Gender inclusivity in advertising in the Caribbean
Call to action for Marketers from Private Sector Companies

Advertising is one of the key sectors which has the opportunity to positively influence gender norms. Such actions will benefit society by shifting rigid expectations which limit individual potential, while also addressing root causes of violence against women and girls.

Gender stereotypes are pervasive among society and must be addressed across sectors in order to promote and socialize gender norms more aligned with human rights principles. Greater knowledge around advertising and its influence on stereotypes, norms, and gender socialization is needed to inform future interventions which can lead the industry in a positive direction.

To fill some of these knowledge gaps, UNICEF and the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, with the support of the Spotlight Initiative Caribbean Programme, conducted a systematic content analysis of 600 advertisements from television and digital media in four Caribbean countries (Barbados, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, and Trinidad and Tobago) that aired between 2019 and 2021.

A close look at advertisements in the Caribbean

The study found that harmful gender norms continue to be represented, reproduced, and reinforced in television and digital media advertisements in the Caribbean. The ways in which women and men were portrayed were often illustrative of discriminatory gender norms and a patriarchal system that privileges masculinity over femininity. The analysis of the ads revealed that:

1. Women were shown as caregivers but also as objects of sexual desire.

▸ Women were more likely than men to be depicted with family or as having dependent children, to be portrayed in domestic spaces, and to be performing domestic tasks.
▸ Women were portrayed in revealing clothing seven times as often as men.

2. Men were portrayed as powerful providers and leaders.

▸ Men were more likely than women to be shown having a professional, paid occupation.

▸ Men were more likely than women to be represented across almost all of the reviewed occupations.

3. Advertisements in the Caribbean failed to capture the region's diversity, widely excluding nondominant groups.

▸ Characters portrayed in the reviewed advertisements were largely heterosexual, young, thin, non-disabled, and middle-class.
▸ There was a near-total absence of LGBTQIA+ individuals, people living with disabilities, and adults over 50 years old.
▸ Very few characters were portrayed as working-class or having large bodies.

The characters in the advertisements reviewed reinforced traditional gender roles and portrayed a very narrow view of Caribbean society, suggesting that such portrayals are "normal" and what is expected or considered acceptable amongst Caribbean audiences.

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Why does it matter?

The power of marketing and advertising in shaping — or challenging — gender norms is especially important during adolescence. The portrayal of gender stereotypes in advertising may create conflicting or unrealistic expectations for youth, which may result in low self-confidence, higher rates of depression, and different forms of gender-based violence. Yet, adolescence can also be a time for transformation, as young people begin to explore and define their own identities and values.

It is critical that the private sector work together with policymakers, civil society, and ad agencies to capitalize on this opportunity window and thoughtfully leverage advertising and marketing as forces for positive change.

What can the private sector do?

1. Internal policy, guidance and tools

Diversity needs to be valued in the workplace. People with a range of perspectives need to have an equal voice and hiring practices should reflect and act on children's rights, and the principles of gender equality, diversity and inclusion.

Companies should take action to:

✔ Look at how diversity, equity, and inclusion in relationship to children is present in the company's overall vision and strategy.
✔ Examine marketing and advertising policies related to marketing to children. Do you have any procurement and recruitment policies around diversity?
✔ Check for programmes to promote positive socialization among children and avoid stereotyping.
✔ Assess if products are developed, designed, and marketed with diversity, equity and inclusion issues in mind.

2. Transformative product audit

To avoid stereotyping in the design and marketing of content and products for children, look at the company's structure and the creative process as well as product marketing and brand communication.

Companies should take action to:

✔ Ensure the company's strategic plan and recruitment policies include diversity, equity and inclusion as core principles, rather than a separate set of objectives or a siloed diversity office.
✔ Track company exit/attrition as a measure of bias.
✔ Encourage senior management cascades commitment throughout the workforce.
✔ Put in place steps to constantly assess whether creative processes take into account culture shifts, trends, and expectations.
✔ Implement regular checks for stereotyping in concept, language, colour coding, images and videos.

