

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2004



2009

Session document

A6-0199/2008

29.5.2008

REPORT

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

Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

Rapporteur: Eva-Britt Svensson

CONTENTS

	Page
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION.....	3
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT	9
RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE.....	12

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 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 Action¹,
 - having regard to Council Directive 89/552/EEC of 3 October 1989 on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the provision of audiovisual media services (Audiovisual Media Services Directive)²,
 - having regard to the Council Directive 2004/113/EC of 13 December 2004 implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services³;
 - having regard to the Commission's roadmap for equality between women and men 2006-2010 (COM(2006)0092) and the related impact assessment (SEC(2006)0275),
 - having regard to its resolution of 25 July 1997 on discrimination against women in advertising⁴,
 - having regard to Resolution 1557 (2007) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, entitled 'Image of women in advertising',
 - 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 (A6-0199/2008),
- A. whereas socialisation (through school, the family and the socio-cultural environment) 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,

¹ OJ C 59, 23.2.2001, p. 258.

² OJ L 298, 17.10.1989, p 23. Directive as last amended by Directive 2007/65/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council (OJ L 332, 18.12.2007, p 27).

³ OJ L 373, 21.2.2004, p 37.

⁴ OJ C 304, 6.10.1997, p. 60.

- B. whereas more should be done to promote, both at school and at home, reasonable and responsible use of television and new technologies from an early age,
- C. whereas discriminatory and/or degrading messages based on gender in advertising and all forms of gender stereotyping is an obstacle to a modern and equal society,
- D. whereas stereotypes may contribute to conduct that is a vector for identification,
- E. whereas advertising and marketing create culture rather than just reflect it, our concepts of gender being socially constructed and advertisements helping us construct them,
- F. whereas advertising is a component part of the market economy and, owing to its ubiquity, has an undeniable impact on public behaviour and the shaping of public opinion,
- G. whereas advertising often presents a caricatured view of women's and men's lives,
- H. 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,
- I. whereas gender discrimination in the media is still widespread; whereas gender stereotyping advertising and media can be considered part of this discrimination,
- J. whereas gender stereotyping in advertising thus echoes the unequal distribution of gender power,
- K. whereas gender stereotyping in advertising not only restricts individuals to playing various predetermined roles, but also excludes individuals who do not fit the norm,
- L. whereas gender stereotyping must be opposed at all levels of society in order to foster equality and cooperation between women and men in both the private and public domains,
- M. whereas right from the first years of a child's socialisation gender stereotyping may contribute towards the gender discrimination which reinforces the perpetuation of lifelong inequalities between women and men and the emergence of gender-specific clichés,
- N. whereas the concept of gender stereotyping is counterproductive and contributes to dividing the labour market into professions by gender, with women generally earning less than men,
- O. whereas the whole of society has to be involved in efforts to avoid the reproduction of gender stereotyping; whereas responsibility for doing so should be shared by all parties,
- P. whereas the barriers to a positive image of men and women being conveyed in all social situations need to be removed,
- Q. 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, including education material, TV games, toy advertising, etc.; whereas children learn by imitation

and mimicking what they have just experienced; whereas gender stereotyping in advertising for that reason influences individual development and accentuates the fact that a person's gender dictates what is possible and what is not,

- R. whereas advertising through different types of media is omnipresent in our daily lives; whereas, regardless of our age and gender, we are exposed to commercial breaks in daily TV programmes as well as to other types of advertising; whereas it is of particular importance that advertising through media be subject to ethically and/or legally binding rules to prevent adverts communicating gender stereotypes and sex-based discrimination as well as incitement to violence and to sexism; whereas the law of many Member States is inadequate and national codes of ethics applicable to advertising are not respected or in some cases do not even exist;
- S. whereas responsible advertising can have a positive influence over society's perceptions of such issues as: 'body image', 'gender roles' and 'normality'; whereas advertising can be a strong tool in challenging and tackling 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. Notes that further research would help elucidate any link between gender stereotyping in advertising and gender inequality;
 4. Calls on the Council, Commission and Member States to exploit, 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 (approved at the European Council of 23 and 24 March 2006);
 6. Calls on the EU institutions and Member States to adhere to the guidelines adopted through various Community programmes, such as EQUAL, and guidelines focussing on gender equality;
 7. Calls on the EU institutions to monitor the implementation of existing provisions in European law on sex discrimination and incitement to hatred on the grounds of sex;
 8. Calls on the EU institutions and Member States to develop awareness actions on zero-tolerance across the EU for sexist insults or degrading images of women in the media;
 9. Calls on Member States to establish national media monitoring bodies with a specific gender equality branch and expertise in order to receive complaints from the public, to grant gender equality awards to media and advertisement professionals, to study and report on the question of women in the media and to carry out regular, systematic monitoring of gender images in media content. In addition, research may be undertaken by the future European Gender Institute;

