



## Advertising Standards Authority Call for Evidence: Gender Stereotyping in Ads Girlguiding Response June 2016

### About Girlguiding

1. Girlguiding is the leading charity for girls and young women in the UK, with over 500,000 members. Thanks to the dedication and support of 100,000 amazing volunteers, we are active in every part of the UK, giving girls and young women a space where they can be themselves, have fun, build brilliant friendships, gain valuable life skills and make a positive difference to their lives and their communities. We build girls' confidence and raise their aspirations. We give them the chance to discover their full potential and encourage them to be a powerful force for good. We give them a space to have fun. We run Rainbows (5-7 years), Brownies (7-10 years), Guides (10-14 years) and The Senior Section (14-25 years). Registered Charity No 306016. [www.girlguiding.org.uk](http://www.girlguiding.org.uk)

### About Girlguiding's Evidence

2. Girlguiding's submission focuses on evidence from the Girls' Attitudes Surveys - our annual research into the opinions of girls and young women throughout the UK aged 7 to 21 and the personal testimony of young members.
3. The Girls' Attitudes Survey canvasses the opinions of over 1,500 girls and young women, inside and outside guiding across the UK each year. We commission expert child research agency Childwise to conduct this survey. For more information and data see [www.girlguiding.org.uk/girlsattitudes](http://www.girlguiding.org.uk/girlsattitudes).
4. Girlguiding's response is also influenced by the Girls Matter campaign - Girlguiding's pre-General Election campaign that profiles girls' and young women's calls for change - Girlguiding's recommendations are drawn from this campaign, created after consultation with girls and young women. <http://new.girlguiding.org.uk/report>.

### Introduction

5. Girlguiding's research shows that girls and young women are concerned about the impact of advertising including on TV, in magazines, newspapers, music, both online and traditional - is having on their lives and are critical of the way girls and women are portrayed. Girls tell us there is too much female nudity, too little diversity, and too few positive female role models.
6. Girls feel that too many adverts still portray girls and women in traditional gender roles or that they sexualise and objectify them. They also fail to reflect the diversity of the society they live in.
7. Girls can internalise the images they see in advertising and this can impact on how they view themselves and their role in society, leading to a knock on effect on aspirations and goals. Girlguiding recognises the pressure this places on girls and has actively called for advertisers to address the representation of girls and young women in the media since 2007. Our report published in that year, *Under 10 and under pressure*, examined girls' perception of body image. In 2010 Girlguiding campaigned to



introduce compulsory labelling to distinguish between airbrushed and natural images, and during the 2015 General Election, our manifesto, *Girls Matter*, called on the next government to stop children's exposure to harmful sexualised content in mainstream media, and empower girls and young women to speak out and be heard on the impact of media sexism and stereotyping.

*'To me an equal society for men and women would be one where shampoo adverts also include men washing their hair provocatively while frolicking in the shower.'*

Former Girlguiding Advocate, 16

## The Representation of Women and Girls

8. Our 2015 Girls' Attitudes Survey found that half of girls aged 11 to 21 (48%) think women are not portrayed fairly in the media. This is a substantial increase compared to 5 years before when 27% of girls thought women were not portrayed fairly.
9. In the same year (2015) we asked girls aged 11 to 21 about the impact of media and found that:
  - 52% had seen women pictured in newspapers or magazines in a sexualised way that made them feel uncomfortable.
  - 42% had read something in the media that trivialised violence or abuse towards women.
  - 55% had seen the media talk about women's appearance before their achievements/job.
  - 53% had heard a joke/remark that belittled or degraded a girl/woman in a film or on TV.

*'We need ...changes in advertising and the media to stop sexualising women...'*

Girls' Attitudes Survey participant

10. Girls report that they are surrounded by negative, limited and stereotypical portrayals of girls and women. Our research shows that the vast majority of girls recognise how widespread a problem this is and the impact it has. Girlguiding's 2014 Girls' Attitudes Survey found that:
  - 69% of girls and young women aged 11 to 21 reported seeing sexism in the media including advertisements.
  - 75% of girls and young women aged 11 to 21 say that there are too many images of naked or nearly naked women in the media.
  - 75% say that the women usually shown in the media are all too much alike, for example in body size and shape, ethnicity, age and profession.
  - 65% agree that too often women appear in the media only because they are the girlfriend or wife of a famous man.
  - 55% feel that there are not enough positive female role models in the media.
  - 49% of girls aged 13 to 21 say that this portrayal of women restricts what they do or aspire to in some way.

