



# Community Perceptions Research

November 2021

# Project Background

Ad Standards commissions regular research to assess community perceptions of advertising and to test whether decisions made by the Community Panel are in line with the views of the broader community.

We know that we are living in a changing world – what was acceptable 10 or even 3 years ago is shifting. For example, we are becoming more accepting of diversity around gender, but we are less accepting of stereotypes and the use of humour to 'pass off' what might have previously been acceptable.

This research provides some insight into how Australians are navigating what is acceptable and unacceptable in advertising content and will support decision making by the Ad Standards Community Panel.

This research focused on three key sections of the AANA Code of Ethics:

- Section 2.1 – Discrimination or vilification
- Section 2.2 – Exploitative or degrading
- Section 2.4 – Sex, sexuality and nudity

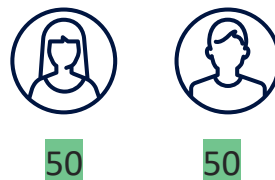
## Who we spoke to... General public

20-min online survey among a  
n=1,500 Nat. Rep. sample

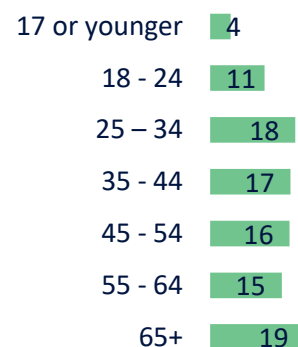
Includes response to ads:  
spontaneous, prompted and by  
Code – with open ended &  
prompted responses

Fieldwork was conducted in  
October 2021

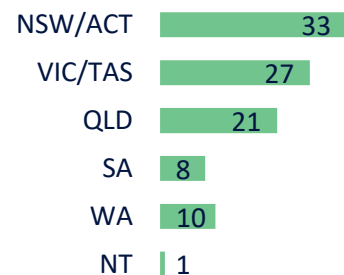
### Gender (%)



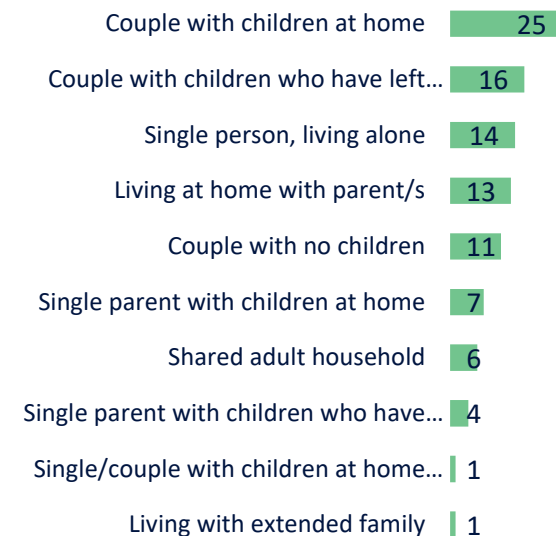
### Age (%)



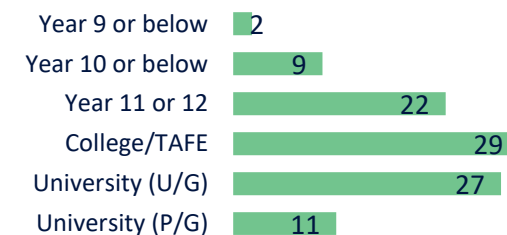
### Location (%)



### Household Composition (%)



### Education Level Achieved (%)





# **General community perception of advertising**



**Overall, there is a sense that we are seeing more inclusivity and diversity in advertising, positively impacting social norms and expectations**



However, for some there is a fine line between positively promoting diversity and inclusion and coming across as 'tokenistic'



