

Case Report

1. Case Number :	0210-24
2. Advertiser :	Department of Social Services
3. Product :	Education
4. Type of Advertisement/Media :	TV - Free to Air
5. Date of Decision:	28-Aug-2024
6. Decision:	Dismissed

ISSUES RAISED

AANA Code of Ethics\2.1 Discrimination or Vilification

DESCRIPTION OF ADVERTISEMENT

There are three versions of this television advertisement which feature a teenage boy getting an alert on his phone and being transported into a physical representation of the internet.

Version 1 features a male saying "Women don't want you to be kind, they want you to control them. If you're not in control as a man, you're a beta".

Version 2 features a male saying "Women don't want you to be kind, they want you to control them".

Three teenage boys call out to girls walking past them, the first boy says "Hey, I'm talking to you!"

The second boy says "What do you think I'm not good enough for you?"

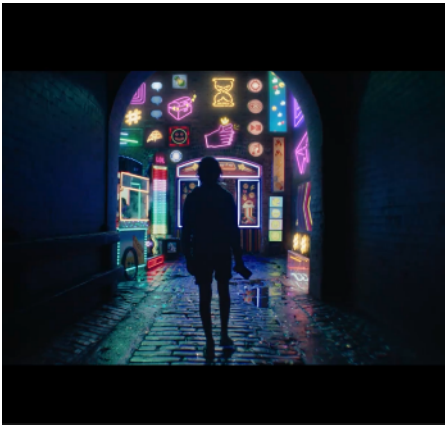
The third boy says "You're gonna regret blocking me!".

Version 3 features a male saying "If you're not in control as a man, you're a beta".

Another man is seen grabbing a phone from a woman and asking "Who were you texting?"

In all three versions of the ad we then see the teenage boy back on the street where his dad asks him if he's alright. He responds that he is before liking the post on his phone.

A voice-over says "Do you know what's influencing your kids? Learn the hidden trends of disrespect before they lead to violence. Authorised by the Australian Government, Canberra".



THE COMPLAINT

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

The ad about gender violence and young man, James with his dad.

Sexist against women.

The ad is about the internet influences young people which is fine, except they ONLY show a boy being affected by what a boy sees and demonises masculinity and young boys. I find most of the 1800 Respect ads to be utterly disgusting and anti male. As the Mother of son's and one daughter I think we are sending terrible messages to young boys and men. Young men are doing very badly, failing, dropping out, drugs and suicide and I think it's the toxic messaging being sent by these type of organisation. Can you imagine them saying making the same ad for girls about femininity. But if masculinity CAN be toxic so too can femininity. It is not toxic masculinity or toxic femininity - it's just bad behaviour by a human. Boys are dying from suicide at ever increasing numbers and we need to STOP the horrible denigration of their sex.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

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

The Stop it at the Start campaign aims to prevent gender-based violence by influencing change to attitudes and behaviours that support or condone gender-based violence. It takes a primary prevention approach to ensure adults play a role in the prevention of disrespect and violence supportive attitudes among young people aged 10–17 years.

Violence against women is at epidemic proportions in Australia. Family, domestic and sexual violence cannot be excused or justified under any circumstances.

While anybody can experience family, domestic and sexual violence, data shows that most victims are women, and that overwhelmingly, violence against women in Australia is perpetrated by men.

In 2022-23, one woman was killed every 11 days by their current or former intimate partner in Australia.

- *The 2021-22 Personal Safety Survey found that since the age of fifteen:*
 - *1 in 4 women has experienced violence by an intimate partner. In comparison, 1 in 14 men has experienced violence by an intimate partner.*
 - *1 in 6 women had experienced violence from a current or former cohabitating partner. In comparison, 1 in 18 men had experienced violence by a current or former cohabitating partner.*
 - *1 in 11 women have experienced violence by a boyfriend, girlfriend, or date compared to 1 in 44 men.*
 - *1 in 4 women had experienced emotional abuse by a cohabitating partner. In comparison, 1 in 7 men had experienced emotional abuse by a cohabitating partner.*

- *Almost 4 in 5 family and domestic violence offenders are male (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Recorded Crime – Offenders 2022-23).*

There is an overwhelming body of evidence, including by the World Health Organization (WHO), of the correlation between violence against women and attitudes around respectful relationships and gender equality. This includes:

- *The WHO's Global Plan of Action to address interpersonal violence, in particular against women and girls, and against children (2016) report cites gender inequality and harmful norms on masculinity as two risk factors contributing to violence against women and girls.*
- *The 2021 National Community Attitudes Survey (NCAS) found a strong relationship between attitudes to gender equality and attitudes towards violence. One in four people believe that domestic violence is a normal reaction to day-to-day stress. Also, one in four Australians believe that women exaggerate the extent of men's violence against women.*
 - *Alarming, the NCAS also found that some Australians' understanding of domestic violence has become more inaccurate since the last survey in 2017. In the 2021 NCAS, two in five respondents believed that men and women are equally likely to perpetrate domestic violence.*
 - *Although attitudes are generally shifting towards improvement over time, responses among young people to some questions in the 2021 NCAS still indicate areas of poor knowledge, relatively high endorsement of violence*

supportive views and a low level of support for gender equality. In particular, the NCAS found that young men's understandings and rejection of violence lags behind that of young women and young non-binary people.

