



LESSON PLAN

Level: Grades 7 to 10
About the Author: MediaSmarts

Gender Messages in Alcohol Advertising

Overview

In this lesson, students think critically about culturally inherited gender stereotypes, and explore how stereotypes about men and women are promoted and reinforced through the images and messages in alcohol ads. In the first half of the lesson, students discuss the nature of gender stereotypes, common male and female stereotypes, and where these stereotypes come from. Students also explore why adolescents are a particularly vulnerable group when it comes to stereotypes about gender and gender relationships. In the second half, students view and discuss alcohol ads that integrate gender stereotypes into messaging about drinking.

Following this, students deconstruct alcohol ads from men's and women's magazines. In a final group activity, students create and administer surveys to other students in order to determine the awareness, exposure and influence of stereotypes in alcohol ads.

Learning Outcomes

Students will demonstrate an understanding of:

- what a gender stereotype is
- the limiting and often negative consequences of stereotyping, particularly as it relates to gender

and an awareness of:

- stereotypes commonly associated with women and men and the sources of these perceptions and attitudes
- how alcohol companies integrate gender stereotypes into their ads in order to influence alcohol consumption
- how they may be influenced by gender messages
- how they may be influenced by messages about drinking in alcohol ads

Preparation and Materials

- To prepare for this lesson, read the teaching backgrounder *Gender and Alcohol*
- Photocopy the following overheads:
 - *Male Stereotypes in Alcohol Ads*



- *The Buddy*
- *Female Stereotypes in Alcohol Ads*
- *Objectification and Dismemberment*
- *What Alcohol Ads Say about Relationships*
- Photocopy the student assignments *Alcohol Advertising in Women's Magazines* and *Alcohol Advertising in Men's Magazines*

Procedure

Class Discussion

In today's class, we're going to look at messages in alcohol ads about gender and gender relationships. Before we begin, does anyone know what the word "gender" stands for? Gender is more than being male or female – it's the generally accepted characteristics or traits that are associated with being a man or a woman in our society.

Write the words "men are" and "women are" on the board.

- Can you give me some words that we associate with being a man or being a woman? (*List answers under each.*)
- Are any of these traits shared by both sexes?
- Are these words accurate for all men and for all women?
- Where do we get our ideas about how men and women behave? (*Answers may include: from family, culture, religion, media, society and so on.*)

Ask students to define the word "stereotype."

Stereotypes are "fixed" or "set" beliefs about a group of people. When we apply stereotypes, we assume that all members of a group are the same – like cookies cut with the same cookie cutter.

In the case of gender stereotypes, this means that if you are a girl or a boy, or a woman or a man, you must act a certain way. Why might this be a problem? The main problem with stereotypes is that they usually give us an incomplete or misleading picture, based on generalizations about groups of people – but without taking into account the diverse characteristics of individuals. Believing stereotypes also limits our personal choices in determining our own interests and skills. For example, a boy who likes flower arranging might worry about being called a "wimp" if he does this. A girl who wants to become an engineer might not choose this career because it is considered a "male" profession.

Gender stereotypes don't only tell us how to act; they also tell us how we should look. When we unconsciously try to live up to the impossible standards of stereotypes, we can do physical and emotional harm to ourselves.

- Can you think of any examples of this harm? (*Unrealistic standards of attractiveness fuel feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem. Some people may be so desperate that they turn to steroids or cosmetic surgery in an attempt to live up to them.*)



From the time we are born, our culture teaches what it means to be a boy or a girl. From the colour of clothes to the toys we play with, the messages begin at a very early age. Young people in particular are influenced by a barrage of messages telling people to conform to a variety of expectations about how men and women look and behave. Nowhere are these stereotypes reinforced more than in advertising.

- Take a guess. On average, how many commercials has the average person in North America seen by age 18?

The average person sees about 20,000 commercials a year – this doesn't include other kinds of advertising such as logos on clothing, billboards, product placement, and so on. Of those 20,000 ads, nearly 2,000 are for alcoholic beverages.

