

Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dun Laoghaire  
Faculty of Film, Art and Creative Technologies

**“Beer for girls”**  
**Women in Beer advertising in the US & Ireland from 1960-2026**

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Submitted to the Faculty of Film, Art and Creative Technologies in candidacy for the  
BA Hons in Graphic Design 2026

## Declaration of originality

This thesis is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for Graphic Design BA (Hons). It is entirely the author's own work except for where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'LMP', written over a horizontal line.

## **Acknowledgements:**

I would like to thank my friends and family, particularly my sister Maya for her unwavering support during the writing of this thesis. I would also like to greatly thank my thesis supervisor Eadaoin Hennessy for her invaluable care and guidance towards this thesis.

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## **Abstract:**

This thesis aims to examine the impact that society plays on the advertising world. More specifically I aim to explore the impact that societal expectations play on women and how that is perpetuated in advertising. I want to show that the beer industry have commodified women for profit and continue to under false themes of empowerment and support. These thematics are used as trends more often than not, in a way of capitalising on women's buying power and using these themes as a way of trying to reprimand their androcentric advertising and adapting that to today's advertising standards. I will be exploring how this is harmful and redundant to women's progression in society. That we need real advocacy and support rather than companies taking advantage of women's empowerment. I will be exploring this through looking at social media terminology, current and past beer advertising in the US, UK and Ireland, as well as looking at how specialists on the subject of feminism view women in advertising.

## Introduction

It is known that societal norms effect our course of conduct in day-to-day life, especially in how we are expected to perform and or act in social situations. Society's ideas of how a woman is socially expected to act is seen reflected in every case of women's representation, including advertising. I will be exploring the development of how women are represented in alcohol advertisements. I will be dissecting this topic by looking at advertising from the 1980's in contrast to present day in the US, UK and Ireland.

I will be referencing the term "Functional democratisation" (Connoly, 2021, 3) to illustrate the changes in power imbalances in the consumption of alcohol in relation to women in Ireland from the 1960's to 2026. This term is used to describe the ever-changing power dynamics between various societal groups. The term "Functional Democratisation" – "was created by Norbert Elias to demonstrate the direction of social and political development from a hierarchal structured social and political order to a more even distribution of power resources within a group of human beings, called society." (Behrouz, A. (2017).

Throughout my thesis I intend to look at functional democratisation as a tool to show the changing power dynamics between men and women. The purpose of social democratization is to allow for the power dynamics to fluctuate in order to create a more just and equal society. This is further explained in my chapter about John Connoly's paper 'Half pints or pints'.

This thesis will analyse gender roles shown in beer advertising in the West. Throughout this thesis I aim to examine how alcohol advertisers have promoted outdated gender roles to push sales to men. Now that women's buying power has increased, brands use themes of feminism and empowerment as trends and not out of sincerity. I will be exploring case studies to illustrate how this is happening. I will be looking at how the commodification of women has been used to sell alcohol, as well as exploring the harmful differences between advertisements aimed towards women compared to advertisements aimed towards men. The harmful differences in men and women in advertising refers to how advertisers use androcentric theories in advertising. These differences are caused by "Androcentrism" which refers to a sociological term that refers to the practice of prioritizing male perspectives, interests, and experiences over those of women. (Hutchinson, J. (2023).

The commodification of women refers to the usage of women's image through themes of empowerment and sexuality. As Judith Williamson so eloquently put "Sex becomes a referent system... always hinted at, referred to, in an innuendo, double entendre or symbolism." (Williamson, 1978). I will be referencing Judith Williamson's theories and ideology throughout my thesis to illustrate the ways in which sexism is still very much so present in today's advertising. I will be using advertising to illustrate that whilst there has been a clear shift in language, the sexism within it is very much still present. I will achieve this by comparing advertisements from the 1960's to present day. Through comparing and analysing the advertisements, I want to provide a full image of the sexism throughout the years and how it has adapted. I believe it is important not only to acknowledge how sexist themes and language have been used in advertising in the past, but to be aware of how it has remained, no matter how subtle or hidden it may be.

I will explore the switch from degrading women to push sales to men, to uplifting them through "empowerment" to try to sell to women. This empowerment is often false; Jenni Murray speaks on this in her podcast 'Women's Hour' on BBC. In the podcast episode 'Feminization of alcohol marketing' she speaks about the pink tax on alcohol "targeting women as our socio-economic power has increased." Murray also speaks on the intended uplifting language of 'girl power' to boost sales and how companies use these terms, made by women to uplift one another, to condescend women with performative acts of feminism. Women's socio-economic power has grown as we have gained rights, and most women in the west that are able to work do work (Murray, 2020). This cultural shift towards empowering women in alcohol advertising came as women gained socio economic freedom and independence from the home. This is a societal change that has happened through the liberation of women's rights seen through the social welfare act, EU equal pay directive and many more. Advertising reflects the society we live in so as women became more empowered that sentiment has been emulated in advertising. However, it seems that our constant growth of buying power has not earned us genuine respect within alcohol advertising.

Companies that I will be looking at as case studies throughout this thesis are as follows; Smithwick's, Coors, Budweiser and BrewDog. I will be using these companies to illustrate the sexist trends varying in subtlety throughout the years. This is where the commodification of women's empowerment and commodification of feminism in general comes into play. I will then conclude by examining White Claw's advertising and brand identity as a counter argument as to what gender-

neutral advertising brings to a modern world of advertising. I will explore the advantages that getting rid of heteronormative gender roles brings as well as the value of representing all genders.

I will also explore the role that social media plays in alcohol advertising in the representations and perpetuation of gender norms. There is a trend on social media of using terminology that are derived from corporate terms, such as “she-e-o” and “girlboss”. This language was formed on social media as a trend started by women in business sectors to uplift other women. Although these terms are intended to be uplifting and empowering women, advertisers have started using these terms and the themes that they represent in a way to sell to women. The ways that advertisers try and use these terms more often than not are performative and even when its well-intended can come across very condescending and manipulative towards women. I am exploring these social media terms as social media plays such a strong role in perpetuating the aforementioned condescending tone of voice in advertising towards women.

## **Chapter 1.1 Babyboom & the rise of the housewife**

“Human differentiation on the basis of gender is a fundamental phenomenon that affects virtually every aspect of people’s lives”.(Bussey and Bandura, 1999 pg. 1) In the psychological review “Social Cognitive theory of gender development and differentiation”, Bussey and Bandura speak on how gender plays a large role in how we are perceived socially and always has, which is down to the social normalities present at any given time. Gender stereotypes are however shifting in a more drastic way than before, primarily in the west. We have been ruled by men and have developed under a system of patriarchy, which is clearly illustrated in our societal norms from past to present. Functional democratisation shows us that power imbalances between various social strata and genders effect our social normalities at any given moment. The functional democratisation in the 1960’s, was one that favoured the liberation of men, I will explore this in the context of the average heteronormative US household.

