

August 11, 2014

Jarett Lopez
Executive Director
Aficionado Studios

Dear Mr. Lopez,

We are writing to you today to urge you to consider the consequences your promotional video for Frosh Week 2014 has on youth safety and sexual violence.

Rape culture “is a society where violence is seen as sexy and sexuality as violent. A rape culture condones [violence] against women as the norm.”¹ Your first promotional video continually linked sexuality and intoxication, this can often lead to Drug Facilitated Sexual Assault, a form of sexual violence.

Your video contributes to rape culture, and therefore to sexual assault, because the systemic causes of rape and the existence of rape culture exist symbiotically. Here’s how it works in the context of your video:

1. Sexual assault is about power and control- not sex. In your video, young women are vulnerable because their intoxication is sexualized. In reality, statistics show us that rapists will seek out intoxicated women to be sexually aggressive towards because they perceive them as more vulnerable.²
2. Rape culture then further condones sexual violence by shaming survivors, silencing them, blaming them and by excusing the behaviour of rapists with the wasteful “boys will be boys” logic. In your video, you encourage the notion that girls who are drunk, or high, and dressed in a sexual way, are all “asking for it.” In reality, drinking, using drugs, the way someone dresses, dances or acts is never “asking for it.”

The Ottawa Hospital has done research on the effect of mass gatherings, such as the event you are hosting, and sexual assault. Drug Facilitated Sexual Assault (DFSA) is most often committed with alcohol, and in their research, the Hospital found that 25% of patients they see had been to a mass gathering prior to their assault- and the average age of these women is very young (under 24 years). Due to our current social environment, many survivors of sexual assault will not report to police for fear of victim blaming, shaming and not being believed, because they had been drinking.

It is important to note that the sexualization and commodification of college and university aged women is just one way that they face structural inequality in North America. Your video obviously promotes this sexualization and reinforces misogynistic stereotypes. Statistics show us that Frosh Week is particularly dangerous for young women. We know that:

¹ <http://www.wavaw.ca/what-is-rape-culture/>

² <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/targeting-drunk-women-accounts-for-sexual-aggression-not-blurred-lines/>



- 20-25% of young women in post-secondary school experience a sexual assault;
- 80% of these sexual assaults are committed by someone the woman knows, and many of these assaults happen within the first eight weeks of class;
- 1/5 of male students agreed that forced sex is acceptable if someone spends money on a date, is stoned or drunk, or has been dating someone for a long time.

These statistics are a result of rape culture and patriarchy in North America, where we simply do not seem to care about the safety of young women.

We do not believe that Frosh Week is inherently debaucherous or dangerous. We strongly believe that youth should be able to celebrate their independence and next stage of life-but should be able to do so safely. You are not the first group who have had to consider the effects of rape culture on what should be a fun party. We have recently supported Escapade Music Festival in training their volunteers on how bystanders can intervene to challenge sexual violence at a huge party, and we know that this is paradigm-shifting.

We do not often think about the implications something like a “promotional video” can have on our society. Words and images have power. Anyone who fights violence against women would strongly advocate the need for voices of male role models, who can offer an alternative view on traditional masculinity and rape culture. This is your moment. This is your opportunity to create change.

By switching your marketing strategy from the usual (and frankly, tiresome) “drunken scantily clad women” approach to something more responsible, you are making a strong statement that rape culture and misogyny are not ideals you wish to promote. You have an excellent opportunity to become a leader, and we urge you to take this opportunity.

We hope that today, you show your leadership by:

1. Changing your marketing strategy to a more equitable and responsible one
2. Training staff and volunteers, with our support, on preventing Drug Facilitated Sexual Assault
3. Use your social media leverage to help challenge rape culture
4. Link to organizations already providing supports and services to survivors of sexual violence

Sincerely,
 Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women
 Sexual Assault Network
 Hollaback! Ottawa
 Interval House of Ottawa
 Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre

