

# Impact Case Study

## Gender equality in advertising



### Introduction and background

The Gender equality in advertising project was established to address a pressing industry problem – the portrayal of gender in advertising and how those portrayals contribute towards violence against women.

The project was led by Dr Lauren Gurrieri in partnership with the ShEqual action coalition, which aims to “to promote gender equality and address the drivers of violence against women in the advertising setting.” (<https://shequal.com.au>)

Dr Gurrieri is a founding member of ShEqual, an action coalition to promote gender equality in advertising. The coalition comprises representatives from the advertising, gender equity and violence prevention sectors as well as local and State Governments.

Dr Gurrieri’s research drives social change, awareness and understanding of sexism in advertising, as a driver of societal gender inequality.

### The research

Dr Gurrieri analysed local and global promising practice and community expectations of gender representations in advertising.

Advertising matters because it is everywhere, with most people seeing more than 5000 ads a day. It’s also a multi-billion-dollar industry, designed to influence our decisions. The Seeing is Believing report notes that:

*“What we expect from women and girls, and from men, boys and gender diverse people, is influenced by how they are shown in advertising.*

*As audiences, we don’t always know it. But in advertising, we are seeing a picture of our culture. We use that picture when we form our ideas about what gender means for who we are and how we live.*

*Still too often, being a woman in an ad means being a sex object, a mum, a stereotype, a prop, or someone not able to think or choose for herself. Too often, being a man means being super-macho, aggressive, or powerful.<sup>3</sup> Gender diverse people are largely invisible. Most ads still show people who are young, white, able-bodied and heterosexual.”*

Dr Gurrieri’s analysis provided evidence that the way gender is portrayed in advertisements had a strong, negative impact on women and contributed towards a culture of violence against women.

### Funding support and/or institutional support

In 2018-2019, a successful collaborative research grant funded by the Victoria State Government Free from Violence Fund (Category 2) led to the project being awarded \$213,955 (\$24,474 to RMIT).

The College of Business and Law funded the ‘Progressing Gender Equality in Advertising’ stakeholder forum, which was filmed. RMIT also provided media engagement support.

### Project outcomes

Dr Gurrieri developed two research reports that analysed local and global promising practice and community expectations of gender representations in advertising.

- “Addressing and preventing sexist advertising: an analysis of local and global promising practice” (2019)
- “Community responses to gender portrayals in advertising: a research paper” (2019)

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What’s next...

## Other publications

- Gurrieri, L. (2021). Patriarchal marketing and the symbolic annihilation of women In: *Journal of Marketing Management*, 37, 364 - 370
- Gurrieri, L., Cahill, H., Finn, F., McVey, L. and Sagheer, S. (Forthcoming); 'Gendered marketing and feminism', *The Routledge Companion to Marketing and Social Impact*

## Media

- Numerous media engagements, including:
  1. The Conversation
  2. SBS 'The Feed'
  3. ABC Radio National

## Speaking events and forums

- RMIT stakeholder forum on 'Progressing Gender Equality in Advertising' was held in November 2019:
  1. The forum was attended by around 120 people from industry, Government, not for profit organisations, academia and RMIT students
  2. Evaluation feedback showed 88% of participants strongly agreed/agreed the event increased their understanding of sexist advertising
  3. A video about the event is online at <https://youtu.be/Aj8BD2APrn0>
- Making Space for Women: 'Sexist advertising and the representation of women and girls in the media and public space' (2017)
- Raising the Bar (2018)
- Ministerial Council on Women's Equality (Victorian Government) (2018)
- Family Violence training for Child Protection Practice Forum, Victorian Government (2018)
- Together for Equality and Respect, Women's Health East (2019)
- City of Melbourne Lunchbox Event (2019)

## Overview of the impact

Dr Gurrieri's work has influenced policy and changed advertising industry practice, addressing gendered inequalities in advertising and the cultural drivers of violence against women in ways that will create impact on the lives of women.

### National Advertising Framework

Dr Gurrieri's research informed the development of the 2020 national framework for championing gender equality in advertising: 'Seeing is Believing':

- <https://shequal.com.au/app/uploads/2020/11/Seeing-is-Believing.pdf>

The framework provides comprehensive, evidence-based strategies to address sexist advertising for industry, community, regulation and policy.

## The Code of Ethics for the Australian Association of National Advertisers

Dr Gurrieri was invited to review the advertising Code of Ethics and present her recommendations to the Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA). Her key recommendations – including the introduction of an objective to avoid harm to consumers and society, and changes to the regulation of stereotypes, sexualisation and objectification in advertising gender portrayals – were adopted and the new Code came into effect in February 2021.

The AANA's updated Code of Ethics can be viewed here:

- <https://aana.com.au/2020/09/23/aana-launches-new-code-of-ethics/>
- [https://aana.com.au/wpcontent/uploads/2020/09/AANA\\_Code\\_of\\_Ethics\\_Effective\\_February\\_2021.pdf](https://aana.com.au/wpcontent/uploads/2020/09/AANA_Code_of_Ethics_Effective_February_2021.pdf)

## Training programs

The research informed the development of a gender equity training program, aimed at changing practices in the advertising industry:

- Women's Health Victoria ongoing Gender Equality in Advertising Workplaces training programs

## Academic impact

This project has also been used as an exemplar case study for the following events:

- Evidencing Research Translation for Academic Promotion (20/6/2021)
- RMIT Researcher Policy Capability Network's 'Engaging and Influencing Policy Stakeholders' (1/9/2020)

## Next steps

Dr Gurrieri is continuing her important work in this field.

At present, she is working on related academic papers with international collaborators, and has taught "how does advertising contribute to gender inequality?" to the first intake of a newly developed course in Gender Equity for the College of Vocational Education at RMIT University.

Dr Gurrieri has also joined a gender equity committee for the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria to address issues of gender inequality related to young people.