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Registered Charity No. 1089547 – Company Registration No. 3869893
Honorary Patrons – Lord Cotter, Ian McNicholl, John Penrose MP, Sara Westle and Erin Pizzey

Advertising Standards Authority
Mid City Place,
71 High Holborn,
London
WC1V 6QT

2 May 2016

Dear ASA

Re: BT Infinity Advertisement (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ejQqKZXcRWg>)

I am complaining on behalf of a domestic abuse charity, The ManKind Initiative, which provides support to male victims of domestic abuse.

I wish to make a complaint primarily under 4.9 and 4.10 of the Broadcast code.

The complaint centres on the slap in the face that the principal male actor receives 15 seconds into the advertisement in the context of treating this as a comedic incident.

This is based on reinforcing negative gender stereotypes, double standards in how violence against men and women is seen as being acceptable by advertisers, treating violence against a man in this context as being funny and the harm done to those men who are victims of domestic abuse or having left still bear the emotional scars.

A significant problem the charity's beneficiaries and society in general faces is the belief that somehow it is acceptable for a woman to hit a man in this way, when it is rightly unacceptable for a man to hit a woman in this way. In an equal society, it is a double standard that should not be tolerated when both acts are equally as wrong and it feeds a wrongful gender stereotype.

One test the ASA has to apply is whether BT would have broadcast an advertisement where a female principal actor was slapped in the exactly the same way by a man and in the same comedic context. If BT would not have broadcast such an incident (and we believe it should not), the question has to be why do they think it is acceptable when it is a man who is slapped?

The societal context for the charity making this complaint is that one of the most significant barriers that male victims of domestic abuse have is that they fear not being believed or taken seriously by friends, family, work colleagues and society in general when they are a victim of (domestic) violence carried out by a woman.

In fact, a number of social role-reversal experiments and the feedback our helpline regularly receives proves that society indeed does not treat such violence as an equal to a man carrying out domestic violence against a woman.

The upshot of this is that many men do not recognise they are victims of domestic violence, do not come forward to get help, their supports networks (friends, family etc) do not recognise they are a victim and also society in general does not recognise or challenge this as domestic violence/abuse.

The advert reconfirms this societal view with the direct consequence that it reinforces society's view that this type of incident is acceptable when a man is the victim. In real life, if a man is being slapped by his female partner, why will she think it is wrong and unacceptable when an advert thinks it is comedic and why would he think anyone would take him seriously if he complained. In fact, the advert makes out that it is the principal male actor's fault.

The last point to the complaint is the context of treating an incident like this as somehow funny. This will be upsetting to those men who are currently victims and those that have survived and still bear the emotional scars. For those men, this type of incident treated as comedy will reinforce the fact that what they are going through or went through was not serious, when of course it was.

Many years ago MFI had complaints upheld by the ASA for an advert where a man was slapped by his wife in the same comedic context. We had hoped that we would never see such an advert again, which adds to the disappointment that BT have chosen to produce such as advert.

Thank you for your time and we look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely

Mark Brooks

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