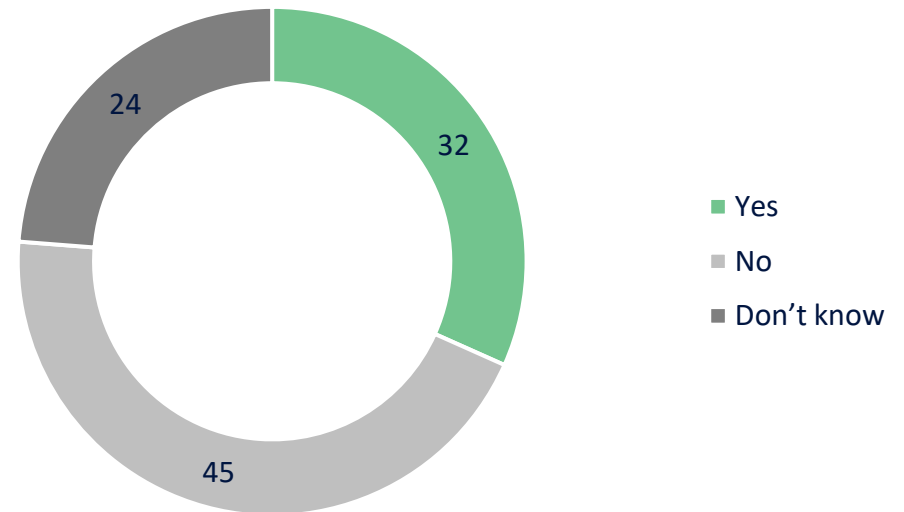
BURNS

*"Did you get the memo that we care about the environment now?"*



## One in three Australians have recently seen advertising they perceive as unacceptable

*Exposure to unacceptable advertising (%)*

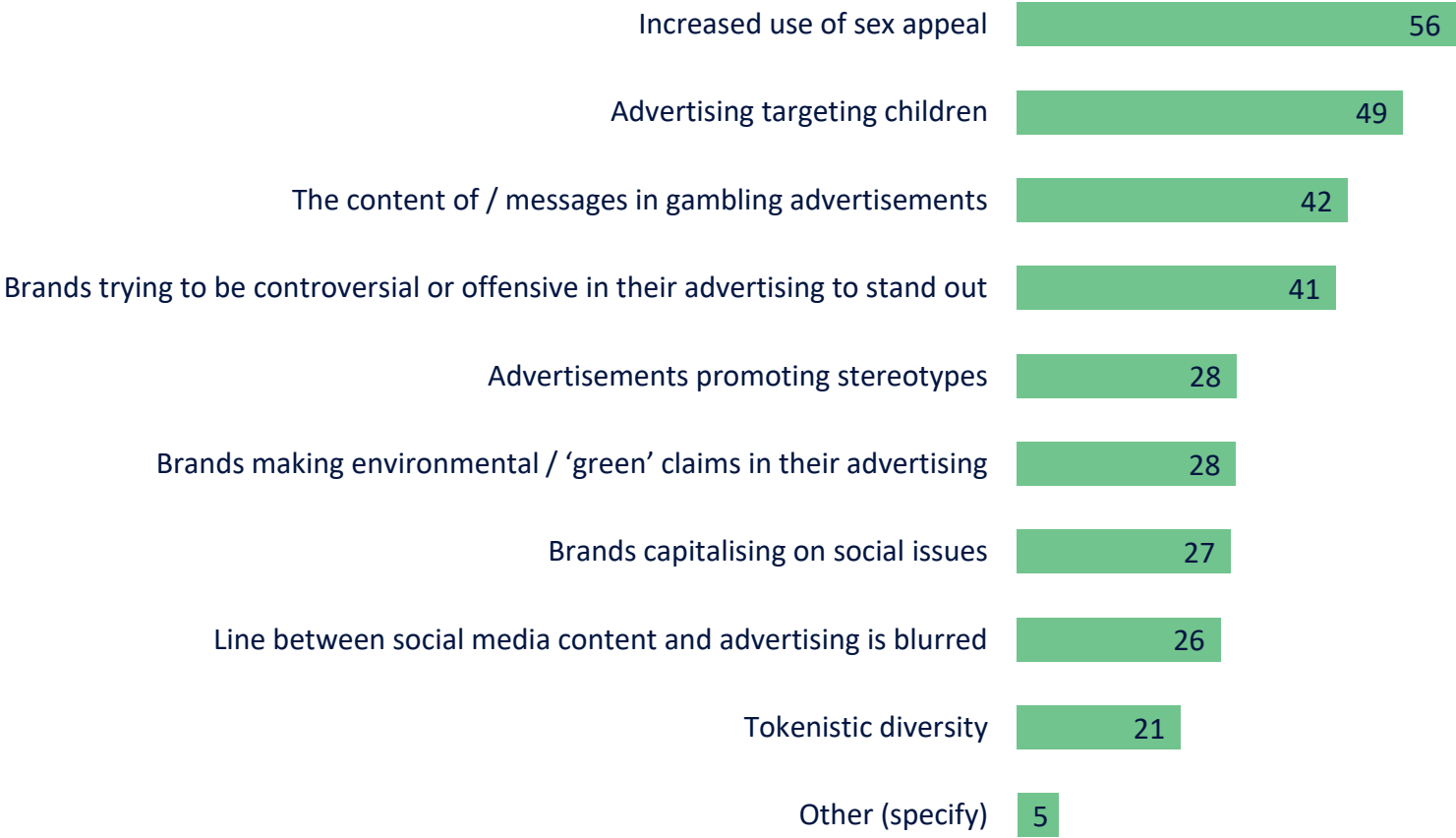


Clear role for Ad Standards in the community

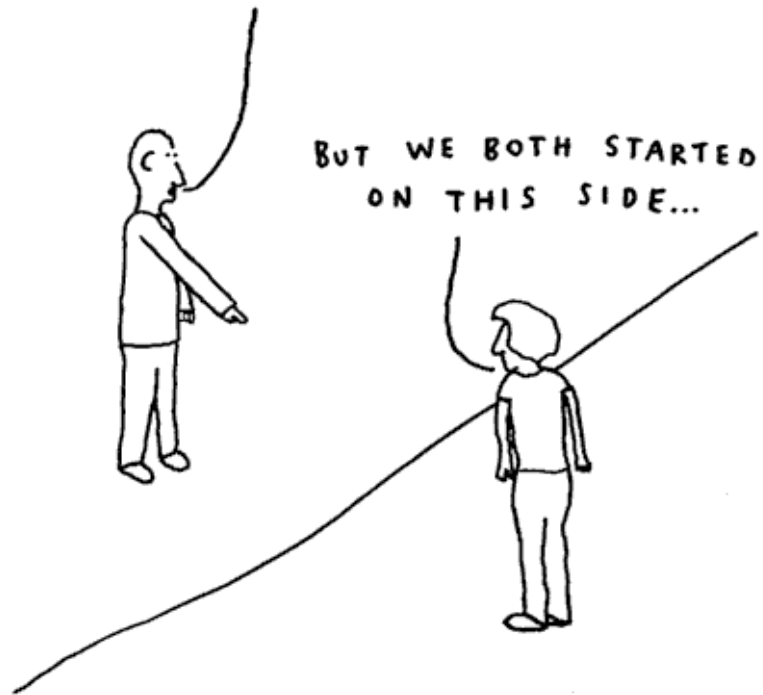
# Australians are most concerned about the use of sexual appeal and advertising targeting children

Concerns about advertising (%)

Average number of concerns per person: 3



LOOK, YOU HAVE  
CROSSED THE LINE



## Goal posts for acceptable humour are also shifting

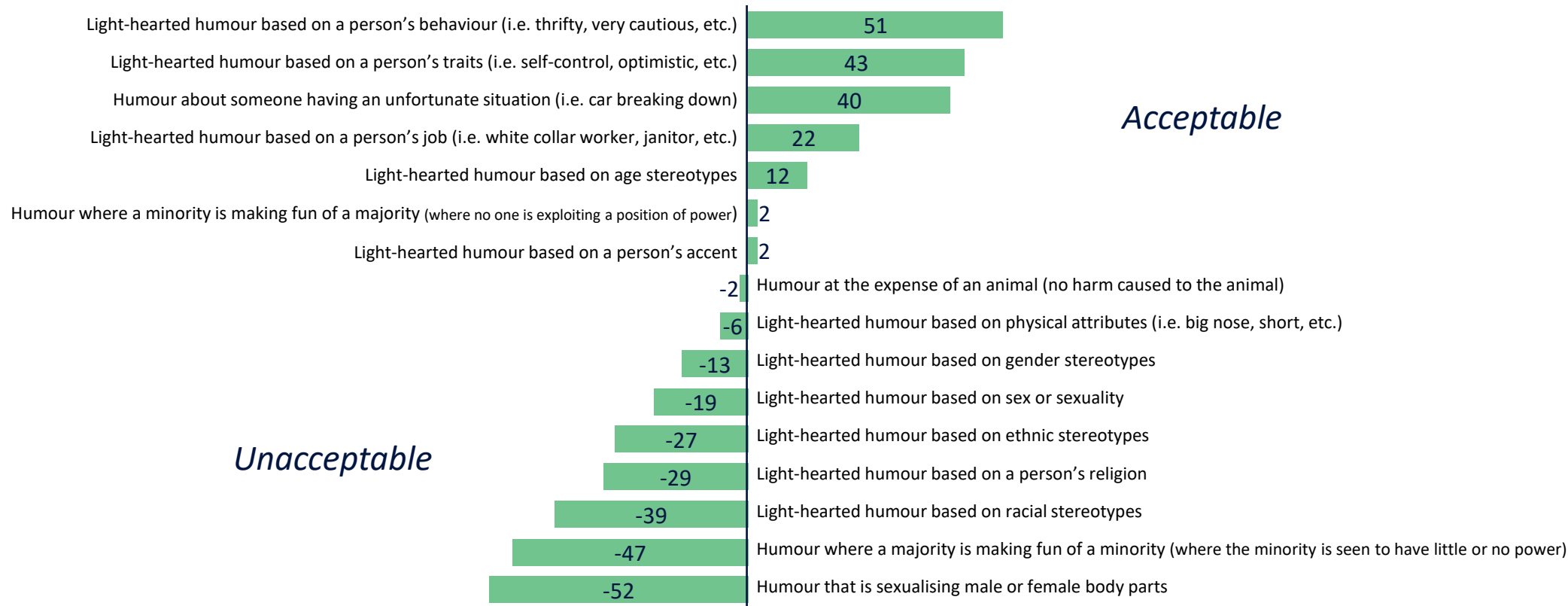
Is there a line?