Many child development experts and health practitioners have voiced concerns about the exposure by young people – especially adolescents – to alcohol ads. Why is this age group a particular concern? *Adolescents are at a time in their lives when they are experiencing rapid biological, psychological and social development. Young adolescents are also reaching out socially and experientially. During this phase, teens:*

- may temporarily be disorganized and erratic in behaviour
- are less willing to accommodate the expectations of parents and other relatives
- may experience mood swings or periods of low self-confidence or insecurity
- seek approval of peers
- are acutely aware of trends in popular youth culture
- develop an interest in sex
- are focused on personal appearance
- shift from parental loyalty and obedience to peer loyalty and obedience
- are idealistic
- are open to new ideas and experiences

A large part of this phase consists of consciously moving towards "adult" lives, which involves trying out behaviour associated with being mature and independent. For many young teens, drinking is considered a right of passage into adulthood. Research has found that, overall, adolescents between the ages of 12 and 14 see drinking as a positive activity – a belief on which alcohol companies spend lots of money to reinforce.

There are also concerns about exposure to alcohol ads influencing the onset of drinking at a young age.

Given that young teens are at a vulnerable age and that many do experiment with alcohol, you can understand concerns about promoting alcoholic beverages in ads. But what about messages in these ads about men and women? Should we be concerned?

(Write the following statement on the board:

Media are a mirror and a model of society

What do you think this statement means? (*Essentially, media provide us with models for behaviour. But at the same*



time, these messages or models are not created in a vacuum, but rather reflect and reinforce existing beliefs and attitudes.)

The world presented in advertising has a big effect on the viewer. (*Remember, advertising is a billion-dollar industry designed solely to influence people.*) Even in a beer ad, the underlying attitudes and messages communicate cultural values, which shape the way we think and the way we interact.

We're now going to take a look at some of these messages:

Put *Male Stereotypes in Alcohol Ads* onto the overhead projector. Review each stereotype with students. Have them brainstorm traits and characteristics for each and record descriptions in their notebooks.

The U.S. organization Children Now identified the following stereotypes, which are commonly associated with men in ads. Alcohol ads also play on these stereotypes.

Beer ads shape and reinforce ideas about masculinity in a variety of ways. The simplest is through images of strength, aggression and sexual potency, but what's just as common are ads that warn men to avoid un-masculine behaviour. Here, for instance, we're warned not to spend too much time or thought on personal grooming; not to be a "metrosexual"; and, above all, not to reveal that we ever danced ballet. (That last is actually a "drink responsibly" ad, implying that telling our friends we were ever un-masculine is worse than other possible consequences of excessive drinking.)

Another popular theme in alcohol advertising is the idea of "the buddy." (Put the overhead *The Buddy* onto the overhead projector.)

- What do these ads tell you about male relationships?
- What connections do alcohol advertisers want you to make about drinking and male relationships?

Now repeat the process for *Female Stereotypes in Alcohol Ads*.

The Sexpot/Bimbo is the sexualized "girl." Flirty, giggly and jiggly, this stereotype is young, usually blonde, and non-threatening.

The Man Eater is the sexually aggressive female. She has a harder edge than the sexpot and is usually a bit older. Glamorous rather than pretty, she gets what she wants from men by using her sexuality.

The Rebel asserts her independence by being a bit wild, in a cute and sexy way. Unlike her male counterpart, the action hero, female rebels are not portrayed as being angry or aggressive. Instead, they achieve liberation through drinking, smoking and partying.

The Prize is that "perfect woman" who can be yours if you consume the right beverage. Pretty, but not giggly, the prize smiles provocatively or remains emotionally aloof. This type of woman is more commonly portrayed in TV commercials in which there is time to develop a plot to explain how she is "won."

The Party Girl is stylish, sexy, glamorous and the "life of the party." Fun loving and confident, she is the centre of attention.

- Are any stereotypes missing?
- Which of these do you think is the most commonly used stereotype in ads for beer and alcohol? Why?



- What promises, or myths, about women and drinking are suggested in each of these ads?
- Judging by the ads we've looked at, who do you think is the major target audience of alcohol companies? (*Young men.*) How do you know?

Place the *Objectification and Dismemberment* overhead onto the projector. Another concern about how women are represented in alcohol ads is the way in which women's bodies are used to sell products. Techniques such as objectification (where someone is presented as a commodity, rather than a person) and dismemberment (where the ad focuses on sexualized body parts) leave the impression that women are not complete human beings.

- How are the women in each of these images objectified?
- What was your initial reaction to each of these ads?
- Who do you think these ads are intended for? Why?

Alcohol ads also contain implicit messages about relationships between men and women. Place *What Alcohol Ads Say about Relationships* onto the overhead projector and discuss messaging with students.

