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**AdStandards.com.au**

Ad Standards Limited  
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## Case Report

<b>1. Case Number :</b>	<b>0262-19</b>
<b>2. Advertiser :</b>	<b>Asaleo Care - Libra</b>
<b>3. Product :</b>	<b>Toiletries</b>
<b>4. Type of Advertisement/Media :</b>	<b>TV - Free to Air</b>
<b>5. Date of Determination</b>	<b>2-Sep-2019</b>
<b>6. DETERMINATION :</b>	<b>Dismissed</b>

### ISSUES RAISED

AANA Code of Ethics\2.1 Discrimination or Vilification  
AANA Code of Ethics\2.2 Exploitative or Degrading  
AANA Code of Ethics\2.3 Violence  
AANA Code of Ethics\2.4 Sex/sexuality/nudity  
AANA Code of Ethics\2.6 Health and Safety  
AANA Code of Ethics\2.0 Other

### DESCRIPTION OF ADVERTISEMENT

There are two versions of this television advertisement.

Version one features:

- A hand pouring red liquid onto a pad as an infomercial style voice over states, "with an ultra-absorbent core".
- A woman stands up from a busy dinner table and asks "Have you got a pad?"
- A man takes a packet of pads off a shelf in a corner store and puts them on the counter to pay for them.
- A woman in a red swimsuit lies on a pad-shaped inflatable in a pool.
- A woman's legs in the shower with water and blood running down them.
- A woman in white lingerie with the bottom of the patterned underwear stained red.
- A man dressed in a pad costume hugs another person as he enters a house.
- Red liquid splashes across a black background
- A teenage girl enters a bathroom holding a pad



- The girl's floral underwear with a pad is shown, and her hand pulls the pad down and pixilation covers the pad and underwear. The words 'why is it considered unacceptable to show period blood?' appear onscreen.
- The girl removes the pad and the pixilation shrinks to only cover the blood.
- the words 'periods are normal. Showing them should be too.' appear against a red background.

The second version features:

- A hand pouring red liquid onto a pad as an informercial style voice over states, "with an ultra-absorbent core".
- A woman stands up from a busy dinner table and asks "Have you got a pad?"
- A man takes a packet of pads off a shelf in a corner store and puts them on the counter to pay for them.
- A woman in a red swimsuit lies on a pad-shaped inflatable in a pool.
- Girls in a classroom pass a pad from one person to another
- A teenage girl enters a bathroom holding a pad
- A woman in white lingerie with the bottom of the patterned underwear stained red.
- An email is typed on the screen with the subject "Out of Office Auto Reply" and the words "Thanks for your email. I am having a very heavy period so will be working from home today.
- A woman scratches her thighs leaving scratch marks. The words '75% of Australian women say there's a stigma attached to having a period.
- A man dressed in a pad costume hugs another person as he enters a house. And they are seen jumping up and down.
- Red liquid splashes across a black background
- the words 'periods are normal. Showing them should be too.' appear against a red background.

### **THE COMPLAINT**

A sample of comments which the complainant/s made regarding this advertisement included the following:

*This is distasteful and unnecessary. Viewers know that sanitary pads are products used for women during menstruation. This is vulgar and not needed to sell a product. Some things should be a bit more private and this ad takes it to an unacceptable level. .*

*Showing girls bleeding is wrong at any time of the day*

*Extremely inappropriate to be so graphic for such a personal and sensitive personnel matter*

*This commercial is extremely offensive. Firstly, period blood is a personal and private experience for women and it does not need to be visually shown for profit. It is also extremely offensive and inappropriate to show young teenage girls, between the ages of 12 to 16, getting their period, with blood dripping down their leg and of them*



*peeling off a period stained pad from their underwear. It appeals to pedophiles to see young girls in this manner and is exposing to young females and extremely dangerous for young girls.*

*It seemed an unnecessary graphic content for a very private and personal issue affecting women. I don't believe the general public need to see such graphic images of things that are held private to women. I am a woman and am not happy to view this ad in front of others especially men in the room.*

*I feel it's inappropriate as it wasn't advertising the product, it was making a shock statement. Bodily secretions shouldn't be shown on TV ads. I wouldn't expect a toilet paper advertisement to show faeces on toilet paper, or an advertisement showing nasal secretions for tissues.*

*We had teenage and young children watching the show and all reacted poorly and in disgust. Even my wife was shocked and appalled. I don't react well to blood myself and my son gets anxious about it also.*

*Unnecessary description of blood inappropriate as both sexes know The process for a female Menstruation. Way too descriptive, visual and disturbing for a sacred process. It is vulgar and personal.*

*I find it absolutely offensive and degrading to all women to show the blood flow and blood splattering everywhere. This is not on!!*

*I feel like this is adult content that is not appropriate for children. I can understand the approach-I get that bleeding is normal, but the graphic nature of the ad means children are exposed to this adult concept before necessary. My young children aged from 3-8, certainly are not ready to have this conversation. I also found the graphic nature unnecessary and offensive just in its nature.*

*This ad explicitly shows period blood in context. Running down a lady's leg whilst showering, and on a pad when removing underwear in a toilet stall. The company claims that period blood is normal and showing it should be too. Their attempt to normalise periods is unnecessary. Periods are not a secret but they are private matters of personal hygiene. Many people have complained on the company's Facebook page with many viewers pointing out that this content is unnecessary. Toilet paper advertisements do not explicitly show people wiping faeces from their bottom and neither should Libra show explicit images of period blood in precise context. Further to this is the concern that the advertisement was shown in a time slot when our family was watching television together. Included in our viewing audience was our young daughter who is of an age where we were not ready to have a discussion about puberty. This content prompted questions from her which we are quite simply not ready to have and that are not timely for her level of development or maturity. I feel very strongly that this company has unnecessarily preempted a discussion about puberty and periods that should otherwise be entirely up to the parents of a family to decide when and where this happens. I agree entirely that periods are a normal part*



*of life, but the content of this advertisement is unnecessary. I am very disappointed in the company's decision to run this advertisement, the decision has been made in poor taste and without consideration of the breadth of the viewing audience.*

