A Critical Analysis of "Moderation" Advertising Sponsored by the Beer Industry: Are "Responsible Drinking" Commercials Done Responsibly?

WILLIAM DEJONG, CHARLES K. ATKIN, and LAWRENCE WALLACK

Harvard University; Michigan State University; University of California–Berkeley

MOUNTING CRITICISM OF BEER AND WINE advertising on radio and television has been accompanied by increased calls for strict regulation or a complete ban. To counter these threats, the nation's alcohol industry and associated trade groups are stepping up their efforts to promote "responsible drinking" and the prevention of alcohol-impaired driving, primarily through paid television advertising.

"Moderation" advertising campaigns by the three major brewers, Anheuser-Busch, Coors, and Miller, have the highest profile. Of these, Anheuser-Busch's "Know When to Say When" campaign, dating back to the mid-1980s, has been the most ambitious. In addition to television advertising, this full-fledged marketing effort includes print ads, point-of-purchase promotions in bars, and "safe ride" and "designated driver" programs. A total of $15 million was spent on the "Know When" campaign in 1990, a sizable amount compared with typical public health campaigns, but only a small part of the company's $459 million advertising budget (Rose 1991).

Before reviewing these campaigns, it is important to understand the social and political context in which they have been developed. Two

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facts stand out. First, beer sales are flat or declining (Charlier 1990). Second, opinion polls show that the public largely holds the industry in low regard (Lipman 1991). It is not surprising, then, that the Roper Organization warned in a special report to the alcohol industry that it must tackle "drunk driving" and other alcohol-related problems head-on, otherwise "the industry is likely to be faced with regulations that severely restrict the consumption and marketing of alcoholic beverages" (Roper Organization 1989, 4).

Indeed, there have been increasing calls for legislation to require warning labels on alcohol advertisements, to match paid alcohol advertising by equivalent exposure for prohealth and safety messages, and to increase excise taxes on alcoholic beverages (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1989). Some antidrug groups have even called for an outright ban on all alcohol advertising if current marketing practices are unreformed (National Commission on Drug-Free Schools 1990).

Advertising is increasingly perceived by the public to be a significant part of the problem. An opinion survey conducted for the Century Council, an alcohol-industry group, showed that nearly three-fourths of adults polled agree that alcohol advertising is a major contributor to underage drinking (Lipman 1991). Similarly, a 1991 Roper poll showed that 33 percent of respondents nationwide said that the advertising industry should "do more about drunk driving," up six percentage points from 1989 (Roper Organization 1991).

Although advertising is part of the problem, it might also, from the industry's standpoint, be part of the solution. A 1989 opinion survey showed that 81 percent of adults polled said that running ads about responsible drinking was an excellent or good idea (Roper Organization 1989).

Thus, the industry appears to have embraced "moderation" advertising to give the public a more favorable view of the industry. Has this strategy worked? According to the Century Council study, the image of the alcohol industry remains poor in spite of the fact that the industry's moderation campaign has done more than anything else to improve it. Although only 29 percent of respondents said that the industry is moving in the right direction, the most common reason they cited was its anti-drunk driving ads (Lipman 1991).

There is little doubt, then, that this advertising, voluntarily produced and aired by beer producers, meets the industry's public relations agenda. The question is whether it meets the public's needs. The

money behind the campaign gives this moderation advertising tremendous potential for disseminating valuable public health messages. It is important, therefore, to examine critically the messages that such advertising conveys (Atkin and Arkin 1990).

We describe several important trends in the paid moderation advertising sponsored on television by Anheuser-Busch, Coors, and Miller. (Descriptions of the 31 advertisements reviewed for this article, which form an exhaustive sample of the moderation ads aired on television by these three brewers through 1991, are available from the authors upon request.) In doing so, we will explore two central issues. First, does this industry-supported advertising deliver appropriate and effective messages for promoting responsible drinking or the prevention of alcohol-impaired driving? As we will see, the brewers have used vague slogans and other advertising strategies that fail to define "moderate" drinking and have overlooked the fact that certain people should avoid alcohol consumption altogether.

Second, how does this moderation advertising intersect with the brewers' overall sales and marketing efforts? We will see that the themes and images used in much of this advertising are consistent with the beer companies' regular brand promotions, which works to the detriment of providing a clear, unambiguous public health message. Indeed, many recent moderation advertisements may also serve to promote consumption.