- The Budweiser ad represents an idealized image of relationships. In the world of this ad, people are beautiful, young, happy and in love – the promise here is that Skyy vodka will transform your boring life and relationships into this.
- The Skyy ad reinforces the idea that men are powerful and act in the public sphere (he's wearing a suit that you might wear to work), while women are passive, exclusively sexual and live in the private sphere (she's in lingerie.)
- The Molson ad plays on the idea that men and women are fundamentally different, and makes fun of "women's culture" by pretending to sell beer to women in the form of a perfume ad.
- The Miller Genuine Draft ad trivializes stalking by having the reader's hand "blot out" the woman's boyfriend – presumably as the first step in taking his place.
- What stereotypes about men and women are promoted in each of these campaigns?
- What are the stereotypes about what men want and what women want?
- Do you think any of these stereotypes are accurate?

Assignment

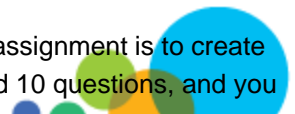
Distribute *Alcohol Advertising in Women's Magazines* and *Alcohol Advertising in Men's Magazines*. Just to make it interesting – have some boys complete the women's magazine work sheet, and have some girls complete the men's magazine work sheet.

Compare answers as a class.

Group Assignment

Divide the class into four groups.

We know that gender stereotypes exist, but how do kids your age feel about them? Your group assignment is to create a survey about "Gender Stereotypes in Alcohol Advertising." The survey will have between 8 and 10 questions, and you



will be responsible for creating the questions, administering the survey to at least 50 other students, and analysing and compiling the data you collect. Each group is to collect data from a different grade.

You want to find out:

- How often do kids see alcohol ads?
- What stereotypes do kids see most often in alcohol ads?
- Is gender stereotyping an issue we should be concerned about?
- Do we think we are influenced by these stereotypes?
- Are we influenced, even if we think we're not? How do you know?
- Are some kids more influenced than others? Girls or boys? Younger or older?
- What do these stereotypes imply about drinking?

Once you've collected and analysed your data, each group will present its findings to the rest of the class.

Evaluation

- Completed magazine assignments
- Group survey and presentation



Gender and Alcohol

It used to be that boys consumed more alcohol than girls. But adolescent girls are catching up to teenage boys – and fast. Recent studies have found that girls in high school – especially those in lower grades – now drink almost as much as high school boys. A 2011 study found that half of all Canadian students had used alcohol in the past year, with little difference between boys and girls. Just under one-third had participated in binge drinking.¹ (In the U.S., nearly half of girls in high school drink, and more than one quarter binge drink.)²

For both girls and boys, offers to drink are most likely to come from a friend, acquaintance or older relative of the same sex. Girls are more likely than boys to be offered a drink in a private setting and to be offered alcohol by someone they're dating. Boys, on the other hand, are more likely than girls to receive offers of drinks from parents or strangers.³

The "friend factor" plays a significant role in whether or not adolescent boys and girls drink. Studies have shown that teens with five closest friends who drink are nine times more likely to drink than those with non-drinking friends.

There are other factors as well. Researchers and child development experts have cited several reasons why adolescents may drink alcohol:

- to experiment
- to socialize
- to test limits
- to belong to a peer group
- societal and media influence
- genetic influence
- to deal with problems
- to give their lives meaning
- to deal with the trials of adolescence⁴

Specifically, teenage girls say they use alcohol to improve mood, increase confidence, reduce tension, cope with problems, lose inhibitions, feel sexy or lose weight. Teenage boys, on the other hand, are more likely to use alcohol or other drugs to experience getting high or to enhance their social status.⁵

Other factors that play a role in whether or not a young person drinks include genetics, personality, psychiatric disorders, suicidal behaviour, expectancies about alcohol, the environment in which they live and traumatic experiences.⁶

Overall, adolescents between the ages of 12 and 14 believe that the positive benefits of drinking (feeling good, fitting in with peers) are more likely to happen than the negative effects of drinking.⁷

However, despite this optimism, there can be no denying the negative cost of drinking by teens. Alcohol is a factor in the leading causes of death among young people: accidental injury, suicide and murder.⁸ Other consequences include addiction, poor performance in school, hampered memory and learning ability, risky behaviour, sexual vulnerability and victimization.



