Ad policy questioned

To the Editor:
We are writing concerning the discussion of Maxell's "Spring Break" advertisement, printed in The Tech a few weeks ago. The advertisement, which we consider offensive, shows four men on a beach climbing over a woman's body.

David J. Harsty's defense of the advertisement [Feedback, May 3] contains reasoning that is both specious and insidious. He suggests reversing the roles — instead depicting four women climbing over a male body — and claims that not to take equal offense at that advertisement would be to give "biased treatment toward women."

Two objections come to mind.

Editorials, marked as such and printed in a distinctive format, represent the official opinion of The Tech. They are written by the Editorial Board, which consists of the chairman, editor-in-chief, managing editor, and news editors. Columns are usually written by members of The Tech staff and represent the opinion of the author, and not necessarily that of the rest of the staff. Letters to the Editor are written by members of the MIT community and represent the opinion of the writer. The Tech attempts to publish all letters received, and will consider columns or stories. All submissions should be typed, triple spaced, on 57-character line. Unsigned letters will not be printed, but authors' names will be withheld upon request.

First, "biased" treatment in this case entirely appropriate, as even Harsty should see on serious reflection.

The reverse advertisement might be amusing, it might be "fanny" to see a realising male "conquered" by four women. But men have long been dominant in our society. They can afford to joke about their supremacy because they are completely secure. Is the situation different when a woman's bare midriff is the target of four men's aggression? You bet it is. Too many men take the type of macho message too seriously to treat it as a joke.

Second, this hypothetical reverse advertisement is just that: hypothetical.

Advertising systematically portrays women in passive roles, dominated if not coerced by men. The Maxell advertisement uses a dehumanized portion of a woman's body to sell a product. We condemn such a portrayal of women as objects. We would object to any such treatment.

Moreover, we believe it is irresponsible of The Tech's editorial board to dismiss the issue with the statement that the newspaper does not "censor" its advertisers. Newspaper advertising has nothing to do with free speech: in fact, it is not "free" at all. Advertising is a paying proposition; making those with money more "free" to express their views than those without money, a newspaper has both a right and a responsibility to oversee what type of material enters its pages. The Tech's all-male editorial board has a responsibility not to perpetuate stereotypes that harm both women and men — especially at MIT, where women already feel the special pressures associated with attending an overwhelmingly male institution.

Deciding not to run an advertisement has nothing to do with censorship: an advertiser with enough money will always find a way to get his message across. We urge The Tech in the future not to help spread the type of message the "Spring Break" advertisement contains.

Elizabeth H. Wiltshire
Jacques N. Gordon

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