



Case Report

1	Case Number	0503/16
2	Advertiser	Riot Stage Youth Theatre
3	Product	Entertainment
4	Type of Advertisement / media	Internet-Social-FB
5	Date of Determination	23/11/2016
6	DETERMINATION	Dismissed

ISSUES RAISED

- 2.2 - Objectification Exploitative and degrading - children
- 2.4 - Sex/sexuality/nudity S/S/N - sexualisation of children
- 2.6 - Health and Safety Within prevailing Community Standards

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

This Facebook advertisement depicts a teenage girl wears a bright orange turtle neck and standing against a bright yellow background. Her hair is pulled back and she has no makeup on. She has four hotdogs in her mouth and is looking down towards the camera. The words 'Flash Sale' are written across the image with details of the performance and sale.

THE COMPLAINT

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

This image is a direct and purposeful reference to degrading sexual acts that many women are subjected to in the pornographic industry. And child exploitation material is a growing industry in Australia. The group running this image in promotional material, flyers, posters, and digital advertising, claim that they are starting conversations about the sex lives of teens but they are simultaneously normalising and condoning violent acts that are inflicted on children.

No images that suggest sexual acts on children should ever be permitted.

All sexual acts with children are violence against children. They cannot consent. This is a

depiction rather than a physical act but depictions of violence toward children are no more acceptable than physical abuse.

If the girl in this image is underage the producers have not only depicted an overtly sexual and degrading act on a child, they have used a child to do so.

I would strongly encourage them to consider how they are only adding the catalogue of child exploitation material with this choice.

I object to this advertisement, because using an image of a young girl, with hot dogs stuffed in her mouth, is being used to advertise a performance by a youth theatre group, related to sex, sexuality, & pornography. It is difficult to establish if the show is supposed to be serious or not, but upon enquiry, apparently it is, & the image is supposed to promote the conversation about effects of porn & sexualisation on young people. I believe it is inappropriate, & exploitative to use this young girl set up to look like she's had these hot dogs shoved in her mouth, to promote a show, or get peoples interest & supposedly "start a conversation," about a serious issue, when we know that the image is a reference to a typical theme in today's dehumanizing pornography, of oral sex being forced on a woman by multiple men at the same time.

I also think the image is misleading, to attract audiences.

No matter how the context of this image was explained, no young girl should even have to visualize or enact such a violent, abusive, unrealistic sex act, & I imagine if this image was of a 12-13 year old boy with hot dogs jammed in his mouth, for the same purpose, there would be more concern & complaints from the public.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

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

Riot Stage has created an image to advertise the upcoming performance of F.- a show which explores how young people learn about sex and sexuality through the internet. The show explores the onslaught of sexual material that is available on the internet and how it is often overwhelming for young people. It is this theme – the way that sex and conflicting information and opinions about sex are shoved down the throats of young people that the image represents. The image problematizes the sexualization of young people, in particular females, and this is in line with the themes of the play. It is purposefully provocative as we are advertising a the ideas behind a provocative piece of art, as opposed to using the model to sell a material product.

The model in the image is 15 years old and both she and her parents have consented to the use of this image. Riot Stage works closely with their teenage ensemble to create performances and the cast are fully aware of the implied meanings of the image. They believe that it is an appropriately challenging image, which has already started important conversations about the themes of the performance within their local communities. Below is a statement written by the model in the image, [Name provided], which clearly communicates her consent to be the model in this image and to have the image distributed.

From [Name Provided]:

“My name is [Name Provided]. I am a 15-year-old girl. I am the girl in the promotional picture for Riot Stage’s show F.

I fully consented to the creation of this image along with my legal guardians. My opinions were always heard and were the first considered with every action taken with this image.

I understand the connotations of this very sexual image, as well as how this image can come across, but during the creation, I understood entirely what the image depicts and felt like a sexually empowered young woman during its creation and I feel that has in no way been taken away from me.

I am part of F. [the play we are creating together]. I play a character within this production and am not just a ‘poster girl’ with no ideas of the themes, issues and concepts I represent.

This photo is F. It is confronting and beautiful and scary and all other emotions brought out by our show. It is information being shoved down our throats and has captured our show perfectly. I want in no shape or form for this image to be removed.”

In the image Riot Stage has not employed sexual appeal as the model in the image is not dressed in a provocative or appealing way. The image is, in fact, meant to be shocking and repulsive, and was created as a parallel piece of art on the same topic as the performance event. Rather than wanting to be the girl in the image, the audience is supposed to feel empathy towards her.

The image does not depict violence in a literal way. Whilst some viewers may interpret the image in this way, there is nothing violent about the image itself as it is abstract. Furthermore, the expression on the model’s face does not express the pain or fear that would accompany a violent act. We understand that, based on personal experience, the image may provoke ideas of violence, but even in this case, the image does not glorify or condone violence against women as we have not romanticized the figure in the image.

Riot Stage is using this image to advertise to an adult audience. We have created a separate image for posters and postcards that are to be distributed to young people and schools. This school-age appropriate image has also been submitted as an attachment and features teenagers lying and sitting on a mattress.

The language used to sell the performance is appropriate to the content of the show and the audience of the performance. The ‘google search terms’ were suggested by teenagers and are terms that most teenagers are familiar with.

