

A moment of feminism

 By [Gail Schimmel](#)

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I'm a closet feminist. "Closet" because I have some mixed feelings about the whole thing, to be honest. Woman's day, for example, leaves me cold. Why on earth do women need a special day? What are we - disabled horses? But then every now and then I hear an advertisement that just pushes all my buttons, and brings that rampant feminist to the surface...

Now, luckily for the radio ad that got under my skin this week, I was so incensed with rage that I was shouting (alone in my car) by the time they got to the part where they said which retailer the ad was actually for. So I am unable to tell you who it was. I'm sure some kind soul will comment and tell us.

But here is what did it for me. The commercial is for some sort of a furniture or appliance retailer, and the voice over says something along the lines of "A home theatre system for Dad! A dishwasher for Mom!"

'So what did *you* get on your birthday?'

This is the sort of rhetoric that we hear every day and it mostly washes over us - but *think* about it. And if you think about it, and are not enraged by it, then you are not thinking hard enough. Dad gets to sit watching DVD's with surround sound, while Mom gets to wash the dishes? And she's supposed to be excited about this? Grateful, perhaps, that she doesn't have to do it by hand? This, in my mind, is entrenchment of negative stereotypes of the worst and most dangerous kind. There are obviously lots of ads where this happens even more subtly - every time a woman is shown doing the washing or cooking or looking after the sick kids, we're being brainwashed. I have made peace with those ads on the basis that they do reflect reality. But offering me a dishwasher as my big treat? It's a step too far.

The Code of Advertising Practice, in Clause 3.5 of Section II, says:

Gender stereotyping or negative gender portrayal shall not be permitted in advertising, unless in the opinion of the ASA, such stereotyping or portrayal is reasonable and justifiable in an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom.

And the definitions say:

"Negative Gender Portrayal" means advertising that portrays a person or persons of a certain gender in a manner that restricts and entrenches the role of persons of such gender in society or sections of society.

A woman's place is in the kitchen. Not!

I cannot think of advertising that restricts and entrenches my role as a woman more than a commercial that implies that it is my job to wash dishes while my husband watches TV. And as long as we condone and perpetuate this type of message, we entrench the perception that even though women might be bringing home half the bacon, cooking it is still their problem.

I'm almost sure that if one lodged this complaint with the ASA, they would dismiss it. The irritating part is that I think that might even be the right decision. The problem is far more fundamental, and it is a space where marketers and creative need to make a conscious effort to think about the copy that flies so glibly from their pens.

ABOUT GAIL SCHIMMEL

Gail Schimmel is a specialist in advertising law. She runs a consultancy - Clear Copy (www.clearcopy.co.za) - that offers advice to marketers and advertisers in relation to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) and other aspects of advertising law. An admitted attorney (with BA, LLB, Psychology Honours and LLM degrees), she was previously head of legal and regulatory at the ASA, and subsequently joined Edward Nathan Sonnenbergs as a director in 2008. Email gail@clearcopy.co.za and follow @GailSchimmel. [View my profile and articles...](#)

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