An Adidas ad released earlier this year has been banned by the UK advertising watchdog after complaints that the selection of bare breasts that it showed objectified women.

The ad had been created in order to promote the wide variety of body shapes that its sports bras are designed for, but the explicit nudity and the fact that children could see the images fell foul of UK rules.

The ASA said the ads were a problem due to “sexualising [women] and reducing them to body parts”.

The ruling does raise questions over whether the watchdog is distinguishing enough between obvious sexual content and images that celebrate body diversity.

The campaign had prompted 24 complaints to the ASA and Adidas defended itself, saying that the pictures were not intended to be gratuitous or sexual but aimed to “reflect and celebrate different shapes and sizes and illustrate diversity”.

The images had also been cropped so that the individual women couldn’t be identified, with all of those taking part having volunteered and being supportive of the overall aims of the campaign.

The company also said it had deliberately avoided running posters and billboards near areas were schoolchildren or religious groups would be likely to see them.

But the ASA added that “we noted the breasts were the main focus in the ads, and there was less emphasis on the bras themselves, which were only referred to in the accompanying text. As the ads contained explicit nudity, we considered that they required careful targeting to avoid causing offence to those who viewed them.”
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By Sandra Halliday

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