

Beer is for boys; wine is for women:
How women perceive portrayed ideas of masculinity in alcohol advertising

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined
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BEER IS FOR BOYS; WINE IS FOR WOMEN:
HOW WOMEN PERCEIVED PORTRAYED IDEAS OF MASCULINITY IN
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ACADEMIC ABSTRACT

This research explores how women's perceptions of the portrayed ideas of masculinity in beer advertising may risk isolating potential female consumers. This paper examined how women make sense of their own social identity in relation to drinking and their gender through the framework of the social identity theory. The guiding research questions for this research are: How do women respond to the use of hegemonic masculinity in the advertising of beer, how do women perceive beer advertisements in relation to their gender constructions, and how do women's consumption based identities factor into their alcohol preference? Although there is a substantial amount of research on the use of masculinity in alcohol advertisements and its effects on men, this research wanted to explore how those traits of masculinity impacted women and their perceptions of the advertising and brands. The results suggested that women tend to reiterate the existing norms of their gender in relation to alcohol despite their detestation of those norms, and they tend to use a cultural lens through which to make sense of those norms and their perceptions of the ads. Additionally, this study is able to provide clarification on better methods of gender representation in advertisements and suggest to brands potential ways to better reach them as consumers.

INTRODUCTION

Advertising agencies and their clients have been under fire in recent years for their controversial campaigns like Bud Light's "Up for whatever," which featured a tagline on a can many women found to be highly offensive. Reports claimed it perpetuated rape culture surrounding the consumption of alcohol: "Bud Light: The perfect beer to remove 'no' from your vocabulary" (Taylor, 2015; Okyle, 2015). But Bud isn't the only one. Countless other brands have been reproached by news outlets as promoting cultures of aggressive masculinity to young college males (Mullen, Watson, Swift, & Black, 2007; Kaya, Iwamoto, Grivel, Clinton, & Brady, 2016) in an attempt to push growth in a slowing category (Bloom, 2016).

Miller Lite's "Man Up" campaign in 2010 came under fire for encouraging ideas that men can't display an admiration for traditionally "feminine" behaviors such as drinking light beer, wearing scarves, or wearing skinny jeans because it makes them somehow less of man and therefore not worthy of drinking good beer (Urban Bohemian, 2010). Ideas like these continue to align beer with concepts of masculinity and potentially obstruct the consumption of beer by women.

Researchers took note of these trends, highlighting the negative effects of excessive and aggressively masculine advertising on young men (Mullen et. al., 2007; Kaya et.al., 2016; Katz, 2016) through the acknowledgment of the alcohol industry's past standards of masculinity in advertising (Towns, Parker, & Chase, 2012; Katz, 2016). Despite the evolution of both advertising and the alcohol industry, much of the media produced for advertising today still holds onto hallmarks of traditional masculinity when it comes to alcohol meaning: beer, "bros," sports, heterosexuality and disdain of intimacy with women (Towns et. al, 2012). Several beer brands have begun just this year to understand the possible effects of failing to target women.

The biggest hazard is in the acknowledgment that women hold 80% of the buying power in the U.S. (Waters & Ellis, 1996), with their campaigns (Schonbrun, 2016; Natividad, 2017). One brand, Skol, even went as far as to admit “we aren’t like that anymore” in an article on Adweek where they wanted to tell the world they were shedding their sexist skin and embrace feminism (Natividad, 2017). The brand had female artists re-design old ads featuring half naked women so that they showed empowered (and clothed) women instead. And Coors was reported to be trying to target both men and women with their latest work (Schultz, 2016). Their CMO, even went as far as to acknowledge that, “Women drink more than 17 billion beers a year, about a quarter of the industry's total volume” (Schultz, 2016).

Although there’s been a significant amount of research done on the representation of gender roles and promotion of sexist ideals in alcohol advertisements, understanding women’s perceptions have yet to be explored in most cases despite the recent realizations of these issues by the alcohol industry and beer brands. In a practical sense, beer brands believe that their old form of advertising, which followed heavier themes of sexism and masculinity, is affecting their bottom line and potentially alienating women consumers (Schonbrun, 2016; Natividad, 2017). They have no scientific or theoretical basis for their beliefs other than observed phenomena and lost market share, which in turn prompts the need for further study of this subject. Furthermore, the study on women’s perceptions may provide a basis for future research relating to other industries that suffer from sexism and micro-aggressions against women and provide industries an understanding of women as potential consumers.

This qualitative study uncovered findings that revealed a deeper understanding of women’s perceptions of the portrayed ideas of masculinity in beer advertising and how those ideas may risk isolating potential female consumers. These perceptions were unveiled by

conducting a series of semi-structured focus groups to determine that socio-cultural gender implications can not only be identified in a series of beer ads, but also how those ads impact women's development of their personal identities in society, and how brand's messaging makes them feel toward the consumption of beer.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theories and Concepts

This paper intends to examine how women make sense of their own social identity and how drinking and advertising play a role in this process through the framework of the social identity theory. The social identity theory was developed by Tajfel and Turner in 1979 in an attempt to explain intergroup discrimination. It has three primary branches of study: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison. The process starts with social categorization in which people categorize and organize people into groups subconsciously in an attempt to understand the world and the environment surrounding them. These groups often rely on demographic and psychographic traits such as gender, race, geographic location and so on. The second part of this process of understanding is social identification in which a person adopts the identity of the group they have placed themselves into, which becomes the person's "in group," or the group they see that most matches their own traits. The group may be titled something as simple as "middle class" or something more complex such as their friend group which may not host a specific demographic title. The third part, and most important part for this study, is the social comparison portion of this theory. This part involves the comparison of one's own group with other groups that they do not identify with. The differences between the identified in-group and all other out-groups are where prejudices come into play as well as a stressed importance of "fitting in" and social pressures that reinforce that importance (1982; Fischler, 1988).

The primary parts of this paper seek to use are the social identification and social comparison sections of Tajfel and Turner's theory, which emphasizes that an individual's

self-concept is tightly meshed with the traits of group membership. According to them, a person will adopt the identity of the group they categorized themselves as belonging to (1982). These sections of the social identification theory will play a significant role in describing why individual women may feel apprehension to purchase or consume alcohol products that do not fit with their group's norms, whether the group may be comprised of other female friends or the whole of women-kind. The theory may also explain why women who see an excess of masculinity in advertising might associate the product of beer with an in-group trait for males and an out-group trait for females. The latter two sections of the theory will stand as an important guide in not only the development of research questions but also understanding the observed phenomena and synthesizing the data collected.

Researchers R. Elliot and K. Wattanasuwan take this idea a step further by proposing the idea that one's identity is a key factor in material consumption, making the study of social identity essential to comprehend the symbolic meaning of goods and the role played by brands in the development of one's identity (1998). The research done by Elliot is cautious not to generalize that social identity is the sole factor in the development of one's whole identity, but instead provides adequate support for and discussion surrounding its importance (1998). A person's social identity, the traits they project to the world in social situations, stands as just one of many factors that can play a role in the consumption of goods and construction of one's personal identity. Fischler goes as far as to make links between consumption of food and drink with socio-cultural identity in his research titled *Food, self and identity* (1988).

Other research supports the idea that the functions of symbolic meanings associated with certain products help consumers make sense of the social world in which they live and the inward construction of their own identity (Elliot, 1997, as cited in Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998, p. 494; Fischler, 1988). The study done by Elliot in 1997 suggest a link between the social identity theory and choices of consumption. Additional empirical studies continue to suggest the same link when they found that consumers compare themselves with a specific social identity associated with a particular product or product category (Dimofte et. al., 2015; Waters & Ellis, 1996), specifically with evidence that alcohol advertising may help its consumers form a socio-cultural identity (Towns et. al, 2012; Livingstone & McCafferty, 2015).

Dimofte's study also provided that significant perceived differences between a product/product category and one's own identity may yield negative attitudes towards the product (2015). From this, there's substantial evidence of the connection between material consumption relating to alcohol products and socio-cultural identity creation by consumers. The connections between social identity and product associations may provide further explanation to why women do not associate beer as a product "traditionally meant for women" based on the messaging provided in advertisements and the culture surrounding its consumption (Goffman; 1976).

Backing up the idea of consumption based identity are the ideas surrounding social constructionism, which looks at gender as a socially constructed piece of one's identity. Judith Butler, theorist and philosopher in gender studies, developed and argued for the idea that gender isn't a biological concept, but instead is manifested through a "stylized repetition of acts" that bring into being the identity of a person (Butler, 1988).

She argues that gender is entirely a social construct developed through gender performativity; performativity meaning the behaviors and actions of a person are a performance of actions and representations that signal to others what gender they identify with. This concept points to the conclusion that “gender is not something one is; it is something one does” (Butler, 1988).

The concept of gender performativity is backed by Erving Goffman’s studies of gender and identity in advertising (Goffman, 1976). How a person behaves, walks, talks, etc. is in a manner that society labels as “like a man” or “like a woman” to give off the perception of being either a man or woman (Butler, 1988; Waters & Ellis, 1996). Goffman’s study on advertising noted the connection between society’s standard for what is labeled as “like a man” or “like a woman” and projections reinforced in advertisements. Researchers believe media plays a role in the labeling of manly and womanly traits by providing examples of the norms through stereotypes and repetitive representations of what should be considered normal or what are “role-appropriate” behaviors (Waters & Ellis, 1996; Goffman, 1976). In this study, the researcher will look at how beer commercials act as the media providing those repetitive representations of societal norms playing into women’s identities.

Towns (2012) noted that the alcohol industry’s representations of masculinity and gender relations are employed “to promote consumption to men” and “show how portrayals of gender identities in alcohol marketing are socially situated and constructed” (pg. 397) which further reiterates Judith Butler when she stated that gender identity is socially constructed. Additionally, the researchers found that “representations in alcohol advertisements designed to reach young men articulate a ‘manual of masculinity’” which

may signify that beer is a drink for those who wish to present a masculine identity (Towns et. al, 2012; Goffman, 1976; Waters & Ellis, 1996).

Drinking and Masculinity

Many of the ideas contiguous with the social identity theory have already made their way into research done on men, masculinity, and beer advertising. Research on men has been given exponentially more attention historically than the study of women, femininity, and beer advertising (Towns et. al, 2012; Strate, 1991). At the core of these studies is the understanding that drinking is a primarily masculine act which perpetuates a series of behaviors defined as masculine. Beer in particular is associated as an inherently more masculine drink than other forms of alcohol (Elliot, 1991, as cited in Jones, 2011; Strate, 1991). To understand where associations between “being a man” and drinking beer derive from, it’s important to understand the concept of masculinity and what traits define something as masculine.

Most commonly, the term “hegemonic masculinity” reappears in historical gender studies of masculinity after being developed by R.W. Connell in 1987. It is the practice that legitimizes men's dominant position in society, justifies the subordination of women, and explains why men maintain dominant social roles over women in society. It establishes men as a collective dominating sex-class (Dempster, 2011). Jackson Katz, a filmmaker, scholar and author, pioneered the studies and education on masculinity in America (Katz, 2016). He acts a key architect in outlining the problems with excessive masculinity and hegemonic traits being pushed onto American men and goes as far as to link these issues to how the effect women in his TED talk of 2012. His highlighted traits of toxic masculinity are defined by “perceived manliness” by the masses and reiterated

by mass media. They include traits such as over-emphasized strength and physicality, power and respect, and toughness or ruggedness (TEDxTalks, 2012; Katz, 2016).

Although the exact examples or models of hegemonic masculinity are still argued over, the ambiguity allows for situational adaptation of the concept (Connell, 2005). Instead of one single man representing the “ideal” form with specified traits, Connell agreed that the example is dependent on the social framework in which it lies. This means that the representation of hegemonic masculinity refers to whatever/whoever is most dominant at a particular time and place. With this understanding, the models of masculinity can represent the most widespread ideal, desirable, and dominant position for men in any situation (2005).

For drinking, the traits that make beer masculine versus a product such as wine as feminine are defined by cultural and social standards. These ideas are in a growing body of literature of studies on masculinity, alcohol, and advertising (Kaya et. al., 2016; Mullin et. al., 2007). Key concepts described as fundamentally masculine in the category of drinking are outlined by a series of behaviors that would otherwise be deemed inappropriate, such as things like urinating in the streets, being so drunk one couldn't find their way home, and excessive use of violence; all of these acts committed in in order to have a “good night out” and reinforce ideas of manliness (Mullin et. al., 2007; Dempster, 2011; Hughes, 2016). Towns offered other hallmarks of traditional male drinking including beer or whiskey above other forms of alcohol (especially cocktails and wine), young heterosexual white males, groups of friends or “bros”, sporting events, and the fear of intimacy with women (2012). The researchers acknowledged these acts put men in the dominating position by setting boundaries that state women cannot behave in the same

manner. All of these acts combined with the already-acknowledged apparent sexualization of women in beer ads (Jones & Reid, 2011; McMullan & Miller & Perrier, 2012; Towns et. al, 2012) suggests beer is a primarily a male drink (Elliot, 1991, as cited in Jones, 2011; Strate, 1992).