What's the line?

When has the line been crossed?

# Perspectives on humour

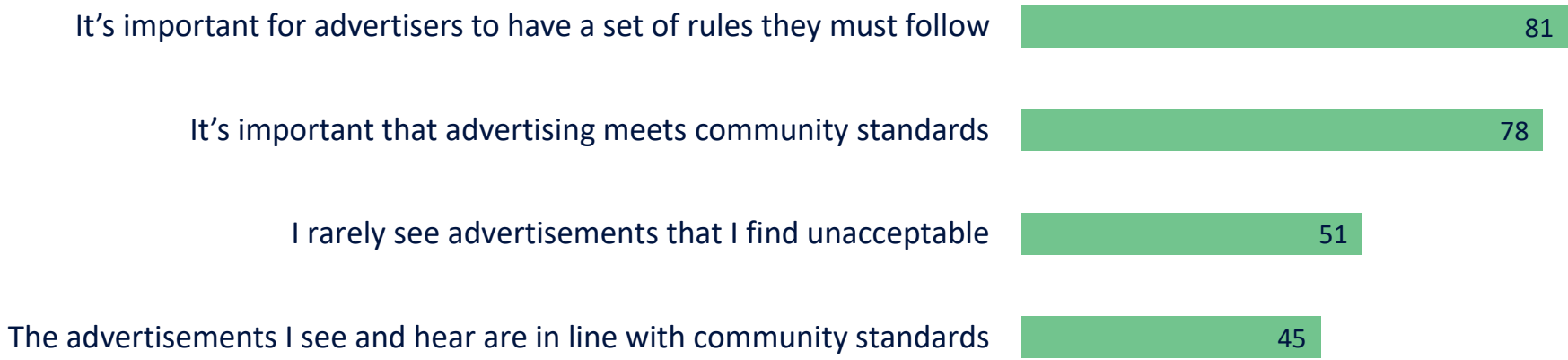
NET acceptability score  
(% acceptable minus % unacceptable)



Humour based on sexualising body parts, making fun of a minority or racial stereotypes is least acceptable

# 4 in 5 Australians know there are rules that govern advertising and agree it is important

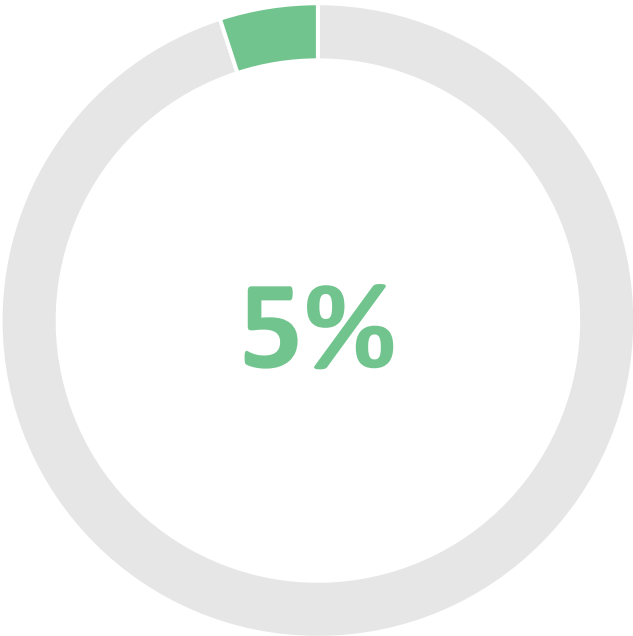
Agreement (%)



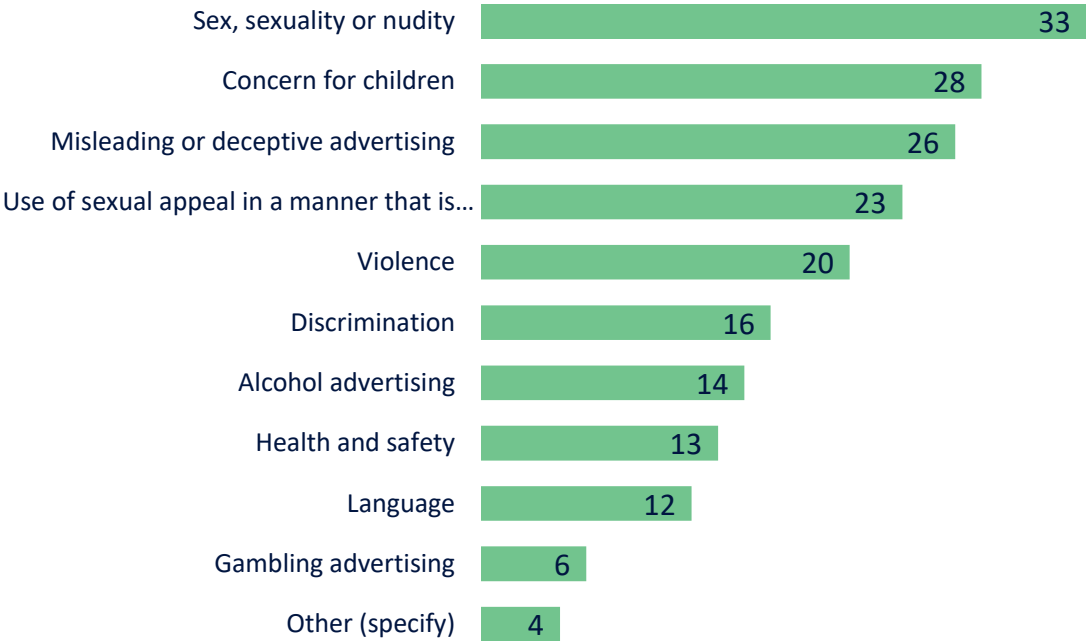
But these rules  
and standards are  
not always met

# 1 in 20 Australians have made a formal complaint about advertising

Ever made a formal complaint (%)



Reason for formal complaint (%)



The top driver for making a complaint is sex, sexuality or nudity in advertising

## Those who have made a complaint are more likely to be...

Single and living alone

Aged 35-44 or 55+

Have a post graduate degree

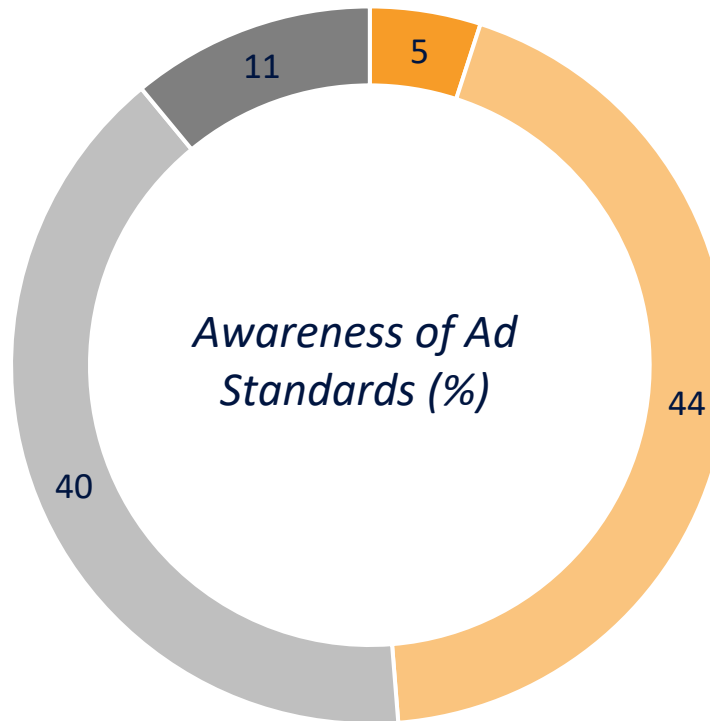
More socially aware and active

- Written to a Member of Parliament
- Boycotted a product or brand
- Worn or displayed symbol of support

