

Invasion of the Essex Men

The dawning of a new social order?

BURKITT
WEINREICH
BRYANT
CLIENTS
& COMPANY
LIMITED

Invasion of the Essex Men

*The dawning of a
new social order?*

By Simon Silvester

BURKITT WEINREICH BRYANT CLIENTS & COMPANY LIMITED
GLEN HOUSE, 200 TOTTENHAM COURT ROAD, LONDON W1P 9LA
TELEPHONE 071- 636 9801 FAX 071- 637 5736

Burkitt Weinreich Who?

This booklet has been prepared by Burkitt Weinreich Bryant, an advertising agency which believes in a ruthless interrogation of the *basic rules* of the marketplace before creating advertising for its clients.

Such questioning - of the product, of its competition and most importantly of its *consumer* - leads to strategies, and thence advertising designed to *get a reaction* rather than just to entertain.

Using intuitive research techniques to work out the flaws in the logic which underpin the unthinking habits of the customer, we aim to find the chinks in the competition's armour.

The resulting advertising can go beyond selling - it may even redefine what the market in question is all about.

Strategies based on a slavish devotion to conventional research however, can only lead to one outcome: a campaign that passes like a ship in the night.

This booklet is based on the disturbing findings of one of our recent projects.

We hope it may provoke you.

Management Summary

- 1 Essex Man *isn't* a joke. Research shows he and his family are *the* affluent Britons of the 1990s.

- 2 Through the 1980's Essex Man's income overtook that of the middle classes who once looked down on him. Less than a *third* of Britain's type 'AB' core middle class families take home more than £25,000 a year nowadays. *Half* the British families earning that sum or more in 1991 are of class *C1 or below*. (Page 5)

- 3 Furthermore, Essex Man has kids who want to work at 16. 34% of Essex households have 3 or more workers, compared with 7% of AB households. AB parents find their kids draining their income as students, and training for the professions or au pairing on a pittance *until their mid twenties*. (Page 14)

- 4 Whilst the ABs dutifully fill in their tax returns, Essex Man is a key player in the grey economy that comprises 16% of UK GDP. Essex Man not only earns more, he earns much of it *tax free*. (Page 8)

- 5 Essex Man doesn't waste his wad on pen-

sions and school fees. (Though 41% of his category own shares) His income goes straight into *the good life*. (Page 9)

6 Thus the Essex household has more cars (47% have two, another 21% have *three*) than the middle classes, and spends more on those cars. *Pity the middle class headmaster in his X reg Cavalier*. (Page 13)

7 And around 9% Essex families have been on holiday to the States in the last year or so. Only 6% of ABs managed to follow them. *The rest couldn't afford it*.

8 Essex Girls shouldn't be laughed at either. Their desire to *earn* rather than *learn* means they are beginning to adopt the American/Japanese spending patterns their British middle class contemporaries *can only dream of*. (Page 17)

The statistical source in points 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7 is BMRB/TGI 1991.

9 The jokes about sex have a basis in fact though. Research shows that Essex Girls exposure to America have left them with *an American morality*. Anything goes, especially on the back seat of an XR3i. (Page 18)

10 All in all, the 1980s have left Britain with a more affluent, more confident C1C2D class than ever before in our history. The signs are that it is *they* and their values, and *not those of the middle class intelligentsia*, which will lead Britain into the next century.

Essex Man

Essex Man, the Rottweiler owning, heavily tattooed, high disposable income medallion man, together with his XR3i driving son, and daughter in white mini skirt and stilettos is the butt of much contemporary humour.

But behind the jokes lies a startling truth: the people behind this culture - the well off C1C2 families so typical of parts of Urban Essex, Milton Keynes and other outposts of prosperous Britain are now so wealthy, and so numerous, that it is they, *rather than the ABs*, who are now the key force in many luxury goods markets.

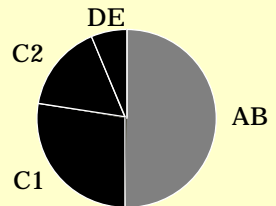
In these markets, not only do marketeers need to rethink their targeting, they need to rethink their entire attitude towards selling. Brought up in an environment where selling is acceptable, and hard cash talks, Essex Man does not share the distaste for 'trade' of his more middle class contemporaries.

