RAISING A MONSTER ARMY:
ENERGY DRINKS, MASCULINITY, AND MILITARIZED CONSUMPTION

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<center>ABSTRACT</center>

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In this project, I seek to explore the ways in which contemporary aspects of militarism and capitalism are expressed and exploited by energy drink manufacturers as part of their efforts to attract young men to buy their products and identify with their brand. Numerous larger and ongoing social, economic, and political shifts are at work here, and I find that examining the visual and textual rhetoric of energy drinks can help us identify how consumer culture reflects as well as perpetuates these forces. I draw from a variety of disciplines, sources, and sites in my efforts, which will ultimately serve to help explicate the content of energy drink advertisements, packaging, web projects, and the self-styled online identities of their consumers. The widespread adoption of masculine-centric rhetoric by nearly all the purveyors of energy beverages, as well as their ever-growing popularity, prompt me to wonder why these messages seem to be so appealing and effective and what that might tell us about masculine gender identity in a post-9/11 era.

For Sheryl and Felix.

Thanks for keeping the hooting to a minimum.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

In this project, I seek to explore the ways in which contemporary aspects of militarism and capitalism are expressed and exploited by energy drink manufacturers as part of their efforts to attract young men to buy their products and identify with their brand. Numerous larger and ongoing social, economic, and political shifts are at work here, and I find that examining the visual and textual rhetoric of energy drinks can help us identify how consumer culture reflects as well as perpetuates these forces. I draw from a variety of disciplines, sources, and sites in my efforts, which will ultimately serve to help explicate the content of energy drink advertisements, packaging, web projects, and the self-styled online identities of their consumers. The widespread adoption of masculine-centric rhetoric by nearly all the purveyors of energy beverages, as well as their ever-growing popularity, prompt me to wonder why these messages seem to be so appealing and effective and what that might tell us about masculine gender identity in a post-9/11 era.

THEORY

First and foremost, my theoretical framework for this study is feminist-inspired critical gender studies. Projects that attempt to deconstruct masculinity owe much to the long tradition of critiquing the social requirements of femininity by feminists and benefit greatly from the efforts of foundational scholars of gender and queer theory like Judith Butler and Judith Halberstam, who look to expose the performative nature of gender identities and separate our gender conceptions from biological origins. These theories provide some of the base assumptions of my work; the understanding that genders are defined in opposition to one another, and cannot exist outside of this social framework in any sort of objective or immutable way. I will be working with writings by Michael Kimmel, Gail Bederman, and others who look at the evolution of

American masculine ideals over time. In addition, authors like Susan Faludi and Stephen Ducat examine the state of gendered identities and relations in a post-9/11 U.S. context, while Lisa Nakamura and others trace out how gender as well as race plays out in online settings.

This project is a feminist effort because of the theories that underlie my efforts, but also because as a feminist I believe the denaturalization of gender is a key step in the movement for equality and social justice. Many of the aspects of masculinity embraced by mainstream American culture are incredibly dangerous and destructive for men and women alike. Looking at cultural products to identify the themes that encourage violence and risk-taking among young men in particular can help us figure out ways in which we can begin to redefine masculinities. As an important counterpart to teaching girls that they may defy gender stereotypes, we need to teach boys the same; that they need not participate in or embody dangerous and hurtful behaviors in order to be "real men." Until we are able to articulate exactly what types of negative messages boys and men receive about how to enact their gender, we will not be able to combat them. These efforts are important to my eventual teaching goals, and this project will help form a basis for my future work with students in gender deconstruction and media literacy.

METHOD

The method I will be employing to reveal and to examine these narratives of masculinity is a textual and visual analysis of physical product packaging and promotional materials produced by energy drink companies, as well as user-generated content in online energy drink communities. In particular, I will be paying attention to the timbre of the rhetoric being employed, especially as it draws on violent, phallocentric, and/or militaristic narratives. I will be examining representations of race and gender in relation to not only the companies' own visual advertisements and that of the action sports arena with which energy drinks are closely

associated, but in the imagery employed by consumers in their online contributions. Specifically, I will be exploring the packaging and web content for Re-Up, Ol' Glory, Ace, and Monster Assault energy drinks. In addition, I will be analyzing gendered and racialized representations at monsterenergy.com, the Monster Beverage Company's website and its social networking group, the Monster Army.

This latter project will require a foray into the realm of ethnography, as I will be considering how the themes I have established in advertisements and company-produced content are accepted and reflected back by Monster community members. In order to accomplish this task, I joined the Monster Army action sports community by setting up a personal profile with the Loop'd (now Hookit) action sports network. I had to register by selecting my specific sport (soccer) under the Monster brand. Members are allowed to upload a profile photograph, insert text about sporting or other interests, upload photo galleries and other content, and become friends with other Monster Army and/or Hookit members. I am not, however, any sort of active athlete, so rather than attempt to pose as one by uploading content, I simply used the registration to see what the process was like and to gain easier access to other Monster members' accounts. This would feel slightly unethical, but the Monster Army is searchable to anyone without logging in, and Hookit profiles show up in Google search results. Though anyone can join, Hookit exists basically as a professional networking site for athletes to connect to sponsoring brands and to one another, and one need not be "friends" with other members to view their content.[1] In contrast, sites like Facebook encourage users to select various privacy settings that limit who can see various aspects of their profiles and uploaded content. The more successful Monster Army athletes had both more contacts and more sponsorships listed in contrast to casual

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[1] You can block other users, choose to display only a first name or a user name (though the default and most common display seems to be first and last name), and allow or disallow the site to visually document your activity in a news feed. Beyond that, users (including non-member users) have free rein to view each other's content.

users who made profiles but often had no contacts listed at all (Or if they did have any, it appeared as if they might be people they knew in real life already).

For this project, I used the site's search functions to attempt to find Monster Army members who were in turn also members of the real-life military, and met with some encouraging successes. The site is set up for people to connect through brand preferences and specific sports, not through real-life occupations (unless you are one of the lucky few athletes who can subsist on sponsorships and competition winnings), so finding these soldiers was a bit of a task. However, I was able to locate several confirmable military servicemen (and one Canadian woman) who are also Monster and/or action sports fans, and looked at how they presented themselves visually and textually as both athletes and soldiers.[2] Though I recognize that the relatively small number of profiles I examined for this project can in no way be considered representative of the overall attitudes of Monster Army members concerning militarism and masculinity in their connections to energy drinks and action sports, these profiles are most notable in that they represent the real-life intersections of the various themes promoted by marketers. It is not just in adspeak that men are encouraged to enact their gender identity through association with adventurous activities, both athletic and military. It is difficult to know to what extent every Monster Army member has absorbed these messages, but we can see that the associations between them have been explicitly accepted and repackaged by some users as integral parts of their identities.

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[2] Seventeen profiles I found either had photos or text referencing military service or living on a military base. Several more profiles of airsoft players featured camouflage action shots that can be hard to tell apart from actual military photos, but I did not include any of these in my count.

 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Energy Drinks and Action Sports

What are we talking about when we refer to energy drinks? Energy drinks are soft drinks

marketed to promote wakefulness and increased physical stamina in consumers. These effects

are achieved typically through a combination of caffeine, guarana, and taurine. Guarana is a

Brazilian plant whose fruit contains about five times as much caffeine as a coffee bean. Taurine

is an organic acid first isolated in ox bile. It is now synthetically produced for food and

pharmaceutical products (including dietary supplements), but it has yet to be proven that it

contributes to energy rates. While energy-type drinks have been around for quite some time,

especially in Asia, the U.S. market really exploded in the late '90s with the huge marketing

success of Red Bull drinks. Energy drinks typically come in eight or sixteen-ounce cans, though

concentrated three-ounce energy "shooters" and giant thirty-two ounce cans are increasingly

common in stores. Energy drinks have been proven to promote mental alertness and sometimes

provide consumers with a euphoric sensation. Most U.S. convenience or grocery stores will have

at least a small selection of different energy drinks. These beverages are largely marketed toward

teenagers and young men as hip and energizing. As I will discuss in chapter one, most of the

scholarly work done thus far on energy drinks specifically has to do with the developing health

concerns of medical professionals.

Companies like Monster—the second-place seller behind Red Bull—sponsor "extreme"

or "action" sports athletes (such as ESPN's X-Games, skateboarding, BMX biking,

snowboarding, etc.), as well as hardcore rock bands, and tailor their marketing to their fans.

Mauricio Ferreira, et al have published a study on the ways in which PepsiCo's Mountain Dew

(a highly caffeinated beverage in its own right with a corresponding AMP line of energy drinks)

has positioned itself in relation to its own Action Sports Tour in order to target these fans and utilize their emotional attachment to the events and competitive athletes for marketing purposes. There is also a growing body of literature on action sports themselves, which focuses largely on how race and gender are enacted in the performance of these activities as well as the larger social narratives surrounding their mainstream acceptance in the 1990s.[3] Energy drink and other companies that wish to reach a largely young, white male audience recognize action sports as an invaluable site for advertising. Perhaps not so ironically, the target demographic for most energy drinks is teen and young adult males, precisely the group eligible for conscription under the Selective Service Act. And in fact, various branches of the armed services sponsor action sports events and advertise during their television broadcasts. The high-octane recruitment commercials blend right in with those of Mountain Dew, video games, and other "action"-related products. I will investigate this rhetorical overlap and uncover why these appeals to masculine risk-taking are effective, or at least clearly believed to be so by those employing them.

War, Gender, and Cultural Militarism

In societies through time and across the globe, masculinity and femininity have not just been categories set up for the purposes of everyday divisions of labor, but to maintain humans' ability to go to war with one another. In his broad cross-cultural survey of the relationship between war and gender, Joshua S. Goldstein explores the ways in which "[c]ultures use gender in constructing social roles that enable war" (Goldstein, 251). Since all males are potential warriors, boys' socialization is focused on fulfilling this role. Eventually they will become men who must be able to measure up to an ideal of discipline over fear to function well in battle (ibid, 256). Despite innumerable claims to men's "natural" martial impulses, and even though boys are trained from birth to fight wars, soldiers must still be coerced or coaxed into battle and then

[3] See: (Kusz, 2007), (Browne, 2004), (Giardina & Donnelly, 2008), to name a few.

rewarded afterward. Goldstein emphasizes the importance of "the nonmaterial rewards: honor or prestige, special titles or memberships, political influence or leadership" (ibid, 253). It is these intangible benefits that advertisers who use military themes are attempting to exploit. The traditional distancing of all things feminine from combat is misleading, however, because women's roles are just as vital to the functioning of the war machine as masculine participation, despite official policies meant to bar them from combat. Often, women help provide or are actually offered *as* the spoils of war for the victors and play active roles in shaming those who cannot measure up. Part of the training for manhood (and hence, war) is a heavy helping of humiliation. As Goldstein puts it, "Shame is the glue that holds the man-making process together" (ibid, 269). Failure to measure up to masculine roles means a literal failure to be a "man."

These processes are, of course, not limited to so-called "traditional" societies. Cynthia Enloe has written tirelessly on the ways in which, despite largely being denied access to political power, women's conformity to feminine roles actually helps enable the modern processes of globalization and militarization. We can think of globalization as the process by which economic relations come to be defined by the international, the transnational, and the multinational. People and institutions can become militarized when they "adopt militaristic values (e.g., a belief in hierarchy, obedience and the use of force) and priorities as [their] own, to see military solutions as particularly effective, to see the world as a dangerous place best approached with militaristic attitudes" (Enloe 2007, 4). From the modern female soldier to diplomats' and officers' wives, to the white middle-class female travel writers of the colonial era, women's acceptance of and compliance with the aims and ideals of the state provides much-needed moral support to the business of making war. In fact, Enloe points out, women who refuse or fail to measure up to

their proscribed roles are often seen not just as insufficiently feminine, but as actual national security threats (ibid, 58). Though my focus in this work is on how masculinity and militarism overlap and reinforce one another, it is important to remember that this is only possible when femininity serves as both the antithesis to and the largest proponent of masculine values. In this way, war and gender are inextricably linked. "The war system influences the socialization of children in to *all* their gender roles—a feedback loop that strengthens and stabilizes gendered war roles," Goldstein explains, thus "[w]ar's influence shadows all of our lives" (Goldstein, 410, emphasis original).

This sentiment—that war is sewn into the social fabric—forms the basis for Michael S. Sherry's wide-ranging look at militarization in the U.S. since the 1930s, *In the Shadow of War*. Sherry is interested in the process whereby in the twentieth century, "war and national security became consuming anxieties and provided the memories, models, and metaphors that shaped broad areas of national life" (Sherry, xi). His investigation seeks to draw out how every aspect of culture and society may become infected with militarism when an obsession with maintaining "security" becomes a (or the) driving political force. However, the acceptance of militaristic values does not mean Americans are particularly martial or bloodthirsty by nature. Sherry emphasizes the particular role of pride in technological development of air and missile power in this process and its ability to distance us from actual sites of violence. More important, however, was the fact that the experience of World War II "taught Americans to associate defense spending with [economic] prosperity, even if they did not think much about how the connection might be sustained" (ibid, 79). President Eisenhower famously decried the "military-industrial complex" that allowed this association to thrive, and worked to curb its effects during his presidency. He claimed that a "permanent state of mobilization" would destroy "our whole

democratic way of life" (quoted in Sherry, 193). His efforts did little to slow the ongoing march of militarization into all areas of American life, however.

During the Cold War era, a conflict that did not require the use of nuclear weapons was considered "limited," a misnomer that added to the perception of the era as a "long peace"[4] (ibid, 225). So no matter how large nuclear arsenals grew, as long as they were never used, the illusion of peacetime—by definition, an actual absence of conflict—remained intact. Adding to the perception of military restraint was the attitudes of the members of the executive branch. Through the Vietnam War, the governing administrations' members believed that "keeping the generals on a short leash also kept the dogs of war in check" (ibid, 254). Clearly, this was (and is) not the case. As Enloe has recently pointed out, "It is civilians who are principal militarizers" (Enloe 2008, 258). As it wore on, the economic, political, and military woes of the Vietnam War shook Americans' enthusiasm for a security-minded state. However, militarism had become so deeply embedded in the political rhetoric of reform that domestic "wars" continued to rage even when demands to bring the troops home grew. Johnson declared a "War on Poverty" during the Vietnam campaign, later on, Carter framed his energy policy as the "moral equivalent of war," and even the elder George Bush waged a "War on Drugs" in the late 1980s. These presidents drew on the metaphor of war despite the tainted connotations of Vietnam in part because WWII and its presumed ability to "unify the nation" remained strong cultural touchstones, especially for the generation that waged the Cold War (Sherry, 261).

This longtime militarization of the political and social takes on new meanings in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. These events served to reframe and rejuvenate certain (mostly conservative) political ideals, as well as

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[4] This phrase was popularized by the title of venerable Cold War historian John Lewis Gaddis' 1987 book, *The Long Peace: Inquiries Into the History of the Cold War*.

giving birth to a plethora of consumer products that latched on to a renewed rhetoric of patriotism. Susan Faludi, among others, traces how the trauma of this national tragedy presented an opportunity for a reassertion of traditional gender ideals. Terrified and grieving citizens identified with a strong, masculine leader who promised revenge upon the perpetrators. Faludi points to how the first responders at the Twin Towers became national icons of heroic masculinity, and the newly-minted wars in Afghanistan and Iraq brought the soldier-hero back into cultural currency. Ongoing national security anxieties allowed the 2004 presidential election to be framed largely as a showdown of who would act as the most effective masculine protector of the nation-state. The continual strain on military forces caused by the unending conflicts in the Middle East keeps issues of recruitment and retention in the armed forces especially crucial, and the resurgent visibility of military veterans in news and popular culture has endowed militaristic imagery and rhetoric new life in public discourses, including those of advertisers. The long-standing conflation of consumer responsibility and citizenship in American culture and politics also plays into these developments (see Cohen, 2003). The current cultural resonance of patriotic military-related identities and aesthetics are ripe for commercial exploitation, and beverage companies are more than happy to engage in them. In fact, with their temporal immediacy and celebration of masculine militarism, some of these energy drinks might be considered quintessential artifacts of the consumer-citizen's response to 9/11.

Consumer Identity and Digital Labor

Finally, this thesis engages the scholarship that explores how late capitalism encourages, or more accurately *requires* individuals to build their identities through consumer choice. This is due partly to economic restructuring that has pushed most American workers into low-paid, tedious service or clerical jobs that do not fulfill traditional ideals of a career or a self-defining

mode of work appropriate to a masculine breadwinner. Workers are encouraged to turn to their leisure pursuits, fueled by consumer products, in order to build identities and gain self-worth. Naomi Klein's late '90s work on the ubiquity of "branding" as the prime mode of marketing for large corporations and the far-reaching social and economic repercussions of this ever-growing emphasis is particularly useful here. The formation of brand-based communities (whether corporate-sponsored or more grassroots) has inevitably moved online, especially in combination with the Web 2.0 economy of social networking. These affective bonds between people and products are ripe for exploitation by both the brands they celebrate and the various online services that provide gathering sites. Many current internet scholars, notably Tiziana Terranova, are focusing their work on how these digital technologies have transformed corporate methods for accruing profits, as traditional boundaries between work, life, and play are increasingly blurred and collapsed by these online social activities. It is the maintenance of these websites by user participation that allows the proprietors to continue to earn advertising revenue, benefiting from brand identification and affect on the part of the consumer-user by their participation in brand communities.

The fact that energy drinks are such a new and growing market makes them an exciting area of study. They have become incredibly popular in a very short span of time in part due to the fact that they draw on all these different, up-to-the-minute cultural and economic factors. The fact that the action sports scene has become mainstream in the past fifteen years or so has exposed the associated products and brands, like energy drinks, to ever-widening audiences, particularly of the coveted youth market. Branding trends and the growth of social networking have contributed to the growing acceptance, or as some like Ernest Hakanen argue, *embrace* of consumer-built identities. In this environment, we actively construct our own unique brands

through consumer choices, rather than through older models of self-definition (particularly for men) that relied on occupational success, work culture, or other achievements in public life. By riffing on militarized aesthetics, beverage companies take advantage of the fact that ongoing wars and the patriotism widely expressed after 9/11 have brought the soldier-hero back into the cultural limelight in a positive sense. And though Monster is just one of a very, very many brands that has taken to digital technologies, the convergence of the aforementioned factors makes energy drinks the unique depository of all these various, seemingly divergent forces.

CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

Again, the seeming nonstop growth of the energy drink market points to an important popular cultural phenomenon that should become an increasingly relevant site of scholarly investigation. Volumes could be written on energy drinks and their relation to masculinity alone, but I find most interesting the connections between these products and militaristic ideals. Cultural ambivalence about our current military endeavors allows for a reevaluation of what the military means to our accepted ideas about gender, power, and identity. Though energy drinks are a perhaps fleeting or ephemeral aspect of popular culture (Who knows how long the trend will last?), the various meanings embedded in the visual and textual rhetoric of their promoters may help us uncover how we are currently attempting to define or redefine ourselves. Advertising, of course, draws on stereotypes and exaggerations, and we cannot take them at face value as true reflections of society. It is important to understand, however, where these assumed shared ideals are coming from and why they are deemed attractive or effective by marketers. The very conscious constructedness of advertising, packaging, and the processes of "branding" allow us to see how meanings are made in our society. Attempting to expose the origins of these messages is not only revealing to the current moment, but may help future historical

investigations of gender or militarism to locate the rhetorical shifts that characterize larger social change.