In a study conducted by the Missouri Alcoholism Research Center in the United States, researchers compared the alcohol use and problem-drinking behaviour of students between ages 12 and 18. When they asked students about consequences of drinking, they learned that boys were more likely to have experienced trouble with parents, problems at school, problems in romantic relationships and physical fights. Girls were more likely to report having problems with friends and doing something they regretted as a result of drinking (although both sexes were equal in reporting being caught in regrettable sexual situations due to alcohol).⁹

Of greater concern, 16-18-year-old boys were nearly twice as likely as girls their age to report driving while intoxicated and were five times more likely to report carrying a weapon when drinking. Girls and boys ages 12-18 were equally matched in reporting mixing drugs and alcohol, with responses for girls ranging from 21 to 41 per cent and boys ranging from 18 to 45 per cent.¹⁰

The long-term health costs of drinking – brain damage, cardiac problems and liver disease – are significant for both sexes, but alcohol poses a particular risk for women and, especially, young girls.

Generally, puberty is considered a high-risk time for alcohol abuse for both sexes. But adolescent girls who are "early bloomers" are particularly at risk of using alcohol sooner – and in greater amounts – than their "later-blooming" peers. Girls are also more likely than boys to experience depression, eating disorders or sexual abuse – all of which increase the risk for substance abuse.

And finally, women and girls metabolize alcohol differently, which means that alcohol passes more quickly into their bloodstreams. As a result, they get drunk faster, hooked more easily, and suffer consequences of drinking more severely than males.

Added to this mix of increased alcohol use by young people is a media culture that glamorizes and promotes drinking. In five Canadian provinces, there are restrictions on portraying alcohol as important for "sexuality or sexual opportunity." Yet there is no shortage of ads that use sex to promote beer and liquor. In countless ads, girls and boys alike are bombarded by messages that build and reinforce positive associations between drinking and sex appeal, as well as independence, rebellion, maturity, fun, success and freedom – attributes that are particularly attractive to teens.

In addition to messages about drinking, these highly engaging ads also deliver messages about gender roles. Because most alcohol ads are primarily targeted at young males, women in them are generally portrayed within the limiting stereotypes of "sexpot," "man-eater," "angel/temptress," "rebel," "prize" and "party girl." The ideal "beer babe" is highly sexualized and impossibly attractive. She – and/or her body parts – is sold to consumers along with the beverage. Being a babe, she's non-threatening, sexually available and subservient. Girls in alcohol ads are permitted to be rebellious, as long as they do so in a cute and flirty manner. They are allowed to be "naughty," but not bad.

This is in sharp contrast to portrayals of men. While women are generally trivialized in alcohol ads, men are more likely to be depicted as powerful, aggressive, and in control: athletes and "regular guys" (who are surrounded by, or trying to get away from, beautiful women) are mainstays in this kind of advertising, while a significant number of ads warn of the dangers of un-masculine behaviour.

Alcohol ads also deliver messages about relationships. Seldom are friendships between women positively portrayed. In fact, when "the girls" get together, it's usually to gossip or ensnare an unsuspecting male. Instead, these ads focus on the "buddy culture" of men and boys, where beer and alcohol are part and parcel of humour, friendship and good times.

Alcohol advertising has much to say about relationships between men and women. In the world of booze,



women are sexual prizes that can be won by drinking the right beverage – or they are the "ball and chain" that men and their buddies escape from through alcohol. Happy couples do exist, but only in a fantasy world of yachts, beaches and exotic locations. Casual sex in a party setting is presented as the norm, with taglines such as "names optional" and "nice finish." Author and educator Jean Kilbourne notes that sex in the media is often condemned "from a puritanical perspective – there's too much of it, it's too blatant, it will encourage kids to be promiscuous, etc." But, she concludes, in reality, sex in the media "has far more to do with trivializing sex than with promoting it. The problem is not that it is sinful but that it is synthetic and cynical. We are offered a pseudo-sexuality that makes it far more difficult to discover our own unique and authentic sexuality."¹¹

