

## Gendered Citizen Constructs in Beer Commercials as a Metatext of Alcohol Control Policies

Matilda Hellman, Anu Katainen & Janne Seppänen

### **Abstract**

This study examines gender constructs in advertising in European beer commercials ( $N = 59$ ). It employs a lens of “citizenship” for discerning techniques by which male and female realms are portrayed as nonrelated, competing, and of unequal worth. This lens provides an explanation for why the connotations are problematic from a public health perspective. The citizenship-related tensions that the commercials entailed concerned taking the lead versus being governed, being free versus being controlled, being seen as a threat versus being welcomed as a friend, and being worthy of solidarity versus being excluded from group bonding. The article argues that these tensions not only involve the ethical issue of encouraging the consumption of potentially harmful substances (alcohol) and reproducing repellent gender stereotypes. The controlling, moralizing, and dull female characters are construed as infringing on the knowledgeable, skillful, and free alcohol-consuming male citizens. Gender thus unfolds as a crucial dimension in the mediation of commercial views on the relationship between the consumer and the state in alcohol policy.

### **Introduction**

Alcohol advertising is considered ethically dubious due to its tendency to encourage and normalize potentially unhealthy, risky, and harmful alcohol consumption. This advertising genre is also known to involve highly stereotypical content—especially so, when it comes to gender roles. Several analyses have pointed out that a hegemonic masculinity mythology constitutes the very ethos of beer commercials (cf. Postman et al., 1987; Strate, 1991, 1992; Wenner, 2009; Wenner & Jackson, 2009). Women are often represented as bodies and body parts, whereas men are portrayed as persons with faces and with high levels of agency and skill (Hall & Crum, 1994). The female characters’ function is to bolster White male ego and to reassure their sovereign position.

Thus far, research on alcohol advertisements has tended to treat the encouragement, glorification, and normalization of alcohol consumption and the reproduction of discriminatory gender stereotypes as two separate issues. The first issue pertains to a general encouragement of drinking, which can counteract health and well-being objectives for individuals and societies, and the second has typically been condemned as a symptom of systematic discrimination against women through objectification and sexualization. The present study is an attempt to examine the questions as two sides of the same coin, both of them part of an advertising language that upholds certain tensions between citizens and state interests pertaining to alcohol policy control measures.

The objectives of the present study are both empirical and theoretical. The article presents an analysis of 59 beer commercials collected from nine European countries, aired in 2013. Previous literature on gender roles in alcohol advertising stems chiefly from the 1980s and 1990s, and there is a need for an updated inventory of the messages circulating in the media milieus of the 2010s. Beer advertising is especially intriguing, as beer is globally the most widely and commonly consumed alcoholic beverage. The scale and visibility of beer advertising is massive, having potentially a major impact on cultural representations of both alcohol and gender.

Our aim is to explore the ways the promotional culture of alcohol advertising rests on perceptions of citizens as objects of alcohol regulation policies. While perhaps more subtly embedded in promotional language than gender and alcohol use, this dimension emerges as basic meaning-making, which is at odds with the epistemic project of public health policy. Our claim is that the citizenship perspective is valuable, as it cuts right to the core contradiction between alcohol regulation and individual freedom to consume (Hellman & Katainen, 2015; Nichols, 2006; Sulkunen, 2009). As such, it is worth developing this further in future research on alcohol promotion culture.

Our analytical strategy has been developed by drawing on concepts from Wexler's (1991) theory of a dichotomous citizen class model and Cronin's (2005) work on gender in citizen-consumer ideas in advertisements. The study can be seen as an intervention in the current scholarly discussion on the ways in which "big stereotypes" (gender, race, and age) efficiently serve conflicts between consumers' and citizens' expectations and rights (see Augustinos & Walker, 1998).

## **Studying Citizen Constructs in Advertising**

Studies concerning the political aspects of aesthetics and cultural images have often focused on identity, distinction, and pleasure. In the 1990s and early 2000s, a growing number of scholars, such as Wexler (1991), Robins (1994), and Cronin (2005), started to suggest that more focus should be put on the “consumer–citizen” concept, which combines the aesthetic and political in subject positions with certain societal expectations. Even as the citizen–consumer entanglement has continued to intrigue social scientists and cultural researchers, surprisingly little has been written about how contrasts between representations of citizenship in advertisements and those in public policies can be theorized.

Consumer and citizen constructs have been shown to be contradictory, especially in commercial images that interfere with conventions of citizenship in inciting certain actions in populations (Foster & Ozkan, 2005; Johnston, 2008). As Spence and Heekeren explain (2005, p. 28):

“Advertising addresses people primarily as consumers, whereas people are primarily regarded, at least according to philosophical and political principles of democracy, as citizens.” The authors go on to ask whether the concepts of citizen and consumer are compatible or incompatible in advertising, considering that the subject preferred by markets is the consumer, one deeply different from the citizen (also cf. Kress, 2010, p. 20).