I will illustrate how the society in the US in the mid 1900’s was one of heteronormative normality. The “baby boom” refers to “the sharp rise in the birth rate that occurred in the United States during the late 1940’s and the 1950’s” (Bean, F.D. (1983). The rise in popularity of the housewife was at its height in the mid 1900’s. In “The Second sex” by Simone De Beauvoir she writes about the married woman and the domesticated life of women in marriage. This book was published in 1949 so I believe it paints an accurate image of what domestic life was like at the time. De Beauvoir writes about marriage as something that is liberating for men and a loss of freedom for women. In context of a husband and wife’s relation De Beauvoir states “She follows wherever his work calls him and determines their place of residence; she breaks more or less decisively with her past, becoming attached to her husband’s universe.” (De Beauvoir, S. (1949). The domesticated housewife is clearly described within this quote. This is why women were depicted as often lesser than men in advertising as that was the societal norm at the time. To audiences advertising on the 1900’s sounds jarring as it no longer reflects the society that we live in.

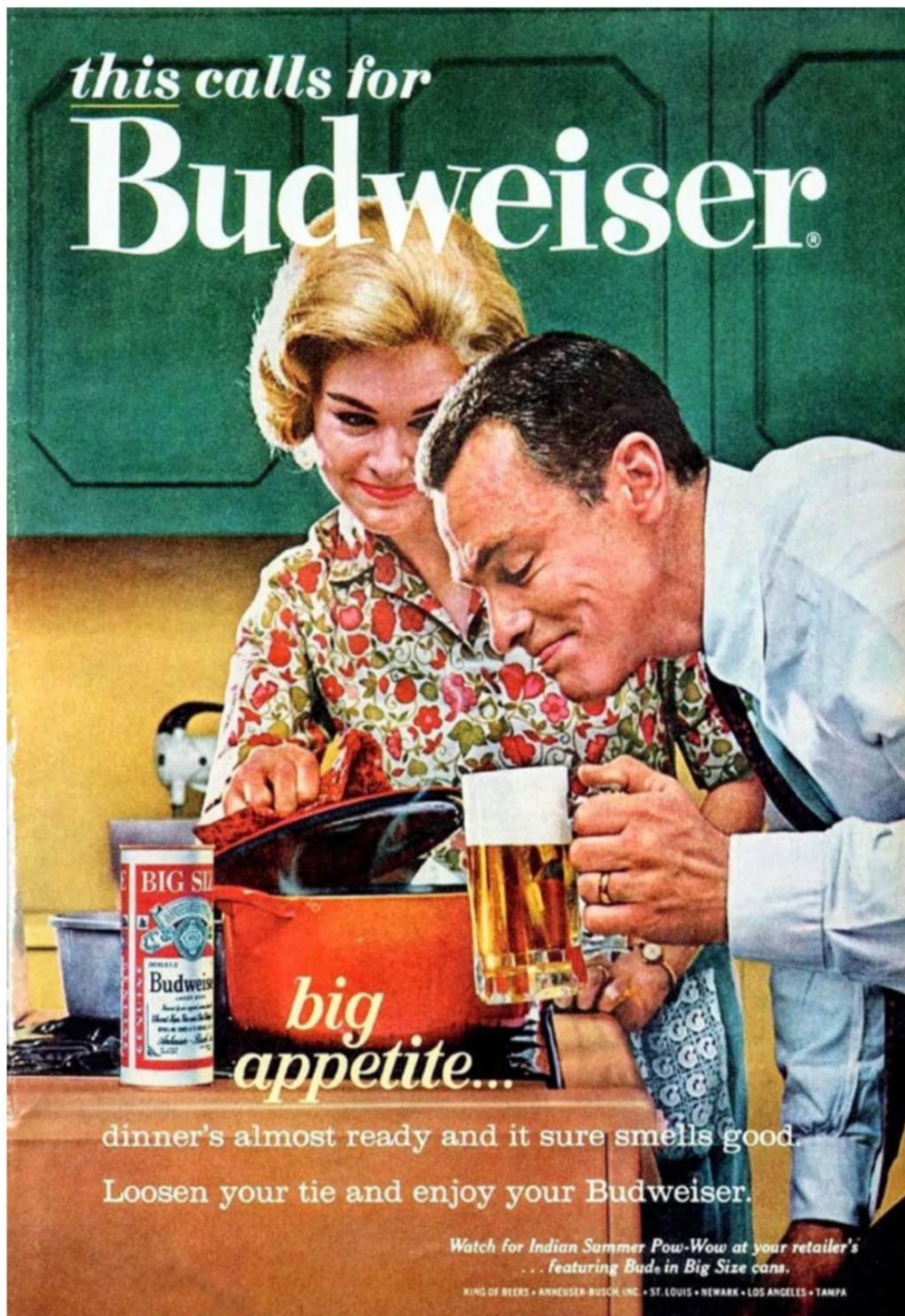


Fig 1. 'This calls for Budweiser' (CNBC) 1963

Fig 4 illustrates that in western society, we often perpetuate the heteronormative domesticated lifestyle as a luxury. Due to this fact, it is often seen reflected in our advertising, and has become the social norm. This ideology is perpetuated in all aspects of our advertising. "Advertising in Western consumer culture is argued to function as a vehicle for broadcasting the culture-ideology

of consumerism.” (Henk van Milligen (2021). When most people think of the heteronormative nuclear family, we tend to think of the typical American family portrayed in the media in the 1960’s, such as the couple in fig.4. This shows imagery of a wife taking care of the domestic household and her husband. This will also be shown in the advertisements that I will be exploring throughout this thesis. The wife in this advertisement is in the background and not being advertised to but more so her image being used as an advertisement for men and perhaps to encourage women to purchase this beer to satisfy their husbands. What I would like to explore is the effects that these ads have had and continue to have on advertising today. I use this brief look at American women’s history to show that women’s representation correlates with the time frame of historical events. This is also to further illustrate my stance of how strongly social norms feed our advertisements. Although women have seemingly equal rights to men, we are not represented with the same fairness and respect as men. During the early 1900’s women were represented as homemakers and their image used as commodities to sell products to men.