In the first chapter I will begin with an overview of historical work that has been done on the peculiarities of American masculinity, with specific focus on men's identities as defined by public life and occupational success. Then I engage the sociological work of C. Wright Mills on how the explosion of white collar office and service industries in the twentieth century in many ways helped erode previous definitions of masculine achievement, increasingly pushing manly self-expression more fully into the leisure sphere. Taking these economic shifts into account, we then can see how the emergence of the energy drink market is in large part due to a timely convergence of advertising trends and growing public appetites for caffeine. Naomi Klein's investigations of the corporate "branding" movement in addition to accounts of the rise of Starbucks in the 1990s provide context to the early successes of these products. Additionally, I take into account Kathleen E. Miller's theory of the "toxic jock" as a mostly white, male undergraduate-age demographic that connects energy drink consumption to various dangerous behaviors as well as the risk-taking narratives of the action sports world. Due to beverage companies' heavy sponsorship involvement with action sports athletes and events, I will be investigating the discourses of whiteness and masculinity that permeate this scene, helping define the demographics of its audience.

In the second chapter, I draw from the previous discussion of the militarization of U.S. culture and some of the gendered cultural shifts that have come about because of the events of 9/11 and the ensuing wars in the Middle East in order to examine the influences embodied in recent cultural productions. A national obsession with war and security has influenced everything from the 2004 presidential election's gendered rhetoric to the trend of civilian

Hummers. The creep also of neoliberal ideas of the free market into every aspect of our lives has added to the tendency of Americans to view themselves firstly as consumer-citizens—to express their patriotism and/or sense of duty through consumer practices. In addition to products of a consumer comfort culture (Sturken, 2007) that has grown up in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, goods that make reference to the military in their branding efforts have increased. I argue that the conspicuous patriotism of many country and western musicians and in the branding of Wal-Mart are both part of a larger cultural response to 9/11 and a strategic marketing tool meant to appeal to a white, working class style of masculinity. In the energy drink world, we see these trends represented by Oklahoma's own Ol' Glory Energy, whose discount price, patriotic packaging, and overt National Guard recruiting draw equivalence between blue-collar authenticity, manhood, and patriotic duty as performed through military service. Ol' Glory bucks the larger energy drink market trend of playing up action sports and "extreme" aesthetics, but it falls nicely into place with a larger rhetoric of pro-military, often pro-war, aggressively masculine patriotism as represented by country artists like Toby Keith, who are often embraced by the conservative political punditry.

Continuing this chapter, I examine how even in the world of more mainstream energy drinks, however, the appeal of militaristic masculinity and its attendant aesthetics become a winning strategy—though without the explicit political references of other post-9/11 cultural productions. The camouflage pattern on the Monster "Assault" flavor's can with its accompanying exhortation to "Declare war on the ordinary!" and the company's wide use of militaristic and violent rhetoric would seem to necessitate an acknowledgement of U.S. military action since 9/11 and since Monster started "cooking up" its "killer energy brew" the following year (monsterenergy.com). However, even while employing militaristic imagery, the Assault

can's text includes a written disavowal of being "for 'the War,' or against 'the War.'" With this oblique reference to the ongoing conflict in Iraq (not to mention Afghanistan), Monster denies *any* political stand on this or any war. By deliberately and vehemently denying connections between their advertising and product design and current events, Monster lets young men who are coming of age in the shadow of 9/11 and the Iraq War to sample military masculine prestige while possibly being able to ignore the cultural trauma that those events inflict.

The final chapter will examine how the Monster Beverage Company has utilized digital technologies to not only participate in masculinist advertising discourse, but also to induce consumers to perform unpaid labor for the corporation through fan sites and brand identification. This chapter's site of inquiry is the Monster website, especially its Monster Army social network, part of the larger Hookit Action Sports Network. The sponsored athletes are ranked as part of the "Army," with professionals falling under the "Generals" heading, down to younger, more amateur athletes in the "Privates" category. The site encourages visitors to join the "Reserves" and take on Monster "Missions," like filming your own Monster commercial, or taking part in Army "Recruitment" campaigns, receiving cases of Monster and stickers and other "gear" in return. This exploitation of consumers' emotional attachment to brands is part of a larger economic trend of corporate cooptation of digital labor, and in some ways can be connected to militaristic discourses of the ideal soldier that celebrate voluntary subsuming of the self to a greater goal.

By analyzing the self-presentation of a number of Monster Army members who are also members of the armed services (most active duty, though at least one retired), I hope to draw together a number of the themes investigated in the previous chapters: particularly those that draw continuities between military recruiting and energy drink advertising. These men's profiles

show how (despite Ol' Glory's claims), the masculine adventure of military service is similarly appealing to at least some action sports athletes and fans. The Monster Army's exploitation of militaristic themes is a specific marketing choice that draws in enthusiastic consumers to perform the labor of socializing and ad-consuming required for websites' economic viability. I contend that though certain internet scholars argue otherwise (Banks and Humphrey, 2008), online communities like the Monster Army do not seem to recognize their activities as labor in the service of a corporate overlord, but as a leisure pursuit performed in celebration of a certain brand-oriented lifestyle.

Through the issues I will be exploring, I hope to pinpoint very recent trends in social definitions of gender. That energy drinks' popularity has exploded in the post-9/11 and war-concurrent era is noteworthy, especially as the raised visibility of soldier identities in popular discourse are evident in the marketing of many of these products. So while the links between masculinity and militarism are perhaps as old as both gender and war themselves, the ways in which a very modern phenomenon like the proliferation of energy drinks reinterpret and benefit from these connections are telling. Of course, while we cannot know at this time whether energy drinks' cooptation of camouflage or army recruitment rhetoric is simply a temporary blip in the larger story of the evolution of gendered identities, pinpointing how they speak to us in the current moment can perhaps give us a clue to where we stand. In addition, it is important to media literacy education that we recognize how gender is employed by corporations to manipulate consumers' affect, like in the case of the Monster Army. Identifying digital labor for what it is, work, helps us more clearly see what it is companies have to gain from establishing online communities and other mechanisms that allow for the sharing of user-generated content. In the following chapters, I hope to explain how these themes of digital-age capitalism,

manhood, and war come together in the rhetoric and imagery of energy drinks and their

marketers.

CHAPTER 1
CAPITALISM, LEISURE, AND CAFFEINATED MASCULINITY

Historian Gail Bederman asks us to think of gender as an ongoing "ideological process," one that "works through political technology, composed of a variety of institutions, ideas, and daily practices" (Bederman, 7). As such, men and women have conceived of and enacted their gendered identities and roles differently at different points of time (this is not to mention variations in gendered ideology and practice due to region, race, ethnicity, class, and any number of other factors). As Michael Kimmel draws out in his historical overview of *Manhood in America*, there is often a widely accepted ideal of appropriate gendered behavior (sometimes called "dominant" or "hegemonic" ideals), as well as "parallel and competing versions that coexist with it" (Kimmel, 4). It would behoove us to look at the work of these and other scholars to trace out some of the recurring themes associated with manhood in American history in order to draw the necessary connections.

Before when can examine how energy drinks go about appealing to masculinity, we must establish why they might choose this as their avenue of attack. I will be recounting some of the history of caffeine on our journey to the place where hopped-up modern capitalism and masculinity crash into one other in the form of energy drinks. Men have not always been encouraged to build their identities upon consumer products and leisure activities, but economic realities of late-stage capitalism in the United States have left many lower middle- and working-class men in particular no other choice. Deindustrialization, economic uncertainty, and the massive domestic growth of the service industry have effectively severed any previous connection between work and masculine identity for many, if not most, American men. One of the most popular venues for vicarious or compensatory masculine achievement is athletics, whether through direct participation or spectatorship. I will be exploring how the rise of action or

"extreme" sports coincided with a late twentieth-century "crisis of masculinity" along with the emergence of the "angry white man." These somewhat disparate threads of capitalism, caffeine, and masculinity come together in the marketing efforts of energy drink companies who are heavily associated with these action sports through sponsorship deals.

MEN, WORK, AND ATTEMPTS AT "FULFILLMENT"

Kimmel's work examines the rise of the iconic "self-made man" in the early United States—an aspiring or established middle-class businessman who worked for himself and embodied such important American ideals as individualism, innovation, and the desire to push the boundaries of the frontier. This ideal would win out over the older masculine ideals inherited from Europe: the genteel patriarch (e.g., Jefferson at Monticello) and the heroic artisan (e.g., the working man's man Jackson), though elements of these "types" of manhood would continue to hold cultural value and were instrumental in the early political days of the republic.[5] Kimmel locates the national political triumph of the self-made man in the "log cabin and hard cider" campaign of Whig William Henry Harrison against Jackson's supposedly effete protégé Martin Van Buren. An election fraught with uncannily familiar rhetoric, Harrison's ill-fated victory "set a dubious precedent: Since 1840 the president's manhood has always been a question, his manly resolve, firmness, courage, and power equated with the capacity for violence, military virtues, and a plain-living style that avoided cultivated refinement and civility" (ibid, 27). This continues to the present day, as Susan Faludi (2007) and others have pointed to the familiar gendered dimensions of the 2004 presidential election.

Despite the decisive ideological triumph of the hard-working everyman pulling himself and his family up by their proverbial bootstraps, economic vagaries and hardships ultimately

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[5] As Bederman points out, "manhood" was the preferred nomenclature for a very long time. The interchangeable noun "masculinity" only began to come into usage right before the turn of the twentieth century (Bederman, 6).

placed this archetype on shaky ground for flesh-and-blood non-allegorical men. The nineteenth-century gendered conception of "separate spheres" only exacerbated matters. Since a man was expected to fulfill the role of the family's sole breadwinner, his work would necessarily take precedent over any other aspects of his life. The self-made, self-employed man was defined by the business he conducted almost exclusively outside of the home, and his manhood was threatened if he became unable to adequately support his family. In addition to economic anxieties, it turns out that the even the successful bourgeousization of America could have seemingly dire consequences for the nation's manhood. While many men dealt with the possibly emasculating effects of comfortable middle-class "over-civilization" around the turn of the century by taking an interest in rugged sports and outdoor activities or by joining secret fraternal organizations in unprecedented numbers, some middle-class men simply broke from all the pressure. This exclusively masculine medical ailment was called "neurasthenia" and was assumed to be a manifestation of the "lack of nerve force," caused by the overtaxing of mental and physical energies (Bederman, 85). Particular emphasis on abstaining from masturbation was recommended for curing or avoiding neurasthenia, as it sapped the male body of its essential "energies" (ibid). Anthony Rotundo has noted that neurasthenic patients generally found little pleasure in the rough-and-tumble leisure activities in which other men found solace from their workaday and family responsibilities. In fact, he argues, a man's breakdown "represented a sharp rejection of work" wherein he was "making a statement, however unconscious, of his negative feelings about middle-class work and the values and pressures surrounding it" (Rotundo, 193). Rotundo may see subversive potential in these men's actions (or reactions, as the case may be), but contemporary opinion-makers did not see it that way. Many feared that an epidemic of

neurasthenia proved that the forces of civilization made men soft, weak, nervous, and worst of all, impotent.

Sporting, hunting, artisanal brotherhood, the "muscular Christianity" and scouting movements, and a cultural reinvestment in the fathering of sons were some of the options offered to remedy this supposed crisis of masculinity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Public figures like Theodore Roosevelt not only advocated for partaking in these hardening pursuits, but most especially to apply those values to the sphere of international politics. Secretary of the Navy, "Rough Rider," and probably the most self-consciously masculine president of all time, TR sang the praises of war and battle and "began to exhort the American race to embrace a manly, strenuous imperialism, in the cause of higher civilization" (Bederman, 184). Based on assumptions of the superior virile manhood of the white race, Roosevelt's "strenuous life" called for aggressive military excursions like the War of 1898 and the ensuing Filipino counter-insurgency. The military would make men out the flaccid, over-educated sons of the middle class. However successfully these exploits may have reinvigorated the nation's manhood, masculinity would continue to cycle through periodic crises throughout the twentieth century, in no small part due to the presumptive feminizing effects of growth in white collar office and service industries.

C. Wright Mills, writing shortly after the Second World War, takes a hard look at how the self-made man—if ever a reality—had by then largely faded into the idyllic past. Now the middle class was made up of dependent employees. The "white-collar man," Mills pronounces, "is always somebody's man, the corporation's, the government's, the army's; and he is seen as the man who does not rise" (Mills, xii). Mills' analysis of corporate and retail cultures is a devastating takedown of the postwar enthusiasm about the secure position given to the suburban

company man in his "gray flannel suit."[6] However, though Mills may start out discussing how the "anonymous insincerity" required by service employees affects "salespeople," it becomes clear that he really means "sales girls" (Mills, 182). In addition, early offices were highly gendered arenas wherein armies of female typists and clerks kept business flowing as usual for their male superiors. In executives' cozy den-like office sanctuaries, hyper-competent secretaries or "office wives" helped "re-creat[e] a man's domestic private space" wherein he could indulge in "legitimized corporate claims of executive fatherhood" (Kwolek-Folland, 166). However, most men would never achieve the position of professional patriarch.

These telling descriptions make it clear that white-collar work has quite legitimately possessed the taint of femininity since very early on, contrasting the intellectual, sedentary activities of an office worker to the hands-on physicality of blue-collar occupations. Service, sales, and office support positions are still so inextricably coded feminine, that the designation "pink-collar" was invented to describe these heavily female, low-status, low-pay, and generally dead-end jobs. Of course, despite this admittedly accurate stereotype, Men have always participated in this type work (especially higher up in the ranks), and today 75 percent of all American workers—male and female—are employed in some type of service industry (Klein, 232).

By the mid-twentieth century, men of the middle class could no longer lay claim to the aggressive, individualist masculinity of the self-promoting entrepreneur, nor could they gain masculine credibility through manual labor. So where did they seek to affirm their manhood?[7] They again turned to leisure, pursuing masculinity in their off-hours. Mills claims that since both

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[6] If my research is any indication, it appears to be a criminal act to not mention this particular fashion fad when writing about midcentury masculinity and work.

[7] Kimmel emphasizes the necessity of actively claiming a masculine identity: "I argue that the quest for manhood— the effort to achieve, to demonstrate, to prove our masculinity—has been one of the formative and persistent experiences in men's lives" (Kimmel, 3).

are subject to the cold realities of a boom-and-bust capitalist economy, "The material hardship of nineteenth-century industrial workers finds its parallel on the psychological level among twentieth-century white-collar employees" (Mills, xvi). He emphasizes the self-alienation that results from friendly personalities replacing actual skills as job requirements in a service-oriented economy. Pointing to a commonly-held "fatalist feeling that work *per se* is unpleasant" (ibid, 229), Mills paints a picture of the white-collar middle manager or superficially smiling salesfloor associate who is simply "working for the weekend." In a depressingly accurate manner, he describes how in the new white-collar middle class, "Each day men sell little pieces of themselves in order to try to buy them back each night and week end with the coin of 'fun'" (ibid, 237). This veiled or perhaps unintentional connection between capitalist exploitation of labor and the work of prostitution further feminizes men's working lives.

After the postwar industrial boom inevitably burst and the patriotic glories of our victory in WWII had faded some, deindustrialization, the Cold War, and the second wave of feminism hastened what Susan Faludi calls the "premature death of masculine promise" (Faludi, 32). By the 1980s, the tarnishing of masculine military prestige due to the U.S.'s losses in Vietnam,[8] the continued conversion to an unstable service economy, in addition to rapidly shifting gender roles had ignited an anti-feminist backlash. Though on the surface it may have appeared that men simply did not and do not want to relinquish their positions of privilege, in reality, "most men, who individually feel not the reins of power in their hands but its bit in their mouths... are [really just] clinging to a phantom status" (Faludi, 41). This phantom masculine prestige haunts men who wish to live up to persistent but unattainable manly ideals that emphasize control over one's destiny and personal fulfillment through occupational success.

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[8] I will be discussing militarism and masculinity in U.S. culture at length in the next chapter.

In contrast, until more recently, working women, who were usually spinsters, widows, or young women waiting to get married and leave (or be forced out of) the workforce, jobs were not necessary to their identities *as women*. Traditionally associated with and defined by the domestic, a women worker was seen as an aberration; employed out of necessity or simply biding time until she could find a husband to support her. So though any and all of us who have worked in Mills' white-collar sectors can relate to the attempt to reclaim one's "real," non-work self during leisure time, men's perhaps unfulfilled roles as breadwinner made these off-duty efforts all the more desperate. If a man could not be in control of his work situation, he could at least make the most of his free time, recovering his diminished power through masculinity-affirming activities in what Faludi has dubbed a superficial "ornamental culture." In this social setting, institutions that once gave men a sense of belonging and mastery have been replaced by "celebrity and image, glamour and entertainment, marketing and consumerism[;] it is a ceremonial gateway to nowhere" (ibid, 35). Part and parcel of the ornamental culture is the illusory world of corporate branding.

BRANDING AND THE SERVICE-BASED ECONOMY

Though her advocacy of late-'90s anti-corporate activism can seem a bit quaint in a post-9/11 world, Naomi Klein's *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* is one of the most comprehensive works for describing the enormous shift in advertising in the past few decades from efforts to sell products to the ongoing attempts to construct a "brand." Though branding is not new, Klein points to a fuller commitment on the part of corporations in response to the late-'80s/early '90s rise in popularity of cheaper, generic brands. Corporations' endless endeavors to capture the emotional loyalty of consumers is based on the idea that successful products are "presented not as 'commodities' but as concepts: the brand as experience, as lifestyle" (Klein,

21). Brands associate themselves with other brands, media, and events in order to pick up free publicity and tap into overlapping markets. Companies need not spend time trying to add value to their specific products because sponsorship is about "thirstily soaking up cultural ideas and iconography that their brands c[an] reflect by projecting these ideas and images back on the culture as 'extensions' of their brands" (Klein, 29). As we will see below, the purveyors of energy drinks are some of the most active players in branding game.

One of the most effective gender-based leisure brands in American history, Playboy, originated at precisely the same time Mills was writing about white collar workers. Hugh Hefner published the first edition of his "classy" pornographic magazine in late 1953 and was extending its name and bunny logo into diverse markets at an unprecedented rate by the end of the decade. Susan Gunelius' recent analysis of Playboy's longtime success emphasizes that especially in the early days, Hefner's magazine and brand was meant to be the literal embodiment of his fantasy lifestyle, one that, it turned out, "many men aspired to lead" (Gunelius, 15). Literary, sophisticated, and unabashedly heterosexual, *Playboy* and its philosophy were not only at the forefront of publicly liberalizing sexual mores in the United States, but they also parted ways with traditional masculine leisure pursuits that emphasized homosocial bonding through sporting or a fraternal order. The growth of Playboy throughout the sexual revolution and beyond did not signal the end of these other manly activities, but its success pointed to not only the larger shift of masculine self-definition in to the leisure sphere, but an enthusiastic embrace of such a development. Playboy produced television shows, sex and dating guides for the enlightened man, and threw lavish parties at the infamous Playboy Mansion. Its urbane lifestyle was embodied by Hefner himself, who, after divorcing his first wife, simultaneously dated multiple women and made public appearances in his signature silk pajamas and smoking jacket. Though the products

examined in this project appeal to quite different masculine ideals, the Playboy brand is an early and particularly successful example of the type of overall attitude or way of life that many beverage companies of the 2000s hope to cultivate in association with their products.

