



Ad Standards Community Panel
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Advertising Standards Bureau Limited
ACN 084 452 666

Case Report

1	Case Number	0418/18
2	Advertiser	Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation
3	Product	Community Awareness
4	Type of Advertisement / media	TV - Free to air
5	Date of Determination	26/09/2018
6	DETERMINATION	Dismissed

ISSUES RAISED

2.4 - Sex/sexuality/nudity S/S/N - general

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

This television advertisement opens with a couple standing in the hallway outside their son's room. The mother gently pushes the father inside. Dad appears in the doorway looking nervous as mum leaves the scene. The father is nervous, looking at the floor as he begins to have what seems like the sex talk before the voiceover says, "Help your kids understand that betting and sport don't have to go together". The dad then sits on the bed after moving a sock out of the way and explains to his son that, "The ads don't always tell you the risks, yeah". The ad concludes with a voiceover, "Before you have the talk check lovethesame.vic.gov.au".

THE COMPLAINT

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

I am offended that the government have to stoop to this level to "spread awareness" I think it lacks class and creativity. Why use sex to spread awareness of a serious topic like gambling addiction. I also find it abhorrent that it's televised at times when



children would view it.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

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

Thank you for notifying the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation (VRGF) of the complaint received by Ad Standards in relation to the 'The Talk' television commercial.

The VRGF has reviewed Section 2 of the AANA Advertiser Code of Ethics and provides the following response to address all concerns outlined in your letter of 13 September 2018.

VRGF objectives

The VRGF is a statutory body funded by the Victorian Government to specifically address the challenge of gambling harm. We work with stakeholders and partner organisations to raise community awareness of gambling harm and influence gambling behaviours, which includes supporting the community to recognise the signs of harm, better understand how gambling can get out of control and where to find assistance.

The Foundation has adopted a public health approach to address all gambling harm. We encourage a whole-of-community response and look for ways to work in different settings. We work with, and learn from, schools and sporting clubs, health professionals, governments, counselling services, researchers, the gambling industry and people who have been affected by gambling, to prevent or reduce gambling harm.

Current environment

More than half-a-million Victorian adults experience some form of harm every year from their gambling activities. Many are not regular gamblers and do not consider they have a problem.

People at risk of developing a gambling problem (low-risk and moderate-risk gamblers) make up 85 per cent of the total harm from gambling in Victoria.

The prevalence of low-risk gambling is increasing. Between 2008 and 2014, there was a 56 per cent increase in the proportion of Victorians engaged in low-risk gambling, an estimated 391,000 Victorians. A further 122,500 Victorians are classified as moderate-risk gamblers, the group most likely to transition to problem gambling.

Gambling harm is pervasive. For every individual who experiences severe gambling



harm, up to six other people are affected, including family members and friends.

Harm is felt most severely as family and relationship problems, emotional and psychological issues, and financial losses.

The money spent on the promotion of gambling dwarfs the amount spent on the promotion of gambling harm reduction by a factor of 30 to one. This promotion by the gambling industry 'normalises' gambling, shapes attitudes and encourages more frequent betting, with minimal reference to the risks.

In 2017, the gambling industry spent \$246 million on advertising across Australia, up from \$90 million in 2011. In Victoria, gambling advertising expenditure during 2017 was \$76.9 million, up 23 per cent on the year prior. The VRGF's Community Attitudes Survey indicates that Victorians are concerned about the proliferation of gambling promotion with 89 per cent in November 2017 believing there is too much advertising, up from 79 per cent in 2016.

Despite this, there is limited understanding of the impact this promotion can have on young people.

The VRGF has a significant role to play in publicly challenging the acceptance of gambling in sport. In doing so we seek to highlight the effects of excessive sports betting advertising on the attitudes and behaviours of different individuals and groups in the community.

For young men in particular, sports betting is increasingly seen as a normal social group practice and can lead to peer pressure and risky gambling behaviour. Heavy promotion coupled with increased accessibility through smartphones, apps and online games make it difficult for young people to recognise the potential harm. This coming of age or rite of passage for young men is highlighted in the VRGF-funded study 'Weighing up the Odds', 2017 which found 66 per cent of young men surveyed began betting at 18 years or younger. Of those in the study who bet at least weekly, 85 per cent were at risk of or already experiencing severe gambling harm.

Young people are amongst the highest risk group of developing a problem with gambling, with research indicating that up to 85 per cent of adolescents have gambled in some form during the previous 12 months (Purdie 2011). It has also been found that parents' gambling behaviours and attitudes may influence whether a teenager is likely to gamble before they are 18 (Delfabbro 2003).

Description of the advertisement

The advertisement is designed as a twist on the universal 'talk' parents need to have with their children as they grow up. It opens with a couple standing in the hallway



outside their son's room as mum gently pushes dad inside. Dad appears in the doorway looking nervous as mum leaves the scene. Both are uncomfortable but can't avoid what's coming, which seems to be 'the sex talk'. Dad's a little nervous, looking at the floor as he begins to have what seems like the sex talk before the voiceover says, "Help your kids understand that betting and sport don't have to go together". The dad then sits on the bed after moving a sock out of the way and explains to his son that, "The ads don't always tell you the risks, yeah". The ad concludes with a voiceover, "Before you have the talk check lovethesame.vic.gov.au".

The aim of the campaign

It is important for parents to recognise that children may see betting on sport as normal even if they don't. The portrayal of sports betting in advertising can make it seem like everyone is participating, even if they actually aren't. This campaign aims to point out how the normalisation of gambling can make it difficult for young people to recognise the risks involved and the role that parents have in educating their children.

The advertisement was focus-tested with the primary target audience, parents of teenagers aged 12–15 years. The qualitative research identified the following favourable findings about the concept:

- Good key message take-out – most participants were easily able to identify the main message as 'have a conversation with your teenagers about the risks of gambling'.*
- Strong cut-through – many participants reported that the concept was likely to capture and sustain their attention due to the "twist" in the scenario (i.e. the initial scenes appeared to be about "the sex talk" but transitioned into a gambling conversation).*
- Importance of the subject matter – many participants felt that the concept increased the importance of having a conversation about gambling by suggesting to parent participants that it was just as important as discussing safe sex with their child/ren.*
- Relatable and believable talent and setting – many participants found the interactions and behaviours of the father and son relatable (i.e. son in room playing on his phone with clothes strewn everywhere).*
- Appropriate tone – many participants reported the TV commercial achieved a "serious" and "supportive" tone which was felt to be appropriate for the subject matter of gambling.*
- Good call-to-action – the clear key message take-out and manner in which the concept role-modelled the appropriate way to have a conversation about gambling was found to encourage many participants to initiate a conversation with their own*



child/ren.

- Good affinity – the TV commercial had good affinity among most participants, particularly fathers and/or those with teenage sons.

Campaign approvals

The campaign strategy and concept was approved via the Victorian Advertising Approval Group in September 2017, and subsequently endorsed by the Victorian Government Advertising Committee in October 2017.

Previous campaign activity

The TV commercial first aired in March 2018, with a second wave of advertising in September 2018. VRGF is not aware of any other complaints regarding the content. In addition to airing on commercial television, the commercial has been watched on YouTube more than 470,000 times.

Additional campaign content on the VRGF website has had significant interest with more than 20,000 visits to the relevant pages. Independent campaign tracking following the March 2018 activity reports that 57 per cent of parents of children aged 12–17 years can recall ‘The Talk’ campaign.

Community feedback

The Foundation receives direct feedback from members of the community via a feedback function on our website. Currently, more than 70 per cent of visitors indicated that they liked the campaign content. Following is a sample of comments from the community in response to the campaign:

- “Just what parents need a guide to help their children face the challenges of life. Hopefully all parents take up the challenge and do not let and depend on others to do it for them, that is where the children stray, as their parents do not accept their responsibility today to/for, their children.”

