

WHASSUP WITH BEER ADS: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF MASCULINE IMAGES IN  
TELEVISION BEER COMMERCIALS

by

JOSEPH W. McLAUGHLIN

(under the direction of Dr. William F. Griswold)

ABSTRACT

There is some thought that men learn how to act in society through media portrayals of masculinity. During the past decade, the once dominant form of masculinity has begun to recede while new masculine forms are becoming more prevalent. A perceived “crisis of masculinity” is evidenced by high divorce rates and the refusal of men to be role models for their children. There has been considerable debate about how these new social conceptions of masculinity are causing men to redefine their societal roles.

This qualitative textual analysis shows how men are portrayed in a selection of television beer commercials. This is important because men have traditionally associated alcohol consumption with masculinity. If to drink is to be masculine, then the behavior of men in beer ads provides a key to understanding these new masculine definitions.

These commercials depict traditionally masculine models and those that represent new conceptions of masculinity. Viewed through a neo-Marxian framework, these portrayals subvert working class men by substituting an unattainable form of masculinity with a new one that ennobles and legitimizes the lack of control often felt by the working classes.

INDEX WORDS: Hegemonic masculinity, neo-Marxian, Beer commercials, Stuart Hall, Thesis, Advertising, The University of Georgia, Qualitative textual analysis, Laddism, semiotics

WHASSUP WITH BEER ADS: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF MASCULINE IMAGES IN  
TELEVISION BEER COMMERCIALS

by

JOSEPH W. McLAUGHLIN

B.S., Syracuse University, 1997

A Thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2002

©2002

Joseph W. McLaughlin

All Rights Reserved

WHASSUP WITH BEER ADS: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF MASCULINE IMAGES IN  
TELEVISION BEER COMMERCIALS

by

JOSEPH W. McLAUGHLIN

Approved:

Major Professor: Dr. William F. Griswold

Committee: Dr. Barry A. Hollander  
Dr. Carolina Acosta-Alzuru

Electronic Version Approved:

Gordhan L. Patel  
Dean of the Graduate School  
The University of Georgia  
May 2002

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my Lord and Heavenly Father. Without His guidance, I would not have felt compelled to pursue a master's degree in Athens. Without His wisdom, I could not have understood the material. Without His strength, I could not have persevered through the most trying and frightening times. Without His love, I would not have found so much happiness in Georgia. But most importantly, without His great grace and mercy, I would be lost to my sins and the futility of a life without purpose. All glory and honor to the Almighty.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Dr. William Griswold, my advisor, whose intellectual versatility and thorough understanding of the mass media helped steady this thesis, and its author, from inception to completion.

To Drs. Carolina Acosta-Alzuru and Barry Hollander, my committee members, who contributed greatly to this project through helpful suggestions, thoughtful comments and flexible schedules.

To my mother, whose countless hours of proofreading and editing helped transform a mountain of text into a work of form and structure.

To Erin, for showering me with unconditional support and demonstrating more patience than I believed humanly possible.

To my friends, both here and at home, who were with me through the coarse and the fine times.

To the 2001 and 2002 University of Georgia baseball teams for providing a welcome port in the otherwise stormy existence known as graduate academic life. Go Dawgs!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
Discussion of Phenomenon.....	2
Beer and Masculinity.....	5
Beer Advertising.....	6
Justification.....	9
Overview.....	10
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE AND THEORY.....	11
Review of Literature.....	11
Generalizations.....	14
Definitions.....	16
Theoretical Framework.....	17
Research Questions.....	21
CHAPTER 3 CONCEPTIONS OF MASCULINITY.....	22
Hegemonic Masculinity.....	23
Developments.....	25
Laddism.....	27
Men, Class and the Media.....	28
CHAPTER 4 METHODS AND DATA.....	31
Methodology.....	31
Data.....	32
Recording Schedule.....	35
Commercial List.....	36

CHAPTER 5	ANALYSIS.....	37
	Hegemonic Testimonials.....	37
	Attacking New Conceptions.....	41
	New Conceptions on Display.....	46
	A Laddish Initiation.....	47
	Smashing Self Control.....	50
	Marketing Masculinity.....	57
	A European Perspective.....	62
CHAPTER 6	RESULTS.....	66
	Conclusions.....	66
	Implications.....	69
REFERENCES.....		72



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The emergence of new conceptions of masculinity, combined with a revised approach to marketing men's products, offers an ideal time to study portrayals of masculinity in the media. Compared with similar research focused on the images of women, serious studies examining the portrayals of masculinity, which have gained attention only over the past 15 years, are few and far between. According to researcher J.T. Wood, "Only in the last two decades have men in any number begun to question the nature and effects of social views of masculinity and to define issues in men's lives." (Wood, 1999: 8) Now, marketing toward men includes themes that were absent from commercials prior to 1980.

Historically, commercials portray men in ways that conform to a definition of masculinity that has its roots in the 19th century American westward migration. Calvin Klein sells underwear not by touting comfort, flexibility and durability, but by exposing its target demographic to a buff male model, with rippling pectorals and a washboard stomach, wearing tight briefs and nothing else. The Gillette company likens the experience of using its razors to flying a fighter jet. Television advertisements for Old Spice aftershave feature a stocky man clad in business attire who, after using the product, captures the attention of a beautiful woman waiting nearby.

Beer advertisements are different. Media consumers are exposed to portrayals of men dressing as women to earn free beer and friends communicating through nondescript howls. Also on display are husbands hiding from their wives in store clothing racks or escaping household chores by constructing mannequins.

There has been very little research to ascertain why beer, which features a horde of masculine cultural overtones, does not follow a pattern similar to advertising for other men's products. This is important because many observers suggest that the self-perception of men may be affected by advertising. Seeking to fill the aforementioned gaps in research, this thesis examines the unique relationship between masculinity, advertising and beer.

The central question of this thesis is as follows. What themes are evident in a selection of videotaped beer commercials and how do they represent different cultural definitions of masculinity?

### Discussion of Phenomenon

The portrayal of beer consumption in television commercials is the focus of this study. As such, it is necessary to understand the history of this alcoholic beverage and its relationship to men and advertising.

The earliest written references to what is now called beer, i.e., a drink made of barley, hops, yeast and water, come from the Greek historian Herodotus, who credited the Egyptians with inventing this brew. Much earlier pictorial references, Sumarian and Mesopotamian

cave paintings depicting men using reeds to drink from a large bowl, date back to c. 4000 B.C. (Baron, 1982: 12) Obviously, the linkage between masculinity and beer consumption predates the founding of the United States, where the role of beer has been defined by the clash of two ideological forces: Puritan ethics and the utilization of beer as an outlet to reaffirm popular understandings of what it is to be masculine.

Currently in the United States on both the federal and state levels, minimum age limits for alcohol consumption, restrictions on alcohol advertising and home brewing, and limitations on the potency of alcohol are all governmental attempts to regulate and even eliminate consumption. European laws governing beer deal mostly with issues of production, e.g., the Rheinheitsgebot, a German law in effect since 1516 that strictly governs the purity of beer ingredients only.

The roots of this discrepancy lie in North America's first European settlers, most of whom belonged to small but strict religious sects wanting to worship away from the eyes of oppressive European monarchs. The settlers regarded alcohol as sinful and believed the Devil could gain easy access to a person's soul through alcohol consumption. (Baron, 1982: 26) While America has no singular religious identity, it continuously grapples with the vestiges of its Puritan past. For example, a lot of what Americans find scandalous, e.g., the sexual affairs of the president, Europeans show little concern for. Europeans led the way in normalizing and decriminalizing behavior that much of the United States still finds reprehensible, including homosexuality and drug use.

Knowing about Prohibition, which lasted from 1920 to 1933, is essential to understanding the linkage between beer and American conceptions of masculinity. The national ban on alcohol production and consumption was largely fueled by women, who, influencing political discussion for the first time, were at the heart of a large temperance movement that worked against men-only bars. Women wanting access to what was a part of the masculine world led to drinking becoming more closely tied to understandings of masculinity.

Prohibition had drastic effects on brewers, most of whom were small, regional companies. There were 50.2 million barrels of beer produced domestically in 1918 and 11 million in 1933, the year Prohibition was repealed. Total breweries dropped from 2,272 before the ban to fewer than half that number after it ended. (Baron, 1982: 187)

During the last half of the twentieth century, beer was attacked chiefly on two grounds, its role in drunk-driving incidents and its use to facilitate violence against women. Since the man's man supposedly suffers no ill-effects from drinking, admitting to having drunk too much to drive is a violation of this masculine ideal. (Strate, 2000: 149) Also, some theorists maintain that men feel disempowered when seeing a pretty woman because of the emotional response she unintentionally creates in them, which results in the male need to assert power over these women to regain their masculinity. (Beneke, 1989: 374) Beneke says that beer, which lowers inhibitions and creates feelings of confidence, facilitates these violent acts committed by men.

## Beer and Masculinity

Consuming beer allows men to demonstrate self-control, a key aspect of traditional American masculinity, as will be examined later. Just as men tamed the natural world, drinking affords men the opportunity to master the debilitating effects of alcohol, i.e., taming the beer. The danger inherent in drinking is desirable because it magnifies the risks of failure and the significance of success. (Strate, 2000: 149) In the United States, there is considerable demand for mass-produced beers from Budweiser, Coors and Miller that contain far less alcohol than imported brands. For example, the national average for beer is 3.2 to 4 percent alcohol by weight. The foreign average for lagers is 3.5 to 4.5 percent by weight; pale ale is 4 to 5 percent by weight, 4 to 6 percent for dark ale and bock, and some malt liquors are considerably stronger. (Baron, 1982: 127) Weak beers maintain their popularity because drinkers, consuming more, feel more masculine. (Baron, 1982: 131)

In addition to augmenting already established masculine tendencies, the perception-altering effects of beer also cause men to drink when they feel powerless, when they perceive themselves as not living up to society's masculine standard as set forth, in part, by the media. (Capraro, 2000: 308) In other words, anxiety develops when men sense the gap between their own lives and the hegemonic masculine model put forth by the media and other social structures. This condition, known as gender role strain, causes shame, fear and depression in those who experience it. However, high levels of drinking decrease inhibitions and

increase in drinkers the belief that they can affect other people. “Heavy drinking makes men feel strong and assertive and, I would argue, the way they are supposed to feel.” (Capraro, 2000: 309)

Lastly, men drink because it facilitates an environment where gender construction and validation can take place. In other words, banter that occurs among men who are drinking serves to strengthen and reinforce the drinkers’ socially constructed conceptions of masculinity. (Gough et al., 1998: 430) “The consumption of alcohol serves to disinhibit the aggression against outsiders as well as enhancing feelings of companionship with and connectedness to one’s company. (Gough et al., 1998: 431)

### Beer Advertising

Beer advertising has been a staple of the television industry since the introduction of the medium for entertainment purposes in the late 1940s. This is not an unplanned occurrence, as more than half of all television sets sold in 1947 were bought by bars. While pub owners hoped the new medium would cause customers to remain seated on their bar stools a bit longer, beer manufacturers soon realized that television offered them a chance to reach drinkers where drinking took place. (Miller, 2002: 68)

Initial concerns among advertisers about a possible public backlash to beer on television relegated brewers, until 1951, to merely sponsoring television programs. Beer commercials were first aired during

late evening hours and never on Sunday. The cultural stigma surrounding beer has decreased since the mid-20th century. Today, beer commercials can be seen on cable television anytime while the hard liquor industry is trying to travel the same path blazed by beer.