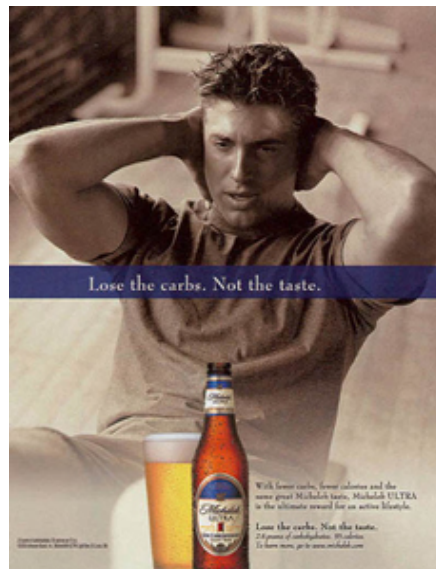
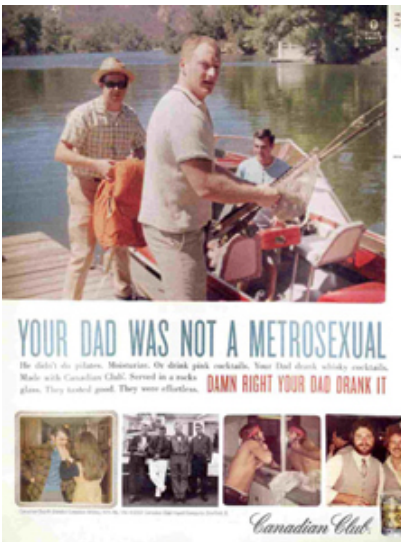
Gender stereotypes in alcohol ads are not unique to the industry and are reinforced through similar stereotypes in other media. Combine the gender messages in the thousands of commercials for alcohol and other products that kids see yearly, with gender messaging on television and billboards and, in magazines, movies, music and music videos, and there is considerable cause for concern – particularly when it comes to young people who are beginning to develop their sexual identities and expectations about relationships. Kilbourne notes that "adolescents are new and inexperienced consumers. They are in the process of learning their values and roles and developing their self-concepts. Most teenagers are sensitive to peer pressure and find it difficult to resist or even to question the dominant cultural messages perpetuated and reinforced by the media."¹² Other researchers have voiced concerns about the way in which sexist concepts are being heavily promoted through advertising to the alcohol industry's "youngest customers." They note that the danger here is twofold: "promoting minors to drink, and doing so in a way that demeans women or implies a promise of sex."¹³

In the past few decades, concerns have been raised regarding exposure of young people to alcohol ads. These concerns are well founded, given that constant exposure to alcohol products – especially at an early age – is the first step toward acceptance of positive expectations about drinking. However, more research is needed on the messaging within the ads themselves: messages about drinking and relationships and messages about how men and women are expected to behave. Given the increase in alcohol use by young people – especially binge drinking – and the particular vulnerability of young women when it comes to sexual victimization, we need to better understand how adolescent boys and girls are interpreting and acting on these messages.

- 1 M. Young. "Student Alcohol and Drug Use." 2011, Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse. <http://www.ccsa.ca/2011%20CCSA%20Documents/2011_CCSA_Student_Alcohol_and_Drug_Use_en.pdf>
- 2 R. Bonnie and M. O'Connell (eds.), "Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility," 2003. Institute of Medicine National Research Council of the National Academies. Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 "Adolescents & Alcohol-Other-Drug Issues," 2002. The Governor's Prevention Partnership.
- 5 National Survey Results on Drug Use from *The Monitoring the Future Study, 1975-1997*, Volume I: Secondary School Students, 1998. National Institute on Drug Abuse, Rockville, MD: Department of Health and Human Services.
- 6 "Youth and Underage Drinking: An Overview, Highlights from SAMHSA's National Household Survey on Drug Abuse," 1999. U.S. Department of Health and Services <<http://www.health.org/govpubs/RPO990>>.
- 7 "Summary: Youth Exposure to Alcohol Advertising," 2003. Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth. <<http://camy.org/factsheets/index.php?FactsheetID=18>>.
- 8 K. Bucholz, G. Banks, and S. Ryan, "Descriptive Epidemiology of Alcohol Use and Problem Drinking During Adolescence: Data From a School-Based National Sample," Missouri Alcoholism Research Center.
- 9 Washington University School of Medicine. <<http://www.missouri.edu/~marc/Poster%206%20-%20Bucholz.pdf>>.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Jean Kilbourne. *Deadly Persuasion: Why Women and Girls Must Fight the Addictive Power of Advertising*, 1999. New York: The Free Press.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 L. Greenfield, *Alcohol and Crime: An Analysis of National Data on the Prevalence of Alcohol Involvement in Crime*, 1998. U.S. Department of Justice.