Another reason to label beer as a primarily male product may be because of advertisers' attempt to convince consumers to construct a "consumption-based masculine identity" (Messner & Montez, 2005; Strate, 1991), meaning advertisers attempt to sell the product by telling men that it's the manly thing to drink. Terms such as "Man Up" are even used in some of the advertising of beer, further supporting the idea of beer as a man's drink (Urban Bohemian, 2010). Messener argues that beer and alcohol advertising constructs a "desirable lifestyle" in relation to modern social conditions, including any shifts in attitudes and norms, and tensions of the broad gender patriarchy (2005). Messener's argument plays well into the idea that men seek out products that reinforce their masculinity and therefore give them a better social desirability (2005; TedxTalk, 2012). Additionally, Strate articulates that beer is a symbol of membership into a club of exclusive macho men, and that its consumption is a sign of being part of that group (1992). It connects back to Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory in which people seek to be a part of an in-group they identify with or desire to be a part of (1979). The implications of beer as a symbol of manliness echoes further with past research linking the use of products as factors in the development of one's social identity (Elliot, 1997, as cited in Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998, p. 494; Dimofte et. al., 2015; Waters & Ellis, 1996).

Additionally, in alcohol advertising, women are out-casted in a way deemed as unappealing to men or deemed nothing more than a sex object for the male gaze (McKay et al., 2009, as cited in Towns et. al, 2012). Despite many ads having women in them, the target of the depictions is not meant for women. Instead, the women in the ad tend to take passive, secondary, or inactive roles which establishes their lack of importance. Overall, several studies reported that the use of sexual imagery and the objectification of women in beer ads has increased over time (Jones & Reid, 2011; Messner & Montez, 2005; Kirkby, 2003). The sexualization of women and treatment of them as objects for male consumption falls under categories in the concept of hegemonic masculinity in which men further ascertain dominance over women as a sex class (Connell, 1998, as cited in Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This messaging is the type of messaging that has come under fire for promoting sexism and violence against women and ultimately forced advertisers to reconsider advertising's role in the promotion of violence against women (Towns et. al, 2012; Schonbrun, 2016; Taylor, 2015).

This research will be conducted with the acknowledgement that there are extensive studies on the sexualization and marginalization by advertising media, and particularly in the realm of alcohol and beer campaigns (Jones & Reid, 2011; Towns et. al, 2012). In many of these past studies, the representations of women work to demote women by presenting them as objects for men to view, as secondary characters when men are present, or as stereotypes of "femininity" such as mothers and baby makers (Waters & Ells, 1996; Goffman, 1976; Crouteau and Hoynes, 2003; Kirkby, 2003). Goffman gives examples of this in advertising saying boys were often shown as taller or standing in relation to their female counterparts, even in brother sister pairs, all done to highlight

the dominance of a man's position over a woman (1976). Other more obvious examples would be women posing nude or in lesser clothing than male counterparts or in positions defined as explicitly sexual (Goffman, 1976). Crouteau and Hoynes discussed women's representation in advertising in their book *Media/Society* as a way to reinforce the notion that women exist for men's pleasure and therefore gives them a disadvantage and lower position socially (Crouteau & Hoynes, 2003; Goffman 1976). All of these examples note that the excessive repetition of males being placed in positions of power over women is turning women off to beer products/brands.

In addition to the social demotion, the overtly oppressive imagery, when repeated over and over again, tells women what products to consume according to Butler's concept of performativity. These repetitive images in advertising tell women what products are "for women" and "for men" and how women should be seen and act and behave around male counterparts, playing a role in women's developed social identities in relation to their consumption (Dimofte et. all, 2015; Goffman, 1976; Waters & Ellis, 1996). Women who promote traits of femininity react negatively towards the excessive masculinity promoted by the ads because it's not aligning with the identity they choose to "perform" or project to the world (Butler, 1988). In turn, seeing reflections of women's oppression in these ads explicitly tells them "this is not a product for you."

Past research already acknowledges that this sexualization is rampant and pervasive (Waters & Ells, 1996; Goffman, 1976; Crouteau and Hoynes, 2003; Kirkby, 2003) and that it holds negative connotations for men and women (Jones & Reid, 2011). The problem though, is that these images continued to exist in advertising so long as it appeared effective in selling a product or lifestyle. The acknowledgment that

sexualization of women (Schonbrun, 2016; Katz, 2016; Nativdad, 2017) paralleled with an emphasis on manliness is turning women off to the ad and products featured (Jones & Reid, 2011) and prompting the need for further study in this realm.

Additionally, for women who feel comfortable expressing traditionally masculine traits in relation to drinking, they face social ridicule. Their choice to drink beer or to drink in excess is seen by the general population as a “transgression of traditional codes of femininity” (Mullen et. al., 2007; Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016). Both men and women in Mullin’s study expressed the idea that drinking beer doesn’t fall under “typical” social norms for women (2007). The traits outlined by Kaya (2016) are persistent characteristics deemed as “undesirable” by the male participants in Mullin’s study or are considered only acceptable for men when drinking (Mullin et. al., 2007).

Women also found tension in the attempt to balance traditional ideas of femininity with the mix of post-modern public intoxication (Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016). Atkinson and Sumnall noted that women saw drinking as a false sense of empowerment in the attempt to alleviate their pressures to obtain the balance between their femininity and drinking (2016). Women who disregarded traditional gender roles were seen as “risk-takers” and more likely to suffer from heavy episodic drinking or severe drinking problems (Kaya et. al., 2016). These conclusions were drawn despite other studies finding data contrary to that research, providing that women were actually less likely to develop alcohol related disorders (Erol & Karpyak, 2015). These studies establish further support for the explanations as to why men and women consume alcohol differently and establishes that gender plays a major role in that consumption.

Furthermore, the men in Mullin's study defined yet another difference in drinking between men and women by stating that, "women can't handle strong drinks the way men can" and that there was a sense of unease when women acted the same as men when drunk (2007; Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016). The study by Atkinson and Semnall backed up the discomfort expressed by the men in Mullin's study. Women expressed feeling more uncomfortable when they appeared to be inebriated in public, but they were more uncomfortable because of the way they look to others and less so because of the actually feeling of intoxication. Their embarrassment had less to do with the act of being publically drunk itself and was fully rooted in social pressures (Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016). Both of these instances give recognition to the idea that women see drinking as a more masculine act and also that both men and women experience unease when women drink in excess and transgress traditional drinking norms.

Differences in consumption

Through the promotion of manliness in advertising of beer, social norms dictate current consumption habits and behaviors surrounding consumption of alcohol products. It is already widely recognized and proven that men drink alcohol as a whole more often than women (Bloom, 2016; Erol & Karpyak, 2015; Auter, 2016), particularly in social gatherings to help them be more congenial (Olenick & Chalmers, 1991, as cited in Mullen et. al., 2007). Additional data research was able to conclude that millennial men are also the primary consumers of beer overall in the United States (Bloom, 2016; Auter, 2016).

A survey done by Gallup Inc. in 2016 reported that beer was the most consumed alcoholic drink in the U.S., but there are significant gender differences between its

consumption (Auter, 2016). Men reported beer as their preferred drink 54%, while women chose wine as their preferred drink most often with beer coming in second place (2016). Another survey done by Neilson reported the preference of beer for men may be even steeper than 54% for millennial men (Nielson, 2015). This data was backed up by a consumer research report done by Mintel, a marketing research and insight firm (Bloom, 2016). Mintel found that women more often opted for wine over beer, but the gap between men and women who drink beer tended to narrow slightly for younger age groups. Stephanie Stern took note of the importance of gender's influence on drinking habits to develop a study on alcohol consumption habits of men and women that found the same gender differences (Stern, 2016).

Additionally, more than twice the number of men cited beer as a drink "for someone like me" than women respondents (Bloom, 2016), providing potential context for understanding that women don't perceive beer as drink for them. The listing of a product as "for someone like me" helps to place the product as a part of a group's identity touching back on the concepts of consumption based identity and the social identity theory's in-group versus out-group mentality (Tajfel, 1982; Dimofte et. al., 2015; Waters & Ellis, 1996). This research backs the idea that perception plays a big role in decision making. A number of studies done on the connection between food/drink consumption and social identity suggest that "people differentiate their own cultural with their eating habits" as a way to mark membership in a group by "asserting the specificity of what they eat" (Chuck, Fernandes, & Hyers, 2016; Fischler, 1988).

It's important to acknowledge latent differences of each gender's behaviors surrounding beer and perceptions of beer brands because it will stand as a foundation for

further exploration and research in this area. Perceptions alone though cannot be concluded as a driving factor without the acknowledging other variables that come into play for perishable food/drink.

Studies researching media's influence on alcohol consumers often disregard the variable of taste as a key player. Taste is not a factor defined solely by one's genetics, but is modulated by a variety of biological and environmental factors (Noel & Dando, 2015). In Noel's research, the study found that emotions played a big factor in the differences in taste perceptions, particularly having positive taste associations with positive emotions and negative with negative. When they examined trends between genders, males appeared to rate bitter as more intense compared to their female counterparts, which is somewhat contrary to a previous report from a large-sample study, where women rated all tastes more intensely than men (Fisher et al., 2013, as cited in Noel & Dando, 2015). One of the most important takeaways from the study were that taste is influenced by emotion, therefore making subjects of a study more prone to perceived differences in taste when exposed to possible negative emotions (such as potentially negative emotions felt toward sexist advertising).

It's also important to note the wide variation of results not only from Noel's small study, but the large scale study as well (Fischer et al., 2013, as cited in Noel & Dando, 2015). The inconstant variation of results nullifies the possible differences in taste buds between men and women, removing it as a major key player in explaining differences in consumption. Because men and women generally don't taste drinks differently, biology won't adequately explain why there's such a large rift between women and men who choose to consume beer. Therefore, taste as a driving force of decision making is too

varied and unpredictable to play a part in this study, which narrows down the possible differences in gender's preferences to a socio-cultural or psychological outcome.

Advertising Effectiveness

This study will examine how advertising plays a role in women's perceptions of beer and how those perceptions are informed by their social identities. Despite the widespread pervasive beliefs that Americans absolutely hate advertising, Americans say that they "like advertising" overall or feel "indifferent" towards it more than they dislike it (Shavitt, Lowrey & Haefner, 1998). According to Shavitt, Americans reported that they enjoy the advertisements for their entertainment value and find them somewhat informative or useful in guiding their own decision making (1998).

A quantitative study was done to explore advertising's effectiveness in prompting purchase through the measurement of consumers' attitudes towards advertising and their ability to recall the ads (Zenetti & Klapper, 2016). It concluded that both the metrics (attitude and recall) had statistically significant influences on short and long-term advertising effectiveness. Part of the explanation for why advertising may appeal to consumers is because their effects on a consumer's attitude toward the ad or brand, liking of the ad, or the desire induced by the ad (Zenetti & Klapper, 2016). This provides sufficient evidence for the idea that advertising does play an important role in prompting purchase intent for specific products. It could provide more information on the noted disparities between men and women's purchase and consumption behavior relating to beer. At the same time, Zenetti's study cautions that it's hard to isolate all variables and generalize its conclusion stating that advertising can be effective but to "differing degrees for different consumers" due to the sensitivities and background experiences of the

consumers (2016). Additionally, eMarketer, a Market Report database, provided a chart of influences from a survey done on the factors that motivate beer consumers to purchase beer they've never purchased before (2016). The chart noted that (excluding of monetary factors) recommendations from family and friends were the most significant factors with advertising being the next follow factor as motivating users to purchase a beer brand (2016).

With the assumption that advertising does play a role in the purchasing decision of consumers, characteristics of the ad that must be taken into consideration to provide potential explanation for the for the gender disparity between men and women beer drinkers. One in particular is noted in a study that said that advertising in the alcohol industry was rampant with extreme pervasiveness of sexism and the sexualization of women (Ford, LaTour, & Clarke, 2004, as cited in Jones & Reid, 2011). The same study looked at ads with depictions of empowerment for women, neutral depictions, and sexist depictions. It found women across a variety of backgrounds and varying levels of feminism all disliked the offensive ads to a greater extent than the neutral or empowering ads. Jones' research concluded that women reported more negative attitudes toward ads that used demeaning sexual appeals, which could also be included in the potential explanation of difference in consumption of beer. This would be under the assumption that advertising plays a significant part in the decision making process as was noted by Zenetti (2016). This notion was supported by another quantitative study with more than two thirds of respondents in a national survey saying that use information from advertising to make purchasing decisions (Shavitt et al., 1998). Goffman also added in his works that "whether or not consumers actually purchase the products advertised, they

may be influenced by the implicit gender-typed messages” projected by the ads (Goffman, 1976; Waters & Ellis, 1996). This gives validity to the idea that advertising plays a role in shaping identity and behavior even without final purchase intent.

The synthesis of these past studies show the gap between not only men and women’s consumption but also perceptions of beer with possible explanation attributed to the gendering of beer advertisements. There’s a foundation of knowledge that gives clout to the effectiveness of advertising’s impact on attitudes towards brands, whether positive or negative. There’s also an established collection of literature that reviews the negative connections between excessive masculinity in alcohol advertising and promotion of hegemonic masculine behavior and attitudes in men. Where the studies fall short is in their understanding and research of women’s reaction to these ideas of masculinity. Thus, this study proposes the following research questions:

RQ1: How do women respond to hegemonic masculinity in the advertising of beer?

RQ2: How do women perceive beer advertisements in relation to their gender constructions?

RQ3: How do women’s consumption based identities factor into their alcohol preferences?