What kind of citizenship construct, then, is at stake in the imaginary constructed in alcohol commercials? One can see that it involves an articulation of freedom by the autonomous consumer–citizen. The discursive strategies used in alcohol commercials embed the idea of a consumer free to become informed about alcohol products and enjoy drinking them. When the citizenship idea emerged in the 18th century, a core aspect of the concept was the equal freedom of people connected through a civil contract. A Marshallian account of citizenship would later integrate conditions for the sovereign individual in view of the collective contract. Loyalty to a larger public good required a bond and a direct sense of community membership and civilization, framed as a common possession (Marshall, 1965). When it comes to the citizen governed in alcohol control policies, the freedom of the consumer can be seen as impaired by an obligation as a citizen to subordinate the self to prevent adverse outcomes caused by the population’s alcohol consumption (McCreanor, Casswell, & Hill, 2000). In view of the above, one could claim that the task of the alcohol commercial becomes one of promoting a form of citizenship that prioritizes the free, consuming citizen over one who is loyal to collective preventive measures.

How, then, can citizen constructs be discerned from the meaning-making of alcohol commercials? We suggest three overlapping ways of accomplishing this. First, citizenship can be discerned by looking for meaning-making pertaining to *action*. This relates to a very basic idea of citizenship. In order to be free to own, to speak, to govern, and to be governed, the individual needs to be reliable and possess the capacity for rational action (Rose, 1999). Taylor (1994) has related the historical emergence of this form of Western selfhood to concepts of potential, recognition, authenticity, and self-actualization. Such citizenship ideas permeate cultural artifacts including commercial messages. They are among the strategies that hail us into entangled gender and consumer identities that articulate what it is to be a consumer and a citizen (cf. Miller, 2007; Wenner, 2013). It is through cultural images of rational and reliable action that we understand what it is to be citizens within a collective contract.

Second, citizenship can be identified as operating through *a dichotomous class setup*. This approach draws on Wexler (1991) who argues that through a range of techniques, advertising upholds and rearticulates a dichotomy between antagonistic social classes in making up the construct of the citizen. Wexler refers to the (new) middle class as the typical “first class.” The “second class” he describes as that of the “other” class, comprising “youth, poor and unemployed people, minorities, domestically laboring women and the aged” (Wexler, 1991, p. 171). In this setup, the first class bolsters its ego as superior through identity work and action, and so normalizes its unique position, and affirms its value. The other class works as a supportive contrast for the first class. Wexler (1991) argues that in order to become a meaningful term, citizenship has to be recreated within the psychological and cultural reality of such dichotomous constructs; the distinction mechanisms must be spelled out and exposed. Returning to the idea that alcohol commercials embed alcohol political control policy setups, one can assume that consumers need to identify with the first class in ways that will protect their position as sovereign in relation to control measures.

The third way of discerning citizenship is through the materialization of *the individual*. With rational action citizenship in mind, Cronin (2005) suggests a way of debunking the citizen–consumer entanglement in advertising. The starting point in Cronin’s approach is quite similar to Wexler’s (1991) approach. Cronin argues that language works through the construct of the individual as a sociopolitical taxonomy, and the dimension of performativity. The individual comes into existence through the confirmation of others. It is only in the process of exchange that each participating self is constituted as an individual; it is at this moment that the rights of the individual produce the individual.<sup>1</sup> For an individual to recognize another as an individual, rationality and the

possession of property are required, or in other words, self-possessiveness. This mechanism has historically tended to exclude women and subordinated others and thus uphold an exclusive citizenship hegemony (Cronin, 2005). Following the three entangled dimensions of citizen constructs described above (*action, dichotomous class division, the individual*), we approached the beer commercials looking for the citizen as the imagined subject of alcohol policies.

### **Alcohol Promotion**

Along with a range of other consumer products such as gambling, soft drinks, or cigarettes, alcohol is increasingly understood to create specific dilemmas for societies. Consumerism entails a right to consume freely, but excessive consumption of potentially harmful commodities leads to societal costs. These products are framed in terms of the need for the state to decide the extent of regulation required in relation to societal burden, on the one hand, and freedom of enjoyment of the individual consumer, on the other (Coggon, 2012).

All European countries restrict alcohol availability and marketing to some extent in the name of public health (Anderson & Baumberg, 2006). Alcohol advertising is regulated to various extents, from the strict French Loi Evin approach to more moderate approaches such as those in the Netherlands where statutory restrictions apply only to TV and radio advertising. Still alcohol advertising and brand logos are a natural part of media environments and urban settings all over Europe today. The messages mediated in alcohol advertising associate alcohol with companionship, sexuality, and success, utilizing techniques that are shown to appeal to minors, such as humor and animated characters (European Commission, 2016; Waiters, Treno, & Grube, 2001). As in the marketing of other products, gender has been shown to be an important feature. Men are especially targeted by beer commercials through sport sponsorship and images of male dominance (Towns, Parker, & Chase, 2012; Wenner, 2009). In these commercial narratives, women are portrayed either as “babes” or “bitches,” the former being the object of sexual desire and something to strive for, the latter representing limitation on enjoyment and the demands of ordinary life (Wenner, 2013). In wine and sparkling wine commercials, women are targeted with images of enjoyment, small time-outs, romantic moments, and sophistication (Törrönen & Juslin, 2013).

