

'This message is brought to you by:' Super Bowl alcohol ads serve mixed messages

February 3 2010, by Amy Patterson Neubert

(PhysOrg.com) -- Alcohol advertisements, including those aired during sporting events, can be misleading with their taglines promoting responsible drinking, says a Purdue University professor.

"The 'Drink Responsibly' message lacks specific characteristics and interpretations," says Adam E. Barry, an assistant professor of health and [kinesiology](#) who has studied how these messages are employed and interpreted. "This vague terminology is not explained and, at the same time, viewers are seeing and hearing conflicting messages about drinking. There is inherent conflict with what they are depicting in their advertisings and the message of [responsible drinking](#).

"The commercials during the Super Bowl can be just as captivating as the game, so it's important we pay attention to what the [alcohol ads](#) are saying and how those messages are interpreted."

Barry's concerns stem from the fact that the alcohol industry is borrowing the responsible drinking message, which was originally developed in the 1970s as part of several alcohol prevention campaigns.

"This was originally a prevention message that was hijacked by the alcohol industry and is now a central component of their marketing and advertising," he says. "In addition to the subjective nature of the message, I think there is an inherent ethical issue. The objective of these commercials is to sell more beer, yet brewers are using a public health message that would imply less, not more."

Barry would like to see experts in public health fields establish what responsible drinking actually means.

For example, Barry's research shows that the manner in which [young adults](#) define and practice drinking responsibly has the potential to be hazardous to their health.

"Young people believe one aspect of responsible drinking is 'knowing your limit,'" he says. "We found that most young people identify their limit through a trial-and-error process. But alcohol affects you cognitively, so how can you truly perceive your limit. This could lead to a number of problems such as [alcohol](#) poisoning or drinking and driving."

Provided by Purdue University

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