*During a family program like survivor an advertisement by libra is encouraging discussion of female menstrual cycles and showed graphic content including what appeared to be blood running down a leg in the shower, blood on sanitary pads. It is offensive and forces parents to have discussions with our children that we have a right to have at an time appropriate for our children and should not be determined by companies pushing their products or media, airing them during family programs*

*I was shocked to see something so confronting right in front of me but was more shocked to see the look on my 7 year old daughters face when she had to watch something so confronting I then had to explain to her what she had just watched I am absolutely appalled that libra has chosen when I was to talk to MY 7year old little girl about periods I am no way ashamed of periods but I had not prepared to speak to my little girl about it at 7 years old!*

*Because my 6yr old and 9yr old boys we're watching tv with my husband and I and I do not appreciate feeling uncomfortable trying to explain to my boys what they just saw! I will tell my boys about periods when the time is right not during our family viewing! Disgusted!*

*I would imagine that anyone, from any walk of life would find it hard not to be offended by this commercial.*

*It is completely in-appropriate at any time of day, for any audience, especially children. My wife was even offended by it.*

*It was obviously designed to shock & cause controversy. Libra & channel Ten deserve staff to be sacked over this, as well as fines, in my opinion.*

*The images portrayed in the ad are disgusting & demeaning to Women. I would liken it to a Toilet paper commercial showing a Faeces cover anus to promote their product.*

*I can;t even watch the whole ad, it is so disgusting. I am relating to you (above) about the parts that I DID actually watch because as a civilised person, I feel like I want to throw up as I don;t want to see menstrual blood. I am sickened and disgusted to have to watch menstrual blood on my tv especially when I am eating and family is watching, all because a company thinks being "edgy" is the way to go. Maybe they think to score virtue points for being on the side of those who are portrayed as "victims" once a month. We are living in a civilised society where people don;t show off their bodily discharges like blood, faeces, urine, semen etc..) in public and if they did in real life, they would be either told it was disgusting or someone would call the police and say the person is unhinged. Also..... I noticed that there are no people of any ethnicity depicted. Only white people and younger age group. It;s as though only young-ish white girls get periods. It's as though combining black skin with periods is not something the company wants to do because they want lay the foundation of the ad as that women are pure and showing black or dark women, would go against that basic premise, lest anyone associate them with dirty/unclean etc.. as was the case*



*hundreds of years ago. Also, a scene where a couple is having sex suggests that men must have sex with females menstruating or else they are bad and could be labeled as women-haters or misogynists etc... No regard for what the man might think of the situation he finds himself in. Also, subtle demonisation of white people. Why didn;t they show a dark skinned couple having sex after the female takes off her hijab? Stereotyping white people. Showing the suggestion that they are the only ones who would have sex when the woman is on her periods because they are uncouth and don;t adhere to the teachings of the Qur'an, that says it is not OK to do that. Muslims and Qur'an is one example. Same would apply to Jewish people and Torah but hijab is more well known than shaitels. This ad is offenseive on so many levels and for many reasons.*

*Sitting with our 9 and 11 year old boys and in less than 30!secs both going from a state of relax to alarm as they watched blood running down the leg of a girl and smeared across a pad and questions about girls bleeding. I should pick the time and the place when I have that discussion with my children but have it thrust upon me while watching an episode of Survivor. My boys go to bed at 8:30pm so please don't justify this as adult viewing time when the program has a 7:30pm start time as is family viewing. It's distasteful and confronting. What's next nipple let down onto breast pads, poop into nappies, semen volume in condoms? Body functions should remain private not used as shock tactic marketing. Please have this removed. The trauma it causes to young children and pre teens is real. Way to build anxiety in a pre teen girl who is yet to have that conversation with her parent.*

## **THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE**

Comments which the advertiser made in response to the complainant/s regarding this advertisement include the following:

*Having considered the complaints and the relevant provisions of the ASA Advertising Codes of Practice (Codes), we submit that the Libra® Blood Normal TV commercial (the TVC) the subject of the complaints complies with the Codes. Accordingly, we submit that the complaints should be dismissed.*

*Many of the complaints made to ASA do not specifically reference a section or part of the Codes which the TVC allegedly breaches. However, ASA has referred us to the following issues / potential breaches of Codes raised by the complaints:*

- *AANA Code of Ethics / 2.4 Sex / sexuality / nudity / sexualisation of children*
- *AANA Code of Ethics / 2.0 / Social Values*
- *AANA Code of Ethics / 2.1 / Discrimination or Vilification / Gender*
- *AANA Code of Ethics / 2.6 Health and Safety / Within prevailing community standards*

*It also appears the complaints fall into the following broad categories, many of which do not necessarily fall within the scope of the Codes, but are nevertheless claims that Libra denies:*



- *Advertisement is generally embarrassing*
- *Advertisement was offensive*
- *Children are too young for parents to explain the product and periods*
- *Too graphic and unnecessary exposure of menstrual blood*
- *Menstrual blood itself is offensive*

*For your reference we have detailed below under separate headings, details of the TVC's creative team and the creative idea behind the TVC, the clearance given to the TVC and reasons for our submission that the TVC complies with the Codes – addressing the elements of the code listed above.*

*We have also set out below some of the very positive responses to the TVC we have received, which we submit should be considered by the ASA's when deciding whether to dismiss the complaints.*

#### *1. The creative idea behind the TVC*

*In 2017 Libra's sister company Essity launched an award-winning Blood Normal campaign for its Libresse® and Bodyform® pads and tampons, becoming the first ad campaign to depict real period blood instead of the blue liquid that usually stands for it and receiving a number of international accolades, including the Glass Lion for Change at Cannes in 2018.*

*Essity's campaign was launched following studies conducted by Essity in the UK and Europe which showed that talking about periods and showing periods were considered major taboos and these taboos were partly caused by mainstream media's typical treatment of the category which showed unrealistic images of women having their period, including using the typical blue liquid to denote blood rather than more realistic red.*

*The Blood Normal campaign run by Essity encompassed TV and digital platforms in the following global markets:*