METHODOLOGY

The literature review provided this research a foundation of common themes and ideas surrounding the portrayal of masculinity in the advertising of beer brands with a great depth of knowledge on its effects of men's behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions in relation to beer. The shortfall of these past studies lies in their one-sided perspective. Many of these studies fail to take into consideration the possible outcomes of beer advertising on women, thus this study targets solely women. Qualitative methods often seek to make meaning of cultural and interpretive studies by employing a wide range of interconnected practices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), much like this study seeks to understand the cultural implications of advertising on its subjects. It also pursues to answer the question "how" in relation to creating social experiences or the meanings of these experiences (2003). Denzin and Lincoln note that qualitative research is "inherently multimethod" to better secure an in-depth understanding of the observed phenomena (2003). For these reasons, the researcher used a variety of methods in her qualitative study to triangulate the information and produce a more conclusive understanding.

Qualitative studies, specifically focus groups and interviews, allow researchers to evaluate the emotions, attitudes, opinions, or sentiments relating to the subject of the discussions (Whyte, 1982; Berger 2000), which in this particular study is the evaluation of attitudes, opinions, and sentiments toward the advertising of beer in commercials. For the purpose of this study, the researcher conducted three focus groups with college-aged women. Focus groups are particularly apt at helping obtain depth surrounding a subject area while potentially giving explanation of its group members' experiences, thoughts, or feelings (David, 2007) which is ultimately the goal of qualitative study. Additionally,

focus groups are commonly used for evaluation of campaigns in advertising, which is another reason the researcher benefitted from this method of study as she examined a series of ad campaigns (2007; Kitzinger, 1994). In addition, focus groups have the benefit of being able to gain a higher number of participants in a shorter amount of time than individual interviews.

The researcher was able to garner three focus groups of college-aged women between the ages of 21 and 26 with 17 total respondents. The standard recommendation is to start with two focus groups until reaching saturation of information (David, 2007). By starting with three groups, the researcher ensured optimal conditions were met for the groups and left open the option to add more later in the study, should the information provided prove inadequate, which it did not. Each group consisted of 4 to 8 women, which erred slightly on the smaller size of the consensus on effective group size, which was denoted as 6 as a minimum number of people in a group (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996; David, 2007).

For this study, the women interviewed went through a screening process and answered a questionnaire that ensured participants who could provide the richest information. Previous studies involving the research of alcohol have used respondents whose age ranged anywhere between 16 and 54 (Mullen et.al., 2007; Dempster, 2011; Jones & Reid, 2011; Livingstone & McCafferty, 2015), with the highest concentration of actual beer drinkers in the U.S. between the age of 22 and 34 (Bloom, 2016; Auter, 2016). Because of this, the women were screened to be over the age of 21, since it is the U.S. minimum drinking age, up to the age of 26 to keep the target to college-aged women

(Dempster, 2011; Mullen et.al, 2007; Livingstone & McCafferty, 2015; Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016).

The researcher put the screener on her Facebook and had friends share the screener in Facebook groups order to get participation. From there, she was able to source a large pool of potential participants. Because of this method of sourcing, the focus group members were all from a large public Midwestern university. The screen was a 6 question survey that helped to keep the potential participants in the correct age range and gender. Additionally, all respondents were screened to be “regular” drinkers. None of the previously listed texts gave specific definition of heavy, regular, or light drinkers, so in order to screen for this, the respondents had to select whether or not they had drank beer or alcoholic cider within the past 30 days. Two studies (SAMHS, 2014, as cited in Erol & Karpyak, 2015; Hughes, 2016) did surveys in which they identified being a “current drinker” as someone who has had a drink within the past 30 days, so this was the criteria the researcher used for her questionnaire. Additionally, the questionnaire asked participants to choose out of a list of seven types of alcohol which they would *never* consider drinking. This question helped to remove anyone who would never consider beer and therefore be too close minded, biased against and inexperienced with beer to provide adequate information on their perceptions of the ads shown. From there, the people who made it to the end of the screener were allowed to provide their name and email if they wanted to be contacted about focus group participation. From this, the researcher was able to develop three focus groups.

Once groups were formed, the researcher started the discussion with a projective technique to prompt discussion. The focus group participants were split in half into two

groups and each group was asked to begin the session by drawing out what they thought the “typical” beer drinker looked like on one side of a poster board. Then they were asked to flip the board and draw what they thought the typical “wine” drinker looked like. The two groups then came back together to discuss their drawings and debate the accuracy of each portrayal. The researcher expected most participants would draw men for the beer drinker and women for the wine drinker, and used this as a launching point for conversation of individuals’ alcohol preferences and preconceived perspectives surrounding beer.

The projective technique, along with a series of topics and questions, were used to initiate further discussion surrounding the consumption of alcohol. This method was similar to a study done on gambling in which the structure of the focus groups involved a discussion prior to presentation of advertisements on the subject (McMullan & Miller & Perrier, 2012). They did a pre-interview questionnaire followed by a pre-ad exposure discussion about the informants’ past experiences with gambling. The pre-exposure discussion was used to “set the mood” before exposing the youth to several gambling ads for discussion. Each person was shown the ads twice before beginning the post- ad discussion (2012). This study followed a similar regime of questionnaire, pre-exposure discussion, ad exposure, and post-exposure discussion. The only difference was the use of a projective technique in the pre-exposure discussion section of the focus group.

For the specific advertisements, three distinctive television ads were chosen and shown twice to the group members. Participants were given paper to write down their initial thoughts and feelings towards the ads. Television ads were the preferred touchpoint across typical categories of advertising in an empirical study of advertising

effectiveness which is why television ads were the only type of ads used in this study (Roozen & Meulders, 2015). A quantitative cross-platform study was previously used to assess the appeal and effectiveness of different advertising mediums including television, radio, web, and print. The study specifically looked at recall, preference, entertainment value, and persuasiveness of each form. The results show that TV commercials significantly influenced the attitude of the subjects compared to the other touch points and was ranked as the most preferred touchpoint two times more than radio which was the next closest in ranking. Because of this, only television ads that ran nationally were used in the study.

In an attempt to get the most representative commercials in a heavily saturated industry, the researcher chose a set of criteria to narrow down her choices. Specifically, the researcher decided to stick with major national beer brands, excluding all small craft breweries and local breweries in an attempt to prevent bias toward or against location specific beers. Additionally, by using larger brands, the participants were more likely have heard of the brands before and were able to speak more freely and openly because of it. They may have had preconceived beliefs surrounding better known brands which will play a part in explaining how these brands help shape societal views. Smaller brands would not hold enough significance to be influential on a mass scale.

The researcher also removed any ads from the running that contained major celebrities to prevent focus group members from fixating on the person instead of the message. She determined this to be true by looking at the commentary sections under each ad on YouTube and Vimeo. She established that celebrities overshadowed the

discussion of the brand, product and message and instead focused in on the celebrity's life, character, successes, and likability.

Any ad that contained a high level of comedy was also removed because of the tendency for people to forgive offenses more easily when humor is involved. Humor also tends to shroud messages more easily and prevent the main idea from being understood as was displayed in the commentary of the commercials. By removing comical ads, the researcher could avoid biases relating to the jokes and humor of any ads.

She also removed any ads with major time relevancy, meaning any ad that is specifically tailored to an event or seasonal occasion. For example, Bud Light had a series of ads relating to the election where they presented ads meant to mimic political ads on television. Another example would be an ad relating specifically to Christmas or the New Year. By avoiding these ads, the researcher avoided political and religious biases as well as avoid time-based priming. It's more likely someone would feel favorable toward a Christmas ad during winter time when they're already primed to be thinking about the holiday season, whereas they may find themselves biased against a holiday ad during the summer season because it would seem peculiar to be thinking about holiday around this time.

In addition to the criteria above, the researcher narrowed her choice in ads to ones that had run in the past five years to keep them in a time span of relevancy. Anything older might seem too out of date and insignificant. The closer to the current year, the more representative the ads are of the current landscape of beer advertisements. Lastly, the researcher sourced her ads by following the criteria listed above when looking at ads available on YouTube and Vimeo, the public spaces where the ads lived. By doing this,

the researcher was able to take ads that were widespread and multiplatform commercials easily available for review.

Each of the three ads were chosen with consideration to their adherence to hegemonic masculine imagery and traits as well as whether or not the ads ran nationally within the U.S. The traits of masculinity were outlined in a series of studies in the literature review with an emphasis on beer, sports, “bros,” sexualization of women, and fear of intimacy with women (Towns et. al, 2012; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Mullin et. al., 2007; Dempster, 2011). Each of the three ads were ranked based on this criteria, with one being offensively masculine as denoted by its adherence to these traits and reports of its offensiveness in the news, one being inherently masculine as denoted by the criteria outlined in the literature review, and one denoted as gender neutral or lacking in the hegemonic masculine traits. The offensively masculine ad chosen was the Budweiser “Not Backing Down” ad that ran in the 2016 Super Bowl. The hegemonic masculine ad was the Dos Equis “New Most Interesting Man in the World” ad which isn’t reported as offensive but follows typical masculine tendencies. This ad is a remake of their old branding with a recast of characters that aired on television in September 2016 and ran into early 2017 before the campaign was cancelled and the agency who created the ad was dropped in June of 2017. And last, the gender neutral ad would be from Miller Coors’ most recent revamp of the brand. The ad is titled “Whatever Your Mountain” as a part of their “Climb On” campaign which premiered in early 2016 and has since expanded and continued to run on air. By using a scale of three different ads, the researcher may be able to uncover disparities between the ads and how each fit into the social identities set out by the women participants.

FINDINGS

This section examines the two primary themes uncovered during a series of focus groups to answer the research questions which address how women respond to the use of hegemonic masculinity in the advertising of beer, how women perceive beer advertisements in relation to their gender constructions, and how women's consumption based identities factor into their alcohol preferences. This study assesses how women make sense of their own social identity and how drinking and advertising play a role in this process through the framework of the social identity theory. Two overarching themes were observed during the research that helps to answer the research questions. The first theme uncovered during this research was the reinforcement of existing gender norms surrounding the consumption of alcohol and the second theme was the use of culture as an interpretive lens for understanding advertisements and the construction of one's identity.

Reinforcement of existing norms

The first theme identified in this study was the reinforcement of existing gender norms, in which the focus group participants provided further evidence that supports the assumptions surrounding gender and alcohol in the literature review. Much of the existing research on alcohol and gender suggested that there's a general assumption that women may not see beer as a product for women. These ideas come from existing cultural norms established by society as a whole. In this particular study, the findings were not only consistent with past research but also took note of an overlying theme in which the participants reinforced gender stereotypes surrounding alcohol consumption.

Women in the focus groups referenced existing norms throughout the study when discussing differences between genders in relation to drinking.

During the research, all participants were broken up into two groups and asked to start with a drawing projective technique. They were asked to draw a typical beer drinker first then a typical wine drinker. The results were congruent across the board. All of the participants ended up drawing their beer drinker as a white male and their wine drinkers as female. Additionally, when prompted with the question of why they chose to portray their drinkers' genders as so, the common responses all centered around expectations.

“I guess I associate beer with guys and wine with women more”

“If you're a man you get a beer. I feel like that's just expected”

“You think of girls having wine nights and guys like getting a keg or 24 pack”

“Women don't drink beer”

From the quotes above, we can see that the notions established in the literature review were backed up, with women agreeing that each product belongs more specifically to one gender over the other. To these participants it was the stereotypical and commonly held notion by society. One participant even expressed her disdain with her own choice to draw these gendered lines when she said, “I hate that I did that. I knew it too when I was doing it but I was like damn it.” From this, we can see the already existing association between gender and alcohol choices for the participants.

Although it was not discussed heavily in the literature review of this research, it's important to understand some of the defining traits of wine drinkers to the focus group member in order to understand gender's role in alcohol preferences. Much as there was evidence to suggest the focus group participants saw beer as “for men,” there was evidence to suggest they found wine to be a primary drink for women or more importantly it suggests that wine is *not* a drink for men.

“I don’t know guys who drink wine”

“I feel like on a younger demographic, I don’t know anyone our age who would order wine that’s a guy”

For all of the focus groups when prompted to draw a typical wine drinker, every single group drew a woman. In fact, several of the participants identified themselves in their drawings or in the other groups’ drawings. One said, “I can see myself in 20 years in your [drawing]” while another agreed saying, “This [drawing] is me.” And when another group began naming off the other products their wine drinker would use such as Lululemon pants and Lily Pulitzer, a group member joked that her fellow member was simply “just naming all her favorites.” None of the women mentioned seeing themselves in the beer drinker drawings.

When discussing the drawings and asked why they chose women for wine and why they chose men for beer, the groups gave the answers of “society” or the quotes above, backing up the idea that beer is *not* a drink for women and wine is *not* a drink for men. Furthermore, there was a social factor to men not drinking beer. One woman said, “Guys would be like ‘you’re weak to drink wine, you’re fruity.’ He couldn’t drink wine or else he’d be made fun of.” And when asked who would make fun of a guy for drinking wine, she responded, “His family and guy friends.” What this indicates is there is an understanding of the pressures to fit into designated gender norms as determined by friend groups or society. Another participant in a separate group reiterated this idea, “I feel like a guy here ordering wine would be like ‘what are you doing?’” saying the “what are you doing” question with a voice of confusion and judgment. The only times men were given the “okay” to drink wine according to the women participants were for special occasions or when involved with a woman specifically.

“The only place he could possibly drink wine is at his wedding, even then it would be like, ‘okay give me a beer.’”

“They would never order it out. They would be like ‘let’s do it over dinner or wine night when we watch a movie together.’”

