

Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center
University of Michigan
715 N. University Avenue, Suite 202
Ann Arbor, MI 48104
<http://umich.edu/~sapac/sia/2008/>

Belvedere Vodka
81 Piccadilly
London, W1J 8HY
United Kingdom

To Whom It May Concern:

Each year, the members of the Networking, Publicity, and Activism Committee at the University of Michigan's Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center conduct the "Sexism in Advertising" campaign. The goal of this campaign is to educate the campus community on the cultural impact of sexist and misogynistic imagery. Members of the committee analyze ads found in various forms of print and electronic media, and the eight worst and the eight most progressive ads of the past calendar year are chosen. One of your company's advertisements, found in the February 2008 issue of Vogue was named as one of the top eight worst ads of this year.

I, _____, find your advertising strategy to be offensive because of the ways in which you:

- Depict women as submissive to men, particularly in terms of sexuality.
- Insinuate that drinking alcohol leads to sexual activity.
- Reduce men to the sexual organ.

The image depicts a woman applying bright red lipstick. Her eyes are wide as if caught in the act of doing something inappropriate and her head is positioned in front of a man's clothed groin. Due to her expression and positioning, the image insinuates that the woman was about to perform oral sex. In fact, the image references a sexual game called "rainbow" in which a woman puts on lipstick and performs oral sex on a man, thus leaving a ring around the penis. The man continues to receive rings of lipstick from other women creating a rainbow effect. This game, as well as your ad, are offensive towards women and promote inequality between the genders. The game states that it is acceptable for men to engage in sexual activity with multiple women and that the activity does not need to be reciprocal. Your ad also displays the woman in this submissive manner.

In addition to displaying women as submissive to men, the ad also reduces the man to the penis. It is a myth that men cannot control their sex drive and that they can "think" with their penis. Engaging in sexual activity is a conscious decision and should be mutual among partners. Depicting a man by only displaying his crotch reduces him to only his sexual organ and his sexual activity and removes accountability from his participation in this activity. Furthermore, this image implies that men are only interested in sex when in reality men are not as sex crazed as the media would like us to think.

Finally, as a stand alone image, the photograph of the two people has nothing to with alcohol. But, by juxtaposing this picture with your product, Belvedere Vodka, you are creating the idea that sexual activity and alcohol go together. In fact, alcohol is a tool used in many cases of sexual assault and domestic violence. Due to the impact that alcohol has on the mind and body, people are more willing to commit these types of crimes because they think they can use intoxication as an excuse. People who are intoxicated are also at a higher risk of being a victim of one of these crimes because it is easier for someone to take advantage of them in this state. Finally, while intoxicated, people may engage in sexual activity and other behaviors that they might not have otherwise participated in if they had been in a sober state. In the State of Michigan, no sexual activity is consensual if any of the people involved have been drinking. Thus, by connecting sex to your product you are promoting the use of alcohol in these instances and in non-consensual sex. Engaging in sexual activity should be a conscious, mutual, and equal decision between the people involved.

In the future, please be aware of the effects of this type of advertisement. We can work together to change the prevalence of sexism in advertising.

Sincerely,

Signature: _____

Print: _____