Gender bias against women bleeds into every facet of our life and social systems. I also use these moments in history as a tool to illustrate women being silenced in society. I am illustrating that even with the monumental fight that women fought in the early 1900’s, we were still subject to ads that depict women as ornamental commodities or are belittled with ‘empowering’ language to boost sales. The advertisements that I examine throughout this thesis show both how in the mid 1900’s in the west and in today’s current climate women are still subject to condescending messaging from advertisers, especially within the beer industry.

Beer is typically seen as a ‘man’s drink’. The ability to drink large quantities of alcohol is seen as strong and heroic amongst men. However, when women drink excessively the connotations are very different in how that’s portrayed in the world of advertising and socially. Socially women are seen as problematic if they drink excessively, also the stereotype of women drinking excessively is not seen as heroic and stoic like it is with men.

## Chapter 1.2 Performative female solidarity

SHE FOUND

# She Married Two Men

In fact, all women do... there's always that Inner Man, you know. And think of all the planning that goes into meals to make *him* contented!

When *you* plan, are you fair to yourself? Do you compliment your delicious dishes by serving the best beer ever brewed?

P.S. It's a *fact*: Budweiser *has* delighted more husbands than any other brew ever known.

**Budweiser**  
KING OF BEERS

*"Where There's Life... There's Bud!"*

ANHEUSER-BUSCH, INC. • ST. LOUIS • NEWARK • LOS ANGELES

Fig 2: 'She found she married two men' (CNBC)1956

The above imagery is an example of performative solidarity as Budweiser has a long history of overtly sexist ads mainly from the 1960's up until the 90's, where in which the cultural shift in gender norms started to change within western civilisation. "Performative solidarity" is used in many different contexts such as race, religion, sexual orientation and more, I will be using the term performative solidarity to speak about feminist performative solidarity that companies have. I will look at how advertising companies performatively portray feminism for their own gain. They do this by using themes such as women's empowerment, friendship, bravery in an exaggerated way to perform solidarity towards women. Many feminist authors have written about the domesticated housewife such as Sylvia Plath in her poem "The Applicant" describing how she felt women were seen by men. Plath looks at women as dolls in this poem, nearly using advertisers language by saying in reference to the housewife "It can cook, it can sew, it can talk, talk, talk." (Plath, S. (1963). Women are always depicted as very well dressed and almost impossibly perfect, almost doll like in the alcohol advertisements from the 1950/60's. This highlights how little respect women were given in the beer industry.

For international women's day Budweiser tried to remedy their actions by remaking some of their past misogynistic ads and bringing them up to date with today's gender norms. The chief marketing officer Syl Saller states "Culture has been shaped by the stories we tell and if you think about it, advertising is telling stories that are backed by billions of dollars to have them heard,"(Handley, 2019) Budweiser had partnered with a social media campaign by the Association of National Advertiser with the hashtag "#Seeher". The initial messaging of this Budweiser ad is very obviously offensive with the slogan "she married two men" as seen in fig. 1, and asking women what beer will 'compliment their dishes,' also in fig.1. This implying that the role of women in the home is to be a responsible and effective housewife. "Woman is doomed to the continuation of the species and the care of the home-" (De Beauvoir, 1949)

**SHE FOUND**

*She Has It All*

In fact, she's never felt more fulfilled. Because she's surrounded by those who embrace who she is, inside and out. And that's all she really needs.

P.S. It's a *fact*: Budweiser can be enjoyed by everyone, everywhere.

**Budweiser.**  
KING OF BEERS

"Where There's Life...There's Bud!"

Fig 3: 'She has it all' rebrand (CNBC) 2019

Fig 2; The second advert is very clearly a lazy attempt at announcing solidarity. This feels performative and a way for Budweiser to clear their name and be represented as a company that aligns

with 'modern values'. When I use the term 'modern values', I am speaking about values that are prevalent in modern society such as individual merit, social norms and more specifically gender norms. The way gender norms were portrayed in the 1960's compared to present day is very different. De Beauvoir comments on the societal expectation of women by writing in reference to married women "-but she is allowed no direct influence upon the future nor upon the world; she reaches out beyond herself towards social groups only through her husband as intermediary." This quote reflects what a married woman of the home was allowed to do and accepted to do socially. This is why heteronormative relationships in a traditional domesticated set up was what was most seen in adverts in the 1960's.

Both the redesigned and original version of this Budweiser advertisement include a half pint of Budweiser as the product they are advertising. Sexism is defined by the oxford dictionary as "prejudice, stereotyping or discrimination, typically against women, on the basis of sex." (Oxford) I mention this definition of sexism to use within the context of beer advertising, to show that fig.1 and fig .2 are sexist in the way that they use stereotyping. In fig.1 they use the language of "She found she married two men."

This act of erasing the past does not take away from Budweiser's history of sexist advertisements. I would like to mention that the time period and the social norms within that period are essential to discuss. In the 1960's advertising towards women while having emphasis on taking care of your husband was the social norm in western civilisation. Women were often advertised beer in a way of portraying traditional domestic life within the home. Women were not advertised in a way to get them to consume beer but to try and push women to purchase beer to have on the table for their husbands when they come home from work. Hence, this advertisement not receiving any backlash at the time. If this advertisement were to be published today it would be taken down very swiftly due to the overt tones of sexism, portraying the woman as just a tool to get beer for her husband. The original ad was not marketed for women but the redesigned advertisement is. However, the advertisement is a case of too little too late, its attempt at showing that Budweiser is the best beer for everyone when it previously stated it's the best beer for husbands.

"It's a fact: Budweiser has delighted more husbands than any other brew ever known" This clearly states that this is not an advertisements for women but for their husbands. The half pint was

never changed to a full pint in the redesigned version. Although in the fig 1 and two both of the images of the beer are seen as bottle with half pint glasses, the second is an attempt at advertising solely to women. There could be an argument to be made at how the half pint is being marketed towards women, however in this case scenario the half pint remains from the original problematic points.

“That woman is real competition” is the slogan used by Budweiser in fig.4; seen below, as a way of advertising Budweiser beer, the insinuation is that “the other woman” is the beer. The image depicts one woman whispering into another woman’s ear while she combs her hair. This advertisement illustrates women in a very vapid way by trying to appeal to women by pitting them against each other. By stating that ‘another woman’ may have better table setting and superior hosting skills to the woman depicted, but if she buys this beer she will be a better host. Women’s value in suburban 1960’s America was highly based on their social value and ability to uphold their home.

The reason as to why women are now being marketed to in comparison to fifty plus years ago, is the increase number of women working and the fact that most women in western civilisation have financial independence, or at least have much more buying power than in previous years. “Without any doubt, one of the most remarkable changes observed in recent decades has been the large-scale entry of women in the paid labour market” (IZA, 2022). This is due to historical movements such as the women’s rights movement and the women’s suffrage movement in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.