- *UK*
- *France*
- *Netherlands*
- *Norway*
- *Sweden*
- *Finland*
- *Denmark*
- *Ukraine*
- *Italy*
- *Us*
- *Argentina*
- *South Africa*

*Any complaints to regional advertising standards boards have been dismissed, accordingly no part of the campaign has been banned by any country.*



*The TVC launched by Asaleo Care for Libra<sup>®</sup>, uses the creative of the Essity campaign, with Libra products.*

*Before deciding whether to launch the Blood Normal campaign in Australia and to what extent it ought to be adapted to meet the Australian market, Libra conducted its own research specific to Australian women, Australian culture and society.*

*The research consisted of:*

- 1. Consumer quantitative testing and validation of the Advertisement before airing*
- 2. Period Taboo study*

*Consumer testing and validation of the Advertisement before airing:*

*Libra<sup>®</sup> tested the Advertisement with 500 women aged 16-65 years before airing it on television. The research found that the vast majority of women (62%) agree that periods are just a normal part of life, so they shouldn't be ignored by mainstream media (e.g. films, TV). This was even more true of women aged 18-29 years old with 67% of them agreeing with this statement.*

*Some of the comments by those who viewed the Advertisement in testing:*

*"Loved how it showed everyday situations and making periods more normal"*

*"Periods are normal and both women and men shouldn't even bat an eyelid when discussing them! The cleanest blood in the body and for some reason we have been shamed in the past? I loved it!"*

*"Periods are normal and nothing to be embarrassed about. It's ridiculous that TV censors showing period blood. Workplaces should be more flexible around women working from home if on their period."*

*"The whole ad was great. Showing how periods are just a normal part of life for half the population that people shouldn't be shamed for it or ashamed to speak freely about it or ask for help if they need to that they don't need to put their life on hold because of a biological condition they were born with."*

*"It's empowering for all women and a great advertisement that periods shouldn't be a taboo subject."*

*"I love the music and the fact that it is normalising something so natural for 50% of the population, it's an important message."*

*'I liked the punchline. I thought it was powerful. I think of all the blood and violence we see on tv and yet we can't show period blood. It made me feel a little sad as well.'*

*'It normalised having your period and showed people not caring or acting like it was gross or something to hide. I liked that it showed blood especially the shower scene.'*

*Period Taboo study*





*Additionally, in July 2019 Libra commissioned an independent research study with the focus on exploring taboos around periods. This study surveyed 1000 people, men and women from Australia and New Zealand.*

*Alarmingly, the survey revealed that, in Australia periods are a topic hushed up and hidden at every level of society – on a scale that transcends any other topic.*

*For instance, Libra's survey and research showed:*

- 3 in 4 Australian women say there is a stigma attached to having a period, with periods listed as more of a taboo than drugs, sex, STDs and mental health problems;*
- 8 in 10 women will go to great lengths to hide their period, with women avoiding swimming (58%) and light-coloured clothes (60%), hiding products in their pocket, sleeve or bra (56%) or checking for leaks after sitting down when on their period (58%);*
- For young Australians the shame of menstruation is so bad that almost 70% would rather fail a subject at class than have their peers know they are on their period and a further 25% would rather be bullied than have their peers know;*
- One quarter of women aged between 18-24 are even embarrassed to purchase female care products.*

*The results of Libra's survey and research was considered by experts such as Dr Lauren Rosewarne, Senior Lecturer in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Melbourne. Dr Rosewarne provided the following opinion:*

*"While our society is becoming increasingly open and tolerant around topics such as transgenderism, homosexuality and mental illness, female menstruation is still something that seen as unacceptable for public discourse.*

*Perhaps that's because periods aren't something we commonly see on television, in movies or on Instagram – if young girls are brought up to hide their period, then they will continue to feel and believe it's something shameful, embarrassing and needing to be hidden."*

*Based on the Australian research, Libra decided launching the Blood Normal campaign in Australia and New Zealand was the right thing to do as the taboo was real in Australia too. Critically, it was seen as within Libra's brand DNA – bravely playing its part to normalise periods, breaking down the taboos of periods and menstrual blood - generating conversation across mainstream media that periods are part of everyday life and period blood is normal. Put simply, bleeding and having a period are both normal, so seeing them in pop culture and advertising should be too.*

*By normalising periods and generating conversation in the media and the public around menstruation the intention was to position Libra® as a brand that:*

- leads change in Australia's society surrounding menstruation / period taboo*
- is on a mission to help Australian women feel better about themselves every day and to tackle period stigma head-on*
- is the brand preference for taking care of everyday periods in everyday life in the Australian market*





*It is also relevant that as the only Australian manufacturer of feminine care products, Libra is committed to and has always played a leading role to help educate and facilitate open and transparent conversations among women and girls to normalise periods and to encourage women to feel empowered about having a period. For example:*

- Libra's website includes the 'Ask Gemmah' web-forum where girls are encouraged to ask Gemmah any questions about periods and the website has a series of articles and tools to break down misconceptions, stereotypes and stigmas commonly associated with having periods, period blood and all that goes along with it.*
- Libra® positions itself in the market to break down period shame as an Australian societal issue:*
  - actively sponsoring charitable organisations such as Share the Dignity; and*
  - providing free resources to education providers for teaching puberty and menstruation through its 'complete School Resource Kit'.*

*In addition to the TVC, Libra worked with several local agencies to bring the #bloodnormal message to audiences via paid, owned and earned media. This was done to amplify the message to Australian women, girls and men that periods are normal and seeing pads, tampons and real blood in everyday life is also normal. The TVC is part of the wider Blood Normal campaign. From all trackable responses and commentary to date, we have measured an overwhelmingly positive response to the campaign.*

*Importantly, part of Libra's survey and research tested the degree to which women want to see change in the way that periods and period blood is portrayed in mainstream media. Almost 50% of women surveyed by Libra confirmed that society's attitude toward periods was old-fashioned and girl's confidence was at risk if periods aren't discussed openly.*

## *2. Film/TVC Versions and Adaptions*

*Film Version Channel Placement Link to film*

*2-minute-long form Digital Only (YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat)*

*30" Bloodnormal V1 Metro Broadcast TV & CatchUp (Bachelor, Gogglebox, My Life Is Murder)*

