
17. emphasises that gender prejudices must be eliminated;

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<sup>1</sup> Video games, discrimination and violence against women. Amnesty International, Spain, 2004 ([http://www.es.amnesty.org/esp/docs/videojuegos\\_2004.pdf](http://www.es.amnesty.org/esp/docs/videojuegos_2004.pdf)).

18. instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.

## EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

A roadmap for equality (2006-2010) contains six priority areas, one of which is to combat gender stereotypes. The purpose of this report is to highlight how advertising fuels and consolidates gender stereotypes and how this has a negative impact on equality. The term advertising encompasses all text, picture or sound messages, in electronic or printed form, aimed at promoting a company's commercial activity.

Some research - although not enough - has been conducted in this field and a conference was held during the Slovenian Presidency in Brdo (Slovenia) in January 2008 to look into the limitations and problems regarding gender stereotypes. Marketing no longer aims to persuade consumers to buy something but to get consumers to interact with other objects on a market in order to create or produce themselves or to purposefully position themselves<sup>1</sup>. Consumption is viewed more and more as a targeted and meaningful productive process. The market and marketers work together in socialising consumers<sup>2</sup>. It is now a key tenet of research into consumption to describe consumption as an important aspect in the construction of human identity<sup>3</sup>. This can be seen as especially true of young consumers<sup>4</sup>. Research conducted in Germany<sup>5</sup>, by the UEAPME<sup>6</sup>, in Poland<sup>7</sup> and elsewhere has been invaluable for this report, as has a recently published study by the Swedish Government that documents and establishes the effects of gender stereotyping in advertising<sup>8</sup>.

The very purpose of advertising is to influence each and every one of us - women and men alike. Whenever we make choices in life, such as on our education, career, relationships and social and cultural affinities, this is not done in a vacuum. We are influenced by a whole range of factors, with social class and gender being two of the most important. Then there are the images and concepts of gender and gender roles that are ever present around us through advertising. Advertising influences us on both a conscious and, perhaps primarily, subconscious level. Technological progress has radically changed the way in which the commercial message is conveyed. This is of major significance in terms of the volume, accessibility and extent of advertising in our everyday lives. Gender stereotypes consolidate narrow gender roles, thus restricting the room for manoeuvre and life opportunities for women and girls, but also for men and boys. As this message is omnipresent in our everyday lives - on TV, in newspapers, in films, and on the Internet - it becomes the norm to which we are expected and required to conform.

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<sup>1</sup> Firat, Dholakia and Venkatesh: "Marketing in a postmodern world", 1995, p. 52

<sup>2</sup> Cova, "The Postmodern Explained To Managers: Implications For Marketing", 1996, p. 22

<sup>3</sup> Arnould & Thompson, "Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research, Journal of Consumer Research 2005, pp. 868-882

<sup>4</sup> Gianneschi, "Varor och märken - om att vara och märkas", Thesis on business administration, Department of Business Administration, University of Gothenburg, 2007

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Carsten Wippermann, Sinus Sociovision; Heidelberg, Germany: "Ways to Equality of Treatment – Today and Tomorrow"

<sup>6</sup> European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises: "Living and Managing Gender Stereotypes in Adulthood: Employer's point of view.

<sup>7</sup> Monika Ksieniewicz, Department for Women, Family and Counteracting Discrimination, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy: "Adulthood: Living and Managing Gender Stereotypes".

<sup>8</sup> Professor Eva-Maria Svensson. SOU 2008:5. <http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/09/59/16/388425af.pdf>

Advertising is specifically designed to be interpreted in a given way. One of the preconditions for uniform interpretation and, presumably, uniform commercial practice, is therefore that the form is based on general concepts or prejudices in its target group's society.

To be a woman or a man in today's society involves living up to artificial expectations, and this can, in practice, often be difficult or even impossible to achieve. Above all, however, it is not an aim worth attaining. Failure is a constant threat, and failure demands its sacrifice: eating disorders, mental illness, low self-esteem, etc. Self-dignity is reduced to conforming to a pre-established gender framework.

Research shows that the norms created by gender stereotypes in advertising objectify people, in the sense that both women and men - although women have suffered more up until now - are represented as objects. Reducing a human to an object leaves the individual exposed to violence and insults. Objectification in advertising is of key importance for the process by which an individual builds his/her identity and for how an image is perceived as 'normal'. Stereotyping relates to ideas about women and men and the relationships between them. Stereotyping in advertising is also seen as an instrument of power. The objective of gender equality policy is for everyone to have the power to shape society and their own existence. Constant exposure to objectifying and stereotyped messages impedes this objective.

Commercial messages are playing an ever more dominant role in child and youth culture. We know that this influence extends way beyond the purchase of goods. They condition children's views about themselves, their environment, their culture and, especially, violence. The image of gender roles conveyed by advertising is especially significant in that children are at the stage of developing their values and attitudes regarding gender roles, and of seeking their own identity. We run the risk of moving away from a self-reliance built up through human relationships and love to a strictly economic condition in which individuals purchase a false sense of security through the possession of objects. Children already in vulnerable situations are those most open to this influence.

"Is it a boy or a girl!" is the first question asked when a child is born. This already kicks off the education process for the newborn child that will now grow and develop into a member of society. Each society has its expectations, including expectations and images that are tied to gender. There is already a model there and the very concept of gender stereotyping involves exaggerating fabricated differences between the sexes. It is to consider that one sex is "better" than the other at carrying out certain tasks in society and to ignore differences between individuals. It creates a major problem by establishing the frameworks for what is "normal" for the respective sexes. Choosing a path that does not correspond to one's gender, in the field of education for example, can seriously restrict the choices made by an individual.

Everybody adopts some form of stereotype or prejudice in their view or interpretation of the world around them, but very few people are conscious of doing so, and gender-related prejudices or expectations can be reproduced uncontested. It is therefore difficult to change the template. This is why it is necessary to combat the structurally embedded stereotype images of women and men we find all around us. This should be achieved through information and awareness-raising measures. There are many ways of doing this, but the action has to permeate all levels of society, by adopting a structural approach that analyses

gender power relations. Gender stereotypes often exist in advertising to the financial gain of big business, in that an individual's search for identity is linked to the nature and volume of the goods and services he/she consumes. It is self evident that real, e.g. biological, differences between the sexes should to be taken into consideration and individual needs also play a role, but the point of departure must be the realisation that we as humans have more similarities than differences.