Equal split female and male



**About half of  
Australians state  
they are aware of  
Ad Standards, but  
very few know  
what Ad Standards  
does**



- Yes, I've heard of them and I am familiar with what they do
- Yes, I've heard of them but don't know much about what they do
- No, I've never heard of them
- Not sure

*Importance of  
Ad Standards  
(%)*



- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Don't know

*Likelihood of  
making a complaint  
(%)*



**The role of Ad Standards is recognised as being important...**

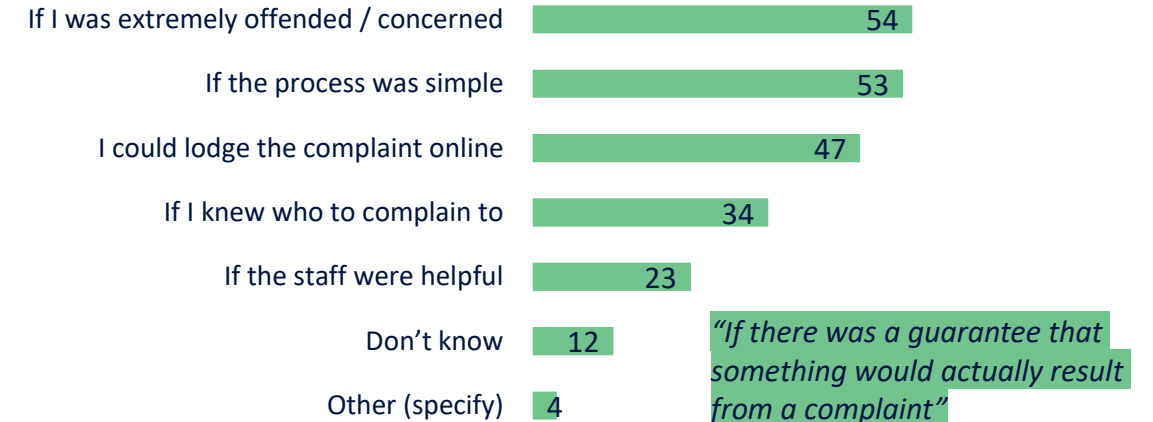
...Although relatively few are likely to actually make a complaint should the situation arise



Complain

## Ensuring an easy process will encourage those offended by advertising to make a complaint

*Encouragement to make a complaint (%)*

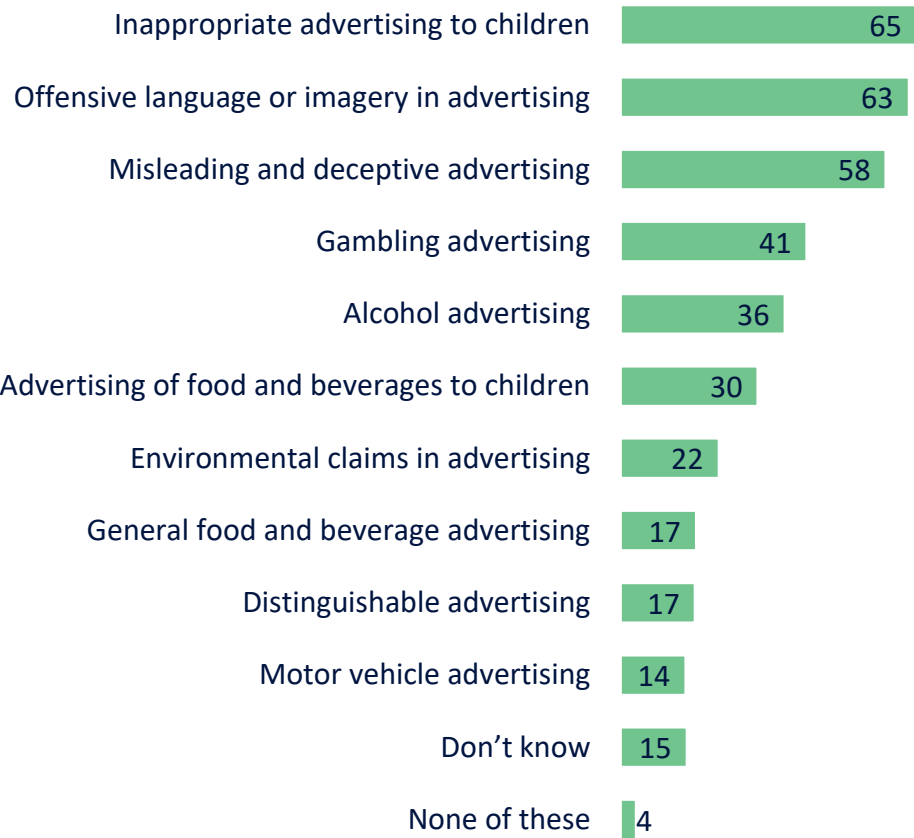


While a sense of confidence in getting a result (worth the effort) is also a consideration

**Those aware of Ad Standards believe they can make complaints regarding advertising that is inappropriate for children, contains offensive language or imagery and is misleading or deceptive advertising**

There is some uncertainty regarding whether complaints regarding other types of advertising can be reported to Ad Standards

*Types of complaints that can be directed to Ad Standards (%)*





# Community Panel alignment



The Ad Standards Community Panel and the Australian community are well aligned regarding Section 2.1 (Discrimination or vilification) of the AANA Code of Ethics.

For Section 2.2 (Exploitative or degrading) and 2.4 (Sex, sexuality and nudity) the issues are less clear cut with perspectives differing by age and gender.