Trends in Industry-sponsored Moderation Advertising

Corporate Versus Brand-name Sponsorship

Both Coors and Miller have linked their moderation television commercials to their eponymous brand names. Until recently, the "Know When" commercials closed with a tag for Anheuser-Busch, the corporation. Beginning in 1990, however, the company's ads closed by highlighting specific brands (e.g., Bud Light, Budweiser, Michelob). In fact, several of the older ads (e.g., Payne Stewart, Scott Pruett, Rap) were reissued with a new brand-specific tag.

One reason for this change is evident. With increased awareness of beer as the "drug of choice" for American teens (Wechsler and Isaac

1991), with greater recognition of its role in alcoholism, alcohol-related traffic crashes, and other societal problems (Taylor 1991), and with the nation's growing health awareness (Charlier 1990), the brewers are concerned that beer consumption will follow the route of cigarette smoking (Alcohol Advocacy Institute 1991; Rose 1991), which became stigmatized beginning in the mid-1960s (*Time* 1988; Cooke 1989). Thus, rather than trying to build good will for the corporation itself, Anheuser-Busch apparently seeks to position its brands as respectable products used by responsible adult consumers.

Campaign Slogans

From the beginning of the Anheuser-Busch campaign, many public health experts have been troubled by its slogan, "Know When to Say When." The major criticism is that the slogan assumes the fact of alcohol consumption and does not communicate that there are certain situations when people should not drink at all. From a public health perspective, a more appropriate slogan would be "Know When to Say No" (Kilbourne 1991).

A second criticism of the slogan is its failure to correct many of the misguided ideas that people use to determine whether they have had too much to drink. Anheuser-Busch's advertising generally ignores this problem, leaving it up to each consumer to decide the meaning of "when." In fact, only one of their ads tries to explain their moderation slogan. Comedian Norm Crosby—known for his word substitutions, spoonerisms, and fractured syntax—explains: "So when I say the wrong thing at the right time, it's funny, but only because I'm in control. But if you're drinking and you start talking like me, then it's a good inclination [sic] that you're not in control. And that's not funny." The suggestion that a person can drink until reaching this degree of impairment is clearly an improper "cue to action" (Janz and Becker 1984).

Critics have also found fault with the Miller campaign slogan, "Think When You Drink," and the Coors slogan, "Drink Safely." These slogans also assume the fact of alcohol consumption and fail to communicate that there are certain situations when people should not drink. The Miller slogan has come under more pointed attack; given the effect of alcohol on cognitive function, the slogan is rather ironic. A more appropriate slogan would be "Think Before You Drink."

Avoiding Driving After Drinking

The premise of the Coors "Now, Not Now" series is to establish a clear demarcation between times when it is acceptable to drink ("Now") and times when it is not ("Not Now"). The ads depict a variety of situations where it is unacceptable—when working with heavy machinery, operating a snowmobile, hunting, and so forth.

Only one of these three ads, however, shows driving per se to be an inappropriate time to drink alcohol ("Not Now"). Instead, all three ads are dominated by a long closing scene in which a man who is severely impaired by alcohol must be dissuaded from driving. Thus, the ads fail to establish clearly that driving after *any* amount of alcohol is potentially a hazard. Instead, they reinforce the public perception that the problem is not drinking and driving, but rather drinking too much and driving.

Taken together, the Anheuser-Busch ads offer a confused message about whether the acts of drinking and driving should be strictly separated. Sometimes the message is clear and appropriate. For example, professional golfer Payne Stewart states, "When I'm driving, I don't drink. When I'm drinking, I don't drive." Unfortunately, other ads fail to argue for totally separating the acts of drinking and driving. For example, "Bud" race car driver Scott Pruett states that it is crazy to drive when one has had too much to drink, then pleads, "So please don't drink and drive."

The Miller advertisements do not deal with this issue directly. Their most recent ad, "Think," does show a man giving his female companion the car keys as they prepare to leave, but there is no indication that the couple planned ahead for her to be the sober designated driver. Of the two, she may be the one who was least impaired.