According to beer historian Carl H. Miller, beer proved to be a difficult sell for advertisers because most drinkers were not interested in the various ways brewers created their products. As a result, the first two decades of beer commercials focused mainly on the taste of beer as a selling point. Herein lies a paradox of marketing beer in the United States. Since Americans typically favor weaker beers that allow them to consume more, brewers are forced to make beer that is virtually tasteless to meet this demand, thereby leaving them with no selling point.

However, when tobacco giant Philip Morris bought Miller Brewing Co. in 1971, it soon set about applying the same tactics to beer that were used to promote Marlboro cigarettes. “The new ads invariably depicted tough and rugged he-men drinking Miller Beer, not because they enjoyed its delicate balance of flavors, not because they fancied the easy-to-open bottle, but because they worked hard all day and, dammit, now it was Miller Time.” (Miller, 2002: 69) By 1978, Miller sales reached 31 million barrels, an increase from 7 million just five years earlier.

These ads, and more specifically the “Tastes great, less filling” campaign for Miller Lite, institutionalized the current trend among beer advertisers to provide no information about the product but rather rely on a soft sell. Considering the health risks and other possibly harmful

effects of consuming large amounts of alcohol, it would be corporate suicide for beer companies to promote the effects of alcohol the way Crest touts its tartar control toothpaste. Instead, advertisers use the soft sell approach to cause the viewer to make sensory and cultural associations with the beer being advertised. “The critical task is to design our package of stimuli so that it resonates with information already stored within an individual and thereby induces the desired learning or behavioral effect,” according to advertising executive Tony Schwartz. (Strate, 1991: 115)

Freed from speaking about the technical aspects of beer products, advertisers for brewing companies craft commercials that feature unrealistic fantasies, many times involving prominent athletes or other celebrities. Since these commercials put forth no real claims about what a beer can or can not do, they absolve brewers from legal responsibility for the effects of their advertisements. In 1994, a Michigan man, stating that the beer company’s advertising claims were untrue and deceptive, sued Anheuser-Busch. According to the text of the lawsuit, the beer-related fantasies portrayed in the commercials caused him to drink the beer and thereby incur mental injury, emotional distress and financial loss. “(The plaintiff) pointed to television advertisements featuring Bud Light as the source of fantasies coming to life, fantasies involving tropical settings and beautiful women and men engaging in unrestricted merriment.” (Parker, 1998: 97) The court dismissed the case and ruled that the dangers of drinking alcohol were well known and that fantasies



in TV beer ads are “grandiose suggestions” not meant to be taken seriously by the public.

### Justification

This study will add to previous research concerning the perceived “crisis of masculinity,” a widely used term in sociological circles that describes how conceptions of masculinity have changed in the United States for a little more than a decade. “Segal points toward the ‘slow change’ of masculine identities in respect to participation in childcare, the declining importance of the ‘breadwinner’ role and adherence to heterosexual norms and practices. (Jackson et al., 2001: 128)

Men are in crisis due to the shrinking number of ways they can demonstrate their socially constructed masculine identity. Vast cultural changes occurred in America during the 1990s, including the increased acceptance of homosexuality and same-sex marriages. According to Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Susan Faludi, same-sex marriages between women have caused men to feel unnecessary, especially when lesbian couples bring children into the family. (Faludi, 2000: 18) The equalizing of homosexuality with heterosexuality are causing men to lose faith in their own “privileged” sexuality.

The outward manifestations of this crisis include the dissolution of traditional marriages through high divorce rates and the refusal of fathers to be the masculine role model for their children. By 1995, fully 50 percent of marriages were ending in divorce and there are no signs

that this trend is reversing itself. “The very paradigm of modern American masculinity, that it is all about being master of your universe, prevents men from thinking their way out of their dilemma, from taking active political steps to resolve their crisis. That they are seen only as acting upon the world stops them from acting on their own behalf.” (Faludi, 2000: 4)

The linkage between men, masculinity and alcohol consumption, as discussed earlier in this chapter, gives strong support to the need for an analysis of masculine portrayals in television beer commercials. If to drink is to be masculine, then the behavior of men in beer ads provides a key to understanding how men view themselves and each other.

### Overview

This thesis is organized into six chapters. Chapter 2 is a review of all relevant literature, an explanation of some generalizations that can be made based on previous research, and a dissection of the class-based theoretical rationale used to analyze the data. Chapter 3 includes an overview of various definitions of masculinity and a discussion of which ones are currently popular. Chapter 4 describes the methodology by which this thesis was conducted and addresses questions of validity of the analysis. Chapter 5 is the main body of the textual analysis and Chapter 6 offers conclusions, explanations, limitations of the study, and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2  
LITERATURE AND THEORY

Review of Literature

The preponderance of research on gender representation in advertising deals with the portrayal of women in advertisements for men's and women's products. Of this, most studies were conducted from a feminist ideological perspective. The earliest studies, conducted during the mid-1980s, found several themes that governed the appearance of women in print ads.

Beginning in 1979, media critic and renowned lecturer Jean Kilbourne began making documentary films that analyzed the relationship between women and depictions of femininity in advertising. Her three films in the "Killing Us Softly" series demonstrated that ads were likely to show only segments of women's bodies, including legs, arms, and head. Kilbourne concluded this segmentation portrayed women as dehumanized bodies, not complete individuals. Secondly, print ads picturing interaction between men and women often presented women in sexually suggestive positions, even when the product being advertised had no sexual basis. She also studied examples of women smiling while under the stare of a man and suggested that the "male gaze" legitimized men's aggression toward women. (Kilbourne, 2002)

Through the course of compiling this literature review, several qualitative and quantitative studies of women in advertising were uncovered that analyzed depictions of unnatural female body types in the media. Directly after seeing “idealized” female bodies, girls would give their own physical appearance consistently lower marks than they otherwise would have. (Lavine, 1999: 147)

Research on masculine media portrayals over the last five years found that “traditionally masculine” portrayals of men abound. Male characters, whether in television programs or commercials, are consistently pictured more with men than women and alone more than in family situations or with children. (Kaufman, 1999: 424) Men pictured alone, or “sole-male images,” with angular features and rugged appearance, are considered men at their most masculine. (Vigorito, 1998: 137) This image of a man alone is key in understanding the history of masculinity. Advertising with heavy masculine overtones appears to have an effect on the viewer. Studies found that even men who were less traditional espoused more traditional masculine attitudes directly after exposure to traditionally masculine models. (J. Garst and G. Bodenhausen, 1997: 313) These findings suggest that men’s non-traditional gender role attitudes may be unstable and susceptible to momentary influences.

What little research exists analyzing men, masculinity and beer advertising has concluded that beer ads are “manuals for becoming a man.” (Postman et al., 1988: 48) Characters in these ads are frequently

stereotypes, including the sports hero and the rock star. Almost without exception, commercials promote the notion that to be a real man in American culture, and accepted among other men, one must drink beer. “Along with beer and beer drinking, then, beer commercials promote a particular view of what it means to be a man.” (Postman et al., 1988: 47)

The majority of the research in this area has been conducted by Strate, who reports the following findings: beer commercials link drinking and driving explicitly through the juxtaposition of images of beer and moving cars. These commercials also make a more general link between beer drinking and excitement through the utilization of images from sports. (Strate, 1991: 117)

In advertising, beer drinking is portrayed as a challenge through which self-control can be tested. By omitting the condition of drinkers when leaving the setting where beer is consumed, commercials imply that drinking has no consequences. Lastly, Postman states that beer is promoted as innocuous by the very fact that beer commercials appear on television while other potentially dangerous products, e.g. cigarettes, are banned. (Postman et al., 1988: 49)

Strate is the most important scholar in the study of men and beer commercials, as is evidenced by the previous descriptions of his two previous studies, one conducted with Neil Postman and the other completed on his own. Drawing from the semiotic work of Roland Barthes, Strate looks for modern-day myths in beer ads and extracts them from the commercials through textual analysis. He does not

employ a neo-Marxian theoretical framework in his analysis, however, which is an element of this thesis.

### Generalizations

The following commonly held ideas about gender representation in television commercials were uncovered by this review of published literature. Television advertising aims to sell a product, either directly, through hard sell techniques, or through associations, via soft sell techniques. A feature of every advertisement is the cultural baggage that shapes how viewers interpret the product in question. This cultural baggage can be either intended or unintended by the creators of the advertisement. Even though researchers agree that men and women simultaneously not only shape the presentation of gender on television, but are also shaped by it, the degree to which these processes occur is a source of debate.

Although not representing the entire field of research, studies of gender representation can be broken down into five main categories: the effect of feminine depictions on women's self-image, the depiction of women in advertisements for men's products, men's self-image after seeing hyper-masculine models, the portrayal of African Americans and other minorities in various media, and the effect of advertisements for alcohol and other vice products on children's perceptions of adulthood. These categories can be approached from three different perspectives: believing that meaning is created by media consumers after digesting a

particular text, stressing that meaning is embedded in media texts and affects consumers without their knowledge, and maintaining that creators of media messages hold the power to give a text meaning.

Although there are many areas yet to be addressed, some questions about gender representation in the media have been settled. Studies have shown that feminine gender portrayals negatively affect the self-image of adolescent girls by representing femininity with waif models and other unnatural body types. (C. Hall and M. Crum, 1994: 311) Men, however, prefer media exposures (e.g., movies, television) that feature hyper-masculine depictions more than ones that feature average-sized men. (Kaufman, 1999: 416) Finally, children are apt to have unrealistic expectations of drinking after seeing commercials that promote beer as an elixir bringing fantasies to life. (Parker, 1998: 100)

While the effects of gender representation on women, children and minorities have been investigated with considerable thoroughness, research about masculine images in the media is not as prevalent. This thesis will tie together themes found in other studies and relate them to men. For example, the meaning and role of women in beer and other commercials has been a popular topic for research but almost no studies were conducted to determine the role of men in the same commercials. Several projects have focused on the effect of alcohol advertising on children's perceptions of adulthood. Similarly, there is a dearth of research about the effect beer ads have on men's understanding of their role in society.

## Definitions

**Advertisement:** A product commercial of 10 seconds or longer, having as its focus a beer brand, with the goal of selling the product.

**Beer:** An alcoholic beverage made from barley, hops, yeast and water that is produced by large corporations for mass consumption.

**Beer Corporation:** A company responsible for the manufacture, bottling and distribution of beer for profit.

**Critical Cultural Studies:** Academic research stream that rejects value neutrality and seeks to ascertain how meaning is constructed by different social and cultural groups. It has its roots in literary analysis, semiotics and Marxism.

**Cultural Association:** Objects or beliefs known to be part of, or linked to, a particular group; (see stereotype).

**Hegemony:** Term used to describe ideological power that is derived from the tendencies of the mass media to support the established power system and exclude competing values.

**Marxism:** Theory that sees the economic base of society as determining everything else in the superstructure, including social, political and intellectual consciousness. Mass media research in this fundamentalist tradition interprets “culture industries” in terms of their economic determination.

**Masculinity:** A socially constructed set of behavioral characteristics, most often attributed to men, which allows them to identify with each other.



Media: Television, radio, newspapers, magazines, the Internet and other means of information transmission delivering news, popular entertainment and advertising.

Men: People born with masculine reproductive organs who are at least 18 years old and grew up in the United States.

Neo-Marxism: Mass media theorists who believe that the relationship between base and superstructure is not as simple as described by Marx. Some key theorists in this area, including Athusser and Stuart Hall, reject the base-superstructure model, arguing that there is a dialectic between what Marx termed “social being” and “social consciousness.”