It is no coincidence that alcohol marketing grammar is gendered; it follows general consumption patterns neatly. Men’s beer consumption as a proportion of total beer consumption is over 60% in all European countries, sometimes more (World Health Organization-Europe, 2013). In Austria, the Czech Republic and Finland men reported twice as much heavy episodic drinking as women. In

Italy, less than 1% of women reported heavy episodic drinking during the past 30 days. In the Netherlands and Romania, men reported almost 10 times as much heavy episodic drinking as women, and in Germany, it was almost 4 times as much. In the UK, the division between the sexes is more equal (20.9% of women and 35.5% of men reported heavy episodic drinking during the previous 30 days; World Health Organization, 2016). While self-reporting of drinking habits is likely to be gendered as well, the prevalence of heavy episodic drinking, which is closely associated with beer consumption throughout Europe, seems to be much higher among men than among women (World Health Organization, 2016). In addition to consumption patterns, risks associated with alcohol use vary according to gender (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2004). A recent study suggests that such effects are partly a result of narrow male role repertoires (Seedat et al., 2009). Poor interpersonal relationships, including those with women, are associated with low well-being scores and mental health issues among men (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988; Wissing, Wissing, Du Toit, & Temane, 2006).

Consumption patterns and related harms involve several aspects of inequality as, for example, socioeconomically disadvantaged groups are more likely to suffer greater harm (Holmes et al., 2014; Mäkelä & Paljärvi, 2008). In this respect, the ways in which men's health and social status can be seen as counteracted in the messages presented in alcohol commercials is an underresearched area. The narrow and segregating gender role repertoire in alcohol commercials has thus far been seen (rightly) as offensive to and discriminatory against women (Jones & Reid, 2010). Yet they also limit men. From this point of view, the citizen and consumer interests of all genders are at stake in the skewed imagery of alcohol advertising.

## **Method**

In order to examine the ways in which gender relates to citizen constructs in alcohol advertising, we analyzed a sample of televised beer advertisements that were aired in Europe in 2013. The sample originates from a study by the European Commission on whether the content of alcohol advertising was in line with the provisions of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive. This directive regulates alcohol advertising in the European Union (EU). A sample of 90 advertisements from nine European countries was selected, based on the proportions of advertisements of different beverage types within each country, and the proportion of ad inserts per brand of each beverage type (European Commission, 2016). The sample in the EU study thus represents the most frequently advertised beverage types and brands. Of the sample of 90 advertisements, 59 were for beer (=N) from the following countries: Austria (8), the Czech Republic (6), Finland (6), Germany (6), Italy

(4), the Netherlands (8), Romania (8), Spain (7), and the United Kingdom (5). These beer advertisements constitute the material used in this study.

The material was approached in keeping with the theory outlined above: How are individuals materialized through their action in the ads, and can this be seen as constituting the bifurcation identified in Wexler's approach. In order to map how the individuals materialized in the ads, we started out with a basic count of the most obvious categories for this analysis, namely, male and female figures, noting the apparent gender of the voice-overs and the activities in which male and female protagonists were involved. This part of the study confirms a continuation of the well-known male domination of this commercial genre. We proceeded by identifying the core techniques employed when distinctions were made between male and female realms. In the next section, we analyze the gendered grammar of the commercials, paying attention to the techniques employed for a meaning-based separation of male and female gender realms. Our analysis identifies four overlapping ways of construing men as citizens: man as an active agent, man as universally competent, the social bond between men, and the female as foreigner and threat.

## **Results**

### *The Active Man*

In 31 of the 59 beer advertisements, there was a protagonist who was clearly at the center of the narrative. In all these cases, the protagonist was male. In 55 of the commercials, a voice-over addressed the audiences directly, typically at the end of the clip. In 54 of the cases, it was a male voice. In the advertisements with no clear protagonist, beer was sometimes associated with mixed-gender groups and events, and women were portrayed as members of such groups enjoying beer on seemingly equal conditions and under similar circumstances as men.

In order to discern the action-based citizen constructs, the roles of the characters in the advertisements were first categorized in terms of action types. In a Golden Brau advertisement (Romania), men were actively doing all sorts of things in a festival surrounding: playing, competing, and barbecuing meat, for instance. A Dutch Amstel advertisement depicts events that take place at a camp site where a Dutch celebrity parks his oversized camper van. The men in the advertisement socialize, play mini golf, and buy beer. In a Dutch Wieckse advertisement, men serve as experts, producers, and providers of beer. An advertisement for Ursus beer lemonade from Romania starts by portraying an archer walking on a glacier. He raises his bow and shoots the arrow

first through a lemon and then through an Ursus bottle. In the next scene, the same man is standing at a beach bar lifting Ursus bottles from a bed of ice and handing them over to a man who is joined by friends of both sexes. They all lift their drinks and enjoy the Ursus together. The male protagonist is a competent shooter and a sociable person who is popular among men and women alike (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Ursus advertisement: protagonist is competent in skillfully shooting an arrow and then confirmed through serving and socializing with others.

