

Case Report

Case number: 0237-25
Advertiser: Honey Birdette
Medium: Store Window
Decision date: 8-Oct-2025
Decision: Dismissed

ISSUES CONSIDERED BY THE COMMUNITY PANEL

- AANA Code of Ethics - 2.2 Exploitative or Degrading - no breach
- AANA Code of Ethics - 2.4 Sex/sexuality/nudity - no breach

AD DESCRIPTION

The digital screen ad in the store window features two images of women wearing black lingerie with the word “Aubrey” at the bottom of the images. Image one features a woman wearing a collar with a leash attached, which she is holding the end of. Image two features the same woman in a similar pose, with another woman standing next to her, with her hand on the first woman’s shoulder.



SUMMARY

Complaint

A complaint was received on the grounds that the ad objectifies women and is sexually inappropriate for a broad audience that would include children. The complainant added that these images are inappropriate for public display in malls where children are engaging in holiday entertainment nearby.

Advertiser response

The advertiser responded that Honey Birdette is a luxury lingerie brand. The models are portrayed as confident and empowered, which is consistent with its brand identity.

The advertiser's full response is included in Appendix A.

Decisions

The Panel found that the ads did not breach sections 2.2 or 2.4 of the Code of Ethics as the sexual appeal presented was not exploitative or degrading, and the ads treated sex and sexuality with sufficient sensitivity to the relevant broad audience.

ASSESSMENT AND DECISIONS

Section 2.2 (Code of Ethics): Advertising shall not employ sexual appeal in a manner which is exploitative or degrading of any individual or group of people.

The Practice Note includes the following definitions:

Exploitative - (a) taking advantage of the sexual appeal of a person, or group of people, by depicting them as objects or commodities; or (b) focussing on their body parts where this bears no direct relevance to the product or service being advertised.

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

The Practice Note states:

For material to breach this section of the Code, it must contain sexual appeal.

Material can be found to be exploitative or degrading even where the model is looking confident where the model is being depicted as a product or commodity or the focus on body parts is not relevant to the product or service being advertised. Advertising which used sexual appeal and suggests that a person is a product, or that they exist only for the enjoyment of others has been found to breach this section of the Code. Likewise, advertising which uses attractive models in revealing clothing, where the use of the model is not relevant to the product, has been found to be exploitative.

Panel assessment

- **Does the ad use sexual appeal?**

The Panel noted that the advertiser's business is to sell lingerie and other related items. The Panel noted that the models are dressed in such items, which can reasonably be said to contain sexual appeal.

The Panel, therefore, considered the ad uses sexual appeal.

- **Does the ad use sexual appeal in a manner that is exploitative?**

The Panel considered that neither of the models appear to be under anybody's control. The Panel considered that they are not paraded for someone's entertainment, are not depicted as commodities, and the focus on their bodies is relevant to the products being promoted.

The Panel considered that the images do not employ sexual appeal in a manner which is exploitative of the women shown, or women in general.

- **Does the ad use sexual appeal in a manner that is degrading?**

The Panel considered that a collar and lead might, in some instances, imply exploitation or be seen as degrading. However, the Panel considered that neither of the models have their collars held by someone else, which implies that they are in control of their own actions. The Panel considered that the models appeared confident, with no indication that they were in a subservient position.

The Panel considered that the ad did not employ sexual appeal in a manner which is degrading to the women, or women in general.

Panel decision

The Panel found that the ad did not breach section 2.2 of the Code of Ethics.

Section 2.4 (Code of Ethics): Advertising shall treat sex, sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to the relevant audience.

The Practice Note states:

Overtly sexual images are not appropriate in outdoor advertising or shop front windows.

Although not exhaustive, the following may be considered to be overtly sexual:

- People depicted in sheer lingerie or clothing where a large amount of buttocks, female breasts, pubic mound or genital regions can be seen;
- The use of paraphernalia such as whips and handcuffs, particularly in combination with images of people in lingerie, undressed or in poses suggestive of sexual position.

Images of models in bikinis or underwear are permitted, however, unacceptable images could include those where a model is in a suggestively sexual pose, where underwear is being pulled up or down (by the model or another person), or where there is clear sexual innuendo from the ad (e.g. depicting women as sexual objects).

Panel assessment

- **Does the ad contain sex?**

The Panel noted that the definition of sex in the Practice Note is “person or persons engaged in sexually stimulating behaviour.”

The Panel considered that no such imagery or suggestions appeared in the images. Accordingly, the Panel considered that the images do not contain sex.

- **Does the ad contain sexuality?**

The Panel noted the definition of sexuality in the Practice Note is “the capacity to experience and express sexual desire; the recognition or emphasis of sexual matters”.

The Panel considered that lingerie and clothing of this nature are likely to be viewed as a means to express sexual desire.

The Panel, therefore, considered that the images do contain sexuality.

- **Does the ad contain nudity?**

The Panel noted that the definition of nudity in the Practice Note is “the depiction of a person without clothing or covering; partial or suggested nudity may also be considered nudity”.

The Panel noted that, while the models’ nipples and genitals were covered, part of the buttocks of the woman on the right in image two is visible. The Panel considered that generally a depiction of a person in lingerie would be considered partial or suggested nudity.

The Panel, therefore, considered that the images do contain nudity.

- **Are the issues of sexuality and nudity treated with sensitivity to the relevant audience?**

The Panel noted that the definition of sensitivity in the Practice Note is “understanding and awareness to the needs and emotions of others”.

The Panel noted that assessing whether sexual suggestion is ‘sensitive to the relevant audience’ requires consideration of who the relevant audience is and how they are likely to react to or feel about the ad.

The Panel noted that the images appear in store windows and considered that the relevant audience includes retail workers, people shopping in the Honey Birdette store and people who are walking past the store, and that this last group would include children.

The Panel noted that the lingerie being advertised in images one and two included a piece around the neck which resembled a collar. The Panel acknowledged that some members of the community would prefer fetish style products not be advertised where children can view them. The Panel considered that the collar was consistent with the strappy style of the lingerie. The Panel considered that the overall impression of the images was of a woman modelling lingerie and was not the promotion or use of fetish products.

The Panel considered that the images do not feature explicit nudity and the models are not posing suggestively, The Panel considered that overall the content is not overtly sexual and did treat the issues of sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to the relevant audience.

Panel decision

The Panel found that the ad did not breach section 2.4 of the Code of Ethics.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The Panel found that the ads did not breach any other section of the advertising codes.

APPENDIX A: ADVERTISER RESPONSE IN FULL

We note the concerns raised regarding the campaign imagery.

Honey Birdette is a luxury lingerie brand. The campaign in question was created with professional models and photographers to showcase our product. These images are not pornographic. In fact, in this specific imagery the models are covered and not wearing lingerie. The creative is part of an international standard of fashion advertising and is designed to celebrate empowerment, confidence and luxury.

While the complainant has described the imagery as “pornography” and “dehumanising,” we strongly reject this. At no point are the women presented as objects or “sub-human.” They are depicted as confident and empowered - consistent with our brand identity.

We respect that not everyone will share the same view on lingerie advertising, but we stand by our campaign and the creative direction we have chosen.

Given the repeated nature of these objections from the same location, we also question whether this matter requires a formal review.