

Gender Portrayal Guidelines

When considering consumer complaints about advertising, Consumer Response Councils will be encouraged to refer to the principles expressed in the Gender Portrayal Guidelines with respect to the representation of women and men in advertisements.

Fast Facts

- Stereotyping Guidelines were originally developed by the CRTC Task Force on Sex-role Stereotyping in the Broadcast Media in 1981
- In 1981, Advertising Standards Canada (then the Canadian Advertising Foundation) took over the administration of the guidelines, on behalf of the industry, and extended their purview to all Canadian paid media
- The Stereotyping Guidelines were revised in 1987.
- Renamed the Gender Portrayal Guidelines and revised in 1993

Interpretation Guide

1. Caution should be taken to ensure that the overall impression of an ad does not violate the spirit of gender equality even though the individual elements of the ad may not violate any particular guideline.
2. While the Guidelines pertain to both women and men, some clauses are particularly directed to the portrayal of women. Men and women are not at equal risk of being negatively portrayed and these Guidelines recognize that fact.
3. Humour, works of art and historical settings can all be positive elements in advertising. However, these techniques should not serve as an excuse to stereotype women or men or to portray behaviour which is not acceptable today.
4. The Consumer Response Councils may consider the nature of the media used when assessments are made. Sensitivity should be demonstrated in choosing media vehicles for certain product categories, such as intimate or personal products.

Gender Portrayal Guidelines

1. Authority

Advertising should strive to provide an equal representation of women and men in roles of authority both for the characters within the actual advertising scenario and when representing the advertiser through announcers, voice-overs, experts and on-camera authorities.

2. Decision-Making

Women and men should be portrayed equally as single decision-makers for all purchases including big-ticket items. Where joint decision-making is reflected, men and women should be portrayed as equal participants in the decision-making process whether in the workplace or at home.

3. Sexuality

Advertising should avoid the inappropriate use or exploitation of sexuality of both women and men.

4. Violence

Neither sex should be portrayed as exerting domination over the other by means of overt or implied threats, or actual force.

5. Diversity

Advertising should portray both women and men in the full spectrum of diversity and as equally competent in a wide range of activities both inside and outside the home.

6. Language

Advertising should avoid language that misrepresents, offends or excludes women or men.