

# Resisting Gender Stereotypes

## A Child-Centered Module

### Guidelines for Facilitators

#### INTRODUCTION

##### Pay Heed to the Fact that:



For this generation, media has virtually partnered the parent in nurturing and bringing-up the child. Since they have enjoyed access to television, literally from day one, it is only logical that so much of the child's routine revolves around it.

As a result, they are hooked to TV, addicted to its programmes and increasingly influenced by it.

##### Who is Responsible The Child or the Media?

This has not happened by accident or because of the susceptibility of the young. Children as consumers of media have been targetted in the most aggressive manner, hooking them to programmes across genres from cartoons to family dramas, comedies to horror/thrillers and films or even news programmes.

As visually literate and savvy viewers, advertisers are increasingly finding children as the most loyal, enthusiastic and dependable audience group. Besides enjoying the campaign and popularising it, children also advertently or inadvertently, market the product. The advertisers invest great value in what they term as the "*pester power*" of children.

##### The Conflict of the Old and the New

No doubt media projects a mix of images and messages, depending on the genre, target audience and the creative team that produces it.

Most of the children recognise the new images, values and messages in media and to some extent even see the need for it, but they are reluctant to let go of the old.



Therefore, they become easy **victims of stereotypical images**, which are the rule rather than the exception.

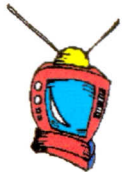
Many of these images are deliberately crafted, and this is particularly evident when it comes to the representation and portrayal of children.

When we talk about media influences, **one area of concern is the construction of gender in the media and the manner in which boys and girls are depicted as individuals and in relation to each other.**



## PAST EXPERIENCE

### Research



Previous studies conducted by CFAR indicate that access to television as well as unregulated viewing by children has grown phenomenally.

As high as **78 percent** of children living in less privileged circumstances have **unfettered access to TV**. (*A Conceptual Framework for Developing Media Education Modules for Children in Difficult Circumstances, DWCD, November 2000*).



Over **70 percent** children in the A1-A2, B1-B2 segments are watching over **10 hours of television on weekends**. (*A five-city study on Media Violence and its Impact on Children, UNESCO, UNICEF, CFAR, 2001*).

### Community Intervention

During March-December 2001, CFAR conducted a "hands on" intervention with children from settlements in Delhi as varied as *Seemapuri, Dakshinpuri, Kalyanpuri, Tigri* besides institutions like *Deepalaya, Prayas, Udaan*.

The objective of the intervention was to understand from the children's perspective their experience of the media.

To begin with, CFAR provided the children with an opportunity to explore their relationship with TV images, content and elements that hooked and thrilled them.

To understand the specific influence of media we even stimulated them to reproduce and explore it in different art forms. The children used TV images, symbols and icons to create skits, collages and sketches. The impact and the personal influence of the media was evident in their various activities.



## What did this Reveal?

In terms of media access, habits, understanding of media content and imagery, the children from less privileged circumstances are no different from others.

They are as **discerning** or as **compulsive in their viewing habits** as the middle or upper income household children.

However, in terms of media impact and influences, factors like **material circumstances, access to educational opportunities, quality of life, parental supervision and peer influence did make them more vulnerable** as viewers and lent more urgency to the set of concerns and issues cited above.



Even within this universe, since each child and the locality he or she belonged to had its distinct characteristics, these differences had to be kept in mind.

Most of them recognise "changes" in terms of images and values and to some extent see the need for new values. However, they tend to support and reinforce the old, much of which has been very deliberately crafted to exploit the viewer's comfort level with familiar images and depictions.

This is most evident on issues concerning their lives, particularly the **media's portrayal of gender roles** of boys and girls.

Finally, it was clear that what "hooked" children in a repeated and never-tiring fashion was not just the technical quality or finesse of well-executed images and storyline but some **key elements** that created in them an "**emotional hype**", "**excitement**", "**sense of discovery**", "**fear**", "**terror**" and "**suspense**".

These elements, most often, went beyond any rational relationship with the image and exploited their deeper urges and needs.

Therefore, it becomes imperative that any module for media education needs to address each of the observations listed above.