From this we can see that women believe men make it a conscious decision to not partake in the consumption of wine. They rationalize it by explaining how wine is too feminine and how men do not want to be seen drinking it for that reason.

“Wine – red wine can be, or is at least associated with, lower calorie than other drinks, because caring about calories and health seems a little bit more feminine.”
“I also think how healthy they [wine drinkers] are”

Health was a big factor for women, explaining that caring about one’s health is a feminine trait. This relates back to the idea of men eventually getting a beer belly over time and how that was an obvious progression of excessive drinking and lack of concern for one’s health. There’s a substantial amount of research on health and masculinity often used to explain why men have a higher degree of health-related problems in the United States (Courtenay, 2000). Much of the research suggests that “health-related beliefs and behaviors, like other social practices that women and men engage in, are a means for demonstrating femininities and masculinities.” Courtenay is just one of the studies done in this realm, but provides all of the previously done research on the subject as context to his study. In both the past studies and Courtenay’s study, certain social practices that undermine men's health are often signifiers of masculinity and thus caring about one’s health is considered a more feminine act.

In this research, healthiness of the drinks and taste preferences were excluded as factor in this research, but it’s important to take note of the *perceptions* surrounding health. Similar to Courtenay’s research, healthiness was explained as primarily feminine traits during this research and came up during many points in this discussion. Note

however, that there is no discussion of actual health benefits or physical differences between men and women discussed, simply perceptive differences of the behaviors and associations surrounding healthiness and fruitiness. Calories, tolerance and taste differences didn't hold any relevance.

Furthermore, women felt a lot of strength and conviction in declaring their personal interest in wine with many stating, "I love wine!" The obvious lack of shame showed the sort of confidence women had when it came to admitting their love and comfort around wine. To some extent, they pitied the fact that men did not have the freedom of drinking wine. After stating that a man would take a sip of wine at his wedding but immediately demand a beer after, they continued to say that the bride, "She's okay with herself enough to be able to be like 'no wine tastes good so that's what I'm drinking.'" This makes the implication that there's a point of pride women hold in drinking something seen as feminine, and some sort of pity for men who don't feel confident enough to drink wine. In this case, the focus groups were able to show that men were reinforcing the gendered categorization of wine as a feminine drink through their obvious discomfort. It's also important to note that the women felt free and comfortable talking about their love of wine in a way that wasn't the same for other types of alcohol. What can be inferred from this is that the declaration of confidence towards wine were signifiers of their confidence in their own gender and ability to represent femininity.

When discussing traits of wine drinkers, the focus group participants highlighted specific traits as inherent to most wine drinkers included things like classiness, softness and sophistication, terms antonymic to description of the rugged and tough traits of masculinity established by past research (TEDxTalks, 2012; Katz, 2016). In this case, we

can see again how beer and wine are being placed opposite to one another in the same way masculinity and femininity are placed opposite to one another.

By outlining the differences between beer and wine drinkers, and their gender associations, we can see how the participants in these group defined being feminine versus masculine. Participants were able to ascertain their own ideals of what makes something manly versus what makes something girly as well as outline where they personally saw gender divides in society, specifically relating to drinking. Many of these ideas strengthened the already existing studies outlined in the literature review.

During the study, the use of the three ads shown, Not Backing Down, The New Most Interesting Man, and Whatever Your Mountain showcased how women participants hinted at their awareness of previously discussed existing gender norms. Some of these conclusions examined the connection between the ads shown and whether or not those ads and the product being sold were seen as “for men” or “for women.” More specifically, the focus group participants had to identify whether or not they saw the ads/products as “for them” or a part of their own personal identity. This section in particular is apt at providing a substantive answer for the first two research questions. In the focus groups, the groups were shown three ads and asked who they thought each was targeted towards. Each time, the members in the groups came to a consensus on who was being targeted.

For the first ad, Not Backing Down, the focus group participants were instantly able to pull out the same traits of hegemonic masculinity that the researcher specifically used to select the ad.

“I got a huge ‘this is for macho man’ from the whole ‘it’s not a pony.’ Like a girl, like ponies.”

“It was very macho and hard rock.”

“So it’s targeted someone who wants to feel more masculine almost by highlighting things that aren’t masculine with the negatives like ‘not soft.’”

The group attributed the masculinity of the ad to the traits of heavy hitting music, the use of primarily white men in the ad, and most importantly, the message copy which used negatives to highlight traits the brand didn’t want to associate itself with such as “imported” and “small.” Overall, the participants described the ad as trying to be tough, macho and exclusive. They even were able to specify that the ad was for “white men who like sports.” Some also used words like “caveman” and “Midwestern” man to describe the target which relates back historic archetypes of masculinity such as cowboys.

From this, the focus group participants immediately categorized the messaging as “not for them” and “not for women.” One participant said, “I felt like they put ‘not’ in front of any words that would be associated with women or feminine ideas like ‘not sipping’ or ‘not soft’ and whatever else. Any words you’d associate with women and women’s products, they wanted to clearly say ‘we’re not that.’”

On top of saying “we’re not feminine” the focus group participants noted how the use of “not” was an attempt on behalf of the brand to say their drink is exclusively for *tough* men. One participants said, “The whole ‘not fruit cup’ part, they were trying to say ‘this is a man’s drink.’” Here we can see how the messaging was able to leverage existing social constructs and archetypes to frame this product as a gendered product, and more specifically, a heavily masculinized product. It wasn’t just seen as a drink for men, but was seen as a drink for tough macho men. From that, they were able to readily tell the women that they are not only *not* the target of the ad, but they aren’t supposed to be

drinking the product. The participants all agreed that there was an heir of exclusivity that came out of this particular ad from the gendering.

“The ‘not for everyone’ part was weird, because I wouldn’t fit that so I shouldn’t be drinking it.”

“I think they were trying to make it seem exclusive, like extremely exclusive which is weird to me because Budweiser, when you think of it, I can get it anywhere. It’s not an exclusive brand.”

“I don’t get what they were trying to do. I don’t connect with it.”

The women were quick to say they did not identify with the messaging in the ad, which positions the action of drinking beer as an out-group trait for womankind. A big talking point for this commercial in particular was the conversation surrounding the ad’s use of women. There was a two second shot in the ad of a group of women in festive clothing at a party holding Champagne glasses, with one woman holding a beer and all of them cheering and dancing.

One focus group member said, “I think the part where I felt excluded was when the girls popped up partying cause all the men were the ones putting in the work for it.” She brought up that women were present in the ad, but she didn’t relate to them at all. The women actually made her feel more excluded because of how they were positioned in the ad. Another girl in a different focus group reiterated this idea, “The women that were shown in the group, you knew still that they [Budweiser] weren’t talking to them for some reason.” And that was a consensus of negative feeling toward the one shot with women across all of the focus groups with other participants saying things such as, “I see all these ladies with their wine glasses, cheering. And there’s one with a beer. That was so weird to me, why was that in there?”

So despite including women in the ad, the fact that the women were secondary characters and non-participants in the production of the beer gave off the message that the

women were mere accessories and that they aren't expected to drink the product. "The women were the party that the men were going to," one group member said highlighting the clear use of the women as merely an accessory for the males in the ads. Another participant commented that they weren't even drinking the beer which seemed odd because it was a commercial meant to sell beer. This put beer even further out of range as a potential product for women and reinforces the ideas of masculinity outlined in the literature review. In Butler's reports on gender performativity, the use of repetitive images in advertising such as women being shown without the product tells them what behaviors are normal for women, which in this case was the action of the women not drinking the beer in the ad. Butler's theory of gender performativity explains how women develop their social identities in relation to their consumption, or lack thereof, a certain product such as choosing not to drink beer because advertising says beer isn't meant to be consumed by women (1988), thus strengthening the existing gender norms surrounding beer.

Ultimately the focus group participants were able to quickly pick up on the traits of hegemonic masculinity and found those specific traits to be isolating and un-relatable. When probed on whether or not the ad changed their view on the brand as a whole, most participants expressed that they did not like the ad but that it didn't change their view on the brand because it wasn't unexpected for this company. This means that they already had expectations relating to their perception of beer. They weren't shocked that they felt excluded by the ad. One person said, "Nothing was unexpected to me but if anything it made me realize how targeted they are, the ads." And another said, "It didn't persuade me. I didn't feel anything different about Budweiser at all. It's exactly the kind of ad I

would expect them to put out.” Their commentary touches on the fact that beer has been heavily gendered throughout history so seeing that sort of portrayal in action wasn’t surprising (Jones & Reid, 2011; Messner & Montez, 2005; Kirkby, 2003).

The second ad titled the New Most Interesting Man had its own set of underlying traits of masculinity and produced the biggest mixture of polarizing feelings from the focus group participants. There was a lot more discussion about the roles of the two main characters in this ad which featured the Most Interesting Man in the World and a female companion who worked with and competed against him throughout the commercial.

The use of a female as a main character in the ad brought up a lot of debate on whether or not she was placed in a good or bad position. One on hand, many participants were happy to see a woman being presented as strong principal character in a beer ad at all, while others felt that she was still being placed secondary to the man and therefore still in a lower power class.

“I noticed they were placing the man against the woman like man vs woman kind of thing which I thought was... well they’re trying to make a statement about that or something, like he’s better than her.”

“It was very like ‘this is a man’s beer. You have to be an interesting man and we’re going to be competing against women in 90% of this commercial.’”

Although many expressed their disappointment to see her playing a secondary role, there was more interest in the fact that the woman was present as a main character at all. There was also a lot of discussion about the obvious difference in how she was presented compared to the women in the first ad. When comparing, the participants applauded the attempt to include women but still said it fell short in some aspects.

“The women in the first one seemed more like an object, whereas this one she seemed stronger and more empowered even if she was still losing. At least she was competing.”
“I thought it was cool to see that he’s clearly the most interesting man in the world, but there’s this woman who’s rivaling him or is his partner in some way.”

Some gave credit to the brand for the slightly improved social position the woman in the Dos Equis ad held compared to the ones in the Budweiser commercial, “I feel like she played not a prominent role, but a more prominent than just dancing around the men drinking beer.” While another said, “I like that she was there. I thought it showed an awareness of the type of masculinity that the Budweiser ad tried to take advantage of.” For the women in the focus group, the simple act of even trying to include them made was worth taking note of. The interesting imagery and slightly more inclusive theme gave it higher value of appeal than the first ad shown. “I think they attempted to be inclusive,” one member mentioned, “Whereas Budweiser it was very macho and excluding all women from their target.”

Some people noted that they presented a variety of races, ages and exotic locations, upping the general inclusivity of the ad further. The fact that a white male wasn't the primary lead, pulled this ad back from the traditional expectations that the first ad held. They did still note obvious traits of hegemonic masculinity when discussing the gender differences in the ad. They brought up that it was a bearded somewhat muscular man doing physical activities and watching sports, all traits outlined in the literature review as traits of typical American masculinity. One participant said, “The second ad was catered to guys. It even had the football in the end of it!” taking note of the importance of strength and sports in creating a masculine persona.

At the end of the day though, the women in the focus groups didn't find the brand any more or less appealing because of the ad. They agreed it was an improvement but nothing special or enticing. In this particular case, the severe indifference that the ad bred about the brand didn't benefit it. They still placed the beer as an out-group product for

women, “I don’t know anyone who’s ever carried Dos Equis. I feel like if I drank that, I would be not part of the group.” While at the same time, it was still seen as in-group product for men. Participants said the target was a more sophisticated older man, “perhaps a business man” or a man with a different type of “subtle masculinity.” Only one person suggested that the brand was trying to appeal to women in any way.

The third and final of the three ads titled Whatever Your Mountain was categorized as gender neutral and lacking the hegemonic traits of the other two ads and was overwhelmingly the favorite amongst the women in the groups from both a messaging and visual standpoint. When discussing, the women could sense the obvious lack of masculine traits with one saying, “So I feel like it wasn’t targeted at a specific gender or anything” and another saying, “They mentioned that everyone deserved this beer which is different from the other two.”

When asked if there was a specific target, the participants agreed that the ad leaned more toward athletes because of its mountain climbing, boxing and tough-mudder imagery. Even with the inclusion of a cowboy in the ad and series of strength/toughness related activities, the focus group women felt they could identify with this commercial the best. The lack of hegemonic traits and inclusivity of other participants actually voided any previously held connotations associated with cowboys and athletes.

When asked why women identified with the characters in this ad more so than the other two ads, the women attributed their adoration to two primary themes: inclusivity and inspirational messaging.

When defining what inclusivity meant to these women, they highlighted that there was a wide array of characters with no singular person taking focus. They also mentioned

the variety of activities which made it feel like the brand selected just a few activities out of a full list of other possible things. So even though the participants couldn't necessarily do the specific activities shown, there was a feeling open-endedness that allowed them to imagine up the things they could do that would fit in this campaign.

“They had an array of people so it seemed more relatable for sure.”

“They felt more relatable and just knowing my physical capabilities, I wouldn't be able to any of those things but I feel like if I went with them, I could maybe make it work.”

They also felt inspired to attempt the things in the ad such as climb a mountain because the ads gave them the idea that they could. It once again avoided characteristics of exclusion. The inspirational messaging was also a big point of appeal because it avoided saying what a person couldn't do or couldn't drink, and it instead sought to inspire them to do anything and overcome anything and reward themselves with a beer.

From this, the women were able to identify themselves in the ad:

“The last one, I felt like it wasn't me in the video obviously but I feel like it was someone I could want to be.”