# Community Panel and general community alignment

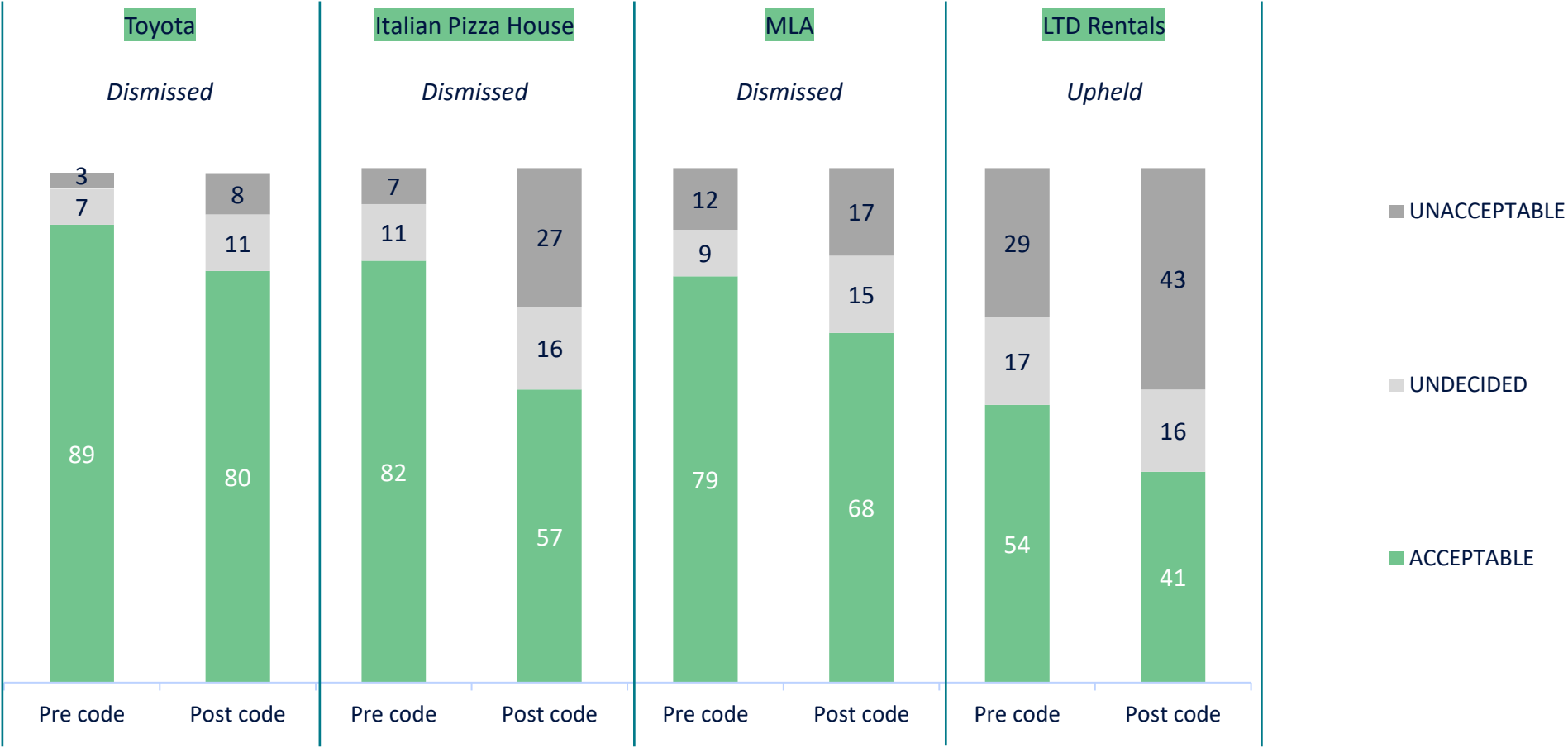
	<u>Advertisement</u>	<u>Case #</u>	<u>Panel determination</u>	<u>Alignment</u>
<b>2.1 Discrimination or vilification</b>	Toyota (TVC)	<u>0357-20</u>	Dismissed	✓
	Italian Pizza House (TVC)	<u>0201-21</u>	Dismissed	✓
	MLA (TVC)	<u>019121</u>	Dismissed	✓
	LTD Rentals (TVC)	<u>0019-20</u>	Upheld	Split
<b>2.2 Exploitative or degrading</b>	ACMN – Magic Mike (Outdoor)	<u>0053-21</u>	Dismissed	✓
	Positive Pumping (Vehicle)	<u>0091-21</u>	Dismissed	✗
	Darra Tyres (Outdoor)	<u>0087-20</u>	Upheld	✓
	69slam (eDM)	<u>0341-20</u>	Dismissed	✗
<b>2.4 Sex, sexuality and nudity</b>	Yum Restaurants (TVC)	<u>0131-20</u>	Dismissed	✓
	Hard Fizz (Instagram)	<u>0390-20</u>	Dismissed	✗
	Bras N Things (Shopfront)	<u>0045-21</u>	Dismissed	✗
	Suit Supply (eDM)	<u>0062-21</u>	Upheld	✓

**Note:** Ad Standards is unable to release copies of advertisements that have been complained about. If you want copies of this copyrighted material, you must contact the advertiser.

# For section 2.1 all ads were regarded as acceptable prior to seeing the Code of Ethics, and the LTD Rentals ad was most polarising

Acceptability of ad – before and after reading section 2.1 of the Code of Ethics (%)

Panel Decision:



B1. Do you believe this advertisement is acceptable?. B3 AD acceptable based on code  
Base: Toyota Dog wash n=1004; LTD Rentals n=1,000; MLA Beef n=1003; Italian Pizza House n=999.

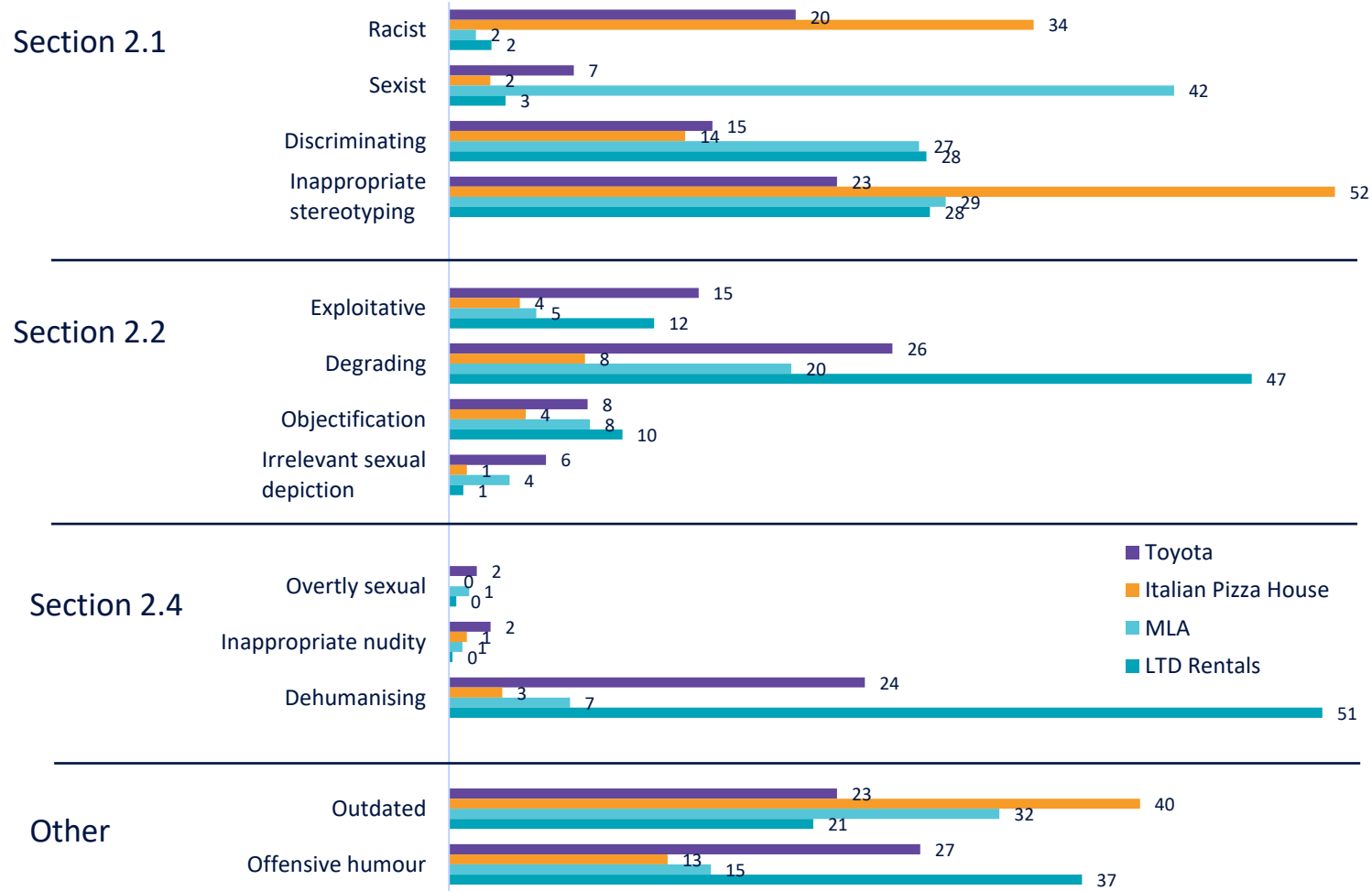
Those who rated these ads as unacceptable did so for a variety of reasons, not just related to Section 2.1