In addition to their promotion of brand-name lifestyles, Klein traces out the process by which many companies that have embraced branding have simultaneously worked to shed the costs of production. Through outsourcing, contracting and subcontracting, most consumer goods companies have effectively extricated themselves from the labor sites of production, contributing to longtime deindustrializing forces in the United States. What is left is a consumer-based economy, which must be staffed by service employees. Further exacerbating domestic economic woes is the fact that big-brand employers are expert at avoiding spending or giving too much to their workers (with, perhaps, the exception of executives at their corporate headquarters). Brand-name points of purchase have become the unfortunate home of clerks whose employers have convinced us that they are, as Klein phrases it, "somehow not quite legitimate workers, and thus do not really need or deserve job security, livable wages and benefits" (ibid, 232). And while certainly some service employees are high school or college kids who may just be around for the summer or to earn a little spending money, as mentioned before, the vast majority of American workers—that is, including adults with families to support—are employed by the services and retail sectors and actually must try to patch together a living from their brand-name paychecks.[9] Indeed, one of the greatest examples of product-light but brand-rich success of the 1990s and beyond is Starbucks Coffee, which perhaps unwittingly helped pave the way for the explosion of the energy drink market in the 2000s.[10]

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[9] Just avoid calling it a "McJob," or else McDonald's will sue you in a British court for libel like they did to two Greenpeace activists in 1997 (Klein, 237).

[10] Though, of course, not to be outdone, Starbucks unveiled its own line of DoubleShot Energy+Coffee drinks in 2008—sold at Starbucks locations as well as grocery and convenience stores.

CAFFEINE AND CAPITALISM

Coffee, derived from the cherries and seeds ("beans") of the *coffea arabica* plant native to Ethiopia, has been consumed by humans for centuries. The appeal, obviously, lies in the "coffee bean's pharmacological accessing of adrenalin" (Topik, 87). In its first base for commercial trade, Yemen, coffee was imbibed for religious purposes by Sufi Muslims who desired to stay awake long hours meditating, praying, dancing, and singing (ibid). Later on, Europeans would embrace the drink for its sobering effects, especially since lack of potable drinking water meant that in places like Elizabethan England, even children drank several glasses of beer every day (Clark, 24). As described by *Starbucked* author Taylor Clark, Puritan Christians and their economically ambitious contemporaries were especially pleased by their new-found ability to "easily regulate their waking and working hours" (ibid, 25). The capacity for self-discipline is a recurring aspect of ideal masculinities as well as for the ideal capitalist employee.

Coffee eventually caught on in North America, due to high taxes on tea and its association with British colonial powers. Clark asks us to imagine "grizzled [masculine] cowboys" around a campfire—they are not sipping tea with their pinkies in the air. Like our young country itself, coffee "symbolized productivity and vigor, [and] soon became fused with the American way" (Clark, 20). It seems a perfect ideological fit.[11] In addition, coffee (along with other stimulants) has long been associated with the military for its beneficial effects on wakefulness. During WWII, Steven Topik explains, coffee rations "became so integral to the U.S. war effort that it became known—and still is known—as 'a cup of Joe' named after the symbolic soldier 'G.I. Joe'" (Topik, 82).

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[11] In fact, "common man"-loving President Andrew Jackson's political pressure was integral to the lowering and abolishment of import taxes on coffee beans (Topik, 95).

Though Americans were always big coffee drinkers, they mostly brewed and drank it at home. With the help of mass production and cheaper *robusta* beans used by grocery store-standards like Folgers and Maxwell House, by midcentury most Americans were unaware that coffee was supposed to or even could taste good. In a move that presaged the use of energy drinks, many Americans chose to get their daily caffeine kick from more drinkable sugary sodas (Clark, 31). In the postwar era, a few gourmet or specialty coffee roasters existed, picking up a bit more business in the hippie counterculture era, though purveyors were more interested in supplying quality grounds for home brewing than in playing host to loitering wannabe-revolutionaries. Inspired by this small trend, three college friends opened up their own roasting company in Seattle in the 1970s—Starbucks Coffee. Though Starbucks was part of a growing appetite for gourmet coffee and found plenty of success in its hometown, the company did not become the mega-brand it is today until ambitious former appliance company executive Howard Schultz came onto the scene. Periodic clashes with the original owners throughout the '80s over the company's future directions came to an end when Schultz bought Starbucks in 1987, determined to replicate Italy's widespread, social espresso-drinking culture in the U.S. with Starbucks' high-quality product (Clark, 63).

Schultz turned latte-drinking into all the rage, tirelessly promoting the Starbucks brand and opening store after store—including ones across the street from one another. Schultz helped create a demand for gourmet coffee drinks, and as Clark argues, "The secret behind Starbucks's magnetic pull on consumers lies in the extraordinary amount of control it exercises over its image" (ibid, 88). The paper to-go cups with the Starbucks mermaid logo became the company's most successful billboard in the hands of customers on the street. The Starbucks juggernaut is now a corporate giant without any close market rivals. And despite claims that the chain drives

mom-and-pop coffee shops out of business, the opposite has proven to be true. Many coffee novices get drawn in by the aura of the Starbucks brand, and then branch out to other independent coffee shops once they get hooked on the bean. Clark found that the vast majority of locally-owned coffeehouses experienced an uptick in business when a Starbucks location opened nearby (ibid, 163). And while Starbucks' has been criticized for its cost- (and milk-) inflated product, low-paid, non-unionized baristas, and dealings with Latin American coffee growers, there is no doubt that the viral spread of the Starbucks brand rejuvenated not just the coffee trade, but Americans' interest in caffeine consumption as more than just a necessity, but as a lifestyle choice.

Despite the aura of the Starbucks brand, companies that sell cheap instant coffee for home or office brewing are still in business, as caffeine consumption continues to be a necessity for many. According to Clark, eighty percent of Americans partake of some kind of caffeine every day, pointing to the drug's (and it is a drug) nearly complete integration into American culture (Clark, 218). At least into American *working* culture. In particular, the Starbucks, Wal-Mart, or FedEx/Kinko's "fake" employees Klein discusses above benefit from the invigorating effects of caffeine as they go about their tedious, non-manual labor. In a discussion of what Jason Pine has come to call "narco-capitalism," Americans' inherited Protestant work ethic rears its head while we attempt to "come up with a vaccine for that great obstacle to boundless productivity: fatigue" (Pine, 359). From (ADHD drug) Adderal-snorting Wall Street traders to meth-addicted long-haul truck drivers, workers of all colors of collars are caught up in the desperate need to stay awake in order to keep the wheels of capitalism turning at a steady clip— not to mention fueling its own big-money market in performance-enhancing products at the same

time.[12] Pine points out the conveniently profitable resultant feedback loop, explaining, "Rather than a force all its own, this market is enhanced; it is tweaking on pharmacologically engineered epistemologies of activity and achievement" (ibid, 363). Enter: the increasingly diversifying world of energy drinks.

MORE THAN JUST A SODA

The first "true" energy drink on the U.S. market was Red Bull, an Austrian company headed by "marketing maverick" Dietrich Mateschitz who was inspired to concoct his sweet, caffeine-heavy product by an energy-providing Thai drink of the same name back in the '80s (Lidz, n.p.). Mateschitz and his company have carefully positioned themselves as sponsors of "extreme" sporting events and publicity stunts like their own Flugtag ("flying day"), where Red Bull fans gather for an annual competition to crown the best homemade flying machines. Red Bull's eventual competitors, Monster, Rockstar, AMP, SoBe and others would follow suit in associating their brand with what has come to be known as "action sports" and a general aesthetic of "extreme"-ness and risk-taking.

In the past few years, parents, doctors, and the media have latched on to energy drinks as an object of criticism and health warnings. They have been cited by many health experts as dangerous to consumers, most of whom are teens and young adults.[13] They warn against consuming the large amounts of caffeine contained in energy drinks, especially in their popular combination with alcohol, as the caffeine's stimulating effects can lead drinkers to underestimate their level of alcohol intoxication. Red Bull and other brands have been specifically banned in some European Union countries because of concerns of consumer danger. However, as Chad

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[12] In what serves to be an apropos turn of events, Pine reports that heavily caffeinated and sugary Mountain Dew soda is the drink of choice among methamphetamine-producing and consuming "clans" (Pine, 364).
[13] See, for example "Caffeine—Watch Out For Energy Drinks" in May 2008's *Child Health Alert* and Fornicola, Fred. "Energy Drinks—What's the 'Buzz' About?" *Coach and Athletic Director*, May/June 2007.

Reissig et al point out, currently "the most lax regulatory requirements [are those] in the U.S., which is also the largest market for these products" (Reissig et al, 7). Excessive consumption of energy drinks causes a number of unpleasant symptoms, manifesting occasionally as acute caffeine intoxication and possibly even leading to death from cardiac arrest. Because soft drink companies fought (successfully) for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to consider caffeine a "flavor enhancer" in its products in the early '80s, soda continues to be regulated as food, not a drug. In addition, many energy drink manufacturers claim to be exempt from existing caffeine restrictions, arguing that their newer products should be considered "dietary supplements," which are also subject to different regulatory requirements than drugs (ibid, 2). However, researchers point out that energy drink advertisements aimed at young males largely promote the "psychoactive, performance-enhancing, and stimulant effects of energy drinks and appear to glorify drug use" (ibid, 4). Along with companies semi-euphemistically encouraging consumers to "party like a rock star" (Rockstar drinks, of course)[14] are those that deliberately adopt drug-related names, including a powdered drink additive called "Blow" that comes with a mirror and fake credit cards and the drink "Cocaine." Both of these drinks were condemned by the FDA and were brought under closer oversight by the agency because they appeared to be marketing their products "as an alternative to an illicit street drug, not [as] a dietary supplement" (ibid).

Sociologist Kathleen E. Miller has linked the consumption of these beverages and their association with an "extreme" aesthetic to a "constellation of health-compromising activities" that make up what is known as "problem behavior syndrome" (which includes taking sexual, alcohol or other narcotic, and legal risks), especially in white male undergraduate consumers (Miller 2008a, 491). And while few studies have yet to be done on energy drink consumers and

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[14] Rockstar, the market's number three brand, was founded by Russ Weiner, son of controversial conservative radio host Michael Savage. Savage's on-air tirades have led some who assume a direct corporate connection to advocate for a boycott of the company.

their motivations, in combination with these unsafe lifestyle choices, these large doses of caffeine may be attractive to broader "sensation-seeking" personalities (ibid, 495). Miller has looked at the ways in which sport-related identification in undergraduates can be connected to these risky behaviors in the figure of the "toxic jock." A "jock" identity is not the same as an "athlete" or "sports fan" identity, but rather subset of those groups more likely to be ego-driven in sports competition and especially susceptible to popular discourses of hegemonic masculinity. Miller asserts that these identities are not just constructed by formal team sport play, but through the socialization that surrounds athletics, including "informal play, spectatorship, and even tangentially sport-related leisure activities" (Miller 2008b, 72). She is also quick to point out that energy drinks easily fall into the problem behavior nexus "[b]ecause conventional marketing strategies explicitly tie energy drinks to an extreme or high-risk lifestyle" (Miller 2008a, 491), including sponsorship of action sports, hardcore rock bands, and the co-optation of militaristic rhetoric and aesthetics I will be discussing in the next chapter.

Miller, Reissig, and others gathered in June of 2009 to hold what was probably the first academic conference on energy drinks, *Energy Drinks: Where Science Meets Main Street*, sponsored by the SUNY Youth Sports Institute. Most of the presenters focused on the physiological effects of energy drinks as well as possible associated psychosocial concerns on young consumers. But American teenagers and college students are not the only population chugging energy drinks these days. It is interesting to note that though Americans drink the largest volume of energy drinks in the world, according to a 2006 study, Thailand—home of the original "Red Bull"—leads the world in *per capita* energy drink consumption (Reissig et al, 2). Also, in contrast to associations between the toxic jock mentioned above and his Rockstar-

sponsored action sports idols to be discussed below, Japanese genki[15] energy drinks often draw on corporate or workplace imagery to move products.

According to an investigation by James Roberson, these drinks have been popular in Japan since the 1960s, the market's first boom "coincid[ing] with the central period of Japan's postwar economic 'miracle,' when workers were called on (and required) to labor especially long hours" (Roberson, 268). Roberson also identifies this time as one of increasing acceptance of consumer culture. Even when genki drink ads feature masculine athleticism, the target market is that of the overworked middle-class "salaryman" who needs the strength and energy offered by these products to make successful business deals and act as the family breadwinner. Roberson makes it clear that though these men may sometimes participate in sporting activities to "prove themselves," we should not confuse them with mere "physical laborers"—genki drinks' targeted consumers are members of a "privileged male/masculine leisure class" (ibid, 377). The Japanese energy drink market, then, draws on appeals to virile masculine identity like their American counterparts, but in a more occupationally-oriented way. Although plenty of men (and women) use energy drinks on the job, an American commercial marketing campaign focusing on this connection is all but unthinkable. As is always the case in cross-cultural comparisons, the specific ideals and markers of the manly ideal inevitably vary.[16] And as Brenton J. Malin has explored in his *American Masculinity under Clinton*, even within one ostensibly unified culture, these ideals are constantly in flux and under negotiation.

ANXIETY, ANGER, AND AFFECTIVE MARKETING

Malin's work sets out to delve into the much-hyped "crisis of masculinity" in the 1990s. Before feminist-inspired (or -provoked, as the case may be) men's movements of the 1980s,

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[15] "*Genki* means (individual) energy, stamina, vitality, liveliness, cheerfulness" (Roberson, 381, note 1).
[16] This is not to mention the fact the genki drinks often contain nicotine in addition to caffeine (Roberson, 366).

gender was considered something that only women possessed, or really, *were*—despite the longtime cultural obsession with gaining and maintaining proper masculinity. Femininity marked women as visible aberrations from the "norm" of humanity (AKA men). When masculinity is allowed to function as a social and cultural force without notice, "This unmarked character is empowering for masculinity (in particular, white, middle-class, heterosexual masculinity) and disempowering for the others—the marked—alongside whom this unmarked identity is exercised" (Malin, 9). Belonging to a group considered to be the universal default is incredibly socially valuable, to say the least, but a growing number of feminist and feminist-informed scholars are working to expose masculinity as a true gender and one of a variety of human identities.

This late twentieth-century gender crisis is in many ways a product of the uncertainty of the Vietnam/civil rights period in American history. As Goldstein argues, Vietnam-era veterans were largely denied the glory of victory in a "good war," like the one their fathers had served in, and thus had not achieved the affirmation of masculinity traditionally bestowed upon those who serve in the military (Goldstein, 271). Whatever the political realities or extenuating circumstances may have been, U.S. military forces in Vietnam failed to win, and many veterans returned home with the weight of shame on their shoulders. These servicemen did not come home to a grateful nation. Once thought of a requirement for full masculine citizenship, military service had been denigrated in the eyes of the American public both through the realities of war on the ground in Southeast Asia, and by the social and political upheaval gripping the nation during this period. With the social denigration of the soldier-hero and of masculinity in general by second-wave feminists, many American men were at a loss to how they should conceive of and enact their masculinity.

Then came the "men's movement(s)." Many post-feminist-era men wanted to rebel against the stoic, hard masculinity of their fathers and sought to develop a new kind of masculinity, perhaps best embodied by author Robert Bly's "mythopoeic" men's movement that reached its peak in the early 1990s. Drawing on "mythology, faux traditionalism, appropriated Native American and nonindustrial ritualism, bowdlerized Jungian archetypes, and evocations of non-Western initiation," this group's adherents sought to collectively heal their psychological wounds (Kimmel, 208). As Kimmel notes, however, not all men's movements were quite so benign in their goals or methods. Advocates for "men's rights" or "fathers' rights" were often embittered divorced men who felt that typical divorce-court rulings like alimony or child support payments or denial of child custody were discriminatory towards men. These men often "felt punished for their attempts to live up to a traditional definition of masculinity that was unrealizable from the start" (ibid, 201). Their efforts at fulfilling the breadwinner's role seemed to have backfired when they were ordered to continue supporting their wives and children despite being forcibly separated from them. However, men's rights activists often claimed women's experiences as victims of domestic violence or sexual assault were exaggerated, claiming that men were just as often on the receiving end, or that the women in their lives would not *allow* them to act as child caregivers. These groups worked to reverse feminist legal achievements like no-fault divorces, restraining orders, and public recognition of gender-based violence. These confused attempts by modern American men to redefine or reclaim masculinity from nefarious feminists or the dehumanizing forces of the Industrial Revolution set the stage for the ambivalent masculine ideals of the 1990s.

As we have seen before in U.S. history, "a president's manhood can serve as a barometer of the nation's visions of masculinity more generally" (Malin, 15). Malin's investigation

examines how the conflicting and conflicted figure of President Clinton in the media during his term in office reflected a moment at which American men were anxiously considering whether to embrace the sensitive post-feminist "new man" or to cling to older, more traditional models of masculinity.[17] The infamous Starr Report alternatively portrays Clinton as emotionally indulgent and as an insensitive womanizer (ibid, 27). Was he the Ivy League-educated, effete, sax-playing bleeding heart liberal, or the Southern-born, good-old-boy, crassly working-class man's man? For as Malin emphasizes in his analysis of '90s television images of working-class men, "real American masculinity" is exercised by "men who know how to get their hands dirty and would rather experience the world than push papers across it" (ibid, 63). But like everything else masculine in the '90s, these images were often internally conflicted, torn between celebrating the salt-of-the-earth Ford truck driver and mocking him for his violations of middle-class decency, particularly his restraint in consumption (think Homer Simpson and donuts or Al Bundy and strip clubs).

Despite all this supposed anxiety over appropriate manly behavior, many men were simply angry. "Stiffed," as Susan Faludi puts it, by all the economic forces working against them and by decades of movements emphasizing the rights of women, racial minorities, homosexuals, many (white) men rebelled against "political correctness" and affirmative action. This anger at "stolen" privilege did not reflect reality, for "[a]lthough they still have most of the power and control in the world, they feel like victims" (Kimmel, 221). Rightwing militias, Neo-Nazi groups, and others made (and make) up what Kimmel identifies as a reactionary "White Wing" of society—though these are only some of the more extreme examples. This movement is

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[17] Malin also analyzes the conflicting film roles played by a number of action stars. For example, he discusses how in the figure of Steven Seagal, the actor's sensitive, "new age" persona is often at odds with the violent hyper-masculinity demonstrated by his martial arts prowess (Malin, 32). Most fascinating for me, of course, is the fact that Steven Seagal has his own line of Asian-inspired energy drinks: Steven Seagal's Lightning Bolt. The product, which Seagal himself is said to have "researched for many years," promises to give you "chi energy" to "fight fatigue" (www.lightningdrink.com).

"composed almost entirely of downwardly mobile lower-middle-class young white men" (ibid, 229). Haunted by their phantom masculine status, and unable to regain it in the workplace or in the equality-focused political sphere, again, these men turned to leisure-time pursuits to enact and achieve their gendered identities. But for many white men, as Kyle Kusz has noted, the traditional arena of sports participation and spectatorship held less pleasure than it once had. Professional sports were increasingly dominated by black athletes, prompting *Sports Illustrated* to ask in 1997, "Whatever Happened to the White Athlete?" (Kusz, ix).

Kusz credits the explosion in press and popularity of so-called "extreme" sports[18] in the early to mid-'90s to a kind of backlash against traditional sporting activities where white men could no longer reign supreme. Achievement through individual sports led to the emergence of a handful of celebrated figures. Though as he emphasizes, white athletes he sees as fulfilling a "teen idol" or "rebellious youth" media role (some examples he discusses are Andre Agassi—who recently admitted to meth use—Tony Hawk, and even Lance Armstrong) have been culturally commodified and essentially defanged. These white male rebels' "alternative" styles and behavior can become acceptable (and lucrative),[19] but only as long as the athlete's identity is "completely mixed with meanings which are aligned with and confirm normative white, middle class, masculine values, practices, and norms even as he appears to resist such things" (Kusz, 28). The young white men of Generation X, then Y, and then whatever is supposed to come next who spend their weekends getting chased away from suburban parks and downtowns on their skateboards may view their own behavior as transgressive or even "anti-social," but as David J. Leonard points out, they can only really get away with it because they are usually exempt from

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[18] "Extreme" is a media-made moniker. Journalist David Browne explains that "within the scene," "action sports" is the preferred nomenclature (Browne, 187).