Designated Driver

The designated driver concept is a simple one: When a couple or group of friends selects a designated driver, that person agrees to abstain from alcohol and to be responsible for driving. The others are free to drink or not as they choose. Designated driver is a made-to-order idea for the beer industry, a partial solution to the problem of alcohol-impaired driving that puts the spotlight on individual consumers rather than on

industry practices. Accordingly, this strategy has been embraced by the alcoholic beverage and broadcast industries, despite no evidence of its real impact (DeJong and Wallack 1992).

Even with this enthusiastic endorsement, only one moderation ad from Anheuser-Busch has featured this idea. Entitled "Designated Driver," this high-energy commercial centers around two couples who enter a busy, noisy club. One of the men is to be the driver, and the other man tosses him the keys. Later, amid several lively bar scenes, the designated driver is shown throwing his keys in the air and announcing, "I'm driving." Speaking of the "family of Budweiser beers," the announcer concludes, "So when they remind you to please use a designated driver, it's all in the name of friendship."

The ad concludes with a chorus singing "Friends Know When to Say When" and a close-up of a key chain imprinted with that slogan. In this context, the "Know When" slogan is especially confusing. The designated driver, the friend who enables others to have fun by drinking, has supposedly agreed not to drink any alcohol, but the slogan says he knows when to say "when"—that is, when to stop drinking.

The visual images used in this ad create another problem. Critics have charged that using a designated driver might encourage heavy consumption by the driver's companions (Seal 1990). Given the ongoing debate over this issue, it is essential that designated driver advertisements assiduously avoid playing into this criticism (DeJong and Wallack 1992). For this commercial in particular, viewers conceivably could think that some of the bar patrons are acting drunk, an impression created by the rapid-fire editing, the swirling camera work, and the bar patrons' uninhibited antics.

Third-party Interventions

There are several steps that both commercial servers and social hosts can take to prevent others from driving after drinking. First, they can provide ample food when serving alcohol and offer nonalcoholic beverages as an alternative, especially to guests who are driving. Later, they can intervene when someone should stop drinking, by offering a nonalcoholic beverage or, if necessary, by refusing to serve that person any more alcohol. As a last resort, they can actively intervene if someone is prepared to drive while impaired, by driving the person home, arranging for a

cab or other transportation, urging the person to stay over until sober, or taking the keys away.

Of course, the best course of action is to prevent drinkers from becoming impaired in the first place (Mosher 1991). Even so, the industry's moderation advertising typically focuses on interventions of last resort.

Two Anheuser-Busch advertisements with actor John Schneider speak of the need for people to serve alcohol responsibly, but they provide no specific advice on how to do that or how to intervene if a guest has had too much to drink. A more recent ad featuring quarterback Dan Marino recommends the idea of "passing" the keys to someone who has not been drinking. It would be preferable, obviously, if he stressed the importance of planning ahead to guarantee that the designated driver has not consumed alcohol.

An early Coors advertisement, "Gimme the Keys," was part of a series of Coors Light ads set in the Silver Bullet Bar. It is near closing time, and the bartender questions a patron at length about his alcohol consumption to determine if he should be driving. The patron strongly resists the suggestion that he is incapable of driving, but the bartender persists and eventually succeeds in convincing his friend to hand over the keys. The positive aspect of the commercial is its modeling of how a bartender can intervene.

On the negative side, the ad does not indicate the need for a strict separation between drinking and driving. The customer has been bar hopping, and although he has only had a couple of beers at the Silver Bullet, he has apparently consumed a great deal elsewhere. Fortunately, the bartender determines that the patron is incapable of driving safely and intervenes. To be consistent with what is taught in responsible hospitality programs, however, the Silver Bullet bartender should never have served him in the first place (Mosher 1991).

Each of the Coors "Now, Not Now" ads closes with a long scene in which an inebriate who intends to drive must be dissuaded from doing so. In the first ad, the point of intervention comes when the driver is trying to unlock his car and drops the keys. In the second, it occurs when the driver is walking down the sidewalk toward his car. In the third, as we see a parked car outside a bar, we overhear the bartender suggesting to a patron that he call a cab to take a customer home. With each successive commercial, then, the point of intervention arrives at an

earlier time. As was the case, however, with "Gimme the Keys," even the bartender's intervention comes too late. A responsible server would not allow a patron to drink so much alcohol that he requires alternative transportation (Mosher 1991). Indeed, counter to the responsible server philosophy, the bartender's offer to call a cab actually comes *after* he has asked the customer if he needs anything else, and the patron has declined.