Furthermore, we go on to show that, unlike the aspiring C1s of 20 years ago, Essex Man is *not* emulating the lifestyle of the ABs. He is secure in his own values, has his own ideas about the world, and is sticking with them.

As the nineties continue, the influence of Essex Man and his values upon our society is likely to wax rather than wane. Essex Man is not waiting for John Major to create a classless Britain, he is carving out a new social order in his own image.

He may be the blueprint for a new set of British values for the next century.

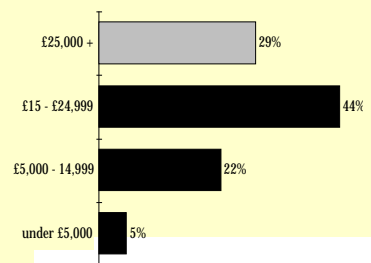
GB HOUSEHOLDS,
INCOME £25K +



Source: BMRB/TGI 1991

There are now as many high earning non AB households in Britain as ABs.

HOW RICH ARE THE
AB'S ANYWAY?



Source: BMRB/TGI 1991

They may be posh, but they aren't rich. 71% of the poshest fifth of British families rake in less than £25K a year.

Who is Essex Man?

In contemporary humour, Essex Man is defined only vaguely; he is rich, but not 'posh'; he drives a sports car with too many lights on it; he owns a Rottweiler. The jokes work because everyone recognises the stereotype.

Here, to aid analysis, we use a more formal definition: We define Essex Man as *a member of any U.K. household of classes C1, C2 or D where total household income exceeds £25,000 a year.*

As we go on to show, the definition confirms the stereotype.

Researching Essex Man

As an advertising agency constantly researching the consumer, we have spent much time interviewing C1C2D adults, talking to them about products as diverse as baby food and petrol.

We have also commissioned special analyses of Target Group Index 1991, the recently published computer database of the buying habits and attitudes of 25,000 UK adults.

We have concluded that in many markets, the socio economic discriminators of AB, C1, C2 D and E are no longer the dimension that is driving consumption. In a country where a good bricklayer can earn more than a solicitor, pure cashflow divides the households that buy premium products from those that don't. And it is Essex households which have the wads.

Essex Man likes money for what it buys

Essex Man not only makes a lot of money, he is more

"I am not sure I could define what rich is. Some people feel rich on fairly small amounts. I know millionaires who would deny they were rich."

John Smith, Shadow Chancellor

What class are you?

It's done by the occupation of the head of your household. For example:

A

judge, large secondary school head, coroner, QC, hospital matron, attorney, auditor, professor, senior managerial, hospital consultant, national newspaper editor.

B

national journalist, social worker (fully qualified) regional newspaper editor, parson, middle managerial, abbot, secondary school teacher, most accountants & solicitors, rabbi, probation officer.

C1

staff nurse, secretary, detective constable, receptionist, clerk, car salesman, sales rep, researcher, cameraman, site foreman, student.

C2

plasterer, printer, brickie, fitter, skilled electrician, London taxi driver, most plumbers.

D

unskilled labourer, minicab driver, removal man, roadworker, rodent operative, lollipopman, despatch rider, au pair.

E

unemployed.

*"Rich is having a big wad
in your back pocket."*

Plasterer

Source: The Market Research Society

willing to spend the money that he has than the professional classes. ABs may often have wealth in their homes, but are much more reticent about expenditure:

- The landed gentry own a large chunk of Britain’s marketable wealth, but prevented by their sense of family continuity, they cannot spend it.
- The professional class sink their money into school fee plans and pensions; they are reticent about spending their money on immediate consumption. And their children limit their parents expenditure by living off their income until their mid twenties, in years of further education.
- But Essex man, unencumbered by a need to save for school fees, and with children desperate to become economically active at 15, has never had it so good. *He has a disproportionate effect on many FMCG markets.*
- Household income isn’t the end of it either. Professionals tend to remain entirely within the legal restrictions of PAYE codes when it comes to income. The Essex man, with his network of craftsman colleagues is a key player in the estimated 16% of GDP which comprises Britain’s grey economy.