*30" Bloodnormal V2 Regional Broadcast TV & Metro (The Project, Survivor)*

*Note: 30" Bloodnormal V1 was running across all Metro & Regional placements from Sunday 18th August 2019. 30" Bloodnormal V2 was running across above placements from Wednesday 20th August 2019.*

## *3. CAB / CAD clearance and rating*



*Both 30" TVC's were approved by Commercials Approval Bureau (NZ) and cleared by ClearAds Australia, with the approval code V1 P63D6TCF and V2 P63DNTCF. In each case the TVC's were confirmed as suitable for broadcast on television.*

*Further to this, both TVC advertisements received a P rating by ClearAds Australia. The Free TV Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice, under 2.2.1, states that "material that has been classified C, P, G or PG may be broadcast at any time. Libra has complied with the above guidelines and ratings and considers the above ratings as appropriate as they allow the TVC's to be shown at times when adults are viewing and can provide guidance to any children also viewing.*

#### *4. Compliance with the Code*

*The following issues have been raised by complainants in connection with the TVC, each of which is dealt with in detail below:*

- AANA Code of Ethics / 2.4 Sex / sexuality / nudity / sexualisation of children*
- AANA Code of Ethics / 2.1 / Discrimination or Vilification / Gender*
- AANA Code of Ethics / 2.6 Health and Safety / Within prevailing community standards*
- AANA Code of Ethics / 2.2 Exploitative or Degrading / Degrading – women*
- AANA Code of Ethics / 2.3 Violence / Graphic depictions*

#### *2.4 – Sex, sexuality, nudity, sexualisation of children*

*The Code states:*

*Advertising or Marketing Communications shall treat sex, sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to the relevant audience.*

*A small number of the complaints allege (which we deny) that the portrayal in the TVC of a young woman in the shower with blood trickling down her leg, another woman kissing her boyfriend and a young woman pulling down her pad while sitting on the toilet:*

*"crosses too many boundaries" and / or "may even excite a few sexual misfits out there" or state that "peadohiles [sic] would get off on this"*

*Although the complainants have not directly quoted that these aspects of the TVC breach section 2.4 of the Code, ASA has requested that we address this as a possible issue.*

*We submit that the TVC complies with Section 2.4 of the Code and the accompanying guidance set out in the Practice Note. The images of the young women in the TVC are at all times tasteful and sensitive to the relevant audience, consumers of the products and the underlying message of the TVC: that is: ....the TVC dares to imagine a world where having periods, using pads and tampons was normal – a part of everyday life for young women and girls.*

*The TVC was broadcast as per the rating guidelines for 'P' rated advertisements. Although this was not a Clear Ads requirement of the approval, the placements were*



*booked from 6.30pm onwards. The TVC was not broadcast during programs intended specifically for children under the age of 13. If children were watching the programs, it is likely they were watching with their parents who can provide their children with the appropriate guidance about menstruation, pads and tampons.*

*The scenes in the TVC are of women and girls doing everyday things while on their period and shows the reality of having a period – normalising a period as part of everyday normal life for women and girls. Menstruation is part of women and girls experience and is part of puberty for girls, but menstruation should not be equated with sexualisation – the TVC does not make having a period sexual it makes it normal.*

*There is no scene in the TVC which shows nudity as such:*

- the scene in the shower shows a woman's legs only, it is not possible from that scene to distinguish the age of the woman.*
- the scene of the woman and man holding hands, going back to a hotel room and kissing does not show nudity and its treatment of sex and sexuality is sensitive in the context of the ad which shows the reality of women and girls doing everyday regular activities while having their period, having a relationship / sex being just one of those activities. (note: this scene only appears in the long form, not the broadcast TVC edit)*
- the closing scene in the toilet of a girl changing her pad, is sensitive in the context of all of the scenes in the TVC which shows the full range of activities that women and girls can do while on their period and the everyday simple and convenient task of changing her pad is part of that reality.*

*We are also able to confirm that all talent were over 18 years of age at the time of filming. Due to privacy laws we cannot disclose any of their personal details.*

## *2.1 Discrimination or vilification of gender / 2.2 Exploitative / degrading to women*

*The Code states:*

*Advertising or Marketing Communications shall not portray people or depict material in a way which discriminates against or vilifies a person or section of the community on account of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual preference, religion, disability, mental illness or political belief.*

*Some of the complaints allege, which we deny that the TVC is degrading to women and girls. For example, one complainant stated "I find it highly offensive and degrading for a young girl to rip a pad off her undies while sitting on the toilet" and another complainant said "sanitary is a private thing that does not need to be displayed so explicitly by a company that wishes to sell its product more. It is disrespectful and vulgar."*

*From our review of the complaints received, complainants have not directly quoted that the TVC breaches section 2.1 of the Code or if it does, any specific scenes which are in breach. However, ASA has requested that we address this as a possible issue. We submit that the TVC complies with Section 2.1 of the Code. There is no scene which is discriminatory, or which is degrading or vilifies women or any person on*



*account of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual preference, religion, disability, mental illness or political belief.*

*As mentioned earlier, the intention of the TVC is to breakdown taboos and to show periods, use of pads and tampons as part of women and girl's everyday life. The need for the TVC is supported by research which showed that across Australia, women and girls feel ashamed of their period and are missing out on everyday activities because they feel they need to hide away. The TVC is encouraging women, men, boys and girls (with guidance from their parents) to imagine a world where women and girls don't have to hide anymore, where there is no shame attached to changing your pad in a toilet, asking for a pad at a dinner party or carrying your pad without hiding it.*

*The summary of feedback under 6 section in this response, highlights some of the overwhelmingly positive feedback we have received, contrary to the complaints to ASA under this section of the code.*

*2.6 Health and safety / 2.0 general community standards / social values / 2.3 violence / graphic depictions*

*The Code states:*

*Advertising or Marketing Communications shall not depict material contrary to Prevailing Community Standards on health and safety.*

*Advertising or Marketing Communication shall not present or portray violence unless it is justifiable in the context of the product or service advertised.*

