Case Report

Case number: 0312-25
Advertiser: Woolworths Group Limited trading as BIG W
Medium: Radio/Audio Streaming
Decision date: 28-Jan-2026
Decision: No breach

ISSUES CONSIDERED BY THE COMMUNITY PANEL

- AANA Code of Ethics - 2.1 Discrimination or Vilification - no breach

AD DESCRIPTION

This radio ad features women discussing the work that goes into preparing for Christmas. It includes phrases such as 'There's a lot to do, the shopping, the wrapping, the cooking, presents for all the kids in my class, myself, mum, dad, in-laws, my in-laws' dog, secret Santa, friendsmas, bad Santa, elf on the shelf, tinsel, Sellotape, wrapping paper, its full on. Really really exhausting and no one helps.'

A voice-over says 'We know who makes it magical. At Big W we've got your favourite brands at great prices and everything you need to make it to the big day in one piece.'

SUMMARY

Complaint

A complaint was received on the grounds that the ad did not feature one male voice. The ad phrases the absence of male involvement as a joke.

Advertiser response

The advertiser responded that the intention was to represent the chaotic, imperfect and real moments of family life, and the primary purpose of this ad was to highlight the chaos of the Christmas season. The women featured are real customers sharing their unscripted, genuine thoughts in a “vox pop” interview. The ad is an empathetic nod to the important role that many women play in their families and communities in the Christmas season. The absence of male voices in the ad is not itself a suggestion that Christmas-related activities are or should be a woman’s job, or that those tasks are unable to be undertaken by other genders.

A copy of the advertiser’s full response is included in Appendix A.

Decisions

The Panel found that the ad did not breach section 2.1 of the AANA Code of Ethics, as the ad did not portray people or depict material in a way which discriminates against or vilifies a person or section of the community.

ASSESSMENT AND DECISIONS

Section 2.1 (AANA Code of Ethics): Advertising shall not portray people 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 Practice Note states:

> A negative depiction of a group of people in society may be found to breach Section 2.1, even if humour is used. The depiction will be regarded as a breach if a negative impression is created by the imagery and language used in the advertisement of a person or group of people on the basis of a defined attribute listed above.
>
> Advertisements can humorously or satirically suggest stereotypical aspects of a group of people in society provided the overall impression of the advertisement does not convey a negative impression of people of that group on the basis of one or more of the attributes listed above.
>
> 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.

Panel assessment

The Panel considered that negative gender stereotypes tend to perpetuate gender bias, and should not be used in advertising. The Panel also noted that the ad did not feature an interview with any male customers.

However, the Panel considered that Christmas time is typically an incredibly busy period for most families, and that it could reasonably be said that women often have a disproportionate share of domestic tasks at this time. However, the Panel was mindful of the fact that the ad was not expressing a view about gender roles. At most, the ad was acknowledging and celebrating the considerable effort of families over Christmas.

The Panel considered that no view was expressed about men, and that there was no suggestion in the comments that men were incapable, unwilling or ineligible to take on such responsibilities, or that they should only fall on women to do. The Panel considered that the absence of male voices could not, in this context, be interpreted as commentary, criticism, humiliation or vilification of any particular gender.

Panel decision

On this basis, the Panel found that the ad did not discriminate against, or vilify any sector of society on the basis of gender.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

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

APPENDIX A: ADVERTISER RESPONSE IN FULL

Woolworths Group Limited trading as BIG W (BIG W) takes advertising complaints seriously and is grateful for the opportunity to respond to this complaint.

BIG W respectfully submits that the advertisement the subject of the complaint (the Advertisement) does not breach any part of section 2 of the AANA Code of Ethics (the Code).

Section 2.1 of the Code

Section 2.1 prohibits advertising that discriminates against or vilifies a section of the community. The Practice Note to the Code provides guidance that advertisements may discriminate against women where they depict harmful gender stereotypes which perpetuate rigid norms of femininity. For the reasons set out below, the Advertisement does not breach Section 2.1 of the Code.