“I suppose we are quite well off. But I can’t afford an exotic holiday until the kids leave school.”

Accountant, Streatham

“I suppose our family home is worth millions. But I still can’t afford a decent car.”

Judge’s daughter, Fulham

“I make a grand or so a week rewiring houses, then make another pony or so at car boot sales on Sundays.”

C2 Man, Romford

WHERE DOES ESSEX MAN LIVE?

	AB	Essex Man
LONDON	17%	22%
SOUTH EAST/ EAST ANGLIA	29%	32%
EVERYWHERE ELSE	54%	46%

Source: BMRB/TGI 1991

How Essex Man is Taking Over

Below are three examples of markets driven by Essex Man:

1 Solicitors aren't buying camcorders

One of the fastest growing durable product sectors of the moment is the video camera. But is it the middle classes who are buying it? No, it's the well off C2. There is an element of lifestyle criteria present here - Essex Man's lifestyle centres around his television, and he will buy any and every attachment for it. But our research shows that most professional families would also like a video camera - *it's just that they can't afford one.*

"It'd be nice to film the kids growing up, but with my mortgage, there's no way I can afford one."

Journalist, Birmingham

2 Even Shares Are Out

Twenty years ago, shares and stocks were the jealously guarded income stream of the professional classes. After a decade of popular Thatcherism, that situation no longer exists.

SHAREHOLDING

	AB	Essex Man
Have stocks/shares	40.7%	40.5%
Have unquoted stocks/shares	21.5%	21.6%

Source: BMRB/TGI 1991

"It's like putting it on the horses. I started with the privatisations, then got into rights issues. Then I got talking to a mate of my son's in MK who's a money broker.."

Man, 42, Bletchley

3 Credit Cards

As far as Essex Man is concerned, there's no point in having lots of money if if no one else knows about it. Gold plated taps in the loo impress the socks off visitors to his home in need of a leak, but how does he

communicate his status to less close acquaintances?

Credit and charge cards provide the answer. They are flashily, highly visible, and rely on minimum personal income, rather than job description to select their user group. *Charge card ownership is higher amongst Essex Man than it is amongst the professional class.*

WANT TO LOOK POSH? FLASH YOUR FLEXIBLE FRIEND

	AB	Essex Man
Hold an Amex Card	4.5%	10.5%
Index vs. All Adults	267	623

Source: BMRB/TGI 1991

Similarly with Gold Cards. In the late eighties, Nat West issued them as a matter of course to all their customers earning £20,000 or more. But research shows that the people who use their gold cards are in the £20 to £25K bracket.

The seriously rich revert to their Barclaycard.

He's Not Emulating the ABs

Twenty five years ago, the aspiring C1 would be busying the social morés of the professional class. But ten years of popular capitalism has given Essex man the confidence to go it alone.

Will he in the end begin to follow the lace curtains of the 1950's C1? The difference between Essex man and his predecessor is that thirty years ago, the upwardly mobile were few and far between. Above them, the only culture visible was that of the moneyed upper classes. They had no option but to ape the lifestyle.

In the eighties though, mass market prosperity was

“My boss goes to France on holiday, but I never want to go back. I got beaten up after Man United Bordeaux once. I go to Fort Lauderdale. It's hotter, and the bar staff talk English.”

Taxi driver, Salford

so widespread in certain parts of the country that Essex Man has an entire network of friends who came up the same way as him, and share his values. And these are now people he meets when he joins the Conservative Association, not the landed gentry. He is hermetically sealed within his own Essex Man environment.

Secondly, he has been a lot better exposed to alternative upmarket lifestyles than his 1950's counterpart. Avid watching of Dallas and Dynasty in the early eighties, combined with extensive travel to America's sunspots (Essex Men are 50% more likely than ABs to have holidayed in the USA recently) has left him with new sets of values to aspire to.

It may perhaps be that over time, Essex man *does* start to ape the patterns of the ABs.

But in John Major's new classless society, will not the pressure be on the ABs to emulate Essex man - *if they can afford to?*

"There's some posh gits at my daughter's pony club. But do you know where they go on holiday? Normandy! They've never even seen the States."

