

Inquiry into the Australian Film & Literature Classification Scheme

Update on Women's Health Victoria's verbal submission made on 7 April 2011

Women's Health Victoria



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We thank you for the opportunity to provide further information on this inquiry. Women's Health Victoria has carried out a brief internet search in relation to two questions posed to us by the Committee on 7 April 2011. This response is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis of advertising codes in other countries and their effectiveness. The questions were:

- Are there examples of advertising codes in other countries that deal with the objectification of women?
- What is Women's Health Victoria's position on the recent Bardot and Sprite advertisements?

Example clauses of advertising codes regarding the objectification of women

The following is a list of clauses from advertising codes around the (English-speaking) world that contain specific sections relating to the representation of women. The United States and the United Kingdom do not appear to have clauses relating specifically to the representation of women in advertising.

Each country, at brief glance, appears to have a similar system to Australia – codes of practice administered through self-regulation, some of which may intersect with national classification schemes and advertising law.

New Zealand (New Zealand Advertising Standards Authority)

Code for People in Advertising

Available at: http://www.asa.co.nz/code_people.php

Basic principles:

4. Stereotypes may be used to simplify the process of communication in relation to both the product offered and the intended consumer. However, advertisements should not use stereotypes in the portrayal of the role, character and behaviour of groups of people in society which, taking into account generally prevailing community standards, is reasonably likely to cause serious or widespread offence, hostility, contempt, abuse or ridicule.
5. Advertisements should not employ sexual appeal in a manner which is exploitative and degrading of any individual or group of people in society to promote the sale of products or services. In particular people should not be portrayed in a manner which uses sexual appeal simply to draw attention to an unrelated product. Children must not be portrayed in a manner which treats them as objects of sexual appeal.

Ireland (Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland)

Code of Standards for Advertising, Promotional and Direct Marketing in Ireland
Available at: <http://www.asai.ie/code.asp>

Decency and Propriety

- 2.17 Marketing communications should respect the principle of the equality of men and women. They should avoid sex stereotyping and any exploitation or demeaning of men and women. Where appropriate, marketing communications should use generic terms that include both the masculine and feminine gender; for example, the term 'business executive' covers both men and women.
- 2.18 To avoid causing offence, marketing communications should be responsive to the diversity in Irish society and marketing communications which portray or refer to people within the groups mentioned in 2.16 should:
 - a) respect the principle of equality in any depiction of these groups;
 - b) fully respect their dignity and not subject them to ridicule or offensive humour;
 - c) avoid stereotyping and negative or hurtful images;
 - d) not exploit them for unrelated marketing purposes;
 - e) not ridicule or exploit religious beliefs, symbols, rites or practices.
- 2.19 Advertisers should take account of public sensitivities in the preparation and publication of marketing communications and avoid the exploitation of sexuality and the use of coarseness and undesirable innuendo. They should not use offensive or provocative copy or images merely to attract attention. Marketing communications that may be considered by some to be distasteful, might not necessarily conflict with 2.15 above. Nevertheless, advertisers are urged to consider public sensitivities before using potentially offensive material.

South Africa (Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa)

Code of Advertising Practice
Available at: http://www.asasa.org.za/Default.aspx?mnu_id=12

- 3.5 Gender
Gender stereotyping or negative gender portrayal shall not be permitted in advertising, unless in the opinion of the ASA, such stereotyping or portrayal is reasonable and justifiable in an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom.

Canada (Advertising Standards Canada)

Canadian Code of Advertising Standards

Available at: <http://www.adstandards.com/en/Standards/canCodeOfAdStandards.aspx>

14. Unacceptable Depictions and Portrayals

Advertisements shall not:

- (c) demean, denigrate or disparage any identifiable person, group of persons, firm, organization, industrial or commercial activity, profession, product or service or attempt to bring it or them into public contempt or ridicule;
- (d) undermine human dignity; or display obvious indifference to, or encourage, gratuitously and without merit, conduct or attitudes that offend the standards of public decency prevailing among a significant segment of the population.

Bardot and Sprite advertisements

In relation to the Bardot and Sprite advertisements referred to in the verbal submission, Women's Health Victoria has been unable to locate images of these. However even if these advertisements were found to objectify women, the Advertising Standards Bureau, through the *Australian Association of National Advertisers' Advertiser Code of Ethics*, would be unable to recommend the restriction of their distribution. The only relevant criteria of the Code would be 'discrimination' or 'vilification'. Objectification is distinct to these grounds and would need to be included as a separate criteria for advertisements such as these to be covered. The fact that the Advertising Standards Bureau did not find that the advertisements breached the Code is not indicative of the ineffectiveness of the Bureau, or interpretations of community perceptions, simply that objectification is not currently covered by the Code. The different clauses listed above provide useful examples that could also work in Australia.