## Focus of the Module

In this module we focus on the **gender construct** especially in advertisements \_ the images of female and male child. Along with the images and content, we also attempt to address the various elements that "**hook**" children.



WHAT DID THIS REVEAL?

What is *evident* to most of us is their *adulation of heroes, celebrities* and their *desire to emulate them*. What is *less evident* are the various elements, which, are used by media to produce *images, characters* and *situations* which are awesome, compelling and addictive.



Based on these observations from very intense interaction with children, we have prepared this module to train young peer educators to critically look at the *latent effect of the medium*.

### Aim

- ❑ To develop a *child-centered module* on media based on children's preferences and insights.
- ❑ To enable the child to discern the nature of a *relationship* that he/she chooses to have *with media content and representation*.
- ❑ To empower the child with the capacity to understand all the elements that contribute to media content in order to make the child an *informed viewer*.
- ❑ To develop the capacity to view the images with a measure of *critical understanding and awareness*.
- ❑ To understand the *gender construct* in media.



### The Kit:

The Media Education Kit contains videotape, exercises, worksheet and a set of cards.

The approach combines both individual and group feedback. We have tried to minimise the verbal feedback and tap other means of expression.

### The Group:

Six to eight participants in the age group of 8 to 14 years, would be the ideal size.

Children in the age bracket of 8 to 10 years, 11 to 14 years can be taken together. It encourages more discussion among the participants. The facilitator is able to interact with each participant individually.

### The Seating Arrangement:

The group should preferably sit in a circle.

The environment should be relaxed to allow children to open up and share. The participants should be allowed to talk. The first 10 minutes of rapport building is important.



# THE MODULE

## Ice-Breaking Exercise:

### OBJECTIVE:

- ≡ To situate children in the context of their own preferences.
- ≡ To allow them to express their spontaneous associations.

### THE PROCESS:

Any of the following rapport building exercises can be used:

Names of serials – Facilitator starts with name and name of favourite serial or a programme starting with the same alphabet.

“My name is Amita, I watch *Aahat*.” The second person adds, “My name is Karan. I watch *Kahin Kissi Roz*. Her name is Amita, she watches *Aahat*”.

### Dumb charade – A Guessing Game

One child mimes any serial. Others guess the title.



During pretesting children enacted:



Sonali Bendre - *Kya Masti, Kya Dhoom*  
Aman Verma - *Khulja Sim Sim*  
Son Pari

Encourages children’s spontaneity. Gives them a sense of ease and joy.

- ❖ Be an enthusiastic, empathetic, alert listener.
- ❖ Encourage openness, frankness in children.
- ❖ Do not reflect any personal bias, or be judgmental, critical or partisan about programmes you know. When you are unfamiliar with a programme, do not appear disinterested.
- ❖ Be neutral but open to every kind of preference. Though children watch children’s programmes and cartoons, very often they name programmes meant for adults as their favourites. Check out the popularity of on-going programmes meant for children.
- ❖ In the dumb charade, older children can write the names before enacting. Younger children directly get into dumb charade.

### OUTCOME:

Will establish an easy relationship between the facilitator and children.  
Children will get into a “relaxed” mood.  
Will ensure a child-centered interaction.

## Introduce the Participants to the Workshop:

Introduce the participants to the workshop.



THE MODULE



# EXERCISE 1



## EXERCISE 1



## Exercise 1

### Explore Elements Hooking Children:

Video clip  
Worksheet  
Drawing  
Discussion



#### TOOLS:

Montage of sixteen images from advertisements and serials depicting young boys and girls.

#### CRITERIA:

Images selected to include quirky, unforgettable, every day, precocious, stereotypical.

#### ELEMENTS (emotions, moods):

Envy, sense of bonding, secure, happy-go-lucky, comfort, exuberant, energetic, exclusive, beyond their every day reach.

#### ASSOCIATION with physical characteristics/ features:

Familiar, every day, trendy, energetic, stubborn, naughty, spirited, adult-like.

#### ASSUMPTION:

Technically well-crafted.

Evokes distinct **emotive associations**.

Association is stimulated and strengthened every time the ad is viewed.

Ensures the sense of enjoyment with the story line and bonding with the message.

