



CASE REPORT

1. Complaint reference number	306/05
2. Advertiser	Weight Watchers
3. Product	Other
4. Type of advertisement	TV
5. Nature of complaint	Discrimination or vilification Other – section 2.1
6. Date of determination	Tuesday, 8 November 2005
7. DETERMINATION	Dismissed

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

The opening scene in this television advertisement depicts a woman standing at the end of a jetty. The following scenes depict various women in different situations. The first shows a woman at a party, another shows a woman in front of a mirror, another on an exercise bike etc. The superscript reads: *“There is more than one woman who feels like the fattest woman in the room; who dreads mirrors; who will try and fail more times than she can count. But there’s one place they can get together and start to change their habits, their waistlines, their mindset. The door is always open”*. The final scene in the advertisement shows the Weight Watchers logo together with a contact phone number.

THE COMPLAINT

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

“The ad showed women who weren’t obese, merely slightly overweight with a voiceover that said: “You don’t need to feel like you’re the fattest person in the room. You don’t need to feel like you’re a failure.” This is grossly insulting to all women who are not a size 10, and implies that anyone slightly overweight is repulsive and a failure... In a time when eating disorders are rife among young girls and women it is irresponsible to imply that anyone overweight should be dissatisfied with the way they look.”

THE ADVERTISER’S RESPONSE

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

“... we do not believe that this advertisement in any way contravenes any part of Section 2.”

“... The advertising was developed from market research with consumers who were concerned about their weight and taps into a variety of emotions that were reported by these consumers.”

“For the past 36 years, Weight Watchers has provided [its] members with support and encouragement based on understanding what it is like to be overweight or obese. We do not believe that the advertisement in anyway implies that “anyone slightly overweight is repulsive or a failure” and that this is in fact the antithesis of the care and support we provide our members.”

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 that this advertisement was for a weight loss programme and was directed towards women who were overweight. The Board further considered that the images and text displayed in the

advertisement were relevant to the product being advertised. The Board was of the opinion that the advertisement did not imply that overweight people were “repulsive and were failures”, rather the advertisement pointed to the range of emotional experiences that overweight women may encounter.

The Board found that the depiction did not contravene the provisions of the Code relating to the portrayal of people.

Further finding that the advertisement did not breach the provisions of the Code on any other grounds, the Board dismissed the complaint.