*'If I could change one thing...I would reduce objectification of women's body in the media.'* Girls' Attitudes Survey participant



*'The media influences society hugely, so if the media presents women as being sex objects, there only to satisfy men and be judged on their appearance, ordinary people start to believe that as well'. Sarah, 18, Birmingham, Girlguiding member*

11. Younger girls, those aged 7 to 10, hold similar views about how women are portrayed. The evidence shows that girls are affected by negative stereotypes from an early age, and have an awareness that the women represented in advertising, and the media more generally, show only a partial picture of the roles girls and women can play in the world.
- Half of girls (48%) aged 7 to 10 think there are too many women on TV who don't have enough clothes on.
  - 43% say that the women usually shown in magazines and on TV are all too much alike.
  - 31% think that a lot of women on TV are there only because of their boyfriends or partners.

### Body Confidence, Gender Stereotypes and Aspirations

12. The majority of girls and young women clearly think that gender inequality - including stereotyped and sexist representations of girls and women in the media and public life - negatively affects how women are treated in society. It also affects their education, aspirations, careers, body image and confidence and their relationships.

13. Our 2014 Girls' Attitudes Survey found that what girls see in the media has a big influence on body image.
- 37% of girls aged 11 to 21 feel they should try to look more like the pictures of girls and women they see in the media.
  - 33% think they are more likely to be successful if they look like celebrities, rising to 43% among those aged 17 to 21.
  - Almost half of girls (45%) sometimes feel ashamed of the way they look because they are not like girls and women in the media. The numbers who feel this way increase from 36% among those aged 11 to 16, to 52% of girls aged 17 to 21.

*'If I could change one thing...I would change the way the media makes women feel - [as if] there is only one "standard" of beauty. This isn't fair!' Girls' Attitudes Survey participant*

14. 39% of those aged 11 to 21 often stop themselves taking part in fun activities because they are self-conscious about their appearance, and 30% take part less in the classroom/at work because they feel concerned about their appearance.
15. Girlguiding research has found that girls can be heavily influenced by gender stereotypes that permeate many aspects of their lives, this includes what they see represented in the media. Girlguiding's 2015 Girls' Attitudes Survey asked girls, aged 7 to 10, their views on what they think girls and boys are like and what they can be, and their answers strongly reflect traditional gender stereotypes.
- 57% of girls say that boys are better at building things.
  - 39% of girls also think boys are better at reading maps.
  - 29% think boys are better at science.
16. At an early age, the research indicates that girls are learning that they should not aspire to be certain things and do certain jobs. When asked to choose their top three potential careers for when they grow up 3% of girls aged 7 to 10 chose engineer or



architect and only 6% chose scientist. Girls' top choices were singer or dancer (34%), teacher (29%) and vet (26%).

17. Older girls, aged 17 to 21, tell us that they feel under pressure to behave in certain ways to help them get a job.

- 44% of young women feel under pressure to stay slim in order to have a better chance at job interviews.
- 27% feel they have to wear high heels.
- 25% feel they have to wear a lot of make-up.

Advertising could do much more to help change the underlying culture that girls live in and challenge what is perceived as 'normal' for women and girls.

*'We're just constantly being told 'you can't do that - you're a girl' or 'that's what you're meant to be'. People are restricting what we can and can't do and trying to put us into neat little boxes.'* Rebecca, 13, Gloucestershire, Girlguiding member

18. Among girls aged 7 to 10, 16% agree that they think they are more likely to be successful if they look like celebrities, and 14% agree that they sometimes feel embarrassed about the way they look because they are not like the girls on TV.

### What Girls Want

19. In 2014 we asked young women aged 17 to 21 what they would like to see media organisations do to improve the representation of women.

- 89% think they should publicly commit to making sure they represent all women fairly.
- 84% think they should commit to showing more positive female role models.
- 83% think they should make sure that there is more difference represented among the women in the media.
- 77% agree that they should agree not to show airbrushed images of women.
- 76% of young women aged 17 to 21 say that campaigns can make a real difference to improve how women are represented in the media.

Girls also thought the government should take action

- 85% think that the government has a role to play in making sure the media represents women fairly.