#### OBJECTIVE:

Need to make the child aware of the "**hook elements**" - both positive and negative hooks.

#### PROCESS:

*Viewing of Clips:* Montage of clips is shown.

**Note** - Television viewing can be a passive exercise. In a group, children can become self-conscious, forget the spontaneity and go into a shell.

To prevent this:

- 1) Give any one child (maybe the quietest) the remote. Let her / him pass it on.
- 2) Let them use it the way they do at home - rewinding and forwarding VCR.
- 3) Some may even put it on the mute.

At the end of this viewing, ask the children to shut their eyes and reflect. Meanwhile distribute the worksheets.

**Note** - Please observe the *gender values* emerging in the following exercises.



EXPLORE ELEMENTS HOOKING CHILDREN



## EMOTION / ASSOCIATION WITH THE CLIPS

Ask children to write down their top of the mind response. Younger children may be allowed to speak.

It could be a word / statement to reflect moods / emotions / attitudes like "peppy", "mast", "boring", "stupid", "real".

Find out what is "hooking" children and why? Children will be partial to some characters and ignore others.

- Allow them personal freedom to sit in a place of their choice.
- Allow creative freedom.
- Make all necessary aids (colour pencils, crayons, paper) available to encourage sharing through illustrations, drawings, story writing.
- Younger children need to be prompted to come up with responses.

So what acts as a "**hook**" for children?

Pretesting indicated many kinds of hooks:



The "Negative" hook for mixed group of children aged 11-12 years

Margaret (Dennis the Menace): Seen as "snobbish", "over-reacting", "vain" girl.

Why? These qualities are associated with people they dislike.

The "Positive" hook across children of all age groups

Dhara ad

Why? "Jalebi" was "irresistible".



Bahut achcha nachte ho  
babu, filmon mein kaam  
kyun nahin karte?

The "Universal" hook across age groups

Coca cola ad with Hrithik Roshan in a Rajasthan village.

Why? The "celebrity" and the child-like jokes of the simple old village man worked.

A hook that divides children: Complan ad

Why? For 11 year olds

Mixed group - "sentimental", "rubbish".


Girls - "sentiment" was the most appealing feature.




EXPLORE ELEMENTS HOOKING CHILDREN




And what “fails” to hook 11 year olds  
The Elle 18 ad. Why?



It is for older girls or mothers





Boring, Girlie

Is there any bias towards or against girls or boys?  
 On girls - see Margaret.  
 On boys - see Complan ad.  
 Any **alternative** or **unusual depiction** evokes discomfort



**COLOUR ASSOCIATION**

Television has strong subliminal effect, more so in advertisements.

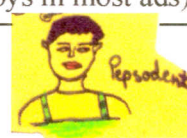
To gauge it, allow each child to draw an object which they recalled or noticed solely for its colour.



During pretesting children drew:

- ☞ Red - Vicky from Small Wonder
- ☞ Red - apple (Colgate or Lakme ad)
- ☞ Blue and white - toothbrush with two-coloured toothpaste (Pepsodent)
- ☞ Yellow - T-shirt (worn by young boys in most ads)



**EXPLORE ELEMENTS HOOKING CHILDREN**

## DISCUSSION

Form groups of two children to discuss and present each other's response to the larger group.

- ❖ During group exercises, form random groups.
- ❖ Observe the group discussions. Listen to any doubts or thinking out aloud.



## REALITY CHECK

What did they think was worth noticing or talking about? What values do they choose? What is seen as "comfortable", "acceptable" or "incorrect"?

The child goes "beyond the hook" and deals with values and messages. In this case, the first value they confront is "gender" stereotyping.

Pretesting across age groups showed

Rahul's reaction to Amitabh Bachchan in the Pepsi ad.  
He is not "believable", as he is unimpressed by the Superstar.

On values, the groups were divided.

- ✱ Should not the guest be offered the drink as Indian culture teaches us to be courteous to guests?
- ✱ Children should behave like children. Why should they part with anything dear to them?



(Read "children" as "boys should behave like boys.")

They just say for the sake of saying. They actually do care about how they look.



The "I-don't-care" girl is "real" - worried about her "looks".

Value: We are prone to anxiety and "I-do-care" attitude.