“I wouldn't consider myself an athlete but it wasn't things I couldn't do like I do yoga, I can run, I can climb a—hike... Well I can't climb a mountain, but maybe I could with Coors.”

This link between their ability to see themselves in the ad then translated to a higher view of both the brand and the beer. A participant who had never had a Coors before said, “I feel like I connected to them more. I would actually go drink a Coors now, I've never had one but I might try one.” And another said that the brand “elevated itself without being snooty.” Every single one agreed that this ad made them feel more favorable toward the brand despite some of them having negative preconceived notions of Coors.

In this case we can see the connection between the ads and women's acceptance of the brand as something positive and the product as consumable. The ad was void of gendered messaging which in turn did not signal to the viewers whether or not the beer was for them or not. The inclusion of many people and activities left it open ended enough for the spectator to make their own decision on the type of person who would consume Coors. The flexibility of being able to write their own narrative for the product helps women to decide on their own whether or not this beer could fit into the set of traits they use to project their own identity to others.

The ad exposure in the research gave cues to the women in the research as to where the products would fit in their lives in relation to their personal gender constructions. Some hinted at existing social constructs while others found ways to circumvent potential prevailing stereotypes. Still, it's important to note that the ideas of hegemonic masculinity were backed up throughout this study, confirming that they do indeed exist and shade women's perceptions of the ads, products and their own identities.

All of this being said, one of the most significant pieces of this theme was that despite the fact that women were using existing norms to make sense of the ads and themselves, there was a tension that also existed between their reality and what they believed should be the norm.

Desire to change the norms. One thing already known, from the literature review, is that the gendering of beer started early in American history during the peak of advertising in the 60s as was discussed by several other reports (Towns et. al, 2012; Strate, 1991). The earliest forms of advertising were lifestyle ads showcasing both women and men at their homes and out on the town before the 60s. Once the social

upheavals started where civil rights and second wave feminism took a forefront, combined with the hippie counterculture movements, white males in America began to reassert their masculinity and dominance as a rebuttal to the social change. This was then translated in the advertising of beer and researchers have explained the shift in beer advertisements at this time as a response to these changes to the existing social order (Towns et. al, 2012). Eventually over time, the ads began to form into the offensively masculine ads that peaked in the 90s and 2000s before shifting back into subtler traits of masculinity that are present in this research.

The participants in this group were very aware of the obvious historical implications of gendering in advertising with one participant lamenting on the potential differences in opinion the groups would have, “I’d be really intrigued to know how different our views on beer would be if advertising never started out as gendered.” Others agreed, acknowledging the history of gendering products and then proceeding to reject this idea. The participants essentially dismissed the idea of gendering products that are consumed by both genders. One said, “I think it’s interesting that these brands are trying to gender drinks when no one really cares— when people are just going to drink what they want to drink.” Others agreed, “At the end of the day, they’re all beer and I’m going to drink what taste the best.”

From this discussion as well as the one in which they were asked to talk about how the ads could appeal more to women, the group started shifting their views toward a favoritism of gender neutral ads. One participant said, “Keep it not gendered. Do scenes with both men and women in there. Making the language more neutral instead of saying fruit because people will associate those words with different genders.”

After asking why neutral could be better than specifically making ads for women, a focus group member offered, “I think when something is clearly overtly targeting women, that could be just as painful to watch and the most—personally speaking—the things that appeal to me most are when it doesn’t seem gendered at all.”

For them, there was a certain cringe-worthiness to previous attempts for brands to appeal specifically to women. Despite the women offering suggestions as to how they could target only women, they mostly suggested to stop excluding women. They ultimately decided that being gendered purposely excludes some group, whether that’s men or women or people who identify as more masculine or more feminine; but in the end, being neutral doesn’t really leave anyone out, so why gender it?

They backed up this idea when discussing brands that were seen as the “everyman’s drink” like Budweiser or Coors. They didn’t see why ubiquitous brands would need to gender anything since they were consumed by both genders anyway.

One of the final pieces in this research was asking the women in the focus groups exactly what they would change in the ads they saw or how the brands would need to change in order to appeal *only* to women. Their answer: not as much as you think. The second focus group believed that the narratives of the ads weren’t so far off. They suggested taking the Budweiser ad and changing all of the character to women stating that, “The idea of strength and the idea that this is not for people who are weak, that shouldn’t necessarily be gendered.” Another member in a different group mentioned a similar outlook on the first ad, “Showing women in the brewing process because there are women brewers and people don’t think that at all.”

The groups also believed that the other two ads had themes that could have easily been adapted to appeal more to women simply through more and better representation:

“I feel like the idea of the cultural travel theme too could stay and that would still be very pertaining to women.”

“I think with all three, they focus on trends that are gaining popularity with women.”

In this case, the group believed the narratives could stay similar to their origins if adjusted just slightly, and the groups didn't even see the emphasis on strength as being a bad thing. They simply wanted women to be included in the idea of strength. Across the board, the biggest change suggested was representation. The women believed that by representing women not only as primary characters, but representing them in an accurate light in the ads would make it easier for viewers to identify with them.

When asked what else would need to be done, the second thing listed most often was the desire to see normal situations in which women could consume beer.

“I almost feel like maybe focusing on the modern woman. Show her going to work, show her going to a bar after work with friends getting a beer... Show showing that. That would make me want to get a beer.”

“I think the ads would have to be more geared towards our normal lives, like we are busy as women.”

“You could also show the different situations where people have beer: with a group of friends, in the summer at a lake, watching a football game. Use those different situations to show how natural it is to have beer in everyday life.”

The group wanted to see obtainable situations in which they could place themselves and see themselves. They wanted the ads to reflect the type of people they personally saw themselves as, presenting the action of drinking beer as an in-group trait for women. “I think the ads would have to be more geared towards our normal lives, like we are busy as women,” one group member offered up. This desire references back to Judith Butler's ideas of gender performativity in that seeing behaviors and actions of a

person acts as a signal to others what gender they identify (1988). In this case, they wanted the actions of the women in the ads to be a signal that they too could consume beer.

And lastly, the final solution they offered up was to just not gender the ads at all. As was previously discussed, the idea of gendering a product like beer was seen as ultimately pointless. Several participants said blatantly, “Keep it not gendered” and, “Use neutral language” instead of putting down femininity.

The Cultural Lens

This research had two primary themes develop during the focus groups with the first being the reinforcement of gender norms and the second was the use of culture as an interpretive lens for understanding the advertisements and the construction of one’s identity.

During the focus groups, the theme of culture emerged throughout the discussions as a lens through which each member interpreted not only the ads but their own identities in relation to their consumption habits. These findings aligned with the framework elements of Tajfel and Turner’s social identity theory as was discussed in the literature review of this study. In the development of one’s social identity, people go through a process of evaluation and categorization which helps them make sense of their identities in relation to others. The process starts with social categorization in which people categorize and organize people into groups subconsciously in an attempt to understand the world and the environment surrounding them (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). These groups often rely on demographic and psychographic traits such as gender, race, religion, geographic location and so on as indicators of identity. In this study, the participants used

their cultural traits and their perceptions of others' cultural traits to interpret both the ads and their understanding of existing gender norms relating to the consumption of alcohol.

Geography. In answering the research questions proposed by the researcher, understanding other external factors that play a role in women's consumption based identity helps explain further their decision making when it comes to alcohol preferences and perceptions of advertising. One of the most significant themes that popped up continuously throughout each focus group was the importance of one's cultural background in their acceptance or detestation toward an ad or brand. Each individual interpreted the ads different from one another based on their personal cultural traits, filtering the messages through their own lens before making any conclusions about the ads. One theme in particular that came up again and again was the reoccurring discussion surrounding geography whether that refers to the already held perceptions they have of different geographic regions or their own experience with different regions.

One participant even made note of the importance to geography and how the women made sense of their own identities, "It's interesting that you both mentioned where you were from, so geography definitely plays a roll." It can be determined that geography is an important part in the identity of the women as it was a subject widely discussed across the entirety of each focus group. This concept brought together an intersection of gender, identity and geography.

For the focus group participants, geography was important in helping them understand perceptions of beer in America versus other countries. Also it helped them understand how geography denotes what sort of products are available in different locations. To them, the products available are then representative of that location. For

example, when discussing each ad, several of the participants mentioned that Budweiser was much more common in Missouri than their hometowns due to the fact that Anheuser Busch is based in Missouri. One of the women said, “Budweiser is so Missouri” drawing a parallel between the product and where it’s sold. Another one talked about how common Coors was in her hometown, “I think back home no one drinks Budweiser really. I’m from Minnesota. I’d drink Coors probably more so.” As well as another saying, “In Portland, where I’m from, I grew up just thinking that Coors was the top brand of beer that all college kids drank.” And for the participant from Texas, “I’m from Texas—a lot of people in Texas drink it [Dos Equis]. It’s like a Mexican beer so my parents drink it.” Each of these three people show how their individual backgrounds determined how much more they accepted each of the three beers in the ads

The women in the focus group used the places they lived as a reference point for many of their conclusions. The geographic backgrounds of the individual participants played a significant part in this study. Their homes were spanning across the United States from Texas, Colorado, Louisiana, California, Ohio, Minnesota and Missouri. Their geographic backgrounds played a role in their perceptions of the brands and products and their understanding of how location influences drinking habits.

Because people draw parallels between products and locations, people then use these parallels to identify themselves with those locations by consuming the product. This alludes to a piece of Butler’s theory on gender performativity in which the actions a person takes signals to others how they want to be seen (Butler, 1988). By consuming a “Midwestern beer” they are saying “I’m Midwestern.” In this case, the act of drinking this specific beer is the performative action the participants are taking to tell others about

who they are. The focus group participants used a geography-focused cultural lens to interpret their perceptions of the products and ads.

Another way that the women participant's geographic backgrounds played into their interpretation of masculinity and identity was through not only their hometowns but through their experience with a greater whole of locations. At least half of the women had previously traveled abroad to a number of different countries in Europe, Asia and South America. For those members, they held different views on beer based on some of their experiences in foreign countries. Their experiences changed how they saw both the beer products and the ads themselves. The primary conclusions drawn by the well-traveled participants was that beer in America is defined as a product of white American masculinity whereas abroad, beer doesn't hold the same connotation.

“I don't mind beer, I like it. I studied abroad and so it was fun to try a bunch of different beers there.”

“When I was in Japan beer had a completely different connotation. It was a fancy situation because it was so rare.”

As shown by the two quote above, the participant's experience abroad changed how they saw beer. For the first girl, the drinking of beer was much more of a norm when visiting European countries. And in the case of the woman who went to Japan, beer was seen as higher class, more comparable to how wine is seen in America. Both agreed that it wasn't the same in America. Their experiences abroad shaded how they consumed beer abroad versus in America.

Another participant, who had also traveled abroad before, pointed out that Budweiser took an anti-foreign stance in their ad in a possible attempt to further exclude anyone who did not fit into the traits outlined as American masculine. The group members, influenced by their experience with cultures outside of American, felt

Budweiser may have used the phrase “not imported” in their ad as an attempt to promote further exclusivity. They believed the company did not want their product to be associated as foreign or un-American in any way. They did not want the product to follow the associations with beer that some may have in other countries. In this case, the women who traveled use their wider cultural understanding as a lens in which to interpret that particular piece of the ad. This reiterates the idea that one’s own experience with differing cultures provides context to how one interprets the messaging in the commercials.

The participant mentioned above explained saying, “I think of white dudes trying to get hyped saying, ‘Yeah! Not imported! That’s so dope! Fuck foreigners!’ I don’t know, but that’s automatically what I connected with when I saw what races were in the ad and seeing those words.” And another in the same focus group agreed with her, “Definitely don’t think that was unintentional because I was thinking the same thing.” Both participants had traveled abroad. They agreed that the brand aligned beer as an in-group trait of white American men.

Another participant offered further explanation as to why Budweiser may have chosen to take that sort of stance, “I also think there’s another layer with it being international. Non-American men define manhood differently.” She believed that the ideals of people abroad would define traits of masculinity in a manner not similar to how American men define masculinity, “It’s a lot more suave and sophisticated, not that rough and tumble American guy thing.” By pushing against the association of foreign-ness, Budweiser’s ad was able to assert itself as masculine defined by traits typical of American men. In this case we see the intersection between geographic traits and gender

norms. Participants were aware that perceptions of gender norms outside of the United States were most likely different than the ones held within the US, giving further support for the idea that geography is one of many cultural factors that influence how one would make sense of their identity in relation to the ads they see.

The participants acknowledged geography's role not only in the construction of their own identity but also in their ability to interpret others' identities as well. This was shown during the focus groups when the participants were asked to draw what they thought was an accurate representation of a typical beer drinker and typical wine drinker. Other than the cultural element of gender, the groups produced an archetype based off of specific locations within the US and what sort of connotations those places held to them.

Participants' drawings each varied slightly but fell into a series of geography specific archetypes. Discussions surrounding these archetypes lead to the development of several primary "types" of beer drinkers with the most common one being the Midwestern/country men. The conversation around the Midwestern man further highlighted the importance of geography to one's alcohol preferences and gender norms relating to those.

There's additionally a body of research which acknowledges that the definition of "being a man" may differ across both social and geographical settings (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Stough-Hunter, 2015). In Stough-Hunter's research, the definitions of rural versus urban masculinity helps to clarify why reference to country men as well as anti-foreign sentiment may signal to the fact that there are traditional ideals of masculinity inherent to American society. He said, "Rural [masculinity] addresses the

notion that rural men often symbolize what is traditionally masculine within American society” (Stough-Hunter, 2015).