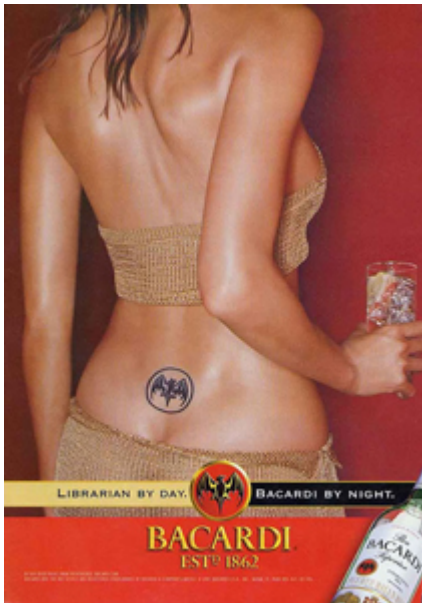
Male Stereotypes in Alcohol Ads



The Buddy



Female Stereotypes in Alcohol Ads



The Sexpot/Bimbo



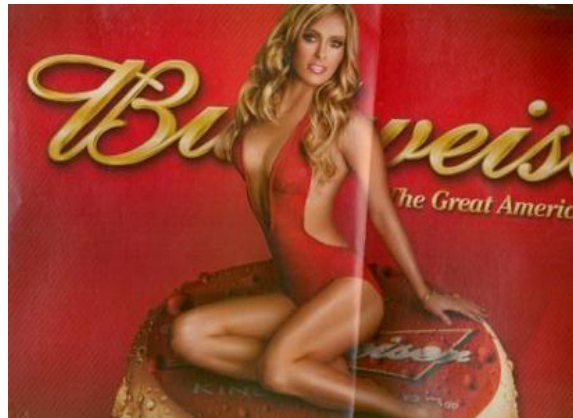
The Man Eater



The Rebel



The Party Girl

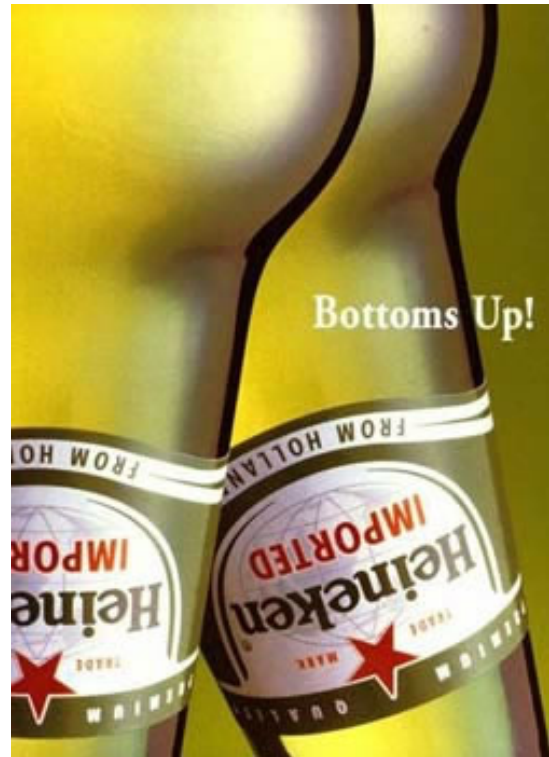


The Prize



The Skinny Girl

Objectification and Dismemberment



What Alcohol Ads Say about Relationships



Alcohol Advertising in Women's Magazines

COINTREAU MARGARITA

100% natural agave nectar. 100% natural. Lightly sweetened with agave nectar. — just open and serve!

BE COINTREAUVERSAL

The margarita you can trust.

—Rehanny Frankel

Skinnygirl MARGARITA

100 calories*
100% natural
Lightly sweetened with agave nectar
— just open and serve!

skinnygirlcocktails.com

MIDORI

WITH COINTREAU

You just know when it's silk.

Silk Casano
Ready to go, seamless, completely sophisticated.

4 ingredients, why so much? Because of that Casano blend. 2 1/2 oz. 50% vodka, 1 1/2 oz. Cointreau, 1/2 oz. Real's Lime Juice, 1/2 oz. Real's Simple Syrup. A splash of natural orange juice, orange wedge and lime garnish for good.

Freixenet
UNPLANNED THE MOMENT

Little Black Dress Up

RED CARPET READY
"Keep the accessories simple and timeless."

SHADOWSKI BINGO SAND EARRINGS
"Adds a modern, playful touch."
www.rosemarie.com

MISS DEWENDORF STRAPLESS DRESS
"Perfect backdrop for a classic, elegant, sophisticated look."
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LITTLE BLACK DRESS HERBET
With hot accents of this black dress, emerald and apricot tulle, the entire outfitting experience and sophistication is brought to life.
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JIMMY CHOO HEELS
"The epitome of elegant."
www.jimmychoo.com

NORDBORGH SILK CLUTCH
"Stylish, sleek, simple. It pulls everything together."
www.nordborgh.com

DEGREE WOMEN ULTRA CLEAR
"Keeps your elegant look free of whiteheads."
www.degree.com

Alcohol Advertising in Men's Magazines

