

COMPLAINT NUMBER	20/333
ADVERTISER	ASB Bank Limited
ADVERTISEMENT	ASB Bank Limited Television
DATE OF MEETING	11 August 2020
OUTCOME	No Grounds to Proceed

Advertisement: The ASB Bank television advertisement shows 'Big Ben' and his fictional journey. The advertisement states that Ben was expected to do great things. Throughout the advertisement, friends of Ben suggest various different jobs they believe he would be good at such as being a bouncer, an All Black or an actor. Eventually Ben decides his own fate by becoming a watchmaker and opening his own store. The advertisement ends with the text and voiceover: "Whatever life you choose we can help you live it, one step ahead".

The Chair ruled there were no grounds for the complaint to proceed.

Complaint: <https://youtu.be/zVZEID5IKIQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zVZEID5IKIQ&feature=youtu.be>

This advert (copied above for reference) has been shown several times via online platforms including both TVNZ OnDemand, and Three Now. I specifically saw it on March 8th 2020 in the evening on both forums.

I find this advert racist, and guilty of perpetuating racial stereotypes. The 'brown' character of Ben is constantly being given advice from predominantly 'white' people. He has very little to say over his own destiny, and is given very few words by the script writers, particularly in comparison to the other characters who should technically be secondary to him in the story-line portrayed. This is especially clear in the shortened version of the advert which seems to be more often used in the online platforms I have observed it on.

This leads on to the types of careers suggested to Ben throughout the advert. He is suggested to take up sport, acting (a support role of henchman), and then a bouncer or security guard, before he decides to open a business. However, the focus even here is not on him being a capable business owner, but rather his service, and this too is seen in the final scene where he is serving several 'white' customers. There is a significant problem when looking at these career choices suggested to Ben. Why could he not have gone into professional programmes, such as science, law, medicine, teaching, business etc? Instead this advert reinforces racist stereotypes that people of colour are useful for winning our sporting trophies, and physically protecting our events. How disappointing that ASB is choosing to add to this narrative, when they could, with some thought and awareness, have used their advert not just to sell their product, and not be racist in the process, but also to encourage non-prejudiced thinking in our society. Please see the below article which develops this idea further.

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/magazine/2019/08/21/why-are-black-males-only-supported-when-they-athletes/QwspMiHYgUjEvhWi3VSI7L/story.html>

If you take a step back from the story-line, the racism in casting is also clear, with actors predominantly white.

Overall, I found this advert was racist and perpetuated racist stereotypes, something which should be unacceptable to the NZ public, and something that warrants condemnation.

The relevant provisions were Advertising Standards Code - Principle 1, Rule 1(c);

Principle 1: Social Responsibility: Advertisements must be prepared and placed with a due sense of social responsibility to consumers and to society.

Rule 1(c) Decency and Offensiveness: Advertisements must not contain anything that is indecent, or exploitative, or degrading, or likely to cause harm, or serious or widespread offence, or give rise to hostility, contempt, abuse or ridicule.

The Chair noted the Complainant's concerns the advertisement perpetuated racial stereotypes.

The Chair acknowledged the genuine concerns of the Complainant but said in this case the Advertiser's portrayal of the character Ben selecting a career for himself did not reach the threshold to cause serious or widespread offence.

The Chair acknowledged the use of stereotypes in the advertisement. The Chair said while "Ben" does initially consider the roles suggested by other people, he eventually decides to be a watchmaker and business owner. The advertisement for a bank promotes the idea of choice and living the life you want to lead, despite the expectations of other people.

The Chair said the advertisement had been prepared with the due sense of social responsibility required and ruled it was not in breach of Principle 1 or Rule 1(c) of the Advertising Standards Code.

The Chair ruled there were no grounds for the complaint to proceed.

Chair's Ruling: Complaint **No Grounds to Proceed**

APPEAL INFORMATION

According to the procedures of the Advertising Standards Complaints Board, all decisions are able to be appealed by any party to the complaint. Information on our Appeal process is on our website www.asa.co.nz. Appeals must be made in writing via email or letter within 14 calendar days of receipt of this decision.