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3. Research and evidence

Strengthen research and evidence to monitor and assess progress. Build the company's research and evidence base, ensuring diverse voices are included in market research and assessment, and that stereotypes are actively avoided. Companies should take action to:

✔ Understand the impact of children's products and content, and how the associated marketing and advertising influence the ways children perceive their world, particularly how they see themselves and others reflected and portrayed.

✔ Ensure diverse samples in concept testing and research.

✔ Monitor and assess progress in producing progressive advertising.
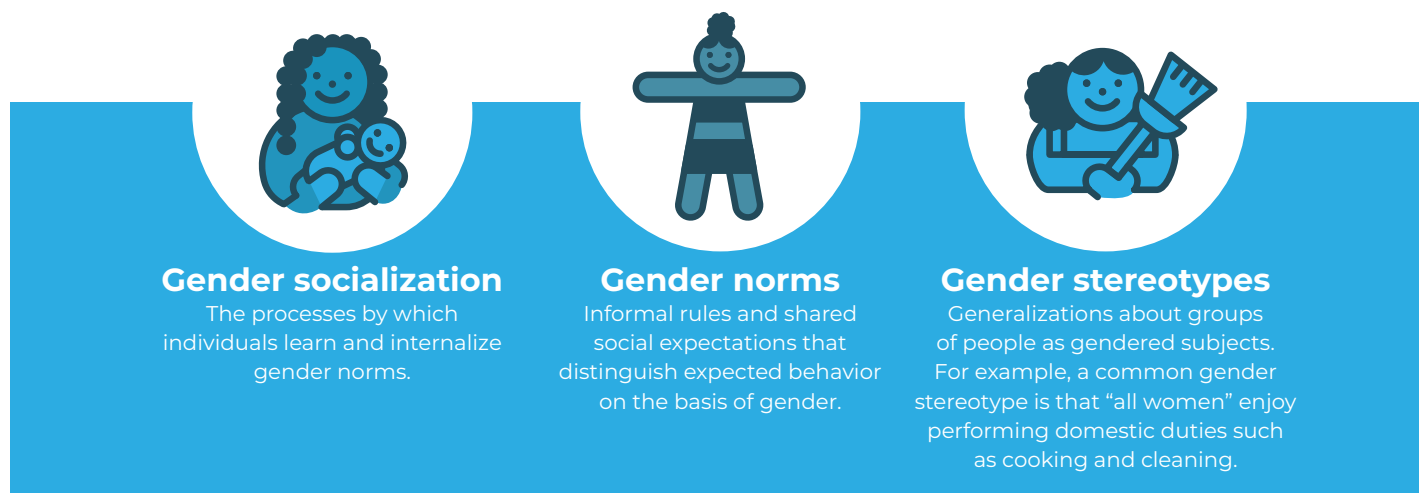
4. External advocacy and thought leadership

Drive change and raise standards across the industry by working with allies to raise awareness of the impact of stereotyping on children and influence private sector policies and procedures.
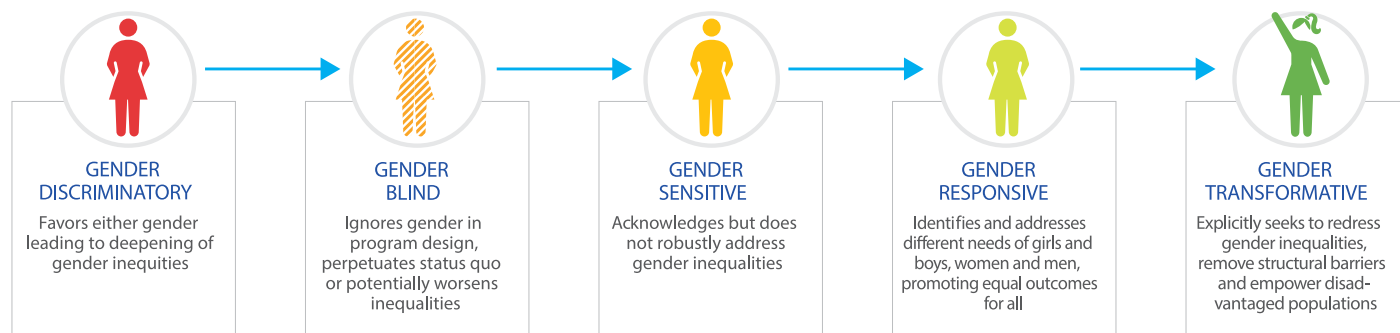
5. Check regularly

Discovering and applying issues and insights around diversity, equity and inclusion is a journey rather than a destination.