(Read "we" as "girls should be girls".)

Vicky in Small Wonder: An "intelligent", "funny", "powerful" character.

"She does everything opposite of what she is supposed to do. She obeys the exact words, does not take out the meaning of the words so her actions become funny."

Values: Since she is "mechanically obedient", ends up following words rather than instructions.

On a medicine bottle was written 'Shake well before use'. Vicky goes out, shakes the well then uses the medicine.



Pepsodent ad - Both the boy and ad seen as “clever”.

Kyunki main Rohit se smart hoon. Mere toothpaste mein do colour hain isliye main do baar brush karta hoon.



The boy is clever to develop a good habit at an early age.

The ad exploits this to sell their product.

“Someone must have told him this (to brush twice) to teach him to brush twice. He is so small that they taught him this to make sure he brushes twice.”

Value: One needs to be “clever” from a very young age.

(Read "boys" are clever.)

Colgate ad:

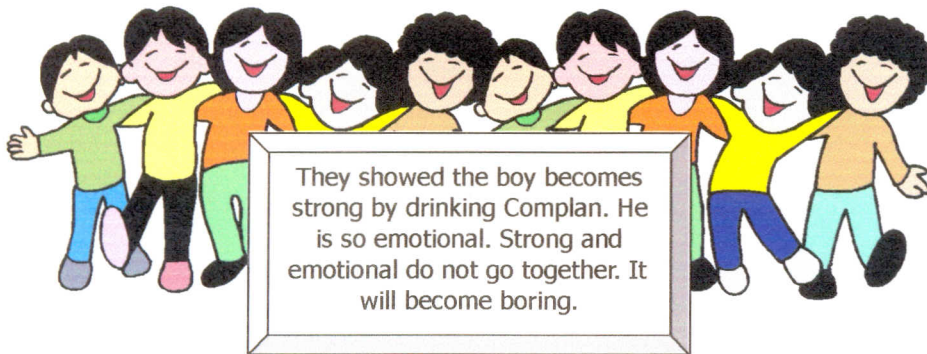


Found the girl “stupid”, “irritating”.

Relating to their own experiences of waking up early for school, they found the depiction “over stretched” or expecting too much from them.

Does anyone start karate immediately after waking in the morning? We feel lazy, foolish, isn't it?"

Complan ad: Giving mixed messages.



Children struggle with values - boyish vitality vs sentiments.

- ❖ Explore all these statements. Give them an opportunity to challenge each other.
- ❖ With alternative, new imagery, children do reality checks. Anything old is accepted with passive resignation and little resistance. *Encourage reality checks* for old values.



EXPLORE ELEMENTS HOOKING CHILDREN



# EXERCISE 2



## EXERCISE 2



## Exercise 2

### Unpacking the Images:

- Clips
- Group work
- Discussion



### OBJECTIVE:

- ★ To sensitise the child to **visual packaging** of media products.
- ★ To make the child aware of and negotiate the **power of images**.

### TOOLS:

A set of cards with vivid imagery of six clips is used to reconstruct the clip.

### ASSUMPTION:

Visual packaging involves understanding separate / composite elements that go into

- ◆ Characters - Vicky the "robot"
- ◆ Dialogues - "I don't care" in Lifebuoy ad
- ◆ Ambience / milieu - family in the Moov ad
- ◆ Music sentimental music in Complan ad
- ◆ Special effects - the girl using karate techniques to get the apple in the "Colgate" ad
- ◆ Props
- ◆ Using flavours like festivals, rituals and song and dance routine - Hrithik and the young boy in the Coca cola ad

The child normally talks about the distinct elements that appeal to them or they consider worthy of notice. This indicates what "elements" compels them to relate to the totality.

For instance, a single element in the Complan ad, the sentimental 'music' determines the relationship with the ad.

### THE PROCESS:

Children use the remote to watch in the manner they want to.

Note: In case they remember the clips, the tape may not be used.

Groups of two - three or even individuals choose a set of cards to visually reconstruct one of the six ads, adhering to its spirit. They can change the story line. Use blank cards to draw the frames they want to add.

Encourage children to share their creative decisions. Each group presents their storyboard. Others probe into the construction of the story.