In most of the beer advertisements, male characters occupy active roles representing a rational and goal-oriented being in the world but were also able to relax and take part in funny and adventurous activities with other men. As such, they embodied a wide spectrum of competence and articulated a general view of agency as a trait of masculinity (Cornwall & Lindisfarnie, 2016). Men's action typically brought events forward. Beer as a commodity was associated with male realms and interests. The action of female characters tended to scaffold the activities of the male characters, boosting the status of the male characters as knowledgeable, sovereign, and social. Often, their role was to flirt with men and to be cheerful when the men arrived on the scene. In the portrayals of mixed groups, a male viewpoint was emphasized by the camera focusing on male faces and by depicting more closely their expressions. The women characters supported the men characters, cheered them if they were playing or competing against each other. They did not stand out in the crowd but instead melted in as faceless representatives of their gender.

Translated into constructs of the citizen individual, one could say that the action-oriented and competence-centered materialization of male characters signified importance and trustworthiness. Women were subordinated as individuals (present) but also as nonindividuals (excluded from individual identity and from the action that encapsulates the status of an individual; Cronin, 2005; Diprose, 1994). The man materializes as a competent figure who needs his beer and has the right to enjoy it. The female character serves as Wexler's second-class construct, scaffolding the freedom of this citizen character.



### *The Universally Competent Man*

Not only did men occupy more active roles than women in the beer advertisements, many of the commercials also included a chain of masculine agency expressions that cut across a wide repertoire of skills and competences. These images emphasized the universal competence and sovereignty of the male protagonist. In these chains of competence expressions, the male protagonists were shown in various risky, adventurous, or skill-based settings, being able to master all kinds of situations across temporal and spatial settings. In a Heineken advertisement from Spain, a man is trying to make it to the Champions League final, which is taking place on the other side of the globe. In order to reach his destination, he dives into the sea, slides on slippery rocks in a jungle, takes a motorcycle ride on a dark and bumpy road, and so on, finally ending up in a helicopter, which takes the still fresh and energetic protagonist to the stadium. Here, a beautiful, smart looking woman is already waiting for him in the crowd at the football arena. The male character combines the qualities of an adventurer and a wealthy businessman in James Bond-esque style (cf. Eco, 1966). Another Dutch Heineken advertisement, with the slogan “legendary travellers wanted,” takes place in an Indian setting and utilizes a similar character of a highly capable man who moves through many exotic settings (Figure 2). The protagonist is trying to catch a goat carrying bottles of Heineken beer, and while chasing it, he masterfully weaves through a parade of waiters, flirts with a beautiful woman who is serving fruit, hits a bull’s-eye in a competition, wins an elephant that lifts him up on a wall, plunges from the wall, flirts yet again with a beautiful woman, and finally catches the goat in the middle of a celebrating crowd.



Figure 2. Heineken™ beer commercial “legendary travellers wanted”: protagonist is skilfully catching a tray; shooting a golf ball in the middle of target and lifted up on a wall in order to catch a goat that carries Heineken bottles.

In these two advertisements, the conditions shift quickly, but the protagonist masters all setbacks, while simultaneously seducing women. A similarly competent male protagonist appears in a

Carling advertisement from the UK, this time in a more everyday context. The protagonist is about to take a sip from a Carling pint when he sees that a cricket ball is approaching a group of unsuspecting nuns. The man runs through the park, jumps on sunbeds, and through an ice-cream van. He manages to catch the ball just in time and the cricket team cheers on him, but as he is throwing the ball back, he accidentally hits the window in the nuns' van.

In the examples above, the male protagonists embody a repertoire of heroic competencies signifying an ability to adapt quickly to any demanding circumstance they may encounter. This embodied property is closely related to a historical position that legitimizes citizens' political rights: ability to use mind and body to alter circumstances and act in beneficial ways (Pateman, 1988). Here, the individual competence repertoire not only construes an outstandingly independent individual but also makes him attractive, admirable, and reliable in the eyes of others. Drawing on Pateman's (1988) concept of the social contract as a political story, Cronin (2005, p. 13) explains that in the construct of the competent individual, it is important that "he" is seen to have the capacity to stand outside himself, to separate himself from his body, and to have a proprietary relation with himself as bodily property. In the beer commercials' narratives about the universally competent male, the protagonist is able to use his bodily and mental capacities in a range of milieus and tasks, thereby creating associations between the male sex, universal competence, and the beer brand being advertised.

If, in the first citizen construct of the active man, the protagonist was scaffolded through a distinction between him and the female characters as anonymous sidekicks, in this second category of citizenship the division that materializes the individual is made between the competent hero and everybody else. His path is the main one, and all other people and events—exotic, special, full of difficult and exciting circumstances—are secondary to this path.

In the Heineken advertisements analyzed, women serve as Wexler's other class, as objects to be pursued or as trophies for heroic achievements. The clearest example of the objectified woman role is in a third Heineken advertisement in the Dutch sample, in which a male protagonist ends up in the same situation time and time again in different locations around the world. In every location, he first spots a woman on the dance floor and approaches her but then notices angry-looking rivals who are also looking at the woman, backs off, and orders a bottle of Heineken. In the final location, the same thing happens but now the protagonist sidesteps all the women on the dance floor, goes straight to the counter, and while ordering a beer, he simultaneously seduces a beautiful woman.

Here, women are positioned as neither individuals nor nonindividuals, neither citizens nor noncitizens (Pateman, 1988); they are present but only as property and pieces of the scenery.

### *The Social Bond between Men*

The third way citizenship is materialized through individuals in the beer advertising excludes women altogether. Here, beer is exclusively associated with all-male realms and all-male social interaction and bonding. In an Estrella Galicia advertisement from Spain, a group of male friends taste “scandalously good” beer and start dancing together using amusing choreography (see Figure 3, left panel). In a Romanian Bucegi advertisement (see Figure 3, right panel), a group of friends are having a picnic outside at a table with large bottles of beer, and they are trying to find competition tokens under the beer bottle caps. In a Bergenbier advertisement (Romania), a man located somewhere high up on the top of a snowy mountain surviving under harsh conditions, receives a beer delivery by helicopter from his mates. A Gambrinus advertisement from the Czech Republic depicts a photo shoot at a brewery in 1869. The brewery manager—an older gentleman in a suit—is given a pint of beer for tasting. He smiles as a sign of approval, making the brewery workers cheer. A photo is taken, and it hangs on the wall of a modern pub, in which a bartender is shown drawing a pint of beer for a customer. The pint is given to the brewery manager in the old photo, and, again, he approves of it. Men are thus united in expertise and skill, and in brewery traditions that span generations. In an Edelweiss advertisement from Austria, two men raise a toast with Edelweiss pints while sitting on the porch of a mountain cabin.



Figure 3. The Estrella Galicia commercial, where men engage in a synchronized dance (left); in the Bucegi commercial, men are socializing while drinking beer in nature (right).

A typical feature in these all-male commercials was a portrayal of a group of male friends spending time in an outdoor setting, escaping from the ordinary run of life. Beer signified shared interests, male solidarity, and the enjoyment of belonging to a circle of friends that engage in masculine

activities. From a citizen perspective, these depictions translate into “dialogical egalitarianism” extending to people with the same interests and characteristics (liking beer and being male). Women do not belong in the sphere of enjoying beer and male companionship.

The men in the all-male beer advertisements engage in a contract within which they recognize each other as individuals incarnating a mutual relationship of the self. This becomes the main class that represents the free, alcohol-consuming citizen. The interference of (female) regulation must be left outside. Thus, while the second-class female characters in the first two citizen constructs upheld the first class (Wexler, 1991) by acting as sidekicks of the competent and smart male protagonist and as objects along his path, in this third group, women were excluded altogether from the genuineness and solidarity of the social contract.

### *The Female as Foreigner and Threat*

In the fourth citizen construct, the separation of sexes is taken a step further by portraying women as a threat to the male protagonists, their internal bond, and their freedom to enjoy beer. A Carlsberg advertisement portrays a couple entering a spa on the woman’s initiative. The man is depicted as uncomfortable with the visit and with the spa as a milieu. Female spa personnel are depicted as pale, cold, and unsmiling, and the treatments are paralleled with torture. The male protagonist notices that a Carlsberg brewery is located next to the spa and he allies with other men in the same situation to escape, using tricks familiar from prison-break movies. The men manage to dig a tunnel into the brewery, and in the final scene, the main protagonist takes a sip from a Carlsberg bottle.

In a Karjala advertisement, a couple is portrayed as enjoying dinner at a fancy but rather sterile-looking restaurant. A waiter hands the man a telephone, and the man answers signaling that it is something urgent, after which he leaves the restaurant leaving the woman behind. It turns out that the caller is a friend who has invited the protagonist to watch an ice hockey game with other male friends. The next scene shows them drinking Karjala beer on a sofa while cheering on their team in front of the TV screen. As in the scene in the Carlsberg advertisement, the female realm and its expectations about couples’ time together are portrayed as boring and monotonous. It is a realm in which men do not fit and from where they seek to escape. Men need to come up with strategies to outsmart their opponents and to meet up with their “real” peers.

A Sol beer advertisement depicts a man and a woman arriving at the man's house. While the male protagonist is getting two Sol bottles out of the fridge, the woman starts fantasizing about redecorating the place, imagining the bohemian brick wall loft turning into a sophisticated, middle-class living room. When the man realizes what is happening (meaning she is planning to change him), he pulls out the bottles and by doing so revives the male order. In this advertisement, the woman represents conventionality and constraints, but unlike the situation in the two previous advertisements the protagonist does not escape, but shows the woman her subordinate place.

In this fourth strategy, all the typical aspects of beer commercial masculinity—agency, competence, and social bonds between men—are shown to be threatened by women who are consequently excluded from male realms. The portrayal of clashing interests of women and men recognizes “the other” (women) as human beings and actors with interests, but as a common enemy of men, which is humorously depicted in a range of situations. In the narratives employing the strategy of depicting male and female interests as separate, the male protagonists are able to take over and suppress the female threat, the “bitch” (see Wenner, 2013), by their inventiveness and cooperation with other men or just by mere masculine dominance as in the Sol advertisement.