Undermining the "Responsible Drinking" Message

Whatever prohealth message emerges in the beer industry's "responsible drinking" advertising is undermined in a variety of ways—some obvious, some more subtle—as the following examples illustrate.

The third "Now, Not Now" ad from Coors presents an interesting contrast between two bars. The first bar, shown as the singer croons "It's the right time now," is alive with music and sexy women. By comparison, the second bar, where the bartender offers to call a cab for a solitary drinker, seems a dreary and unexciting place. We see this bar from the outside, on a dank, rain-slickened street. There is no music, no crowd noise, just this quiet conversation. Similarly, in "Gimme the Keys," the Silver Bullet Bar is nearly empty and lifeless, not the frenetic, happy place that viewers have seen in Coors Light commercials. The implication is clear. Some bars are fun. Other bars—patronized by losers who need to be monitored, who need reminders to be "responsible"—are not.

An advertisement featuring Scott Pruett, a racing driver sponsored by Budweiser, shows Pruett sitting alongside his bright red car, which is emblazoned with the Budweiser brand name. Pruett himself wears his matching driving uniform, which has a large "Bud" logo on the front right side. Traffic safety advocates have long complained about beer companies' sponsorship of auto racing and the use of race car imagery in beer ads (Buchanan and Lev 1989). Featuring a car that conceptually links drinking and driving in a supposed prevention message is both unnecessary and inappropriate. Another example of this link can be found in "Friends," which shows a bar scene with a television set playing in the background. Of the nearly infinite possibilities available to them, what did Anheuser-Busch elect to show on this set? An auto race.

Two moderation ads from the late 1980s feature Bud Light's Spuds

McKenzie. In one ad, three slinky actresses cozy up to Spuds as the dog, outfitted in black tie, plays a piano. The message: "Do you know why Spuds McKenzie has so much fun at parties? Because he's always in control. Spuds knows it's cool to live by one simple rule: Know When to Say When." Spuds's testimonial is at complete odds with his "Party Animal" image portrayed in Bud Light's product advertising, making him a noncredible "spokesdog" for this moderation message.

"Rap" makes the suggestion, "Keep control of your game, don't follow the pack." This line implies that not drinking to excess would make a person stand out as being different from everyone else. This is a critical shortcoming because many young adults drink, often to excess, as a means of bonding with their peer group (Lastovicka et al. 1987). Also, young people who reject the designated driver role complain that, by not drinking, the driver is set apart from the rest of the group (Saatchi and Saatchi 1988). "Rap" reinforces those concerns.

Prodrinking Messages

Over the years, the beer industry's "responsible drinking" ads have incorporated more and more elements designed to promote beer consumption. In our view, most recent ads undermine the prohealth message of responsible consumption by introducing prodrinking themes and images that are typical of the companies' standard beer commercials.

Anheuser-Busch. To illuminate this point, it is instructive to see how Anheuser-Busch's ads have changed since the mid-1980s. The early "Know When" commercials were similar to low-budget public service announcements, relying principally on the use of sports celebrities to admonish the public. In every case, the message is a general appeal for moderation. An advertisement featuring basketball star Patrick Ewing is typical. Dining at a formal restaurant with a young woman, Ewing turns to the camera: "When you party with good friends it makes for a good time. But it takes good sense too. Know When to Say When. A reminder from Anheuser-Busch."

With respect to beer promotion, these advertisements from the mid-1980s constituted a soft sell. We hear about "good friends" and having a "good time," but we are also immediately reminded of the need for "good sense." At party scenes, between two and six beer drinkers can be spotted, but beer is not a dominating presence.

With the next round of commercials, featuring actor John Schneider,

beer was pushed front and center. In his first ad, Schneider goes up to a bar and grabs a full beer mug. The sales pitch is direct: "You gonna go out and have a couple of beers? Now, that's what I call living. Now, too much—that's never a good idea." In his second ad, he pours himself a glass of beer as he talks. In the third ad, Schneider walks along a crowded beach, talking about the importance of "responsible" alcohol consumption. He opens as follows: "Summer parties call for cold beer. It's easy to work up a thirst when it's hot out." As we see brightly colored sailboats in the background, and as a couple splashes into the water with a large inner tube, Schneider grabs a beer from an overstuffed cooler and opens it. A fact ignored by this ad is that alcohol consumption is a major risk factor in drownings and boat accidents and is therefore illegal on many beaches (National Committee for Injury Prevention and Control 1989).

