



## **STUDY: SIGHT OF ALCOHOL FUELS AGGRESSION**

Research Part of Larger Debate on Effects of Drinking

November 03, 2005

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CHICAGO (AdAge.com) -- A study slated to appear in the January issue of Psychological Science suggests the mere presence of alcohol-related images -- including those in advertising -- encourages aggression even if people aren't drinking. A new study suggests the very sight of alcohol-related images can make some people aggressive.

The study, based on the results of experiments involving 246 college students, indicates the mere sight of alcohol brings aggressive thoughts to mind. The study was conducted by Bruce Bartholow, assistant professor of psychology at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Of course, the fear for beer and liquor advertisers is that research of this type could be turned against them.

### **Consumption-free aggression**

"The link that we often study in the laboratory between alcohol consumption and aggressive behavior ... isn't necessarily dependent upon consumption," Mr. Bartholow said in an interview. "We didn't have to give people alcohol."

In one experiment, 121 people were briefly shown alcohol-related images, such as a beer bottle, as well as images of weapons and "neutral" images such as a plant. They were then shown words that were either aggression related or neutral or a meaningless string of letters. People were quicker to identify the aggression-related words after being shown alcohol or images of weapon than after neutral images.

In another experiment, 125 people filled out a survey to gauge their drinking behavior and beliefs about the effects of alcohol. They then were split into groups, one of which looked at six alcohol-related magazine ads -- including ads for Budweiser and Grey Goose -- and another that looked at "neutral" ads (cheese, for example). Both groups then read a short paragraph about a person engaged in arguably hostile behavior, such as refusing to pay rent until his apartment was painted.

The study found people who had looked at the alcohol ads rated the character as more aggressive than people who had seen neutral ads. And the connection was largest among participants who believed alcohol consumption led to aggressive behavior.

### **Being aware of links**

Mr. Bartholow said he wasn't calling for the abolition of alcohol beverage advertising, but said marketers should be "aware that there are links people have between alcohol" and aggressive behavior.

Mr. Bartholow's research takes place within a broader debate about why alcohol consumption appears to encourage aggressive behavior in some people.

Some argue that alcohol increases aggressive behavior by weakening cognitive processes. Another perspective, explored in Mr. Bartholow's work, contends alcohol increases aggression, at least partly, because people presume it has certain effects. This notion is based on the "semantic network model of memory," which argues that concepts sharing a similar meaning -- "kill" and "death" -- are stored close together in memory. When one concept is activated, others become more accessible and are more likely to affect behavior.

For example, nearly 40 years ago, researchers found the mere presence of a weapon increases aggressive responding.

Representatives of beer and spirits trade associations and a number of marketers didn't immediately return calls for comment.

Source: **AdAge.com ONLINE EDITION**