The advertisements portray a world in which male and female interests are not only highly different but also likely to collide: men pursue freedom, enjoyment, and friendship; women represent constraint, relationship pressure, and traditional values. Taking this representation even further, in the Karjala advertisement, the woman is abandoned at the restaurant and replaced by beer and friends. In the Carlsberg advertisement, the man is able to restore his autonomy by his cleverness but without breaking up the relationship. The Karjala advertisement seems to suggest a detachment from the other sex. The same point is utilized in an Egger advertisement in which the male protagonist is dreaming of a spouse—a beautiful, lightly dressed woman—who would hasten to greet him when he arrives from work (Figure 4). The dream fades away, and the man ends up on his sofa sipping beer, depicted as happy just the way he is: alone and drinking beer.



Figure 4. Egger beer advertisement “taste”: the protagonist dreams of a woman who would wait for him at home but eventually settles for the preferable, less complicated scenario: life alone with his dog and a beer.

In Table 1, we have gathered the four citizen constructs discussed above and their adherent gendered rationales. The protagonist materializes as a free, alcohol-consuming citizen in a context that excludes the woman as an equal figure standing beside him. Instead, as in the fourth construct, the female figure represents policies that want to exclude fun and friendly elements, including the enjoyment of alcoholic beverages. The role of the female protagonist thus comes to parallel alcohol control public policies that restrict the freedom of the citizen.

Table 1. Separation of Gender Realms Through Citizen Constructs.

**Table 1.** Separation of Gender Realms Through Citizen Constructs.

Separation Strategy	Citizen Rationality
The active man	The man is the active agent who leads situations; women’s role is to support and stay in the background. The man materializes as a capable individual through the action that stratifies the two classes in “the active protagonists” (men, citizens) and “the passive objects” (women, not included in the sphere of competence)
The universally competent man	Men can master all kinds of situations employing their manifold universal competence. Women serve as rewards, which a man gains access to by his mastery. The man materializes as a reliable individual whose path in life is sovereign. Other inhabitants of the stories are extras.
The social bond between men	Solidarity between men is achieved through joint interests. Enjoyment of belonging is achieved through male friendship and exclusively male activities. The man materializes as an individual through interaction with other individual men. Women are not part of this social-bonding scenario.
The female as foreigner and threat	The female realm and women are a threat to men’s agency, competence, and the social bonds between men. The man materializes as an individual through a preferred scenario which excludes women. The woman is a force that tries to control the man.

## Discussion and Conclusions

Advertising restrictions are often seen as restricting the opportunity for businesses to grow and develop (Elliot, 2008). Furthermore, marketing regulations are often framed as conflicting with the aims of freedom of speech; the premise of a free and open society is that consumers are encouraged to form their own opinions and conceptions on the world, including those concerning commercial goods. The aim of this study has been to relate the meaning of gender in alcohol advertising to these issues, particularly in view of the responsibility of societies to protect citizens from unhealthy products. In our analysis, the concept of the citizen has served as a logical bridge between the functions of gender clichés in advertising and the overall societal aims of alcohol politics.

We argue that, when analyzed closely, beer advertisements emerge as acting against citizens' legitimate expectation of protection against potentially unhealthy and harmful product messages and freedom from discriminatory gender stereotypes. They also present, and trade in, impoverished prospects for meaningful social interactions and other important human functioning in view of citizen rights.

In making our argument, we have presented four strategies used in the advertisements. In all, gender realms are presented as separate, conflicting, or opposing. The implications of the study can be drawn not only from a gender equality or consumer protection perspective but also from a citizenship perspective. These implications can be summarized with two overlapping conclusions. First, one can say that constructs of male protagonists as individuals and citizens depend on constructs of women and female realms as secondary. This stratification implies more worth, mutual respect, and equality among men than between people of different sexes. Women are operationalized as a second class to bolster male status, as they are familiar enough and equal enough to serve as a humorously constructed enemy. Both the underpinning of gender constructs (male sovereignty) and the absurdity of the competition between the genders (men vs. women) are in line with contemporary sexist clichés, as they are depicted through funny and humorous situations (e.g., men escaping women). A part of this humorous absurdity is the rejection of women who pose a threat as soon as they cross the line and threaten to materialize as individuals (e.g., as having plans, actions, ambitions, hopes, and emotions).

Here, the male protagonist symbolizes the citizen and the female character materializes as necessary for upholding this citizenship construct. She is the necessary second class: the object that underpins the importance of the man's life path. She is the invisible and nonexistent element needed for real and true sociality within the male realm. Furthermore, she incorporates the threat to male freedom in the same manner as public control of citizens' drinking.

One could assume that the elevated sovereignty of the male citizen in these beer commercials naturally translates into a beneficial superior real-life social position. However, when viewed in the light of prevalence of heavy episodic drinking among men with social and mental health problems (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2004), as well as studies about the association between men's health and isolation (Yang, McClintock, Kotzloski, & Li, 2013) and how mental health problems among men are associated with a lack of meaningful relationships with women (House et al., 1988; Kawachi & Berkman, 2001; Rosenfield & Mouzon, 2013; Robles, Slatcher, Trombello, & McGinn, 2014), it is

clear that these beer advertisements do not portray a beneficial position for any citizen—not the least the male citizen and consumer of beer.