Recent moderation ads from Anheuser-Busch use an altogether different approach that exploits the themes and visual imagery of the company's brand advertising. The "Designated Driver" ad is illustrative. Played without sound, this ad resembles a beer commercial. In fact, several of the scenes, such as those showing two women playing a basketball arcade game at a bar, are taken from a concurrently running product ad for Budweiser. The moderation message is provided by the announcer, but his voice is nearly drowned out by the rock music and the ambient sounds of the bar. This inconsistency between verbal and visual messages violates a basic tenet of good public service advertising (National Cancer Institute 1989).

Other commercials on Anheuser-Busch's current "play list" also incorporate elements designed to promote beer consumption and to position particular brands. For example, "Friends" includes several scenes that are typical of beer commercials directed to young consumers—for example, young couples heading for a bar or flirting, outdoor fun in off-road vehicles and on the water. In one scene, a dog ("man's best friend") is shown carrying a half-empty six-pack in its mouth, dutifully retrieving the remaining beers for his master. Later, his master is shown nuzzling the dog in appreciation. Focusing on the theme of friendship, the advertisement states, "The family of Budweiser beers is proud of all the friendships we've helped make," thus echoing a familiar theme in beer advertising, that beer can facilitate social interaction (Postman et al. 1987).

The message entitled "Rap" features black actors who do an urban-

style rap on the "Know When" theme. In several scenes, the two men sit on stools alongside a small table. Each has a mug of beer. At one point, they hit their full mugs together, as if in a toast. Later, we see that the mugs are about half full. In the very next shot, as the men say, "Yo, I'm out of here," we see that the mugs have been drained empty, suggesting that they "chugged" down the remaining beer, behavior that is inappropriate in an ostensible moderation ad.

In contrast, a newly released advertisement by Anheuser-Busch, which is tied to the "Why Ask Why?" campaign for Bud Dry, avoids many of the negative features found in other recent ads. First, this commercial does not use the "Know When to Say When" slogan, a first for Anheuser-Busch. Second, there are no scenes depicting alcohol consumption and no product displays. Third, beer consumption is not directly linked to any promise of benefit. In addition, the ad lists several benefits of avoiding heavy alcohol consumption (e.g., "Someone is counting on you"), and it underscores the fact that police have stepped up their enforcement of the law. It is important to note that, despite the lack of visual elements from typical beer advertising, this ad still has high production values and is visually appealing.

On the negative side, with its opening question ("Why not have one for the road?"), the ad fails to argue for a strict separation between the acts of drinking and driving. Instead, it implies that the problem of alcohol-impaired driving is caused by people who have "one too many." Also of concern, the Bud Dry theme, "Why Ask Why?," feeds into the sense of alienation, cynicism, and fatalism that many young people experience today (Graham and Hamdan 1987)—that is, their feeling that much of life is unexplainable and should therefore be shrugged off, perhaps with a drink.

Coors. Moderation advertisements produced by Coors have followed the same course as those by Anheuser-Busch, moving from commercials that resemble typical public service announcements to ads that use imagery typical of brand promotion advertising.

The "talking head" approach was used in "Trend," which features Coors spokesman Mark Harmon. He makes this observation on the changing social scene: "It really does seem that more people are beginning to respect the difference between a few and a few too many. And that's kind of nice." The suggestion that social norms are changing is a good strategy for promoting responsible drinking, but the ad has two critical shortcomings. First, like the "Know When" slogan, this ad offers

a vague definition of responsible drinking. Second, by defining the problem as drinking "a few too many," the fact that many people should not drink at all is ignored.

With the recent introduction of its "Now, Not Now" campaign, Coors radically altered the look of its responsible drinking commercials. As noted, a positive feature of these ads is their attempt to establish a clear demarcation between times when it might be acceptable to drink ("Now") and times when it is not ("Not Now"). With this approach, however, fully half of these 30-second ads are devoted to promoting beer consumption, and the prodrinking scenes in these ads are standard fare for beer advertisements—playful teasing between a young man and woman at the beach, male bonding around the campfire, bars crowded with sexy women. Thus, in ads ostensibly designed to promote responsible drinking, half of the scenes promote Coors Light using the same themes and images that are found in their brand advertising, and with the same apparent purpose: to increase the legitimacy of beer consumption in a variety of different social situations.