The first phase of the campaign was launched in 2016 and the focus of each phase is informed and developed through extensive research and testing. Developmental research to inform phase 5 was conducted from April to August 2023. Findings showed a 'new problem' has emerged which has quickly occurred since research was conducted for phase 4 of the campaign in 2021.

It uncovered that new significant influences, originating in social media are creating an echo chamber of disrespectful voices which are having a significant impact on the attitudes and behaviours of young people towards gendered disrespect. They are changing the definition of respect / disrespect, how disrespect is experienced and felt, and adults are largely absent from these conversations. These new powerful influences are creating fertile ground for generationally violence supportive attitudes to grow.

The current phase of the national campaign, The Hidden Trends of Disrespect, aims to educate adults about the new and hidden forms of disrespect young people are being exposed to online and offline, and the negative impact this has on attitudes and behaviours.

The advertising materials show the journey of a young person (James), representative of many young Australians, as they try to navigate a world of disrespect alone. Depicted through a dramatised online world, its influence and its allure, the advertising shows how easy it can be for young people to be exposed to disrespectful content. The advertising ends with James being unsure of the type of content he is seeing and hearing. He casually gives the content a thumbs up, illustrating how young people don't fully understand the context or impact of what they are seeing. Noticing James' change in demeanour the father (adult influencer) takes the opportunity to step in and start a conversation.

The Advertising materials underwent rigorous concept testing and developmental research and followed the Australian Government advertising approvals process.

There is one 60 second and three 30 second advertisements for the campaign, with two 15 second cut downs. The 60 second advertisement was only used for the first three weeks of the campaign so was not live when the complaints were lodged.

RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC AANA CODES

The campaign has received a General (G) classification from ClearAds. In line with the Commercial Television Code of Practice 2015, material classified 'G' is not necessarily

intended for children but it must be very mild in impact and must not contain any matter likely to be unsuitable for children to watch without supervision. The advertising does not break requirements for G classification under the Code of Practice as:

- *Depictions of physical and psychological violence are very restrained, and the use of language has a very low sense of threat or menace and does not show violent activity to be acceptable or desirable.*
- *Phrasing and language is sensitively and appropriately used to relay the storyline.*
- *Themes dealing with social or domestic conflict have a very low sense of threat or menace to children.*
- *There are no references to sex, nudity, drugs, suicide or dangerous imitable activity.*

Advertising placement for this phase is booked by the Australian Government's master media agency, Universal McCann. Advertising is placed across television, digital video, cinema, social, search and content partnerships. Advertising is targeting people aged 18-54 years as parents and other adult influencers of young people aged 10-17 years. Advertising is placed nationally, including regional and remote.

This complaint relates to free-to-air television placement where target audience buying is for people aged 18-54 years.

In addition, under Section 2 of the AANA Code of Ethics:

2.1 – Discrimination or vilification

The campaign does not discriminate against or vilify a person or section of the community on account of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, disability, mental illness or political belief.

Concept testing of the advertising materials was undertaken with the target audience through four waves of research. Wave 1-3 of research, undertaken in storyboard and concept stages, it found that it was critical for the advertising materials to show victimhood in both boys and girls. The concepts developed into executions that showed the impact on girls (showing fear, running when not feeling safe in Script 2 – Teen boys and Script 3 – Phone snatch) as well as the impact on boys where young boys (James, the main character) were unsettled and confused about how to respond to what they are seeing online.

Findings from the final concept testing wave, where produced materials were tested were that "The campaign clearly demonstrates the negative impacts this new rhetoric can have on both boys and girls, while avoiding a sense that boys/men are the problem. It focuses the issue on the problem, that at its heart, is stemming from powerful influences that parents often aren't seeing or directly exposed to".

Additionally, at the final concept testing wave 'The diverse casting achieved in the final execution is considered highly appropriate. The mix of ages (young people), genders and cultural backgrounds combine to implicitly signal that this issue is affecting all young people and is a universal issue'. They were found to "make adults feel that they are missing important parts of the disrespect/respect conversation with young people".

The call to action at the end of the advertisement is to the campaign website, which hosts a range of tools and resources also available in alternative formats including 11 languages, and Easy Read, to help adults learn about the issue and feel confident when talking to young people about respect.

