



Ad Standards Community Panel
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AdStandards.com.au

Advertising Standards Bureau Limited
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Case Report

1	Case Number	0222/19
2	Advertiser	Honey Birdette
3	Product	Lingerie
4	Type of Advertisement / media	Poster
5	Date of Determination	10/07/2019
6	DETERMINATION	Dismissed

ISSUES RAISED

- 2.2 - Objectification Degrading - women
- 2.2 - Objectification Exploitative - women
- 2.4 - Sex/sexuality/nudity S/S/N - general

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

This poster advertisement features a blonde woman in a white lace bra, garter belt and underpants. Text over the image states "Sale. Limited markdowns for a limited time". The image ends at the model's lips, the top of her head is not shown.

THE COMPLAINT

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

Woman is portrayed as faceless and headless, depicting her as nothing more than a body available for somebody's sexual use. Sheer underwear draw attention to genitals. This sexually objectifying image is unsuitable for public display.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

Comments which the advertiser made in response to the complainant/s regarding this





advertisement include the following:

The female model in the advertisement name is Kristina Sheiter from Elite and she is much “more than a body available for someone’s sexual use”. It’s offensive to the model, to women and to 2019. She is a professional lingerie model from one of the highest profile agencies in New York.

In order to have the model advertise previous product (from previous campaigns) that is on SALE we have to remove her face. This is standard practice across the industry. Trust me I would prefer to use her face.

It’s SALE ad that focuses on the product we sell in our 60 plus retails stores across Australia, UK and the USA.

Much like Victoria’s Secret, Agent Provocateur, Bras N Things, Cotton, Bonds etc.

It is a mesh set. There are no genitals to be seen at all. They have been photoshopped.

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 noted the complainant’s concern that the advertisement:

- depicts a woman as faceless and as a sexual object available for someone’s sexual use;
- depicts the woman as wearing sheer underwear which directs attention to her genitals;
- is not suitable for public display

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

The Panel noted that the poster advertisement features a blonde woman from the lips down wearing a white lace bra, garter belt, sheer underpants and stockings. Text over the image states “Sale. Limited markdowns for a limited time.”



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 complainant’s concern that the advertisement sexually objectifies the women by depicting her without a face as nothing more than a body available for somebody’s sexual use.

The Panel noted the advertiser’s response that in order to have the model advertise a previous product that is on sale they have to remove her face and that this is standard practice across the industry.

The Panel considered that the woman was not depicted as having no face, she was depicted from the lips downwards. The Panel considered that the effect of cropping the image was to highlight the lingerie which was on sale, and did not dehumanise the woman.

The Panel noted that the advertised product is lingerie and the advertiser is justified in showing the product and how it would be worn provided that in doing so it meets the provisions of the Code.

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 considered that the depiction of a woman in lingerie is one which most people would consider to contain sexual appeal.

The Panel then considered whether the advertisement used sexual appeal in a manner that was exploitative of an individual or group of people.

The Panel considered that the advertisement did only depict the woman from the below her nose, but that part of her face is visible.

The Panel noted it had previously considered an image of a woman whose face had been cropped out in case 0086/17, in which:



“The Board noted that the advertisement was for a plumbing service. The Board noted that the woman was wearing only a tool belt positioned over her pubic region and the iPad over her breasts. The Board considered that the use of the woman in addition to her naked breasts being covered only by the iPad was an image that was sexualised and that it had no direct relevance to the product/service... the Board however, considered that the image was exploitative and by not including the face and/or head of the woman was lowering her in character and reducing her only to a set of breasts for the promotion of a service. On balance the lack of relevance of the image and the level of nakedness did amount to an image that was exploitative and degrading.”