For this particular case, Midwestern flyover states are known for having vast spans of open country, farms and rural communities. With that, a set culture has developed in these communities and has influenced the traits of the Midwestern/country man character brought up by focus group members. This particular archetype is historically significant in that its roots are deep in the history of America and American’s obsession with the hyper-masculinized cowboy figure. The use of this figure points to the established symbolic correlation between cowboy culture and male masculinity.

Strate (1995) discussed this in his research when he references the cowboy figure, “This type of image is effective only because we already know what it means, because we have prior experience with the image of the cowboy as a historical type and as a fictional character” (Strate, 1992). He described the importance of these already existing ideals as a way for advertisers to avoid any sort of necessary explanation and touch on preconceived ideals relating explicitly to masculinity, “The advertiser does not have to explain that the image [of a cowboy] refers to masculinity, rugged individualism and self-sufficiency. We can make those associations without actively thinking about them.” (Strate, 1992).

Strate (1992) was particularly an advocate for qualitative studies of masculinity in beer commercials. He said quantitative methods could help get numbers and observations to describe a phenomenon, and experiments could measure physiological and emotional reactions of audience members to certain images in advertising, but it was qualitative

research that was important in understanding the cultural meaning of those cowboy images and other such images of status and masculinity.

In this study, the researcher was able to analyze and find evidence of the cultural meanings of specific imagery in beer advertisements that references traits of beer drinkers. The traits the participants affiliate with country or Midwestern beer drinkers were big beer bellies and being a middle-aged, or as several participants said “dad-aged,” man. “He feels like a Midwestern dad,” one participant said describing her group’s drawing. The “beer drinker” in question has an attraction toward big trucks and a special love for bud light over other types of beer. One group even verbally mentioned the term cowboy as a way to wholly describe their beer drinker while another drew on a cowboy hat to caricaturize him and pull from the same fictional stereotype mentioned in Strate’s research. The women in the focus group used the geographic reference of their typical drinker in order to signal to greater cultural traits associated with that geographic region such as the use of trucks, which is more common in rural country. Their use of a cultural lens to interpret their drawings had them discussing the traits associated with regions around the country such as the Midwest or rural areas of the country.

The participants used their understanding of the country as a way to identify other traits held by their beer drinkers. One of the most common traits pulled up was the importance of drinking around sports for the Midwestern man. Many of the participants discussed their typical drinker having a beer while “watching the game” or during a sporting event.

“I feel like beer is a little more regular for this guy. Rather than on occasions. Like nightly. Like halftime beer.”

“Dads go to a game together, they’re at the Cardinals game with a drink.”

“So much drinking happens around sporting events. That’s not the only setting, but I think it’s a good characterization.”

These ideas were discussed in several sets of research in the past when describing hegemonic traits of masculinity which these women were able to identify as typical to beer drinkers. Hallmarks of traditional masculinity when it comes to alcohol means beer, bros, sports, heterosexuality and disdain of intimacy with women (Towns et. al, 2012).

One of the groups even included a television with a basketball game in their drawing. All of these indicate how sports play into the identities of these Midwestern men. So although the women may not identify specifically with these traits themselves, they use their understanding of geography and culture to interpret the identity of others. In Tajfel and Turner’s theory, this is the third piece of the theory, the social comparison part. As was previously stated in the literature review, this part involves the comparison of one’s own group with other groups that they do not identify with (Tajfel and Turner, 1982; Fischler, 1988). The women in the focus group were able to identify the in-group traits of beer drinkers by referencing their geographic location. And from that location, there was an implication of other traits that would belong to that region of the country and those people.

There’s additionally a body of research which acknowledges that the definition of “being a man” may differ across both social and geographical settings (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005 as cited in Stough-Hunter, 2015). In Stough-Hunter’s research, the definitions of rural versus urban masculinity helps to clarify why reference to country men as well as anti-foreign sentiment may signal to the fact that there are traditional ideals of masculinity inherent to American society. He said, “Rural [masculinity]

addresses the notion that rural men often symbolize what is traditionally masculine within American society” (Stough-Hunter, 2015).

Their use of a geographic lens enabled them to make sense of other’s identities in comparison to their own. These descriptions, along with the historical symbolism of masculinity that cowboys already have, we can understand that the women in these focus groups were presenting their view on the role of geography on gender norms relating to alcohol consumption.

Intersection of geography and class. A further demonstration of this idea was the comparison that the women made between their typical beer drinker drawings and typical wine drinker drawings. From their drawings and discussion, we can start to see the intersection of other cultural traits in addition to geography. The focus groups participants began to draw conclusions about the differences of city living and country living as representations of social class traits as well as specific gender traits.

Juxtaposed next to the Midwestern man, one of the primary discussed factors for the stereotypical wine drinker was an emphasis on city living. When talking about wine drinkers, one group recanted, “She’s a city girl” and “She’s maybe sex in the city.” And when probed for specific locations, “She definitely does not reside in Columbia, Missouri.” Then they proceeded to name off cities like Milan and Paris as possible locations for her. Another group offered up the suggestion that she drinks in places such as rooftop bars or a bar in “view of the Eiffel tower.” The women also noted that their wine drinkers were often of a higher class status, with the products they suggested for the women being luxury brands such as Kate Spade, Lily Pulitzer, Jimmy Choo and Prada. The mention of the rooftop bars was also an indicator of higher class because of the

general higher price point associated with rooftop bars and the general higher cost of city living. These conclusions were the opposite of the trait identified for their frat bros and Midwestern beer drinking archetypes who were more commonly identified as Walmart shoppers, truck drivers and Bud Light, PBR and Stag drinkers which are all value brands of beer.

In this case, they used location to denote the class level of their drinkers, drawing from the already held understanding that metropolitan cities are higher cost therefore, people living in the cities are more likely to be of a higher social/economic class. To the participants, city and country are opposites. This juxtaposition plays into the first piece of the social identity theory laid out by Tajfel and Turner in which people work to categorize people into groups based on shared qualities. The participants used geography as the determining factor that defines the traits of class and gender for these groups.

By placing wine and beer on opposite sides of a spectrum, the women were drawing conclusions that anything that is related to beer is the opposite of something relating to wine. City versus country, wine versus beer, men versus women. Therefore, if wine drinkers are more commonly women, then beer drinkers must be the opposite and be more commonly men. This comparative method used geographic differences to add more in and out group traits to each product.

Additionally, this addressed ideas presented in Stough-Hunter's research as well as Connell and Messerschmidt's lifetime of studies in which the concepts of hegemonic masculinity are more closely aligned with rural definitions of masculinity, not urban ones, thus providing further evidence of the importance of geographic cultural differences in gender norms. It also re-emphasizes the idea that the lens women use to interpret their

understanding of themselves and their perceptions involves many intersecting cultural factors.

Education. Another way that the women used culture to interpret their understanding of identity construction was through their perception of education's role in alcohol consumption.

As was previously discussed, the women were asked to draw out typical beer drinkers and came to a set of specific traits and archetypes. The first one was the Midwestern country man. The second group discussed by all of the focus groups is the "frat bro" group. To clarify, this shortened term is an abbreviation of the words "fraternity brothers," as in a male member of a collegiate fraternal social organization. Not once was the formalized name of "fraternity brother" used among the participants though which is why the shortened "frat bros" will be the name of reference for this group. It's significant to note that fraternal organizations on campus, specifically the one's referenced by the focus groups, are male-only organizations. This is significant because it represents a level of conventional gender exclusivity the focus group members are aware of.

"The first two guys that popped into my head were these guys [the Midwestern men] and the kind of drinker in a frat."

All three of the focus groups listed frat bros as a group of typical drinkers, with one group making a frat bro as the focus of their projective drawing of a typical beer drinker. When explaining who he was, they gave him a quick description, "His name is Matt. He liked to party. He's out day drinking and has his whale shorts on. His, I don't know what fraternity I made up but like Delta Sigma something." Just from this description alone, we can determine that the women began to outline traits typical of a

frat bro in the same manner that they were able to identify traits specific to Midwestern men.

One of the primary traits of the frat bros discussed by the focus group members was a high level of intensity relating to drinking. They used terms such as “shotgunning” and “chugging” drinks as opposed to sipping or drinking when discussing the behaviors of frat bros. The emphasis on excessive drinking was heaviest amongst this group compared to the Midwestern men or wine drinkers. This plays a significant role in defining beer as a male-specific since the concept of sipping is considered feminine while drinking in excess is masculine.

In a previous study in the literature review, researcher Mullen discussed the importance of men drinking in excess versus women noting, “there’s a link between excessive alcohol consumption and the male role” (Mullen et. al., 2007). His literary review discussed the idea that “not drinking has been seen as weak and feminine” and that drinking heavily relates back to men’s attempts to reassert their masculine identities (2007). And this fact was considered almost obvious to many of the group members as one even said, “He likes to get trashed obviously” when addressing their frat bro drawing. And another noted “he’s just like a beer after beer after beer kind of guy.”

Another primary trait of the frat bro group was a connection between this group and the importance of drinking around sporting events, just as sports were important to the Midwestern men as well. In this case though, much of the discussion of drinking had to do with tailgating more specifically. The way this differed from the first group’s emphasis on sports was the ideas of pre-gaming and tailgating before games. These men were more likely to drink prior to the actual sporting event.

“I see a lot of beer drinkers at tailgates that are like that.”

“I think of people socially drinking at tailgates, I think of those type settings.”

Some other parallels that can be drawn between the Midwestern man and the frat bro are that both emphasized excessive consumption of alcohol whether that meant bingeing for the frat bros or “drinking nightly” which was mentioned by several participants when talking about the Midwestern men. Another parallel they drew was between some of the other traits was that they both are men who appreciated country music and trucks as well, touching on the historical importance of the country/cowboy stereotype. But it’s important to note that all of the participants go to school in Missouri, so the presence of these cowboy traits may have been overemphasized when discussing the frat bros and may not necessarily be the norm of all frat bros across the country.

The women used their background as college students as a point of comparison to the drinkers they are more heavily exposed to on a day to day basis. This sort of attribution based on familiarity is a psychology concept called the mere-exposure effect. In social psychology it’s the phenomenon in which people tend to develop a preference for things merely because they are familiar with them.

It was also important to note that the women presented another piece to this cultural trait when they were asked if there were any other type of typical beer drinkers in their drawing activity. Other than the one’s they presented in their drawings, when probed about other groups, the participants often said, “all college students.” This type was the only one that included women in the description but had a vague set of traits unlike the Midwestern men and frat bros who each had their own set of identifiers. This college student group held no specific characteristics other than a shared educational system.

“I think of maybe the female counterpart to the frat drinker is also a type of beer drinker”

“I was going to say just college students in general”

It's important to note these groups because they outline the in-group characteristics for drinkers' identities. These traits are the set standard against which women will compare their own identities and group associations. From this we can see that women's educational backgrounds gave them this piece of their cultural lens in the same way that their geographic background and hometowns made them more or less familiar with certain types of beer. And the importance of familiarity proved to be highly important when women made sense of how beer fit into their own personal identities.

Social identity. The results of this study were able to draw a number of conclusion around women's perceptions of a brand based on its advertising. Most all of the women felt more favorable toward the ads as the number of typically masculine traits decreased, with the first ad Not Backing Down being the least favorite and the Whatever Your Mountain ad being the favorite. From there, it would be easy to take a leap and say that the women would then hold the same favorable opinions of the product and brand reflective of their feelings toward the advertising. But that wasn't actually the case, at least not completely. The women *did* agree that the ads influenced their opinions of the brands, making them feel slightly more inclined to try a brand like Coors after seeing the ad, but another major factor popped up in the discussion about their resulting consumption.

Instead the importance of “fitting in” and “familiarity” became the stand out factors in their decision toward consumption. For these women, they were more open to Coors after finding its ad inspiring and favorable but the ad wasn't the sole factor playing

a role. It would be easy to suspect taste as the deciding factor, but when given the opportunity to discuss taste more freely, it wasn't mentioned. It was instead the importance of their social groups' opinions of their alcohol choice that was mentioned.

In the groups, the participants were asked, "out of the three products presented, Budweiser, Dos Equis and Coors, which would you feel most comfortable carrying around in public or at a party? The consensus: Budweiser reigned as the most chosen option.

"I would say I feel most comfortable carrying around a Bud."

"Probably Budweiser because it's just more well-known out of the three. A lot of people could relate to me if I was drinking it. Kind of blend in."

But it wasn't just the choice in brand, but the choice to drink beer at all that was influenced by others. One participant discussed how her choice to drink beer was primarily for social reasons, "My goal is always not to stick out with my drink choices. Quite frankly, I'd love to order a Sex on the Beach but I would get an eyebrow or two from people so I would probably just do the Budweiser just so no one would think I was boujee." And another participant said, "I don't know anyone who's ever carried Dos Equis. I feel like if I drank that, I would be *not* be part of the group. They would be like, 'Why did you even get that. What is that?'"

From this it was observed that the brands popularity and general representation in a region or amongst a group of people reigns as a deciding factor in its social acceptability. The beer's commonness makes it an in-group trait of people in that area. So even as college-aged women may not see beer as a primary trait "for women," when transcending those standards, they will still look to choose the most acceptable beer dubbed "for my friends" or "for college students" or "for people in the Midwest."

