



CASE REPORT

1. Complaint reference number	261/06
2. Advertiser	Kao (Aust) Marketing Pty Ltd (BioZet)
3. Product	Housegoods/services
4. Type of advertisement	TV
5. Nature of complaint	Discrimination or vilification Gender - section 2.1
6. Date of determination	Tuesday, 11 July 2006
7. DETERMINATION	Dismissed

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

This television advertisement is set on a crowded bus which jerks suddenly to a halt, and which forces a woman's head into the chest of a young man hanging onto the overhead handrail. Noticing how soft and fresh his shirt feels, she lingers in that position as other passengers begin to notice her strange behaviour. The young man seems to accept the situation and we cut to a scene of him folding his shirt at home, and himself admiring the softness and fresh aroma, obviously caused by washing with Biozet, shown nearby. As the bus moves off again, the spellbound woman returns to reality and pulls away from the young man, a little embarrassed and looking apologetic, but he himself has an understanding smile.

THE COMPLAINT

Comments which the complainant/s made regarding this advertisement included the following:

My entire family...believe that if the gender roles were reversed, then the ad would not be acceptable to everyday society, let alone in its current format...if an 18 – 20 y.o female was on public transport and a 40 y.o. male rubs his face against the young female's chest, there would be an outrage.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

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

The advertisement does not discriminate against or vilify either character on account of their sex. The interaction between the characters is non-sexual and neutral. Neither is shown to be objectified, humiliated, or injured in any way. Also neither character displays any hint of predatory sexual behaviour. Both are caught in a bit of advertising hyperbole that suggests that clothes washed with Biozet are so soft you'll forget where you are.

The advertisement does (not) raise any issues in relation to the inappropriate or insensitive treatment of sex. The scene depicted is not harmful or sexual in nature, but is executed in the spirit of fun and light hearted humour.

The question of whether this would be acceptable if viewed in a different way is irrelevant, as the advertisement is subject to the Code in its current form and not other imagined hypothetical variations.

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 concern that the depiction of the woman rubbing her face against the man's chest was inappropriate and that if the roles were reversed in this advertisement there would be no question that it was unacceptable.

The Board discussed this advertisement for some time. The Board was of the view that the depiction was not sexual in nature and did not discriminate or objectify men as the advertisement made it clear that the reason for the woman's behaviour was the softness of the man's jumper. The Board also considered it important that in the advertisement the man was bemused not concerned and did not indicate that the woman should stop her behaviour.

The Board considered that it was important that programs and advertising be able to reflect Australians' ability to laugh at themselves and to find humour in situations. The Board considered that the clear message of the advertisement was the quality of the product – fabric softener – and that the advertisement had a gentle non threatening and non sexual tone.

The Board agreed that if a man were depicted rubbing his face against a woman's chest that this would likely be unacceptable. However the Board did not consider that touching a man on the chest was comparable to touching a woman on the chest. The Board considered that the same advertisement with roles reversed would be likely to be acceptable if a man were rubbing his face against a woman's arm or her back or any other non sexual part of her body.

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