[19] Tellingly, this is the same era during which grunge and other "alternative" styles of rock music became popular, perhaps in part in response to the dominance of black artists in the increasingly popular genre of rap.

the "potential for repression and violence that are often experienced by youth of color who defy societal expectations" (Leonard, 99). So even while snowboarding, BMX biking, motocross, and other action sports certainly carry the risks of physical injury (not unlike the bodily sacrifices offered up by enlisted soldiers), their enactment in white homosocial preserves are actually incredibly culturally *safe*. Among other men, action sports athletes are free to act unabashedly "male," and there is no need to be politically correct or accommodate groups of people from different backgrounds.[20] In addition, despite the fact that some of these alternative activities (particularly winter sports) may require expensive equipment and/or access to certain exclusive spaces for training, action sports enthusiasts like to emphasize that their stars are firmly entrenched in the authenticity of the working class, "not the captains of the sailing team nor the honor society students" (Browne, 275).

In addition to acting as an exclusive male preserve for unguarded behavior, Kusz explains that with the growth of media attention surrounding action sports, including but not limited to the first ESPN X Games (originally called the "Xtreme Games," until they found out it was not cool to do so) in 1995, a larger national and national*ist* rhetoric developed about and around these activities. Action sports athletes saw themselves as enacting long-time American fantasies of the self-made man who valued "rugged individualism, conquering new frontiers, and achieving individual progress" (Kusz, 63). It was not long before various consumer goods brands realized that action sports was a potential goldmine for co-opting the coveted white male of the 18-34 (and younger!) marketplace segment. Taking everything from disposable razors to fast food tacos and labeling them "extreme" was an annoying and highly *American* trend in the '90s. Even the U.S. Marines took notice, setting up recruitment booths at the X Games; one year giving

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[20] This is not, of course, to say that people of color (or women, for that matter) do not participate in these sports, but by sheer numbers alone, they tend to be the exceptions to the rule of "extreme"-ness belonging to white men and may more often appear as token members of these social groups.

away skateboards to the winners of a chin-up contest (Browne, 247). But the real trailblazer in this regard was PepsiCo's Mountain Dew brand.

Though Pepsi does not allow Mountain Dew to talk about its extra caffeine (in comparison to most non-energy drink sodas) in advertisements, the brand's marketers wanted to connect ideas of excitement and thrill with cynical Gen-X slackers and their teenage counterparts of the early '90s. As one former Pepsi executive told David Browne, "There's a caffeine rush you get from Mountain Dew that's very similar to adrenaline, and that was the metaphor they were driving" (Browne, 178). Connecting action sports and generalized "extreme" imagery to the "flavor-enhancing" effects of caffeine right at the dawn of ESPN's mainstreaming of the sporting genre gave Mountain Dew a serious head start on its beverage competitors. In 2001, Pepsi launched AMP Energy drinks under the Mountain Dew brand to compete with the growing popularity of Red Bull. Then, in 2005, the brand threw their extreme credentials behind their own Dew Action Sports Tour in cooperation with NBC and MTV.

The Dew Tour and its winter sports counterpart point to the ways in which "subversive" or "alternative" sports were—unsurprisingly—effectively commodified and adapted to the commercial model of traditional sports with regular "seasons" and corporate sponsorships that allowed a lucky few to actually make a living off of their athletic pursuits. The Dew Tour's participating competitors are themselves sponsored by companies like Monster and its energy rivals Rockstar, Red Bull, and Full Throttle, each of which have built on Mountain Dew's success in connecting a caffeine rush with the rush of playing and watching risky alternative sports. And even those action sports purists or old-timers (like, from the early '90s) who lament the loss of the genre's "punk rock" subversive appeal have to admit that the cash flow in and around events like the X Games and the Dew Tour has been the biggest factor in getting sports

like snowboarding recognized as "legitimate" (featured in the Winter Olympics for the first time in 1998) and in turning two-time snowboarding gold medalist and skateboarding champion Shaun White[21] and his mentor, skateboarding veteran Tony Hawk into household names (not to mention multi-millionaires) through the massive franchising of their eponymous video games (Browne, 9).

In a 2008 article in the *Journal of Sport Management*, Mauricio Ferreira et al look at how energy drink companies, riffing on these types of identification with a supposed subculture, use sponsorships as a positioning strategy that allows them to "enhance brand preference among specific, targeted consumer groups" whose emotional investment in the sponsored events is ripe for exploitation (Ferreira et al, 735). Red Bull, of course, got in the action sports game quite early with its sponsorship of wacky and dangerous "athletic" events. Back in 2003, the company's marketing director Norbert Kraihamer told *Sports Illustrated* of their sponsored athletes, "Uniforms make us suspicious. Extreme sports are better suited to expressing the individual" (Lidz, n.p.). This widely celebrated hyper-individualist persona has led many to refer to these activities as "lifestyle sports," as they require participation in the attendant aesthetics and exclusive socializing whether on or off the hill or the half pipe. By Naomi Klein's count, identification as a lifestyle means that action sports have successfully built themselves a "brand." And as new energy drink brands entered the market, they eagerly hopped in line to prove their caffeine- and taurine-loaded products were the most non-conformist of them all (or at least that they had the most caffeine or came in the biggest can). The Monster Beverage Company (currently a subsidiary of Hansen's Natural) came on the scene in 2002 and quickly established itself as one of the most adept brands at penetrating the action sports-affiliated marketplace.

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[21] Shaun White is a Red Bull-sponsored athlete.

Monster's commitment to sponsoring athletes and fostering energy drink and action sports-related lifestyles is demonstrated by the development of their Monster Army website. The Monster Army is a brand group established through Hookit.com, "the largest and most active social network for lifestyle sports," which brings together athletes and brands for sponsorship opportunities (Hookit.com).[22] I will be discussing the explicitly militaristic aspects of the Monster Army and its place within the growing economy of free digital labor in chapter 3, but for now we can see that its sponsorship of professional action sports athletes (the "generals") and the successful construction of a build brand-based community are an important part of Monster's overall marketing scheme. In a demonstration of what Henry Jenkins calls a new "affective economics," the star extreme athletes who fill the upper ranks of the Monster Army legitimize the company's presence on the action sports scene. As Jenkins describes, more and more, "Marketers seek to shape brand reputations, not through an individual transaction but through the sum total of interactions with the customer—an ongoing process that increasingly occurs across a range of different media 'touch points' (Jenkins, 63). Monster builds consumer-brand relationships through associations between its products and the professional sporting events that help fill the "reserves" and ranks of amateur and semi-pro athletes. Of course, these affective bonds between consumers and a particular brand or product only make sense if we examine the ways in which America's version of late capitalism encourages male identity formation through consumer choices.

YOU ARE WHAT YOU CONSUME

In contrast to the Japanese genki ads that draw on men's white-collar occupational identities, most consumer products aimed at American men attempt to provoke identification

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[22] In early 2010, Hookit was the new name launched by the site previously known as Loop'd Action Sports Network (they got sued out of that one), which was previously known as SponsorHouse.

with a more physical, embodied masculinity. This is not a new development of course. As Michael Kimmel mentions, turn-of-the-century manufacturers of toiletries like shaving paraphernalia had emphasize their products' connections to manliness and hard work in order to avoid the taint of femininity that had been encoded in the rhetoric of consumption. For a time, urban department stores even established separate, gendered entrances so as to "ease the psychological threat to men entering such spheres there to engage in such feminizing activities as shopping" (Kimmel, 84). Thankfully, entrances to public buildings are no longer segregated, but advertising is still clearly not a unisex world.

In an examination of discourses surrounding food and masculinity in men's fitness magazines, Fabio Parasecoli identifies a strong thread of desire to control "not only one's body appearance, but also to curb one's desires and appetites" (Parasecoli, 32). Warnings against the "unbridled pleasure" of sweets that can ruin all of a man's dieting and exercising efforts (softening the body) lead experts to recommend that you have your girlfriend hide them from you (ibid, 34). In addition, despite the obsessive focus on food, men's magazines and their advertisers perpetuate men's aversion to the feminine tasks of grocery shopping and cooking. Instead, the food and "health supplement" industries[23] exploit this fear by offering quick, convenient solutions that keep kitchen time to a minimum. Getting men to believe in a body-changing miracle contained in a can or a powder helps turn them into "better consumers of high added value, hence more expensive, products" (ibid, 28). Energy drinks follow these conventions, as they are far more expensive compared to regular soda or a cup of coffee, but also promise (and seem actually) to be more effective in promoting alertness, if not necessarily great promoters of overall health. Clearly, Monster's focus on men's bodies participating in action sports has far more to do with developing a certain image than it does with physical fitness.

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[23] Though Parasecoli does not specifically mention them, I would include energy drinks squarely in this category.

Not all of Monster's pitches are focused on the physiological aspects of manhood, however—the company is capable of drawing more subtle associations with positive cultural ideas of manhood. Because of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the perennially masculine figure of the soldier has gone under positive revaluation. In many ways, it does not seem a coincidence that energy drink sales went up exponentially at the exact same time post-9/11 political rhetoric emphasizing manly martial virtues carried the day. In the next chapter, I will examine how Monster and other energy drink companies have incorporated militaristic aesthetics and rhetoric into their marketing strategies in order to capture the attention of young men. While some attempt to appeal to traditional ideals of patriotism and service, others associate the risks involved with military service to edgy action sports-oriented lifestyles. These varying methods are particularly interesting when juxtaposed with the recruitment strategies of the actual U.S. military. Whether a toxic jock, a potential recruit, or just a devotee of the post-9/11 cult of heroism, professional advertisers expect young men to respond the masculine prestige and excitement associated with the military and war. The next chapter will examine how political messages inevitably become embedded in this marketing, and what those messages can tell us about the current state of American masculinity.

CHAPTER 2
SELLING MASCULINITY, ONE CAN AT A TIME:
WAR AND GENDER IN POST-9/11 AMERICAN CULTURE

The American energy drink market has exploded in the last decade, right alongside disheartening nightly news reports about the United States' ongoing wars in the Middle East. Afghanistan and Iraq are the first extended conflicts to be fought by the all-volunteer force— meaning that the burdens of waging war largely fall onto a small segment of the population, military personnel and their families. However, the figure of the soldier or recent combat veteran has gained new life in popular culture including television characters (*Numb3rs*, *Mercy*, and many, many more), video games (discussed below), and even beverage marketing campaigns. Taking into account Goldstein's assertions of how gender and war sustain one another, I will be examining how the militarized culture of the U.S. manipulates the concepts of masculinity and military heroism. In addition, I explore how beverage companies and military recruiters use similar strategies to recruit young men and how the marketing of various energy drinks reinscribe cultural patterns and themes ascendant in the post-9/11 era of war.

A number of factors have added to the current heightened state of national security, but two large (and seemingly contradictory) ideological forces that came to the forefront during the Bush administration were neoconservatism and neoliberalism. Wendy Brown defines neoconservatism as a "literally unholy alliance" between a broad spectrum of conservative groups who tend to agree that state should be tasked with "setting the moral-religious compass for society, and indeed for the world" (W. Brown, 697). Neoconservatism is espoused in turns by those who support a strong military, evangelical Christians, pro-Israeli groups, and enthusiastic Cold War holdouts. In contrast, neoliberalism is a market-based ideology that opposes government regulation of business and calls for the state itself to "construct and construe itself in

market terms" (ibid, 694). In the past half-century or so, this *laissez faire* view has been popular among Republican and Democratic administrations alike, and has been carried out through public policy by influential free-market gurus like Milton Freedman, Alan Greenspan, Larry Summers, and others. As Brown points out, the uneasy alliance between the proponents of a "business model of the state in one case and a theological model of the state in the other" (ibid, 697) that has been trying to hold together since at least the Reagan Revolution of 1980 in some ways reached full fruition in the wake of 9/11.

Despite differences in worldview, the use of military power to enforce American interests is often were neoliberals and neoconservatives come together. However, as Brown describes, often "what critics loosely refer to as imperialist behavior veers between commitments to corporate interests and free trade on one side and statist moral crusades at odds with these interests on the other," leading to uneven foreign policy results (ibid, 698). Taken together though, they help justify what would ultimately become known as the "Bush Doctrine." Through a slow but steady creep of policy supported especially by advisors like Albert Wohlsetter and others at the conservative RAND Corporation think tank, the United States found itself in a place where "it could as a matter of routine employ force proactively to thwart plausible aggressors and overturn regimes that refused to abide by American norms"—whether economic or moral (Bacevich, 165). Free market economists have influenced the figure of the consumer-citizen (discussed below) and were instrumental to the conversion to an all-volunteer military force, among other developments. Brown argues that consumerism has a depoliticizing and de-democratizing effect on civic institutions, leaving the citizenry open to exploitation by government-sponsored authoritative religious claims to moral truth. A perfect example, she claims, is the yellow ribbon "Support Our Troops" magnets "often affixed to the hind end of

SUVs and minivans" so popular in the last decade (W. Brown, 709). The command-form syntax of this consumer-bought sentiment stuck to a consumer-bought vehicle leaves effectively no room for debate or nuance. As I will discuss below, Brown sees in this item a peculiar "vacuity" which "expresses the very lack of action or participation that is contemporary citizenship, the substitution of ordinary family and consumer life for democratic participation" (ibid).

Drawing on Sherry's work on cultural militarism we examined in the introduction, former Army officer and Vietnam veteran Andrew Bacevich argues that the recent (re-)emergence of overt and enthusiastic militarism is not simply a function of post-9/11 global realities. Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union, the executive branch under Clinton (and hence, the military under his control) did little to stray from its Cold War role of superpower and international policeman. By the time George W. Bush was in office in 2001, "the terrorists succeeded only in reinvigorating the conviction that destiny summons the United States, the one true universal nation, to raise up a universal civilization based on American norms" (Bacevich, 13). Bacevich also points out that one of the ways militarism can be upheld as the status quo by everyday citizens is the perpetuation of myths about soldierly heroism. To criticize "the troops" is taboo, as their portrayal as liberators and patriots maintains the United States' pose as an innocent (and wronged) party, avenging the breaching of its borders by evildoers. The beatification of soldiers not only contributes to recruitment efforts, but it keeps civilians from asking too many questions ("Just put a yellow ribbon magnet on your bumper!"). If we have faith in the valor and virtue of our troops, we can believe that "the soldiers whom we hire to do the nation's dirty work but whom we do not know are, in fact, bringing peace and light to troubled corners of the earth rather than pushing ever outward the perimeter of an American empire" (ibid, 98). This fight against cognitive dissonance would come to the forefront in

particular with the United States' invasion of Iraq and the invocation of "9/11" and "terrorism" as justification.

MASCULINE HEROISM, 9/11, AND THE CONSUMER CITIZEN

After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, a palpable sense of fear permeated much of the American political landscape, accompanied by a scaly underbelly of shame, especially for American men. As Susan Faludi points out, not only had our physical borders and sense of safety been penetrated by hostile enemies, but especially in a culture where masculinity is represented by activity (versus passivity), "the fact that [spectators] could do nothing but watch from a safe remove only added to the ignominy" (Faludi 2007, 154). Thus, the United States had been deftly emasculated, for a man is not masculine by nature of biology, but the state "must be asserted through repetition, in words and in *actions*" (Ducat, 5, emphasis added). The immediate aftermath of the attacks "facilitated the revivification of 'heroic' manhood," focusing on the performed masculinity of active New York firemen, policemen, and other rescue workers (Faludi, 227). Americans rallied around the flag, and President George W. Bush enthusiastically stepped into what Faludi sees as a "Daniel Boone"-type role. She argues that one of the main consequences of 9/11 was the triggering of "a search for a guardian of the homestead, a manly man, to be sure, but one particularly suited to protecting and providing for the isolated American family in perilous situations" (Faludi, 148). The process of cultural remasculinization demonstrated through the "War on Terror" and the explosion of the domestic security industry "enabled the federal government, at least temporarily, to cast off its Democratic-era image as an engulfing, infantilizing, and ultimately castrating maternal caretaker and refashion itself as a stern paternal protector and avenger of the nation's shared trauma" (Ducat, 231).[24]

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[24] With the pressures of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq piling up over the next few years, the 2004 presidential election in particular would be become about these politics of fear and protection. This was the perfect year for the

While politicians and fire fighters were framed in terms of active and protective heroism, civilian outpourings of patriotism in response to the terrorist attacks were often redirected to the marketplace. Shortly after the Twin Towers fell, President George W. Bush urged consumers to keep spending, to take a trip to Disney World, to buy a car. Framing the situation in patriotic terms, he declared, "We cannot let the terrorists achieve the objective of frightening our nation to the point where we don't… conduct business, where people don't shop" (quoted in Scanlon, 175). This conflation of consumer spending and the obligations of citizenship are nothing new to Americans. As Lizabeth Cohen argues in *A Consumers' Republic*, economic growth spurred by mass consumption has been portrayed as a patriotic duty since (at least) World War II. In addition to subscribing to their role *as* consumer-citizens, Americans turn to consumption itself in their expression of patriotism. Massive sales of American flags and World Trade Center (WTC) and Pentagon memorabilia characterized the ensuing days after September 11 as part of an enactment of what Marita Sturken calls a patriotic "comfort culture." She looks at the role kitsch and mass production have played in the construction of memory surrounding the Oklahoma City bombing and the WTC, and argues that this comfort culture "functions as a form of depoliticization and as a means to confront loss, grief, and fear through processes that disavow politics" (Sturken, 6). For example, the act of buying an FDNY teddy bear (ostensibly a child's toy and symbol of comfort) and placing it at the impromptu memorial at Manhattan's Ground

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Democrats to nominate Vietnam veteran John Kerry. Despite representing "the Mommy Party," held responsible for the untrustworthy institutions of Big Government, and despite being an "elite" liberal politician from Massachusetts, John Kerry polled unusually well with veterans early on in the race (Richardson, 134). So instead of refusing to play the "more manly than thou" game being propagated by security-minded Republican strategists, Kerry jumped right in, posing with hunting rifles and emphasizing his military experience (Faludi, 151). But by attempting to legitimate his candidacy through these means, Kerry's position was particularly vulnerable when his military credentials were brought under attack. Many blamed his ultimate loss on his campaign's failure to quickly react to and refute criticisms of Kerry's record by the conservative-funded Swift Boat Veterans for Truth.

Zero plays an important role in constructing a national sense of innocence that leaves pre- and post- attack political exigencies unexamined.

Jeffrey Melnick argues that idea of "9/11" itself has become a "cultural readymade;" a bundle of unexamined meanings and associations that can be dropped in or alluded to, serving as a framework or backdrop for any number of cultural productions and/or political purposes (Melnick, 5). I will be exploring how the assumptions associated with "9/11" and the ensuing wars provide the context for the marketing of a number of different energy drinks. And in the (overtly) political world, despite the fact that many observers—especially neoconservatives— had agitated for the final deposition of Saddam Hussein since the first Gulf War, what made the actual 2003 invasion of Iraq possible was an appeal to "9/11" and the horrors of terrorism. In 2002, Bush administration officials made "candid disclosure[s] that the September 11 anniversary had been envisioned as 'a centerpiece of the strategy' that would help 'sell' the idea of an Iraqi war to the American people" (Heller, 2).