- “It will help the parent to talk to the teenagers and also tell the teenagers to live in the whole family. If not they will not do the right things and get into the wrong tracks, it will ruin the rule of the society.”

- “It highlights an issue that should be raised with children. It’s a reminder that what adults let wash over them can be a lure to kids who don’t yet have the experience of life to make them question advertising and resist pressure.”

- “It isn't relevant to my family but maybe to others.”



- *“Why is parenting left to the father, both parents should have an interest to see their children understand.”*

- *“This is a conversation everyone needs to have with their loved ones of any age”.*

Two emails from community members have been received, one commented on educating young people about gambling and the second suggested limiting the hours gambling advertisements can be shown on television.

Addressing the code of ethics

In reviewing Section 2 of the AANA Advertiser Code of Ethics the VRGF does not believe this television commercial has contravened any part of the code, as set out below.

2.1 Discrimination or vilification

We do not believe any vilification or discrimination is portrayed or depicted.

2.2 Exploitative or degrading

We do not believe any of the individuals in the advertisement are exploited or degraded in any way.

2.3 Violence

We do not believe any violence is portrayed.

2.4 Sex, sexuality and nudity (Advertising or marketing communications shall treat sex sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to the relevant audience).

The advertisement plays on the idea that some conversations with teenagers can be difficult, but necessary. The awkwardness of the father in the opening scenes is a relatable experience for most parents, who are the target audience for the campaign. The ad also reinforces that having a conversation about the risks of gambling is a vital component of parenting teenagers, who are regularly exposed to gambling promotion.

Great care was taken to portray the interaction between father and son as genuine, caring and sensitive. The talk is not about sex but the father is aware of the son’s discomfort and interacts with him respectfully and kindly, showing he has the son’s best interests at heart.

A comedic aspect of the ad, included for effect, shows the father moving a sock with his pen as he sits down on the bed. The scene shows other clothes scattered on the bed



(and on the floor). No sexual connotation was intended by the father's removal of the sock, the closest item to where he sits.

2.5 Language

No strong or obscene language was used in the ad.

2.6 Health and safety

We do not believe there are any health or safety issues in the ad.

We have also considered the code as a whole and do not believe this television commercial has contravened any clauses within it.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond.

References

Delfabbro & Thrupp (2003). The Social Determinants of Gambling in South Australian Adolescents, Journal of Adolescence

Derevensky, J., Campbell, C., Meerkamper, E., Cutajar, J., 'Parents perceptions of adolescent gambling: a Canadian national study', International Centre for Youth Gambling and High-Risk Behaviours' McGill University, Journal of Gambling Issues, Issue 25, June 2011.

Jenkinson, R, de Lacey-Vawdon, C, Carroll, M, 2018, Weighing up the odds: young men, sports and betting, Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, Melbourne

Purdie, N., Matters, G., Hillman, K., Murphy, M., Ozolins, C., and Millwood, P. 'Gambling and young people in Australia', Report to Gambling Research Australia, Australian Council for Educational Research, August 2011

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 contains sexual references that would be inappropriate to be seen by children.

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



The Panel noted the television advertisement depicts a wife ushering her husband into their son's room to have 'the talk'. He states 'just because everyone seems like they're doing it, doesn't mean that they are actually doing it' and he moves a sock off the bed. It is revealed the advertisement is a community awareness announcement relating to sports and betting.

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 that the television advertisement had been given an 'G' rating by CAD which means that the relevant audience would likely be broad and include children.

The Panel considered that the advertisement could be interpreted as using sexual innuendo to deliver their message, but considered that this innuendo was not obvious or inappropriate.

The Panel considered that the advertisement was drawing a parallel between the importance of talking to children about sex, and the importance of talking to them about the risks of gambling.

The Panel considered that in the context of an important community message, to inform parents and children about responsible gambling, the use of a slight sexual innuendo was not inappropriate for a broad audience which would include children.

The Panel determined that this advertisement did treat the issue of sex, sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to the relevant broad audience and 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.

