



Case Report

1	Case Number	0356/14
2	Advertiser	Alcoholics Anonymous
3	Product	Community Awareness
4	Type of Advertisement / media	TV - Free to air
5	Date of Determination	10/09/2014
6	DETERMINATION	Dismissed

ISSUES RAISED

2.1 - Discrimination or Vilification Gender

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

A woman awakes next to an almost empty glass of wine and wine bottle on its side, on a bedside table. In the background a man appears back to screen adjusting his shirt. He gathers keys and wallet/phone from a dressing table and in the reflection of a mirror leaves the room. The woman looks around and with a confused expression, sees the man leaving.

The screen is superimposed with a caption reading: Q: Does your drinking cause you shame ? The woman is seen now alone in the bedroom with another caption superimposed: A:A That caption merges into a website address www.AA.org.au

THE COMPLAINT

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

The ad is sexist. It suggests that a woman's sexuality is something that women should feel shame over. The male in the ad was not treated as though his actions were wrong, yet the woman was made out to have committed an act that is wrong and shameful. This was made clear by displaying a caption that said "does your drinking make you feel shame" whilst the camera focused on the woman. It is misogynistic, sexist, and perpetuates the idea that a woman's sexuality is somehow inherently wrong. Completely offensive and inappropriate.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

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

The General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous Australia submits the following response to a complaint received by your Bureau about a Community Service Announcement.

Our commercial was created explicitly to attract the attention of young women who drink beyond their control, often with dangerous consequences to their health and safety. They are one of the most highly vulnerable and at-risk groups of people within the community. All evidence points to the fact that 'unplanned' regrettable sexual encounters are a primary stimulus for women to consider seeking help. The key emotional driver is feelings of shame and remorse. We know this to be true from first hand accounts related at AA meetings. It was this common 'rock bottom' experience that informed the advertising agency creative brief, which led to the creation of this advertisement.

We would like to draw attention to two key matters. The advertisement does not ask the viewer to pass judgement on either the man or woman in the depicted scenario. The question 'Does your drinking cause you shame?' is on screen at a point when the young woman is clearly considering her own response to the situation, not the man's or anyone else's. It is also important to note that it is not her sexuality that is identified as the potential source of the shame, but rather the lack of control caused by alcohol (her "drinking").

We have had nothing but positive feedback about the commercial previously and know that it has been effective in encouraging women to seek assistance from our organisation. The fact that it has been running for several years without any complaint whatsoever would suggest that this recent objection is possibly an extreme interpretation of the depicted scenario.

We strongly request that the complaint be rejected. This is a commercial that has helped many people address their problems with alcohol misuse and has the potential to help many more people for years to come.

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 is sexist in its suggestion that a woman should be ashamed of a sexual encounter but a man shouldn't.

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 the advertiser's response that the target market for this campaign is young women who "drink beyond their control, often with dangerous consequences to their health and safety".

The Board noted that an advertiser can choose to direct its product to a specific target group or gender and considered in this instance that the focus on the advertisement is on the potential consequences of excess alcohol consumption and how the young woman may feel after this rather than the sex act which is inferred to have taken place.

The Board noted that the advertiser is focusing on a message about excess alcohol to its target audience of young women and considered that the lack of comment on the man's behaviour in the advertisement does not amount, in the Board's view, to a suggestion about men and casual sex, and does not suggest that men would not feel shame for their sexual encounters when drunk.

The Board considered that the advertisement did not portray or depict material which discriminates against or vilifies a person on account of gender.

The Board determined that the advertisement did not breach Section 2.1 of the Code. Finding that the advertisement did not breach the Code on other grounds, the Board dismissed the complaint.