Key terms

Gender socialization
The processes by which individuals learn and internalize gender norms.

Gender norms
Informal rules and shared social expectations that distinguish expected behavior on the basis of gender.

Gender stereotypes
Generalizations about groups of people as gendered subjects. For example, a common gender stereotype is that "all women" enjoy performing domestic duties such as cooking and cleaning.

UNICEF's 'Gender Continuum' diagnostic tool

UNICEF uses the Gender Continuum diagnostic tool to evaluate the effectiveness of a development or humanitarian intervention in addressing gender inequalities in programme design, implementation, monitoring and/or evaluation. You can use this tool as a clear guide and/or inspiration to support gender inclusive and equitable marketing campaigns.

GENDER DISCRIMINATORY	GENDER BLIND	GENDER SENSITIVE	GENDER RESPONSIVE	GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE
Favors either gender leading to deepening of gender inequities	Ignores gender in program design, perpetuates status quo or potentially worsens inequalities	Acknowledges but does not robustly address gender inequalities	Identifies and addresses different needs of girls and boys, women and men, promoting equal outcomes for all	Explicitly seeks to redress gender inequalities, remove structural barriers and empower disad-vantaged populations

Source - Promoting diversity and inclusion in advertising: a UNICEF playbook

Demonstrate your commitment

By setting key performance indicators, you can demonstrate your commitment as a company to avoiding negative stereotypes and achieving diversity, equity and inclusion in the development, marketing and advertising of products designed for children. Use this check-list of key indicators to guide your progress:

Business strategy and structure

❏ A separate diversity, equity and inclusion budget line ensures sufficient resources are allocated.
❏ Senior management is committed to a cascade approach throughout the workforce.
❏ Company exit/attrition rate is tracked as a measure of bias.
❏ External talent is identified to support diverse voices on the team.
❏ Educational programmes on gender socialization or bias training are offered.
❏ The company is affiliated with key actors such as World Federation of Advertisers / Unstereotype Alliance / Local Marketing Association, etc.

The creative process

❏ Steps are put into place to ensure diversity in product testing – for teams, partners, experts and participants – and team composition is monitored.
❏ Internal workshops/webinars are conducted to raise the issue of how diversity, equity and inclusion can influence product development and marketing.
❏ Regular analysis of the impact of hiring practices and the workplace culture on creative teams is carried out.
❏ Long-term strategic plans and commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion are developed for creative teams.

Product marketing and brand communication

❏ Advertising scripts and copy are tested for bias, with ads tested with a diverse audience of children.
❏ Metrics are put in place to measure progressive ads in regular tracking
❏ Impact assessments are conducted with diverse child stakeholders to understand how marketing can influence their perceptions of themselves and others.
❏ Regular contact with industry bodies/ governments is maintained to ensure minimum standard around steoreotyping children.

Policies and practices

❏ HR policies and practices to monitor gender balance in the workplace are put in place.
❏ Gender policies are followed.
❏ Peer mentorships and support groups for women and minorities in the workplace are available.
❏ Company's overall approach to a gender policy is categorized: Gender negative or blind, gender aware or sensitive, or gender responsive or transformative.

Corporate Social Responsibiity

❏ Corporate social responsibility policies related to gender and advertising are available.
❏ Company supports any initiatives related to gender outcomes for girls or gender equality.

For more recommendations and info:

• A Review of Advertising in the Caribbean and Its Links to Gender Equality, Gender Norms, and Violence Against Women and Girls" study in the Caribbean

• Promoting diversity and inclusion in advertising: a UNICEF playbook