Stereotype: A common set of assumptions, sometimes incorrect, that characterize a particular social group.

### Theoretical Framework

This study, conducted within the boundaries of the critical-cultural research paradigm, features a neo-Marxist theoretical perspective. Critical-cultural scholars take a critical view of society and reject value neutrality. Instead, they try to ascertain how meaning is constructed by different social and cultural groups. The roots of cultural studies chiefly come from literary analysis, semiotics and Marxism. (McQuail, 2000: 49)

Semiotics was developed by Ferdinand de Saussure, who theorized that society could be read through “signs.” It assumes that texts have

meaning, built-in by way of language, which can only be interpreted through a cultural framework. (McQuail, 2000: 311) While semiotics focuses on media content, Marxism is necessary to place that content into a cultural and ideological framework.

Marxism is also a major contributor to critical-cultural studies. Writing during the last half of the 19th century, Karl Marx expected that, due to harsh working conditions and lack of adequate compensation forced on the indigent by the Industrial Revolution, poor citizens in capitalist countries would revolt against the wealthy citizens. However, he believed the poor did not revolt because social structures were in place to manipulate their thought processes, make them complacent and legitimize the power of the wealthy. For example, Marx did not support religion because it advocated tolerance in the face of harsh treatment and subservience to the government.

While Marx could not delve extensively into the mass media, because most were not in existence during his lifetime, he opened a link for scholars to use his thoughts. “The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby... the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.” (Marx & Engels: *The German Ideology*, cited in Gurevitch et al., 1982: 22)

Today, many neo-Marxist scholars base their research on this segment of Marx's ideology and apply it to the mass media in every society, not just those with capitalist economic systems. A school of neo-

Marxist theorists, known as the Frankfurt School, is strongly associated with the idea that mass communication was manipulative and oppressive. The theorists that are counted as Frankfurt School members include Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Max Horkheimer. Formed in 1923, this lineage of neo-Marxist theorists has extended to the present day. While there is no singular school of of neo-Marxist thought, some common ideas, shared by media researchers illustrate this ideology.

According to Gurevitch, these scholars believe that capitalist societies function on a system of class domination with the media as one of several players in an ideological arena where class views are fought out. While seemingly independent, the media relay messages consistent with the interests of the dominant classes. Audiences accept the messages contained in the media because they do not have access to any alternative meaning systems that would allow them to reject what is presented to them. (Gurevitch et al., 1982: 1)

To what extent media messages affect people and how much autonomy people have to reject the ideological content in these messages cause debates among modern neo-Marxist theorists. Some researchers, usually from the strict Marxian tradition, believe the media produce a “false consciousness” in the working classes. These researchers take an extreme stance whereby media products are seen as expressions of ruling class values that can not be denied by media audiences. (Althusser: *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, as cited in

Gurevitch, et al., 1982: 24) In much the same way that Marx believed the social structures of the late 19th century kept the people from revolting, in this model, the media distract people from thinking.

This thesis will rely on the thoughts of media researcher Stuart Hall, who developed a less extreme view of how an audience relates to media messages. Hall (1980) argues that the dominant ideology is embedded in a text as the “preferred reading” but is not automatically adopted by media consumers. He believes people may either accept or reject the preferred reading based on their social situations. “Dominant” readings occur in those whose social situations favor the preferred reading. “Negotiated” readings occur in those who use the preferred reading to explain their social position. “Oppositional” readings are produced in those whose social situations are in conflict with the preferred reading. (Hall, 1980: 136)

As this thesis deals with how men are represented in television commercials, it is necessary to choose a theoretical model that explains “representation” and the sources of meaning. Once again, Stuart Hall fits the bill. He advocates three kinds of representation. The reflective approach argues that meaning occurs in the real world and that language, represented here as media messages, reflects a meaning that already exists in everyday life. A second model of representation, known as the intentional approach, gives the speaker power over the meaning of language. Words mean what the speaker believes them to mean. Lastly, the constructionist approach to language argues that words have no

innate meaning, except the temporary meaning imbued in them by people. (Hall, 1997: 24-25) The constructionist approach will be used in this thesis because there is negotiation that occurs between the television commercial and the viewer as to what the text and images in that text mean. This approach explains how viewers can take multiple meanings from the same television commercial because each viewer negotiates a separate meaning with the same text.

### Research Questions

This theoretical rationale has led to the formation of the following research questions. How are men portrayed in a selection of videotaped beer commercials and how do they represent different cultural definitions of masculinity? What class-based readings can be extracted from these commercials that decipher the ideological message inherent in beer ads? What are some readings of these ads that suggest they may be part of a repressive ideological apparatus?

## CHAPTER 3

### CONCEPTIONS OF MASCULINITY

There are numerous definitions of masculinity. Since this thesis will determine how men are portrayed in television commercials, it is important to look at these different definitions as they are evidenced in society. As a rule, men are most often associated with being masculine, although this is not always the case. (Wood, 1999: 20) Before analyzing the competing forms of masculinity, it is necessary to understand the differences between sex and gender.

Sex refers to a person's biological makeup, whether one has male reproductive organs or female reproductive organs. When referring to human beings, a person is either male or female. Gender, however, is socially constructed. Whether one is masculine or feminine depends on how that person's behavioral characteristics mesh with socially defined conceptions of gender. (Wood, 1999: 20) Gender is most easily explained using a scale.

feminine -----I-----I-----I-----O-----I-----I-----I----- masculine

If the greater part of a man's traits are ones that society considers masculine, he will register somewhere to the right of the zero. But if a man mostly exhibits traits that society considers feminine, than he will

register somewhere to the left of the zero. It is important to note that, if society's conceptions of masculinity are redefined, a man can become more or less masculine even if he does not change his behavior. In the 1980s, sensitive men who shared their feelings with women were considered masculine. In the 1990s, acknowledging concerns about romantic relationships was no longer considered a masculine characteristic. The concept of gender is not as stable as that of sex; it is not consistent from one culture to another. Social conceptions of gender, ever evolving with the progression of years and societal norms, are constantly redefined throughout a person's lifetime.

Characteristics that conventionally define American masculinity include physical strength, ambition and control of emotions. (Kimmel, 1996: 144) It is important to understand that masculinity is defined in opposition to femininity. By taking the above-mentioned masculine characteristics into account, one can conclude that American femininity is defined as someone being less physically strong, less ambitious but more in touch with his or her emotions. (Wood, 1999: 22) While there are various popular understandings of what it is to be masculine, one must investigate the dominant form before other, less recognized, forms can be understood.

### Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity, the dominant form of masculinity as defined by sociologist R.W. Connell, has its roots in the mid-19th century

westward migration in America. The concept of American masculinity, defined by the ability of a man to control, which arose during this time, is the form that remains dominant to this day. (Connell, 1987: 14)

The ideal example of hegemonic masculinity in action is the American cowboy, who controlled everything in his environment. Riding horses, moving cattle and otherwise settling the West signified his control over people and nature. The West necessitated brute physical strength for a person to flourish. Women, considered to be, generally speaking, ill-equipped for this environment, were dependent on men for their survival. This established men's control over women. Important for this study was the belief that the American cowboy, demonstrated by his ability to drink and resist the debilitating effects of alcohol, was in control of himself. (Connell, 1987: 44) This idea that men can prove their masculinity through interaction with beer and liquor is still prevalent today. Finally, Connell theorizes that the West's lack of established social structures, (e.g., government, family, church) allowed men to take sole credit for all they accomplished. Even today, a hallmark of hegemonic masculinity, a titan in the sociological realm of competing forms, is a man's ability to succeed without help.

Hegemonic masculinity defines itself in opposition to all other forms of masculinity and also to femininity. (Connell, 1987: 89) Connell credits hegemonic masculinity with providing the roots of patriarchy, a cultural phenomenon by which powerful men have created a society where women are oppressed and disempowered.



It is important to note that hegemonic masculinity, while the dominant form, is not completely embodied by men. In reality, it is impossible for men to control all aspects of their environment. There are always some constraints, established by society, that have control over men. Governments enact laws, churches set rules for moral behavior and the workplace has rules and regulations to be followed for the benefit of the employer. Obviously, relatively few men actually possess hegemonic masculinity; however, it still rules. (Connell, 1987: 181)

Connell's theory was expanded in the 1990s by sociologist Michael S. Kimmel. (Kimmel, 1996: 18) In addition to defining masculinity by what can be controlled, he included (a) providing a form of escape and (b) excluding others, e.g., women, minorities, etc. Here, we see that the fluid nature of gender includes defining masculinity through the actions of other groups. While different activities have been considered masculine at different points in time, the aforementioned three characteristics have been consistent throughout history.

### Developments

A major shift in social beliefs about what it means to be masculine came as a result of the Industrial Revolution in the United States around the turn of the twentieth century. The advent of factories took men out of the home for extended periods of time. As a result, men's traits of emotional reserve, ambition and the desire to succeed in the workplace formed the basis of society's definition of masculinity. (Wood, 1999: 28)

The feminist movement of the 1970s again changed social perceptions of what it means to be masculine. Men who ascribed to the goals and ideals of feminism were called Pro-feminists. (Wood, 1999: 85-86) They believed both sexes, having the right to enjoy the same opportunities and expectations, were equal and should be treated as such. An outgrowth of the feminist movement, which sought to equalize opportunities between the sexes, was the elimination of gender differences. Pro-feminist men believed they could be caring and nurturing, characteristics that heretofore were a hallmark of femininity. Likewise, they accepted women who were aggressive and controlling. Feminism was the first major challenge to hegemonic masculinity and out of the movement came a new masculine form, the New Man.

The New Man began to seep into the public consciousness in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The New Man was a “reformed” man, still possessing the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, except that women were to be treated as equals, not objects to be controlled. The New Man was “a man in a woolen jumper prowling the urban streets as a ‘wolf in sheep’s clothing’. Soft yet strong, sensitive yet sexy, cool yet caring.” (Jackson et al., 2001: 33)

Ten years ago, both sociologists and mainstream media professionals began to write about a crisis of masculinity, which was centered around the idea that the hegemonic masculine form was being rejected by men. (Jackson et al., 2001: 15) Researchers, including Michael S. Kimmel, thought the shift was due to the influence of the

feminist movement and the growing realization of the unrealistic nature of hegemonic masculinity. In other words, hegemonic masculinity presented an unrealizable goal that men could never achieve.

From this debate rose several alternative definitions of masculinity that found their way into the American consciousness. “Each new version of masculinity struggles to become the true version: the one that becomes most widely accepted as common sense.” (Jackson et al., 2001: 45) These new masculine forms were represented through various media. In the 1999 film *Fight Club*, a group of men, unable to achieve the masculine standard set by society, turn their self-loathing outward by hatching plans to destroy society and each other. Appearing at the same time were the Promise Keepers, a national men’s support group, who took their masculine cues from Christian teaching.

### Laddism

More popular, and more socially acceptable, is the new masculine form, Laddism. (Jackson et al., 2001: 35) The Lad is a construct functioning in direct opposition to the classic hegemonic masculine form and the New Man of the 1970s and 1980s. The Lad wants no part of the control game or the responsibility that comes with having power. Looking to women as a source of sex only, he shuns marriage and serious dating. Busying himself with constructing the appearance of financial success, he does not aspire to business positions that require a great deal of responsibility. The Lad cares primarily about having fun. “Just as

tabloids focus on sex, sensation, scandal and sport, so too the defining interest of Lad culture are depressingly similar.” (Jackson et al., 2001: 37, 86) Laddism refers to someone who shuns traditional masculine definitions in favor of an alternate, possibly boyish, identity.