This image does not contradict community health and safety standards as: a) it is an abstract representation of an issue and; b) it is not glorifying or condoning the sexualisation of young people, rather it is abstractly depicting the occurrence in hopes of drawing attention to the negative impacts on young people.

When we (the artists at Riot Stage) received these complaints we deeply considered the concerns that were raised. As we work with young people, we in no way wish to contribute to their ongoing harm or disempowerment directly or indirectly. We have worked

collaboratively with our teenage cast to create the performance and we took these complaints to our ensemble and asked for their opinions. As a result of this conversation we have adjusted our marketing to supply more context about the show and our intentions to the viewer. On the Facebook event we have included a longer description of the show and have included a statement about the image that explains our intentions. We, as an ensemble, have appreciated this dialogue and feel that these adjustments will only help to draw audiences further into this important discourse.

Revised script description:

Teenage sex in a post-internet world.

Today, when a 16 year old wants to know something about sex – they just Google it.

They Google things like: average dick size, clopping, scissoring, what's squirt and does sex hurt?

F. navigates how teenagers learn about sex and sexuality in 2016 through a dense and stimulating digital landscape— tinder, sexting, vlogs, memes, instant gratification and online personas.

Through a combination of anonymous online surveys, candid conversations and gutsy improvisations, Riot Stage worked with a group of 11 teenagers (15 – 19 year olds) to navigate the topics that have informed the creation of F. including porn, masturbation, consent, gender, kinks and the pressures of a media-saturated world.

A fictionalised presentation grounded on very real issues, F. mirrors the internet – it's an overload of information designed for short attention spans – where five minutes is way too long and content is repeated, adapted and transformed again and again.

F. director, [Name Provided], explains "F. is a new work based on truth and steeped in fantasy about how the internet is taking over our brains and highlights that teens are the ones dealing with the consequences."

"We are spring boarding from Frank Wedekind's classic Spring Awakening which examined the ramifications of sexual oppression in 1892 and re-examining the same issues in a contemporary setting," she said.

Since 2010, Riot Stage has collaborated with independent professional artists and teenagers to create innovative, dangerous, current work inspired by the experiences of young people.

CONTENT WARNING: This show examines themes of consent, suicide and sexual abuse. It contains strong language and is recommended for audiences 15+.

For more information about the themes presented in the show check out the following organisation and websites:

Minus18 (www.minus18.org.au) - youth led organisation for gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans youth.

Headspace (www.headspace.org.au) - national youth mental health foundation.

SECASA (<http://youth.secasa.com.au/>) - the youth arm of CASA (Centres Against Sexual

Assault). The website contains information about sexual assault and relationships for young people.

YEAH! Red Aware (www.redaware.org.au) - youth led sexual health organisation.

New image description:

The constant stream of advertising adults have been subjected to since childhood is dwarfed by what kids face in 2016. This bombardment of input is what the Riot Stage promotional image for "F" is attempting to communicate: the way we are force fed sex/violence/love/romance/toothpaste/you-name-it without our consent (the consequences of which fall disproportionately on the shoulders women). The image and our production are parallel responses to the same provocation: what does it feel like to be a teenager in 2016? They both aim to represent what it's like to exist in a time when it's difficult to hear your own thoughts, to find your own opinion through the din of media and connectivity. Our play, and the process of making it, are attempts to do the opposite of the problem the image is commenting on. They are an attempt to let young people speak up.

The cast of our show, including the young person in the photo, have been working in an incredibly safe artistic space, where their voices are encouraged, heard, and made into art. We have very much made this work together. We feel compelled to note that while both the image and production draw attention to negative aspects of our contemporary society, there are countless positive aspects of being young in 2016. We have witnessed them up close through this process. We would like to acknowledge the internet as a great source of education and personal empowerment. Take a look at our event description for some resources with further information on many of the topics we are examining within our work.

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 inappropriately sexualised the young girl in the advertisement.

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

The Board then 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 Board noted that this Facebook advertisement features an image of a girl with four hotdogs protruding from her mouth.

The Board noted that the advertisement was for a theatre production which explored the theme of sexualisation of children and teenagers.

The Board noted that the early sexualisation of children was an important issue to the community and considered that the advertisement was intentionally confronting to draw attention to the issue and the Production which was about this issue.

The Board considered that there are sexual connotations in the advertisement; however considered that there is no reference to sex in the rest of the advertisement, and to some viewers the sexual connotation would not be clear.

The Board noted that depicting children as sexual beings is nearly always inappropriate in advertising, however considered in this instance the sexual connotation is mild, relevant to the product and intentionally confronting in order to draw attention to an important issue.

The Board also noted that the girl in the advertisement had parental permission to appear in the advertisement, had full knowledge of the sexual connotations of the advertisement and was an actively involved in the theatre group and performance.

The Board noted that the Facebook advertisement would be limited to an audience of people 13-years-old and over and who were viewing the Facebook page.

The Board considered that in the context of this limited audience, the mild sexual connotations were appropriate for the product being advertisement.

The Board considered that the advertisement did treat the issue of sex, sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to the relevant audience.

The Board determined that the advertisement did not breach Section 2.4 of the Code.

Finding that the advertisement did not breach the Code on other grounds, the Board dismissed the complaint.