SELLING MILITARISM (AND THE MILITARY) SINCE 2001

Many have argued that in combination with neoconservative saber-rattling, neoliberal economic proponents pushing for the opening of ever more markets can be blamed for the increased militarization of American culture. Neoliberals can also be credited, perhaps somewhat ironically, with the development of the all-volunteer armed forces. In her comprehensive look at the market forces involved in the Army's volunteer recruitment efforts, *America's Army*, Beth Bailey traces how obligations of citizenship represented by the draft came to be replaced by free market logic. Under these assumptions, potential recruits could make "decisions based on rational understandings of their own economic best interest" (Bailey, 4). However, Woodruff et al point out that since the United States' move to the all-volunteer force at the end of the Vietnam

War, "the propensity of American youth to serve in the military" has been sharply declining (Woodruff et al, 354). The army in particular has had trouble filling its ranks, especially during a time of war wherein naval and air forces have played a very small role. Even among those who do serve, only about 30 percent of them wanted or expected to join the military when they were in high school. "Obviously, the army's manpower demands are being met by employing a large number of low-propensity soldiers" who are targeted by military recruiters and government-funded advertising campaigns (Woodruff et al, 358). So how do we get young people to fight our wars for us?

Bailey points to a brief shift in advertising strategy at the outset of the Iraq War that appealed to duty, honor, and service. However, these appeals have never been successful, and the army "would soon enough return to its usual recruiting campaign—and as Operation Iraqi Freedom became an extended conflict, struggle to meet its recruiting goals" (Bailey, ix). These "usual" campaign methods focus on "promises of individual opportunity: marketable skills, money for college, achievement, adventure, and personal transformation" (ibid). And though practical financial benefits certainly influence many recruits' decisions to enlist, a National Research Council study published in 2003 found that the biggest motivating factors fell under the category of "patriotic adventure" (Woodruff et al, 355). Melissa T. Brown identifies in army recruitment ads a version of soldiering masculinity meant to appeal to "regular guys" (as opposed to the elite warrior image presented by the Marine Corps). And despite the expansion of women's military roles due to manpower shortages and an ambiguous "front line" of combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, "in the recruitment materials, their position has actually retracted" in recent years (M. Brown, 33). Clearly, the main targets of recruitment efforts are young *men* to whom this patriotic adventure might appeal.

The all-volunteer force (AVF) literally has to "sell military service alongside soap and soft drinks in the consumer marketplace" (Bailey, xi). But the armed forces themselves are not the only ones using military themes to sell their "products." Again, the target market for energy drink companies is that of teenage and young adult men: essentially the same demographic that the military itself looks to for recruitment—and who are (or soon will be) eligible for conscription under the Selective Service Act. From on-base marketing to recruiting partnerships to watered-down but still militaristic rhetoric, various beverage companies have attempted to cash in on the renewed cultural currency of the soldier-hero since 9/11.

SUPPORTING THE TROOPS

Perhaps most telling of this marketplace convergence is the Re-Up Energy Drink,[25] formulated by former Marine Michael Spearman for his Patriot Beverage Company. Spearman started the company in 2007, and since then has traveled across the country, campaigning to get cases of his cans onto domestic military bases for sale to the troops (Freedman, n.p.). Each branch of the armed services has a different colored camouflage can (pronouncing "I Am What I Drink") and parts of the company's proceeds go to the Injured Marine Semper Fi Fund and the Wounded Warrior Project veterans' charities. Spearman's website, Reupdrink.com, features a montage of professional-looking photos of various troops in action, accompanied by dramatic orchestra music and the yells of marching soldiers.[26] Though Spearman's stint in the Marine Corps in the late 1980s was far shorter than his career as a police officer or his forays into private security for celebrities like Will Smith, he has framed his marketing campaign in terms of his veteran status, which has allowed him a more welcome audience than he might have otherwise been granted trying to get military installations to purchase his product (Freedman, n.p.). Re-Up

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[25] "Re-up" is a slang term meaning to reenlist, or to re-supply oneself with drugs (urbandictionary.com). I am pretty sure Spearman means the former.

[26] A suspiciously high number of these photographs seem to have been taken during particularly scenic sunsets.

just may represent the pinnacle of capitalist branding efforts. Not only have the armed forces worked with civilian marketers to "brand" themselves for recruiting purposes, but now a former Marine is exploiting that brand identification to sell energy drinks back to those who have already been successfully "sold" on it. Re-Up's mere existence seems to fulfill the free market's greatest potential—whether one views that in a hopeful or a cynical light.

Ol' Glory, another energy drink, sets itself up as superior to those effete snow boarders and skydivers touted by most of the big beverage companies: real courage means serving one's country. This type of patriotic masculine posturing has long been a staple of country music. The elder President Bush utilized these associations to promote an image of himself as an adopted Texan with "down home" or "earthy" values, claiming that "when I want to feel a surge of patriotism or turn nostalgic or even when I need a little free advice about Saddam Hussein, I turn to country music" (quoted in Hart, 159). His son George W. Bush worked even harder to eschew his family's patrician background, appealing to his lifelong love of country music—a connection that came in handy in the heady super-patriotic days after 9/11 and the run-up to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Country stars like Toby Keith (musically) threatened America's enemies with a "boot in your ass" because "It's the American way" (quoted in Hart, 160). According to William Hart, "Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue" was only released on CD because Pentagon leaders encouraged Keith to do so (Hart, 166).[27] In a mutually beneficial 2004 exchange, he was allowed to shoot the music video for his song "American Soldier" at California's Edwards Air Force Base and the National Guard got to use the song for two promotional videos (ibid, 167).

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[27] The 2008 film *Stop-Loss* (which could probably be accurately described as anti-war), about a traumatized Army sergeant is forced back to a second tour in Iraq through a bureaucratic loophole features a core group of soldiers cheerfully singing Keith's song in a "home video" from early in their first deployment. Later on, in a telling juxtaposition, one of the PTSD-riddled main characters sings the iconic "We'll stick a boot your ass" section of the song immediately before the scene where it is revealed he has killed himself, distraught that his alcoholic and violent tendencies might keep him from redeployment.

Various country stars have made public appearances with conservative pundits, including at the Glenn Beck-organized "Rallies for America," which were characterized by critics as "pro-war" and defended by proponents as "pro-troops." Manly country artists Toby Keith, Ray Stevens, and others were cheered on by government and military officials when they promoted "forcible sodomy as the nation's preferred method of payback" (Hart, 160). Country music fans, conservative political organizations and figures, and members of the government and military brass welcome metaphors of sexualized violence as part of appropriate patriotic sentiment, especially as they are offered up by male musicians. However, media backlash was quick and harsh when Texas' Dixie Chicks bucked country music conventions by (indirectly) criticizing Bush's push for the invasion of Iraq in 2003. However, the outrage over lead singer Natalie Maines' onstage comment that "We're ashamed Bush is from Texas," seems outsized in comparison, but as feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe has pointed out, militarization can only be successful if women submit to and enact their supportive roles. In contrast, appropriately feminine behavior was demonstrated by other country artists like Martina McBride and Sarah Evans who performed at patriotic, pro-Bush events and were hailed by the likes of Fox News luminary Sean Hannity, who holds annual country music-dominated "Freedom Concerts" (Hart, 163).

Another institution of the American heartland to step up its claims to patriotism after 9/11 was big-box king Wal-Mart. Sam Walton's Arkansas-based company features in-store signs exhorting customers to "Buy America," though Wal-Mart itself is at the forefront of retail globalization and most of the products it carries are not, in fact, made in the United States (Scanlon, 186). However, many continue to think of it as quintessentially American, and the retailer sold hundreds of thousands of American flags in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. In her

recent book *To Serve God and Wal-Mart*, Bethany Moreton argues that evangelical Christians and free-market enthusiasts formed the crucial ideological base behind the explosive growth of Wal-Mart and Sun Belt economies in general in the postwar era. Their conservative religious, economic, and political motivations were key to Wal-Mart's success in cultivating a family-values-centered business empire, powered by mostly rural, white, female employees (Moreton, 2009). These strong philosophical associations have been espoused and exploited by Walton and his corporation, bringing us to the point at which perhaps the best way to prove patriotic fervor is to pick up red, white, and blue supplies at that all-American one-stop shopping depot. Jennifer Scanlon criticizes this linkage between displaying the stars and stripes and presumed love of country, however. The (seemingly) simple act of displaying a Wal-Mart-bought flag, decal, or bumper sticker (made in China) can get caught up in a more complex—if perhaps rhetorically oversimplified—web of political meanings. The ubiquity of post-9/11 and wartime flag-flying eventually "mandated the equation between patriotism and war. Patriots, who flew flags, also supported 'our troops'; those opposed to the war, according to this definition, did not support the troops and simply were not patriots" (ibid, 181). Ol' Glory Energy Drink founder Don Sessions was drawing on precisely these sentiments when he set out to sell his own patriotic beverage.

NICHE MARKETING AND "AMERICA'S ENERGY DRINK"

"X-treme sports are for sissies," declares the Ol' Glory Energy Drink website, explaining why their corporation does not sponsor action sports athletes or competitions like other energy drink companies (Ol' Glory, n.p.). Instead, they "support the ultimate sport: defending America." Founded by a patriotic Oklahoman, Ol' Glory sets itself up as the most masculine *and* American beverage out there: it comes in a can decorated by the U.S. flag, the Pledge of Allegiance, and National Guard recruitment information (sometimes also a bald eagle). The flash video at Ol'

Glory's homepage shows photos of military training juxtaposed with men participating in action sports, accompanied by a hard rock soundtrack and featuring text that undercuts the supposed appeal of the "extreme":

> Here at Ol' Glory we think that those so-called x-treme sports are for sissies. So what does that mean? Let's break it down. We don't support parachuters… but paratroopers. We don't care how fast you can drive, but how much drive you got. We believe the only kickflip that counts is the kickflip that brings your opponent to their knees. Winning isn't about who gets there first; winning is about who gets there the strongest. And we don't need bikini models when we've got role models. And really anyone can fall from the sky, but it takes skill to fly through it. And that's why we don't sponsor x-treme sports. We support the ultimate sport: defending America's freedom. Ol' Glory: By Americans, for Americans, for America. America's Energy Drink" (Ol' Glory, punctuation added).

At some point, it becomes unclear whether the company is selling cans of energy drink or the masculine prestige afforded by performing military service. Luckily, Ol' Glory does not force its consumers to make the choice.

Considering its discount price (each costs 99 cents, as opposed to most 16-ounce energy drinks, which usually retail upwards of two dollars each) and the no-frills design of the can, Ol' Glory has clearly decided to concentrate its marketing funds in their web content. This flash video uses photographic slides in an almost call-and-response fashion (e.g., parachutists replaced by paratroopers, a bikini model by a role model) to present what many energy drink consumers might consider "cool," and to reframe it in a way that portrays it as frivolous at best, and perhaps even disloyal to one's country. While some of the pro-military shots seem to appeal to the action-seeker (jumping out of planes, hand-to-hand combat, flying jets), the dismissal of the ubiquitous energy drink bikini model is made complete when her photo is replaced by a man in uniform crouching down to hug his (presumably) young daughter. This back-to-back comparison not only takes a shot at other beverage companies for using clichéd sex appeal to market their

brands, it portrays Ol' Glory's consumers as responsible *adult* men, fathers who fulfill their obligations to their country and to their families. This is an Ol' Glory drinker: a man who is not swayed by pictures of scantily-clad ladies, but by the call to serve his nation.

Inspired by founder Don Sessions' interaction with Oklahoma-based service members deployed to Iraq in 2004, Ol' Glory has partnered up with the National Guard itself to make recruits out of its consumers. Much like Spearman and Re-Up, Ol' Glory and its distributor, American Beverage, LLC have pledged a "commitment" to the military (even beyond printing the National Guard website on the can). Part of the proceeds of each bargain-priced can goes to Operation Homefront, a volunteer organization that "provides emergency assistance and morale to our troops, to the families they leave behind and to wounded warriors when they return home" (American Beverage, n.p.).

The company espouses rhetoric that appeals to consumers who are proud of God and Country and prefer Ol' Glory to the more expensive but better-known Red Bull or Rockstar (both of course known for their sponsorship of those sissy "x-treme" sports). Sessions (who is in his seventies) has made an effort to present Ol' Glory as "America's Energy Drink," saying, "A couple of years ago, they were thinking about taking God out of the pledge, so I put it really large on the can. I figured if you don't like the pledge, don't buy the can" (Evans, n.p.). The lower price and in-your-face patriotism of Ol' Glory's marketing indicate the deliberate targeting of (predominantly white) pro-military, working-class consumers. These appeals place this product within a larger conservative rhetoric about aggressive nationalism ("love it or leave it"), displays of patriotism, and who counts as a "real American." Stephen Ducat draws a connection between many blue-collar white men's espousing of conservative views and the tension caused by "the 'feminizing' experience of being at the bottom in an economic hierarchy, or at the lowest rung in

a workplace command structure" (Ducat, 171). Sherry points to a Vietnam-era example, when the film *The Deer Hunter* helped transform prisoners of war into "crucial symbols of American manhood" to white working-class men (Sherry, 262).

The Ol' Glory website's video's direct challenge to the masculine credentials of those who participate in action sports is a direct affront to energy drink industry conventions. The big three of Red Bull, Monster, and Rockstar are all heavily involved in action sports sponsorships; so clearly Ol' Glory is attempting to corner a different segment of the market. While still probably appealing to mostly young men, Ol' Glory asserts that militarized masculinity is superior to any other incarnation of gender expression and that "real men" are willing to put down their skateboards and take up arms for America. Another company, Ace Energy, attempts to target yet another subset of the market—that of classic car enthusiasts and vintage hipster types—through a nostalgic militarism.

Ace is a subsidiary of Hansen's Beverage (also Monster's parent company).[28] Its name and aesthetics draw on WWII-era fighter planes and pin-up girls. Each can is made to appear like a "bullet riddled cockpit" and features the "alluring imagery" of a classic pin-up girl appearing in front of an ace from a deck of cards (Ace). Ace does not frame itself as anti-action sports, but instead proactively sponsors classic car shows frequented by tattooed rockabilly and greaser throwbacks and their Bettie Page-lookalike girlfriends. Its use of a shot-up airplane, Ace says, "directly connects with the danger, excitement and honor of military fascination." Ace is consciously trading on a specific sentimental take on WWII that will appeal to a nostalgia-focused demographic, exploiting the appeal of iconic ace pilot war heroes and the beautiful,

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[28] Ace has not updated its website since 2007, but nowhere have I found evidence that they no longer make the drinks.

scantily-clad women whose pictures they painted on the noses of their planes in order to sell modern-day energy drinks.

Despite the cans' "bullet holes," though, Ace does not acknowledge the actual violence of wartime. In fact, compared to most energy drink companies, Ace's overall marketing rhetoric is extremely low-key, far less aggressive than most of its competitors—presumably a strategic decision made in order to draw in the right kind of consumers. The website appeals to working people who need energy to work hard in the "American tradition," claiming that Hansen's "knows what the public wants, because it is a company that is out where the people are, doing what the people are doing" (ibid). Like Ol' Glory, Ace's manufacturers are committed to an image that it is made up of everyday people who work hard, who like to participate in working-class manly pursuits like working on old cars and looking at pictures of attractive ladies in 1940s fashions. While Ace does not engage in the type of patriotic or pro-troops rhetoric of some of the other companies we have examined, its appeal is based on widespread cultural nostalgia for WWII as the "good war," thus adeptly sidestepping any problematic associations with modern-day soldiering.

So far we have seen energy drink manufacturers who make their drinks for the troops, or at least to support them, for patriots, working men and women, and for people who wish they had lived several decades ago. Each of these campaigns capitalizes on certain positive associations with the military, and quite directly address this connection within the advertising itself. It is particularly intriguing that the action sports-sponsoring and mainstream Monster Beverage Company has also dipped into the cultural waters—though it has emerged with its own, slightly diluted salute to militarism.

MONSTER ASSAULT, "THE WAR," AND MEMORY

Each of the various Monster flavors' cans contain written promotional copy that usually plays up the "intensity" of the drink, its benefits, and delineates its specific niche in the Monster flavor/style pantheon. The Monster "Assault"[29] can's copy is somewhat different from the norm, as well as somewhat troubling:

> At Monster we don't get too hung up on politics. We're not for "the War", [sic] against "the War," or any war for that matter. We put the "camo" pattern on our new Monster Assault can because we think it looks cool. Plus it helps fire us up to fight the big multi-national companies who dominate the beverage business. We'll leave politics to the politicians and just keep doing what we do best—make the meanest energy supplements on the planet! Declare war on the ordinary! Grab a Monster Assault and VIVA LA REVOLUTION!

An analysis of the company's usage of that final tagline, so closely associated with hyper-masculine Argentinean Marxist revolutionary Che Guevara in popular culture, is a paper unto itself.[30] However, taken with the choices to package their drink in camouflage and recruit consumers to join their social networking "army," Monster's blanket disavowal of a political stance on the current Iraq and Afghanistan wars or any other conflict is highly ironic.

I am bewildered as to whom exactly Monster means to address with this defensive statement. Clearly, someone at the company recognized that some people might protest their choice, yet Monster ultimately decided to use the camouflage pattern despite its possibly problematic political associations. It is telling, though, that sometime between September of 2008 and February of 2009, the pattern on the cans changed from an imitation of the digital

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[29] Assault is Monster's "red" flavor.
[30] Scholars of Latin American studies and Latin@ culture have covered some this elsewhere, including: Van Dahm, Stacey. "Ricky, Che, Fidel, and Arenas: Trumping Masculinity in U.S./Cuban Cultural Maneuvers" *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Studies Association*, Oct 12, 2006.

camouflage[31] standard to U.S. military uniforms since 2005 (more suitable to desert warfare) to the more classic "woodland"-style camouflage utilized first during the Vietnam War (Clausen, n.p.). It seems unlikely that this was purely an aesthetic choice, and points to a certain awareness of the need to further distance the product from the politics surrounding the ongoing conflicts. So while Monster draws on blatantly militaristic aesthetics and rhetoric, its simultaneous aggressively apolitical assertions seem fancifully ignorant at best and disingenuous or even irresponsible at worst.

Through his psychological practice, Stephen Ducat found that many men's self-worth is directly affected by the successes or failures of their nation's armed forces (Ducat, 13-14). Despite civilian status, then, an affective connection between militarism and masculinity seems to encourage men to take at least a passing interest in military pursuits or leisure activities that mimic them. Taking this further, Melissa Brown points out that though most American men will never actually serve, many "often pursue [a] vicarious relationship with the military through the consumption of movies, video games… novels, popular histories, and other forms of pop culture, while their sons continue to play with a variety of war-themed toys" (M. Brown, 4). In the realm of video games specifically, not only can civilians participate in "realistic" first-person shooter military missions in the hugely popular *Call of Duty/Modern Warfare* console series by Activision,[32] but the army itself has a video game: *America's Army*. The first version was released as a freeware downloadable PC game in 2002,[33] a branding move that "completely blew

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[31] In fact, the black-and-gray digital camo pattern on this earlier version of the can is nearly identical to the background pattern of parts of goarmy.com, the U.S. army's main recruiting site.

[32] Most of the *Call of Duty* games are hyper-realistic first- and third-person shooter games set during WWII, available on all major gaming systems. The award-winning *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* and *Modern Warfare 2* are the exceptions. *Modern Warfare 2* drew PR fire for a sequence in which players can participate in a terrorist attack against civilians (Snider, n.p.). However, Activision won back some good press by setting up a foundation to help wounded veterans find employment (O'Keefe, n.p.). (http://www.monsterenergy.com/web/modern-warfare-2).

[33] This is the format in which the game is still most widely available, though Xbox and mobile versions have been developed.

away the gaming-software competition" (Bailey, 243). Starting in 2005, the game began featuring a series of "Real Heroes:" the biographies and likenesses of actual army veterans (not to mention their subsequent release as plastic action figures) who have received extraordinary commendations (Barnes, 1). In a not-so-surprising turn of events, Monster Energy and *Modern Warfare 2* sponsored a cross-promotional giveaway contest in 2009. When Monster partners with the makers of *Call of Duty*, it is building stronger cross-promotional ties between its own products and pleasurable military-related pursuits like these video games—a process the U.S. army has recognized itself as valuable.

