



Case Report

1	Case Number	0289/12
2	Advertiser	Queensland Theatre Company
3	Product	Entertainment
4	Type of Advertisement / media	Billboard
5	Date of Determination	25/07/2012
6	DETERMINATION	Upheld - Modified or Discontinued

ISSUES RAISED

2.4 - Sex/sexuality/nudity S/S/N - sexualization of children

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

A couple are lying down on their sides. The lower half of their bodies is covered in a silky fabric. The female is looking directly at the camera and has a light coloured gown on. The male, shirtless, has his arm wrapped around the female.

The text reads, ""Queensland Theatre Company. Ignite your love of theatre. Buy a flexible season ticket and save up to 30%. theatre2012.com.au.""

THE COMPLAINT

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

The advertisement suggests paedophilia. The female looks clearly like a child in bed with a man. It is implied that they are naked under the sheets. It is very blatantly obvious to any observer that the girl looks like a child. I am tired of the constant sexualisation of children by companies looking to attract attention. Many parents are tired of this. Can this company be pulled into line and told that advertisements suggesting paedophilia are simply appalling? In my view this advertisement borders on condoning criminal behaviour and shows a total lack of respect for children's welfare.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

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

- *A Shakespearean classic, Romeo and Juliet is the cornerstone production for Queensland Theatre Company (QTC) in 2012.*
- *An ideal and very relevant play, this production was selected to represent the QTC Season 2012 campaign offer in communications.*
- *The specific image was created to dramatically capture the core essence of the story of play itself - a story of doomed young love and forbidden passion*
- *The couple appearing in the photo are the professional actors who have been cast to star in Queensland Theatre Company's forthcoming season of Romeo and Juliet*
- *Melanie Zanetti, the female actor is 26 years old and Thomas Larkin, the male actor, is 26 years old*
- *Melanie Zanetti was not styled or retouched in any way to look deliberately younger - the selected shot was chosen due to the powerful intensity of her direct and rebellious gaze into the camera*
- *QTC's imagery is true and authentic to the time in which it is set and, indeed to the playwright. Juliet's age in the play is that of a young woman, presumed to be no more than 16 years old*
- *It's important to note that the original play is currently studied in full detail by teenagers ranging from 14 to 17 years throughout Australian secondary schools, with no censorship enforced in terms of Juliet's intended age of key story themes.*
- *The billboard is on the exterior of the Queensland Theatre Company premises*
- *Alternative images with the same actors from the same photoshoot were also used in billboard advertising.*

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 complainant's concerns that the advertisement is suggestive of paedophilia.

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

The Board 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 and, where appropriate, the relevant programme time zone".

The Board noted that the advertisement is an image of a young woman and young man lying in a manner which is suggestive of them being in bed.

The Board noted it had previously considered the same image in a different medium (case reference 0497/11). In that instance the Board "...considered that the advertisement is suggestive of a couple in a bed naked and, in the Board's view, also suggests that the couple have been engaged in sexual activity.

The Board noted the advertiser's response that one of the performances put on by the theatre company is Romeo and Juliet and that the actors depicted in the advertisement are both 26 years old.

The Board considered that there is no reference in the advertisement to Romeo and Juliet as being one of the plays performed and that it was not obvious that the image was a reference to Romeo and Juliet.

The Board considered that the woman, regardless of her actual age, appears in the advertisement to be very young – at most a young teenager. In the Board's view the woman would be considered by the audience as being a young teenage girl.

The Board noted that the advertisement was placed in The Weekend Australian Magazine which has a predominantly adult audience.

The Board noted the Practice Note to the Code which states in part 'Advertisements with appeal to younger people which contain sexualised images or poses are to be used with caution. Models which appear to be young should not be used in sexualised poses.'

The Board considered that the advertisement uses a model who appears to be very young in a manner which is suggestive of sexual activity with a man and that there is not an obvious link to a play about young love. The Board considered that the use of a young looking woman who appears in the advertisement as a young teenager is inappropriate in a highly sexualised image regardless of the audience to which the advertisement was directed. The Board determined that the advertisement did not treat sex, sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to the relevant audience.

Finding that the advertisement breached section 2.4 of the Code the Board upheld the complaint."

In this instance the Board noted that whilst the advertisement is the same as in case reference 0497/11, the media format has changed and the advertisement is displayed on a billboard which is available to a broad audience which would include children. The Board noted that in its previous determination against 0497/12, it had expressed concern that although the advertiser had responded to say the image had been taken from the play, Romeo and Juliet, there was no reference to this play in the advertisement. The Board noted that in the current advertisement there is still no reference to the play and considered that the image, as viewed by a broad audience, would not be interpreted in the context of a play about young love but as an image of a man embracing an apparently naked young looking woman.

Consistent with its previous findings, the Board considered that the advertisement presents an image of a woman who appears to be a young teenage girl and that this image of her in bed

with a man is not appropriate and does not treat sex, sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to the relevant audience.

Finding that the advertisement did breach Section 2.4 of the Code, the Board upheld the complaint.

ADVERTISER RESPONSE TO DETERMINATION

The advertiser advised that the billboard will be removed within 10 days as at 20 August 2012.