Laddism has been represented in the media chiefly through a bumper crop of men’s magazines, appearing in the past decade. *Maxim*, *FHM*, *Stuff*, and *Loaded* have helped decrease the circulation of traditional men’s magazines including *GQ* and *Esquire*. The premiere issue of *Loaded* in 1995 contained these guidelines for defining the Lad by “what they eat (pub snacks), what they don’t (‘formal meals’), who were ‘top lads’ (George Best), and who were not (John Major), what they liked (Tarantino, ‘a laugh’) and what they didn’t (marriage, snobs).” (Jackson et al., 2001: 36).

### Men, Class and the Media

As this thesis analyzes commercials from a neo-Marxian perspective, it is important to realize how class is portrayed on television. For the most part, men on television, and especially in commercials, are portrayed as white collar workers who live in the suburbs among affluent surroundings. (Kimmel et al., 1992: 225) According to sociologist Ian Harris, “images of these men occupy a powerful place in the American psyche and set standards for male behavior.” (Harris, 1992: 227).

Advertising campaigns create the image that a majority of men enjoy white-collar, professional status, which is, in reality, far from accurate. A 1990 study showed that, out of 55,988,000 employed men in the United States, fully 45 percent were working in blue collar professions while another 27 percent were working in non-professional technical fields and 13 percent were employed in the service and farm occupations. Lastly, only 15 percent of employed men held professional, white-collar jobs. (Kimmel et al., 1992: 226)

How do men in each occupational group stack up to the masculine image found in television and advertising? Working class men, usually without a high school education, labor in jobs that are dull, repetitive and dangerous. Furthermore, their positions are most susceptible to economic downturns or the implementation of advanced machinery that could make their skills obsolete. “From the 1950s until approximately 1978 this group of men enjoyed some economic security, and media images of the happy, beer-drinking blue collar worker abounded. However, most of these men now feel inadequate in the face of a dominant media culture which venerates executives in three piece suits.” (Kimmel et al., 1992: 227)

Likewise, white collar men, also, do not identify with these media depictions, which present men of their ilk as being able to enjoy the material benefits of success. (Harris, 1992: 228) While these men did not suffer under economic oppression until the post-September 11 economy forced many brokers, webmasters, etc. out of their jobs, many will never

achieve the level of success and power they set for themselves. There are, after all, a finite number of top management jobs in existence. Most white collar men advance to a certain success level and then plateau. As they get older and can not keep abreast of modern technology, their corporate mother fires them in favor of younger, more knowledgeable, less expensive men.

When thinking about men, class and the media, understanding the following is important. Media images of men do not accurately depict men in any social class, even the upper class who are portrayed on television most frequently. Even though most classes of men are not represented in television depictions of masculinity, all classes use these depictions as a ruler by which to measure success. (Harris, 1992: 227) The hegemonic masculine form, which underlies most media depictions of masculinity, creates an unachievable standard that most men, regardless of class, can never achieve.

CHAPTER 4  
METHODS AND DATA

Methodology

This study is a textual analysis of television beer commercials. This type of analysis is a very useful tool to interpret data from a critical-cultural perspective. Unlike content analysis, textual analysis argues that meaning in a media text is hidden within its structure and cannot be extracted by analyzing simple, numerical data. “The term structure implies a constant and ordered relation of elements, although this may not be apparent on the surface and requires decoding.” (McQuail, 2000: 311)

First, one must define what a “text” is before it can be analyzed. In a very literal sense, a text is a unit of media, including books, television programs, recorded songs and magazine advertisements. In McQuail’s “Mass Communication Theory,” however, Fiske also defines text as the “meaningful outcome of the encounter between content and reader.” (McQuail, 2000: 349) In other words, a television commercial does not become a text until it is consumed by a television viewer. Fiske also argues that the same text can hold multiple meanings since each viewer interprets the same commercial differently. This definition is appropriate because it goes hand-in-hand with Hall’s idea that people, depending on their circumstances, read ideological messages differently.

As the use of textual analysis has become more widespread, it has gone beyond merely interpreting the actual words in a media message to include interpreting the entire message, including pictures, drawings, etc. A sign is, “any sound-image that we can hear or see and which usually refers to some object or aspect of reality.” (McQuail, 2000: 312) This makes textual analysis appropriate for analyzing beer commercials, which feature spoken and written text as well as moving images. This is an interpretive method that does not seek to find one single, correct answer. Instead, textual analysis promotes equally plausible, yet competing, meanings.

#### Data

This thesis highlights six themes in representations of masculinity found in 12 television beer commercials. These ads were selected for study from a data field of 45 that were recorded during sporting events between Sunday, September 9, 2001 and Wednesday, February 27, 2002 (Table 1). Sports were targeted because they were likely to yield the most beer commercials. There is no reason to believe that beer commercials recorded during non-sports television programs would yield ads with different masculine depictions. Since both sports and alcohol consumption are hallmarks of masculinity, it is logical that beer advertisers would want their products featured during sporting events.

Ads that make up the data field were found on six videotapes of recorded sporting events and are listed in Table 2. To pinpoint the



location of each commercial, the videotapes were numbered and a master sheet was composed listing the commercials on each tape when they appeared. For the purposes of this thesis, numbers in parentheses are sometimes used instead of the commercials' full titles. Ads for Budweiser, Bud Light, Coors, Coors Light, Michelob Light, Miller, Miller Lite, Miller Genuine Draft, Killian's, Amstel Light, Guinness, Icehouse and Sam Adams comprised the data field.

Each commercial, assigned a title based on its content, was investigated by using a textual analysis sheet to determine which ones featured the most masculine overtones and warranted a full analysis. Before conducting the analysis, a period of three weeks was spent performing a textual "soak," in which each commercial was viewed twice weekly and ample notes taken. Data from the sheets, indicating race, style of dress, speech pattern, surroundings and actions of the character, and other categories, were used to find patterns.

The following six themes constituted the criteria for selecting commercials: hegemonic masculine representations, Laddish representations, other masculine representations, conflict between different conceptions of masculinity, and physical manifestations of masculinity. It is important to note that these themes were not selected before viewing the data. Instead, these themes were extracted from the data during the aforementioned textual soak. Based on these criteria, Coors (4, 10), Bud Light (20, 27, 45), Miller (11, 28, 37), Miller (7) and Guinness (36), and Amstel Light (16, 17) were chosen for this study.

Advertisements not chosen for a full analysis did not feature a male, main character (12, 14, 15, 21, 22, 23, 31, 42) or portray a cultural definition of masculinity as described in earlier chapters (1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 19, 25, 29, 33, 39). While some commercials demonstrated the themes mentioned above (8, 9, 13, 24, 30, 40, 44), they did not portray them as well as the commercials that were ultimately selected. The remaining ads that were not chosen failed to display any themes about the social construction of masculinity whatsoever.

Table 1: Recording Schedule

National Football League

Sunday, Sept. 9	Tampa Bay vs. Dallas	Fox
Sunday, Sept. 9	Atlanta vs. San Francisco	Fox
Sunday, Sept. 9	Miami vs. Tennessee	ESPN
Sunday, Sept. 23	St. Louis vs. San Francisco	Fox
Sunday, Oct. 14	NY Giants vs. St. Louis	Fox
Sunday, Oct. 14	NY Jets vs. Miami	CBS
Sunday, Oct. 21	Atlanta vs. New Orleans	Fox
Sunday, Oct. 21	Minnesota vs. Green Bay	Fox

Major League Baseball

Sunday, Oct. 21	Yankees vs. Mariners	Fox
Saturday, Oct. 27	Yankees vs. Arizona	Fox
Saturday, Oct. 28	Yankees vs. Arizona	Fox
Tuesday, Oct. 30	Yankees vs. Arizona	Fox
Wednesday, Oct. 31	Yankees vs. Arizona	Fox
Thursday, Nov. 1	Yankees vs. Arizona	Fox
Saturday, Nov. 3	Yankees vs. Arizona	Fox
Sunday, Nov. 4	Yankees vs. Arizona	Fox

National Hockey League

Thursday, Nov. 29	Pittsburgh vs. San Jose	ESPN2
Sunday, Dec. 2	St. Louis vs. Minnesota	ESPN2
Tuesday, Dec. 4	Rangers vs. Washington	ESPN2
Wednesday, Dec. 5	Colorado vs. Detroit	ESPN
Thursday, Dec. 6	Islanders vs. Philadelphia	ESPN2
Thursday, Dec. 6	St. Louis vs. Los Angeles	ESPN2
Sunday, Dec. 9	Los Angeles vs. Chicago	ESPN2
Tuesday, Dec. 11	Pittsburgh vs. Washington	ESPN2

NCAA College Football

Tuesday, Jan. 1	Citrus Bowl	ABC
Tuesday, Jan. 1	Fiesta Bowl	ABC
Tuesday, Jan. 1	Sugar Bowl	ABC
Wednesday, Jan. 2	Orange Bowl	ABC
Thursday, Jan. 3	Rose Bowl	ABC

National Hockey League

Wednesday, January 30	St. Louis vs. Washington	ESPN
Wednesday, Feb. 6	New York vs. Detroit	ESPN
Wednesday, Feb. 13	St. Louis vs. Colorado	ESPN
Wednesday, Feb. 27	Philadelphia vs. New Jersey	ESPN

Table 2: Commercial List

1.	Bud Light		“Island Rescue”
2.	Coors Light		“Avalanche 1”
3.	Coors Light		“Avalanche 2”
4.	Coors		“Barry Sanders”
5.	Budweiser		“Jerry, Jerry, Jerry”
6.	Budweiser		“Playing Poker”
7.	Miller Lite		“Plastic Bottle”
8.	Miller Lite		“Match Trick”
9.	Killian’s		“Lipstick Smear”
10.	Coors		“Yogi Berra”
11.	Miller		“SUV Disgust”
12.	Miller		“Brewmaster”
13.	Coors Light		“Duke Saves The Day”
14.	Budweiser		“Patriotic Montage”
15.	Miller Genuine	Draft	“Party Montage”
16.	Amstel Light		“Baffled Brewers”
17.	Amstel Light		“Just Add Water”
18.	Bud Light		“Touchdown Dancer”
19.	Miller Genuine	Draft	“Threesome”
20.	Bud Light		“Street Racer”
21.	Coors Light		“Mountain Scene”
22.	Coors Light		“Concert Scene”
23.	Budweiser		“Horse and Mouse”
24.	Coors		“Don Larsen”
25.	Budweiser		“Doggie Disappointment”
26.	Miller Genuine	Draft	“Poolside Antics”
27.	Bud Light		“Port-A-John Mishap”
28.	Miller		“Beer Faucet”
29.	Michelob Light		“Night Rendezvous”
30.	Bud Light		“Skinny Dip”
31.	Budweiser		“Bottle Close-Up”
32.	Budweiser		“Take Care Of That Thing”
33.	Michelob Light		“Art Gallery”
34.	Miller Light		“Bowling Alley”
35.	Budweiser		“Soccer Fan”
36.	Guinness		“Rocket Widget”
37.	Miller		“Parking Woes”
38.	Budweiser		“Leaving A Tip”
39.	Budweiser		“Calling Tina”
40.	Sam Adams		“Meeting The Sister”
41.	Michelob Light		“Business Meeting”
42.	Icehouse		“Snowy Football Girls”
43.	Miller Lite		“I Won The Lottery”
44.	Sam Adams		“Gold Digger”
45.	Bud Light		“Shake It Up”

## CHAPTER 5

### ANALYSIS

The six themes that emerged during the preliminary investigation of the data are analyzed here. While this is one possible way of interpreting the data set, other readings of these commercials are equally valid. Here, there is an explanation of each commercial's narrative followed by an analysis. It is important to note that, while some commercials did not lend themselves to class-based readings, there is an overall linkage between each ad's target demographic and the cultural definition of masculinity that is being depicted.

