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Summer's Eve's "Hail To The Big V" Campaign Deceives

Have you caught the newest [advertising campaign for Summer's Eve](#) feminine hygiene products?

My mouth hung open in astonishment when I saw it for the first time during the previews for [Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows](#). I had two immediate reactions: Why are feminine hygiene products being advertised in a movie theater full of teenagers and children? And, who heck is their target market? My guess is: sexually active adolescent girls and very young women.

I suggest [Fleet Laboratories](#), which pushes a full-line of Summer's Eve feminine "cleansing and freshening products" (that [WebMD](#) and plenty of ob/gyns say we don't need!), change the portfolio's brand name to the more accurate: Summer's Deceive.

The [press release](#) announcing this "bold new campaign" that supposedly "empowers women," proclaims, "The V" is anything but women running through fields of flowers or along a beach with their mother talking about feeling fresh." Hey, I'm all for that. But here are the two major things that bother me:

- 1) The campaign reduces women to one body part — and uses a [talking fist](#) to personify a woman's vagina. As one male friend put it, "I know guys talk about that body part in those ways, but do women really? These ads look like they could have been part of the TV ad parody segment on [Saturday Night Live](#)!"
- 2) It reduces male/female relationships to pure lust. One of the talking "Vs" on the website comments, "I can make men drop to their knees in about 2.1 seconds." And the centerpiece ad shows men in mortal combat with gorgeous women watching them while the voice-over croons, ". . . over the ages and throughout the world men have fought for it, battled for it, even died for it." **IT?** And what if the women they're fighting for don't want their so-called "wonders down under," to be the booty for the victors?

Is it sexist? Is it racist? Or just plain creepy? New York corporate communications consultant Linda Dunbar thinks it's all three, telling me, "My assumption is that companies do not insult

and anger their consumers intentionally. Which is what makes this tasteless, offensive ad campaign so puzzling. Who allowed this to go out the door?

Could two years of research be wrong? Well, I'm no advertising expert, but the campaign was developed in what looks like advertising guy land. According to the Richards Group Agency's website, 27 of their 29 [Creative Group Heads](#) are men.

So, before I stuck my neck out too far to comment for Forbeswoman, I polled my network. Within minutes, my inbox started filling up with dozens of emails from men and women. They had plenty to say about the website and the ads, which include versions for [Black](#), [Caucasian](#) and [Latina](#) women. Comments in my informal poll are running 97% negative with four main objections:

- 1) Hand puppets personifying talking vaginas.
- 2) Reducing women to our private parts.
- 3) Pushing products women don't need by target very young females and playing to their insecurities.
- 4) Equally offensive to men who are portrayed as helpless in the face of the "most powerful force on earth."

Here's just a sampling:

- *The hand representing a talking vagina just grossed me out completely!! But the men fighting for a vagina -not the woman- just makes me stinking ANGRY!!!*
- *It's both appalling and insulting that women's "vaginas" are being "hailed" at a time when we are still vying for respect for our intellectual contributions and a seat at the corporate boardroom table. Perhaps when a woman receives one at C.B. Fleet, better marketing campaigns will emerge.*
- *Leave it to men to make a joke out of not only your V but to suggest that in order to "respect your V" you must clean it properly. Any gynecologist will tell you that the V is a perfectly self-cleaning machine!*
- *The more I think about it, though, the more annoyed I am by a message that seems to say all of my power as a woman emanates from my private parts. Not cool.*
- *Wow! I visited the website and I am offended and stunned. As a person who works with young women regularly, I fight every day to combat the perception that their value lies in their sexuality, appearance and the level of their appeal to men (or to anyone). All of my efforts, and those of their other mentors, focus on a woman/girl's core values, self worth, wisdom, intellect and integrity. This ad campaign flies directly in the face of these efforts and, in my opinion, sets women back decades in our fight to gain and maintain our place of respect and dignity in this world."*

- *The ads are sexist toward both men and women. They imply that men can't resist women's sexuality and that women's sexuality is all about their (smelly) vaginas. I've also seen quite a few e-mails from women of color who express disbelief that any company wouldn't get the sexism inherent in the ads geared to them. ([Gloria Feldt](#), author, NO EXCUSES.)*
- *It's brilliant! ... but I hate it.*
- *The ad was clearly designed with men in mind, not women – though the insecure woman may purchase it to please a man ... for all the wrong reasons. Other than that, I really liked it ... NOT!*
- *This whole series of creative executions plays like a late night fraternity nightmare rather than an honest discourse with intelligent women about a serious topic. It may already be making the rounds on campus, if not for summer break, perhaps it will become a cult classic or subculture item. Is this a male fantasy spin out? A creative message designed and unleashed for pure shock value or social media viral PR spin? This Summer's Eve effort cloaks itself in being bold and empowering for women, but it is thinly disguised female disempowerment and it is highly inappropriate when given the potential seriousness of personal feminine hygiene and even related health issues better left to medical experts, doctors and pharmacists. (Advertising/Marketing [Professor Sheila Sasser, PhD](#))*
- *Great. You mean to tell me that women aren't successful unless their butt smells like something that just stepped away from a perfume counter? (from a 12 year-old female)*

And on and on and on. The campaign is being cleverly positioned as one that “empowers women.” Summer's Eve and Fleet Laboratories have even gone so far as to partner with a “[women's empowerment expert](#)” and a newly-hatched [girls advocacy organization](#), headed by a reality TV survivor. They've thought of everything except holistic, real women and the reality of our lives.

I'll leave the final word to Beth Morrison, the highly-respected [CEO of Haven](#), one of Michigan's largest domestic violence shelters who told me

The whole series is offensive. Not funny. Reduces women to one part of our anatomy – the part men want and want to smell nice. Sexist beyond measure. I wish I had the big bucks they spent on this ad. Think of what they could do for women's reproductive health, the fight against abuse, mutilation of women's bodies, etc. etc. etc.

Are you listening [Summer's Eve?](#)