A video game of realistic warfare featuring real-life combat heroes muddles the lines between leisure and real-life military exploits. At a certain point, it becomes difficult to distinguish fantasy from reality. Leisure activities have long been militarized (from children's tin soldiers to hunting parties), but now real military forces are taking advantage of this fact and making the reenactment of the combat exploits of real-life soldiers into an enjoyable pastime for potential recruits. By also invoking militaristic imagery and rhetoric, other products like Monster drinks are able to draw on the masculinist discourses associated with cultural tropes about manhood and soldiering. Young men can "try on" the masculine military ideal through consumption of military-inspired (or even military-made in the case of *America's Army*) goods and products and perhaps find a legitimate manly identity, because actual military service is no longer broadly considered a requirement to "make a man out of" boys. By appropriating the language of military ranks, adopting the usage of a camouflage pattern, and by tacitly acknowledging the larger symbolic implications of this use, Monster Energy is trafficking in not-so-veiled militarized consumerism.

Monster, Activision, Ace, and even Ol' Glory and Re-Up are playing with the most appealing parts of military masculinity while eschewing the grim realities that come along with military life and actual combat. Orna Sasson-Levy, in a discussion of motivations of Israeli combat soldiers, has found that the idea of a "thrill" or "rush" (*rigush* in Hebrew) is one of two main components in the erection of a positive combat identity (Sasson-Levy, 302). This falls nicely into line with both the "extreme" lifestyle associated with the toxic jock identity and participation in and/or spectatorship of action sports as well as the NRC's findings that military recruits are often seeking a "patriotic adventure." This is not, of course, to say that the men and women who ultimately enlist in the military are consumerist dupes who think that their service will be just like the video games or that people who use energy drinks have no self- or political awareness. It is to say, however, that the fact that civilians can partake in military-inspired "camo chic" styles or "Declare war on the ordinary" beverage without having to engage in a more nuanced analysis of the embedded cultural symbolism is particularly telling. Though soldiers themselves may very well drink Monster Assault (and do, as we will see in the next chapter), though civilian consumers may know someone deployed to combat abroad or know someone who was killed on 9/11, the company makes a deliberate decision to not recognize these emotional realities. The somewhat ludicrous political disavowal made by Monster on the Assault can's packaging can be seen in light of the ever-important capacity for self-discipline. Sasson-Levy says that along with a desire for action, "The masculine imperative for emotional self-control, which is especially pertinent to combat soldiers, confers men with prestige and locates them in a superior position to women" (Sasson-Levy 301).

This masculinist tendency to demonstrate extreme emotional self-control and to perpetuate rhetorical memes that uphold the status quo point to the very real possibility that the

United States has never fully grieved, as a culture, for 9/11 and its victims. Several years in, the fact of an ongoing military conflict in the Middle East that was launched ostensibly in retaliation for the September 11 terrorist attacks, in many ways can be glossed over by those who feel that they have no specific personal or political stake in the matter. As Judith Butler points out in her book *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*:

> President Bush announced on September 21 that we have finished grieving and that now it is time for resolute action to take the place of grief. When grieving is something to be feared, our fears can give rise to the impulse to resolve it quickly, to banish it in the name of an action invested with the power to restore the loss or return the world to a former order, or to reinvigorate a fantasy that the world formerly was orderly (Butler, 29-30).

Only ten days to wrap up our emotional processing seems awfully severe. Reading the meanings underlying the masculinist and militaristic discourses Monster employs in its marketing, the company's claims to "neutrality" about "the War" make evident that it is not just politics they wish to sidestep; it is the taint of emotional vulnerability that accompanies any real analysis of trauma or war. And though Re-Up and Ol' Glory tacitly recognize the strains of service members' families and the dangers of combat in their charity work, these aspects remain unexamined on the surface of their calls to support (or join) the troops.

In 2006, Mark Dery wrote an article in the *Utne Reader* about "camo chic," for which he emailed veterans about their views on the trend of military patterns in mainstream fashion.[34] One Army vet who served in Iraq responded, saying, "The militarization of our culture is absolutely repugnant. Our money, foreign policy, and culture [are] invested in war, and the glamorization of

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[34] Recent buzz in the feminist blogosphere brought to my attention the website for New York's Butch Bakery, which features cupcakes for "manly men." Each cupcake is baked in a neutral-colored muffin cups and feature a decorative chocolate disk sitting atop the brown or white frosting. These disks feature various "masculine patterns" like Wood Grain, Houndstooth, Plaid, Checkerboard, Marble, or most popularly, "Woodland Camo." No "frilly pink-frosted sprinkles-and-unicorns" cupcakes here—because apparently even baked goods must be appropriately gendered and militarized (http://www.butchbakery.com/index.php).

camouflage is an offshoot of this paradigm. There is nothing sexy about camo. Granted, I cannot disassociate camo from blood and blown-apart body parts…" (Dery, n.p.). What the ironic juxtaposition of camouflaged consumer goods and the refusal to recognize or engage with its obvious practical meanings exposes is a reality in which consumer choice has become a stand-in for every other aspect of political, social, or civic engagement. What Monster is ultimately selling is an identity that draws on the traditional masculine tropes of risk-taking or thrill-seeking, military symbols, and emotional self-control or self-denial. What the statement, "At Monster we don't get too hung up on politics. We're not for 'the War', against 'the War,' or any war for that matter," reveals to me is a new depth to the shallowness of consumerism. Monster Assault is willing to appeal to the same types of masculinist ideals as the military, and yet positions itself as a neutral third party to any political interpretations that may result.

So while it is obvious that capitalist production and consumption are inextricably wrapped up in modern American politics, and even more blatantly so after 9/11, many corporations still consider it expedient to deny that consumer choice has any political implications. A company like Monster can allow consumers to play with politically charged identity markers without recognizing the actual politics contained therein. Perhaps our mourning did end September 21, 2001, like President Bush said. Monster and other "politically neutral" products want to move us along, appeal to the part of us that thinks camouflage is hardcore, and convince us that "the War" is outside our purview as consumers.

The company once again banks on its customers' political apathy in its recruitment for the online Monster Army, another military-infused marketing tool. The Army takes the commitment and acceptance of militarized ideals much further than the competing companies mentioned in this chapter by actually utilizing the military masculine appeal in constructing a social

networking site. Despite refusal to directly address the serious, real-life political conversations about the deployment and management of the U.S. military, Monster manages to draw in those to whom militarized aesthetics are attractive in addition to being action sports fans. In the next chapter, I examine the Monster Army profiles of some of the men who fall within this overlapping demographic. The ways in which these men present themselves as gendered beings is fascinating, particularly in light of the current investigation of connections between militarism, masculinity, and elements of an energy drink-centric lifestyle. Monster has jumped on the Web 2.0 bandwagon, benefitting from the conflation of labor and leisure in the digital economy. I will attempt to expose how this co-optation of user-generated content benefits companies like Monster while looking at how a specific group of users contribute to both this pool of exploited labor but also to the discourses of hegemonic styles of masculinity promoted by the company.

CHAPTER 3
VISUALIZING THE MONSTER:
RACE, GENDER, THE UNIFORM, AND DIGITAL LABOR

In the previous chapters, we have looked at how economic forces heavily influence social

expectations vis-a-vis performance of gender. In addition, we have seen how economic

restructuring has spurred particular political movements and how these larger forces can play out

in the various messages embedded in commercial advertisements. As we saw in the last chapter,

corporations who produce these energy drinks embrace this entanglement of affect, politics, and

capitalist consumption with varying degrees of openness. Companies like Ol' Glory baldly face

up to their political motivations. Alternatively, Re-Up attempts to cloak itself in the guise of the

provider of a badly needed service to enlisted men and women (not to mention its heavy

involvement in armed services charities) while yet existing as a profit-seeking company. Even

more stealthily, Monster attempts to eschew the political altogether while still gaining reflected

masculine prestige from militaristic aesthetics in a time of war. Monster's foray into the world of

online social networking reflects these tendencies. The company's Monster Army brand group

co-opts the vocabulary of the military through the action sports network Hookit.com, while

deftly avoiding engaging with the actual military or its endeavors in any explicit way. However,

as I emphasized earlier, Monster and the U.S. Army are fishing in the same demographic pond,

which comes to the fore clearly when examining the Monster Army profiles created by members

of the armed services.

One element that stands out when perusing Monster Army members' profiles, military-

affiliated or not, is that Monster and Hookit more generally attract participants who are

overwhelmingly white and male. Many internet scholars, in particular Lisa Nakamura (discussed

below), have noted that the ideologies embedded in online architecture have assumed that

internet users reflect a white, male default demographic. I will be investigating some of the reasons for this bias as well as how this is reflected in Monster's demography and the site's possible appeal to Kimmel's downwardly mobile political "White Wing," discussed in chapter 1. To put this all into context, I will map out where social networking falls into terms of the newer digital economy ushered in by the last decade's embrace of Web 2.0 technologies. In addition, it is important that we look at how user contributions to social networking sites are not only acts of self-definition through online identity construction, but also how these leisure-time activities have become exploitable labor. The degree to which users are aware of this co-optation of their leisure/labor is unclear, though as more and more corporations realize the profit potential of engaging consumers in online formats, it is bound to become more obvious to their target demographics. So while the Monster Army's existence is not a unique development in current capitalist branding practices, it is reflective of the continuous blurring of lines between leisure and labor. Perhaps most importantly for this project, the Army serves as a site of observation for how the previously discussed advertising tropes of masculinity, risk-taking, and militarism are translated into online consumer participation.

SOCIAL NETWORKS, PRIVACY, AND GENDERED LABOR

Let us first establish what we mean when we discuss social networking. Boyd and Ellison have defined a social network site as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (boyd and Ellison, 211). As we will see, the Monster Army follows all of these basic conventions. While there are some (mostly smaller) social networking sites out there that are essentially non-commercial, most popular sites like MySpace, Facebook, and of

course, Hookit feature targeted advertising and allow brands and corporations to maintain their own profile pages which individual users can become "fans" of or even "friend" outright.[35] Sal Humphreys believes that social network markets demonstrate a larger economic shift "from industrial production to networked production"(Humphreys, 235). Grant Kien points out that the recent Web 2.0 spike has intensified the long-time process through which "Capitalism first created and then has steadily commodified leisure time throughout its evolution" (Kien, 178). Social networking represents an economy in which the consumerist act (socializing) has become one and the same as the act of production (creating data) in a never-ending feedback loop. As the "principal commodity in an information economy," data is the means by which the "corporate machine feeds itself" (ibid, 183). Production within the digital economy takes forms as diverse as everything from paid professional web design to the murkier areas of leisure/labor involved in social networking and the creation and dissemination of user-generated content. The traditional (masculinist) definitions of "work" do not include these latter types of activities. However, it is the maintenance of these websites by user participation that allows the proprietors to continue to earn advertising revenue. Tiziana Terranova emphasizes that these types of technical and cultural labor are unrelated to employment and "have developed in relation to the expansion of the cultural industries and are part of a process of economic experimentation with the creation of monetary value out of knowledge/culture/affect" (Terranova, n.p.). The appropriation of (sub)cultural productions for consumption (as seen in the action or "extreme" sports example) is a long-standing capitalist practice; the internet economy is a continuation, not an innovation. However, Terranova asks us to recognize that these productions are not just snapped up by some nefarious outside force, insisting that we "think of cultural flows as originating within a field that

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[35] It should be noted that MySpace came on to the social networking scene in 2003, explicitly inviting bands to set up pages, a practice which had been banned on the earlier site, Friendster (still popular mostly in Asia).

is always and already capitalism" (ibid). In many ways, the cycled and recycled data that fuels the digital economy is in essence a trade in personal identities (which are in turn constructed by economic forces). Google and Facebook keep track of what you list as favorites in your profile, your search terms, what sites you visit, and glean any demographic details they can in order to better customize targeted advertising.

The building of a personal profile on social networking sites is normally considering a leisure-time activity. The exception is in the case of posting a resume at job sites like Monster.com (no connection to the Monster Beverage Company), LinkedIn.com, and other professional networks. The fact that many corporations and schools block Facebook, MySpace, and other sites on their institutional intranets demonstrates this ideological divide between work and play. However much time white-collar workers or students "waste" on these sites—whether while on the clock or at home—they are clearly involved in the continual application of grease to the capitalist wheel.

Writing with John Banks, Humphreys points out that despite this economic reality, the social has been "devalued in most economic analyses to date, seen as feminized and non-financial, and hence of relative unimportance" (Banks and Humphreys, 414). Despite this gendering of social activities, women and men alike are participating in them. At this point, we are faced with certain questions: What does it mean when we willingly post our personal information on a dating site or passively allow the Google bots to track our every mouse click? Is the building of our profiles, listing our likes and dislikes, publicly connecting ourselves to our "friends'" profiles worth the invasion of privacy? Kien wonders if perhaps we are "whoring" ourselves out, "trading [our] own intimacies in exchange for something considered valuable, e.g., online profiles" (Kien, 180). This association with prostitution, with its inevitably feminizing

implications, points to the larger theme explored previously in which capitalism's exploitation of labor is seen as inherently emasculating. As Banks and Humphreys observe, the results of working the social network street corner reverberate into the workplace of technology workers (many of whom are probably breadwinners), who may effectively be displaced by unpaid amateurs who contribute passive data as well as actively generate content for websites (Banks and Humphreys, 415). This connection to prostitution becomes even more evident when looking at resume-posting sites like the aforementioned Monster.com where companies can troll for potential hires and particularly when considering the Monster Army's parent network, Hookit (after its most recent name change), which was created specifically to bring together action sports athletes and corporate sponsors.

WHITENESS AND ONLINE ARCHITECTURE

Before we go any further, we need an examination of how racialized values and assumptions are superimposed onto the structure of digital technologies by designers. Lisa Nakamura has done quite a bit of writing on race in cyberspace and emphasizes in her work the ways in which whiteness (and maleness) are often assumed the default identity of internet users (though admittedly, the existence of more sites oriented specifically toward women and/or people of color have changed this somewhat in the past several years). Especially in the earlier days of the internet, interface design clearly reflected the identities and values of its creators. As Nakamura points out, "the landscape architects of the web's forking-path structures such as portals are largely white male software engineers" (Nakamura 2002, 106) and benefit the same. This engineering demographic gets complicated by the fact that lower-level programming tasks are increasingly outsourced to workers in Asia, particularly in South Asia. However, these "model" Asian workers are not there to add racial or cultural diversity to the technologies at

hand; they are utilized simply because they can be paid lower wages than domestic employees. The anonymous hordes of subcontracted Asian technology workers that prop up the careers of the mostly white and male stateside software superstars are "thought to not need a 'personal life;'" (ibid, 24). Somehow these programmers do not mind sitting for hours at a computer screen accomplishing tedious, repetitive tasks, unlike their American counterparts (white, Asian, or otherwise), whose pay grade is considered "above" that kind of work. Asian workers' contributions to the final products are almost completely unacknowledged, their identities and experiences do not change the values embedded in the projects they have been assigned. There is no need to worry that their participation would color (literally) the end goal in any way, as the mostly white and male software engineers and executives still call the shots.

Despite the participation of diverse global labor forces in the construction of the web and the innumerable applications created to exploit its power and reach, white men are still very often considered the most likely users. When signing up for an account at Hookit.com (formerly Loop'd) through the Monster Army, users have the option of uploading a photograph to their profile pages. If a photo is not uploaded, the default image is a white silhouette of what looks to be a man (broad shoulders, no visible hair outline) wearing a sideways baseball cap (see Figure 1). Similarly, as pointed out by (among others) Occidental professor Lisa Wade at the incredibly valuable *Sociological Images* blog, the default Facebook image is also a white silhouette of what appears to be a man wearing a (white?) collared shirt on a blue background. Again, she emphasizes, "whiteness and maleness are the characteristics we attribute to 'person,' unless there are reasons to do otherwise" (Wade, n.p.). At least in the case of Facebook, the color scheme falls in line with the theme used throughout the site, which is blue and white (see Figure 2)— though mostly white.

While looking at the huge popular appeal of the all-white Apple iPod, Nakamura identifies whiteness, when used in technological design often serves the purpose of "conveying a sense of neutrality, modernism, and negative space" (Nakamura 2008, 109). Though issues of race may not be consciously contributing to these conceptions, the color white is associated with clean, uncluttered, and sleekly modern design that takes *on* racialized content when applied to default human representations. Unless users take the time to correct the record, they will be portrayed as white and male. The Monster Army site is designed with a grey and black print background, with black empty space, accented with Monster's signature green. The default white-on-gray "skateboarder dude"[36] silhouette comes directly from parent site Hookit and fits with its overall color scheme, though Monster has customized a number of the site's other features to mirror the design aesthetic of its home site, Monsterenergy.com. This is not to suggest some sort of racist conspiracy on the part of Monster web designers or Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, but it does point to the invisibility of whiteness as a racial identity by virtue of its privileged status. We are so accustomed to white men standing in for the default human, that it is often very difficult, especially perhaps for real-life white men, to see this as anything but natural. It is important to point out when this privilege is so blatantly assumed, even on sites like Hookit and the Monster Army that cater largely to white men. This default photo needs to be recognized for what it is, a choice that is part of a consciously constructed design—and these choices, however cavalierly undertaken, reflect the bias of the designer and the surrounding social world that accepts these choices as right and natural.

BRAND COMMUNITIES AND THE PURSUIT OF "COOL"

Newer, post-Fordist consumption patterns are based on economic models of continual capitalist growth, which require proliferation of available products supported by constant

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[36] See, he is rebellious and alternative because he wears his hat at a jaunty angle.

increases in consumption. Political economist Andrea Migone describes how these shifts increasingly lead to consumption concentration in upper income brackets as economic stratification grows (Migone, 184). Only certain groups can keep up with the accelerating cycle of commodification, consumption, and obsolescence that has both grown out of and helped form an "increasingly hegemonic discourse that equate[s] individual expression with material possession" (ibid, 176). This has led to social narratives that emphasize consumer goods as a kind of cure-all for issues of identity. Obtaining supposedly scarce or expensive consumer products has become "the accepted form of expressing 'individual' choice, determining status, showcasing wealth, and satisfying psychological compulsions" (ibid, 184). Mark Deuze points out how advertising "cleverly market[s] to people's desire to be different, to be critical, to be cool" (Deuze, 29), the irony being that one of the only legitimate modes of "difference" would involve actually rejecting consumerism altogether. However, both hegemonic discourse and the reality of living in a culture whose every part is, "always already" influenced by capitalism, makes this option undesirable as well as impractical—perhaps nigh upon impossible—to accomplish without completely retreating from mainstream society.

Much of the process of branding involves an attempt to attach a company's name to the nebulous affective concept of "cool" in the minds of potential consumers. What is considered cool, of course, changes constantly; once too many people (particularly too many *older* people) get into a song, clothing style, beer, *whatever*, it immediately loses its cultural cachet. Like in the case of the "indie" or "alternative" sports championed by energy drink companies, marketers attempt to sell each consumer his or her own "unique" identity through the transference of supposedly "underground" knowledge.[37] It should be noted that individualism and independence

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[37] This can be seen clearly in long-standing and well-documented tendencies to co-opt African-American cultural productions by the larger white society as a whole.

are traits long valued in American culture, particularly in men, from the self-made businessman to the lonely frontiersman, as discussed in the first chapter. Attempting to build or maintain a unique individual identity is also heavily promoted as integral to youth cultures, in particular by advertisers, who are, of course, adults. Susan Herring exposes the ironies of market-mandated individuality, as "youth are exhorted to make individual choices, yet in so doing, they conform to mainstream ideas about youths as individualistic (and about individualism as positively valued in a capitalistic society)" (Herring, 80). Trends that become too mainstream are eventually declared "inauthentic," and marketers must rush to push youth and youth-seekers to consume the next big thing.

