

When will advertising embrace diversity, gender and race equality, and start reflecting the real world?

In 2019 the law changed for gender and stereotypes in advertising where it was stated that there could no longer be gender stereotypes in advertising that could cause serious harm or offense. However, now over 3 years on we are still seeing these problems occur in everyday advertising. With the younger generations knowledge and observations of change in today's society, change needs to be done now more than ever to keep up with the constant change in ideologies of the twenty first century.

Advertising has been around for decades but has not always had a good representation with the public. Advertising can be controversial at times and cause upset to the public resulting in complaints and advertisements being taken down. The ideas of gender, race and stereotype unfortunately are still with some people today who were highly influenced by the propaganda of war time and advertising of the past that stuck to traditional gender roles and identity. Women were especially targeted in the first world war as they were told to stay at home to cook, clean and look after their children. Women began to be highly domesticated through advertising shaping the way people saw women and how it shaped societies ideas. Women were pictured wearing aprons, holding cleaning supplies, cooking and looking after children. These images became a staple in advertising to get women to do what the government wanted, and very little advertisements were seen for anything but these ideas at the time. Likewise, men were represented to be the bread winners of the family where the advertisements were seen to have men in uniform and recruitment advertisements. These are one of the most common stereotypes we see in advertising and still can be seen today. Although people started to believe these ideas and conform with these ideologies some women started to go against these ideas as they didn't like the way they were being perceived through advertising and wanted to do something about it.

As time moved on many brands started to realise that change was needed in advertising not only to benefit them with income but to earn respect and acknowledgment for what they were doing as a company. One thing that wasn't shown until more recent years were different races in advertising. This was especially a problem in America where African American people did not see advertisements representing them. Therefore, after the civil rights movement brands like Coca Cola, Burger King and McDonalds started to make advertisements that would target African Americans and start to show more diversity in their advertisements. However as this was not done before and new to advertising agency's the adverts they created back then would not be seen as suitable and maybe offensive today. The companies were being run by mainly white people who didn't have first-hand opinions on their adverts in the creative stages. For example, McDonalds came out with a campaign to target African Americans by using illustrations and paintings. The imagery showed the family's eating and having fun together however in an attempt to attract their target audience, they began to use the words "dinertimin'", "waitin'" and "get down". These words were intended to catch on and be used by the consumer however they didn't catch on and in fact it came to light that the campaign could have racial and stereotypical undertones as it was aimed at working-class African Americans also suggesting they don't like to eat out at fancy restaurants and do not like to tip. As McDonalds were targeting African Americans, I can see how this could be taken in to targeting and suggesting that McDonalds have picked up on habits only African Americans do. What is interesting is that the other adverts at the time that were targeted towards white people didn't include any of these words that had dropped the 'g' or even the suggestion on no tipping. I believe that the campaign had good intentions and the company was doing well with having the mission to include everyone, but I can also see how some people may have taken offence and that the copywriting could have been altered and thought out some more.

Other brands started to realise the change in advertising and wanted the change to be known. Brands started to include more controversial ideas about gender and race in advertising. The brand Lego is one of them. In the 1960s – 1980s Lego showed their advertisements with children both girls and boys playing with Lego. Lego still today is seen as a more male product however this is due to traditional ideas of men being the ones to go and build and want to fix things. The items you can make out of Lego are also often more attracting to males such as planes, cars and trucks there are now thousands of different things Lego gives everyone the opportunity to make including the diversity in more feminine products like Lego flowers that in 2022 have become very popular attracting both male and female customers. Lego as early as the 60s has tried to abolish the idea of building with blocks just being for a male audience. The advertising from Lego in the 60s and 80s showed boys and girls playing together with Lego. The copywriting for the advertisements didn't focus on gender and focused on how happy the child is when creating something they made all by themselves. This showed customers that younger and older children can play and create with Lego and how much fun they get out of doing it. The idea behind this advert I think for this time is very well thought out and executed well. I love how it does not focus on the gender as its main concern but how happy both genders are able to enjoy their product whilst subtly showing that they are embracing gender norms in advertising. Lego was able to represent this well without using traditional ideologies of genders by not including ideas like blue is for boys and pink is for girls. This is done very well throughout their advertisements and the product itself are multi coloured brick using primary colours as well as showing the children in the advertisements such as the girls wearing baggy jeans, a plain simple t-shirt and wearing blue. These advertisements become iconic and has been recreated 40 years later to once again show gender diversity in advertising. They were recreated for international women's day 2021 where they showed young women of different races, ages and disabilities to encourage creativity in these young girls and to be proud to show off whatever your ideas and products they have made are. Overall, these Lego advertisements from the 60s and 80s were very well received by the public and still are now as people respect Lego for going against gender norms in a time where no one else would especially with toys where certain toys were seen for specific genders along with colours. People were able to finally relate to an advertisement involving gender and felt like gender was being represented correctly for their time.

In 2017 we seen the brand Dove create a tv advertisement that was intended to show how Dove was made for every woman. However, this did not come across well as the advert showed three women taking off a t-shirt that matched their skin colour. This may not sound like a problem nevertheless still raised concerns after the visual showed a black woman take off her t-shirt to reveals the next two women who were white. This is another example of a brand not fully recognising the mistakes and thoughts behind racism that can be seen in the advertisement. Whereas the idea may have been harmless the execution became harmful even the makeup artist for the advertisement mentioned that it had underlying racial aspects. With this example we can see even modern advertisers with more knowledge of today's society people in the advertising agency still make mistakes and receive backlash for this. The clips took to twitter and found thousands being angry at the fact this could be shown by Dove themselves who posted the original clip. After the backlash it was taken down and an apology was made. This shows that people of different races and people who may know more about ideas like this needs to be more prominent in the workplace especially in advertising. Going back to my earlier points in the second paragraph about McDonalds the same happened then, 50 years on and we are still seeing a problem in the advertising work industry where there is not enough diversity when working in advertising to check these types of advertisements from first hand experienced people who have knowledge about racism and can identify these problems to prevent the upset some adverts cause. Although I do not feel like the advertising agency is always to blame. There are many examples where complaints are made, and an

advertisement has been taken down. John Lewis a company very famous for their advertisements especially Christmas advertisements where they discuss problems from the real world and reflect people's emotions through advertising. Even as recent as 2021 people are not always accepting of alternative ideas that goes against traditional stereotypes of gender. In 2021 John Lewis released an advertisement called 'let lives happen'. The advert showed a young boy being more feminine wearing his mother's clothing and wearing makeup whilst dancing and results in to destroying the house. It is going against what young boys are normally represented doing and how John Lewis reflected the differences we now have in our society where we are accepting of different genders and how one decided to express themselves. The advert was up for 16 days until it received 337 complaints for pushing gender, terrible behaviour and sexism. I personally think the advertisement is a great representation of today and what needs to be shown more in advertisements however when someone tried to show this it seems to get the complaints. This shows that it's not only the advertising company that has a problem it's also the public and how it is not fair to always blame the advertisement. I don't think there is anything wrong with this advertisement and that it reflects children and gender today well and good enough to be shown but that it is also the general public that still have traditional ideas about gender and advertising that don't want to see the change and find it hard to accept that there are now changes that are being recognised and reflect in to the real world and that it is time advertising like this is shown to be able to show the diversity and represent everyone as not doing this also has resulted in complaints.