*Many complaints have stated that the showing of period blood in the TVC is of itself offensive. From our review of the complaints made this is the most common ground for complaint. Examples of comments made by complainants are listed below:*

*"I understand the objective of trying to normalise the fact the women have periods however feeling the need to show period blood to do this is offensive"*

*"I understand there are a small percentage of women that feel like the [sic] are being period shamed, I have never seen or heard of it happening. Surely they can provide their point with out featuring bodily fluids. I have never seen a commercial with bodily fluids ever, why start now."*

*"I don't believe we need to be subjected to seeing women and blood on their pads during their period. It is highly offensive. It's such a personal things and some things need to be kept private."*

*From our review of the complaints, it appears that many of the complainants who have taken offence to seeing period blood in the TVC have expressed a "what next view" stating that if blood is allowed to be shown in a TVC just because it is a normal bodily fluid, then why not show poo, wee or snot too. Examples of this view are below:*



*“nor do I want to view it myself ... just as I do not expect to see a toilet paper ad with excrement on it because its normal for everyone to have a bowel movement.”*

*“what next ... QUILTON advertising faeces on a toilet paper?”*

*“we don’t show people urinating or defaecating, these are also natural bodily unctions. We don’t see faeces on our ads because it’s tasteless and unnecessary.”*

*We submit that the TVC complies with sections 2.2 and 2.6 of the Code and is a sensitive and tasteful portrayal of a real topic in our community that needs to be addressed. There is nothing in the Code which prohibits the showing of period blood. There is nothing in the TVC which links the showing of period blood to any act of violence. The blood shown in the TVC is clearly intended to be period blood, it is not as a consequence of any violent act.*

*As mentioned above, the TVC is based on research conducted in Australia (and globally) on the feminine hygiene category which all pointed to an entrenched sense of shame surrounding periods that exhibited itself in the many strategies women use to hide their period and resulted in some disturbing figures around the way Australian women and girls feel about their periods. The results of the survey of Australian and New Zealand women and girls showed that women felt disgusted and men felt disgusted by it.*

*As the only Australian manufacturer of feminine care products, Libra has played a leading role in helping to destigmatise menstruation for over forty years. Libra wants to play its part to shift the paradigm, to change how periods are represented in mainstream media advertisements. A key part of this change was the typical blue liquid used to denote blood is replaced with a more realistic red to demonstrate a pad’s absorbency and, crucially, blood is depicted on women’s pads.*

*But, the TVC is not just about showing period blood, the TVC comprises multiple scenes which are deliberate, carefully and sensitively constructed to address everyday activities that women and girls in our survey had stated they prefer to hide away from when on their period. So, the TVC does two things:*

- (1) it shows periods like they are, normal, boring, sometimes emotional, painful or awkward and sometime not; and*
- (2) shows women without shame swimming, women without shame being intimate with partners, men without shame shopping for pads, women without shame asking for a pad, women without shame having period pain, girls without shame changing their pad.*

*Period blood should not be likened to poo or urine. Period blood is part of everyday life for women and girls. There is not the same stigma attached to poo or urine. That is part of the message we are making.*

*We submit that the period blood shown in the TVC has a context and is normalised and sensitive to the audience and our consumers. For Libra the showing of period*



*blood is key to demonstrating the brand's commitment to breaking down taboos and starting a meaningful conversation about periods, pads and tampons in our community which will help women and girls normalise their experiences and get on with everyday life when having their period, it will also help men and boys understand that periods are a normal and healthy part of life.*

#### *5. Support received for the TVC*

*Asaleo Care expected that its TVC would not be universally liked. Complaints received align with the results of our research – i.e. many people feel uncomfortable when confronted with the reality of periods, they would prefer to periods, pads and tampons to stay a topic just talked about by women and girls and hidden away from mainstream culture.*

*Since launching the #BloodNormal campaign Asaleo Care has been overwhelmed by supportive comments it has received across all media from men and women of all ages. Examples of publicly available feedback it is set out below. The purpose of the campaign was for Asaleo Care to play its part in breaking down taboos for periods, pads and tampons. The comments below, show that the campaign has started conversations and will contribute to breaking down the taboo and shame surrounding periods, pads and tampons.*

#### *Facebook*

*"DON'T STOP, NEVER EVER STOP. This message is too important and it's about time we get it loud and clear"*

*"Bloody loved it. The ad was captivating. Not necessary or important for us oldies, but great for younger women struggling to deal with the stigma."*

*"God I feel so reinvigorated by the gutsy honesty."*

*"I have a ten year old daughter and am very happy there's a chance she won't have the same 'period' shame of previous generations."*

#### *Instagram*

*"Finally! We shouldn't be ashamed of what is completely normal!"*

*"I just explained the meaning to my daughter. About time – well done!"*

*"I'll be switching from my usual brand to you after seeing this campaign. Thank you"*

*"Great campaign. Started a conversation in our house" –*

#### *Twitter*

*"Can't believe it has taken until 2019 for this. Wish I had seen this ad when I was 12"*

*"Love the ad and much needed breaking down of stigma around PERIOD BLOD."*





*“Period blood in TV!!! Yes Libra! Well done!”*

*“The shot that hit me was the girl in the shower. That was real, that made me smile. So glad we are normalising periods again... Sad we have to normalise it though. Half the population bleed, I’d say that’s pretty normal.”*

## **6. Conclusion**

*We submit this TVC and the #BloodNormal campaign of which it forms a critical element responds to a need to breakdown taboos and shame experienced by women and girls when having their period.*

*The spectrum of complaints – positive and negative that the TVC has elicited shows it is a topic that does not sit comfortably with all people: some want it to remain hidden whilst others want periods, pads and tampons to be part of everyday life.*

*The TVC seeks to breakdown stigma and by providing a link to educational materials (including via Ask Gemmah) and the #BloodNormal campaign literature published on our website, provide a place for women and girls (and their husbands, brothers, fathers and sons) to access real information about menstruation, our products and how it can be seen differently ... as a part of everyday real life and does not need to be hidden away.*

*The airing of the TVC was during Network 10 primetime programs such as The Bachelor, Survivor, The Project, My Life is Murder and Googlebox. The TVC was appropriately CAB / CAD cleared as suitable for this audience.*

## **THE DETERMINATION**

The Ad Standards Community Panel (the “Panel”) considered whether this advertisement breaches Section 2 of the AANA Code of Ethics (the “Code”).

