

10 September 2010

Independent Code reviewer  
AANA Code Review

By Email: [codereview@aana.com.au](mailto:codereview@aana.com.au)

Dear Code Reviewer,

**Re: Review of the Code of Ethics**

I would like to congratulate the AANA for allowing the Australian public to contribute to the review of the code of ethics.

I write to you on behalf of Maribyrnong City Council's, White Ribbon Day Group and as the Acting General Manager of Community Wellbeing. We are calling on advertisers to commit to depicting women and girls in positive respectful ways. We strongly encourage the AANA to consider the creation of a specialised code to address gender equity. We support an external regulation of adherence to the code of ethics.

Maribyrnong City Council has a strong commitment to creating a community in which women are able to live free from violence and fear of violence, demonstrated through the Maribyrnong Respect and Equity Project: Preventing Violence Against Women.

Victorian Health Promotion Foundation has identified in order to achieve this goal we need to;

- Create societies in which there are strong regulatory frameworks supporting gender equity,
- Promote positive portrayals of women (e.g. in advertising) and
- Support communities which foster the development of healthy and respectful relationships between men and women.

Violence against women is the leading contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15–44, being responsible for more of the disease burden than many well known risk factors such as high blood pressure, smoking and obesity. The statistics are horrific. Over their lifetimes, almost one in five Australian women will be sexually assaulted. Almost one in three will be physically assaulted. Almost one in four children in Australia will witness violence against their mother or stepmother. Less than one third of victims will report it. The cost of this violence to the Australian economy has been estimated at \$13.6 billion in 2009.

The causes of violence are complex. However, accumulated evidence from around the world suggests that the key contributing factors are;

- Unequal power relations between women and men
- Adherence to rigid gender stereotypes and
- Broader cultures of violence

Many current images of women and girls in advertisements confirm stereotypes, cause offence, and promote a negative body image. Sexualised images stereotype women and often convey strong messages about gender relationships and a belief in male dominance. These messages are shown to promote male violence against women.

There is a strong relationship between individual men's perpetration of violence and their attitudes about gender roles and relationships. Cultural values about gender roles and relations at the broader community and societal levels are also influential in the perpetration of violence.

Specifically, studies demonstrate that the prevalence of men's violence toward women is higher in societies where;

- Manhood is culturally defined in terms of dominance, toughness and male honour
- Gender roles are more rigidly defined; and
- There is a relatively high degree of gender segregation.

*A Right to Respect: Victoria's Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women* identifies media, arts and culture as a powerful tool for social change. The media and popular culture play a hugely important role in transmitting social norms and beliefs. Given that the media can both reflect and challenge society, they can either reinforce or undermine the attitudes and norms that contribute to violence against women.

The representation of women and girls can powerfully influence the way the role of women is viewed (particularly in relation to men). The recent National Survey on Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women 2009 highlighted that attitudes and beliefs are central to the contexts in which violence against women occurs. Violence supportive attitudes work to justify, excuse, minimise or hide physical or sexual violence against women. The report also highlights that community attitudes can change and that violence against women is preventable.

The media has a unique opportunity and enormous potential to promote respectful relationships and build non-violent gender equitable communities. This responsibility resonates with the articulated objectives of the AANA code of ethics, however could be strengthened by including reference to ensure that advertisements are respectful.

We support the aim of the code to promote ethical and responsible advertising and to ensure that it continues to meet community expectations. We trust that the revised code will articulate best practice standards through modelling, promoting and facilitating equal, respectful and non-violent gender relations.

Thank you for the opportunity to have input into the review of the code of ethics. For further correspondence please contact the Respect and Equity Coordinator, Emma Wilkinson on [Emma.Wilkinson@maribyrnong.vic.gov.au](mailto:Emma.Wilkinson@maribyrnong.vic.gov.au)

Yours sincerely,



**Andrew Day**  
**Acting General Manager Community Wellbeing**