Key associations with ads tested under Code 2.1 (%)

“The first section is totally unnecessary and offensive. The implication is getting old people into a bus needs force and fear grrr”

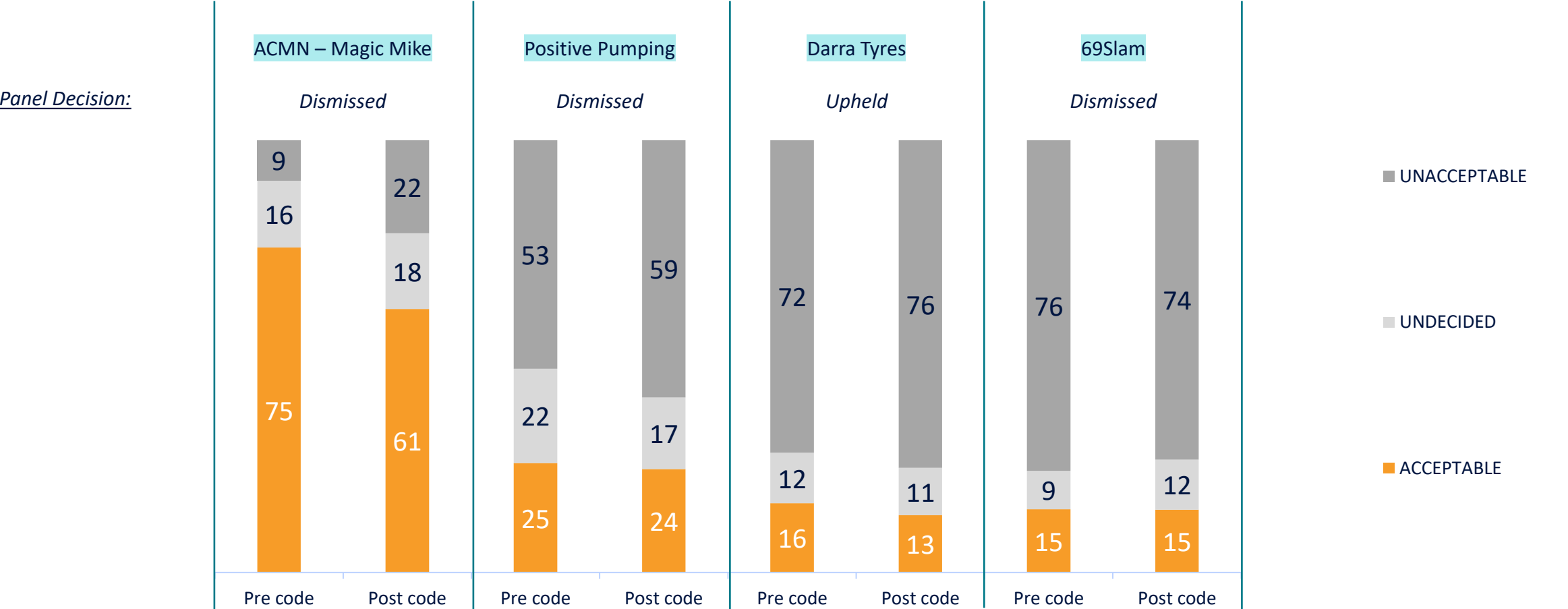
“They are acting like the elderly are animals”

“Not acceptable because treating seniors as animals”  
- LTD Rentals



# After exposure to Code 2.2 the general public remains firm in their opinion of these ads

Acceptability of ad – before and after reading the section 2.2 of the Code of Ethics (%)

