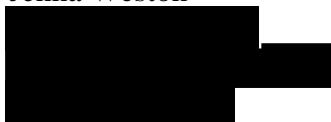


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To the House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs

Submission regarding the inquiry into the regulation of billboard and outdoor advertising

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission as part of the inquiry into the regulation of billboard and outdoor advertising. I would like to address the terms of reference with regard to community concerns about large-scale public advertising, the *Australian Association of National Advertisers' Advertiser Code of Ethics* (the Code of Ethics), and the role of the Advertising Standards Bureau (ASB).

Community concerns about large-scale public advertising

As billboard advertising is visible to everyone, it is impossible to avoid its message and imagery. People have no choice about whether they see it or not – they are forced to view it when they go about their everyday lives. As such, billboards and other forms of outdoor advertising (ie. bus shelters, vehicles) should not be used to promote brothels, sex shops, strip clubs and pornography, particularly because they can be seen by children and there is no way of rating them for viewing by mature audiences. Further, billboards and other forms of outdoor advertising should not objectify and sexualise women and girls. It is an increasingly common practice to include sexual images of women in order to capture attention in advertising, when there is no relation to what is being advertised. Such advertising shapes attitudes and behavior in society, particularly to those who are impressionable, like children and young adults. Hyper-sexualised messages entrench the idea that women are only good for one thing – their sexual availability and use.

The Australian Association of National Advertisers' Advertiser Code of Ethics and the role of the Advertising Standards Bureau

The way the current ASB system works, there is no incentive for advertisers to change their behavior, because there is no penalty for breaching the code. This results in repeat offending, such as AMI (advertising sexual enhancement products for men – see <http://news.ninemsn.com.au/article.aspx?id=663170> and <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/queensland/hold-your-load-billboards-to-come-down-20101129-18dik.html> for examples of their repeated breaches of the Code) and Wicked Vans (see <http://www.theage.com.au/news/news/wicked-sexist-slogans-offensive/2008/07/21/1216492321927.html>). In effect, advertisers can comply with the board's ruling by removing the offensive advertisement, only to replace it with something else just as offensive.

Furthermore, the advertising does not need to be censored or removed while

complaints are being considered by the ASB, so that, by the time the ruling has been made, the campaign may have run its course and the advertiser may have profited from any controversy stirred up by the advertisement and complaints. For example, I have previously made a complaint to the Advertising Standards Board about a billboard for Calvin Klein jeans, which had overtones of sexual violence towards women (see <http://122.99.94.111/cases/0411-10.pdf>). While the complaint was upheld in the end, the billboard remained in place for several weeks until the decision was reached by the ASB. Furthermore, a search of ASB case determinations on Calvin Klein advertising shows that complaints for five other ads were received, and subsequently dismissed, thus indicating the community concern about the style of advertising used by Calvin Klein, and the inability of the current Code of Ethics to deal with these concerns.

Consequently, it must be realised that the Code of Ethics needs to be amended, because it is inadequate to deal with the increasingly pornified imagery that is becoming available in public spaces. The Code of Ethics needs to reflect that this increase in pornified imagery is a form of sexual harassment, and to recognise and reflect the research which shows that the objectification of women frequently employed by advertisers threatens the equality and well being of women and girls. This research indicates that the objectification of women has a negative impact on the health and well being of women and girls, and can lead to self-esteem issues, eating disorders, and an obsession with appearance and sexual allure. Some of this research can be found here:

https://www.tai.org.au/documents/dp_fulltext/DP90.pdf

<https://www.tai.org.au/index.php?q=node%2F19&pubid=433&act=display>

<http://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/girls/report.aspx>

<http://collectiveshout.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/sexualisation-young-people-1.pdf>

http://www.girlscouts.org/research/pdf/beauty_redefined_factsheet.pdf

For example, I recently submitted a complaint to the ASB about a sexualized image on the cover of a Rivers catalogue, which was dismissed as the ASB deemed that it did not breach the current Code of Ethics (see <http://122.99.94.111/cases/0003-11.pdf>). However, the image on the cover of the catalogue is not referenced inside the catalogue, so it is obviously designed merely to capture attention, rather than portraying the wearing of any of the items that are being advertised. With the title above the picture “get excited”, the image is clearly intended to be sexual, and it objectifies women by portraying them merely as objects of sexual desire. As discussed above, this kind of sexualisation has a negative impact on the girls and women who are forced to view these forms of advertising everyday, and which will not be changed because the current Code of Ethics does not deal with these issues.

I hope that you will give serious consideration to these matters. Once again, thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely,
Jenna Weston.