

3. Is it a conflict of interest for a publisher to run for public office? For a reporter or editor?

Macro Issues

1. Evaluate Bloomberg's editorial decisions based on stockholder theory versus stakeholder theory?
2. Does the fact that Bloomberg LP is a privately held company make any difference to your ethical analysis? Compare Bloomberg's relationship with Bloomberg LP and Jeff Bezos's relationship with the *Washington Post* in reporting political news.
3. Should the ethical strictures that apply to news workers apply equally to managers and owners? Do you think your response is practical, considering the current ownership structure of most media organizations?

CASE 9-C

AND THE OSCAR REJECTS . . . FRIDA MOM

CHAD PAINTER

University of Dayton

Companies are willing to pay a premium to reach the 18 million people who tune in annually to the Oscars telecast. In 2020, Oscars ads sold for \$2.6 million for a 30-second spot.

One company, however, was shut out at the Oscars. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences rejected a Frida Mom ad for being "too graphic with partial nudity and product demonstration."

In this 60-second ad, a new mother struggles to use the bathroom following childbirth. The spot centers on a new mother who is woken up during the night by her crying newborn. She gets out of bed to use the bathroom. Her postpartum belly is visible, and she is wearing ill-fitting mesh underwear with bulky pads. Most of the ad takes place in the bathroom, where the new mom struggles to urinate (a common problem following childbirth) and uses a poorly designed peri bottle—a squirt bottle that allows a woman to clean her bottom easily and gently after childbirth—that requires a lot of dexterity and flexibility to use. The ad ends with the tagline "Postpartum recovery doesn't have to be that hard" and a shot of a variety of Frida Mom products (Seligson, 2020).

In an email to Frida Mom, the Oscars suggested the company consider advertising “an alternative product in their portfolio” or a “kinder, more gentle portrayal of postpartum” (Seligson, 2020).

Frida Mom executives said they wanted to show postpartum recovery in unsparing detail. The ad, however, was criticized by some mothers (although others strongly supported it), who said that postpartum is almost never as difficult as depicted in the ad, that hospitals and doctors do help new mothers, and that the ad depicted new mothers as weaker and more helpless than they actually are. There also was criticism about the cost of the product—Frida Mom’s “Labor and Delivery + Postpartum Recovery Kit” sells for \$99.99, making it a luxury that only certain classes of women can reasonably afford.

“The ad you’re about to watch was rejected by ABC & the Oscars from airing during this year’s award show,” the company wrote on Instagram after posting the video. “It’s not ‘violent, political’ or sexual in nature. Our ad is not ‘religious or lewd’ and does not portray ‘guns or ammunition.’ ‘Feminine hygiene & hemorrhoid relief’ are also banned subjects” (Henderson, 2020).

Frida Mom CEO Chelsea Hirschhorn said she thought networks and advertising boards are “cautious against polarizing the broadest base that they have, so some of these topics generate very polarizing opinions. I don’t happen to think pregnancy and postpartum are one of them” (Seligson, 2020).

The ad has been viewed more than 4.3 million times since it was posted online.

Micro Issues

1. The Frida Mom ad was rejected because it was “too graphic.” Compare it to ads—for example, ads about prescription drugs including those that treat erectile dysfunction—that did run during the Oscars telecast.
2. Frida Mom has received a wealth of free advertising—in terms of both news stories and the 4.3 million times its ad has been viewed online. What are the ethical issues, if any, of using the Oscars rejection to garner free publicity?
3. Should Frida Mom have reshot the ad to depict a “kinder, more gentle portrayal of postpartum”? What are the ethical implications of reshooting the ad? Of not reshooting it?

Midrange Issues

1. Would the Frida Mom ad pass the Post Toasties Test (discussed in [chapter 8](#))? Why or why not?
2. Many 2020 Oscar ads—including Nike’s commercial narrated by Serena Williams and Cadillac’s commercial featuring victorious women at an awards ceremony and in a boxing ring—were directed at female viewers. What are the economic advantages of targeting women in the Oscars telecast? What are the ethical implications of your answer?
3. Thinx created the ad “MENstruation,” which showed an alternate world where men menstruate. It was rejected by CBS but ran on networks including NBC, Bravo, MTV, E!, and TLC. Did companies such as Frida Mom and Thinx cross an ethical line with their ads? Where is that line?

Macro Issues

1. Frida Mom executives said they wanted to show postpartum recovery in unsparing detail. What is the role of truth telling in advertisements? How is that similar to and/or different from truth telling in news?
2. Is the Frida Mom ad socially responsible? Why or why not?
3. Evaluate the Frida Mom ad in terms of feminist ethics.

CASE 9-D

WHO CONTROLS THE LOCAL NEWS? SINCLAIR BROADCAST GROUP AND “MUST-RUNS”

KEENA NEAL

Wayne State University

Americans take for granted that the news they watch on their local NBC, ABC, CBS, or Fox affiliate is local. But what if what we watch on our local news is produced at the corporate headquarters of the broadcaster rather than by local reporters and producers?

In May 2017, Sinclair Broadcasting Group brokered a \$3.9 billion deal to buy Tribune Media’s 42 television stations. (Tribune terminated the sale agreement in August 2018 following pushback from the FCC and Department of Justice.) Sinclair, the largest owner of local television