Plumber, High Wycombe

Towards a new target group description

Clearly in certain matters - marriage, friendship, peer group and so on, class is the key social discriminator. But when it comes to buying expensive cars, does class matter all that much? Oxbridge dons are As, and many want a swimming pool. But it's the brickie on £25K (cash) who will have one built.

We therefore leave the question for debate:

Should we carry on targeting our luxury product campaigns at ABs, rather than at the *rich?*

Essex Man Lifestyle

Perceptions of Society

Essex Man first of all denies that social order exists. He doesn't want to admit that there are socioeconomic groups in Britain today. The word class is an anathema to him.

Essex man always has the same view of his past - a steady rise in affluence, with its associated guilt.

(But not to the extent that it promotes philanthropy. According to TGI, 39% of Essex Men have given less than £5 to charity in the last twelve months.)

He denies the idea of class being important, professing the view that 'we're all the same nowadays'. However he is willing to accept that there are 'posh people' around, but he *does not see them as the mainstream of society*.

Meanwhile, Essex women in particular have a fairly clear idea of what lies below them or in their terms what is 'common'.

This includes:

- Tattoos on women (Tattoos on men are acceptable)
- Unskilled/long term unemployed workers and their families.
- Anyone living in inner city areas.

The Essex family is carving a new social order with themselves at pole position.

The Importance of Cars

ABs joke about the XR3i driver with his skirts and

What's the difference between an Essex Man and a supermarket trolley?

A supermarket trolley has a mind of its own.

What makes an Essex Girl squeal during sex?
Getting her toe stuck in the cigarette lighter.

spoilers. But we would argue that Essex man is the norm, but for two distortions within the UK car market:

- In America, most people own their own cars. It is thus normal for young men to 'do up' their cars. In Britain, most ABs have company cars, and *aren't allowed* to do them up by their employers. A note of resentment perhaps?
- In Britain, the high price of motoring (Car prices are amongst the highest in Europe, and petrol costs three times as much as in America) means that most teenagers drive their *parents* cars. Few families can afford the American ideal of a car for every member of the family over 17. *Except in Essex.*

Essex Man is actually less likely than average to own a dog. It's just that when he does, it isn't a corgi.

ESSEX MEN HAVE THE FLASH CARS

	AB	Essex Man
Bought new car		
in last year	17.9%	21.9%
Spent £15K + on car	3.2%	4.2%
2+ Car households	48.0%	67.3%
3+ Cars	8.9%	20.6%

Source: BMRB/TGI 1991

Why so many cars?

Essex man has more children earlier than his AB rivals. By the time he is 45, and has 'made it', he has two or more kids in their late teens or early twenties.

At this point in their lives, AB kids are still living off their parents, being sent to university, or expensive secretarial colleges, or being subsidised as foreign au pairs.

Essex kids on the other hand have no such interest in vocational study.

GETTING INTO THE REAL WORLD

	AB	Essex Man
Leave education by 18	52.1%	73.5%
3+ full time workers in the house	6.6%	33.8%

Source: BMRB/TGI 1991

At this point in the family's life cycle therefore, the affluence rockets:

THE ESSEX MAN'S HOUSEHOLD INCOME AT 45

Self (builder)	£30,000
Wife (admin back up)	£12,000
Son (Insurance sales)	£15,000
Daughter (shop asst)	£8,000
Total	£65,000

As household income increases, overheads drop, as he begins to finish paying off his mortgage, his wife has gone back to work, and his kids are still at home. (Typically they continue pumping money into the household economy until they are 24 - life at home is too good.)

Thus whereas the professional parent cannot afford to give their child more than a gold watch at 18, Essex man gives his kids *cars* as coming of age presents.

How does an Essex girl switch the bedroom light on?

By opening the door of the Capri.

"I don't like my Karen bringing blokes home. I caught her sneaking some geezer up the stairs one night, and I smacked him one in the face."

Electrician, West Midlands

Why the jokes about sex in cars?

The liberalism towards their children's sex lives that is often typical of professional parents is not adopted by Essex men. Instead, a strong moral code - particularly for daughters - prevails.