Beer advertisers have often used sexual imagery in their advertising, leading critics to charge that such ads communicate that beer drinking will lead to sexual fulfillment (Kilbourne 1991; Postman et al. 1987). The use of sexual imagery in the third and most recent ad from the "Now, Not Now" series is therefore noteworthy. The commercial opens on a smoky, dimly lit dance floor, with shots of several attractive women, most wearing short black skirts, gyrating to rock music. As the camera looks up from the dance floor to a dancer's legs, a man sings, "It's the right time now."

Miller. Miller's current effort includes three ads. The first commercial, "Historical," is designed to connect beer consumption with mainstream American life—by alluding to the historical tradition of beer consumption in the United States and by associating consumption with a night out on the town, the excitement of a blind date that clicks, male comradeship, and sports. There is even a golden-hued farm scene with a family heading back to the house after a hard day's work. The subtext: "Miller is as American as apple pie."

The moderation message is communicated only by the announcer's voice. "For over 100 years, in countless warm and friendly places, it's been Miller Time. At Miller, we're proud to have always brewed our beer carefully and responsibly. That's how we'd like you to drink our beer—carefully and responsibly." It is a gentle reminder, as much de-

signed to position Miller beer as a premium product as it is to promote responsible drinking.

The second commercial, "Contemporary," is similar in tone: "In thousands of comfortable places all across America, it's a friendly, easy time. It's Miller Time." We see no less than eight separate scenes of people enjoying a beer at a restaurant or bar, by a campfire, and in other outdoor settings. The pace is languid, supporting the message that Miller provides a relaxing escape from everyday pressures.

The most recent Miller ad, "Think," has a radically different pace. Set in a bar, this ad is visually similar to current ads shown by Anheuser-Busch ("Friends," "Designated Driver") and Coors ("Now, Not Now #3"). As the ad opens, we see a young couple entering an upscale bar, a lively place filled with attractive people. Some play pool. Some sit at candlelit tables, talking and flirting. Others play darts. Still others dance to the beat of Aretha Franklin's "Think." The pace is electric, with quick edits, off-center camera angles, tight close-ups, and sweeping, jittery camera movement. Interspersed among these scenes, a series of three black-on-white graphics tells us what we are seeing, making explicit the promise of the ad: "Good Times, Good Tunes, Good Friends."

The link between beer and sexual promise is clearly evident in this ad. In one scene, for example, the left half of the screen is filled with a buxom woman in a short black skirt and a tight, low-cut blouse who is gyrating to the music, swirling her long hair back and forth. As in the Coors ad described earlier, the camera angle is up from the floor. The lower right portion of the screen is dominated by a full, frothy beer mug sitting on a nearby table.

The final ten seconds provide the moderation message. We see the couple from the first scene. As they prepare to leave, he drops the keys in her hand, which we see in slow motion. He puts his arm around her shoulders, and they walk outside. The scene fades to the next graphic in the series: "Good Thinking." The final graphic, "Think When You Drink," is accompanied by the announcer's explanation: "Something to think about the next time you're out. Think when you drink. A reminder from the Miller Brewing Company." As the music fades, we see a red neon sign for Miller in the bar window. Through the glass, images of dancers, slightly distorted, still move to the music.

With the slogan "Think When You Drink," the perfect theme music for Miller's moderation campaign would seem to be "Think." Although

the word is repeated throughout the song, its opening lines underscore the fact that this commercial is about more than being responsible: "You better think (think), think about what you're tryin' to do to me. Think (think, think). Let your mind go, let yourself be free."

These recent ads from the three brewers, with their strong prodrinking message, reinforce the perception that problems with alcohol are the responsibility of the individual consumer. In general, the industry endorses drunk-driving countermeasures that are premised on individual responsibility and is opposed to any that implicate alcohol itself and thereby threaten sales (Ross 1986). Wallack (1991) spells out the subtext to moderation advertisements that link beer consumption with the good life:

> It is the beautiful people who have all the fun, but it is the failures who have all the problems. It is the people who can't handle it, who are genetically predisposed to disease, who are not really like "us" who have the problem.