*That woman  
is real competition*



As a hostess, I mean. She has more original ideas for table settings than you can shake a stick at. And the dishes she dreams up are out of this world—but there's one thing that never changes. The beer *has* to be Budweiser. She says that when you're proud of a meal, why not pay it the compliment it deserves—the beer that has graced more tables than any other ever known.

**Budweiser.**

KING OF BEERS

*Treat Yourself a Little Better*

ANHEUSER-BUSCH, INC. • ST. LOUIS • NEWARK • LOS ANGELES

Fig 4: 'That woman is real competition'(CNBC)

Budweiser, despite having taken disputably performative steps in recent years to change, have a long standing history of problematic ads when it comes to women. In 2015, the parent company of Budweiser; Anheuser-Busch who own the beer bud light released #upforwhatever campaign which stated they had “the perfect beer for removing no from your vocabulary for the night” This was extremely poorly received by the public, particularly with women. This advertising campaign was not well received. The public outrage did lead to the campaign being shut down, however, before it was the advert even got political attention. Congresswoman Nita Lowey commenting on the campaign “no means no. This ad perpetuates rape culture.” (Strom, S, 2015).

This sort of language although allegedly well intentioned, very much so missed the mark. As a female, this may be glaringly obvious to me, but it is worth pointing out the serious potential repercussions of this advert considering the inhibiting effect of alcohol. Mix the combination with hazing young teens, frats, impressionable men and women and well we can see where this quickly goes awry.

Considering the potentially severe repercussions the apology from Budweiser stating they ‘missed the mark’ leaves a lot to be desired and they fail to take any sort of true accountability in their action of releasing this campaign. This advert shows that this company is not supporting women by creating adverts that perpetuate rape culture as well as their sexist past advertisements illustrated at the start of this chapter. This ad campaign also stirred controversy earlier in the year by tweeting the following “On #StPatricksDay, you can pinch people who don’t wear green. You can also pinch people who aren’t #UpForWhatever.” (Strom, S, 2015).

I have stated before that advertising is a reflection of the society we live in, and I chose to believe that the society we live in today is one better than the one portrayed in Budweiser advertising campaigns. I am of the belief that society proves itself and this is reflected in reality by the public backlash this particular campaign received. The backlash is evidence in and of itself that Budweiser’s efforts to change are clearly lacking any true substance or reflection of our society and they should and could do so much better. The fact the campaign did receive the reaction it did does leave on to hope for the future of advertising and hope that companies like Budweiser step up to the mark.

 **Archive: Nita Lowey** X  
@NitaLowey · [Follow](#)

RT if you agree [@budlight](#) [#UpForWhatever](#) campaign should promote responsible - not reckless - drinking. [#NoMeansNo](#)



6:57 PM · Apr 28, 2015 i

 65  Reply  Copy link

[Read 24 replies](#)

 **The Representation Project** X  
@RepresentPledge · [Follow](#)

[.@budlight](#), no means no. This ad perpetuates rape culture and we're [#NotBuyingIt](#) [x.com/Ely4Estefania/...](#)

 **Estefania Elizondo** @Ely4Estefania  
If I'm drunk at a bar and say "No" it actually means "I'm up for whatever"....  
Really [@budlight?](#) [@RepresentPledge](#) [x.com/\\_cingraham/sta...](#)

8:35 PM · Apr 28, 2015 i

 75  Reply  Copy link

[Read 5 replies](#)

Fig 5 : Responses to Bud Light ad campaign 2015 from X, formerly Twitter



Fig 6: Response from Bud Light ad campaign 2015 from X, formerly Twitter

## **Chapter 2.1 Irish women and alcohol advertising**

In John Connoly's paper "Pints or Half Pints," Connoly summarises his paper by stating "This paper examines the relationship between the gender power balance, changes in the consumption of alcohol and changing social interdependences." (Connoly, 2021). Connoly states that he is specifically exploring the empirical setting In Ireland in the 1900's up to present day. This is extremely relevant to the thematics of my thesis as I will analyse the change in the tone of beer advertising from the mid 1900's to present day. I will do this more visually through examining how women are seen and represented in beer advertising. Advertising towards women is a relatively new phenomenon. Connoly states in his paper that it was a rebellious act for women to order pints in the 1970's.

He references a case study in which a prominent feminist and founding member of the Irish Women's Liberation Movement, Nell McCafferty, led 30 women in protest to a bar to order 30 Brandys and one pint of Guinness. The bar man refused to serve each women a pint. This is due to the fact that the social norms of the time were for women to not drinks from full pint glasses. That women who could drink came from "specific social cohorts"(Connoly, 2021).

Connolly uses the term Functional democratization which is referenced in Norbert Elias's book 'what is sociology'. Functional democratization is the idea that over time, power between different social groups such as men and women shift in terms of power imbalance. Groups that may have had more power and or influence in the past may lose that power while others may gain it. The point of this process is to create more equality between groups, in this case, men and women, and that people are always connected and depend on each other in different ways. That essentially power changes over time and is not fixed. Connolly uses this term to look at how the power imbalance between genders has developed over the course of the 1900's to present day and how that relates to women's drinking habits.

Women were often legally refused pints in the 1970's as there was no legislation in place to state that women had the right to such equality, and so in this time women were refused pints unless accompanied by a male chaperone. Although some bars denied women pints entirely, male chaperone present or not. Bars were permitted to deny women beer in this time period based solely on gender, however, this changed in the year 2000 when the Equal Status act was passed. It is not that there was a specific law in place to say women couldn't legally get served pints but more so that there was a social norm surrounding women and beer. This 'social norm' was legally abolished with the 'Equal Status Act of 2002'. This piece of legislation states "The Equal Status Acts 2000-2015, prohibit discrimination in the provision of goods and services". (*Irish Legal Guide*, 2021)

Fig.7 is a Smithwick's ad that depicts a man going to the pub for a pint. He arrives on time in a leather jacket waiting on the woman, presumably a friend or a date. The words that show up on screen are used as a double entendre to depict both the man and the woman in the advertisement. The words that show up on screen when the man is on screen are "cool breeze" "warm leather" for the woman "starting out" "finishing touch" "never early" "always late" "turning heads" "spinning tails" "warm hearted". These terms are later revealed as being a double entendre for the Smithwick's beer and the woman. The implications of the words used for the man paint him as cool calm and collected. The implications imposed on the woman are that she's unorganised, "always late" and physically attractive "turning heads". The camera pans up from the woman, showing all the men at the bar's heads turning around as she approaches the man waiting for her. Although these may seem inoffensive it shows the perpetuating of heteronormative gender roles, offensive social norms and being condescending towards the woman.



