IT'S A JUNGLE OUT THERE

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[Assignment: In a short essay, make a point about television or another form of popular culture. If you choose to make a cause and effect analysis, what are the the effects or consequences of something, or what are the causes?]

(1) "Honk, honk!" sounds an automobile in the background as the camera in the commercial focuses on the shoes passing each other along a busy Los Angeles street. With fast-beat music playing in the distance, the camera suddenly eyes a sign warning LOOSE GRAVEL. Next the camera briefly looks at more shoes strolling along the sidewalk. Then the camera swings upward at a forty-five degree angle to a flashing DON'T WALK sign across the street. As the camera moves across the street it flashes scenes of construction workers crushing the pavement with raging jackhammers. Dust spews out from the ground until the area is obscured. Once again, the camera reverts to looking at shoes moving briskly along the street. Abruptly, the scene changes to several people coming together in front of a store. One of the people, recognizable as Joe Montana, gives everyone a "high five" and then declares, "It's a jungle out there." The street scene disappears and finally the name of the product appears. It is L.A. Gear. Flashy advertisements like this one have become commonplace on American television. Essential to the commercials are easy-to-remember messages like "Bo knows" and "Reebok lets U.B.U" and star athletes like Bo Jackson, Michael Jordan, Larry Bird, and Joe Montana. Recent shoe advertisements have created several effects including the unreasonable fixation with a particular brand, the notion that one needs particular kinds of shoes for every specific activity, and even eruption of fights over shoes among inner city adolescents.

(2) To begin with, shoe advertisements make people believe they have to own a particular brand name. Advertisements use superstas to project this idea. Showing Michael Jordan in a particular brand suggests that the viewer must wear Air Jordan shoes, made by Nike, in order to play basketball as well as Michael Jordan. To remind the audience what an outstanding basketball player Jordan is, the commercials show him performing lay-ups and slam-dunks. With the rise of the popularity of tennis, shoe companies are also employing tennis players to push their shoes. In one advertisement, Andre Agassi is playing an intense game of tennis with some competitor. During some of the volleys, the audience is shown the power of his hits, during others the audience is shown his feet moving with precision around the tennis court. The message the advertisements are attempting to convey to the audience is that Agassi's shoes are instrumental in producing the power, prestige, and control of Agassi's tennis.

(3) But commercials for shoes have had far graver effects than is usual for promotional gimmicks leading to false expectations. Since these commercials are projected at vulnerable adolescents, many inner city kids have come to feel that wearing shoes displayed in the ads will raise their status among other adolescents. At school, male adolescents judge each other by the type of shoe worn. The more expensive the shoe, the
higher the status. Inner city adolescents are easily spending over one hundred dollars for one pair of shoes. Since the mother and father may not always have the extra funds to pay for such a costly item, some adolescents raise money by selling drugs. With good reason, concern over adolescents selling drugs to buy shoes has caused an outcry against the shoe commercials among school authorities and among groups trying to help inner city adolescents. But shoe companies keep defending their practice and they keep showing commercials with black people having fun with their expensive Nike or Reebok shoes.