Rebekah Willett examines how consumerism is based on not only the pursuit of what is "cool," but also on a rhetoric of choice. Marketing literally "creates possible lifestyle choices which position consumers in terms of desire and belonging, as well as separation and distinction" (Willett, 55). The number of real options is relatively limited, however. For example, even if the cereal in the generic section is literally manufactured at the same plant as a name brand cereal, the packaging and the aura surrounding the brand present the illusion of difference and choice between the two. The higher price of the branded product essentially acts as a "subscription fee" to the prestige afforded by adopting the brand into an ongoing lifestyle (Dolfsma, 9). Will you choose the high status bestowed upon those who can afford "real" Fruit Loops? Or will you push back against mainstream culture and embrace the tackiness of the big Malt-o-Meal bag of Tootie Frooties? Notice, of course, that this "choice" is limited to those who can actually afford to buy either brand, though the counter-cultural justification may be just as, if not more, appealing to those who cannot. It is through each of these seemingly minute consumer decisions, or the selection of what Ernest Hakanen calls "repetitious signs," that a discrete identity is built.

Hakanen is convinced that 21st-century Americans have become so accustomed to the idea that we each represent our own unique brand, that it has become normalized and embraced, with each of us actually marketing ourselves as active cultural agents. Just like we consciously choose each piece of information we will include in our networking profiles, we "'freely' collect[] signs that signify the self" (Hakanen, 37). We are willingly commodified.

It seems, then, that citizens of our late capitalist consumer society must inevitably accept these premises of consumption-built identities. Enterprising corporations' next move is, of course, to harness these identities for profit. Though consumer identities are based largely on ideals of individualism, the reality of mass-produced goods and cultural products necessarily points to the formation of communities of consumers who share brand preferences. Marketing professors Albert M. Muñiz Jr. and Thomas C. O'Guinn describe how "Brand communities carry out important functions on behalf of the brand, such as sharing information, perpetuating the history and culture of the brand, and … exert[ing] pressure on members to remain loyal to the collective and to the brand" (quoted in Jenkins, 79). Many brand-centered communities originally formed organically, like fan- or supporter-built groups pages in the early days of Facebook. Now, however, politicians and brands control their own pages and content that regular users can become "fans" of. As the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) emphasized in a 2008 status report geared toward corporate advertisers, "[I]f you're not on a social networking site, you're not on the Internet" (IAB, 1). Following this new marketing maxim allows for corporations to effectively "listen in" on consumers' brand-related conversations and to direct and channel the affective elements of fandom.

Affective bonds between consumers and brands extend to fellow consumers. The search for cool in underground cultures can also help bring people together around a brand name or

lifestyle choice; this can be an obscure music scene, an "alternative" sexual community, or a "nerdy" hobby like comic book collecting or science fiction fandom. Hope Schau and Albert Muñiz recognize that "marginality and stigma" can help unite brand communities through a "common struggle" (Schau and Muñiz, 145), though outside persecution or derision is not always necessary for the building of community ties. Online networking can provide a social support system to persons formerly isolated by their particular tastes. Part of a balancing act Monster engages in is between promoting the exclusivity of their products and the people who love them, and attempting to build the broadest customer base possible.

Energy drinks, though extremely popular, are still mostly associated with youth as well as edgy and masculine alternative sports. This positioning is strategic on the part of the drink manufacturers. However, the drinks' well-publicized health risks help stir up controversy around the products, attracting rebellious types who are drawn to the social margins. The more parents and teachers try to stop kids from drinking energy drinks, they more they want them. Virtual communities constructed around brand identification help maintain the advertisers' ideal balance between uniqueness and popularity. The worldwide Monster Army is over 200,000 strong, but every member has her or his (mostly his) own individual profile based around the members' sport of choice while at the same time connecting all the members together as fellow Monster drinkers.

Besides custom communities or brand profile pages on social networking sites, another digital advertising tool is brand-oriented widgets that users can download. IAB points out that these are particularly popular with producers of user-generated content, who they claim are "eager to identify themselves with a brand that can make their blogs or profiles more dynamic" (IAB, 10). Members of the Monster Army's reserve forces have access to exclusive images and other downloadable content like Monster Army recruiting ads they can place on personal

Facebook profiles and the like. Cultural protocols of user-generated content sites are often multi-directional and interactive, and advertisers are encouraged to join in "conversation" with the potential consumers who produce this content rather than simply advertising *at* them (IAB, 13). Corporations increasingly recognize the value of social networking in the construction and maintenance of brand communities based on shared identity.

THE MONSTER ARMY'S MASCULINE RECRUITS

With its focus on action sports and military aesthetics, the Monster Beverage Company consistently aligns itself with hegemonic discourses of masculinity. Monster aggressively invites its website's visitors to "Unleash the beast;" and stamps its various drink flavors with names like M-80, Khaos, and Assault. Monster refers to those it sponsors as the "Monster Army," ranking professional athletes as "generals," and encouraging Monster consumers to join the "reserves." Danielle M. Soulliere, in a discussion of conceptions of manhood reflected in professional wrestling, recognizes gendered rhetoric like Monster's as part of current hegemonic conceptions of masculinity in North American society. This type of idealized masculinity is often characterized by "violence and aggression, emotional restraint, toughness, risk-taking, physical strength, courage, power and dominance, competitiveness, and achievement and success" (Soulliere, 2). In a recent volume, Chris Beasley helpfully problematizes the phrase "hegemonic masculinity," pointing to its etymological origins as a political mechanism meant to preserve male power and build solidarity between men (Beasley, 171). However, as he deftly points out, in fact, "many men who hold significant social power do not embody hegemonic masculinity," (ibid, 174). Many ideal masculinities can coexist, from the local to the global level, which hold varying levels of legitimacy depending on which aspects are stressed by specific (sub)cultural values. I want to be very clear that the "hegemonic masculinity" I will be discussing here is

merely an *ideal*, one that can never really be fully embodied by any one man or group of men, but is used to police the boundaries between genders. Soulliere's definition above clearly lays out many of the attributes of the masculine ideal as defined both explicitly and implicitly by Monster and its fans. She is also careful to point out that these supposedly admirable (or perhaps inevitable) masculine traits represent "the cultural ideal or normative definition of manhood in North American society, [which] is primarily reflective of White, heterosexual, middle-class men" (Soulliere, ibid). With an eye to the specific, then, we can see that Monster considers this (admittedly powerful and privileged) demographic its target market, and the company's websites are designed for and around their pursuit of a specific hegemonic masculine ideal.

This demographic reveals itself in the membership of the Monster Army's sponsored ranks and reserves. One of the most striking patterns that emerges when looking at monsterenergy.com and the Monster Army social network is the overwhelming *maleness* of it all (though technically separate sites, the Monster Army is linked to from Monster's homepage and uses various elements of the same design theme). This is not to say that there are no women represented on the site. One of the main menu options on Monster's front page is "Monster Girls." The Monster Girls are models who make appearances at Monster-sponsored events, providing eye candy for action sports fans, giving out Monster paraphernalia, and presenting awards. As of this writing, seven "professional" Monster Girls have profiles on the site, including numerous risqué photographs available for download. All of the women appear to be white or Latina, and without exception each model conforms to hegemonic beauty standards: light-skinned with long hair, young, very thin, and feminine. Positioned as sporting spectators,

these women pose no threat to the ideal masculinity demonstrated by the Monster Army's sponsored athletes.[38]

Aside from the Monster Army associated with Hookit, Monster hosts its own internal community of Monster fans. These accounts clearly exist less for Monster enthusiasts to socialize with one another, and more as the means for Monster to co-opt user-generated content. Though members can comment on each other's photo and video uploads, they have no centralized, publicly accessible profile to glean information from or communicate with one another. Thus this community does not fall under the definition of social networking established above. The photo galleries feature Monster products, brand logos, members themselves participating in action sports, playing music, shooting guns, drinking Monster, or existing as young, attractive females.[39] As per the user agreement, Monster is happy to take ownership of the uploaded content, reinforcing again the unidirectional transfer of benefits. The real social networking, however, is happening in the Monster Army, with content transfers happening between Monster and the network's members, but most importantly, between the soldiers themselves. Though fully equipped to function as a solely social platform, the Monster Army seems to be more about connecting to brands and athletes as fans or potential recipients of

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[38] A brief overview of each woman's profile yielded informative results: belly button piercings and "I Will Survive" as a favorite karaoke tune are very common. Also, at least one model is a big Nietzsche fan (I'm talking about you, Monster Girl Evelyn Hernandez!).

[39] The community photo submissions could be a project unto themselves, especially the ways in which the female members present themselves performing femininity. I will limit my analysis to this extensive footnote: A cursory glance through the first several pages of most recent photo submissions revealed that in contrast to the Monster Army, as we will see, at least half of the community members are women. Most of their photos are reminiscent of the sexy poses struck by the official Monster Girls (a few are even suspiciously professional-looking), though some of the women have uploaded pictures of themselves participating in action sports like motocross, surfing, or snowboarding, this is usually in addition to some cheesecake-type shots. Though the gender split in the Monster Community's contributors may actually more accurately reflect the actual consumer population, the submissions are from a very concentrated (and good-looking) sample of Monster fans. These are people who are interested in sharing their media—whether snowboarding shots, bikini poses, or Monster can pyramids—with other Monster fans and the company itself. So although a surprisingly large number of the members (members who submit content, anyway—some of us are lurkers) appear to be women, the vast majority of their submissions place them in the position of existing for purely ornamental purposes. The sexual titillation to the (presumably) male gaze provided by the Monster Girls is reinscribed by female Monster fans that mimic the conventions "sexiness" in their homemade photo shoots.

sponsorships that as a place for friends to keep in touch. Perhaps an apt comparison would be that the Monster Army participation more clearly resembles the professional MySpace pages of bands than average Facebook profiles.

The Monster Army is interesting—among many other reasons—in that professional athletes (the "generals"), dedicated amateurs (captains, sergeants and privates), and beginners or fans (the reserves) basically belong to the same broader community. Throughout the ranks, the vast majority of the Army is made up of men, though the lower the ranks, the more female members appear. As of this writing, Monster sponsors thirty-two "general"-level athletes, two of whom are women (both Canadian), one snowboarder and one free skier. Though their profiles, like those of their male counterparts mostly focus on their athletic prowess and public achievements,[40] Monster is also sure to include a little something about being "photogenic" or a "natural beauty" (Pelosi, Burke). Among the U.S. region Monster Army members, only about six thousand identify as female as opposed to 99,000 men, and while the performance of gender by all the members is worth exploring, I will be focusing on certain aspects of masculinity on display.

The Monster Army invites users to peruse the ranks in the online "barracks," check out downloadable "propaganda," and sends out monthly blast emails with the "General's orders." The periodic "missions" usually involve signing up for a contest, but sometimes the contests require the reserves to make Monster commercials (like one in early 2009) or participate in Monster viral marketing in some other way. Much like the company's use of camouflage on their Assault cans, the Monster Army adopts military jargon seemingly unironically. Though unlike

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[40] In a politically charged but completely decontextualized reference typical of Monster's rhetoric, the profile for Monster General and surfer Dane Reynolds asserts that having to move back inland when each summer ended was for young Reynolds "a torture worse than anything they dished out at Abu Ghraib" (http://monsterarmy.hookit.com/Members/Monster/danereynolds.aspx).

the Assault can, there are no disclaimers of political intent anywhere on the site. While military-affiliated drinks Re-Up and Ol' Glory link directly to charities that benefit veterans and their families, and Ol' Glory promotes enlistment by linking to military recruiting sites, Monster evidently does not feel it necessary to make explicit links to the *real* army. Setting up the Monster Army in this way reveals innumerable and ongoing conscious decisions made by Monster marketers and web designers, and just because the company avoids this connection, does not mean the use of appealing militaristic aesthetics is unnoticed by users. We have previously established the overlapping demographics of U.S. military recruiters and marketers for action sports and energy drinks. I am interested in looking at those with whom both interested parties have been successful: military personnel who have Monster Army profiles.

THE SOLDIERS

The stereotypical American armed services member is a young white man, and this stereotype holds true when looking at the Monster Army's real-life soldiers and Marines.[41] Without a scientific poll, it would be nigh impossible to determine any exact number of military members who also have profiles with the Monster Army, as users can pick and choose what (if any) personal information to share publicly. Each user has to choose at least one sport with which to identify themselves, including more traditional team sports that Monster and other brands that use Hookit are probably not really interested in sponsoring (I chose soccer, for example), but there is no area in which to list an occupation (or "day job"). In fact, most profiles of the reserves contain very little text at all, making the woefully inadequate search functions even more difficult to use. However, through searching for words like "army," "marine," and

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[41] I found one young (white) woman who was in the Canadian army who was also successfully competed in tae kwando tournaments, but no other female service members. In keeping with the conventions of the Monster community submissions, this woman's profile photo was her in a bikini, but her albums included martial arts action shots and uniformed photos from her deployment to Afghanistan.

"military," I found several self-identified service members on the site. Those who had sponsorships for their sports had action shots for their profile pictures and in their photo galleries and mentioned their military service in text somewhere, but those who were more casual action sports participants often used pictures of themselves in uniform and even on deployment overseas as their profile photos.

The gendered performance of these men in their profiles reflects and celebrates many of the masculine themes discussed in previous chapters. One particularly successful off-road ATV rider, 40 year-old David Ogden, Jr. proudly identifies himself as a U.S. Marine and listed under his brand sponsors, he has typed in a quote from Ronald Reagan: "Some people live an entire lifetime and wonder if they have ever made a difference in the world, but the Marines don't have that problem" (Ogden, n.p.). As noted numerous times, the Monster Beverage Company presents itself as completely apolitical, despite utilizing militaristic aesthetics in a time of war, but the occasional hint of politics slips through in individual members' profiles. Ogden may just like the Reagan quote for what it says about the Marines' active masculinity, but he almost certainly would not have featured it if he was strongly opposed to the former president's politics. Ogden, or "Regulator," mentions that he will be missing the early 2010 competitive season because he has been called up for a third tour of duty, this time in Afghanistan.

Many of Ogden's photos are of his various competition vehicles or action shots, with him in full racing gear and helmet on his four-wheeler. However, in his "Random" photo gallery, he has posted a photo of himself apparently competing in a body-building competition, flexing his muscles and wearing only small briefs with a number attached. Though the photo's title, "Yeah… that was me in 2000," seems to be a joking reference to the fact that he has aged and is probably no longer in this top performance shape, he has chosen to continue to display the photo,

as if to prove that he at least once was capable of achieving the muscular masculine ideal. Another "Random" photograph is of Ogden with a group of male friends at a bowling alley, this time he is posing holding to bright blue bowling balls in front of his crotch, entitled, of course, "Blue Balls." This direct, though comedic, phallocentric reference confirms the overwhelmingly homosocial status of the Monster Army (not to mention the actual military). In an investigation of the gendering of male-dominated workplaces, Peter Levin has discussed the ways in which military and sports metaphors, along with sexual joking have "highlighted rather than minimized the differences between men and women and created visible in-groups and out-groups" (Levin, 389). Ogden is surely aware that like the group in the photo with him, the vast majority of Monster Army users will be men themselves who are expected to enjoy and engage in sexualized joking. Women who wish to be accepted by the community must conform to these gendered social norms, while at the same time inevitably being alienated by their peers' phallocentric displays of male heterosexuality.

Ogden's "USMC" gallery features a number of photos from his various deployments, including Iraq in 2005, and at least one of the seemingly obligatory uniformed-and-holding-a-big-gun shots. This standard (phallic) pose is demonstrated quite explicitly by another Monster Army member, 23 year-old James McIntire, who identifies as a participant in mixed martial arts. His sparse profile only contains a few photos and very little text, but all of the pictures are from his service in the U.S. Army, apparently during a deployment to Korea. He literalizes the connection between weapon and penis in his profile photo, which features him in full combat uniform, standing behind barbed wire and holding his rifle suggestively between his legs while a buddy looks on (see Figure 3).

Other men directly connect their proactive masculinity as demonstrated through action sports with their military lives. Mark Oldroyd is a 33 year-old sponsored motocross rider. While his photo gallery is purely moto-centric, he proudly proclaims his status as a U.S. Marine in a statement on his profile page, claiming, "I have been on active duty for the last 12 years, which keeps me in great shape. I have done 2 combat tours in the middle-east, and when I'm not pounding the enemy, I'm pounding the track..." (Oldroyd, n.p.) "Pounding" is common slang for having sex, pointing to the regular practice of emasculating enemies through forced sodomy (whether literal or metaphorical). Oldroyd sees himself as applying the same skills and determination to his sport that he is to his job as a Marine. Somewhat surprisingly, his profile contains the only direct reference to military enemies or actual combat I found in the site, though many of the soldiers include photos from Iraq, Afghanistan, or other sites of deployment. Instead, their pictures are of signs in Arabic, the men themselves wearing their "full battle rattle" but not actually engaged in battle, flying in helicopters, or in the case of one army sergeant, refusing to give his last Monster away to Iraqi children (profiles for Zach Radtke and Nathaniel Vincenty-Cole). The men who are both active duty military personnel and also members of the Monster Army would almost certainly disagree with Ol' Glory's assertion that "x-treme" sports are sissy compared to defending America's freedom, as they appear to have adopted both as part of their online (and presumably, offline) identities.

In addition to team pages for military-based recreational sports teams, some members feature photos of themselves in camouflage clothing participating in paintball or airsoft gaming.[42] At first glance, these photographs are somewhat unsettling. The airsoft "battle" shots

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[42] Airsoft is type of pseudo-battle activity like paintball that uses light plastic ammunition shot from replica firearms.

look like real combat in many ways.[43] Michael Schmidt, 48, a heavily sponsored BMX and mountain bike racer, has a photo of a group of men in camouflage, the "Boonie Rats" (named after a Vietnam-era soldier ballad) that I thought was a real group of particularly insensitive soldiers joking about killing until I realized it was entitled "Paintball" (see Figure 4). Elsewhere, Schmidt mentions his long military service, including as a veteran of Desert Storm. Though he is no longer on active duty, his "For Fun" photo gallery includes shots from his army days, including one of him in uniform in the back of a jeep during the 1992 Los Angeles riots (Schmidt). In addition, his blog page features a flag and eagle-bedecked "Support the Troops" image, a sentiment that is inevitably fraught with political implications despite Schmidt's obvious sincerity. He clearly considers his career as an infantryman and EMT to be integral parts of his identity. To complicate matters, however, Schmidt presents himself as the proud father of two children with special needs, which points to an accepted masculine role performed mostly outside of the aggressive hegemonic ideal promoted by Monster and most of its members. Of course, real people will inevitably prove far more complex than gendered ideals allow, and there need not necessarily be any tension between a man's roles as action sports athlete, family man, and army veteran. The role of the presidential Protector-in-Chief of the homeland, for example, draws on these various masculine roles without them coming into conflict with one another. Attempting to identify elements of hegemonic masculinities in actual people is only useful when group patterns emerge, some of which I have attempted to identify here.