Fig 7: Smithwick's advertisements 1991

This advertisement depicts a man going to the pub for a pint. He arrives on time in a leather jacket waiting on the woman, presumably a friend or a date. The words that show up on screen are used as a double entendre to depict both the man and the woman in the advertisement. The words that show up on screen when the man is on screen are “cool breeze” “warm leather” for the woman “starting out” “finishing touch” “never early” “always late” “turning heads” “spinning tails” “warm hearted”. These terms are later revealed as being a double entendre for the Smithwick's beer and the woman. The implications of the words used for the man paint him as cool calm and collected. The implications imposed on the woman are that she's unorganised, “always late” and physically attractive “turning heads”. The camera pans up from the woman, showing all the men at the bar's heads turning around as she approaches the man waiting for her. Although these may seem inoffensive it shows the perpetuating of heteronormative gender roles, offensive social norms and being condescending towards the woman.

We can also delve further into the imagery present in this advertisement. As you look around the background of the bar, there is not one other female present. This further illustrates the point that a bar is for men to drink beer in, not a place for women. When the woman is given a drink, it is a half pint which makes sense to Ireland's social norms at the time, as Connolly states “the refusal to serve women pints was not exceptional at the time” (Connolly, 2021). I chose this advertisement as it is a

clear step away from the 1960's advertising in which women are only buying beer for their husbands. Although this advert show cases a modern world and a modern woman, there are still problematic.

### **Chapter 3.1 Commodification of women**



Fig 8: 'The official beer of being done wearing a bra', Coors Light 2019

This is an advertisement made in 2019 to promote Coors's less calorie dense version of their beer, Coors light. This ad is clearly advertised towards women by trying to relate to women. Coors do this by branding their light beer as 'the official beer of being done wearing a bra'. (Coors, 2019) This advertisement depicts a woman getting home, presumably after work, as she puts down her brief case and kicks off her high heels. The woman opens her fridge and picks out a can of Coors light out of her fridge that only has condiments, a singular apple and green foods prepped in lunchboxes. The attempt at relatability fell short for these reasons, the company of Coors does not stand for equality which I will explore further into this chapter.

These details may seem irrelevant however, they are all pertinent to how women are depicted in beer advertising. The subtlety of having this woman have nothing but healthy food in her fridge, and then her after work treat is a light beer. The fact that they've chosen to make this advertisement targeted towards women, an ad for a less calorie dense version of their beer is a performance of social gender roles imposed on women. This is an example of how Connolly speaks about functional democratization in relation to gender equality when looking at the beer industry (Connolly, 2021 pg.?). The imbalance shown here is the imbalance of expectations of women next to men. The fact that the woman in this

advertisement isn't being sexualised is an example of functional democratization , as it reflects a long term reduction in power balances between men and women.

The image shows a screenshot of a Twitter thread. At the top right is the 'X' logo. The first tweet is from Emma Right (@IslandLover13), dated August 2, 2019. Her profile picture shows a tropical island. She is replying to @JessicaLevkoff, @hopforwardbeers, and two other users. Her text reads: "I agree! I don't work in the beer industry, but it seems like women in beer commercials are usually there to be sexy for dudes, not just to enjoy a beer for themselves. I can totally relate to this moment of relaxation at the end of the day." Below this is a reply from Ani (@anidoll), whose profile picture shows a woman's face. Her text reads: "But it's it a 'light' better because we're women?? I never drink light beer and I love being a girlie girl. I like the commercial, just not the fact that it's a light beer." Below the reply is the timestamp "8:31 PM · Aug 2, 2019 from Stratford, CT" and an information icon. At the bottom of the tweet are icons for a heart (1 like), a speech bubble (Reply), and a link icon (Copy link to post). A rounded button at the bottom of the tweet says "Read 1 reply".

**Emma Right** · Aug 2, 2019  
@IslandLover13 · [Follow](#)  
Replying to @JessicaLevkoff @hopforwardbeers and 2 others  
I agree! I don't work in the beer industry, but it seems like women in beer commercials are usually there to be sexy for dudes, not just to enjoy a beer for themselves. I can totally relate to this moment of relaxation at the end of the day.

**Անի (Ani), M. Ed**  
@anidoll · [Follow](#)  
But it's it a "light" better because we're women?? I never drink light beer and I love being a girlie girl. I like the commercial, just not the fact that it's a light beer.

8:31 PM · Aug 2, 2019 from Stratford, CT

1 Reply Copy link to post

[Read 1 reply](#)

Fig 9 : Responses to Coors Light ad campaign 2019 from X, formerly Twitter



Fig 10: Responses to Coors Light ad campaign 2019 from X, formerly Twitter

The ad received a mixture of positive and negative reviews, some women found it relatable and were happy to see a woman not being sexualised in an ad. Some women however found offense in the fact that the beer advertised is a light beer. The intention behind this new kind of advertising for Coors was described as the following by the senior marketing manager of Coors. “When we developed this campaign, we made a conscious decision to focus on real moments – things our consumers were actually doing,” Coors Light senior marketing manager Chelsea Parker (Callahan, 2019). Although the advertisers have claimed to not have anything but positive intentions the truth is in the details. The premise of having a fridge filled with healthy foods is not something seen when advertising towards men. It is, whether it was conscious or not, an example of the ingrained diet culture towards women.

There are many famous examples of companies using feminism to further their sales. This is also very much not just in beer advertising as shown in “The famous Virginia Slims cigarette campaign attempted to cash in on the ‘women’s lib’ movement of the time, trying to attract female consumers who identified with the movement.” (Murray, 2020). This is seen time and time again within the advertising industry to try and capitalise on current topics and what is popular in the media and culturally.

Coors, as a company, have a long history of decade long boycotts by feminist groups who protested the fact that the company made conservative political donations to anti-woman's rights organisations. Coors released an internal memo stating, "We are ensuring our incentives are tied to business performance and do not include aspirational representation goals, beginning next year." This is their statement of dropping its Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI) initiative (Hansford, 2024) This feels like a very half-hearted, sweep it under the rug, statement. Whilst Coors may be trying to advertise to women, it is very clear that it is still not a demographic they respect, nor take all that seriously.