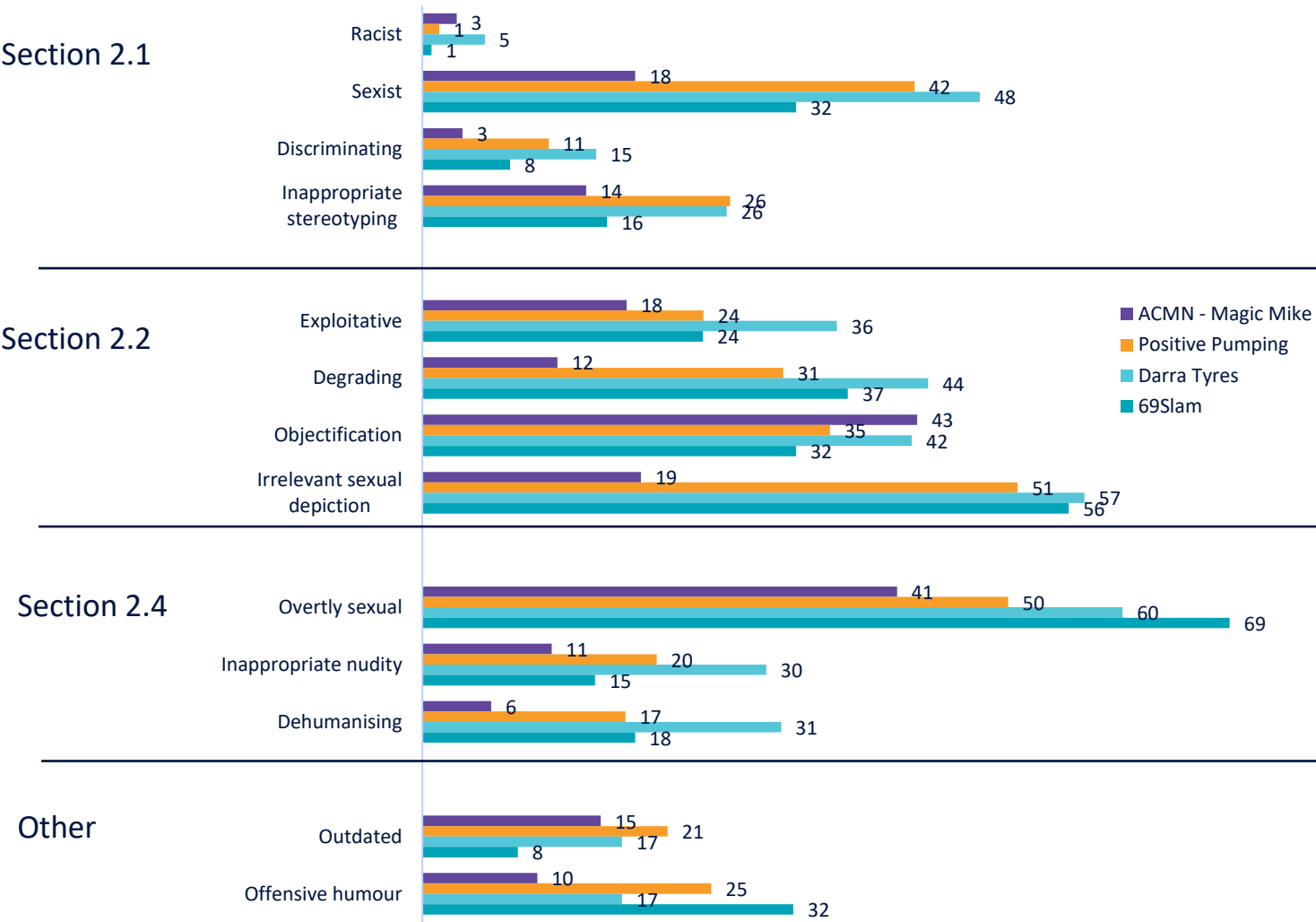


# Content for all ads except the ACMN ‘Magic Mike’ ad regarded as overtly sexual and irrelevant to the product being sold

“What does a naked woman have to do with pumping a hose. Totally irrelevant to the advertising” – **Positive Pumping**

“It is very unnecessary for the girl model to be wearing revealing clothes for an ad about tyres” – **Darra Tyres**

“It’s quite confronting... the male supposedly drinking from the female underwear. I find it offensive” – **69Slam**



# Clear gender divide evident

Males are twice as likely as females to deem Darra Tyres, Positive Pumping and 69SLAM ads as acceptable

Acceptability of ad (%)

	DARRA TYRES			69SLAM			POSITIVE PUMPING		
%	Yes	No	Unsure	Yes	No	Unsure	Yes	No	Unsure
♂	25	63	12	19	73	8	34	45	21
♀	7	82	11	10	80	10	17	60	23

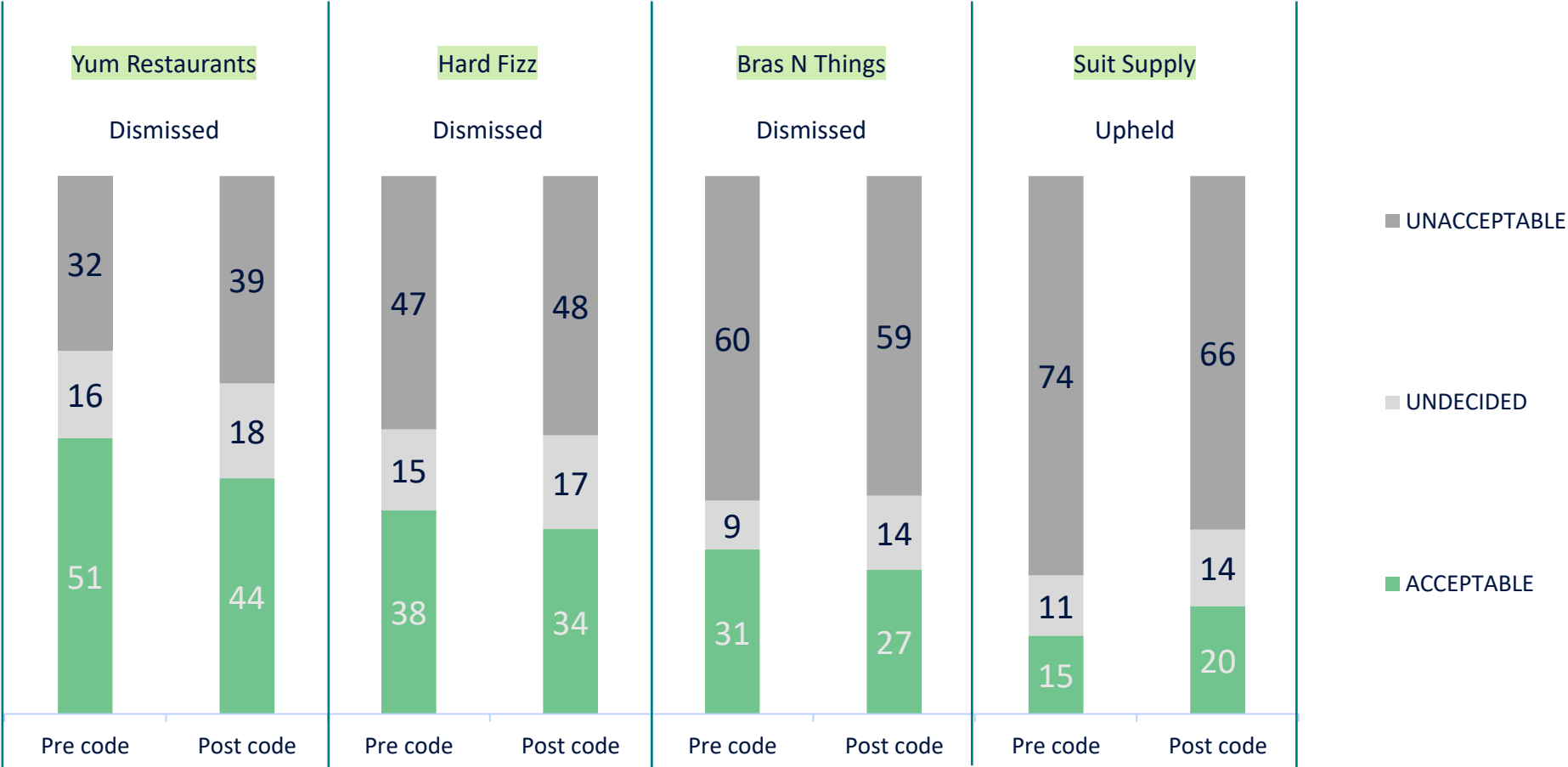
But even if these ads are targeted at men, the majority of men still find them unacceptable



# Both ‘Yum Restaurants’ and ‘Hard Fizz’ are somewhat polarising decisions among the general public, ‘Bras N Things’ is misaligned

Acceptability of ad – before and after reading the section 2.4 of the Code of Ethics (%)

Panel Decision:



