

## Broadcasting Code of Practice

Although I have been disturbed on several occasions by the nature of material I have seen on television, one particular instance forced me out of my lethargy to lodge a written complaint.

The incident concerned an advertisement which showed a young person eating popped potato balls from a packet by throwing them up in the air and attempting to catch them in their mouth. I knew this was a dangerous practice (often used with peanuts) since I am aware of a person who choked and died while doing so; medical authorities have warned against this practice. Further, in my home I was with a visiting child who (unbeknown to me) adopted the same dangerous procedure with small ice balls. The child came to me red faced and obviously distressed but unable to indicate what the problem was since she was choking and could not speak. Fortunately, in the process of collapsing, she doubled up and this assisted in dislodging the obstruction.

I lodged a complaint with these details to the Advertising Standards Bureau. The reply was that the advertiser did not consider the activity harmful, it was a fun way to eat food and the complaint was dismissed. I then raised the matter with the President of the Australian Medical Association. Recognising the seriousness of the issue, the President immediately wrote personally directly to the advertiser confirming the dangerous nature of the practice and requesting the advertisement be withdrawn.

These details were then forwarded to the Bureau where the Board then simply said it appreciated the concern and that "general public attitudes do not always agree with that of individual personal opinion and decisions are based on what it perceives are prevailing community attitudes". Such a statement was totally irrelevant since they had the medical evidence of the AMA condemning such a procedure. If the view of such a specialist organisation is ignored on a medical issue, then how can we have any faith in the effectiveness of the code of practice. Community prevailing attitudes are frequently wrong and cannot be invoked when dangerous behaviour is being promoted despite the advice of experts.

On this basis alone, I can appreciate why others to whom I have spoken have little faith in the complaint process and why alleged standards are merely the whims of unrepresentative members of the arts, media etc whose subjective judgements bear no affinity with the majority of the community. In fact, it appears they have free reign to dictate and socially engineer the situation so that they establish the norms. One would hardly let the prison inmates determine on behalf of the community the acceptable standards for such issues as punishment, rehabilitation, parole, probation etc despite their involvement in these matters.

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