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Letters

Alcohol ads take advantage of vulnerable youth

As a certified professional in the field of adolescent addictions, I would like to respond to one of the items included in the "InBrief" section of the November 2004 issue of *Counseling Today*. The headline reads "Television alcohol ads that bombard teens continue to increase."

The Center for Alcohol Marketing and Youth at Georgetown University found that "nearly 90,000 more alcohol ads aired on television in 2003 than two years earlier." Is there a correlation between an increase in alcohol ads and underage drinking? Statistics show that underage drinking (ages 12 through 20) continues to grow.

According to findings from the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, alcohol is far and away the top drug of abuse for American teens. CASA observed that teens have easy access to alcohol because parents are too often unwitting co-conspirators who see underage drinking as a rite of passage rather than a deadly round of Russian roulette. This observation of the "parental soft sell," coupled with the increased "hard sell" from the alcohol industry, further establishes that children are victims in a culture that glorifies alcohol consumption.

Educational efforts are commendable, but in spite of the wide range of programs to reach out to students, drinking among the teen population continues to

be a concern. Sadly, the CAMY findings show that the alcohol industry is fueling the underage drinking problem by spending more advertising dollars to target teens.

Yes, greater attention needs to be paid to factors that impact the environment around students. The advertising message that "drinking is cool" will have to lose its glamour before we witness any truly positive results.

Finally, I want to point out that underage drinking is not just a college-age problem. It is a growing problem among high school-aged children as well, partly due to parental permissiveness and the alcohol industry's need to exploit that opportunity.

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