

# Sex sells?

*“Does it make the difference?”*


**LEVEL: 2**

**GROUP: 10-30**

**TIME: 60-75 MIN.**

**Complexity** Level 2

**Group size** 10 to 30

**Time** 60 to 75 minutes

**Overview** This exercise addresses a number of issues, including relations between different genders, advertising presentations of males and females, perceptions of what is male and female in advertising and the influence of advertising on the creation of public perceptions regarding gender, sex and sexuality.

**Objectives**

- To identify everyday presentations of gender using the example of advertising in the media
- To identify gender stereotypes projected through the media
- To reflect upon and discuss the social construction of gender roles
- To raise awareness about inequality of opportunity between genders
- To promote empathy with the other gender

**Materials**

- Newspapers and magazines
- Scissors
- Glue
- Flipchart paper

**Preparation** Collect various different newspapers and magazines, rich in advertisements and pictures in both colour and black and white. Read the instructions carefully and study the grid that participants will use in the second part of the exercise (see handouts).

## **Instructions**

- Introduce the activity. Start by referring to everyday life and common perceptions of different gender roles in society. Explain that it is almost impossible to find dimensions in life where the aspect of gender is not present. Even when we think of basic things, such as who will wash the dishes at home, the seating arrangements of girls and boys in schools, places where women and men are employed, gender is present. Explain that advertisements in the media very often benefit from the different characteristics, stereotypes and prejudices that are current in a society about genders.
- Tell participants to look through the supplied newspapers and magazines and choose one advertisement to analyse.

- Using the grid (see handouts), each participant should then identify and note down the different parties in the advertisement, the direct (obvious) and any possible hidden messages that it conveys and the use made by the advertisement of gender stereotypes.
- In addition to the grid, ask them to write down the attributes of men they find in the advertisement on blue post-its, and the attributes of women they find in the advertisement on pink ones.
- Once participants have filled out the grid (give them about 20 minutes for this task, to include time for reflection), ask them to get together in pairs to share with each other the advertisements they chose, the grid they prepared and their gender analysis (blue and pink post-its with attributes of men and women). (Give the participants about 20 minutes for this task as both participants in the pair need time to present and share.)
- When participants finish the work in pairs, the facilitator should collect the blue and pink post-its prepared by the individual participants and present them to the plenary, putting each colour post it on separate flip chart (one for women's attributes and one for men's), reading out the words on the post-its.

### **Debriefing and evaluation**

Ask participants to comment on the attributes given to men and women. They may also make reference to the advertisements, but it is not necessary to receive complete oral reporting from the pairs.

Some questions you can put to the group to initiate a discussion on this issue include:

- How do you feel about the male and female attributes identified as a result of the analysis of the advertisements?
- In your opinion, are these attributes accurate for men and women you know, or in general? How / how not?
- To what extent do you consider such portrayals appropriate, and why?
- How are these attributes reflected in the context where you live?
- Where do you come across such presentations of male and female attributes?
- What do you consider to be the consequences of such portrayals of women's and men's characteristics?
- In what way do such portrayals of women's and men's attributes in advertising affect the perception and self-perceptions of young women and men?
- How do you think advertising can avoid the use of stereotyped and negative portrayals of women and men?
- In what way can advertising contribute to forms of gender-based violence?
- Can advertising contribute to violating people's rights? How?
- How can you / your organisation contribute to the creation of more gender equitable advertising practices?

### **Tips for facilitators**

Be aware that advertising often uses overtly sexual images or covert sexual messages about women or men to 'sell' the product they are advertising. This aspect certainly has to be addressed by a discussion of this nature, but remain aware that discussions that have content relating to sex may cause discomfort to some participants.

### **Suggestions for follow-up**

Ask the group to develop a code of ethics for media professionals working in the areas of advertising and marketing concerning the presentation of gender in the media. Use prioritisation or ranking methods.

### **Ideas for action**

Contact local media professionals, especially working in the area of marketing and advertising, to discuss the issue of the presentation of gender in the media. If your group has already worked out a code of ethics, ask the media professionals to comment. Alternatively, invite media professionals to come to meet the members of your group and organise a panel discussion on the issue of the presentation of gender in the media. Consider inviting feminist activists with strong views on the issue to take a key role in the discussion.

## HANDOUT

### **Grid for Analysis**

	What?	Who?	(In-)Appropriate?	Why?
Role				
Behaviour				
Activity				
Attribute				