The Panel first outlined the complaints received about the advertisement.

- Complainants’ were concerned about the tastelessness of the advertisement.
- Complainants’ were concerned about the advertisement being discriminatory and vilifying towards woman by publicising a private matter.
- Complainants’ were concerned about the advertisement being discriminatory and vilifying towards certain religious groups by referencing a sacred process and by depicting sexual intimacy between a couple.
- Complainants’ were concerned about the advertisement being discriminatory and vilifying towards other races/ethnicities.
- Complainants’ were concerned that the advertisement objectifies and degrades women.
- Complainants’ were concerned about the depiction of a woman scratching her thighs.
- Complainants’ were concerned that the placement of the advertisement was inappropriate,





particularly the placement during the evenings when many young children would be watching.

- Complainants noted that the advertisement was upsetting to children, and that the advertisement had caused children to have many questions about the content of the advertisement.
- Complainants were concerned that the placement of the advertisement was inappropriate, particularly the placement during the evenings when many women are watching television with their partners, children and parents and may be embarrassed by the content.
- Complainants' were concerned that the depiction of young women menstruating would appeal to paedophiles and such a depiction is dangerous for women.
- Complainants' were concerned that the depiction of a bodily function and blood was unnecessary, and may be upsetting to some viewers who are unsettled at the sight of blood.
- Complainants' considered that just because menstruation is normal, it doesn't mean it is appropriate to be on television.
- Complainants' were concerned that there is no public health message to justify the shock value of the advertisement.

The Panel viewed the advertisement and noted the advertiser's response.

The Panel noted the advertiser's response that the intent of the advertisement is to normalise conversation and depictions of menstruation.

The Panel noted that this television advertisement has two versions:

Version one features:

- A hand pouring red liquid onto a pad as an infomercial style voice over states, "with an ultra-absorbent core".
- A woman stands up from a busy dinner table and asks "Have you got a pad?"
- A man takes a packet of pads off a shelf in a corner store and puts them on the counter to pay for them.
- A woman in a red swimsuit lies on a pad-shaped inflatable in a pool.
- A woman's legs in the shower with water and blood running down them (referred to in this case report as the "shower scene").
- A woman in white lingerie with the bottom of the patterned underwear stained red.
- A man dressed in a pad costume hugs another person as he enters a house.
- Red liquid splashes across a black background
- A teenage girl enters a bathroom holding a pad
- The girl's floral underwear with a pad is shown, and her hand pulls the pad down and pixilation covers the pad and underwear. The words 'why is it considered unacceptable to show period blood?' appear onscreen (referred to in this case report as the "toilet scene").
- The girl removes the pad and the pixilation shrinks to only cover the blood.
- the words 'periods are normal. Showing them should be too.' appear against a red background.

The second version features:

- A hand pouring red liquid onto a pad as an infomercial style voice over states, "with an ultra-absorbent core".
- A woman stands up from a busy dinner table and asks "Have you got a pad?"
- A man takes a packet of pads off a shelf in a corner store and puts them on the counter to



pay for them.

- A woman in a red swimsuit lies on a pad-shaped inflatable in a pool.
- Girls in a classroom pass a pad from one person to another
- A teenage girl enters a bathroom holding a pad
- A woman in white lingerie with the bottom of the patterned underwear stained red.
- An email is typed on the screen with the subject "Out of Office Auto Reply" and the words "Thanks for your email. I am having a very heavy period so will be working from home today.
- A woman scratches her thighs leaving scratch marks. The words '75% of Australian women say there's a stigma attached to having a period.
- A man dressed in a pad costume hugs another person as he enters a house. And they are seen jumping up and down.
- Red liquid splashes across a black background
- the words 'periods are normal. Showing them should be too.' appear against a red background.

The Panel first addressed some complainants' concerns that were not an issue under the Code of Ethics.

The Panel noted complainants' concerns that the advertisement's subject matter and visuals are distasteful and not appropriate for a television advertisement. Specifically the Panel noted concerns that advertising menstruation in a manner which depicts blood is "disgusting" and "gross". The Panel noted that advertisers are free to use whatever images and phrases they wish in an advertisement provided that such images or phrases do not breach a section of the Code. The Panel considered that some aspects of the imagery in the advertisement may be unsavoury or off-putting and noted that some complainants were upset that the advertisement had aired during meal times. Overall however, the Panel noted that the issue of bad taste falls outside of the Code therefore the Panel is unable consider this aspect of the complaints when making its determination.

The Panel noted some complainants' had referenced a scene depicting two people kissing and that this depiction of sexual intimacy was inappropriate. The Panel noted that this scene did not appear in the two versions of the advertisement that were on television, but rather in a longer version that was online only. The Panel noted it could not consider that scene in this case.

The Panel noted complainants' concerns that the depiction of bodily fluids was unnecessary. In particular, the Panel noted comments that advertisers don't use faeces and mucus to advertise toilet paper and tissues. The Panel noted that its' role is to consider the content of advertisements, not hypothetical scenarios. The Panel noted that, of itself, the depiction of body fluids is not against the provisions of the Code, but did consider this aspect of complaints under Section 2.6 of the Code.

The Panel noted complainant's concerns that the depiction of blood in particular was upsetting, as some members of the community have an aversion to blood and this depiction was especially distressing to them. The Panel noted that this is not an issue under the Code and noted that it was unable to consider this aspects of complaints.

The Panel then considered issues which are under the Code.



The Panel considered whether the advertisement complied with Section 2.1 of the Code which requires that 'advertisements shall not portray or depict material in a way which discriminates against or vilifies a person or section of the community on account of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual preference, religion, disability, mental illness or political belief.'

The Panel noted the Practice Note to Section 2.1 of the Code which provides the following definitions:

*"Discrimination – unfair or less favourable treatment*

*Vilification – humiliates, intimidates, incites hatred, contempt or ridicule".*

The Panel noted the complainants' concerns that the advertisement is discriminatory and vilifying towards woman by publicising a private matter.