#### Hegemonic Testimonials

Coors (commercials 4, 10) presents sports heroes as living embodiments of the hegemonic masculine form. They are held up as examples of what all men should be in order to enter the hegemonic, masculine world. Other themes, the healthful benefits of the natural world and man's ability to tame its wildness, are also evident.

"Barry Sanders" (4) opens with the words "Be Original" shown on the screen in white lettering against a black background. The letters fade into a shot of sports announcer Ahmad Rashad sitting in the stands of an empty professional football stadium. He tells the following anecdote. "On December 6, 1992, Barry Sanders fumbled the football. He was

determined never to let that happen again. But it did happen again, three years and 803 carries later.”

After Rashad finishes speaking, several cans of Coors are shown halfway submerged in a bucket of crushed ice. The camera pans across the field of beer cans until a hand comes from off screen to pick one up. The announcers says, “Hey, nothing beats an original. Original Coors, brewed with Rocky Mountain water.”

The following shot shows a close-up on the can of Coors as a finger pops the tab, spraying ice and carbon dioxide. The hand surrounds the can so that nothing is visible except the word “Original.” The next shot shows the can being placed on a table. Both the can and hand appear giant sized. When it makes contact with the table, the can takes up the entire frame and there is a sound that is reminiscent of a thunder clap.

The scene dissolves to a close-up of Barry Sanders, the former running back for the Detroit Lions, wearing a forest green golf shirt and sitting in front of a backdrop that features snow capped mountains. Holding a can of Coors, he says, “Original Coors. Hold on tight,” before crushing the can in his fist.

Another commercial in the same advertising campaign is a testimonial featuring former New York Yankees catcher Yogi Berra (10). Rashad, seated in a dugout, says, “A catcher is expected to field bunts, chase pop-ups, throw out base runners, and hang on to every pitch. All this without making a lot of errors. Well, that’s pretty much what Yogi Berra did in 1958, when he went the entire season without making any.”

The commercial's mid-section is identical to the one featuring Sanders. When Berra appears on the screen, he holds up a can of Coors and says, "I used to catch baseballs. Now, I'm pitching beers."

#### Coors (4, 10) Analysis

The sports stars in these commercials are presented to the viewer as ideal representations of hegemonic masculinity. Both Sanders and Berra are praised for successfully controlling their surroundings. Sanders did not fumble the football for more than three seasons. (A fumble is a mistake that occurs when a player has the ball but loses control of it, giving other players the chance to pick it up.) Berra, faced with the myriad responsibilities of being a catcher, did not commit a single error during the 1958 season. He is lauded by the announcer for being continually in control.

Sports stars are obvious models of hegemonic masculinity. They operate in an environment that is rife with uncertainty, usually in which men are competing against each other over control of an object. In these ads, the chaos and conflict inherent in sports mirrors the chaos and uncertainty of nature, an arena first conquered by the American cowboy and considered a stronghold of traditional masculinity.

By being successful athletes, Sanders and Berra have earned the right to drink Coors, which represents the challenge of nature. Coors is linked with nature via the backdrop of snow-capped mountains and the narrator's announcement that Coors contains Rocky Mountain water.

“In many other beer advertisements, nature is depicted as a challenge to be met and overcome, i.e., taming the wilderness, and the identification of beer with nature suggests that beer, too, can be a test of manhood.” (R. Anderson and L. Strate, 2000: 152) The commercials’ tag line, “Be original,” is a verbal challenge to viewers while the oversized beer can that lands with a thunder clap is a physical challenge.

Although he speaks only once, Sanders tells the audience to “hold on tight” to their cans of Coors Light. By saying this, he suggests that men should accept the challenge of beer drinking in an effort to control this manifestation of nature. That the can even needs to be held tightly signifies that it may pose a challenge to the drinker. Sanders’ act of crushing the empty can of Coors signifies his symbolic control of nature the same way he once controlled the football. His actions also serve as instructions by which the viewers learn how to meet nature’s challenge, in this example, by finishing a can of Coors.

From a Marxist perspective, one can read these ads as messages that laud physical labor to the point of heroic proportions and ennoble the working classes by correlating masculinity with physical exertion. This is meant to fixate workers on a less-valued form of societal power, e.g., physical strength, and divert them from other, more valued forms of power in society, including political and monetary. Both Sanders and Berra are praised for utilizing their bodies to achieve a masculine goal, control of the physical world around them in which they earned their living. But these ads do not mention other types of hegemonic control.



Members of the working classes are likely to have jobs that require physical exertion and, as such, are likely to identify with sports heroes who also use their bodies to earn a living. But Sanders and Berra have earned more money by using their bodies than most working class people ever will. By equating masculinity with mastering the physical world, working class men are encouraged to persevere at their occupations if they want to be considered masculine. Members of the dominant classes, who generally do not use their physical bodies to earn a living, are therefore less masculine and not worthy of aspiration. But it is the dominant classes that possess valued forms of societal power.

#### Attacking New Conceptions

Images of men standing in judgment of other men and control over one's home and possession are major themes in the world of Miller High Life (commercials 11, 28, 37). Here, physical labor is highly valued and beer is its reward. Class-related themes are also present in these texts, as a closer look reveals.

“SUV Disgust” (11) opens with a close-up of a white, non-descript SUV parked in a residential driveway. The viewer is seeing the SUV from the next residential lot. The camera wavers and adjusts its focus slightly as the following is read. “Leather seats, automatic transmission. Nowadays you’ll hear people call this a truck. Well, a man knows a station wagon when he sees one. This car will only see off-road action if the driver backs over a flower bed.”

Then there is a wide-angle shot of the same scene. This time a Caucasian, middle-aged man with a noticeable pot belly, a 1950s-style crew cut and dressed in a white golf shirt and brown slacks, with his back to the camera, is staring at the SUV from the adjacent lawn. He does not move. Instead, the camera flashes for a moment on his eyes, fixed on his neighbor's SUV with a look of skepticism and disgust. His head begins to shake slowly. The final camera shot is a close-up on a half-finished bottle of Miller Beer in the man's left hand near his waist. In this shot, the viewer sees the man's right hand, holding a rake, begin to move across the screen.

The following narration ends the commercial. "If this vehicular masquerade represents the high life to which men are called, we should trade our trousers for skirts right now."

"Parking Woes" (37) depicts a similar scenario, another Caucasian man, with his back to the camera, holding a half-finished Miller in his right hand and a rake in his left. He is watching his neighbor across the street, who is trying to park his SUV with a boat in tow by backing it into the garage. Instead, he hits his mailbox and runs over his lawn. Next, the main character's mouth is seen forming the word "pathetic."

The narrator reads, "This is enough to put a High Life man off his lunch. Time was, a man knew how to command his own vehicle. Just how far are we willing to fall? Better reacquaint yourself with the High Life, soldier, before someone tries to take away your Miller Time."

The third commercial, “Beer Faucet” (28) opens with a close-up of a wrench tightening a large bolt onto a tiled wall. The next shot partially shows a bathroom sink. The last close-up is on a pair of hands putting a glass under the sink faucet, then turning a sink knob to release hot water, turning a second knob to release cold water, and finally pulling a bar handle, now attached to the sink, which forces Miller out of the faucet. The viewer hears, “Nice wrench work, chief. If more men would heed the call of the Y chromosome, maybe more of us would have three such faucets at our fingertips: hot, cold and Miller High Life.”

Miller (11, 28, 37) Analysis

These commercials not only demonstrate hegemonic masculinity in action but also acknowledge the nascent splintering of masculine forms and, in true hegemonic fashion, attack competing conceptions of masculinity.

The world of Miller High Life bears a strong resemblance to 1950s America, a time before feminism, sensitive men, and competing views of masculinity. From a visual standpoint, the colors in these commercials are washed out and the screen is marked by occasional streaking lines, much like an old, home movie would appear before the days of camcorders. Camera shots that occasionally waver and lose focus add to this effect.

The men are shown in a suburban environment featuring neat rows of one-story, wood homes with separate garages, nicely manicured

lawns and shade trees just beyond every driveway. Depicting housing developments of this kind, which were first built after the end of World War II, adds to the commercials' retro feel, as do the clothes of the men being depicted. One character wears a solid color golf shirt tucked into slacks while the other dons a plaid work shirt and wears a fishing hat. Even the sink fixtures in "Beer Faucet" are noticeably dated.

The only hints that these commercials are not set sometime in the 1950s come from the mechanical devices that are scorned by the narrator. There were no shiny, new SUVs in the 1950s, and the boat featured in "Parking Woes" is a modern one.

These men, who embody traditional hegemonic masculine traits, stand in judgment of modern masculine forms and declare them unacceptable. In these commercials, physical labor is a hallmark of manhood. The men are shown either raking their property or installing a new sink fixture. Both men outdoors are holding their rakes and half-empty bottles, and the one indoors is shown drawing himself a pint of Miller after installing a bar handle on his sink. The reward of physical labor is Miller beer.

The behavior of the men in these commercials supports the idea that masculinity is best demonstrated in nature, much like the cowboy of the American west. In "SUV Disgust," the narrator chides the SUV owner because he is not likely to use his machine to conquer nature. "This car will only see off-road action if the driver backs over a flower bed," the narrator says sarcastically.

These commercials support the notion that men do not show emotions. None ever speak, and two are shown with their backs to the camera. All one sees of the man working on his sink is a pair of arms. These men rarely move and maintain expressions of almost complete passivity, giving only slight physical indications of their annoyance and disgust. Their emotions are brought to the fore via the narrator's voice mirroring the men's thoughts.

From a Marxist perspective, these commercials promote physical labor as a necessary key to manhood and the trappings of wealth as antithetical to manhood. The man in "SUV Disgust" derides the owner of the SUV and attempts to emasculate him by calling the vehicle a station wagon and suggesting that the owner trade his trousers for a skirt. In society, however, SUVs are status symbols purchased by individuals who can afford to spend more money for gas and upkeep costs. Many SUVs come equipped with features found mostly on luxury cars. The SUV in commercial 11 is equipped with an optional front-end protector. In this commercial, the attainment of wealth is not desirable if one wishes to be a "real man."

Similarly in "Parking Woes," the main character chides his neighbor because he cannot effectively control his SUV. But the neighbor, in addition to owning an SUV as a status symbol, also has a boat, which represents not only the wherewithal to purchase expensive items, but also the availability of leisure time to enjoy them. Instead of raking his lawn, as the main character does, the neighbor enjoys his

boat. This ad depicts wealth as contrary to manhood and frowns on those people whose social position allows them to have leisure time.

While these ads promote control as a key element of masculinity, it seems the level of control experienced by these men is limited to their homes. It is unlikely that someone living in a one-story prefab house possesses a position in elite society. These men clearly do not have the means to hire someone to do their yard work. Yet, through beer, they get to experience Miller Time, known in these ads as “the High Life.” How paradoxical, that in order for a man to experience “the High Life,” he must give up desires for material wealth and social status. Here, the term “High Life” is used to subdue the working classes and legitimize their subsidiary place in society.