The message, in short, is that other, willfully irresponsible people are spoiling the fun that beer makes possible—that is, people who do not know when to say "when" and do not "think" when they drink.

Discussion

While Anheuser-Busch, Coors, and Miller have used "responsible drinking" advertising to improve the public image of their brands, several aspects of that advertising, from a public health perspective, are counterproductive.

First, slogans like "Know When to Say When," "Drink Safely," and "Think When You Drink" gloss over or totally ignore several important public health messages:

1. No level of alcohol consumption is completely risk free.
2. If adults choose to drink, they should limit their consumption. (Guidelines on alcohol consumption issued by the Office for Substance Abuse Prevention [1991] state that women should limit their consumption to no more than one drink per day, men to no more than two drinks per day.)

3. The acts of drinking and driving should be kept strictly separate at all times; drivers should abstain, not drink until they "know when to say when."
4. Those who are pregnant, nursing, or are trying to have a baby should not drink any alcohol.
5. Drinking alcohol may be hazardous for people using over-the-counter, prescription, or illicit drugs.
6. Drinking any amount of alcohol is risky for people recovering from alcohol or other drug dependence.
7. Abstinence is a socially acceptable choice.

Second, several aspects of these commercials undermine whatever prohealth message they provide, mainly by presenting themes and images that are consistent with the beer companies' regular brand promotions. These moderation ads generally reinforce the idea that beer consumption is a reward for hard work, an escape, a social lubricant, a device for furthering romance or sexual conquest, a facilitator of male comradeship, an emblem of group membership and acceptance, and a means of gaining a social identity (Kilbourne 1991; Postman et al. 1987).

The beer industry is often criticized for airing brand commercials that violate its own Brewing Industry Advertising Code (Anheuser-Busch n.d.). The industry, of course, consistently denies that charge. In our view, however, this same debate can be engaged as we examine the industry's so-called moderation advertising.

The code states, for example, that "beer advertisements should neither suggest nor encourage overindulgence." Yet, we hear Norm Crosby tell us that it is okay to drink beer until we mispronounce words the way he does. We see several moderation ads from Coors showing two bottles of beer being grabbed at once. We see half-full mugs of beer drained empty within a split second.

Depictions of "revelry" are also a violation of the code. Two recent ads, Anheuser-Busch's "Designated Driver" and Miller's "Think," feature bar scenes with exuberant patrons dancing, laughing, even jumping up and down. Combined with dizzying camera work and quick edits, viewers might well conclude that at least some of these patrons are drunk.

The code also prohibits portrayals of "sexual passion, promiscuity, or any other amorous activity as a consequence of drinking beer." Yet,

these ads repeatedly link beer consumption with romance and even raw sexuality. What purpose could it serve, other than the very one prohibited by the code, to use bar scenes with up-angle camera shots of young, short-skirted women gyrating to rock music?

In response, the industry would undoubtedly deny that these ads violate the code, just as they deny that their mainstream brand promotions are in violation. Because the code is voluntary, there is no final arbiter. Our point is this: The code aside, such depictions are counterproductive if the true intent of the ads is to promote responsible drinking.

Any *responsible drinking message*, whatever its sponsor, should adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Make it clear that alcohol consumption is inappropriate before or during certain activities or in any situation that requires alertness.
2. Do not imply that drinking alcohol is the socially accepted norm at any type of social occasion or for any group or type of individual.
3. Do not model, suggest, or otherwise encourage heavy consumption.
4. Do not include scenes that depict revelry or hint at the possibility of inebriation.
5. Neither glamorize alcohol consumption nor depict it as a way to have a good time, to celebrate, to fit in, to project a certain self-image, or to attain social or financial status.
6. Do not portray "sexual passion, promiscuity, or any other amorous activity" as a consequence of or in association with drinking beer.

Unfortunately, much of the industry's "moderation" advertising violates these principles. Thus, in order to play a constructive role, industry-sponsored moderation advertising must be reformed so that it is done more responsibly. So-called moderation advertising that actually seeks to promote drinking is not part of the solution, but may instead serve to worsen the problems created by heavy alcohol consumption. To the extent that the brewers continue this strategy, they invite public cynicism and anger.

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Address correspondence to: William DeJong, Department of Health and Social Behavior, Harvard School of Public Health, 677 Huntington Avenue, Boston, MA 02115.