

Media Release

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BSA says *Naked Attraction* was acceptable to broadcast, but needed a stronger audience warning

The Broadcasting Standards Authority has found it was acceptable to broadcast the first two episodes of the British dating show *Naked Attraction* after 9.30pm with the AO (Adults Only) classification, but a stronger content warning for audiences was needed.

Naked Attraction is a reality dating programme that involves a clothed person choosing a date from six naked people, whose naked bodies are gradually revealed in stages from the feet up. The nudity was not blurred or pixelated in the episodes broadcast.

The BSA received complaints from 13 complainants who argued the programme should not have been allowed to air because of the high level of full-frontal nudity and sexual discussion. Some described the programme as ‘pornographic’ and degrading to the programme participants and human relationships in general.

In its decision the Authority recognised the important right to freedom of expression, which is fundamental in broadcasting and may only be limited where that is justified – to avoid actual or potential harm that may be caused by a broadcast.

In deciding whether the programmes were acceptable for broadcast, the Authority accepted that the level of nudity went beyond what most viewers would be used to on free-to-air television in New Zealand. However, the Authority noted that the programme was substantially about the naked human body, and “nudity itself is unlikely to breach broadcasting standards”.

The Authority then considered how the nudity was dealt with in the programme and concluded that it was “largely matter of fact and clinical”, the tone was kept light and it was clear that the participants were participating freely and willingly.

The Authority considered that “[t]here was a positive element to these episodes. The overall messaging about body image and self-esteem was an encouraging one. The essential message was that there is no standard attractive body configuration and that those who do not meet Hollywood standards of body configuration are nevertheless attractive.”

The Authority considered whether the broadcasts caused harm to an extent which justified limiting freedom of expression. It accepted that there was a high level of nudity and the programme would not be to everybody’s taste, but concluded that the programme was a matter-of-fact examination of the human body and did not obviously threaten norms of good taste and decency or cross the line of what is acceptable for an Adults Only programme broadcast after 9.30pm.

“We have stood back and asked ourselves what harm have these broadcasts caused. ... We struggled to find any palpable harm that would be done to any individual, group or to society generally by the broadcast of these programmes. Some viewers may have been upset but this would have been transitory. There is no compulsion for programmes of this kind to be viewed but they must be adequately signposted,” the Authority said.

However, the Authority concluded that the audience warning shown before each episode was deficient and “did not fairly reflect the nature of the content”. The warning alerted viewers to nudity, but it did not alert viewers to the sexual material. This meant viewers who did not want to be exposed to this kind of content were not given a reasonable opportunity to make an informed choice about whether to watch the episodes.

In its decision, the Authority highlighted the importance of broadcasters using the suite of tools available to assist audiences to make informed choices about what they watch.

“Warnings are an important tool used by viewers and a vital part of the package of information available to them, to enable them to regulate their viewing and to make informed viewing choices. Viewers are much less likely to be offended, and the [good taste and decency] standard is less likely to be breached, where the audience is adequately prepared for what is to come.”

While the Authority upheld this aspect of the complaints under the good taste and decency standard, the Authority did not make any orders. The Authority considered that “the decision provides clear guidance to broadcasters and to the public about the importance of audience advisories and the deficiencies of the warning in this case”. However it acknowledged the efforts of the complainants in raising their genuine concerns with the Authority.

“The complaints raised important issues about New Zealand society and the value we place on freedom of expression, and we acknowledge the complainants’ efforts in raising their genuine concerns with us,” it said.

ENDS

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FURTHER INFORMATION

The episodes were broadcast on 27 October and 3 November 2017 on TVNZ 2. The full decision is available at <http://bsa.govt.nz/decisions/latest>. The decision was made under the Free-to-Air Television Code of Broadcasting Practice which is available at <http://bsa.govt.nz/standards/overview>.

ABOUT THE BROADCASTING STANDARDS AUTHORITY

The BSA is an independent Crown entity that oversees the broadcasting standards regime in New Zealand. The BSA determines complaints that broadcasts have breached standards, undertakes research and oversees the development of broadcasting standards in consultation with broadcasters.

The Authority members are Peter Radich (Chair), Te Raumawhitu Kupenga and Paula Rose.

For more information see our website: www.bsa.govt.nz