Fig 11: 'and twins' Coors Light 2002

This Coors Light advertisement from 2002 rewrites the lyrics to an old country song called “I love” by singer Tom T.Halls. This advertisement replaced the words “I love little baby ducks, Old pickup trucks, Slow moving trains, And rain, And I love you too.” Which were the original words of Tom T Halls’ song to “I love football on TV, Shots of Gena Lee, Hanging with my friends, And twins,”. (Clark, 2017). This is a very clear example of women being used as sexual commodities in beer advertising. The sole role of these women in this advertising campaign is moving around seductively. The copy for the Coors Light branding feels very dark next to the imagery of the women. The men in this advertisement are seen partying in regular clothing and the only women in the ad are seen either dancing seductively or kissing a man.

I bring up the contrast between these two advertisements, which I will be doing further into this chapter. This is to show that the beer industry has a lot of companies that preach feminism but don’t actually hold those values. Companies are commodifying women by using women’s empowerment and relatability for profit. This is unethical and seen far too often in the beer advertising industry. Molson Coors – which Coors is a subsidiary of since their merger in 2005. They pulled their Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) initiatives in 2024. “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) refers to the principles aimed at fostering diverse environments, ensuring equitable treatment, and creating an inclusive culture within organizations and groups. At its core, diversity encompasses the variety of identities and backgrounds present in a group, including characteristics such as gender, race, age, and more.”(Mohn, 2024). The company commented on why they chose to pull their DEI initiatives. The DEI initiatives effect members of the LGBTQ+ community, women, people of colour, people of poorer economic backgrounds. The pulling of DEI initiatives clearly shows that Coors is not a company that feels the need to support or adhere to initiatives that support women among other marginalised groups.

Coors have historically had a rocky past with marginalised groups so it is not shocking that they have problematic advertising. Through anonymous affidavits from Coors employees they claimed that they were being forced to participate in a lie detector test during their interview. These questions included questions such as “What are your sex preferences? How often do you change your underwear?” (TIME, 1977). This is just one example of the unprofessional sexist questions asked by this brewing company during the interviewing process. Feminist groups such as (EG) among others boycotted Coors after this news came out. “ In Los Angeles, feminists have joined the

boycott to protest the polygraph exams and Joseph Coors' backing of Phyllis Schlafly, the leader of the anti-Equal Rights Amendment forces." (TIME, 1977)

### Chapter 3.2 Pink advertising



Fig 12: "Beer for girls" Brew Dog ,2018

This advertisement was made by the independent company BrewDog who made an IPA called 'beer for girls' in association with international women's day. This advert was seen as controversial due to the usage of condescending language accompanied by the laziness of just throwing pink onto a beer. Following the controversy, they stated that they would send a percentage of proceeds to charity and were also sick of seeing this sort of "lazy" advertising. (BBC 2018). This suggested to consumers, that they support women and are also tired of seeing women's advertising being boiled down to shiny pink packaging and nearly childish language. To use their own words, "Pink IPA is clearly an over-the-top ridiculing of the types of sexist marketing we often see from brands trying to engage a female audience,"(BBC 2018) .

The controversy arose from a society on one side(men or women?), being tired of simplified gendered advertising, and on the other side people thinking it simply ' isn't that deep'. Women have progressively become more and more important and significant in the beer industry as women gained independence and increased spending power as I discussed in my previous chapter. A large portion of women statistically choose beer as their primary choice of alcohol, making women a considerable market.

To discuss this in terms of statistics, women do drink comparable amounts of alcohol to men and nearly 50% of women’s first choice of alcohol is beer. Beer being the most popular choice among “87% of men and 47% of women” (National Drugs Library).

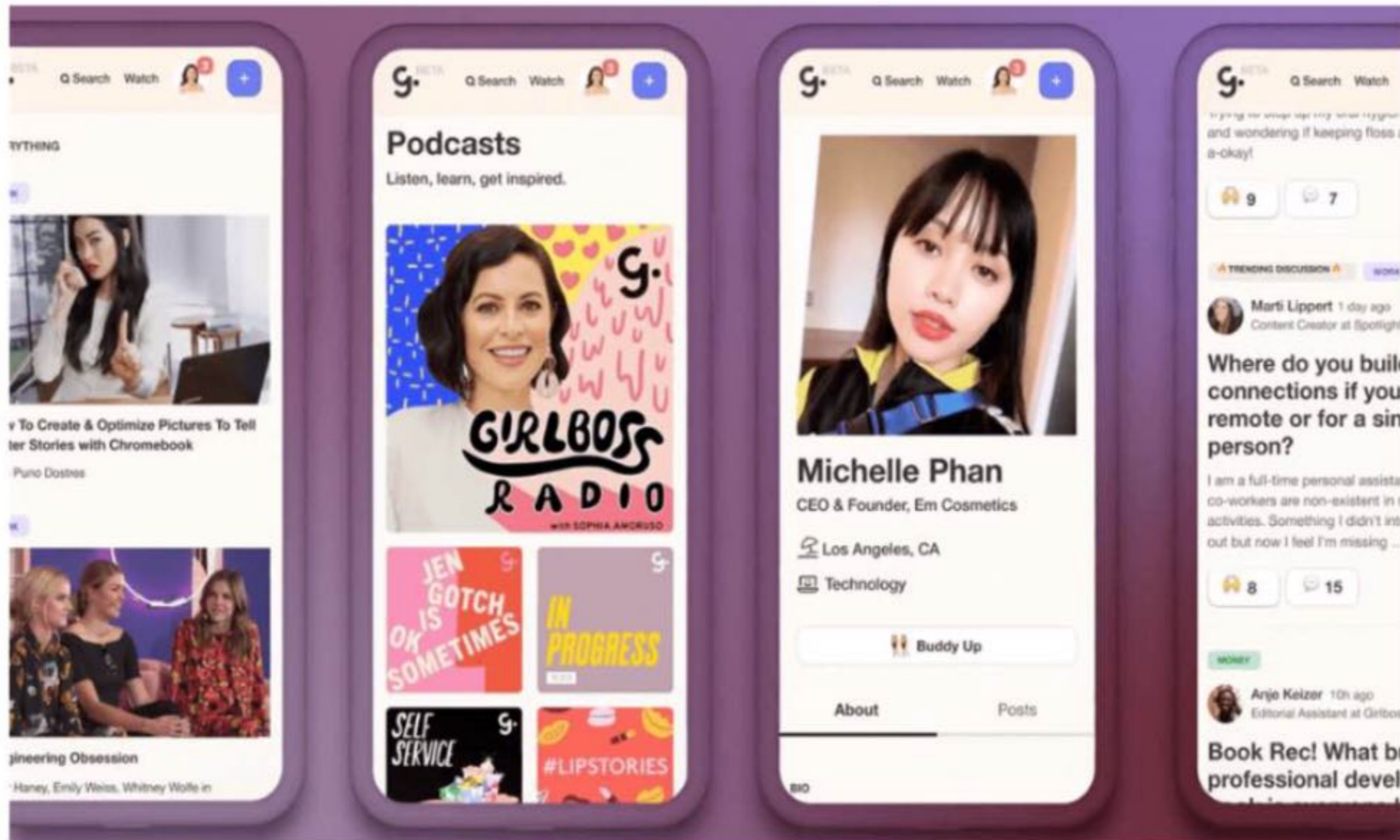


Fig 13: Girlboss app, Adweek, 2018

Another important element within this chapter, is the usage of social media terms to create a false sense of empowerment. ‘Girlboss feminism’ is a term coined on social media to encapsulate women in business in a purely surface level way. Writes about “feminism against feminism” in her first chapter of her article “Contemporary Feminism as Portrayed in Popular Media”. She references to this term to illustrate how feminist rhetoric has been weaponised to take advantage of the female consumer with the usage of social media buzzwords as a marketing technique.