Each participant talks about the frame / dialogue / jingle they liked the most and why. It could also be the frame they disliked or left out.

- ❖ Do not push for a "correct", "coherent" or "logical" response.
- ❖ Focus should be on differences emerging in the gender roles.
- ❖ Give due recognition and importance to whatever they share.
- ❖ Appreciate and learn from their sharing.
- ❖ Don't go with any predisposition, the pretesting shows how creative children can be.



How did the process work?

The pretesting showed the following:

**Reconstruction of Elle 18 ad:**

**Frames included:** The girl goes out. The car breaks down. She repairs it, comes home. She cuts her hair and puts on nail polish, as she has to go to a party. At the party, she dances. Everybody watches her and laughs.



**Frames omitted:** Four frames left out.

Two frames with the elderly woman talking about girls being “disciplined” and “docile”.

Three girls pillow fighting.

A young woman arm wrestling with a man.

**Key Frame:** The frame where everyone is laughing because she does not know how to dance, becomes the central card. The girl becomes the butt of ridicule.



Why? Because she is “different” in every sense of the word and challenges her “gender” role in every possible manner.

**Shudh namak ad**

**Frames included:** All frames but sequenced differently. Modification in the story line.

Where is the Modification?

In the manner in which it ends.

**Original:** The mother catches up with the boy at the shop and gently admonishes him for buying the salt.



**Modified:** The mother sends the boy to buy a packet of salt. The boy is given another brand of salt, he scolds the shopkeeper and gets a packet of Shudh namak and returns home. The mother appreciates his effort.

The focus is on "Adult Approval". It gives the young boy the freedom to choose the product and return home to hand over the product to an "appreciative" mother.

**Key Frame:** The frame where the child chides the shopkeeper, in an adult-like fashion, immediately motivates the children to say, "if the child is right, the adult should listen."



#### Dhara ad

**Frames included:** All frames used to reconstruct storyline with new twists and turns and dramatic explanations.

**Modification:** A plate full of jalebi, made of Dhara oil, is lying on the table. The child sees it and is tempted at the sight. He eats the jalebi while the family is out on a walk.

The mother and grandfather scold him for eating the jalebi.



The child leaves the house and the grandfather brings him back home. The father tells him it is ok to have the jalebi. The child is happy.

**Key Frame:** one with the jalebi and the other with the boy and the grandfather.

**Discussion:** While children talk about the child "running" away from the house, it is seen in the context of eating the jalebi and incidental to the storyline. Here again gaining adult approval plays a pivotal role.

**Pepsi ad:** The frame is extended.

Amitabh Bachchan walks into the house. The family offers him a Pepsi. Unfortunately in all this excitement, the bottle breaks. The youngest child in the house has the other bottle of Pepsi. Amitabh pleads with him. He finally offers the drink to the star. However once again the bottle breaks, leaving the Superstar thirsty.



**Key Frame:** The "role swapping" where Amitabh is pleading with the child.

Shudh namak / Pepsi ad: The adult-like "power" of the child appeals to young viewers. Shudh namak / Dhara ad: "Adult approval" has strong appeal.



UNPACKING THE IMAGES



**OUTCOME:**

**Power of Images:** The "power of images" influenced the children in two ways:

- ❖ Distinct Elements heightened the impact.
- ❖ Attitudinal Barriers get strongly reinforced.



**Distinct elements:** Can be individual characters or a composite image.

**Character:** Pepsi ad - Amitabh Bachchan and the child. All other elements used to construct the "contemporary, Indian" family are there either to heighten the "thrill" of Amitabh Bachchan or the "stubborn, defiant" presence of the child.



**Composite Image:** Moov ad - the happy family  
All the individual elements add up to heighten the frame of the happy family as the key element (ambience / environ).



It will bring out the complexity of any piece of communication and help in understanding the influence images have on children.

**Gender Values:**

The facilitator will confront strong attitudinal barriers.

The alternative male image is very easy to accept - that of an "adult-like", discourteous, rebel child. Even in their reconstruction they are quite imaginative and innovative - modifying the story line to get "adult approval".