The Advertisement is part of BIG W's ongoing brand platform - "How Good's That". The platform's overall intention is to represent the chaotic, imperfect and real moments of family life, and the primary purpose of this particular Advertisement is to highlight the chaos of the Christmas season. The women featured (aside from the voiceover artist) are real BIG W customers sharing their unscripted, genuine thoughts in a "vox pop" interview. The Advertisement is an empathetic nod to the important role that many women play in their families and communities in the Christmas season. The women are not portrayed as being discriminated against or vilified, or portrayed in a way that has this effect.

Unlike how discrimination is defined in the Practice Note, the women in the Advertisement are also not portrayed in any negative light, treated unfairly, or depicted in a way that is less favourable. Instead, the women are portrayed as ambitious, selfless and extraordinary, with the Advertisement humorously recognising their efforts to tackle the long list of Christmas tasks; ensure all gifts are bought and wrapped, the food is ready, and a hidden elf continues its mischief. The line "We know who makes it magical" is far from rendering women or their contributions as a "funny little joke" as alleged by the complainant. Rather, it is delivered with a tone of respect and shared understanding of the effort involved at Christmas time, without conveying any such message that those contributions are exclusive to, or the sole responsibility of, women.

We note that the Panel has previously dismissed complaints regarding advertisements that focused on women's household contributions, where the depiction was of a "relatable family circumstance" (0210-23), with the Panel itself noting that "it is a common occurrence in many households that mothers shop and prepare food" (0012-25). The depictions in the Advertisement are no different and importantly, fail to reach the discriminatory or vilifying threshold of section 2.1.

Based on internal customer research conducted by BIG W, BIG W contends that highlighting women in the Advertisement is a depiction of a relatable family circumstance and real family dynamics. The research surveyed 801 Christmas shoppers in January 2025 with a comparable gender split. The study found that women - especially mothers in young families - carry a disproportionate share of the Christmas workload. In particular, the data showed that women dominated last-minute Christmas shopping and outpaced men in child-specific categories

(such as baby items and toys) by up to 200%. ABS data also confirms that women take on more domestic labour than men (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024).

We acknowledge the complainant's concern that "not a single male voice featured during the ad", however the absence of male voices in the Advertisement is not itself a suggestion that Christmas-related activities are or should be a woman's job, or that those tasks are unable to be undertaken by other genders. The line, "and no one helps" which appears in the Advertisement, is being spoken by a single customer to indicate their personal experience (that others may in fact share) during the December rush, and not a broader commentary on the capacity or duties of other genders. For example, it could indicate that in this customer's household, assistance is not being provided by other members of the family such as aunts, uncles, grandparents, teenagers or adult children. Furthermore, the Practice Note states that the rules do not "prevent ads from featuring one gender only" and the Panel has previously commented that there is no obligation for an advertiser to include all genders in every advertisement (case 0210-23). As referred to above, the Advertisement was a deliberate effort to market to, recognise and honour women, and this approach does not inherently discriminate against or vilify any gender.

For completeness, the Advertisement ran from 30 October 2025 until 23 December 2025, and is no longer being circulated at the time of response. Noting the Advertisement received close to 6 million impressions during its run time and BIG W received no further complaints, we contend that most of the community would not share the complainant's interpretation of its message.

Given the Advertisement does not depict material in a way which treats women, or any other person or section of the community, unfairly or less favourably, or humiliates, intimidates or incites hatred, contempt or ridicule of same, the Advertisement cannot be found in breach of Section 2.1.

Other parts of Section 2

The Advertisement is also not in breach of any other section of Section 2 of the Code as it does not employ sexual appeal (section 2.2), does not present or portray violence (section 2.3), does not reference or portray sex, sexuality or nudity (section 2.4), does not use inappropriate language (section 2.5), does not depict material contrary to prevailing community standards on health and safety (section 2.6) and because the Advertisement is clearly distinguishable as advertising (section 2.7).

Conclusion

BIG W submits that the Advertisement does not breach any part of section 2 of the AANA Code of Ethics. We reaffirm our commitment to the AANA Codes and community standards, and respectfully request that the Complaint be dismissed.