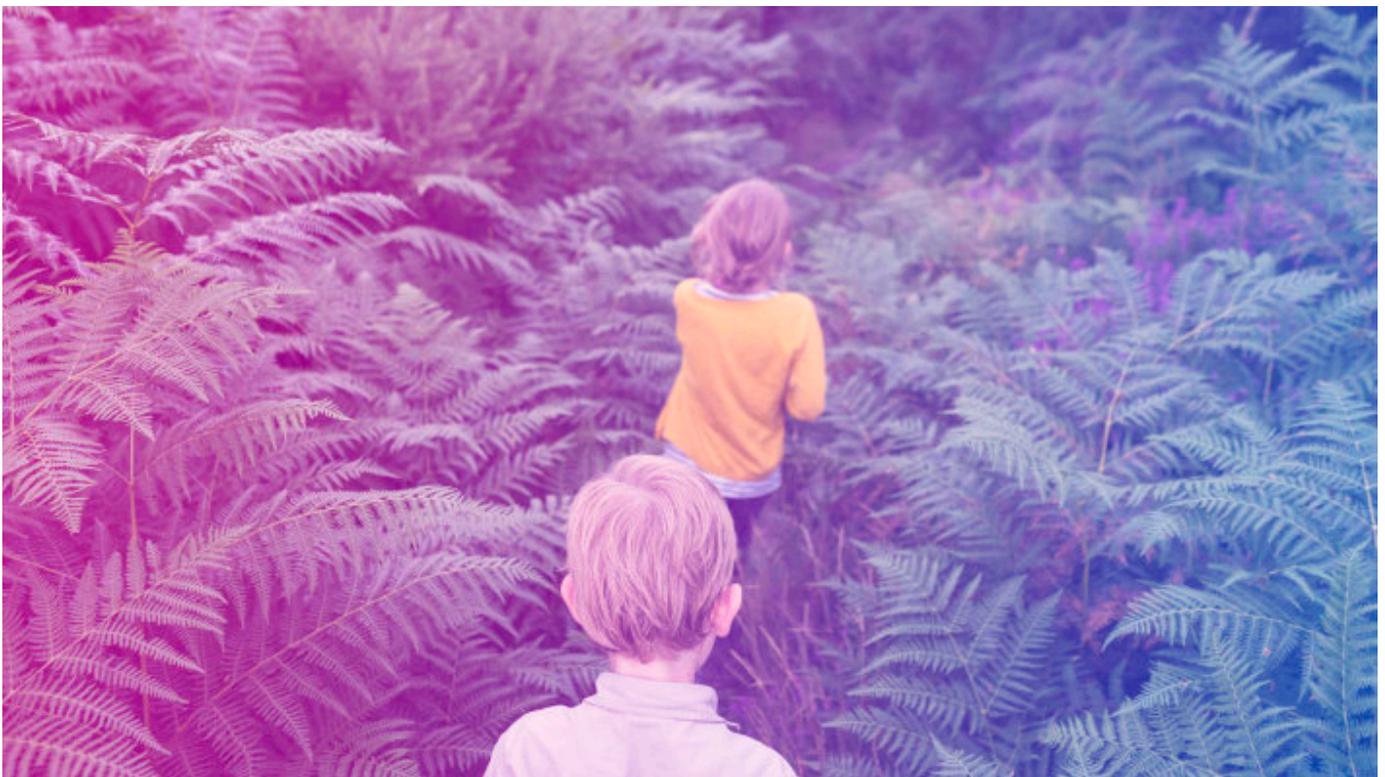


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61% OF WOMEN AND 46% OF MEN THINK KIDS SHOULD BE RAISED WITHOUT GENDER STEREOTYPES

A new Havas survey of more than 12,000 people in 32 countries reveals a shift in consumer attitudes toward gender.



BY MEG CARTER 3 MINUTE READ



Brand owners should follow the lead already taken by Target in the U.S. and John Lewis in the U.K. to combat gender stereotyping by de-gendering their products, packaging, in-store experience, and other marketing communications—including advertising, new research published this week suggests.

A worldwide shift in consumer attitude toward gender is revealed by The Future is FeMale, a new survey of more than 12,000 men and women in 32 countries commissioned by Havas.



[Photo courtesy of Unilever]