Though many more Monster Army reserves may (and probably do) have past or current military experiences than the few dozen I was able to positively identify, it is notable that there

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[43] One enthusiast's profile picture is of him looking grim and wearing sunglasses with his airsoft rifle, a custom-built spiky helmet in hand, and an American flag behind him. It was eerily reminiscent of a self-posed photo of a white supremacist militiaman, like something Timothy McVeigh might have posted had the internet been more prevalent in the early '90s.

are, in fact, men who strongly assert their devotion to the military and to action sports (and energy drinks, presumably) at the same time. For the conservative and economically downwardly mobile "White Wing" men Kimmel has discussed, the military may be one of the only remaining places to achieve legitimate occupational masculine fulfillment, and the fact that men attracted to the masculine-heavy edginess of action sports include some demographic overlap with the military is telling. Kathleen E. Miller has asserted that her "Toxic jock theory heralds hegemonic masculinity as a bedrock component of jock identity, perhaps more important than an affinity for sport itself" (Miller 2008b, 72). As we can see, these men, at least in some small part aspire to the hegemonic ideals of risk-taking, (potential) violence, physical and emotional strength and control that are sponsored by Monster, required in the military, and incredibly valuable in successful athletes. All of these factors do not mean that women, people of color, gay men and lesbians, or others do not or will not purchase Monster drinks or participate in the Army's online community. However, it is clear that the powers that be at Monster feel that their attention and advertising dollars are best devoted to those who will be attracted (or at least not repelled) by marketing efforts that valorize these aspects of hegemonic masculinity.

DIGITAL LABOR AND CONSENT

Now that I have looked at how some Monster fans utilize these online tools, I want to return to how it is that Monster benefits from their participation, part of which hinges on both a tacit and active acceptance of a certain image of masculinity. As I discussed in the last chapter, the movement of military recruitment into the consumer market points to a greater shift in American culture, one in which the idea of "voting with your wallet" stands in for traditional definitions of civic duty. President Bush's mid-crisis exhortations to continue spending reflect the inherent inseparability of politics and economics, and how American-style democracy and

marketplace capitalism work to sustain one another through the figure of the consumer-citizen. Once in the Monster Army, reserves have access to discounts on exclusive Monster gear and are encouraged to participate in "missions" and recruiting efforts. And while joining a social networking site is definitely not the same experience as joining the military in real life, the gendered symbolism inherent in the invocation of the act of enlistment serves to reinforce masculinist narratives already at work in Monster's brand positioning. The ideal soldier gains mastery of many of the characteristics valued by hegemonic definitions of masculinity through grueling training, especially honing the capacity for emotional control. Orna Sasson-Levy points out that despite the agency assumed inherent to self-discipline, the military apparatus uses it to teach soldiers to subsume personal desires to collective interests. This includes harnessing young men's thrill-seeking tendencies for the needs of the state (Sasson-Levy, 313). Remember all those recruits seeking a "patriotic adventure?"

Monster's exhortation, then, to its consumers to follow their favorite action sports stars' examples and join the Monster Army points to a somewhat nefarious branding strategy. Young, white, jock-identified types are being recruited into the Army through positive associations with Monster products, action sports, and/or affiliation with military-themed aesthetics or ideals. They are then encouraged to—at least in some small way—bend their own will to match the methods and goals of the Monster Beverage Company's marketing department. Consumers are offered membership in a group that though technically open to anyone with Internet access and an email account, values a unique commitment to the Monster brand. Monster's website, and especially its Army, has moved beyond just simply selling cans of super-caffeinated soda; it is selling access to a certain type of identity based on and around hegemonic masculinity. This is not to suggest that those who join the Army, apply for athletic sponsorship, or are just casual consumers of

Monster energy drinks are without agency. As Migone points out, "advertising does not determine consumer behavior, but only helps to shape consumer attitudes" (Migone, 181). Consumers join the Monster Army or contribute to the Monster Energy community's photo galleries voluntarily and presumably receive at least nominal affective fulfillment through their participation, even if other, more material benefits may not be forthcoming for any but the most elite athletes.

Through its sponsorships and fostering of an online community, Monster hopes to shape loyal and enthusiastic consumers who not only actively attract or "recruit" others, but also continue to passively create traffic for Hookit as well as at Monster's home site, where they are exposed to advertising from brands with which Monster has strategically partnered. The aspect less apparent to consumers who identify with brand communities is this exploitation of their non-traditional labor. Again, the invisibility of this type of work is due not only to the increasingly unclear leisure/labor boundary, but as Terranova emphasizes, points to an underlying masculine bias. This denial of recognition "betrays the persistence of an attachment to masculine understandings of labor within the digital economy: writing an operating system is still more worthy of attention than just chatting for free for AOL" (Terranova, n.p.). As feminists have long pointed out, there is a direct correlation between labor that is valued, paid or otherwise rewarded, and association with masculine pursuits. However, as Terranova and others have made clear, it is the simple acts of logging on, clicking around, and participating in conversations (not to mention contributing content to internet sites) that generates ad revenue and makes companies' web presence profitable.

Banks and Humphreys argue that digital leisure-laborers who create and contribute online content are in fact "canny participants" in the admittedly uneven blending of financial and social

economies represented by the rise of social networking (Banks and Humphreys, 405). I, however, remain skeptical. Though this competent participation may be true for users who are deeply embedded in digital cultures and/or tech industries, the average Facebook user or Monster Army reserve member is probably not quite as knowing as these authors assert. Even as internet users may be aware that they are participating in the digital economy, they are not likely to recognize that what is a supposedly leisure activity (surfing the 'net or social networking) is actually a form of unpaid labor. Terranova describes this peculiar development as neither a "continuation of capital [n]or a break with it," but a "mutation that is totally immanent to late capitalism" (Terranova, n.p.). It is unclear, however, if a broader recognition of digital labor as just that—labor—would lead to resentment on the part of casual Internet users. Would the Monster Army reserves feel exploited if the connections between their free social networking labor and corporate profits were more clearly drawn? It is difficult to say, but it does seem evident that free labor on the internet is necessary to the functioning of the digital economy just as women's unpaid domestic and emotional labor is key to the reproduction of workers available to capital. It is ironic, then, that Monster's attempts to profit from the activities of unrecognized workers draws on such obviously masculinist rhetoric and imagery. Perhaps the digital economy will eventually reach a tipping point at which these armies of free labor begin to push back against their exploitation by capital. For now, however, Monster and innumerable other companies have successfully harnessed consumers' zest for online communities to serve their corporate master plans.

In this chapter I have attempted to more closely examine the specific Web 2.0 marketing tools Monster uses to build up its brand's appeal. The Monster Army and Hookit are part of the larger trend of building social networks around just about any shared interest thinkable. Both the

Monster Army and the Monster Energy Community serve as opportunities to appropriate the labor Monster's fans and athletes are willing to contribute to the company's various sites. Part of the importance of recognizing this process of cooptation is because it is not immediately evident to all (arguably most) users. While I do not think this knowledge would necessarily prevent many people from participating in social networking, we need to understand how personal information, no matter how many privacy precautions we take in setting up online profiles, are the food of the digital economy. Brands do not encourage fans to upload various content just out of the goodness of their hearts: it is so they can use this data to better target advertising to users *and* their contacts—this is not to mention the word-of-mouth and media buzz created by social networking activities.

My investigation into the military personnel who are Monster Army members is not an attempt to provide a prime example of the digital economy's processes, though their profiles' mere existence is a direct result of a much larger economic shift in which corporations concentrate huge resources in online marketing tools. Other internet scholars have covered this far more thoroughly than I, as this project is mostly engaged with energy drink companies' production of masculine discourse. These corporations' online engagement is partly incidental to the fact that they are selling their products in a web-centric era, though this functions in combination with attempts to appear cool, and thus necessarily on the cutting edge of developing technologies. By locating the Monster Army within these movements, I recall the arguments of C. Wright Mills and others in the first chapter that pointed to the heavy importance of economic developments to men's conceptions of themselves as men. Forced to define themselves largely through leisure pursuits, social network profiles become a site of conscious identity construction in which men's assumptions about masculinity and their varying levels of acceptance of

hegemonic gender ideals is laid bare. Most Monster Army profiles likely feature subscription to only some of the company's appeals to masculinity, but in the case of the profiles examined here, we can see several converging in the self-presentation of certain reserves members including manliness as demonstrated through risky sporting pursuits, cultural militarism and/or actual military service, and phallocentric joking and posturing. And though Monster and its fans' masculine pursuits are certainly not unique in the energy drink industry, their extension of these values into the world of social networking is, and the company's ever-growing popularity seems to demonstrate that it is a winning combination.

FIGURES
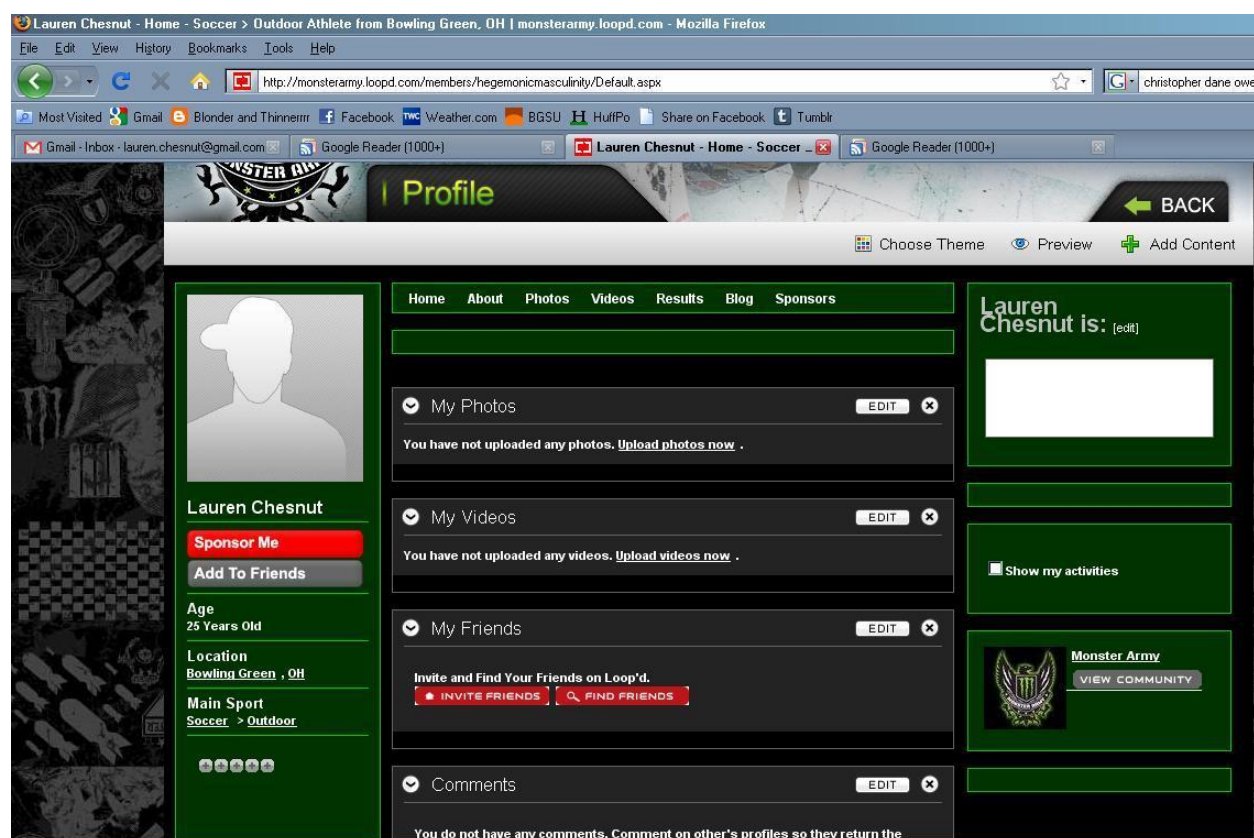
Figure 1: The Monster Army/Hookit.com default user image is that of a (white) male with a sideways baseball cap (monsterarmy.com).

Figure 2: The default profile picture on Facebook (facebook.com).

Figure 3: James McIntire's Monster Army profile picture (McIntire).

Figure 4: Monster Army member Mike Schmidt is a real-life army veteran, but the motto: "If you kill for fun you're a Sadist, If you Kill for Money you're a Mercenary, If you Kill for Both you're a Boonie Rat" applies to his paintball team, pictured above (Schmidt).

CHAPTER 4
CONCLUSIONS

Irving Horowitz has claimed that "Ours is not a political culture;" instead, American

politics are really a "fusion of personal sentiments and economic goals" (Horowitz, viii).

Through examining the ways in which consumer goods often serve as the vehicle of political

expression in the U.S., this assertion seems to hold true. This thesis has been an attempt to

identify how affect, consumer capitalism, and political expression become intertwined in the

world of energy drinks. Complex processes of gender construction are simplified by advertisers

of all stripes, but energy drink manufacturers show a unique commitment to conversations about

modern manhood. Due in part to the deep cultural connections between gender and war, the

United States' ongoing military efforts in the Middle East and the public discourse surrounding

them provide an almost inevitable backdrop for any efforts to define or redefine masculinity. I

have considered the products, marketing, and web content produced by energy drink companies

(and their fans) valuable artifacts in an attempt to more firmly pin down some of the most recent

discourses of masculinity and how various political and economic forces may be influencing

their content.

One of the aims of this thesis has been to expose the ways in which militaristic ideals and

the notions of the inevitability of war influence our everyday lives. As we have seen by looking

at products produced by Monster, Ol' Glory, and others, even the most apolitical-seeming

consumer decisions (like what to drink) are fraught with tension because of the attempts of

corporations to create and market products that will appeal to consumers by drawing on larger

cultural symbols and discourses. The Monster Beverage Company may believe it can disavow

the political associations of, say, camouflage, but the fact that the Monster Assault can's

designers recognize the appeal of the pattern means that they implicitly understand the positive associations between men, the military, excitement, and danger.

This might be all well and good if militarism were a benign force. The misleading concept of the Cold War as a "long peace," and the reality of waging nearly constant ongoing conflicts or campaigns by the U.S. military since WWII, as well as the development of an all-volunteer force, have allowed a state of war to become a normal part of life for Americans, most of whom will not be directly involved. Besides desensitizing Americans to the death and destruction of faraway civilian populations as well as on our own forces (as long as they come in small numbers), martial values become acceptable in all sorts of non-military settings. Feminist theorists and activists warn against the inherently hierarchical and masculinist nature of military structures, warning against the influence the valorizing of militarized styles of masculinity on the broader socialization of boys and on institutions that carry out these processes. Anti-war activist Leslie Cagan claims that "Military institutions themselves are also anti-democratic and the opposite of structures based on feminist principles" (Cagan, 252). Despite the growth of women's presence and roles in the U.S. and other militaries, training for battle draws on supposedly natural masculine personality traits in order to mold civilians into proper soldiers. This gendered instruction is a continuation of the coaching given to boys to suppress emotions as part of the "hardening" process that will turn them into men, as outlined by Goldstein (Goldstein, 268).

By trafficking in images of militarism through consumer products, beverage companies, video game designers, and others are effectively normalizing the deadening of men's emotions and the adoption of hierarchical and authoritarian methods of organization outside of an explicitly military context. This is not to say, of course, that consumers are unknowingly

drinking in militarized values and are too clueless to understand that a camouflage pattern on a can represents camouflaged uniforms. It is to point out the ways in which references to militarism are so completely integrated into our culture that we easily accept them as normal, unobjectionable, and even attractive. And while certainly not everyone (certainly not Ol' Glory's Don Sessions) would agree with Cagan and with me that everyday cultural militarism may not actually be in the best interest of regular women and men (and, as Cagan argues, soldiers themselves), we cannot begin to debate the point until we effectively expose just how unnoticed it has become.

Another important part of this project has been placing current hegemonic ideals of masculinity in context of American history, pointing to both their variable nature and also the tendency of certain aspects to retain influence. From the self-made man to the modern relatable political candidate we would all like to "have a beer with," independence and anti-elitist tastes have long carried cultural weight. This discussion of "authenticity" draws much from the cultural celebration of white, working-class, masculine values and is often a very active part of the appeal of various conservative movements. Case in point: in October of 2008, Republican vice presidential candidate and Governor of Alaska Sarah Palin received both criticism and praise for announcing to a North Carolina audience that small towns are "the real America" and the "pro-America areas of this great nation" (Layton, n.p.). Drawing on her "Jane Sixpack" appeal, Palin and her handlers emphasized her "rural roots, her lack of sophistication and worldliness, her bare bones education, her plain-spokenness, [and] her moose hunting" (Gabler, 1). It should be noted that though Palin is a woman, her political brand played up her adherence to these masculine ideals as her greatest assets. This phenomenon points to the possibility of projects that utilize

Judith Halberstam's concept of "female masculinity" to further investigate the gendered dynamics of Palin's public face.

The conflations between patriotism, war, and masculinity in public discourse have become particular evident in the process of writing this thesis, and I think it necessary that we recognize how these discourses feed one another. By locating energy drinks in a unique post-9/11 and wartime era, we must engage with the reordering of gender that often accompanies national crisis. As Susan Faludi and others have described, often security fears lead people to latch on to the familiar and the traditional, allowing for stricter and more old-fashioned gender roles to be publicly reasserted. In addition to these developments, however, is the nearly complete conversion of the U.S. citizen to a citizen-consumer whose civic duty is fulfilled through the maintenance of capitalist economic cycles. Taken together, we start to understand how products like Re Up, the energy drink for enlisted men and women or Ol' Glory, the beverage of choice for working-class, patriotic types susceptible to military recruitment have come into existence. In many ways, the webs of political and cultural meanings represented in their marketing make military-themed energy drinks prime examples of Horowitz's description of U.S. political culture. Patriotic sentiment, subscription to militarized masculine ideals, and acceptance of one's role as a consumer-citizen all play a part in the development of products like these.

Besides the historical discussions of American manhood and patriotism and efforts to denaturalize militarized cultural elements, this thesis has relied heavily on research about how shifts in capitalist economies influence how identities, particularly *gendered* identities, are enacted and how that performance helps fuel corporate profits. The rise of service and white collar sectors jobs psychologically displaced many men who had been raised to value the idea of

a self-made man who economically independent and adequately provides for his family through some type of appropriately masculine occupational pursuit. While men's self-definitions were pushed further and further into the leisure sphere, consumer brands became more and more invested in promoting certain images and lifestyles than in individual products for sale. Not only are these developments key to understanding why a company like Monster would so fully immerse itself in the action sports community and co-opt positive associations with militarism, but it also helps to explain how Monster and others have been able to convince their consumers to perform unpaid digital labor for them.

Not only do I believe that consumers are largely uncomprehending in their grasp of how social networking and other online activities work as an economic system, but I also think that a number of factors encourage white men in particular to somewhat unconscious to how they are being manipulated. In my engagement with the scholarship of Lisa Nakamura, I hoped to help elucidate how internet architecture is built for (even if not always *by* anymore) a default white male user. Sites like Hookit and monsterenergy.com cater to this group in part because their privileged status makes them an important source of income, but also because their largely culturally unmarked status has forced those who do not fit the demographic to accept that white men often stand in for humanity in general, are used to be excluded, and hence do not have the option of demanding representation by the corporations they patronize.

In large part, my investigation of the Monster Army social networking site was spurred by the aforementioned examinations of cultural productions that reinscribe hegemonic discourses about masculinity and militarism. However, though the themes certainly carried through, even in my ethnographic research of individual members' profiles, the economic aspects helped again to expose how corporations make aesthetic decisions like those to include military recruitment

information or to mimic the military hierarchy in social network form in order to attract, retain, and ultimately profit from consumers. The construction of the Monster Army not only carries out the widespread marketing practices discussed in this project that celebrate militarized masculinity, but also points to how these associations can be exploited by every new economic development. The Monster Army rides the wave of free digital labor performed by consumers in their leisure time out of affective bonds with its brand and the larger lifestyle it encourages by joining the world of social networking. So while my broader research areas of interest do not necessarily include digital technologies, my engagement with energy drink trends and cultural representations of masculinity led me to explore this growing area of both research and corporate profits. In all, I hope this project signifies merely a beginning in a body of scholarly literature concerning the social and cultural implications of the energy drink industry's marketing strategies—whether that pertains to physical packaging and web design, digital labor exploitation, or masculinist rhetoric—and the changing definitions of American masculinities.

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