#### New Conceptions on Display

Unlike sports stars who are always in control and men living the High Life, men in commercials for Bud Light (20, 27, 45) and Miller Lite (7) have an opposite relationship to beer than the hegemonic examples seen in ads for Coors and Miller. Here, beer is a catalyst that causes men to lose control and subsequently embarrass themselves. However, this embarrassment does not affect their ability to feel masculine. These commercials are excellent examples for discussing how the dominant ideology maintains the social position of the working classes by legitimizing and lionizing helplessness and missteps.

## A Laddish Initiation

The first Bud Light commercial, “Street Racer,” (20) opens with a scene of four Caucasian men in racing uniforms, much like those worn by NASCAR drivers, conversing at an outdoor track. A racer, speaking with an abnormally high-pitched voice reminiscent of someone who has inhaled helium, says, “Hey, looks like it’s going to be a great race.” Another driver, the commercial’s main character, responds, “Yeah, I guess.” His voice, however, operates within the normal tonal range for a man. The first driver responds, “You new around here, huh?” When the main character responds in the affirmative, a third driver, who also has a high-pitched voice, says, “Well, good luck.”

The next scene consists of fast-cutting camera shots showing the four men, wearing helmets, racing down a twisting, asphalt street at breakneck speeds on wheeled skeleton racers. The men pilot these devices, which are similar to skeleton sleds seen in the winter Olympics, by lying on their backs and pointing their feet downhill. The montage is set to dance music with a heavy beat and the following lyrics. “I race, I ride, I take it to the top. I want it, I need it, I will not be denied.”

At the end of the montage, the camera follows the racers as they move into the track’s final segment. The television viewer sees the main character, leading the race, take his eyes off the track and fixate on a pretty, brunette waitress as she delivers a tray of two Bud Light bottles to a table of spectators. She glances and smiles at him in slow motion as she walks. Next, the viewer sees the main character’s skeleton sled veer

off the track and head for what appears to be a flagpole. Although never shown on camera, it is assumed that the racer crashes his genitalia into the pole, due to the position of his body on the sled.

The final shot shows all four racers conversing at the finish line. One remarks to the main character that he ran a good race, to which he responds, "Thanks," now speaking in the same high-pitched voice as everyone else. An announcer says, "For the great taste that won't fill you up and never lets you down, make it a Bud Light."

#### Bud Light (20) Analysis

This commercial is centered around the theme of initiation, which serves to mark the crossing of a boundary between social levels. For example, an initiation that takes place in almost every culture is the puberty rite, during which a male goes from boy status to man status. In previous research on beer commercials, A major theme in beer commercials involves using beer to initiate a newcomer into the socially constructed masculine world. (Postman et al., 1987: 14)

In "Street Racer," the experienced racers have the authority to accept the main character into the masculine world of street racing. Were this commercial using hegemonic masculinity as its model, it would be necessary for the main character to complete the course without error to gain acceptance as a man. This ad uses the Laddish masculinity as its model, one that is not based on control and, in fact, shuns it.



It is clear from their high-pitched voices that the experienced racers (those who have already been accepted as men) have already lost control on the race track, yet they form the dominant male group to which the newcomer must aspire. The main character reveals his status as a first-time racer through his normal speech. During the race, the main character focuses on the beer, which causes him to lose control and undergo the experience that will ultimately allow him to be accepted by the other men. Instead of making fun of him at the end of the race, the experienced racers tell the main character that he had a “good race,” thereby initiating him into the Laddish masculine world of fun and speed. Note that none of the characters exhibit shame at having injured their genitalia, the biological differentiator between men and women. Now, all the men literally speak like little boys, those known as lads.

From a Marxist perspective, this commercial demonstrates that being accepted as a full member of society is a painful process to be avoided. At the beginning of the narrative, the main character’s first time status is evident to the experienced racers in the group. He is a new addition to the world of power that street racing represents. By the end, however, the main character is a full member of the racing group, being told by the others that he had a “good race.” He is now fully accepted into the social group, but at what cost? The initiation has changed his speech and left him with the voice of a boy.

Likewise, members of the working class, not fully accepted into contemporary American elite society, are cut off from the world of power

and control. They are unable to own expensive items and take expensive trips. Their family heritage and lack of social skills also prevent them from joining certain clubs and civic organizations and getting their children accepted into select schools.

Through this commercial, members of the working classes are urged to forgo any attempts to aspire to the dominant classes. Joining the masculine world of power and speed, as represented by the street skeleton racers, would mean undergoing a painful experience.

### Smashing Self Control

While the previous Bud Light advertisement countered the hegemonic notion that men must control their surroundings, the following pair, starring comedian Cedric “The Entertainer,” attack the idea that masculinity is predicated upon self-control.

“Port-A-John Mishap” (27) opens with an African-American couple laughing as they stroll arm-in-arm through a sunny, carnival fairground. The woman, svelte and wearing a peach sun dress, is holding a bottle of Bud Light. The main character is wearing a brown, striped derby and is dressed in black slacks and a white, button-down shirt open in the front.

As the couple approach a portable bathroom, the woman asks, “Hey, would you be my big, strong watchdog and guard my Bud Light while I go to the ladies room?” to which the main character responds with an affirmative, “Woof,” before taking the beer from her. The verbal exchange between the two shows they are clearly enjoying each other’s

company. She caresses his face and runs her left hand over his chest while he smiles at her request to hold the beer bottle. He seems to enjoy the watchdog moniker. The music that underscores the scene is a derivative of funk and features horns and a noticeable bass line.

In the second shot, the man, now standing in front of the bathroom door, notices some friends across the fairground and begins to wave and dance. The music comes to the fore as the main character, not paying attention to what is behind him, repeatedly thrusts his hips and backs into the toilet, now teetering from the force of his gyrations. In the next camera shot, the main character bumps the toilet with enough force to send it off its base and down a steep incline, which elicits screams from the woman still inside. The camera focuses on a close-up of the man's expression, which is one of surprise. A narrator reads the lines, "For the great taste that won't fill you up and never lets you down, make it a Bud Light."

The final shot shows the main character and another African American couple, ostensibly the friends to whom he was waving, looking off-camera at what is assumed to be the woman, who has emerged from the toppled bathroom. The main character ends the commercial by shouting to his soiled date, "It ain't that bad." The other characters in the shot do not seem concerned with the woman in the fallen bathroom. Instead they seem like rubberneckers at a car crash, their faces filled with a mixture of interest and relief that they were not the ones in the bathroom when it toppled.

“Shake It Up” (45) illustrates similar themes. A man is embracing a beautiful, African-American woman on his living room couch to the sounds of light, romantic music, reminiscent of a samba. Both are dressed in expensive clothes, he in a silk shirt and and she in a party dress. They withdraw from the embrace and gaze longingly at each other. She asks, “Why don’t you go get something to cool this fire down?” The main character tells her that he knows what to get and, maintaining his composure as he seemingly glides across the floor, walks into the adjoining kitchen. As he walks, we see that the apartment is well furnished. The kitchen is orderly and a full cadre of cooking utensils is in full view.

The camera follows the man into the kitchen, where he looks into his refrigerator and finds two bottles of Bud Light. With the beer bottles firmly in hand, the samba-style underscoring switches to a heavy dance beat and increases in volume. The main character, obviously excited at his successful efforts to impress the woman, gyrates and shakes his arms and hips to the dance beat. After a few seconds of dancing, he pauses on the other side of the kitchen door for a moment to regain his suave composure before returning to the living room.

The camera next focuses on the man walking slowly to his date, presenting the bottles of beer, and saying, “I got two logs for that fire.” Handing one of the bottles to the woman, he sits down in his original position on the couch. Next, the viewer sees the main character holding the beer near his stomach, with bottle opening pointed at his date. He

twists off the cap and an inordinate amount of beer comes rushing out, due to his shaking it in the kitchen, and douses the face of his date. The announcer says, “For the great taste won’t fill you up and never lets you down, make it a Bud Light.”

The final camera shot shows the main character trying to clean off his date’s face with a blow dryer. She has her eyes closed and appears to be grimacing, still repulsed by what happened. The man tells her, “It’s not that bad.”

#### Bud Light (27, 45) Analysis

The two commercials that feature Cedric “The Entertainer” demonstrate Laddish attitudes toward women and self-control. Although Lads want women for sexual purposes only, they often achieve this end by presenting themselves as possessing traditional masculine qualities. “He (the Lad) aspires to New Man status when he’s with women, but reverts to the Lad type when he’s out with the boys. Clever, huh?” (Jackson et al., 2001: 35)

In both commercials, the main character successfully presents himself to his female counterpart as a New Man, which was described earlier as someone who possesses an accommodating attitude toward women in addition to otherwise hegemonic masculine traits. Clearly, the woman entering the bathroom has asked the man to be her watchdog. Dogs have long been a symbol of traditional masculinity and they have been used as mascots by beer companies, including Budweiser.

The men in these ads revert to a Laddish identity when their dates are not in sight. In “Port-A-John Mishap,” the appearance of friends is the trigger that sends the man into a boyish dance that ultimately dooms his date. Likewise, in “Shake It Up,” the man alters his behavior drastically when out of his date’s line of sight. The viewer witnesses the man take great pains to regain his artificial persona before re-entering the living room. As nary a wedding ring is seen in any of these commercials, they support the Laddish position that marriage is undesirable because men can only be their natural selves when they are away from the eyes of women.

The irrelevance of self-control to demonstrating one’s masculinity is another theme in these commercials. Here, the beer is a catalyst that causes men to lose self-control. In both ads, the men begin gyrating only after having a Bud Light in their hands. The music heard on the commercials’ soundtracks is for the benefit of the viewer and does not exist for the characters. Therefore, in the world of the commercial, the men who dance do so with no musical accompaniment that would give them a reason for performing their gyrations.

Strate maintains that the theme of self-control has long been present in beer commercials. (R. Anderson and L. Strate, 2000: 154) In ads that promote a hegemonic definition of masculinity, a man who exhibits a lack of self-control is seen as unable to meet the challenge posed by alcoholic consumption. He is often guided by a hegemonic masculine model that instructs the man to take command of himself.

Here, there is no such model. The main characters dismiss the effects of their Laddishness with the slight phrase, "It's not that bad." In the Laddish tradition, these men are not overly concerned about their future relationships with the women they have offended. In "Port-A-John Mishap," the main character offers no assistance to the woman after her fall. He offers no words of concern and makes no attempt to console her, choosing instead to remain with his friends. Now covered in human excrement, she is no longer sexually desirable to the man. As such, she is useless to him.

There are stronger psycho-sexual overtones in "Shake It Up." In the characters' dialogue, while seemingly working in concert, the man and the woman are at cross purposes. The viewer sees the woman draw away from the man's embrace. Although she is smiling, she clearly downplays the prospects for a sexual encounter with the words, "Why don't you go get something to cool this fire down?" The man, returning with two bottles of Bud Light, tells her, "I got two logs for that fire." This is a reference to the ability of alcohol to lower inhibitions and make it easier for men to achieve their sexual goals.

The Laddish goal of using women solely as sex objects is accomplished in this commercial figuratively, if not literally. The beer bottle is clearly a phallic symbol and the act of shaking it up and letting it explode clearly parallels ejaculation. It is important to note that the man's Laddish nature, which caused him to shake the bottles of beer, was the means by which his sexual desires were symbolically fulfilled. The

scene in which he douses the young woman is titillating, vaguely paralleling rituals from hardcore pornographic films in which men ejaculate on women's faces for the sexual pleasure of the viewer. The amount of beer, and the force at which it exits the bottle, is intentionally exaggerated. This commercial links alcohol with loss of control and the victimization of women. Also, women in these commercials end up covered in human fluid in both a pictorial and figurative sense.