Faced with such strong parental disapproval, Essex youth have only one option: the back seat of the XR3i.

"My daughter's going to have a really nice white wedding. I don't want no one messing around with her before then."

Man, Dagenham

More on decorating cars

Cluster analysis of market research data in the motoring market shows that motorists fit into five or six distinct clusters.

There is a primarily AB cluster of typically executive company car drivers; A cluster of Sierra/Cavalier driving sales executives. Another cluster comprises younger male drivers, who own Escorts and hot hatches, and tend to service them themselves.

Essex Lads we have spoken to in the past have strong reasons for 'doing up' their cars. Key amongst these is that their model is often widely owned in their area, and adding extra lights, dice and so on is a way of personalising it. There is also an element of style involved.

Undressed cars are seen as very middle aged; their dad's cars, or the type of car that belongs to the 'company man' the sort of executive who never steps out of line.

Thus car dressing performs for the Essex lad the role of mating plumage and of differentiating his generation.

"I spend every weekend tinkering with my motor. It's a sort of hobby."

Man, 23, Chingford

"Garfields are nice. They make cars look nicer."

Girl, 19, Reading

Appealing to Essex Man

This document only gives a sketch of the new British rich. Clearly, guidelines for communicating with this group are going to be heavily product specific, and dependent on the market.

However it is clear to us that much of British advertising for expensive products is couched in genteel middle class tones. Whilst an element of class is appreciated, *the avoidance of selling* is a mistake. Set out your product and tell him why it's better. Essex man is used to dealing and getting discounts

Sell to him like an American - he will listen. He's been to the States, he likes the people, he appreciates the service. The American bent for commercialisation, anathema to the British middle class, is the credo upon which Essex Man built his lifestyle.

Finally, watch your media choice. Essex Man doesn't care for the Independent or the Guardian. The women have their clothes on, and there's no Nigel Dempster for the wife.

Why do Surrey Girls avoid gang bangs?
Too many thank you notes to write.

HASN'T THE RECESSION GOT RID OF GREED IS GOOD?

	1991 average	% incr over 1990
Top 10% of male employees	£26,406	8.6%
Median	£14,430	7.5%
Bottom 10%	£8,356	6.8%

Source: DoE New Earnings Survey, year to April.

The caring nineties - what a joke. As the recession continues, so do the pickings for the rich. The earnings gap is now wider than at any time since 1886, according to Professor A B Atkinson of the LSE.

The Truth About Essex Girls

The butt of a thousand jokes she may be, but Essex Girl enjoys a much more affluent lifestyle than her than her stable maiding or au pairing AB counterpart:

Money

Essex girl lives at home, and leaves school at sixteen to 'get into the real world' and start earning. Girls who stay on into further education are resented as 'snobby cows'.

By seventeen, she has a reasonable disposable income - typically £110 a week for a £8.5K shop assistant. The point about Essex Girl though is that she has *very few overheads*:

- She lives and eats at home, paying minimal or no rent.
- She has no desire for saving or pensions. She has been brought up to *live for today*.
- Her bedroom is filled with tv, hifi, video from a decade of *cash rich Christmases*.
- The car, petrol, holidays and so on are *funded by her father*.
- Drinks, meals out, cinema tickets or for entertainment are also covered. Essex code of conduct is *always* that the male pays. Going Dutch is for 'lezzies and students'.

Essex Girl has thus few financial demands on her. The money - £440 a month - therefore goes entirely on *clothes and make up*.

Thus in her spending habits our 'Essex Princess' is a western version of the *office lady*, the 18 to 25 year

THE ESSEX COURTSHIP RITUAL

Date 1

Dinner: avocado/prawns or 'lingweeny' then steak in a Beefeater or other 'class' restaurant. He drives her home. The hand up the skirt upon arrival is resisted.

Date 2

Romantic film in the local multiplex, followed by burger in his car. She 'let's him do it' as they are now 'in a relationship'.

Date 3

Sex in her bedroom whilst her parents are in the pub.

Date 4

She catches him at a party with one of her friends. Break up.