*'Every day we are exposed to thousands of images and ideas from the media. That's why I think their sexualised and stereotypical representation of girls and women is one of the major reasons for the high levels of sexism still present across society. Constantly seeing airbrushed and sexualised images of women has an extremely negative effect on girls' body confidence, and it affects how men and boys think too. Giving girls a voice on how this can be tackled is really important. Things have to change.'* Morgan, 17, Folkestone, former Girlguiding Advocate

*'The media should include a diversity of images that portray women, for example in politics, business, academia, engineering, science, technology, mathematics and leading professions. These images must also be taken seriously, not ridiculed or mocked for not conforming to the sexualised stereotype of women.'* Sarah, 21, Morecambe, Girlguiding member



## Girlguiding's Work to Address Gender Inequality

20. Girlguiding's programme, research and advocacy promotes gender equality and our vision is of a world free from gender inequality where girls and young women are empowered and free to fulfil their potential. Through our programme resources, such as our range of *Go For It!*<sup>1</sup> Activities - which includes *Go For It! Be Constructive*, *Go For It! Experiment* and *Go For It! Be the change* - we teach girls practical skills and tools to fulfil their potential. Girlguiding supports girls to have their voices heard and speak out on issues they care about, including sexism and gender inequality. Our young members have made clear some of the specific things they want to see change through campaigns such as *Girls Matter* and *No More Page 3*.
21. Free Being Me is a global badge programme using fun and interactive activities to grow girls' self-esteem and body confidence. It encourages girls to celebrate their individuality, empowering them to challenge the myth of the "perfect-looking woman" created by society. The scheme has been created by the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) and the Dove Self-Esteem Project, to reach millions of girls across the world. At Girlguiding, we train Peer Educators to run Free Being Me sessions for young members. <http://new.girlguiding.org.uk/latest-updates/making-a-difference/building-body-confidence>

## Girlguiding Recommendations

22. Girls tell us they want to see the advertising industry do more to tackle gender stereotyping and the sexualisation of girls and women and to promote gender equality. In order to tackle these issues, Girlguiding would like to see the advertising industry and its regulators take action:

### Through Engagement with Girls and Young Women

- Empower girls and young women to speak out and be heard on the impact of media sexism and stereotyping by making it easier for young people to lodge a complaint and making young people more aware of the process.
- The Committees of Advertising Practice (CAP), responsible for writing and maintaining the UK Advertising Codes, should work with girls and young women to create an advertising code that addresses their concerns.
- Endorse the use of resources to help girls recognise the tools and tricks advertisers use to influence young people.

*'The media need to stop coverage of size 0 models and promote a healthier attitude towards body confidence and self-esteem.'* Laura, 21, Wakefield Girlguiding Member

*'Showing an equal variety of not only men and women but different races will provide a true equality in the media.'* Danielle, 16, Orpington Girlguiding Member

### Through Regulation and Guidance

- Support and endorse the Be Real campaign's Body Image Code. The Code emphasises the need to show the varied roles that women play in our society and the diversity of women. Girls tell us that they want to see more

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.girlguiding.org.uk/Guides/gfibadge/gfi/index.html>



women doing different jobs and a greater representation of the diversity of women.

- b. Stop children's exposure to harmful sexualised content in advertising by promising to ensure the ASA and CAP codes operate on principles similar to those of the broadcast watershed.

*'The main barriers to equality are the misconceptions that are deeply ingrained in our culture and the stereotypes that are portrayed by the media. Equality requires a change in perception and attitudes, not just laws, which is currently the case.'*

Former Girlguiding Advocate, 22

### Through Education

- c. Support the campaign to introduce gender equality and body confidence lessons in school to ensure girls are taught about photoshopping, airbrushing and gender stereotypes. The ASA should use its position as an expert authority to convince government of the positive difference this could make.
- d. Recognise the power of peer education and endorse resources that help young people increase their resilience to the images they see in advertising. Our *Free Being Me* global initiative helps to increase girls' body confidence, and not let concerns about their appearance hold them back from becoming active, responsible and confident citizens of the world.

*'Girls are growing up surrounded by things that can make them feel bad about themselves - images of women photoshopped beyond recognition, sexist music videos and song lyrics, lads' mags... The list goes on. I spent most of my teenage years plagued by self-doubt. Had it been a requirement for my school to teach body confidence, then that angst would more than likely have been prevented.'* Nikki, 22, Southampton, former Girlguiding Advocate