Viewed through a Marxist ideological framework, these commercials divert the attention of the working classes away from class conflict by depicting a scenario that focuses on gender conflict. Marx believed that class was the only meaningful social distinction. Other factors, including sex and ethnicity, never had a place in traditional Marxism.

These ads portray black men, who are typically members of the working classes, as successful people who wear fine clothes and live in luxurious apartments. While the lifestyle depicted in these ads is unattainable for most black men, who are members of the working classes and will never possess status jobs, these working men continue to use white collar media models as yardsticks to measure their own success level. (Kimmel, 1992: 230)

The linkage between masculinity and alcohol consumption and abuse of women that is portrayed in these commercials serves as a dangerous model for the working class male to emulate.



## Marketing Masculinity

In 2001, Miller Brewing Co. began marketing Miller Lite in plastic beer bottles. The same year, Ireland-based Guinness Brewing Co. began marketing a draft version of its Guinness Stout that featured a device inside each beer bottle, dubbed the “rocket widget,” which preserved the beer in its draft form. A textual analysis of two commercials constructed around the plastic bottle and the rocket widget reveals how each beer company uses masculine overtones to draw drinkers to their new products.

“Plastic Bottle” (7) begins by depicting several aspects of the Laddish lifestyle, as labeled in Chapter 2. A group of men are shown tailgating at a sporting event. The blue, outer wall of a baseball stadium looms in the background as men throw frisbees to one another in the foreground. The atmosphere is one of fun and relaxation. Two men are featured prominently. An African-American in his late 20s, wearing a casual button-down shirt with an orange pattern, drops to his haunches to get a beer from an open cooler. The camera cuts to his friend, a Caucasian man wearing a red, button-down shirt standing about 14 feet away, who says, “Hey Steve, throw me a Miller Lite.” This request from the main character forces a frown onto the African-American’s face, and the words “throw me a Miller Lite” echo, as if spoken into a canyon.

The picture blurs out of focus, signifying a break in the timeline of the narrative. When focus returns, the viewer is treated to a series of occurrences that demonstrate the main character’s lack of coordination.

The main character says, "Toss me the remote," and he lets it slip through his fingers and out a window open nearby. At a sporting event, he calls to a vendor, "Hey, peanuts," which come from off screen and hit him in the face. The main character is playing outfield at what is ostensibly a softball game and a ball bounces into the camera shot and hits him in the groin. Next, the same man is shown at a bar where he falls off his barstool while trying to catch some popcorn in his mouth.

The viewer is returned to the original timeline of the narrative through another fade technique. There are two quick, close-ups on the men's faces. Even though the main character, who is cultivating the attention of a cute, Caucasian woman in her 20s, looks eager to try, the African-American seems worried that his friend will not catch the beer bottle. The toss is made and, although the main character catches the bottle, he drops it in his attempt to give it to the woman. Next, the bottle is shown on the ground, still intact.

The woman takes responsibility for the fallen bottle by saying, "I'm such a klutz," and the main character, recognizing a kindred spirit, introduces himself as Dan. The narrator is heard saying, "Grab the unbreakable plastic bottle from Miller Lite. It's Miller Time."

The Guinness ad "Rocket Widget" (36) seems to target the same upscale, 20-something males as does "Plastic Bottle" but uses traditional masculine themes, including the entrance into nature, to promote the new product. The commercial begins with blackness and tiny stars floating in the distance to establish the illusion of outer space. Sounds

of radio chatter mixed with static grow louder as an object appears in the distance and heads toward the camera.

The object, moving from right to left across the screen, is a gray rocket ship in the shape of a cylinder with a conical top. As it passes through the foreground, the words “1759 Rocket Widget” are seen printed on the side of the craft. Although there is nothing to give a sense of perspective, the rocket is made to look enormous as it passes through the shot. The camera pans to follow the craft, soon engulfed in a brown cloud of fast-moving particles. This quickly occupies the entire shot.

The announcer says, “Thanks to the technology inside, you can take Guinness Draft outside.” With the mysterious brown cloud still filling the screen, the camera pulls back and appears to emerge from the top of a Guinness bottle and continues to pull back until the entire bottle appears in the shot, held against the blue-jeaned leg by the left hand of a Caucasian male.

Finally, the camera pans away from the bottle and the viewer understands that the man, who is never seen except for his hand and legs, is holding the Guinness as he sits in a chair at a backyard barbecue. It is night and stars illuminate the night sky, much like they appeared at the ad’s opening. The camera settles on a Caucasian woman in her 20s dancing in front of the man holding the Guinness. The stars once seen inside the bottle now decorate the night sky. The announcer ends the ad with, “Announcing Guinness Draft in a bottle.”

## Miller Lite (7) and Guinness (36) Analysis

These two commercials distinguish themselves from all others in the data field because the products they advertise are physical manifestations of competing masculine forms. The Miller Lite ad portrays a Laddish definition of masculinity because the product being advertised, beer in a plastic bottle, is a symbol of the New Lad's rejection of control-based masculine conceptions. Similarly, the commercial for Guinness features strong references to the challenge of nature because the rocket widget facilitates outdoor consumption of the draft beer, which typically has been confined to indoor venues only.

Like "Street Racer" (20), "Plastic Bottle" tells the story of a Laddish man experiencing a loss of control. Notice that there is no initiation ritual because the main character in this commercial already embodies Laddish masculinity. He cannot control various objects that are thrown his way. Yet, instead of reacting with embarrassment, he appears comfortable with his inability to catch and continually places himself in situations where he will probably drop whatever is thrown to him.

Therefore, a plastic beer bottle that will not break when dropped is the ideal product for such a person. In society, a plastic beer bottle absolves a drinker from maintaining the minimum amount of sobriety necessary to keep from dropping and breaking an easily shattered glass bottle. By marketing a plastic bottle, Miller Lite has created a physical product that represents the tenets of Laddish masculinity, the avoidance of control and responsibility in favor of fun and exciting situations.

From a Marxian perspective, this commercial implores those who lack control to place their trust in outside forces instead of taking control of themselves. Here, the main character obviously demonstrates a lack of coordination but instead of working to improve to the point where he can catch successfully, he relies on a plastic beer bottle, which eliminates his need for coordination. In the same way, the working classes are not in control of many aspects of their lives. They are usually the first workers to be replaced by technological advances and earn the lowest incomes. All the while, they are coerced by the dominant ideology to continually operate in the current social system. This depiction of a man ignoring his lack of control in favor of using a crutch provided by Miller Lite legitimizes reliance on the dominant ideology.

Before the introduction of the rocket widget, men wanting to drink Guinness Draft were forced to do so in a pub, where the ingredients of the un-pasteurized stout could be served fresh from the tap. Because consumption of the beer was confined to an indoor arena, Guinness could not use images of nature to promote its product. As explained in the analysis of Coors' Barry Sanders testimonial, (4) linking a beer to the natural world imbues the product with hegemonic masculine overtones.

The rocket widget, however, allows the draft to be consumed in that most traditionally masculine of places, the great outdoors. Doing so is encouraged by the announcer, who says, "Thanks to the technology inside, you can take Guinness Draft outside." In truth, the rocket widget allows drinkers to consume Guinness Draft anywhere outside a pub,

including other buildings. Notice, however, that the word “outside” is used in the commercial to mean “nature.”

The “Rocket Widget” ad uses the challenge and excitement of space travel, otherwise known as the final frontier, as one of its themes. Much as Coors offers a challenge to drinkers through its linkage with nature, so does Guinness equate itself with the theme of challenge through its use of space imagery. Much as space is exciting, dangerous and challenging, so are the prospects of drinking Guinness.

The commercial tells viewers, through a narrative that is rife with symbolism, how the excitement of Guinness Draft can be transferred into the world of the great outdoors. The beer, which is one of the darkest on the market, is depicted as deep space while the rocket widget is represented as a space ship that bears a striking resemblance to the shape of the actual device. When the camera pulls back through the brown foam that occurs when a Guinness is opened and emerges into the back yard scene, it is as if the excitement of Guinness is transferred to the man who is drinking it, who finds himself in an outdoor setting.

#### A European Perspective

Commercials for Amstel Light (16, 17) promote the supposed superiority of European beer, specifically Amstel, by attacking American beer and its linkage to American masculine forms, both traditional and modern. The men in Amstel ads are not affiliated with American masculinity and therefore are free to judge and, ultimately, condemn it.

“Baffled Brewers” (16) opens in a brewery replete with large, copper-plated, cylindrical brewing devices and whirring pasteurization machines. Three Caucasian men dressed in white laboratory coats and black slacks are standing in the foreground. They are the brewmasters at the imagined brewery on display in the commercial. Two are bald, one has a few wisps of gray hair, and all are older than 50, clearly the oldest men depicted in any beer commercial used for this study. Each is holding a bottle of beer in his hand that seems to be the source of much wonder and confusion. The camera holds steady as each man alternately stares at the beer bottle, scratches his forehead, or throws up his hands to signal futility. The narrator says, “Sorry. We’re from Amsterdam. We didn’t know light beer was supposed to suck.” The shot switches to a bottle of Amstel Light against a gold background as the narrator finishes, “Amstel Light, the beer drinker’s light beer.”

In “Just Add Water,” (17) the commercial opens with a shot of a man pulling a pint of Amstel Light from a draft handle behind an elegant, cherry wood bar. The viewer sees only the bartender’s right hand, which is pulling the pint, and left hand, which is holding the glass. The camera pans down to follow the glass, which features the Amstel Light logo, as the bartender takes it away from the tap and places it on the bar. The beer has a darker color than is found in most light beers. Several Caucasian patrons can be seen moving in the background but are incidental to the narrative of this ad.

The announcer says, “If you want that light beer taste...” after which water begins gushing into the glass of Amstel from off screen. The water causes the beer to overflow from the glass and soak the bar. The narrator finishes the sentence with, “... just add water.” After mixing with water, the contents of the glass is largely clear and has lost its golden color. The commercial finishes identically to “Baffled Brewers,” where Amstel Light is declared “the beer drinker’s light beer.”

#### Amstel Light (7,8) Analysis

These Amstel Light commercials hold American men accountable for the discrepancies between their masculine ideals and realities. The two Amstel ads portray American beer as a weak opponent for men looking to demonstrate the power over their environment. As mentioned in Chapter 1, most domestically mass-produced beer has a lower alcohol content than their European counterparts. The cultural definition of hegemonic masculinity, however, purports that men drink beer to be challenged and, ultimately, win control. This theme has evidenced itself in ads from American brewing giants Coors and Miller. Likewise, commercials that present characters with Laddish identities, including those produced by Bud Light, use beer as a catalyst for creating chaos. These two Amstel commercials point out the folly that American men are testing their masculine identities against the weakest of opponents, i.e., watery American beer.



Since Amstel is a European beer, its advertisements are not forced to portray American conceptions of masculinity. Hence, it is in a position to successfully attack these American definitions of masculinity. Amstel presents itself as the “real” challenge, where American beers are merely second class contenders. The narrator’s comment that American light beers “suck” is clear enough. Similarly, the gushing water used to dilute a glass of Amstel Light to make it more “American” is a visual accusation of domestic brewers.

## CHAPTER 6

### RESULTS

#### Conclusions

There is widespread belief that commercials play a significant role in shaping social conceptions of masculinity. Television advertisements are merely one component of a larger media mechanism that establishes, portrays and reflects American cultural meanings, values, and expectations. Commercials sell products by linking them with the fears, hopes and beliefs of the intended purchasers.