10. Notes that stereotyping is utilised in marketing directed at both adults and children, stresses that stereotypes in advertising on children's television programmes are a special problem because of their potential impact on gender socialisation and, subsequently, children's views of themselves, family members and the outside world;
11. Notes that efforts to combat gender stereotypes in the media and advertising should be accompanied by education strategies and measures to cultivate awareness from an early age and develop the critical faculties as from adolescence;
12. Stresses the fundamental role which should be played by the school system in developing children's critical faculties with regard to images and the media in general, in order to prevent the disastrous effects of the recurrence of gender stereotypes in marketing and advertising;
13. Notes the need to challenge traditional gender roles in order to achieve gender equality;
14. Draws attention in particular to the need to eliminate messages contrary to human dignity and conveying gender stereotypes from textbooks, toys, video and computer games, Internet and the new information and communications technologies (ICTs), as well as advertising through different types of media;
15. Notes with extreme concern the advertising of sexual services, which reinforce stereotypes of women as objects, in publications, such as local newspapers, which are readily visible and available to children;
16. 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 codes and/or legal rules applicable to creators and distributors of advertising concerning the concepts of discriminatory advertising and demanding respect for values of human dignity;
17. Notes the need to conduct continuous training actions for media professionals and, in collaboration with them, awareness training actions for society on the negative effects of gender stereotypes;
18. 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;
19. 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 Spain¹. 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;

¹ Video games, discrimination and violence against women. Amnesty International, Spain, 2004 (http://www.es.amnesty.org/esp/docs/videojuegos_2004.pdf).

20. Draws attention to the fact that use of the television and new technologies is increasing among children and adolescents, that such use starts at a very early age and that unsupervised television viewing is on the rise;
21. Draws attention to the report entitled "Eating Disorders, Body Image and the Media" published in 2000 by the British Medical Association; notes that media portrayals of the ideal body image can adversely effect the self-esteem of women, particularly teenagers and those susceptible to eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa; recommends that broadcasters, magazine publishers and advertisers adopt a more responsible editorial attitude towards the depiction of extremely thin women as role models and portray a more realistic range of body images; calls on advertisers in particular to consider more carefully their use of extremely thin women to advertise products;
22. Calls on the Member States to ensure by appropriate means that marketing and advertising guarantee respect for human dignity and the integrity of the person, are neither directly nor indirectly discriminatory nor contain any incitement to hatred based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, and do not contain material which, judged in its context, sanctions, promotes or glamorises violence against women;
23. Notes that the codes of conduct in the mass media and new information and communications technologies (ICTs) rarely include gender considerations, and that this is a problem that needs to be solved;
24. Recognises the work that media regulators in some Member States have already done to explore the effects of gender stereotyping and encourages regulators in all Member States to share best practice with regard to these issues;
25. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to develop a 'Code of Conduct' for advertising in which marketing communications respect the principle of equality between men and women and in which sex stereotyping and any exploitation or demeaning of men and women are avoided;
26. Reminds the Commission that the above-mentioned Council Directive 2004/113/EC, when first proposed by the Commission, also covered discrimination in the media; calls on the Commission to step up its efforts against this discrimination;
27. 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; considers that all Member States should, like Spain, which has established a prize for 'creating equality', make official the award of a prize by advertisers to members of their own industry, and a prize awarded by the public, to reward advertising which best breaks with gender stereotypes and presents a positive or status-enhancing image of women, men or relations between them;
28. Underlines the need to disseminate the principles of gender equality through the media by means of publications and programmes, designed for different age groups, to popularize best practices and respect for gender differences;

29. Emphasises the need for an ongoing debate on the media and their role in creating and perpetuating gender stereotypes;
30. Calls on the Member States to design and launch educational initiatives, developed in the spirit of tolerance and eschewing all forms of stereotyping, which significantly disparages the relationship between men and women, to promote the culture of gender equality by means of appropriate educational programmes;
31. Emphasises that gender stereotypes must be eliminated;
32. 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 themselves¹. Consumption is viewed more and more as a targeted and meaningful productive process. The market and marketers work together in socialising consumers². It is now a key tenet of research into consumption to describe consumption as an important aspect in the construction of human identity³. This can be seen as especially true of young consumers⁴. Research conducted in Germany⁵, by the UEAPME⁶, in Poland⁷ 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 advertising⁸.

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁸ 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.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	27.5.2008
Result of final vote	+: 19 -: 5 0: 6
Members present for the final vote	Edit Bauer, Emine Bozkurt, Hiltrud Breyer, Věra Flasarová, Claire Gibault, Zita Gurmai, Esther Herranz García, Livia Járóka, Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou, Urszula Krupa, Siiri Oviir, Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou, Zita Pleštinšská, Karin Resetarits, Teresa Riera Madurell, Raül Romeva i Rueda, Eva-Britt Svensson, Corien Wortmann-Kool, Anna Záborská
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Gabriela Crețu, Iratxe García Pérez, Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg, Mary Honeyball, Kartika Tamara Liotard, Marusya Ivanova Lyubcheva, Zuzana Roithová, Petya Stavreva, Bernadette Vergnaud
Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote	Armando França, Ewa Tomaszewska