



Case Report

1	Case Number	0128/12
2	Advertiser	AAMI
3	Product	Insurance
4	Type of Advertisement / media	TV
5	Date of Determination	11/04/2012
6	DETERMINATION	Dismissed

ISSUES RAISED

2.1 - Discrimination or Vilification Race

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

The advert shows a female character called Rhonda in Bali getting a foot massage, indulging in a few more pleasures with the money she has saved on her car insurance. Following on from Rhonda's fame in a previous AAMI ad, her fame has now spread overseas and the masseuse recognizes Rhonda and her 'beautiful brake foot'.

THE COMPLAINT

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

It was extremely racist - the woman receiving the massage is white the one giving it is dark skinned with a thick accent very much a 'happy ethnic' stereotype and at the end of the ad we see a group of dark skinned women clamouring to touch the white woman's feet...

The AAMI advertisement crucially at its heart lacks cultural awareness and sensitivity and perpetrates negative stereotypes about Asian women.

The problem is AAMI's underlying assumption that a poor Asian woman would be happy to - and indeed enjoy - the opportunity to pamper a successful white woman. The advertisement reeks of cultural and economic imperialism. Many of my friends family work colleagues and associates agree that this particular advertisement is extremely uncomfortable to watch. I as a woman of Asian ethnicity have been asked "Does this ad make you angry?". Of course it does.

When contacted the Advertising Manager Marketing from AAMI stated that the ad portrayed an "actual depiction of events that happen in Asia example Bali". Perhaps it is.

Why however choose a poor Asian country where foot massages can be bought for as little as AUD\$2 for an hour? This seems to be a strange way to "communicate that with the savings you make you can afford to indulge in a few activities you otherwise may not have" (Advertising Manager on the purpose of the ad).

The fact that they have chosen to use a dark Asian woman with stunted English to communicate this message has obviously been for the 'humour'. I query why AAMI would find the depiction of Asian women from a developing country fighting to rub a white woman's feet is humorous and how it achieves the intent of the ad (that AAMI customers can save money) as detailed by Mr Whitner.

As an Australian woman of Asian ethnicity this advertisement is deeply offensive to me as it implies that Asian women are subservient to white women. It perpetrates negative Asian stereotypes - the stereotypical submissive Asian woman who is only too keen to rub a white woman's feet with a stilted accent.

Clause 2.1 of the AANA Code of Ethics states that "advertising or marketing communications shall not portray people or depict material in a way which discriminates or vilifies a person or section of the community on account of race ethnicity nationality sex age sexual preference religion disability or political belief".

The AAMI ad vilifies which is defined as (among other things) "humiliates...or ridicules of one person or a group of people because of their race ethnicity nationality...".

As an Australian woman of Asian ethnicity I find that this ad both humiliates and ridicules my ethnicity. It is besides the point that the Asian woman in the ad is located in Bali and therefore has an Asian accent. The very structure of the ad reflects cultural and racial insensitivity particularly the scene where a gaggle of poor dark Asian women fight over the opportunity to rub "Rhonda's" feet - a white woman.

Your attention to this matter is greatly appreciated.

The advert has a lady massaging Rhonda's foot. She uses the word the phrase terima musaki (excuse my spelling) which is thank you in Balinese language. Before that I didn't realise this ad was supposed to be set on the beach in Bali. The whole concept of the advert is very derogative to Balinese women. The actors don't dress like them they wear headgear that I have not ever seen on any Balinese person. They make them out to be primitive stupid ladies condescending to the famous Rhonda. I have been to Bali on many occasions I have never ever seen any Balinese women anything like they are portrayed in that ad. It's supposed to be a serious ad not a skit it is very offensive to me and quite a few other of my friends and colleagues have commented the same. By the way I am Australian not Asian but this ad is soooooo wrong. Maybe they should be told.

I found the advert offensive as I feel it is slightly racist. It portrays that all Asian people all speak with a thick Asian accent and are hungry to mob a Caucasian tourist on holiday.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

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

We refer to your letters dated 21 March 2012 and the complaints that have been made to the Advertising Standards Bureau regarding AAMI's "Rhonda in Bali" – Safe Driver Rewards advertisement ("the Rhonda in Bali advertisement").

Background

AAMI is a provider of motor vehicle insurance and the Rhonda in Bali advertisement is the most recent in a series of advertisements that AAMI have produced featuring “Rhonda” in promoting its Safe driver rewards benefit.

The Complaint

The complaints made to the ASB cite that the Rhonda in Bali advertisement does not comply with Section 2.1 of the Advertiser Code of Ethics (“the Code”), which 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.

