



BCV10 - Western Victoria

Violence in program promotions

The complaint

The complainant alleged that a promotion for an episode of an M classified program, *Charmed* was too menacing for broadcast during a G classified animal documentary, *Sandra Sully Presents: Who's Aping Who*.

The promotion for *Charmed* was broadcast on two occasions between 7.30 p.m. and 8.30 p.m. on 2 July 2001 by Victorian Broadcasting Network (1983) Pty Ltd (BCV 10).

The promotion consisted of a number of images that were broadcast in rapid succession. It featured a dark-haired young woman turning into an older woman with bright red lips, fanged teeth and frizzy, blond hair. The woman/witch screams when attacked by a male demon-like character who threatens her and then attempts to strangle her. The demon is pushed away by the witch, after which he flies through the air, landing against a wall.

Relevant code of practice

Program promotions are subject to more stringent content restrictions than programs, due to promotions' lack of context or storyline.

The relevant code provisions are at Section 3 of the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice (the code):

Restrictions in G Viewing Periods and in Certain Other G Programs

3.8 Special restrictions apply to the content of program promotions in 'G' viewing periods, or in G programs which start at 3.30 p.m. on a weekday, or which are broadcast between 7.30 p.m. and 8.30 p.m. on any day. All such program promotions must comply with the 'G' classifications requirements set out in clause 2.11, and in addition must include no material which involves any of the following:

...

3.8.2 punches, blows or other physical or psychological violence against people or animals (other than in sequences which clearly depict comedy or slapstick behaviour);

...

3.8.7 anything which has more than a very low sense of threat or menace;

...

The relevant parts of clause 2.11 are:

2.11 Material classified G is not necessarily intended for children but it must be very mild in impact and must not contain any matter likely to be unsuitable for children to watch without supervision.

The classification requirements concerning violence in G material are set out in code subclause 2.11.1. It states:

2.11.1 *Violence*: Visual depiction of physical and psychological violence must be very restrained. The use of weapons, threatening language, sounds or special effects must have a very low sense of threat or menace, must be strictly limited to the storyline or program context, must be infrequent and must not show violent behaviour to be acceptable or desirable.

The decision

The ABA determined that the licensee breached clauses 2.11 and 3.8, and subclauses 3.8.2, 3.8.7 and 2.11.1 of the code by broadcasting the promotions for *Charmed* in a G classified program.

In the ABA's opinion, the promotion was too brief to provide a context that would place the characters and their actions in a fantasy, comic or slapstick genre, particularly for viewers unfamiliar with the M classified program. Consequently the ABA considered that children watching the G classified nature program may

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have perceived the witch and the demon featured in the *Charmed* promotion to be real and menacing people.

The witch's actions which caused the demon to fly through the air and slam into the wall, and the demon's attempt to strangle the witch were therefore determined to be material that involved physical violence against a person in breach of subclause 3.8.2.

The ABA considered that the characters' physical features were made more powerful and confronting in the instances where a character was seen in menacing or threatening situations, by the fact that their face or body filled the screen. These elements, emphasised by the two protagonists' vivid makeup and strange hairstyles, contributed to a sense of threat and menace which was greater than 'very low'. As a result, the promotion breached subclause 3.8.7.

The ABA determined that the *Charmed* promotion breached clause 2.11 and subclause 2.11.1 for the following reasons:

- the promotion contained material that was not very mild in impact and was too threatening to be suitable for children to watch without supervision (clause 2.11);
- the witch's actions which caused the demon to fly through the air and slam against the wall, and the demon's attempt to strangle the witch amounted to visual depictions of physical violence that were not very restrained (subclause 2.11.1); and
- the scenes which included the witch's screams and the demon's threat to murder her included language and sounds and special effects that had more than a very low sense of threat or menace (2.11.1).

As the promotion did not comply with clause 2.11, its broadcast was in breach of clause 3.8.

Action taken

BCV 10 stated that, while it did not accept the ABA's findings, they had been notified to the classifiers at Ten Network Pty Ltd (Ten), who make decisions in relation to promotions on behalf of BCV, and that 'the Ten classifiers...have resolved to approach the classification of future 'G' classified *Charmed* promotions with reference to this finding'...

The ABA recommended to BCV 10 and Ten that the findings should be applied to all promotions for M programs that are broadcast during G classified programs, and not just to promotions for *Charmed*.

As this is the first time a breach of this nature had been found against the licensee of BCV 10, the ABA decided not to take any further action.