This actually strengthens the conclusive importance of one's social identity over their own personal identity. Their social identities trumped their personal taste preferences and their preferences relating to the ads. They chose a brand based more on what would further iterate their similarities toward their peers instead of choosing one that they enjoyed the flavor of or that inspired them with their messaging.

That being said it's important to take note that the majority said Budweiser, but some did give additional commentary emphasizing that Budweiser just happens to be the most common beer found in the Midwest where these focus groups took place. Two of the participants from different regions of the US noted that Coors was the most acceptable drink in their respective homes of Portland and Minnesota, making them more inclined to choose Coors as the drink they felt most comfortable carrying.

It still backs up the idea that fitting in is a primary factor in their decision as well as showcasing the importance of one's cultural background. Both quotes show how these women's understanding of the most acceptable drinks according to their hometowns helped influence their decisions relating to consumption. It also stands as a reminder for brands that many factors go into women's perceptions of their brands, not only taste and the message they portray but the brand's ubiquity and ability to influence specific social groups.

Past studies continue to suggest consumers compare themselves with a specific social identity associated with a particular product or product category (Dimofte et. al., 2015; Waters & Ellis, 1996), with evidence that alcohol advertising may help its consumers form a socio-cultural identity (Towns et. al, 2012; Livingstone & McCafferty, 2015). For the focus group members were able to provide further context to the notion of

consumption based identity. Two primary sections of the research were able to expand upon alcohol's importance in one's social identity. First, each focus group participant was asked to present their favorite drink to the group and provide possible explanation as to what their preferences said about them. What this was able to uncover was each of their associations with their drink preference and a culture trait they've adapted into their representative identity.

The participants were asked to provide their favorite drink and favorite place to drink in town and then what they believe those choices say about them. Some of the description provided by the participants directly related to what their alcohol preference meant to their consumption habits such as when one said, "I like beer a lot, any kind of beer...I would say that that says about me that I like the taste of a nice beer and I like to enjoy the taste of it." Statements like these gave more framework as to why that particular person chose the drink they chose but maybe not in relation to their identity development. Others were more insightful by providing a deeper cultural root to their choices. An example of this is when one girl described her favorite place to go as being relaxed in the beginning but more excitable as the night goes on, "I think it's me as a person, chill then hyped." Her association with her drinking is a direct representation of who she thinks she is as a person. This backs up the idea that she sees her consumption choices as a direct reflection on herself.

Another person provided further context into why she may choose an item for social reasons, "I guess it says when I do drink, it's to feel comfortable socially." This particular participant touches on the pressure of social expectations. She chooses specific drinks to fit into "role-appropriate" behaviors in order to fit in with her peers. It connects

back to Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory in which people seek to be a part of an in-group they identify with or desire to be a part of (1979). This woman adapted her choices and behaviors to align herself more fully with the in-group she desired to be a part of.

Each of these examples is important in developing an understanding of the motivations that push women to perceive the action of drinking beer as an in-group trait or perceive certain type of alcohol as representative of their identity. It also more precisely helps explain why the ads presented to them during the focus groups did or did not fit into their understanding of their own cultural identities.

DISCUSSION

This study uncovered and analyzed two primary themes that help to answer the research questions proposed. The first theme uncovered during this research was the reinforcement of existing gender norms surrounding the consumption of alcohol and the second theme was the use of culture as an interpretive lens for understanding advertisements and the construction of one's identity.

The first theme found that women do indeed see the existing lines drawn between men and women when it comes to alcohol consumption. They see beer as a product more for men and wine as a product more for women. Additionally, they were able to identify stereotypical traits of hegemonic masculinity when discussing their thoughts on beer drinkers as well as their perceptions of the alcohol ads shown to them in the research. They were quick to not only identify those traits of masculinity but quick to renounce them and the brands who chose to use them.

The second theme found discussed the use of cultural traits as a lens through which women interpreted their own identities and their thoughts on gender construction in the commercials. The importance of geography, gender and class became prominent factors that played into their perceptions. Additionally, the research found that social identity often trumped one's personal identity when participants were making sense of what and why they consumed certain products over others. The acknowledgement of these findings were supported by the philosophies of the social identity theory.

Both of these themes contributed to answering the three research questions presented at the beginning of this study:

RQ1: How do women respond to the use of hegemonic masculinity in the advertising of beer?

RQ2: How do women perceive beer advertisements in relation to their gender constructions?

RQ3: How do women's consumption based identities factor into their alcohol preferences?

From this research, it's understood that there's a negative association with the use of masculine traits in alcohol advertising. In part this is due to tension between the portrayals of women and men in the ads and how women perceive their own gender. When what they see does not compliment how they see themselves, there's an obvious disconnect for women as consumers and they find they cannot identify with the ads or the products in the ads. This in turn isolates women consumers who want the products they consume to represent who they are outwardly. Butler's theory on gender performativity and Tajfel and Turner's theory on social identity both emphasize the significance of one's actions representing who they want others to see them as. In this case, the failure of alcohol companies to appeal to women has resulted in college-aged women rejecting beer as a part of their consumption based identities.

These findings concur with the studies on consumption based identity by the researchers R. Elliot and K. Wattanasuwan and Fischler. The first two suggested that one's identity is a key factor in their material consumption, making the study of social identity essential to comprehend the symbolic meaning of goods to one's identity (1998). Fischler made links between consumption of food and drink with socio-cultural identity in his research titled *Food, self and identity* (1988). All of the work they produced is

backed up by the findings in this research as many women discussed the social meaning of consuming certain alcohol products. To the consumers, these products (along with others) work to signal what sort of person they want others to see them as, specifically pulling from existing social stereotypes and historical archetypes.

More importantly, connections between these identity theories and advertising were made in this study. The ads themselves reinforced existing social norms and the gendered lines drawn between beer and wine, signaling to the women in this study that the product shouldn't align with their desired representations of their identity. In this case, the second and third research questions were answered with the two themes found in the study: the reinforcement of existing norms combined with an interpretive cultural lens as a way to understand the ads in relation to their gender constructions.

Limitations

This research aims to contribute to existing research and discussion surrounding the topic of gender representation in advertising and in the beer industry. Because of the nature of qualitative studies, the research being done cannot necessarily be generalized to the population of women as a whole, but instead seeks to uncover observations held by a few in the hopes of gaining some potential insight into the thoughts, feelings, and emotions that women hold toward beer advertisements. This research study had some limitations based on its design. To avoid focus groups running too long and losing the attention of the participants, this research only used three beer commercials for the ad exposure component. However, since there are hundreds of beer brands in the United States and the world, these were chosen based on their ability to follow the set criteria established by the researcher. The criteria she set out helped to mitigate potential issues

that could arise from bias toward or against brands as well as ensure that all three ads were on the same playing field when it comes to audience cognizance.

When it comes to interpretation, the unit of analysis in focus groups is “the thematic content or discourse used in the groups” and not specific properties of the individuals in the group (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996). The researcher must be conscious of the individuals and their separate biases but keep in mind that their traits are not the focus of the research or analysis. In this case, the researcher took note of outliers in the group and looked to see how those outliers compared to the larger pool of participants, not just the other members of their respective group. By doing this, the researcher was able to determine whether or not the information provided was a more commonly held understanding or opinion instead of an opinion slanted by one individual’s personal experience or bias.

Along the way, there were several small potential limitations that popped up that did not necessarily affect the outcome of the research, but should be kept in mind nonetheless. Due to the nature of the study, participants may have been primed to think about their drinking preferences and drinking beer before the groups even started. Since they had to take and pass a screener questionnaire about their alcohol habits, the participants were already in a mindset to discuss beer more so than any other form of alcohol. Also, the participants discussed almost exclusively beer, with some discussion of wine for comparison’s sake, but otherwise excluded discussion around any other form of alcohol. By keeping the study focused, the researcher could narrow in on gender themes relating only to one particular product.

Additionally, throughout the course of the study, participants offered up ideas on how to improve advertising commercials for beer to appeal more so to women. This study attempts to offer suggestions on best practices, but a quantitative study would be needed to determine actual correlation between women's preference and gender themes in beer commercials. Lastly, as was noted in the literature review, each group consisted of 4 to 8 women, which errs slightly on the smaller size of the consensus on effective group size which was denoted as 6 as a minimum number of people in a group (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996; David, 2007). In this case, this could be a limitation but the researcher believes that the smaller groups actually allowed participants to talk more freely than the larger groups in which some participants require more encouragement to speak. Still, based on past research and standards, the smaller group sizes can be seen as a negative and should be taken into consideration when looking at the findings of this study.

This researcher hoped focus groups would uncover a plethora of insights and information relating back to the three research questions presented. She sought to understand women's thoughts and feelings relating to the use of masculinity in beer advertisements with the intentions of being able to provide practical implications for the future direction of advertising for beer brands.

Implications for Marketers

What alcohol companies can take away from this research is that there are gender lines being drawn around certain products with some being socially labeled as "for men" or "for women." Although these lines don't always deter each gender from consuming outside of the lines, the use of gendering was seen ultimately as pointless and only a construct meant to isolate specific groups. All of the participants agreed that the brands

were gendering the drinks without any real need to. They believed that, at the end of the day, they were going to drink what they wanted to drink based on their personal preferences making gendering ultimately useless. Companies can use this knowledge to tailor their targeting efforts to a wider range of people

The opinions and suggestions offered by the focus group participants may provide a greater understanding to the importance of avoiding not only overt traits but also subtle traits of masculinity. When looking at the New Most Interesting Man ad, the participants didn't necessarily find the actions of the character offensive, but found the narrative as a whole to be botched attempt to be more inclusive. The main character was still a burly looking man attempting to outdo the woman he was with in a series of competitive physical strength based acts. Despite making changes from their previous ads, this brand's attempted baby step toward inclusivity was a doleful effort that ultimately failed in the eyes of their consumers. In part this was due to subtleties of masculinity that weren't considered when reworking the narrative.

Brands may also take this research and the reports that show their profit margins shrinking as a warning on the hazards of ignoring one's audience. As the social landscape of the United States changes, brands must adapt to find their footing in the new landscape. In this case, the alcohol industry had remained fairly rigid in their blatant use of sexism and sexualization of women, originating in the 60s, and now many brands are seeing the negative results of their failure to change. Instead, consumers are flocking toward niche areas of the industry that fit into their social ideals and identities. Wine, craft beer and niche drinks such as seltzers and alcoholic sodas are all gaining in popularity, with many marketer attributing it to their ability to appeal to underserved

consumers. And as was pointed out in the research, the importance of social identity reigned supreme even over personal identity when it came to consumption, so brands can take cues from the cultural shifts of society to understand what sort of changes need to be made with their own brands. By being a part of the conversation in an authentic way, their brand may thrive instead of struggle to hold onto antiquated methods of targeting.

This research hopes focus groups will uncover a plethora of insights and information relating back to the three research questions presented. The researcher looks to understand women's thoughts and feelings relating to the use of masculinity in beer advertisements with the intentions of being able to provide practical implications for the future direction of advertising for beer brands.

Future Research

This research focuses on masculinity in beer/alcohol advertising which has been pervasive over the course of advertising history. Future research may be able to look further into the changing landscape by analyzing new ads that take a stance of inclusiveness in diversity. Several brands have already begun to make changes, even from the beginning of this year to the end, brands are making more and more change to promote inclusion in areas that were otherwise considered exclusionary.

As was previously mentioned, there's a lot of potential for future research surrounding other types of alcohol other than beer since other types of alcoholic drinks have gained traction in recent years (Bloom, 2016; Auter, 2016). Understanding why women feel more inclined to consume wine would be a strong parallel to this study and could provide a more in-depth understanding of what factors women find appealing that draw them to wine over beer. Contrary to that, there's potential to discover why men

have yet to follow the same path as women when it comes to wine consumption. There's also research that suggests other types of alcohol hold onto the discussed traits of hegemonic masculinity such as whiskey and bourbon as was mentioned in the literature review (Towns, 2012). Exploring this section of the alcohol industry may unveil parallels between the beer industry and whiskey industry or may provide more context as to why these products are seen as masculine.

Another possible route for future research is the potential to look at other demographics factors other than gender and how those play a part in alcohol preferences. Geography and age came up a few times in discussion which suggests those two factors hold some sort of significance in alcohol preferences worth looking into. Looking at the whole range of demographics could be interesting in finding which play the most important role for consumers.

Another potential way to analyze the commercials shown, or other beer commercials, could be through a content analysis of the comments on each video. As was stated in the methodology, the ads were all available online on either YouTube or Vimeo, where the public has free reign to comment on them. Much of the commentary held polarizing opinions from men and women across the world pertaining to the content of the commercial. Analyzing those comments could provide heavily explicit insights into how both men and women perceive the ads.

Lastly, as was previously mentioned, the use of quantitative research could provide more insight into the actual best practices for appealing to women in beer advertising. The women in this focus group were able to give potential direction but those

suggestions cannot necessarily be generalized or determined as actually effective in improving favorability with women.

Appendix A

The following discussion guide served as a general guide for the focus groups. These questions are meant to unearth perceptions held by the women in the groups as well as reinforce the findings of past research. Because these focus groups were semi-structured, other questions not included in the appendix may have been asked.

INTRO

Welcome and thank you for volunteering to take part in this focus group. You have been asked to participate as your point of view is important. I realize you are busy and I appreciate your time.

