



CASE REPORT

1. Complaint reference number	206/09
2. Advertiser	Reckitt Benckiser (Aust) (Clearasil pimple pen)
3. Product	Health Products
4. Type of advertisement	TV
5. Nature of complaint	Health and safety – section 2.6
6. Date of determination	Thursday, 14 May 2009
7. DETERMINATION	Dismissed

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

This television advertisement from Reckitt Benckiser (Aust) for its Clearasil pimple pen opens with a teenage girl discovering a pimple on her face while sitting on a school desk. She then sends a phone text message to say she is not able to go out with Mark, her boyfriend. A girlfriend sits next to her and says, “So you are writing him off?” The girl explains that she has a pimple coming up and she doesn’t want Mark to see her. Her friend offers her a pimple pen and tells her to “write the pimple off - not him”. A voiceover then explains how the pen works and viewers see the girl applying the pen to her pimple, walking into Mark’s class and leaving him a note which says “Meet you at the café”. The advertisement ends with a shot of the girl smiling and the voice over saying “Write pimples off before they appear”.

THE COMPLAINT

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

I think that this advertisement is inappropriate as its purpose is to persuade young and often insecure women that having even one pimple will mean boys will not like them or go out with them. Pimples are an unwanted part of many adolescents' lives and this ad serves to further sufferers' insecurity, potentially leading to mental health problems such as low self-esteem and depression. I believe that this breaches s2.6 of the AANA code of ethics as it fails to meet community standards on the mental 'health and safety' of young women.

THE ADVERTISER’S RESPONSE

Comments which the advertiser made in response to the complaint/s regarding this advertisement included the following:

In respect of the Complaint we make the following comments:

1. the complainant alleges that the Advertisement is in breach of section 2.6 of the AANA Code of Ethics (“Code”) because it “serves to further sufferers’ insecurity, potentially leading to mental health problems such as low self-esteem and depression”.

2. Section 2.6 of the Code states:

2.6 Advertising or Marketing Communications shall not depict material contrary to Prevailing Community Standards on health and safety.

3. The question therefore is twofold:

(a) what is the Prevailing Community Standards on health and safety in the context of how young women perceive the importance of their appearance?; and

(b) does the Advertisement depict material that is contrary to the Prevailing Community Standards on health and safety?

4. The term “Prevailing Community Standards” is defined in the Code to mean “ the community standards determined by the Advertising Standards Board as those prevailing at the relevant time, and based on research carried out on behalf of the Advertising Standards Board as it sees fit, in relation to Advertising or Marketing Communications”.

5. In our view, and subject to any research that the Board may carry out as it sees fit, the prevailing community standards relating to how young women may perceive the importance of their appearance, particularly in relation to young men in the context of a developing pimple or skin blemish, are many and varied.

6. The Advertisement depicts a young woman being concerned about the condition of her skin and the appearance of a developing pimple before a date. The young woman’s reaction is not an uncommon or unusual reaction and we believe that the depiction in the Advertisement of the young woman’s reaction is well within the range of prevailing community standards.

7. Given our comments in paragraph 10 and 11 above, we believe that the Advertisement is not depicting material that is contrary to the Prevailing Community Standards on health and safety.

8. Moreover the Advertisement is promoting a treatment for a skin condition and a remedy to the young woman’s concern about her appearance in the form of the Clearasil Pimple Blocker Pen. As the complainant himself points out, “pimples are an unwanted part of many adolescents’ lives”. Rather than persuading “young and often insecure women that having even one pimple will mean that boys will not like them or go out with them” as suggested by the complainant, the Advertisement does quite the opposite and promotes a remedy for dealing with unwanted developing pimples. In this regard we believe that the Advertisement provides a basis for higher self-esteem and confidence in young women in relation to any concerns they may have in respect of the condition of their skin by promoting a product that helps them look after the health of their skin.

9. Given our comments in paragraph 13 above and elsewhere in this response, we strongly dispute that the Advertisement has the potential to cause low self-esteem or lead to mental health problems of any nature.

10. For the reasons set out in this response we believe that the Advertisement complies with section 2.6 of the Code (and the Code generally) and urge the Board to dismiss the Complaint.

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' concern that the advertisement is likely to lower self-esteem for young women suffering from acne.

The Board noted that acne is a common part of life for many young people and that the scenario depicted is typical of the way young people (men and women) feel during that part of their development. While the Board agreed that the advertisement did depict young people not wanting to go out with a pimple, that a relatively simple solution was found for this problem ie: use of the product. The Board considered that this advertisement was unlikely to lead to any increase in lack of self-esteem of young people and did not depict material that is contrary to prevailing community standards on health.

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