However the girl child has to conform to a more traditional role - "caregiver", "disciplined", not allowed to "whistle" or doing anything "unconventional". Any deviation leads to a high level of discomfort. This leaves us with hardly any role models for girls.

In the next exercise we focus on these attitudinal barriers.



# EXERCISE 3



## EXERCISE 3

## Exercise 3

### Portrayal of Boys and Girls: Media's Role in Shaping Values, Messages, Roles, Images

This is a practical session and any of the tools in varying combinations can be used, depending on the group of children. The last two exercises were clip-centred while this provides the scope for self-reflection.

#### OBJECTIVE:

- 1) To give them an opportunity to personally deal with the **values that media highlights as gender**.
- 2) To help them understand the influence popular images have on them.

#### TOOLS:

Drawing, role playing, practical exercise, clips from ads and serials, ranking card

#### ASSUMPTION:

Children have set notions about gender. A combination of factors, including media, has influenced these notions.

Given this understanding they become prey to the more "**stereotypical**" and "**sexist**" media imagery. This has to be challenged - both individually and collectively.



#### THE PROCESS:

**Drawing:** A drawing depicting a family sitting together in a room watching television is used to do:

1. **Individual reflection** - Weaving a story around the drawing
2. **Group simulation** - Role playing

**Individual reflection:** To narrate a story around the drawing in writing, sharing their individual experiences and point of view.

The key elements are

- 1) Individual preferences.
- 2) Mutual disagreements.
- 3) Compromises / adjustments - some in favour of children, others in favour of parents.

**Group simulation:** Role playing through improvisation of different roles - parents, grandparents, older / younger siblings, friends, guests, servants.

Allow reverse role playing.

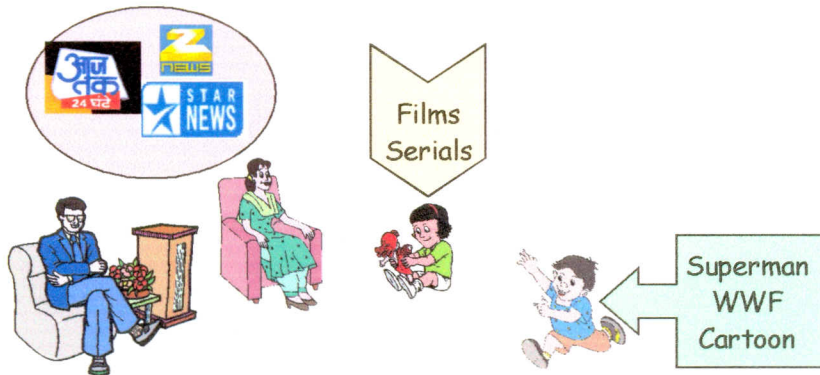


PORTRAYAL OF BOYS AND GIRLS



What did the pre-testing show?

**Individual Preferences:**



**Disagreements:**

Father tries to impose his preference.

"Father gets angry and shouts he will break the remote in three parts".

Parents annoyed over the daily fights, ask them to switch off the TV. Everyone goes to bed.

**Compromises:**

"Though parents want to watch news, they cannot refuse the children".

**Key outcome:**

- Children show awareness of self.
- Most situations resolved in their favour.

**GROUP SIMULATION:**

- "Squabbles" and "fights" are the rule and routine in a family viewing TV.
- Aggression / persistence / bullying is a "given" behaviour.



Every individual was aggressive, demanding the right to be heard. This attitude did not change with role improvisation from a daughter to a mother. Television is an addictive medium.

During the discussion they admitted that once they get hooked to something they tend to argue and fight with each other.



## Ranking Exercise

The previous exercises have encouraged very unstructured exploration. This part is a more focussed, classroom exercise.

Participants individually rank the eight characters on the criteria of their "desired/ not desired" gender roles, values and attitudes.

Allow them to discuss their ranking. If necessary let them re-rank the characters.