2.2 – Exploitative and degrading

The advertising does not employ sexual appeal in how minors who appear in the advertising are used or in any manner which is exploitative or degrading to any individual or group of people.

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2.3 – Violence

The 30 second phone snatch television advertisement portrays suggestive violent behaviour. As outlined within the script, the advertisement includes a man using controlling language, and displaying controlling behaviours by snatching the phone, however no physical violence is shown. This meets the requirements of CAD's G rating.

This portrayal of suggestive violence is considered appropriate in the context of the campaign. It aims to stop violence against women and children, by educating adult influencers such as parents, carers and guardians about the connection between disrespect and violence, as well as the attitudes that excuse, condone or trivialise violence.

Concept testing of the advertising materials was undertaken with the target audience through four waves of research, including with victim survivors of domestic violence. There was no evidence throughout the research that the advertisement was depicting violence unnecessarily.

2.4 – Sex, sexuality and nudity

The campaign does not depict sex, sexuality or nudity.

2.5 – Language

The campaign only uses language that is appropriate in the circumstances, as indicated by the CAD classification of G, considering they were appropriate for the audience and media placements. The language used was carefully selected to be reflective of what people are seeing and hearing online and offline, based on the developmental research conducted.

There is no strong or obscene language used.

2.6 Health and safety

The campaign is not contrary to prevailing community standards on health and safety as it aims help break the cycle of violence against women and children by encouraging adults to understand what is influencing young people’s perceptions and attitudes that contribute to gender-based violence, reflect on their attitudes, and have conversations about respect with young people.

As part of the production and filming process, all strict standards and policies were followed to ensure safety and welfare of all talent, including minors on set.

2.7 – Distinguishable as advertising

This advertisement falls within the definition of advertising under AANA codes. The advertising is clearly distinguishable as advertising – the authorisation statement at the end of the advertisements is a clear, recognisable and indicating that the advertising is part of a Government campaign. ‘Authorised by the Australian Government, Canberra.’

THE DECISION

The Ad Standards Community Panel (the Panel) considered whether the three versions collectively forming this advertisement breach Section 2 of the AANA Code of Ethics (the Code).

The Panel noted the complainants’ concerns that the advertisement:

- Is sexist against women
- Perpetuates negative stereotypes about men and boys.

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

Section 2.1: Advertising shall not portray or depict material in a way which discriminates against or vilifies a person or section of the community on account of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, disability, mental illness or political belief.

The Panel noted the Practice Note to Section 2.1 provides the following definitions:

- *Discrimination – unfair or less favourable treatment.*

- *Vilification – humiliates, intimidates, incites hatred, contempt or ridicule.*
- *Gender – refer to the attributes, roles, behaviours, activities, opportunities or restrictions that society considers appropriate for girls or boys, women or men. Gender is distinct from ‘sex’, which refers to biological differences*

The Panel noted the Practice Note to Section 2.1 states:

Harmful gender stereotypes are unacceptable because they perpetuate unconscious bias and rigid norms of femininity and masculinity that shape what it means to be a girl, woman, boy or man. Advertisements should take care to avoid suggesting that skills, interests, roles or characteristics are:

- *always uniquely associated with one gender (eg. family members creating a mess while a woman has sole responsibility for cleaning it up);*
- *the only options available to one gender; or*
- *never carried out or displayed by another gender, as this may amount to discrimination on the basis of gender.*

Nothing in this rule is intended to prevent ads from featuring:

- *one gender only;*
- *products designed or made for one gender featuring only that gender (eg tampons, breastfeeding products);*
- *gender stereotypes as a means to challenge their negative effects.”*

Does the advertisement discriminate against or vilify men?

The Panel noted that the advertisement is a targeted ad that is looking to address a specific problem. The Panel considered that the aim of the advertisement is to increase awareness amongst parents of the negative culture that children can be exposed to online. The Panel considered that the intent of the ad was not to suggest that all men think and act in that manner. The Panel considered that the advertisement did not depict men as receiving unfair or less favourable treatment, and did not incite hatred or contempt for all men.

Does the advertisement discriminate against or vilify women?

The Panel acknowledged that some of the behaviour and views featured in the advertisement did depict women as receiving unfair or less favourable treatment. However, the Panel considered that this depiction was to highlight a problem and illustrate its negative effects. The Panel considered that in the advertisement there is a call to action to parents to find out more information to address the problem.

The Panel considered that the advertisement did not discriminate against or vilify a person or section of the community on account of gender.

Section 2.1 conclusion

The Panel found that the advertisement did not breach Section 2.1 of the Code.

Conclusion

Finding that the advertisement did not breach any other section of the Code the Panel dismissed the complaints.