The Panel considered that the complainants' overall concerns appeared to relate to the topic of menstruation being promoted at all, and that such a reference to a matter which some women wish to remain private is offensive.

The Panel considered that of itself, the topic of menstruation is not discriminative or vilifying although some members of the community would prefer not to have this type of issue discussed publicly.

The Panel considered that the women in the advertisement are depicted as being comfortable with themselves and their current situation. The Panel noted that one woman is shown going to the bathroom holding a sanitary product and is not attempting to hide it. The Panel considered that there is no negative language or imagery in the advertisement that implies that that woman, or women in general, should be embarrassed about menstruation or that a woman who is menstruating is a lesser person.

The Panel noted some complaints that depicting women having their period is humiliating. The Panel noted that the whole #bloodnormal campaign, including this specific advertisement, is based around the concept that menstruation is normal and not something to be embarrassed or shamed about. The Panel considered that the overall impression of the advertisement supports this concept.

The Panel considered that the advertisement does not depict the women in the advertisement or women in general in a manner that is unfair nor in a manner that would be likely to humiliate or incite ridicule. The Panel determined that the advertisement does not discriminate against or vilify a person or section of the community on account of gender.

The Panel noted the complainants' concerns that the advertisement is discriminatory on the basis of race, as there are only Caucasian women depicted.

The Panel viewed the advertisement and noted that a man of African descent was depicted, but that all of the female actors did appear to be Caucasian. However, the Panel noted that ultimately advertisers are free to use whatever people they choose in an advertisement provided that such use does not amount to discrimination or vilification on the basis of race.



The Panel considered that unless there is content in the advertisement which references a particular race, the use of people of one race is not of itself discrimination and the Panel noted that the Code does not require racial diversity in advertisements.

The Panel considered that the advertisement did not portray or depict material in a way which discriminates against or vilifies a person or section of the community on account of race and determined that the advertisement did not breach Section 2.1 of the Code

The Panel noted the complainants' concerns that the advertisement may be discriminatory towards certain religions and ethnicities. The Panel understood this concern to relate to the depiction of menstruation, which is a topic of significance to several religions and ethnicities.

The Panel noted a complaint that menstruation is a sacred process and that its depiction is offensive.

The Panel noted that advertisers are not required to ensure that advertisements meet the religious or social beliefs of every viewer, and considered that the current advertisement makes no reference to a specific religion or to religion as a whole.

The Panel expressed sympathy for members of the community to whom this would be religiously inconsistent but considered that the manner in which the advertisement is depicted is not inciting ridicule or discriminating against a religion.

The Panel considered that the advertisement did not portray or depict material in a way which discriminates against or vilifies a person or section of the community on account of religion and determined that the advertisement did not breach Section 2.1 of the Code

Overall, the Panel determined that the advertisement did not breach Section 2.1 of the Code.

The Panel considered whether the advertisement was in breach of Section 2.2 of the Code. Section 2.2 of the Code states: "Advertising or marketing communications should not employ sexual appeal in a manner which is exploitative or degrading of any individual or group of people."

The Panel noted the AANA Practice Note which provides guidance on the meaning of the terms exploitative and degrading:

Exploitative - (a) taking advantage of the sexual appeal of a person, or group of people, by depicting them as objects or commodities; or (b) focussing on their body parts where this bears no direct relevance to the product or service being advertised.

Degrading – lowering in character or quality a person or group of people.

The Panel first considered whether the advertisement used sexual appeal.

The Panel noted that the advertised product is feminine hygiene products.

The Panel considered that the two women in the advertisement are portrayed in a state of undress in the shower scene and toilet scene, but noted that only their bare legs were visible.



The Panel noted that there was a depiction of blood in the scenes and that the depiction of the women was in relation to menstruation.

The Panel considered that most members of the community would not consider the depiction of women's legs in combination with menstruation to be sexually appealing.

On that basis, the Panel determined that the advertisement did not employ sexual appeal and did not breach Section 2.2 of the Code.

The Panel considered whether the advertisement was in breach of Section 2.3 of the Code. Section 2.3 states: "Advertising or Marketing Communications shall not present or portray violence unless it is justifiable in the context of the product or service advertised".

The Panel first noted complainants' concerns that a woman is shown scratching her legs and that this is a depiction of self-harm.

The Panel considered that in the context of the advertisement for feminine hygiene products, the woman is scratching her legs in frustration or discomfort in relation to her menstrual pain. The Panel considered that this is not a depiction of stereotypical self-harm, but is an expression directly related to her current pain, not unlike clenching your fist or clenching your teeth.

The Panel considered that some members of the community may interpret this as a depiction of violence in the form of self-harm, but the Panel considered that this was a mild depiction of violence and was justifiable in the context of an advertisement for feminine hygiene products and the company's message that they understand what women experience during menstruation, i.e. pain.

The Panel then noted complainants' concerns that the depiction of blood in the advertisement is graphic and confronting.

The Panel noted that there are no violent scenes in the advertisement and considered that the amount of blood depicted in the advertisement is not excessive or disproportionate. The Panel considered that the depiction of blood in the context of the advertisement for feminine hygiene products, while not normally shown in advertising this type of product, is justifiable in the context of an advertisement for such products.

Overall, the Panel considered that the advertisement did not breach Section 2.3 of the Code.

The Panel considered whether the advertisement was in breach of Section 2.4 of the Code. Section 2.4 of the Code states: "Advertising or Marketing Communications shall treat sex, sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to the relevant audience".

The Panel considered whether the advertisement contained sex, sexuality or nudity.

The Panel noted the Practice Note for the Code states:

*"Images which are not permitted are those which are highly sexually suggestive and inappropriate for the relevant audience. Explicit sexual depictions in marcomms, particularly*



*where the depiction is not relevant to the product or service being advertised, are generally objectionable to the community and will offend Prevailing Community Standards.”*

The Panel noted complainants’ concerns that:

- the placement of the advertisement was inappropriate, particularly the placement during the evenings when many young children would be watching, and that the advertisement had caused children to have many questions about the content of the advertisement.
- the placement of the advertisement was inappropriate, particularly the placement during the evenings when many women are watching television with their partners, children and parents and may be embarrassed by the content.
- the depiction of young women menstruating would appeal to paedophiles and such a depiction is dangerous for women.