When examining beer ads, it is clear that depictions of social conceptions of masculinity are among the devices that link the beer being advertised to the television viewer. This research supports the position held by Strate that beer commercials are manuals on masculinity. In addition to beer drinking, the other actions of men in beer commercials promote particular views of what it means to be a man. Here, further thoughts are offered.

Note that the characters in beer commercials are stereotypes. There were no depictions of sensitive men, nor were any thoughtful men, intelligent men, homosexual men or even ethnic men portrayed. There were only one-dimensional men, which is the essence of a stereotype. Any time a stereotype is used as a substitute for a complex social phenomenon like masculinity, then society as a whole is short-changed.

The findings of this study demonstrate that men in beer commercials are portrayed as either traditional man's men or adult man-children who shun the responsibility that comes with age. Commercials that present a hegemonic conceptualization of masculinity promote man's dominance over a set of variables that includes himself, his environment, other men, and the natural world. This social construction of masculinity, formed in the 19th century, is the standard which all others are compared. For example, the Coors ads that featured Barry Sanders and Yogi Berra (4, 10) are as suited to the 1950s as they are in the 21st century. Conversely, commercials that depict a socially constructed definition of masculinity that opposes the tenets of traditional masculinity portray men as inept and out of control.

In the world of hegemonic masculinity, men work hard and play hard, as evidenced by the testimonials of famous athletes and the depictions of men doing yard work. For the most part, men's labor is physical and beer is a reward for a job well done, a symbol of respect and accomplishment for the worker. As with work, play provides a challenge to a man's physical and emotional strength. Sports also provide an arena where immediate action is required and control over one's body is the difference between failure and success.

Although never explicitly stated, drinking is a test of control in those commercials that feature hegemonic masculine overtones. Because alcohol affects one's ability to respond to new situations, it increases the risks associated with movement and speed. Therefore, the challenge is

also increased. In this way, beer is not only a reward for demonstrating the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity but also a way in which men can test their self control and thereby prove their masculinity.

In the Laddish world, men sacrifice control and power to experience fun and excitement. Men often encounter challenges but actually reinforce the Laddish conception of masculinity by failing these hegemonic tests. Just as beer works to enable hegemonic masculine males, so does it provide the means by which men lose control. Utilizing the Laddish social conception of masculinity works in advertising for two reasons. First, it provides an alternate conception of masculinity for those viewers who do not identify with traditional, hegemonic models. Second, it may resonate with men who are experiencing gender role strain, a condition that causes men to feel inadequate.

The analysis also shows that beer commercials are ripe for a class-based analysis. Several commercials, including Miller (11, 28, 37), are clearly engineered to appeal to working class people more than others. Other ads link physical strength and labor with masculinity to fixate the working classes on physical labor. Furthermore, the emergence of Laddism and Laddish media portrayals should be investigated as to whether this conception of masculinity serves to legitimize the lack of control experienced by the working classes. For example, if working class men believe that control is not necessary to be masculine and, furthermore, not desired, then there is no impetus for them to struggle against the dominant classes' ideology and oppression.

## Implications

The results of this study are meaningful to several different groups in society, including executives who control beer companies, parents, lawmakers, television viewers, beer drinkers and researchers. First, beer companies should examine more closely the themes that are present in beer ads, apart from merely promoting the product. This short analysis showed that many beer ads not only contained, but normalized images of men abusing women and men losing control of fast-moving vehicles. In other words, the abuse that women endured at the hands of Cedric “The Entertainer” in Bud Light (27, 45) and the loss of control experienced by the racer in Bud Light (20) were not depicted as cause for concern. Should the courts ever reverse their position that beer ads are merely “grandiose suggestions” not meant to be taken seriously by the public, and consider the social effects these ads may produce, then major manufacturers including Budweiser could be opening themselves to lawsuits by battered wives and people convicted of drunk driving.

Parents should be especially concerned about how messages in beer commercials affect how children view adulthood. Because male children are not yet masculine, either biologically or socially, they do not possess a frame of reference with which to gauge the content of beer ads. There is some question as to whether using Laddish depictions of masculinity in commercials is akin to cigarette companies using cartoon characters, including Joe Camel, in print advertisements. The Laddish characterizations found in this analysis, which depict men seeking fun

and excitement in a consequence-free environment where they do not possess control, bear a striking resemblance to the mindset and day-to-day lives of many children. Further studies should be made to determine how the emergence of Laddism and its utilization in advertising has altered children's opinions of alcohol consumption.

Lawmakers, whose role in society is ostensibly to better the lives of American citizens, should also take note of this analysis. As yet, the government has not chosen to place the same restrictions on beer advertising that cigarette companies must follow. This is a wonder, considering both industries use similar soft-sell techniques and create images that may be appealing to children. Before the emergence of Laddism, beer ads dealt with traditionally masculine themes that did not appeal directly to children. Now that Laddism is being portrayed in beer commercials, it may be time for lawmakers to re-evaluate beer commercials and possibly impose restrictions for the benefit of society.

This research is useful to television viewers and beer drinkers on multiple levels. Although most people realize that advertising is about more than selling a product, few have been trained to decipher its hidden meanings. This analysis can alert people to themes embedded in beer commercials that they otherwise might have missed. Second, by reading about the linkage between advertising and masculinity as explained here, television viewers can more accurately gauge their reactions to beer commercials and understand why they feel a certain way about a particular ad campaign. Third, beer drinkers can gain

insight into what brewers and advertisers think of them by understanding that the messages in beer commercials say as much about the target audience as it does about the beer.

Finally, these findings provide myriad new questions to be addressed by researchers in future studies. The new topics to be explored include whether any other conceptions of masculinity are making their way into the popular consciousness and if Laddism will become more prevalent than traditional masculinity.

## REFERENCES

- Allen, Robert C. (Ed.) (1992). Channels of Discourse, Reassembled. London: Routledge.
- Baron, Stanley (1982). Brewed in America: A History of Beer and Ale in the United States. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Beneke, Tim (1989). Men on Rape. In M. Kimmel (Ed.), Men's Lives (2nd ed.) (pp.370-376). New York: MacMillan Publishing Company.
- Brooks, Gary R. (2001). Masculinity and Men's Mental Health. Journal of American College Health, 49(6), 285-298.
- Burgess, Robert J. (1993). Silver Bullets: A Soldier's Story of How Coors Bombed in the Beer Wars. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Callinicos, Alex (1976). Althusser's Marxism. London: Pluto Press Limited.
- Capraro, Rocco L. (2000). Why College Men Drink: Alcohol, Adventure and the Paradox of Masculinity. Journal of American College Health, 48(6), 307-316.
- Connell, R.W. (1987). Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics. London: Polity Press.
- Connell, R.W. (1995). Masculinities. London: Polity Press.
- Corner, John (1999). Critical Ideas in Television Studies. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Creswell, John W. (1998). Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design. London: Sage Publications, Inc.



Faludi, Susan (2000). Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man. New York: William Morrow and Co.

Garst, Jennifer and Bodenhausen, Galen V. (1997). Advertising's Effects on Men's Gender Role Attitudes. Sex Roles, 36(9/10), 312-332.

Gough, Brenda and Edwards, Gareth (1998). The Beer Talking: A Carry Out and the Reproduction of Masculinities. Sociological Review, 46(3), 409-436.

Gurevitch, Michael et al. (Eds.) (1982). Culture, Society and the Media. London: Methuen.

Hall, Christine C. Iijima and Crum, Matthew J. (1994). Women and 'Body-isms' in Television Beer Commercials. Sex Roles, 31(5/6), 308-318.

Hall, Stuart (1980). Encoding/Decoding. In S. Hall, D. Hobson, A.Lowe, and P. Willis (Eds.), Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-1979 (pp.128-138). London: Hutchinson.

Hall Stuart (1982). The Rediscovery of Ideology: Return of the Repressed in Media Studies. In Michael Gurevitch et al. (Eds.), *op. cit.* (pp.56-90).

Hall, Stuart (Ed.) (1997). Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices. London: Sage Publications, Inc.

Hanke, Robert (1998). Theorizing Masculinity Within the Media. Communication Theory, 8(2), 183-203.

Harris, Ian (1992). Media Myths and the Reality of Men's Work. In M. Kimmel (Ed.), Men's Lives (2nd ed.) (pp.225-231). New York: MacMillan Publishing Company.

Hernon, Peter (1991). Under the Influence: The Unauthorized Story of the Anheuser-Busch Dynasty. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Jackson, Peter et al. (2001). Making Sense of Men's Magazines. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc.

Jean Kilbourne. (2002). *Biography*. Retrieved February 13, 2002 from: [www.jeankilbourne.com/bio.html](http://www.jeankilbourne.com/bio.html)

Kaufman, Gayle (1999). The Portrayal of Men's Family Roles in Television Commercials. Sex Roles, 41(5/6), 414-426.

Kimmel, Michael S. and Messner, Michael A. (Eds.) (1992). Men's Lives (2nd ed.). New York: MacMillan Publishing Company.

Kimmel, Michael S. (1996). Manhood in America: A Cultural History. New York: The Free Press.

Klumas, Amy L. and Marchant, Thomas (1994). Images of Men in Popular Sitcoms. Journal of Men's Studies, 2(3), 112-122.

Lavine, Howard; Sweeny, Donna and Wagner, Stephen H. (1999). Depicting Women as Sex Objects in Television Advertising: Effects on Body Dissatisfaction. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 25(8), 146-152.

Lincoln, Yvonna S. (1995). Emerging Criteria for Quality in Qualitative and Interpretive Research. Qualitative Inquiry, 1(3), 275-289.

McQuail, Denis (2000). McQuail's Mass Communication Theory (4th ed.). London: Sage Publications, Inc.

Miller, Carl H. (2002). Beer and Television: Perfectly Tuned In. All About Beer, 22(6), 68-72.

Miller, Toby (1998). Commodifying the Male Body: Problematizing 'Hegemonic Masculinity'. Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 22(4), 431-446.

Parker, Betty J. (1998). Exploring Life Themes and Myths in Alcohol Advertisements through a Meaning-Based Model of Advertising Experiences. Journal of Advertising, 27(1), 97-112.

Postman, Neil et al. (1988). Myths, Men & Beer: An Analysis of Beer Commercials on Broadcast Television in 1987. Washington D.C.: AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

Rotundo, E. Anthony (1993). American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era. New York: BasicBooks.

Savan, Leslie (1994). The Sponsored Life: Ads, TV, and American Culture. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Scott, Linda M. (1994). Images in Advertising: The Need for a Theory of Visual Rhetoric. Journal of Consumer Research, 21(2), 252-273.

Strate, Lance (1991). The Cultural Meaning of Beer Commercials. Advances in Consumer Research, 18, 115-119.

Strate, Lance (1992). Beer Commercials: A Manual on Masculinity. In S. Craig (Ed.), Men, Masculinity and the Media (pp. 78-92). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Strate, Lance (2000). Intoxicating Consumptions: The Case of Beer Commercials. In R. Anderson and L. Strate (Eds.), Critical Studies in Media Commercialism (pp. 145-157). New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.

Vigorito, Anthony J. and Curry, Timothy J. (1998). Marketing Masculinity: Gender Identity and Popular Magazines. Sex Roles, 39(2), 135-152.

White, Mimi (1992). Ideological Analysis and Television. In Robert C. Allen, op cit. (pp.163-170).

Wood, J.T. (1999). Gendered lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture. Canada: Wadsworth.