In a pretesting with a group of boys, the young characters were ranked as follows:

### Boys

1



"Cute", "funny" in an "innocent" way

2



"Clever", "dares to speak up", "different", "endearing"

3



"Joyful", "vigorous", "graceful"

Unusual, "non-conformist" depiction, "too grown up"



PORTRAYAL OF BOYS AND GIRLS



Girls

1

"Mischievous",  
"spirited", "funny",  
"mechanical robot"



2



"Mischievous",  
not dependent on  
adult supervision  
"spirited"



"Caring"

3

4



"Rigid", possessive about her  
father, "stubborn" (in response  
to her circumstances)



Elle 18, Lifebuoy girls, Margaret  
"Fashionable", "mischievous", "vain"  
"unconventional" - cutting their hair, whistling at boys



PORTRAYAL OF BOYS AND GIRLS



Gender specific values or biases of young viewers are clear.

# EXERCISE 4



## Exercise 4

### Concluding Exercise - "Speaking Out"

This concluding exercise is open-ended. It allows participants to air their views, share experiences. The facilitator can use it to consolidate the earlier discussions.

#### OBJECTIVE:

To allow children to revisit all the values, messages, images and roles.

#### PROCESS:

The facilitator should help the group as a whole to understand how many of their every day values about gender are shaped and reinforced by the media. This can be done in many ways.

- a. Any exceptional values or messages could be singled out for discussion and debate.

The Hook: The images rejected by the children ("sentimental" boy in Complan; "tomboyish" girls in Elle 18) can be re-examined.



Can girls repair cars or boys be "sentimental" about their family? Do they like "sentimental" girls?

- b. Oft-repeated stereotypes or biases which children are exposed to or have expressed can be taken up.

Ranking exercise: Children appreciated "conventional" images. Can these be changed?

Can boys be depicted as "caring", "sensitive" individuals, may girls behave "adult-like" or "tomboyish"?



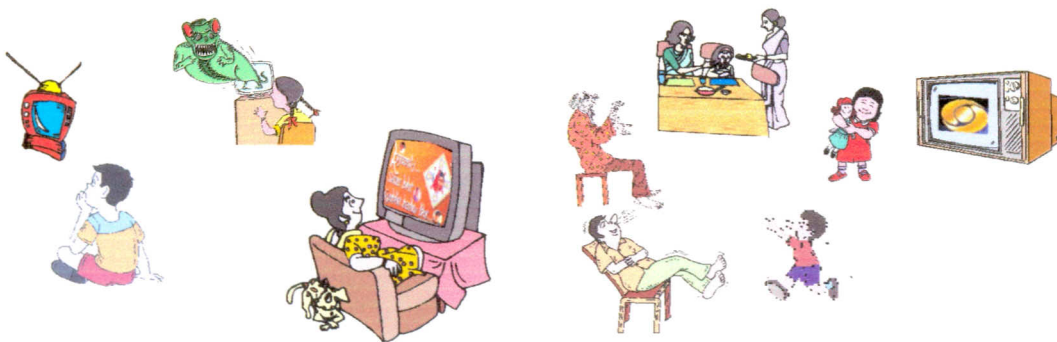
c. Simulation

Drawing: Ask them to profile the family 20 years ago and 20 years hence?

Alternatives:

2022: Family with a number of TV sets. Individuals sit in separate rooms and watch their favourite programmes. No fights or stresses.

1982: An extended family watches *Hum Log* with friends without any disagreements. Presence of only one channel. Limited access to the medium.



What is the imagery of the parents on television? How are children depicted?  
Is the family relationship the same as shown on television?

This helps the child to cope with existing realities.

Encourage discussion around their notions of gender, reality check and any shifts following the exercises and deliberations.

**OUTCOME:**

Besides becoming more aware of how media portrays boys and girls, this exercise initiates discussion around their views and experiences on gender roles.

It provides them with an opportunity to deal with personal values related to gender.

The media education helps the children to deal with gender issues in a more objective manner.



SPEAKING OUT

## Images Included in this Module



Vicky, the robot,  
from Small Wonder

The Complan  
boy



The Zandu  
balm boy



The Colgate girl



Lulu

The Lifebuoy  
or "I-don't-  
care" girl



Koyna from  
Choti Ma



The Coca cola boy



Rahul, the  
Pepsi boy



The Lakme  
boy



The Elle 18 girls

Margaret  
from  
Dennis the  
Menace



The Pepsodent boy



The Shudh  
namak boy



The Moov  
girl



The Dhara  
boy