# Ads mainly rejected for being overtly sexual and irrelevant sexual depiction

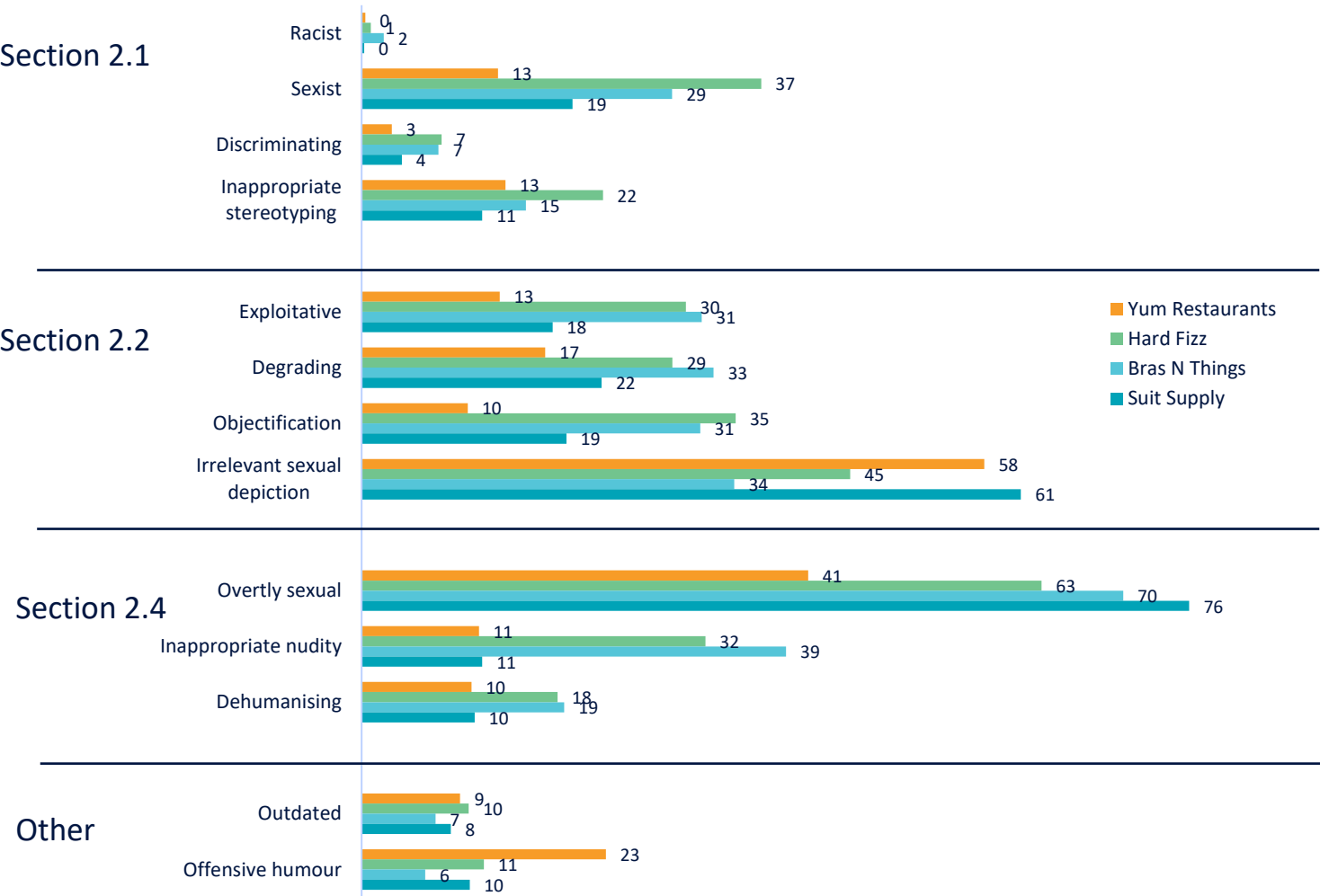
“This is extremely offensive, as it uses sex to sell fast food and is offensive to women” – **Yum Restaurants**

“The women all have little clothes on, the man is fully dressed. Tis is sexual exploitation and is not acceptable today. Use intelligence to make ads, not sex!!” – **Hard Fizz**

“It should not be displayed in public area where it can be seen by everyone, including children”  
- **Bras N Things**

“It is sexualising and I did not like seeing them touching each other's tongues in that manner’  
- **Suit Supply**

## Key associations with ads tested under Code 2.4 (%)





## Generational divide

Older Australian’s more likely to deem ads unacceptable on the basis of sex, sexuality and nudity. Younger cohorts demonstrating more permissive attitudes.

Acceptability of ad (%)

	BRAS N THINGS			SUIT SUPPLY			HARD FIZZ		
%	Yes	No	Unsure	Yes	No	Unsure	Yes	No	Unsure
16 - 17	57	32	11	9	72	19	52	36	12
18 - 24	59	30	10	14	77	9	49	35	16
25 – 34	36	56	9	16	69	15	43	45	12
35 - 44	34	60	7	21	69	10	41	46	13
45 - 54	21	66	13	16	73	11	34	50	16
55+	18	74	8	11	79	10	30	52	17

Proportion of undecided grows with age, suggesting potential challenge in pushing perhaps ‘unpopular’ views

# There is a gender divide when deciding the acceptability

Women are significantly more likely than man to find these ads unacceptable – with the exception of Bras N Things where opinions are balanced

Acceptability of ad (%)

	BRAS N THINGS			SUIT SUPPLY			HARD FIZZ		
%	Yes	No	Unsure	Yes	No	Unsure	Yes	No	Unsure
♂	33	59	8	20	69	11	43	43	13
♀	28	62	10	9	79	11	32	51	17

*“It’s a bit sexy but that’s okay. The purpose of lingerie is for women to feel sexy”*  
Female



# Key takeaways

1. While Australians are happy seeing more inclusivity and diversity in advertising, more than half (56%) are concerned about the use of sexual appeal.
  - *Other concerns include advertising targeting children (49%), the content of gambling ads (42%) and brands trying to be controversial or offensive to stand out (41%).*
2. 1 in 3 Australians state they have seen advertising they perceive as unacceptable, but only 1 in 20 have made a complaint.
  - *Organisations that people complain to include TV/ radio station, ACMA, ACCC and Ad Standards.*
3. 8 in 10 Australians agree that it's important for advertisers to have a set of rules they must follow and that it's important that advertising meets community standards.
  - *When Ad Standards' role is explained, 7 in 10 people see it as important body.*
4. The Community Panel and the community are well aligned regarding Section 2.1 (Discrimination or vilification). For Section 2.2 (Exploitative or degrading) and 2.4 (Sex, sexuality and nudity) the issues are less clear cut and perspectives differ by gender and age.
  - *The community can be divided and sometimes undecided about sensitive issues. As a group of diverse Australians from a range of different backgrounds, the Community Panel faces this same challenge when making a final determination. Whether complaints are upheld or dismissed can often come down to a vote. If the vote is close, the case report will reflect a range of views.*

**The Ad Standards Community Panel will consider these insights and the latest community views when assessing advertisements against the relevant codes.**