Some popular examples of the unnecessary gendering of non-gendered words are terms such as ‘girlboss’ instead of boss and ‘She E O” instead of CEO. When companies take part in using this terminology they are essentially manipulating the consumer to buy their product while being purely performative towards gender equality. The way in which women are currently portrayed in advertising is increasingly with a sense of empowerment. However, is it really empowerment when its being commodified?



Fig 14: People per hour, BBC, 2020

This advert in Fig 14 is an example of the term ‘girlboss’ getting misused by companies, turning the what is meant to be, positive term into something condescending and demeaning. Although, this advert is not a beer advert and may seem out of the scope of my thesis, I use this example to show the terms in use. The advert here is for financial freelancers, targeted at women in a very condescending way by framing women as acting as if they are in charge but to leave the serious work up to the professionals. “You do the girlboss thing, we’ll do the SEO thing” this ad was taken down by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). “The ASA upheld 19 complaints it received about the advert and ruled that it reinforced “harmful gender stereotypes” (Jones, L. (2020).

There is a shift in advertising since the 90’s which is spoken about on BBC’s women’s hour on the feminisation of alcohol; “We’ve seen a move away from sexualising women to sell alcohol to men, towards alcohol brands trying to align their products with sophistication, women’s empowerment, and with female friendship,” (Murray, 2020). This article also touches on the hashtag #dontpinkmydrink, which was a social media campaign started in 2019 . The #dontpinkmydrink campaign highlights how women feel about the usage of pink advertising as an attempt by alcohol conglomerates to appeal. The campaign states “The aim is to call out the ways companies use patronising tropes to target women: cotton candy-coloured labels-” Social media is the largest tool for advertising and

the way in which women are being advertised towards is seen as demining with usage of such terms as “girl boss,” “Sh.E.O” and other twists on stereotypically male phraseology.

Companies look at how profitable the idea of women empowerment is only then do they push towards it. Gendered pink branding is seen more and more in advertising especially through social media. Especially for ‘girlifying’ branding, that is often depicted in advertising towards women. This is not to say that all branding that is pink is condescending or necessarily marketed towards women, however, pink branding paired with belittling phrasing such as “beer for girls” in BrewDog’s advertisement is a clear example of this phenomenon. In relation to ‘girlifying’ in advertising the social media campaign ‘Don’t pink my drink’ is a clear case study showcasing this point. ‘Don’t pink my drink’ is a social media movement addressing how “- equating women’s drinking with pink, with fun, with friendship, with empowerment” (Murray, 2020) .

I can comprehend both sides of the argument when it comes to BrewDog’s pink beer. How it could be seen in both positive and negative lights. One positive action that BrewDog did was that they made the beer 20% cheaper for people who identify as female and donated some of the proceeds to charity. The company said that it was meant to be showcasing the use of pink branding as problematic in a light hearted and somewhat ironic manner. The brewer says it’s a sarcastic way to address the gender pay gap and have a dig at “lazy” marketing campaigns. (BBC, 2018)

On the negative side, I can understand that they could have made their regular beer cheaper and donate proceeds. That there was not really a need for pink branding and ‘girl beer’ to be used, as it is a condescending slogan. BrewDog is extremely hypocritical by publishing this advertisement as in doing so, they are pushing gender stereotypes and condescending sexist language while stating that they are exhausted of seeing pink beers being advertised towards women. “Pink IPA is clearly an over-the-top ridiculing of the types of sexist marketing we often see from brands trying to engage a female audience” (BBC, 2018). They are essentially furthering this harmful narrative and serving as an astounding example of how the beer industry has not changed and that they do not understand the female consumer’s needs or want for respect.

“Companies capitalize on the western popularity of feminism for their personal anti- feminist narratives you have inflated egos and fostered a culture within craft beer that deifies founders”. I use

this quote to bring the attention to beer companies who capitalise on feminist ideologies and language while not practicing those principles or in many cases go against them. Beer companies such as the aforementioned independent beer company; BrewDog, have been accused of creating a toxic sexist work culture and breeding a “culture of fear” (McKeever, 2021).

In July of 2021 over 100 past and present employees signed a letter stating the unacceptable work culture within this company who have claimed to care for women. In the article by CNBC, workers anonymously wrote a letter that stated “by placing personalities at the centre of your messaging sexist and misogynistic brewers who claim to be standing up for free speech”. (McKeever, 2021). This is seen time and time again by many big corporations but particularly within the alcohol industry. The change in narrative towards women in advertising in the past few decades is very obvious. However, the same messaging in terms of who beer is primarily marketed towards remains the same. To add to injury, beer companies fail to become anyway inclusive or respectful to the gender that makes up a significant amount of their consumer base.

Commodification of feminism has become a marketable tool within advertising, however, there's a fine line between empowerment and exploitation. Alcohol companies often use thematics such as women's empowerment to further sales without actually having any call to action. Karl Marx speaks on economic fetishism which is relevant in terms of exploiting women's empowerment for profit. “Economic fetishism is an economic phenomenon that occurs in capitalist societies when values of products is derived not from what they can do for consumers but from what they mean to consumers” (Das Kapital, 1867). I feel that what Marx is pointing at here goes hand in hand with the commodification of women's empowerment. Economic fetishism refers not to what they can do for consumers, but what they believe consumers want, much like the commodification of women's empowerment as advertisers capitalising on the female empowerment movement seen on social media. This calls back to the example of BrewDog's ‘beer for girls’ which also raises an interesting point as to how that terminology is seen as condescending, because why would ‘normal’ beer not be for women?