Date 5

Next man.

old non-career woman so typical of Japanese society, who typically funds £1000 of designer clothes a week out of her secretarial salary.

Sex and the Essex Girl

But Essex Girl isn't entirely like the Japanese. It is clear that a heavy exposure to American values and an ethos that believes in living life for today means Essex Girl is *sexually active from as young as 13*.

Her first sexual experience usually comes on holiday. As a 21 year old C2 from Romford put it to us:

"When you're on holiday, you feel all different. I was in Orlando with my parents when I was 14 and I met this bartender called Brett. He looked like one of those American football players, and was really forward, unlike wimpy British blokes. He had a really nice apartment and I just couldn't resist."

Clearly though, Essex Boys are no blushing violets when it comes to hot dates. As one of them pointed out: *'You act all romantic, because girls like all that stuff. But what you want is a good doff. You take her out, you spend fifty quid on her, you're obviously entitled to your reward.'*

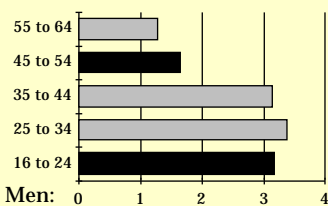
Aspirations

Essex Girl never wanted a career. In qualitative research groups, the pattern of her desires is as uniform as it is clear. What she wants is:

- Lots of beach holidays (Florida or California - Spain is 'for Sharons') and a mahogany tan.
- Marriage and a baby at 21.
- A large, newly built house with a pool, fitted kitchen, jacuzzi and Sky.

As Essex Man is in a better position than the ABs to benefit from the upswing as the recession ends, the likelihood is that she *will get it all*.

BONK BONK BONK



Men: 0 1 2 3 4
Source: The Observer/Gallup

The average young British woman has slept with 3.2 men already - *twice as many as her mum has had in a lifetime*.

HOW MANY MEN HAS ESSEX GIRL HAD?



*Mrs. Thatcher **banned** the national sex survey which would have told us.*

*The results would have been interesting. Many Essex Girls we spoke to had slept with **seven** men by age 24 - over **twice** the national average.*

Conclusions & Predictions

- 1 Ten years of popular capitalism and the quantum leap in affluence experienced by certain sectors of British society in the eighties cannot be ignored.

Marketeters are hiding their heads in the sand if they believe that expensive products should be targeted exclusively at AB's. In a society where a good bricklayer can earn more than a headmaster, it is household income that its the key discriminator in many consumer goods markets.

In John Major's classless society of the nineties, it is *the colour of your money rather than the stripes of your tie* that successful luxury manufacturers will target.
- 2 In 1979, Essex Man was the lifelong Labour supporter who let Mrs Thatcher in. The outcome of the next election will hinge on whether he stays Conservative, or returns to his Labour roots. John Smith had better pitch his 50p tax band carefully. *Essex Man's neck is on the block next to the stockbrokers.*
- 3 Essex Man has been to the States, has experienced good service, and increasingly will not shrink from demanding it. The "Sorry about the flies, sir" sector of *the British service industry* may soon be in for a shock.
- 4 A certain proportion of British TV commercials will lose their smarmy middle class voice overs, and replace them with the cash-on-delivery language of Essex Man. Goodbye Richard Briers and Geoffrey Palmer, hello Derek Jameson. *The hard sell will come to Britain.*
- 5 The nineties will see a *crisis in British middle class values*. Middle class mummies no longer tell their daughters to become nurses - the wages are too bad. But how will their children choose between a life of penury as a local government officer, or the high life of selling fitted kitchens? *Posh or dosh* - that will be the question.

Research Sources

One of the key research sources for this paper is Target Group Index 1991, a British Market Research Bureau survey of the buying habits and attitudes of 25,000 UK adults aged 15 plus.

With results appearing in August each year, it provides the key marketing database for the advertising and marketing industry.

The survey asks respondents to identify their gross household income within certain salary bands. Of course, a certain proportion refuse to give an indication. For this report, the results are adjusted for non response.

The consumer quotes have come from Burkitt Weinreich Bryant's many group discussion research projects for our clients, combined with findings from research discussions with consumers in pubs, clubs and on the streets of Britain.