



Case Report

1	Case Number	0558/17
2	Advertiser	Geocon
3	Product	Community Awareness
4	Type of Advertisement / media	Billboard
5	Date of Determination	19/12/2017
6	DETERMINATION	Dismissed

ISSUES RAISED

- 2.2 - Objectification Exploitative and degrading - women
- 2.4 - Sex/sexuality/nudity S/S/N - general
- 2.6 - Health and Safety Unsafe behaviour

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

Billboard advertising erected on two sides of a Woden Valley site to promote a future residential development. It includes the developer's name and logo, development identity, campaign imagery, messaging and contact details.

THE COMPLAINT

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

The male depicted is a well dressed spunky fashionable fully clothed individual that accurately reflects a lot of the Canberra men you'll see strolling around the city at lunch time. The woman on the other hand is a sexualised Kardashian figure riding a bicycle with no helmet or shoes on. It is incredibly rare to see a Canberra woman in a swimsuit. This is right near my house and I walk, ride (fully clothed and wearing a helmet) and drive past it several times in a day. I'm about to buy my first house. This does not represent the average young working woman in the ACT looking to buy a property, such as myself. It is the stark difference between the man and the woman that has so many people offended. Why does the woman have to be in a g-string type undergarment whilst the man is fully clothed?

Geocon had a choice when they designed this hoarding to depict whatever they liked and this

was their choice? This type of sexualised imagery perpetuates attitudes that treat women as second class citizens and sex objects leading to the current epidemic of violence against women. This is not a message or attitude that should be promoted anywhere but especially not in such a prominent and visible place.

The woman is depicted riding a bike. She is not wearing a helmet as required by ACT law.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

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

We have closely reviewed the complaints made in relation to our hoarding design for a new development in the up-and-coming suburb of Woden, Canberra. Having considered the Advertising Standards Board Code of Ethics, we believe our hoarding imagery complies with the provisions outlined therein. We pay particular attention to Sections 2.2, 2.4 and 2.6, which have been raised in the complaint, and address them in relation to our advertisement below.

The design of our advertising hoarding aims to attract interest in the development and convey an aspirational, chic lifestyle. Vibrant colours and striking images of cool, confident people have been used to convey a contemporary and aspirational lifestyle, akin to imagery evoking a sense of optimism and excitement in high-end luxury magazines such as Vogue, Elle and Wallpaper.

The hoarding features graphical elements including developer and development logos, contact details, a woman posing stationary (standing) on a bike along with two further people, a man and a woman, looking out towards the audience. The models are highly stylised and portray a modern, hip, cosmopolitan look and feel that is aspirational and appeals to a demographic that is our target audience.

Referencing Sections 2.2 and 2.4:

The creative focuses on interpretive "lifestyle" and is not literal in sense. The intention is to inspire ideas of a "way of living in Woden", that is contemporary, edgy, liberal, progressive, professional, successful, healthy and aspirational.

The models are conservative, yet edgy and boast a European style, depicting a level of glamour, sophistication and success. The imagery is typical of lifestyle publication imagery widely accepted in market, including (globally) Peroni TV and press ads, Calvin Klein press ads and more locally Seafolly bus shelter posters and Everlast Clothing billboards. All have a similar look and feel to the WOVA hoarding design and portray a fun and aspirational view.

The image of the woman on the bicycle is not sexualised or sexually explicit in any way, nor could it be interpreted as exploitative or degrading in nature. She is wearing a swimsuit, on a stationary bicycle, depicting health, confidence and independence. There is no nudity or exposed private areas, no inappropriate interaction with others in the image. The woman is depicted in a positive light, referencing a happy, healthy, confident person enjoying an aspirational lifestyle, which is relevant to the product being sold.

Referencing Section 2.6:

The image comprises a model posing stationary using the bicycle as a photo prop. There is no context to suggest she is cycling on a road or streetscape without a helmet, indicating a disregard for safety. The shadowing behind the bike accentuates its stationary nature. The image is highly stylised and not intended to be taken in a literal sense. We do not believe the average viewer of the hoarding would take this image literally and be concerned that it promotes unsafe cycling through lack of a helmet.

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 features an image that is degrading to woman and has strong sexual overtones.

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

The Board 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: (a) where images of Minors, or people who appear to be Minors, are used; or (b) in a manner which is exploitative and degrading of any individual or group of people.”

The Board noted the AANA Practice Note which provides guidance on the meaning of the terms exploitative and degrading:

“Exploitative - means clearly appearing to purposefully debase or abuse a person, or group of persons, for the enjoyment of others, and lacking moral, artistic or other values.

Degrading – lowering in character or quality a person or group of people.”

The Board noted that in order to breach this Section of the Code the advertisement would need to be using sexual appeal in a manner that is considered both exploitative and degrading.

The Board noted the Billboard features a young woman wearing a leotard and dark sunglasses, stylised hair and make-up and is visible from the waist up standing position and from a side view sitting on a stationary bike. Also featured is a stylised image of a young man wearing a shirt and jacket with dark sun glasses visible waist up frontal view.

The Board noted the woman is dressed in a leotard as she is depicted exercising, whilst the man is dressed in a suit. The Board considered as the woman is depicted exercising the image is not demeaning to women.

The Board noted the complainant’s concerns that the advertisement objectifies women and is inappropriately sexualised to promote a future residential development.

The Board considered the depiction of the woman in this manner is not a representation that the Board considered lowered the woman in character or purposefully debased the woman for the enjoyment of others.

In the Board's view, the advertisement did not breach Section 2.2 of the Code.

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".

The Board noted that the Billboard advertisement is for a future residential development and shows one female and one male model. The Board noted that the image of the woman in a leotard viewed from the side angle sitting on a stationary bike was very large and in a location that would mean that the audience would include children.

The Board noted, the models are visible only from the waist up and a side view of the female model sitting on a stationary bike and though the female model's leg is exposed due to wearing a leotard, there is no breast visible nor are other private parts of the woman shown.

The Board noted that the placement of the advertisement meant that the audience would be broad and would include children and considered that the images were not sexually suggestive or inappropriate for a broad audience.

The Board determined that the advertisement did treat the issue of sex, sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to the relevant audience and did not breach Section 2.4 of the Code.

The Board then considered Section 2.6 of the Code. Section 2.6 of the Code states: "Advertising or Marketing Communications shall not depict material contrary to Prevailing Community Standards on health and safety".

The Board noted that the image of the female model on the billboard is sitting on a stationary bike without a helmet and considered the bike to be a prop.

The Board considered that while most members of the community would not consider riding a bike without a helmet to be socially acceptable, in the context of the promotion and the stylised images depicted the female model sitting on a stationary bike is not unsafe.

The Board considered that the image is not depicting material that is contrary to Prevailing Community Standards on health and safety and did not breach section 2.6 of the Code.

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