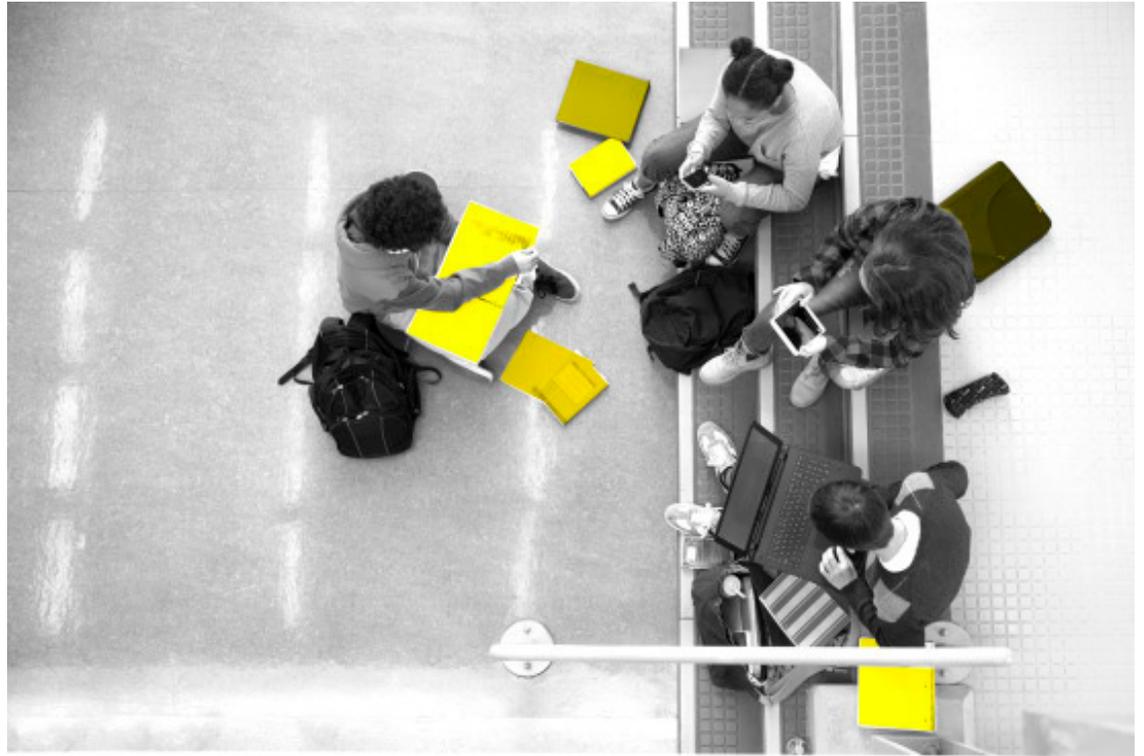
One of the most striking findings is the significant number of those surveyed who endorse an “agendered”—or gender-neutral—approach to raising future generations: 61% of women and 46% of men believe children should be raised in as gender-neutral a way as possible to guard against rigid gender restrictions.

Also notable is the extent to which the way we think about gender is changing, however.

When asked whether certain traits or attributes applied more to men or women, significant overlap between the genders was evident. For example, 75% of both men and women believe the two sexes are equally valuable to society; 69% of men and 71% believe the sexes are equally smart; 64% of men and 68% of women believe they are equally intellectual; and 63% of both men and women believe they are equally trustworthy.

Notably, barely half the global sample—55% of men and 54% of women—believe parenting comes more naturally to women than men.

Gender distinctions are rapidly blurring, the findings show. A majority of women (52%) and 44% of men surveyed agreed with the statement that, “I do not believe in set genders; gender is fluid and people can be what they feel they are.”



[Photo: Hero Images]

In developed markets, meanwhile, barely half the sample (52%) believe “a man should be masculine,” and just 48% believe “a woman should be feminine.”

Even so, equality between the sexes remains elusive. Nearly half of the global sample agreed with the statement that, “women today have rights but no real power.” A majority of men and women—52% and 64%, respectively—believe there are not enough women in executive positions and when asked what prevents women from earning as much as men, the greatest obstacle cited by both sexes was sexism and or gender bias.

The findings come at a time when concern about gender stereotyping and the de-gendering of products, product presentation, and other forms of marketing communication is fast moving up brand owners’ agenda.

Two weeks ago, British retailer John Lewis announced it would no longer use “boys” and “girls” labels on children’s clothing and plans for a new line of gender-neutral clothing.

The move followed Target’s summer launch of an “all-gender” lifestyle product line for kids featuring non-gender-specific kids clothes from Toca Boca, the digital toymaker, two years after the retailer reduced the amount of gender-based signage for kids products in store in response to customer feedback.

According to Havas, the normalization of gender blurring and growing acceptance—and expectations—of a gender-neutral approach should be the key takeouts from its findings for brand owners.

At the Cannes Lions Festival of Creativity in June meanwhile, Unilever co-convened with UN Women at the inaugural session of the Unstereotype Alliance—an initiative also supported by Johnson & Johnson, Procter & Gamble, Microsoft, Diageo, and AT&T, to proactively address and eliminate stereotypes (including sexual stereotypes) in advertising worldwide.

“The traditional binary notion of gender simply doesn’t work anymore—for advertisers, for manufacturers, for educators, for anyone,” says Marian Salzman, chief executive officer of Havas PR. “For now, that means most of us find ourselves talking and thinking about gender more. But, ultimately, it will serve to make gender of lesser import because we will all exist somewhere along the spectrum rather than being divided into two opposing camps.”

At a time when people are increasingly embracing—or at least coming to grips with—the notion that gender is not set in stone and that people may be male, female, something in between, or something else altogether, Salzman believes that businesses need to stop segregating and targeting around gender and start focusing on individuals’ human potential as family and community members, as employers or employees, as consumers and as citizens.

“As brand marketers, we have to keep in mind that moving toward an agendered future is about expanding not curtailing freedom of choice. A girl who likes to dress up as a princess and walk to school with a sparkly pink backpack should feel comfortable doing so—as should a boy who wishes to do the same,” she says.

“Our job is to help push back against those rigid gender norms that pressure children to embrace or reject certain things simply because previous generations deemed them ‘gender inappropriate’. There’s no room for that phrase anymore. If you like something and it doesn’t harm anyone else, then it’s appropriate.”