Using the terminology of ‘girls’ while marketing solely to adult women is an example of how the beer industry condescends women within their advertising. The culture of ‘girlifying’ adverts is not solely tied to alcohol advertising. (Murray, 2020) however it is prevalent in many alcohol

advertising campaigns; primarily surrounding advertisement of beer. Ads saying ‘beer for boys’ is unheard of, whereas it is very commonly used for advertising towards women.

### **3.3 White claw: the gender-neutral solution**



Fig .14 Grab Life By The Claw ad campaign, White Claw, 2024

White Claw is a hard seltzer company, although unlike my other chapters this advertisement isn't a beer advertisement. I would like to examine this advertisement as an alcohol brand that has not leaned into performative gender norms in order to show that it is unnecessary and outdated to use these heteronormative gender roles. The advertisement shows a group of friends coming together to drink white claws. Every single one of the friends are dressed in current trendy clothing, all showing individual style and personalities. What none of the people in the advertisement was, was sexualised or used in any other way than just to show friendship being shared over drinking white claw. This advertisement is an example of gender neutral advertising that is rare to see in alcohol advertising. I would like to use the whiteclaw advertisement as a reference to show how beer advertisers could learn from this kind of advertising.

I also would like to highlight that statistically women don't go for ultra pinkwashed brands, I believe this is why White claw has become such a popular drink choice especially with younger generations such as Gen Z. (McBride, 2020). What this also shows is that Gen Z are paying more and

more attention to the moral compasses of the companies they chose to buy from and consume. We are becoming a more accepting, educating and accepting population and as such Whiteclaw has been rewarded by demonstrating that in their advertisements. Their copyrighting “grab life by the claw” which gives a motivational but friendly feel with a play on words to whiteclaw.



Fig 15: Screenshot of copyrighting on white claws website, 2025

White Claw’s copyrighting is fun and adventurous in tone of voice. Their branding shows that they are advertising towards a young vibrant crowd of adventurous ‘wavemakers’ and as this copyrighting above states “were here for the ones who make their own” (White Claw® Hard Seltzer 2025). Their whole brand identity is based around waves. Their logo is a large wave, their imagery used throughout their website and overall campaigns are that of all kinds of people. Further ensuring they are representing men as well as marginalised groups in an equal way and marketing people as people. There is no sign that whiteclaw is advertising at any certain gender, the only demographic they seem to be leaning into advertising towards as previously mentioned are young and adventurous people. (White Claw Hard Seltzer, 2025) Their mission statement is “We are whiteclaw, we are inspired by the power, purity and potential of ocean waves’ (White Claw Hard Seltzer, 2025)

Whiteclaw became very popular in the US, so much so that they had to announce a national shortage due to the increase of sales going up 250% in a year. “Sales of White Claw are up roughly 250% in 2019 compared to the previous year”(Huddleston, 2019). The senior vice president of the company is Sanjiv Gajiwala who stated that “The momentum continues to build,” (Huddleston, 2019). Looking at hard seltzers is also prevalent to the beer industry as more and more are joining on

the trend of hard seltzers “worried about hard seltzer eclipsing the popularity of beer.” (Huddleston, 2019)

White Claw has had an association amongst men for the fact that it gained popularity instantly with women due to the flavours being seen as typically feminine. The current editor of the *New Yorker* said in an interview “It has long been considered the very opposite of macho,” *Slate*’s Brendan Koerner wrote in 2008. “A drink that fragile co-eds swill while giving each other pedicures.” (McCarthy, 2019). The association that a lot of men had with hard seltzer was that it was “bitch drink” (McCarthy, 2019).

Whiteclaw had a partnership with social media comedian Trevor Wallace in an effort to try to gain more sales from men and overturn the stigma of drinking hard seltzers that are deemed feminine due to their fruity flavours such as mango, black cherry and pineapple (White Claw, 2025). Trevor Wallace created a viral video with the “ain’t no laws when you’re drinkin’ claws baby” (McCarthy, 2019) and comparing it to alcoholic beverage Four Loko which is more likely to be drunk by men due to its higher alcohol content. White Claw was also publicly supported by self-proclaimed “bro”. The social media term bro is described as “obnoxious partying males who are often seen at college parties” (Biron, 2019). Ben Shea who is a producer in the United States who commented on the hard seltzer by saying said. “But I also just feel comfortable saying I like White Claw and that it’s good.”(Biron, 2019)

This is all to say that the need for gendered advertising isn’t a necessity anymore, however, unfortunately there is still gendered bias on whiteclaw. This is mostly from straight men who may have some ingrained systems of toxic masculinity ingrained into how they believe they would be perceived had they drank a “girly” drink. White Claw has managed to resonate with a majority of individuals from all backgrounds and genders. Having an alcoholic beverage that is not advertised in a heavily gendered manner and in fact in a non-binary way is a very new phenomenon and rather large jump from the fact that women only started to be advertised towards in the 1970’s in Ireland (Connolly, 2021)

## Conclusion

I explored the cultural context in which advertisements lived in, in the mid 1900's and where they have progressed to now. Through exploring historical context in both the US and Irish society, I believe I illustrated as to why and how beer advertising in the mid 1900's is so jarring to the modern consumer. I explored the differences between how women in society were viewed in the 50's/60's compared to present day. Through many political movements and outcries, women have gained an almost equal footing in rights, which we have managed to gain quite rapidly. However, our new founded place in society is far from without its struggles and that tends be highlighted in certain aspects. The beer industry, with the historic context and it still remaining a majority male industry, tends to be a shining light example where society still has a lot of progressing to do.

I have illustrated how beer advertisers are trying to capitalise on women's empowerment without genuinely supporting women themselves. These adverts try and reflect what they think women want to see. The likes of the BrewDog advert where they published an advertisement about beer for girls in pink packaging to allegedly poke fun at old fashioned, misogynistic advertising while in fact doing that themselves. This is a sign that the beer industry does not understand how women should be represented in advertising. I explored how advertisers have made attempts at adjusting their messaging while not actually changing their company values and the impact that has on the adverts they send out.

I then looked at White Claw as a counter argument to illustrate that gendered advertising that is not inclusive, no longer has a place in the beer industry. The success that White Claw has had with consumers perfectly illustrates that point. They show hope and also hopefully an insight as to what the beer industry's advertising will reflect

in coming years. I will finish off my thesis by saying that I believe I have proven that there is a bias towards women in the beer industry that has been prevalent throughout history in the US and Ireland. I also have shown how companies used women's image in the 50/60's to demean and belittle women has now transitioned to using themes of feminism and empowerment as a trend. However, more often than not in an insincere thoughtless way, that in turn, sends the same message as the adverts of the 50's/60's and that the language has changed, but the underlying view of women has not.

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