Second, the beer advertisements portray men as active, autonomous, and capable, as ideal citizens. At the same time, they narrow down both genders' cultural positions and thus weaken the citizen positions of all gender identities. In line with Wexler's (1991) approach to the construction of classes in advertising, one can see that the separation of female and male realms in beer advertisements suggest gender roles that are different "by nature." The "natural" difference between masculinity and femininity becomes a symbol of a political distinction between freedom and subordination (Pateman, 1988). Beer commercials—even in the late 2010s—articulate a "natural" separation of gender interests. While this separation reflects the systemic sexism still inherent in the modern social order, its use in advertising can also be seen in instrumental terms. Men must drink beer in order for beer producers to sell beer. As humans and citizens, beer consumers, who are typically men, are approached in advertising as separate from people who drink less or no beer (=women). They must also be separated from political projects that aim to restrict alcohol consumption. Beer commercials are able to integrate all these aspects in their gendered imaginary.

Overall, our approach has demonstrated that the representation of gender in beer advertisements is not merely about problematic stereotypical gender roles and positions but also involves certain basic citizenship-based tensions, such as taking the lead versus being governed, being free versus controlled, being seen as a threat versus welcomed as a friend, being worthy of solidarity versus excluded from group bonding, and so on. Furthermore, we have shown that the consumer–citizen approach can reveal certain violations of ethical standards of marketing and of societal objectives in areas of health and population well-being.

## **Notes**

1. When it comes to advertising, this relates both to the involvement of the reader when decoding messages and in the messages' symbolic grammar that reproduces and confirms their identity position in the dichotomy of the classes.

## **References**



Andersen, P., Baumberg, B. (2006). *Alcohol in Europe*. London, England: Institute of Alcohol Studies.

---

Augoustinos, M., Walker, I. (1998). The construction of stereotypes within social psychology from social cognition to ideology. *Theory & Psychology*, 8, 629–652.

---

Coggon, J. (2012). *What makes health public? A critical evaluation of moral, legal and political claims in public health*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

---

Cornwall, A., Lindisfarne, N. (2016). *Dislocating masculinity: Comparative ethnographies*. London, England: Taylor & Francis.

---

Cronin, A. (2005). *Advertising and consumer citizenship: Gender, images and rights*. London, England: Routledge.

---

Diprose, R. (1994). *The bodies of women: Ethics, embodiment and sexual difference*. London, England: Routledge.

---

Eco, U. (1966). James Bond: Une combinatoire narrative [In French]. *Communications*, 8, 77–93.

---

Elliot, R. (2008). Advertising sin and sickness: The politics of alcohol and tobacco marketing, 1950–1990. *Social History of Medicine*, 21, 190–192.

---

European Commission . (2016). *Study on the exposure of minors to alcohol advertising on linear and non-linear audio-visual media services and other online services, including a content analysis*. Retrieved from <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/study-exposure-minors-alcohol-advertising-tv-and-online-services>

---

Foster, R., Ozkan, D. (2005). Consumer citizenship, nationalism, and neoliberal globalization in Turkey: The advertising launch of cola turka. *Advertising & Society Review*, 6.

doi:10.1353/asr.2006.0001

---

Hall, C., Crum, M. (1994). Women and “body-isms” in television beer commercials. *Sex Roles*, 31, 329–337.

---

Hellman, M., Katainen, A. (2015). The autonomous Finnish man against the nanny state in the age of online outrage—The state and the citizen in the ‘whiskey gate’ alcohol policy debate. *Sociologia*, 52, 334–349.

---

Holmes, J., Meng, Y., Meier, P. S., Brennan, A., Angus, C., Campbell-Burton, C. A.,...Purshouse, R. C. (2014). Effects of minimum unit pricing for alcohol on different income and socioeconomic groups: A modelling study. *Lancet*, 383, 1655–1664.

---

House, J. S, Landis, K. R., Umberson, D. (1988). Social relationships and health. *Science*, 241, 540–545.

---

Jones, S., Reid, A. (2010). The use of female sexuality in Australian alcohol advertising: Public policy implications of young adults’ reactions to stereotypes. *Journal of Public Affairs* Volume, 10, 19–35.

---

Johnston, J. (2008). The citizen-consumer hybrid: Ideological tensions and the case of whole foods market. *Theory and Society*, 37, 229–270.

---

Kawachi, I., Berkman, L. F. (2001). Social ties and mental health. *Journal of Urban health*, 78, 458–467.

---

Kress, G. (2010). *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. London, England: Routledge.

---

Makela, P., Paljarvi, T. (2008). Do consequences of a given pattern of drinking vary by socioeconomic status? A mortality and hospitalisation follow-up for alcohol-related causes of the Finnish drinking habits survey. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 62, 728–733.

---

Marshall, T. (1965). *Class, citizenship and social development*. New York, NY: Anchor.

---

McCreanor, T., Casswell, S., Hill, L. (2000). ICAP and the perils of partnership. *Addiction*, 95, 179–185.

---

Miller, T. (2007). *Cultural citizenship: Cosmopolitanism, consumerism, and television in a neoliberal age*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

---

Nicholls, J. Q. (2006). Liberties and licenses: Alcohol in liberal thought. *International journal of cultural studies*, 9, 131–151.

