

MADD vs. SPUDS debate speech

A couple of months ago I was thumbing through a magazine, when a particular page caught my eye. There on the page relaxing in a director's chair, wearing a tuxedo, was an ugly white dog with one black ring around its eye. It took me a minute to realize that this was Spuds MacKenzie. Spuds MacKenzie is the "original party animal" that represents Anheuser Busch's Bud Light beer. At the time, I didn't know very much about Spuds MacKenzie, just a few things my little girls told me like they think he's cute and they like his commercials. I had also heard some rumors like the "original" Spuds MacKenzie is dead, and the new Spuds MacKenzie is really a female dog that just had puppies. But the rumor that concerned me the most was that Mothers Against Drunk Drivers (MADD) want Anheuser Busch to stop using Spuds MacKenzie to promote Bud Light. Apparently, MADD thinks there is a subliminal message behind Spuds MacKenzie that is making young people think it is okay to drink. From the October, 1987 issue of People's Magazine, MADD urged Anheuser Busch to take a look at the effect Spuds MacKenzie is having on our children. Okay, so you are probably saying to yourself, "He looks so harmless." Well, I thought so too. I thought, how could such an ugly dog have a subliminal effect on anybody? At first I didn't know whose side to be on, but then I did some research and my answer became very clear quickly. I think you will agree with me once you know more about Spuds MacKenzie, what children and adults think of him, and the effects he has on children. Anheuser Busch always creates a great atmosphere around Spuds MacKenzie. They always show him all dressed up, gorgeous girls on both arms, lots of popularity, and always in the best night clubs. The problem with the scenario is that Anheuser Busch needs to show the other side of drinking. We never see Spuds MacKenzie in sleazy bars, laying on the floor drunk out of his mind wondering where his next beer is going to come from. Of course not, because I think if our young people clearly understood what can happen when you drink, a lot of them would choose not to drink.

Several months ago, I spoke with Sandy Gilman from the Northwest chapter of MADD, and she had this to say: "The problem with

Anheuser Busch is they don't show the other side of drinking. They just glamorize the night club scene for young people." She also mentioned that children can become addicted to drugs and alcohol faster than an adult.

After I learned more about the discord going on between MADD and Anheuser Busch, I decided to do some research and find out just what young people think about Spuds MacKenzie. I decided to visit two grade schools, and survey 132 children between the ages of 7 and 14. What I wanted to find out was: 1. Do they know who Spuds MacKenzie is? 2. What product he represents? 3. Would they use the product? The results were astounding! Out of the 132 children, 108 of them knew who Spuds MacKenzie was (no surprise). But out of the 108 children who knew who Spuds MacKenzie was, 47 of them said they would use Bud Light beer. Three of them admitted to having already drank it. My guess is that at the 11 to 14 age that the number is higher, but they didn't want to admit it. What I think told the whole story though was just being in the room with the children to see how they reacted. When I first walked into the classrooms, nobody was really interested in the fact that I was doing a survey until I said Spuds MacKenzie's name. After that, their faces lit up. Everyone wanted to tell me what they thought. A lot of the seventh and eighth graders referred to Spuds MacKenzie as a "real cool dude, real popular." A seventh grade girl came up to me and said, "I hope you're not here to tell me to stop wearing my Spuds MacKenzie t-shirt, because when I wear it I feel real popular." A third grade boy stood up in the classroom and said, "My dad's a bud man, and I'm going to be a bud man when I grow up." Well, score another one for Spuds MacKenzie.

I also randomly asked college students if they knew who Spuds MacKenzie was. I would like to share some of their reactions with you. One student thought he was a basketball player, while another thought he was a newscaster, and yet another student I asked thought he was a wrestler. So I wonder, how do we rationalize the fact that when so many adults don't know who Spuds MacKenzie is that so many young people do? Is it because we are at a consenting age so the subliminal suggestion to drink is lost on

us? The problem is though, what about young people? They are at their most impressionable age now. The biggest surprise in my research occurred when I was working with my daughter, Morgan, who is nine years old. I pride myself on the fact that I monitor her television viewing very carefully. I was really surprised when I asked her who Spuds MacKenzie was she could not only tell me, she could describe the commercials. The only time I don't watch television with Morgan is during after school specials and Saturday cartoons. So I asked her, "when are you seeing these commercials?" You guessed it, during after school specials. A couple of Saturdays ago, Morgan came to me at 10:00 in the morning to tell me she had just seen a Spuds MacKenzie commercial on during the Flintstones. We are talking about prime time t.v. for children. There is no reason for Anheuser Busch to advertise during prime time t.v. viewing for children. This is planned media programming by Anheuser Busch to get our children to think about beer and drinking at an early age. You know what I'm upset about, and you should be too. There are plenty of other hours in the day for Anheuser Busch to advertise other than prime time t.v. for children. While working with young people helped me gain valuable information, going shopping also benefited my research. I wanted to see how else Anheuser Busch was advertising Spuds MacKenzie other than the commercials. I was in luck the week I went because two large department stores were having Spuds MacKenzie week. I got to see all kinds of things like key chains, posters, t-shirts, puzzles, earrings, and mirrors. You know, all of the types of things adults buy for themselves. So, I decided to buy some of the Spuds MacKenzie items for myself. But as I was getting closer to the cash register, I began to feel uncomfortable about buying anything with Spuds MacKenzie's face on it. I explained how I felt to the sales lady. She told me that the stores get the Spuds MacKenzie t-shirts in by the hundreds, and sell them that way, and it's not adults buying them. What about those stuffed Spuds MacKenzie dogs, they sure are cute don't you think? When was the last time you saw an adult buy a stuffed Spuds MacKenzie dog for himself?

From the October, 1987

issue of People's Magazine, William McCord, Executive Director of the South Carolina Commission on Alcohol Abuse had this to say, "I can't believe Anheuser Busch has the audacity to say those stuffed Spuds MacKenzie dogs are not for children. It's an insult to the intelligence of the American people." I couldn't agree more. Some people argue that in ten years young people will not remember spuds MacKenzie. That's like saying they won't remember reading, writing, and arithmetic--they will. A good example of this is: McDonald's, Burger King, and Wendy's. When you ask young people where they want to go to have a hamburger, they won't say the local cafe. They will probably say they want to see Ronald McDonald, Hamburgler, or Wendy. As long as Anheuser Busch is allowed to use Spuds MacKenzie to draw young people's attention to beer, there will be a subliminal message. This is overt manipulation by Anheuser Busch to get young people to drink, and it is a fact that we all need to consider.

Now that you know more about Spuds MacKenzie, what children and adults think of him, and how affects children, I think we need to urge Anheuser Busch to admit a fault and stop using Spuds MacKenzie to advertise Bud Light beer. Some of the schools in the area have disallowed students to wear Spuds MacKenzie t-shirts. This is a start. As adults though, there are a few things we can all do: 1. Don't buy t-shirts or anything else that has Spuds MacKenzie on it for children, because it's not for children. 2. If you are in the room with young people and a Spuds MacKenzie commercial comes on, turn it off. Monitor television very carefully. 3. Be aware of advertising campaigns like Spuds MacKenzie, while seemingly harmless they are leading our children down the wrong path. In conclusion, I would like to say that I am not here to tell you not to drink, that is your own choice. I'm just asking that we let children grow up without subliminal messages that make them think it's okay to drink so they can make a clear choice whether to drink or not. I would like to leave you with one last thought, "If Spuds MacKenzie were a democratic presidential candidate today, he would be out of the race by now."

by Beth Magionos

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