The Panel first considered the complaint that the depiction of young women menstruating would be of appeal to paedophiles and therefore dangerous for women. The Panel considered that this interpretation was highly unlikely to be shared by most members of the community and considered that the advertisement did not depict material which was sexualised in this manner.

The Panel considered whether the advertisement depicted sex. The Panel noted the dictionary definition of sex most relevant to this section of the Code of Ethics is ‘sexual intercourse; sexually stimulating or suggestive behaviour.’ (Macquarie Dictionary 2006).

The Panel considered that the depiction of the women in the shower scene and bathroom scene were not of themselves a depiction of sexual intercourse, sexual stimulation or suggestive behaviour and that the advertisement as a whole did not contain sex.

The Panel considered whether the advertisement depicted sexuality. The Panel noted the definition of sexuality includes ‘sexual character, the physical fact of being either male or female; the state or fact of being heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual; sexual preference or orientation; one’s capacity to experience and express sexual desire; the recognition or emphasising of sexual matters’. The Panel noted that the use of male or female actors in an advertisement is not of itself a depiction of sexuality.

The Panel considered that the topic of menstruation is a depiction of sexuality, as it is a physical fact of being female.

The Panel considered whether the advertisement contained nudity and noted that the dictionary definition of nudity includes ‘something nude or naked’, and that nude and naked are defined to be ‘unclothed and includes something ‘without clothing or covering’. The Panel considered that the Code is intended for the Panel to consider the concept of nudity, and that partial nudity is factor when considering whether an advertisement firstly contains nudity and secondly treats that nudity with sensitivity to the relevant audience.

The Panel considered that the two women in the advertisement are portrayed in a state of undress in the shower scene and toilet scene, but noted that only their bare legs were visible. The Panel considered that most members of the community would not consider the depiction of women’s legs to be a depiction of nudity.



The Panel considered whether the advertisement treated the issue of sexuality with sensitivity to the relevant audience.

The Panel considered the meaning of 'sensitive' and noted that the definition of sensitive in this context can be explained as indicating that 'if you are sensitive to other people's needs, problems, or feelings, you show understanding and awareness of them.' (<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/sensitive>)

The Panel considered that the requirement to consider whether sexual suggestion is 'sensitive to the relevant audience' is a concept requiring them to consider who the relevant audience is and to have an understanding of how they might react to or feel about the advertisement – the concept of how subtle sexual suggestion is or might be is relevant to the Panel considering how children, and other sections of the community, might consider the advertisement.

The Panel noted that the advertisement received a P rating by ClearAds (not in children's programs) and was aired at a time appropriate to the rating (<https://www.clearads.com.au/storage/final-clearads-handbook-version-ca12.pdf>). The Panel noted the advertiser's response that the advertisement was only scheduled to air after 6.30pm. The Panel considered that the relevant audience for this advertisement would likely be broad and include children.

The Panel noted complaints that the advertisement was aired at a time that was inappropriate for the broad audience. The Panel considered complaints that the advertisement had taken away the power of parents to prepare and plan for a conversation about menstruation.

The minority of the Panel considered that the topic of menstruation is a personal issue for many women, and considered that although de-stigmatising it is important, airing the advertisement during family viewing time when women may be with their partners, children or parents, forces the topic to the forefront and can cause embarrassment and emotional distress.

The minority noted that the advertisement was broadcast by a commercial company selling a commercial product and was not a community awareness message. The minority considered that many members of the community were unprepared for such a graphic advertisement to be broadcast when watching programs such as Survivor and The Project.

The minority considered that if the advertisement had been broadcast on online mediums only, or after 8:30pm it may have been appropriate, but to broadcast an advertisement that many members of the community would find uncomfortable and confronting in family viewing times did not treat the issue of sexuality with sensitivity to the relevant audience.

The majority of the Panel considered that the advertisement is communicating an important social message and promoting equality and the de-mystification of menstruation. The majority noted that the advertiser is a commercial company but considered that an advertiser whose main business is feminine hygiene products is well placed to champion such a message. The majority noted the research that the advertiser provided regarding the perception and experiences of women in Australia in relation to menstruation.





The majority of the Panel noted that the average age for a girl to begin menstruation is 12, but that studies show that that age is reducing and that some girls start menstruation as young as 8. The majority noted that some complainants' considered that their children were too young to view the advertisement.

The majority considered that the advertisement is broadcast during family viewing times and it is unlikely that children will see the advertisement on their own. The majority noted information on the website <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au> that many children have questions about sexual reproduction during primary school, and considered that this advertisement provides a good conversation starter for children who are watching with their parents.

The majority of the Panel considered that although the topic of menstruation or an implied message about sexuality may make some members of the community uncomfortable, the advertisement depicted material in a manner that is sensitive to the relevant broad audience which would likely include children.

The Panel determined that the advertisement did not breach Section 2.4 of the Code.

The Panel considered whether the advertisement was in breach of Section 2.6 of the Code. Section 2.6 of the Code states: "Advertising or Marketing Communications shall not depict material contrary to Prevailing Community Standards on health and safety".

The Panel noted the complainants' concerns that the depiction of bodily fluids in the advertisement was against prevailing community standards on health.

The Panel considered that the advertisement is in the context of promoting feminine hygiene products, and noted that there is no depiction of people disposing of sanitary items in an unsafe or unhealthy way.

The Panel considered that the depiction of blood in the context of an advertisement for feminine hygiene products is not against prevailing community standards on health. The Panel noted that the depiction is an accurate presentation of a real physical occurrence.

The Panel noted that although some members of the community would prefer not to see bodily fluids displayed on television, it was not a depiction which could be found to breach the Code and its depiction in an advertisement which would be viewed by a broad audience including children is not inappropriate.

The Panel determined that the advertisement did not breach Section 2.6 of the Code.

Finding that the advertisement did not breach the Code on other grounds, the Panel dismissed the complaints.