



Advertising Standards Authority  
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Ms S Douglas  
AHRC Centre for Law  
Gender and Sexuality  
Kent Law School  
University of Kent  
Canterbury  
CT2 7NS

Please Quote: A09-89627

23 March 2009

Dear Ms Douglas

### **Department for Work and Pensions**

Thank you for your recent complaint; I'm sorry to hear that this ad has caused you concern.

I should state at the outset that we don't consider the ads you refer to as part of the Department for Work and Pensions "targeting benefit thieves" campaign to be in breach of our Code. Let me explain. The ASA Council has recently considered similar complaints about this ad but concluded that it was unlikely to be seen as stigmatising or undermining an identifiable group of people. It considered the appearance of the people in the ad to be incidental. The ads are unlikely, in our view, to be seen as targeting or labelling those in receipt of state benefit as "cheats" or "lazy" or imply that all people who receive benefits are criminals. In our view, most people will understand that the campaign seeks to highlight that the Government is tackling benefit fraud and monitoring those they suspect. We accept that some may find the tone of the campaign and the imagery distasteful and perhaps threatening; however, we don't think that it is likely to offend most that see it or encourage people to think they are under surveillance even if they are innocent. We don't consider the imagery in the ad likely to be seen as encouraging or condoning state violence, as presenting surveillance as a solution to wider social problems or as compromising the dignity of those on lower incomes.

I understand that you are also concerned that the ad may, through its imagery, be seen as referring to domestic violence. As I have indicated, we accept that some may not agree with the tone of the ad but we don't think the "target" image is likely to be seen as encouraging violence against those on benefits. I understand your concerns about the various initiatives to tackle violence against women, but I'm afraid we don't think the ad is likely to be interpreted as referring to domestic violence: it is clear the ad concerns benefit fraud only. I understand that there are a number of interpretations that can be extrapolated

Chairman Rt Hon Lord Smith of Finsbury • Director General Christopher Graham  
ASA Council Alison Goodman • Andrew Motion • Colin Philpott • David Harker • Diana Whitworth • Elizabeth Fagan • Gareth Jones • James Best • Jean Coussins • Louisa Bolch • Neil Watts • Nigel Walmsley • Sally Cartwright • Sunil Gadhia • Susan Murray

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from the imagery in the ad, but we must consider what most people are likely to infer from it. In this case, although we understand your concerns, we don't think they are likely to be shared by most that see the ads. I should point out to you that this is the only complaint we have received which makes the connection with domestic violence which seems to indicate that yours is not an interpretation being formulated by most people. If you feel that the imagery of the ad is inconsistent with the Government's strategy you should contact the relevant department and notify them of your concerns.

I can assure you that violence in advertising is an issue we take seriously and we judge each individual complaint on its own merits. As you can see from the attached report, we have upheld against a number of ads on this very issue. Whilst we understand, and sympathise, with your concerns we don't think the ads in this campaign are likely to breach our Code and will therefore take no further action.

I understand that this decision may disappoint you but I would nonetheless like to thank you for taking the time to contact us with your concerns. You may wish to search our website where you will be able to find our recent report on violence in advertising which you may find of interest.

Yours sincerely



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The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) and the Advertising Standards Authority (Broadcast) Ltd will use the information you have given us to deal with your complaint. If your complaint falls under the remit of a different regulatory body, we will normally pass it on to that body. If you are seeking suppression from an advertiser's database or have not received goods or a refund, we will pass the details of your complaint to the advertiser so it can take action.

We will not contact you for marketing purposes unless you have given us permission to do so. You can register at the 'Keep Me Informed' section of our website for communications you would like to receive from us, and can amend your choices at any time.

We would like you to be available to take part in the ASA's customer satisfaction research. On our behalf, an independent research company contacts complainants by e-mail. Please let us know if you do NOT want to participate in that research by emailing [data.protection@asa.org.uk](mailto:data.protection@asa.org.uk) or writing to Advertising Standards Authority, Freepost LON20659, LONDON, WC1V 6BR.

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