---

Nolen-Hoeksema, S. (2004). Gender differences in risk factors and consequences of alcohol use and problems. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 24, 981–1010.

---

Pateman, C. (1988). *The Sexual Contract*. Oxford, England: Blackwell.

---

Postman, N., Nystrom, C., Strate, L., Weingartner, C. (1987). *Myths, men, & beer: An analysis of beer commercials on broadcast television*. Falls Church, VA: AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

---

Robins, K. (1994). Forces of consumption: From the symbolic to the psychotic. *Media, Culture and Society*, 16, 449–468.

---

Robles, T. F., Slatcher, R. B., Trombello, J. M., McGinn, M. M. (2014). Marital quality and health: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 140, 140–187.

---

Rose, N. (1999). *Powers of freedom. Reframing political thought*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

---

Rosenfield, S., Mouzon, D. (2013). Gender and mental health. In Aneshensel, C., Phelan, J., Bierman, A. (Eds.), *Handbook of the sociology of mental health* (pp. 277–296). Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Springer.

---

Seedat, S., Scott, K. M., Angermeyer, M. C., Berglund, P., Bromet, E. J., Brugha, T. S., Kessler, R. C. (2009). Cross-national associations between gender and mental disorders in the World Mental Health Organization World Mental Health Surveys. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 66, 785–795.

---

Spence, E., Van Heereken, B. (2005). *Advertising ethics*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

---

Strate, L. (1991). The cultural meaning of beer commercials. In Holman, R, Solomon, M (Eds.), *Advances in consumer research* (Vol. 18, pp. 115–119). Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research.

---

Strate, L. (1992). Beer commercials: A manual on masculinity. In Craig, S. (Ed.), *Men, masculinity and the media* (pp. 78–92). London, England: Sage.

---

Sulkunen, P. (2009). *Saturated society. Governing risk and lifestyles in consumer culture*. London, England: Sage.

---

Taylor, C. (1994). The politics of recognition. In Goldberg, D. (Ed.), *Multiculturalism*. Oxford, England: Blackwell.

---

Törrönen, J., Juslin, I. (2013). From genius of the home to party princess: Drinking in Finnish women's magazine advertisements from the 1960s to the 2000s. *Feminist Media Studies*, 13, 463–489.

---

Towns, A., Parker, C., Chase, P. (2012). Constructions of masculinity in alcohol advertising: Implications for the prevention of domestic violence. *Addiction Research and Theory*, 20, 389–401.

---

Walters, E., Treno, A., Grube, J. (2001). Alcohol advertising and youth: A focus-group analysis of what young people find appealing in alcohol advertising. *Contemporary Drug Problems*, 28, 695–

---

Wenner, L. (2009). Brewing consumption: Sports dirt, mythic masculinity, and the ethos of beer commercials. In Wenner, L., Jackson, S. (Eds.), *Sport, beer, and gender: Promotional culture and contemporary social life* (pp. 121–142). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

---

Wenner, L. (2013). The media sport interpellation: Gender, fanship, and consumer culture. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 30, 83–103.

---

Wenner, L., Jackson, S. (2009). Sport, beer and gender in promotional culture: On the dynamics of the holy trinity. In Wenner, L., Jackson, S. (Eds.), *Sport, beer, and gender in promotional culture: Explorations of a holy trinity* (pp. 1–34). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

---

World Health Organization . (2016). Country fact sheets, alcohol. Retrieved from [http://www.who.int/substance\\_abuse/publications/global\\_alcohol\\_report/profiles/en](http://www.who.int/substance_abuse/publications/global_alcohol_report/profiles/en)

---

World Health Organization–Europe . (2013). Status report on alcohol and health in 35 European countries. Retrieved from [http://www.euro.who.int/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0017/190430/Status-Report-on-Alcohol-and-Health-in-35-European-Countries.pdf](http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/190430/Status-Report-on-Alcohol-and-Health-in-35-European-Countries.pdf)

---

Wexler, P. (1991). Citizen in the semiotic society. In Turner, B. (Ed.), *Theories of modernity and post modernity* (pp. 164–175). London, England: Sage.

---

Wissing, M., Wissing, J., Du Toit, M., Temane, Q. (2006). Patterns of psychological well-being and satisfaction with life in cultural context. In Delle Fave, A. (Ed.), *Dimensions of well-being: Research and Intervention* (pp. 14–33). Milano, Italy: Franco Angeli.

---

Yang, C., McClintock, M., Kotzloski, M., Li, T. (2013). Social isolation and adult mortality: The role of chronic inflammation and sex differences. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 54, 183–203.

## **Author Biographies**

**Matilda Hellman** is a visiting scholar at Harvard University. Her research concerns epistemic, political, and cultural dimensions of lifestyles and addictions. She is the author of the textbook *Promoting Vices: An Introduction to Research on the Advertising of Coercive Products* (2017).

**Anu Katainen** is a university lecturer in social policy at the University of Helsinki. Her research has focused on questions such as youth alcohol use and class-related health behavior.

**Janne Seppänen** is a professor of visual journalism at the University of Tampere. He has published extensively on the meaning of images and lately on the meaning-making and appeal of alcohol advertising.