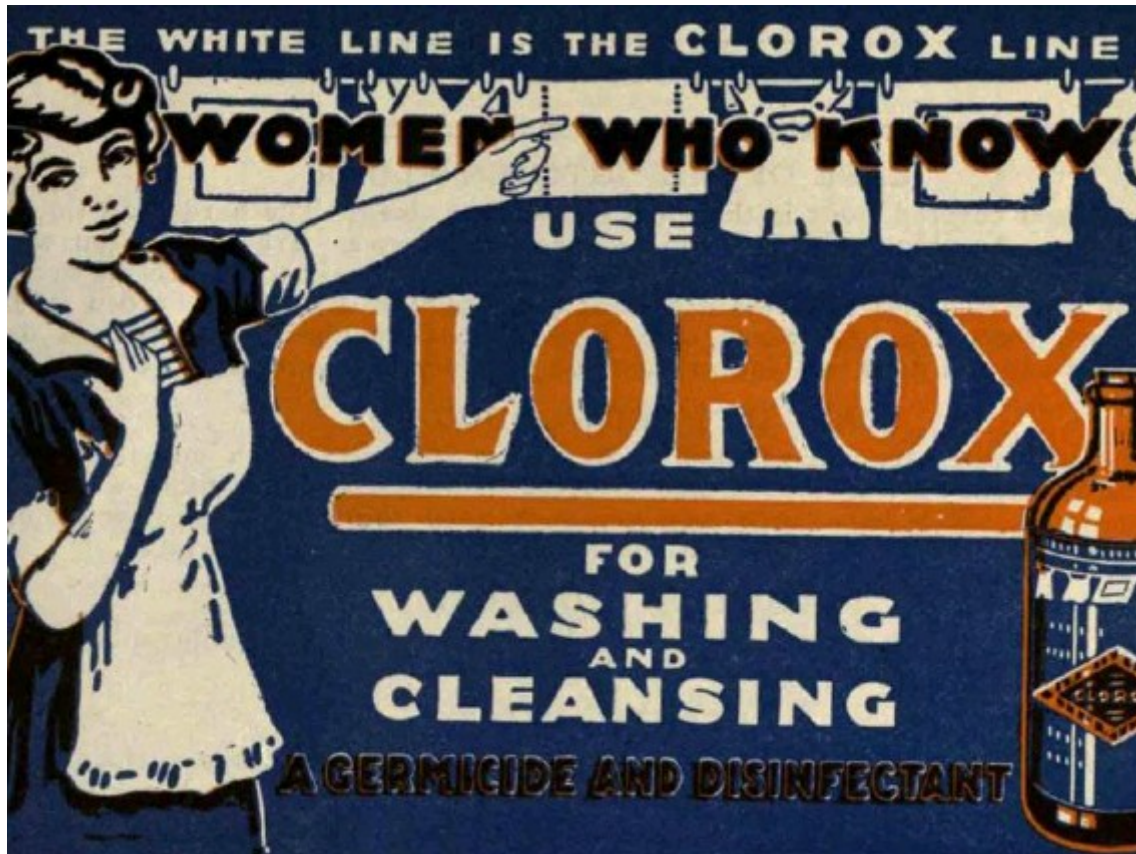


# Stricter rules needed to tackle gender stereotypes in advertising, watchdog says

The Independent · 18 Jul 2017 · MAY BULMAN

A “tougher line” is required to tackle potentially harmful gender stereotypes in advertising that instil gender roles and drive “unfair outcomes” in society, the UK’s advertising watchdog has warned.



The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) concluded that regulations must be stricter after carrying out research which found that stereotypes in ads can “restrict the choices, aspirations and opportunities of

children, young people and adults”.

The report, published today, says that while the regulator had a record of banning ads on the grounds of objectification and inappropriate sexualisation, a “tougher line” was needed on those that feature stereotypical gender roles, including those that mock people for not conforming.

It cites examples of a number of depictions in adverts it states are problematic, including depicting family members creating a mess while a woman has sole responsibility for cleaning it up and suggesting a specific activity is inappropriate for boys because it is stereotypically associated with girls, or vice versa.

In response to the evidence, the Committees of Advertising Practice (CAP), which writes the UK Advertising Codes, will develop new standards on ads that feature stereotypical gender roles or char-

acteristics, which the ASA will then administer and enforce. The new standards are set to come into force next year.

Evelyn Greeves, an 18-year-old Girl Guiding advocate, told The Independent she was highly influenced and pushed to think a certain way by adverts as she was growing up, saying: “It’s taken me a long time to unlearn the stereotypes that were instilled into me by adverts and the media while I was growing up.

“The images of women make me feel like my body should be a certain way, and I think I’m still unlearning this idea that it’s always the woman who does the cooking and cleaning. It can definitely sway people in a subconscious way to believe they should look a certain way or pursue a certain future. And the ads are everywhere. Once you’ve started noticing them, you notice they are all over the place.”

It comes as the Girlguiding from the Girls’ Attitude Survey 2017 revealed that more than nine in 10 (93 per cent) girls and young women aged 11-21 think the advertising industry should stop using gender stereotypes of women and men,

Fifty-nine per cent of the same group, meanwhile, had seen airbrushed images in the media in the past week which made them feel pressured to look different, while 47 per cent had seen stereotypical images of men and women in the media in the past week which made them feel less confident to do what they want.

Guy Parker, chief executive of the ASA, said tougher advertising standards could play an “important role” in tackling inequalities not only for individuals but throughout society as a whole. “Portrayals which reinforce outdated and stereotypical views on gender roles in society can play their part in driving unfair outcomes for people,” he said. “While advertising is only one of many factors that contribute to unequal gender outcomes, tougher advertising standards can play an important role in tackling inequalities and improving outcomes for individuals, the economy and society as a whole.”

Ella Smillie, lead report author, said: “Our review shows that specific forms of gender stereotypes in ads can contribute to harm for adults and children. Such portrayals can limit how people see themselves, how others see them, and limit the life decisions they take. Tougher standards in the areas we’ve identified will address harms and ensure that modern society is better represented.”