

Date: March 19, 2012

TO: Bob Ritter

FROM: Lauren Sibley

RE:

The Hardee advertising agency is in the process of creating an “edgy” ad for a client who sells hamburgers. Jeff, one of the newer assistant account planners, is struggling to accept the ad idea because he is not sure if it is a perfectly ethical choice. His team wants to pin point the target audience, “young hungry guys,” by using their strongest interests—girls and food. They believe the best way to do this is by creating a purposefully inappropriate ad that will be eventually pushed to YouTube. In theory, since networks would not accept the ad, the audience would want to watch it more.

As an advertising professional, I firmly believe team members should voice their ethical concerns whenever they arise, even if they are fairly new to the team. Jeff should have immediately shared his opinions without reservation or fear that his boss and members would laugh him “out of the room.” I think his concerns are warranted, because if the ad is too risqué to place on television, what makes it appropriate to put it on the Internet? I believe it cheapens the ad and the brand image of the company. In addition, I think using this pornographic style for a hamburger ad could begin to make the creation of these ads socially acceptable. Where would it stop?

Though the question of social responsibility is whether or not the target audience needs “sex to sell,” I believe Aristotle’s Mean and Kant’s Categorical Imperative are the more important ethical principles to consider. The fact is, more than just the target audience will see the ad if it is an extremely viral video on YouTube, and the advertising team should take the entire public into consideration. A blatant sexually inappropriate ad containing a girl and a

burger is not one that will appeal to an equal amount of viewers. It may obtain a great amount of hits, but that does not guarantee a great amount of acceptance among the public or a great amount of burger sales. Also, after considering Kant's Imperative, do we want to steer advertising toward this type of ad creation? If it is too inappropriate for T.V. it should not be an ad at all. The product is not one usually connected with sex ads, but the Networks accept even those that are. So, if ads for more sexually driven products are appropriate enough for T.V., then this ad for a hamburger should be too.

Jeff dissected the issue to the best of his ability, but in order to make the final decision he should ask other officials in his office, especially the females. It is important to know their perspective on the ad because though they are not the target audience, they would still be exposed to the ad. He could also seek advice from parents of teenaged boys, since that demographic is typically looking at such videos on the Internet already, and the video would be about a "schoolboy's dream." Do they want their children to be exposed to pornographic ads for everyday food products, like hamburgers?

The biggest stakeholder is the client. If they do not agree with Jeff's opinion, they could find another agency to work with, and his team could lose its "hot spot" reputation. On the other hand, they could gain some respect for making such a decision for the hamburger company because they would be saving the brand from a cheapened reputation.

I completely agree with Jeff that this ad is too risqué to continue with. Though it seemingly appeals to the target audience in the best way possible, I do not think it is at all ethical, and I think there are better ways to sell the product. It is not a sexually appealing product—it's just a hamburger. By making this promiscuous ad just for YouTube and the product website, it's setting a norm for future ads with a similar product. The best thing for Jeff to do is to voice his ethical concerns to the client and his team, and defend his principles.