Unlike case 0086/17, in the current advertisement the Panel considered that the depiction of a woman in lingerie was relevant to the product being promoted. The Panel considered that the image had been copped to show the woman’s face from the lips down, and the effect of this was to show that the focus was on the sale product, not the woman’s body. The Panel considered the ‘SALE’ text was clearly in the context of the product being for sale and was not suggestive of the woman being for sale. The Panel considered that the advertisement did not depict the woman as an object or commodity. The Panel considered that the advertisement did not draw particular focus or attention to any particular body part, and that the depiction of the woman in lingerie was relevant to the product being promoted. The Panel considered that the advertisement did not use sexual appeal in a manner that was exploitative of the woman.

The Panel then considered whether the advertisement used sexual appeal in a manner that was degrading of an individual or group of people.

The Panel considered the woman was shown standing in a way which accentuated the product. The Panel considered that the depiction of a woman modelling lingerie was not a depiction which lowered the model in character or quality.

The Panel considered that the depiction of the model and the accompanying text did not lower the character or quality of the model and did not use sexual appeal in a manner that was degrading of the model.

On that basis, the Panel determined that the advertisement did not employ sexual appeal in a manner which is exploitative or degrading of an individual and did not breach Section 2.2 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 noted the complainant's concern that the sheer underwear draws attention to the woman's genitals and the sexualised image is unsuitable for public display.

The Panel noted the advertiser's response that although this is a mesh set there are no genitals on display at all as they have been photoshopped out.

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

The Panel considered whether the advertisement contained 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 noted that the woman was posed wearing lingerie and considered that such a pose and such attire was not in itself a depiction of sexual intercourse or sexually stimulating or suggestive behaviour. The Panel considered that the advertisement 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 for the application of the term in the Code, the use of male or female actors in an advertisement is not of itself a depiction of sexuality.

The Panel considered that the image references sexual matters as it is a promotion for a store that sells lingerie in a wide variety of styles and that the image of the woman posed in a manner that suggests she is showing off the lingerie is a depiction of the woman expressing her sexuality.

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

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 considered that the depiction of the woman wearing this style of lingerie



was relevant to the product being promoted. The Panel considered that although it is reasonable for an advertiser to depict the product being promoted, the depiction should be treated 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 noted 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 suggestions 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 this image appears in store windows and considered that the relevant audience includes retail and ancillary services workers, people shopping in the Honey Birdette store and people who are not shopping at Honey Birdette but who are walking past the store, and that this last group would include children.

The Panel considered that while the style of the lingerie is sexualised, the woman's pose is confident and not inherently sexually suggestive. The Panel acknowledged that the sexualised nature of the product itself may not be considered appropriate to be advertised in public facing areas by some people shopping in the centre, including those with young children, however in this instance the Panel considered that there was no sexual messaging or themes in the advertisement which would make it confronting for these audiences. The Panel considered that young children would be unlikely to view this advertisement as sexually suggestive, and the most likely interpretation by this audience would be of a woman posing in underwear that is available for sale in the store. The Panel considered that the advertisement was sexually suggestive due only to the nature of the product, but not highly sexually suggestive and that the advertisement did treat the issue of sexuality with sensitivity to the relevant audience.

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 treats nudity with sensitivity to the relevant audience.

The Panel noted that the woman is not entirely nude, however considered that the woman's cleavage was exposed and that the mesh material the briefs the woman was



wearing are made of are suggestive of nudity.

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

The Panel noted the Practice Note for the Code provides:

“Full frontal nudity and explicit pornographic language is not permitted. Images of genitalia are not acceptable.”

The Panel considered that while the woman’s briefs are made of a sheer material, the lace detailing makes it evident that the woman is wearing underwear and is not naked. The Panel considered that no details of the woman’s genitals can be seen through the fabric.

The Panel considered that the woman’s genitals were not visible and that the women’s breasts were covered by the product and not the focus of the advertisement. The Panel considered that there was no overt nudity at a level that most members of the community would find confronting or unacceptable. The Panel considered that the advertisement did treat the issue of sex, sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to the relevant broad audience and in the Panel’s view the advertisement did not breach Section 2.4 of the Code.

Finding that the advertisement did not breach any other section of the Code the Panel dismissed the complaint.