Specifically, the complaints allege that the Rhonda in Bali advertisement (in summary):

- is racist because it portrays a white woman receiving a message from someone “is dark skinned, with a thick accent, very much a ‘happy ethnic stereotype and at the end of the ad we see a group of dark skinned women clamouring to touch the white woman’s feet”;*
- “lacks cultural awareness and sensitivity and perpetrates negative stereotypes about Asian women”;*
- “AAMI’s underlying assumption that a poor Asian woman would be happy to - and indeed, enjoy - the opportunity to pamper a successful white woman.”*
- “The fact that they have chosen to use a dark Asian woman with stunted English to communicate this message has obviously been for the ‘humour’. I query why AAMI would find the depiction of Asian women from a developing country fighting to rub a white woman’s feet is humorous and how it achieves the intent of the ad.”*
- “As an Australian woman of Asian ethnicity, this advertisement is deeply offensive to me as it implies that Asian women are subservient to white women. It perpetrates negative Asian stereotypes - the stereotypical submissive Asian woman who is only too keen to rub a white woman’s feet, with a stilted accent.”*
- “The AAMI ad vilifies, which is defined as (among other things) “humiliates...or ridicules of one person or a group of people because of their race, ethnicity, nationality...”. As an Australian woman of Asian ethnicity, I find that this ad both humiliates and ridicules my ethnicity. It is besides the point that the Asian woman in the ad is located in Bali and therefore has an Asian accent. The very structure of the ad reflects cultural and racial insensitivity, particularly the scene where a gaggle of poor, dark Asian women fight over the opportunity to rub “Rhonda’s” feet - a white woman.”*

AAMI’s Response

The purpose of the advertisement is to demonstrate in a light-hearted and humorous way the extra pleasures in life that a customer might be able to enjoy by saving on their insurance with AAMI and the fact that by being an AAMI Safe Driver, Rhonda is somewhat of a “VIP”. AAMI comment in relation to the Rhonda in Bali advertisement that:

- the scene shown is one in Bali not Australia;*
- it depicts what is a typical scene and experience for any traveller to Bali and was a useful device to demonstrate the little luxuries in life that could be afforded as a result of a saving on insurance;*
- beach masseurs are a common and a well-regarded profession in Bali;*
- Rhonda’s behaviour throughout is in no way demeaning and she is shown to be respectful to her masseuse by thanking her in Indonesian;*
- the accent and skin tone of the masseuse (though slightly exaggerated) is in our view appropriate for a character who is Balinese and who works in the sun as part of their day to day job;*

- *the advertisement does not depict the masseuse in a negative light. Rather, the masseuse is seen to be enjoying her job, is happy and friendly and the image is not a negative stereotype;*

- *the conclusion of the advertisement which shows a group of masseuse all wanting to be Rhonda's masseuse, was simply a way to demonstrate in an exaggerated and humorous way that Rhonda is special and somewhat of a 'VIP' because of her status as a Safe driver and her good 'brake foot'. There was absolutely no intention to suggest the masseuse shown would be fighting for the opportunity to massage Rhonda's foot simply because Rhonda is a white woman but rather because of her status as a 'good driver'. AAMI considers it is quite clear that is not the case in the context of the advertisement.*

At AAMI, we value and respect the diversity in our community. The intention in the Rhonda in Bali advertisement was simply to depict in a humorous way the benefits and 'VIP status' that come with being an AAMI Safe Driver against the backdrop of a typical Balinese holiday experience. There was no intention to discriminate and AAMI do not consider the Rhonda in Bali advertisement is discriminatory or otherwise in breach of section 2 of the Code. Please feel free to contact us if you have any additional questions or concerns.

THE DETERMINATION

The Advertising Standards Board ("Board") considered whether this advertisement breaches Section 2 of the Advertiser Code of Ethics (the "Code").

The Board noted the complainants' concerns that the advertisement is racist in its portrayal of an Asian woman massaging a white woman's feet.

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

The Board considered whether the advertisement was in breach of Section 2.1 of the Code. Section 2.1 of 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, sex, age, sexual preference, religion, disability or political belief."

The Board noted that the advertisement features the recurring AAMI character Rhonda taking a holiday paid for by the savings she has made through using AAMI.

The Board noted that Rhonda is having a foot massage on a beach and that the woman massaging Rhonda is Asian. The Board considered that as the advertisement is clearly set in a holiday destination, in this instance Bali, it is acceptable to portray something which an Australian tourist could typically expect to experience.

The Board noted that the Balinese women in the advertisement are portrayed in a positive manner and considered that the use of a Balinese woman massaging Rhonda's feet is not something which most members of the community would consider racist.

The Board determined that the material depicted did not discriminate against or vilify any person or section of the community on account of race and did not breach Section 2.1 of the Code.

Further finding that the advertisement did not breach the Code on any other grounds, the Board dismissed the complaint.