This focus group discussion is designed to assess your current thoughts, feelings, opinions and perceptions about alcohol and beer advertising. The focus group discussion will take no more than an hour and I will be recording it, but all recordings will remain private. No names or images of anyone in this room will be released. For additional details about the privacy of these groups please see the consent form I handed out.

Ground rules

- Everyone should participate
- There are no right or wrong answers
- Information provided in the focus group must be kept confidential
- Answer all questions with the assumption that you like the products
- You do not have to agree with other's opinions, in fact we encourage you not to
- Have fun!

Are there any questions before we get started?

PROJECTIVE TECHNIQUE

Draw as a group (split into two separate groups and have them introduce themselves to each other and then work on the questions below as a group)

Draw what you think a typical beer drinker looks like?
(flip poster board) Now draw what you think your typical wine drinker looks like?

Discuss as a group. Have each team explain their person to the other team and compare.

Ask "why?" they chose those specific traits (*ex: why did the majority of you chose to make your beer person a man and your wine person a woman?*)

Is this drawn character is reflective of anyone they know or reflective of a social group (moms, sorority sisters, boyfriends etc.)? Who?

Have each group identify the biggest differences and similarities between the drawings and debate which is “most accurate” (*is group x’s more representative of the typical drinker or is group y’s, this will identify the most common socio-cultural traits associated with beer drinkers according to this group*)

What other sort of brand’s do you think each drinker would own or services they would use? (*Write a list. Gives an idea about their consumption based identity*)

Now that we have a clear picture of the traditional beer drinker, do you think there are other types of beer drinkers that wouldn’t be the same as this one? Do the same activity of identifying their traits/brands. (*this question goes the opposite direction of the previous ones and asks them to look at other types of traits are often associated with beer drinkers. It’s important to note whether or not women are seen as a secondary category of drinkers or if all consecutive traits are inherently masculine*)

GROUP PRE-DISCUSSION

Intro

Please go around and tell the group your name *and your favorite alcoholic drink on the board since we all know this research is about alcohol.*

AD EXPOSURE

Not Backing Down (x2)

So first, I just want to get general thoughts and feelings?
What did you like and dislike about the ad?

Who do you think this ad was directed to? How would you describe this person?

What are the cues in this ad that makes you believe it’s for [this person/men not women]?
Think visually, the sound, the voice over, etc.

--

PICK ONE-TWO OF THESE:

What made you think this/feel this way?
Are you drawing from past experience?
Is this similar to other ads you’ve seen?
Are there things in society that makes you contribute to this belief?

--

What does this ad make you think of the brand or the people who made this ad? Are your opinions more or less favorable after viewing the ad and why?

Most Interesting Man 2 (x2)

Again, I want to get general thoughts and feelings?
What did you like and dislike about the ad?

Who do you think this ad was directed to? How would you describe this person?

What are the cues in this ad that makes you believe it's for [this person/men not women]?
Think visually, the sound, the voice over, etc.

--

PICK ONE-TWO OF THESE:

What made you think this/feel this way?
Are you drawing from past experience?
Is this similar to other ads you've seen?
Are there things in society that makes you contribute to this belief?

--

How does the target of this ad compare to the last one? Do you think the same consumer would buy both of these products? Why or why not?

What does this ad make you think of the brand or the people who made this ad? Are your opinions more or less favorable after viewing the ad and why?

How do you feel about the characters in this ad? What traits did they have that you identify with?

What did you think of the brand's decision to add a woman character to their "Most Interesting Man" campaign? *(In case you did not previously know, they had only the one man in their ads. He was also turned into a meme < we would assume most to all of the participants were aware of the previous campaign or meme).*

Whatever Your Mountain (x2)

Again, let's start with general thoughts and feelings?
What did you like and dislike about the ad?

Who do you think this ad was directed to? How would you describe this person?

How would you compare this to the last ad you saw? Are they for the same person?

What are the cues in this ad that makes you believe this? How was it presented differently or similarly to the last ad (*visuals, actors, music, voices, etc.*)

(PROMPT to draw comparison chart on board if necessary about traits of ad and/or target of ad)

What does this ad make you think of the brand or the people who made this ad? Are your opinions more or less favorable after viewing the ad and why?

How do you feel about the characters in this ad? What traits did they have that you identify with?

How were the women in this ad different or similar to the woman in the previous ad?

POST DISCUSSION

Out of the past three ads you saw, which one did you identify with most? Why?

What do you think this brand was doing better than the other two?

If these brand were trying to appeal to ONLY women, how would they have to change their ads?

Out of all three products shown in the ads (Budweiser, Coors, Heinekin) which would you feel most comfortable carrying around in public (at a bar, party, etc.)? Why?

CONCLUSION

- Thank you for participating. This has been a great discussion and your opinions are all very appreciated. I hope you have found the discussion interesting as well.
- If there is anything you are unhappy with or any additional information you feel you need to add, please contact me after I dismiss everyone.
- I would like to remind you that any comments featuring in this report will be anonymous.
- And lastly...
- Before you leave, please hand in any papers you used or were asked to fill out.

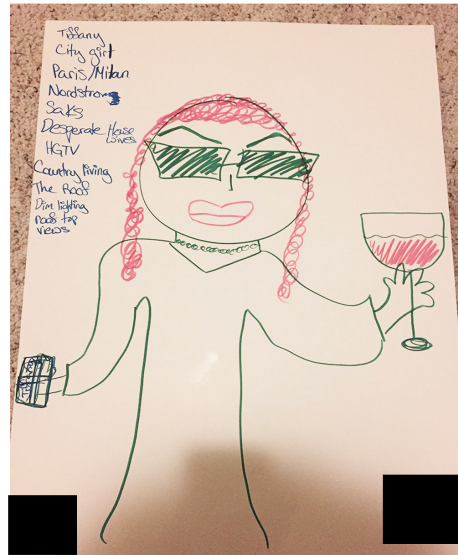
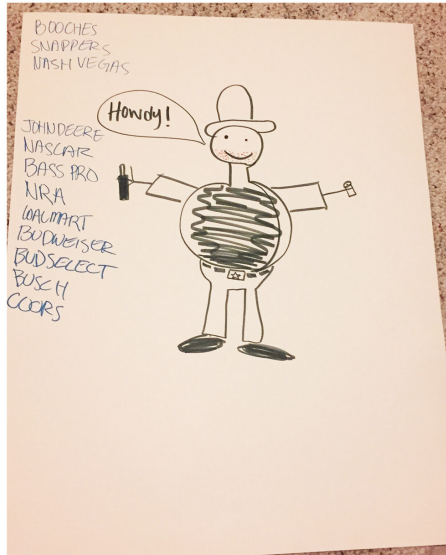
THANK YOU AND GOODBYE!!!!!!

Appendix B

The following appendix contains the images drawn out in the first activity denoted in the methodology. Names are blacked out.

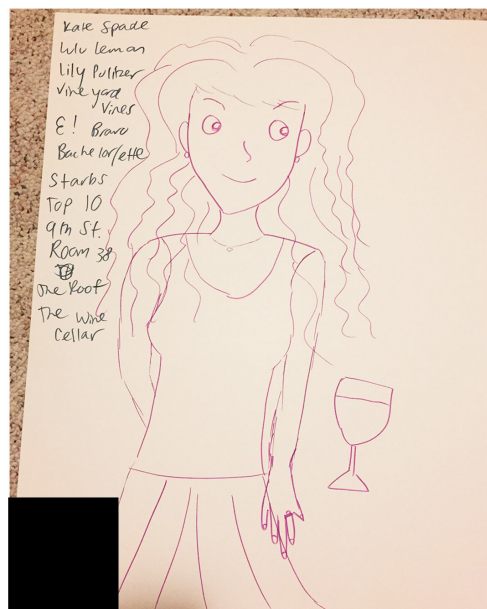
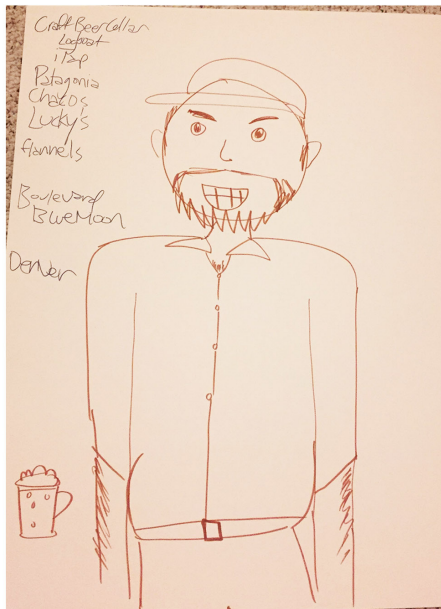
[focus group 1, group a, beer drinker]

[focus group 1, group a, wine drinker]

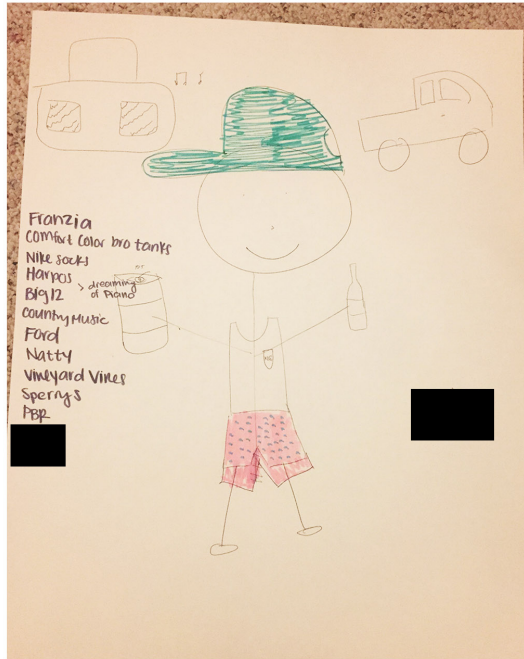


[focus group 1, group b, beer drinker]

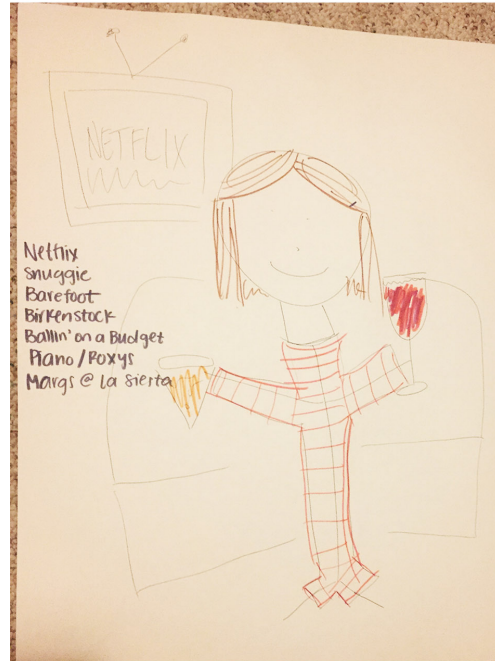
[focus group 1, group b, wine drinker]



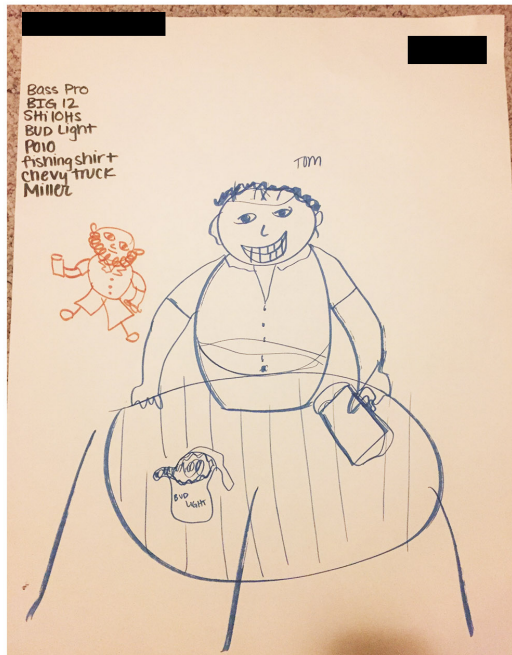
[focus group 3, group a, beer drinker]



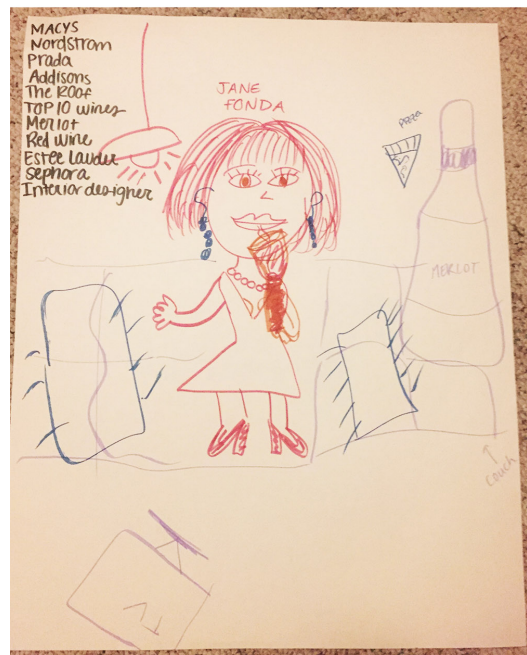
[focus group 3, group a, wine drinker]



[focus group 3, group b, beer drinker]



[focus group 3, group b, wine drinker]



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