

JEZEBEL

Women File Class Action Suit Against Sephora For Alleged Racism

Kate Dries / 11./19/2014



Following Sephora's [disastrous](#) 20% off sale a few weeks ago, when loyal customers were unable to purchase products because of website failures and others said they had been permanently locked out of their accounts because they were of Asian descent, four women have filed a class action lawsuit against the company alleging discrimination.

The complaint, filed by Wigdor LLP and Imbesi Christensen in Manhattan Federal Court against Sephora and its parent company LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton Inc., involves four women of Chinese descent living in the United States: Xiao Xiao, Jiali Chen, Man Xu and Tiantian Zou. It alleges that the company purposefully blocked only the email addresses of customers of Asian—specifically Chinese—descent, due to the belief that those customers were planning to resell products purchased during the sale.

After Sephora's Facebook page was flooded with comments and a Reddit thread went up accusing Sephora of racist practices, the company acknowledged that they had "indeed, de-

activated accounts due to reselling — a pervasive issue throughout the industry and the world." But this complaint alleges that Sephora didn't acknowledge that they had only done so with specific customers:

Shockingly, what Sephora declined to disclose in its public statement was the fact that on November 6, 2014, it only blocked and/or deactivated the VIB and VIB Rouge accounts that were:

(i) associated with email addresses with names that appeared to signify Chinese/Asian race/ethnicity/national origin/descent regardless of the web domain used; and/or

(ii) using web domains originating in China/Asia, including inter alia, qq.com, 126.com and 163.com

According to the complaint, more than 95% of the blocked and deactivated accounts belonged to people in the U.S. who were not bulk buying or reselling. It specifies that the blocked accounts had nothing to do with the overloaded website issues Sephora was experiencing.

To date, no explanation has been provided by Sephora as to why customers of or perceived to be of Chinese/Asian descent were singled out while seemingly non-Chinese/Asian customers were permitted account accessibility once the website was restored.

This does not look great for Sephora. After calling Sephora's customer service line, one of the plaintiffs was apparently told that "all customers with qq.com email addresses were blocked."

The suit asks for compensatory damages for the plaintiffs and punitive damages for Sephora. I've requested comment from Sephora and will update if I hear back.