



ADVERTISING
STANDARDS
BUREAU

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Case Report

1	Case Number	0032/14
2	Advertiser	Mardi Gras Sydney
3	Product	Sport and Leisure
4	Type of Advertisement / media	Print
5	Date of Determination	14/05/2014
6	DETERMINATION	Upheld - Modified or Discontinued

ISSUES RAISED

- 2.1 - Discrimination or Vilification Gender
- 2.2 - Objectification Exploitative and degrading
- 2.2 - Objectification Exploitative and degrading - women
- 2.4 - Sex/sexuality/nudity S/S/N - general

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

Avant Card postcard for #There's only oneparty. The party.org.au. The image by Elvis Di-Fazio depicts an oiled and naked man sitting on the back of a female dressed in black underwear and fish-net stockings. They are both on a kitchen bench.

THE COMPLAINT

A sample of comments which the complainant/s made regarding this advertisement included the following:

The advertisement is promoting the Sydney Mardi-gras (there is no text to identify the product on the front of the postcard only the image. It is only on the verso that the #theresonlyoneparty The party.org.au" appears). However most people - especially young people - may not know that this organisation is not promoting parties in general but specifically promotes an event. The postcard's visual message would be read by any reasonable person as an image of a submissive female in a domestic kitchen setting being dominated by a male in a sexually overt manner and that this is acceptable 'party time' behaviour. Visual images are highly potent in communicating messages and this image promotes the sexual domination of females that reflects the message that this is acceptable and normal behaviour. My concern is that this postcard is freely available to people of any age including children in cafes, retail outlets, theatres etc and that it sends a message that

Australian society tolerates - indeed promotes - sexual domination of women and that the ideal female is one who is willing to go down on all fours to enable a man to ride her. I am not complaining about a female's choice of sexual practices and do not suggest that this act in itself necessarily disempowering to females, it is the context - a postcard image with freely available without any context. I have no complaints about Avant Card Company who provide a fantastic and creative service promoting arts, not-for-profit and other organisations. I have no problems with avant cards publishing images that challenge and confront but in this instant the advertisement which is openly accessible to all ages is clearly breaches community standards in terms of the sexualisation of women. My complaint is that in this instance this freely available card sends the wrong message to society and to young females and males in particular who are highly influenced by the media. The fact that the meaning of the message may not be the domination of a female - as it promotes the Mardi Gras - is irrelevant. The potent visual message says to young women and girls that their role is to be sexually dominated and that their value is as a sexual being - the explicit objectification of females without context in readily available media product promotes an overt message that is sexist. The normalising of female submission and the objectification of females through highly potent visual media products that are freely available to the general population and can be unacceptable. The Avant card model of advertising and promoting means that individuals value the material product - the postcard - in that they take the (free) object and the message continues to have meaning and in this case that is highly problematic. I do understand the irony of the image my complaint is that the visual message sends an overt message about female submission that out of context is sexist and offensive and impacts on the self-worth of females and males.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

Comments which the advertiser made in response to the complainant/s regarding this advertisement include the following:

I am writing in response to a letter received on 24 January with regard to a complaint received about an Avant postcard promoting a Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras event.

I apologise for the lateness of this response, we are a small not-for-profit organisation which has recently undergone a restructure, which has led to reallocation of workloads and delays in some areas.

The image in question was one of a series of 3 postcards distributed through the Avant Card network, designed to promote the annual Mardi Gras Party. Attached are proofs of all 3 postcards to demonstrate the content in which the image appeared.

The image depicts a naked man straddling a clothed woman, in the context of a party setting. The image was in no way intended to demean or degrade women, or to suggest any sexual subordination or domination. The woman featured in the image is renowned burlesque artist Lillian Starr whose work challenges traditional notions of gender and sexuality through performance, and Lillian was a key contributor in devising the image in which she appeared. The image was shot by a highly regarded photographer Elvis di Fazio as part of a broader series of images depicting a highly stylised party scene. The three images used in the postcard campaign were selected for their visual impact and were intended to be attention-catching. I accept that in isolation the image in question may have been confronting for

some people and that the intent of the image could be misinterpreted without the appropriate context.

As a community driven organisation which exists to promote equal rights and challenges discrimination of the basis of gender or sexuality, we are always perceptive to the views of the community and encourage people to share their views on how we operate. While we remain confident that our intent behind using this image was sound, receiving this thorough and well thought out complaint has led to much discussion and will certainly inform our decision-making in the future.

THE DETERMINATION

The Advertising Standards Board (“Board”) considered whether this advertisement breaches Section 2 of the Advertiser Code of Ethics (the “Code”).

The Board noted the complainant’s concern that the advertisement depicts sexualised material which is inappropriate for the medium.

The Board viewed the advertisement and noted the advertiser’s response.

The Board considered whether the advertisement complied with Section 2.1 of the Code which requires that 'advertisements shall not portray 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 preference, religion, disability, mental illness or political belief.'

The Board noted that the advertisement is an Avant Card postcard for the Mardi Gras. The image depicts a naked man sitting on the back of the burlesque performer, Lillian Starr, dressed in black underwear and fish-net stockings. They are both on a kitchen bench. The back of the postcard reads #There's only one party. The party.org.au.

The Board noted that it had previously considered an advertisement for the Purl Bar (ref: 0442/11) that showed a woman on all fours with a saddle on her back. In this matter, the Board considered that, “while the advertisement does depict a woman in a pose that may be considered by members of the community as demeaning toward women, the image does not expose any inappropriate parts of the woman and is a stylized image recognized by many as an iconic fashion image. The Board noted that the pose of the model is provoking but not inappropriate for the likely small audience.”

Consistent with the decision above, the Board determined that the image of the man on top of the woman’s back in the current matter was highly stylised and reflective of both parties happily taking part in the scenario. The Board considered that the material depicted did not discriminate against a section of the community on account of gender and did not breach Section 2.1 of the Code.

The Board then considered whether the advertisement was in breach of Section 2.2 of the Code. Section 2.2 of the Code states: “Advertising or marketing communications should not employ sexual appeal in a manner which is exploitative and degrading of any individual or group of people.”

The Board noted that the image features a naked man riding on the back of a woman and raising his hand to smack her bottom, similar to the action of a jockey whipping a horse to make it gallop faster. The Board noted that on its own, the image has no clear connection to the Mardi Gras and that the depiction of someone on all fours in this manner is an image consistently considered by the community as a sexualised image suggestive of one person dominating another.

The Board considered that the image did employ sexual appeal in a manner which is exploitative and degrading and that it did breach Section 2.2 of the Code.

The Board then considered whether the advertisement was in breach of Section 2.4 of the Code. Section 2.4 of the Code states: “Advertising or Marketing Communications shall treat sex, sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to the relevant audience”.

The Board noted that the avant card postcards are distributed widely throughout cafes, restaurants and other venues to promote special events. The Board noted that this image was only one of a series of images to promote the Mardi Gras. The Board noted that the postcard did not clearly identify the Mardi Gras as the event being promoted and that the images showed no connection to an event of this nature.

The Board considered that the image of a naked man on top of a woman dressed in fishnet stockings and heels was a sexualised image that could easily viewed by children and by a broad section of the community and that, in the board’s view, that community is likely to consider the image highly sexualised.

The Board considered that the advertisement did not treat the issue of sex, sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to the relevant audience and determined that the advertisement did breach Section 2.4 of the Code.

Finding that the advertisement did not breach the Code on other grounds, the Board upheld the complaint.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE TO DETERMINATION

We acknowledge the complaint and advise the card is no longer being distributed and this image will not be used again in the future in inappropriate venues.

