

“Straight men drink beer & gay men drink cocktails”: Alcohol consumption & the construction of gendered identities



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Masculinities, roles & transitions: exploring diversity and wellbeing in the unfolding of men's lives: 10 May 2016





Alcohol and Identity

Does what and how you drink
reveal who you are?



Gender identities & alcohol

- Rejection of 'masculinity' & 'femininity' as static attributes –a “multiplicity of masculinities and femininities inhabited and enacted variously by different people and by the same people at different times” (Paechter 2003)
- What, where & how alcohol is consumed is a powerful way of constructing gender identities
 - Public / excessive drinking no longer only linked to masculinity, but women's drinking still constructed as 'different' to men's
 - Changing social context of drinking in UK: e.g. diversification of licensed premises / different brands marketed according to versions of masculinity or femininity portrayed



Skinnygirl™
MARGARITA



Brig

Hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995)

Multiple masculinities, but not all equally valued

- **‘Hegemonic’ masculinity**: currently culturally authoritative (time / context / local v global. Ambiguity & fluidity)
- Contrast with all forms of femininity, subordinated & marginalized masculinities (e.g. ethnicity / class)
- Gay men positioned at the bottom of the male gender hierarchy (subordinated)
 - “Gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity” (Connell 1995)
- Power of hegemony - dictate the terms in which events are understood so that they appear **natural** and **normal**



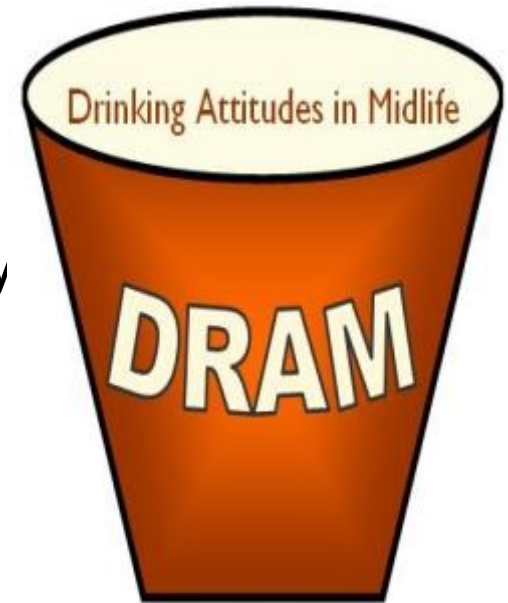
Draw on 2 qualitative studies to explore constructions of identity around drinking

- 1) How is alcohol associated with constructions of identity among men & women in early midlife (DrAM)?
- 2) How is alcohol associated with constructions of identity among LGBT people?



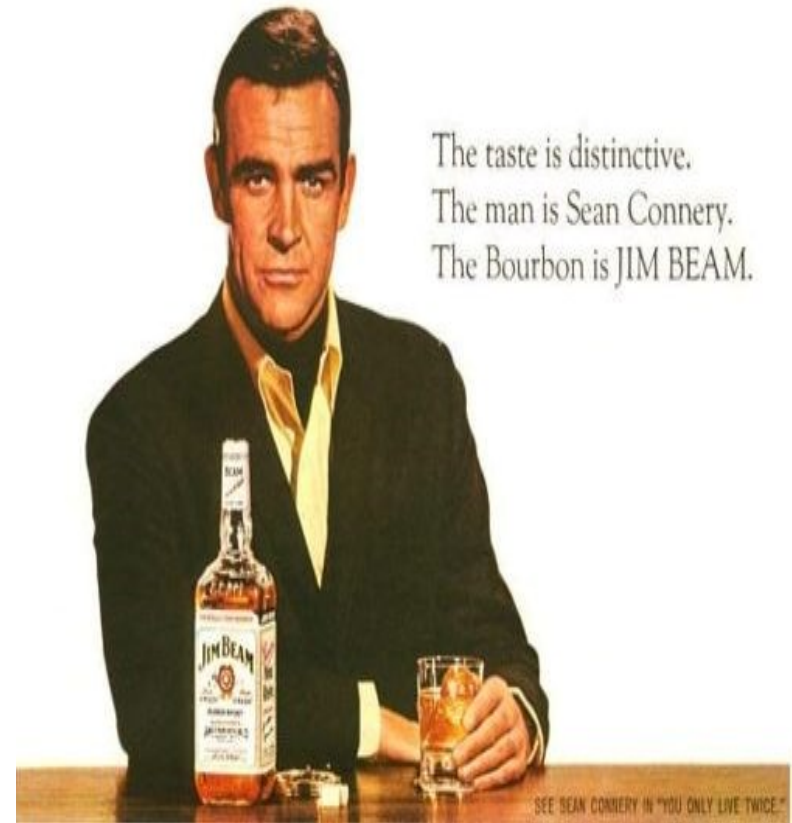
How is alcohol associated with constructions of gender in early midlife? **(MRC funded: Emslie, Hunt & Lyons)**

- Research has focused on youth. We focused on men & women 30-50 yrs
- 15 focus groups with people who already knew each other & drank 'regularly'
- Recruited from community groups, bars, workplaces, community websites
- Respondents all white but diverse SES
- Wide range of drinking (0-92 units in last week)
- NB No (self-identified) LGBT respondents



To 'drink like a man':-

- take it straight
 - don't sweeten it
 - drink beer or spirits
 - don't hesitate
 - be able to 'hold' your drink
- (Lemle & Mishkind 1989)



‘Drinking like a man’ in Scotland?

- Narratives suggested that drinking pints of beer was the ‘proper’ way of drinking (publically) ‘as men’:-
 - BILL: Prefers red wine but “as a male you’d rather project yourself as more simple than fancy – it’s a pint & shut up!” (FG3)
 - GAVIN “I drink rose wine .. behind closed doors in the company of close friends, but not if I’m out in the pub!” (FG14)
 - FERGUS: You walk over with a glass of coke and it’s “oh, here comes the gay boy”, do you know what I mean? (LAUGHS) .. If you walk over with half a pint of beer, “what’s wrong with you, are you skint?” You know. But I can take it! (FG2)



Drinking as an 'act of friendship'

- Limited opportunities for socialising without alcohol: idea of going out for dinner /coffee together greeted with laughter or disbelief
- Drinking pints & buying rounds in the pub constructed as an integral part of making and maintaining male friendships in midlife



An 'act of friendship'

Pub group (Men, 49-90 units)

- HUGH: I think it's a communal attitude.. For guys our age... you're in a GROUP, you stand your ROUND, and you would always look to offer. I can't think of anything worse, you just buy your own wee drink. It's a kind of act of friendship saying, "do you want a pint?"
- EWAN: It's an olive branch. .. a social exchange, that sends .. a sign - "I think you're OK". Men the world over, certainly men in the industrial west of Scotland, aren't going to start hugging each other and saying, "let's do a latte". But, "do you want a drink"? "Aye OK". And of course the deal is, I'll buy you one back and there becomes a certain sense of comfort there. It gets round the sort of awkwardness you might have in the sort of male to male relationships. (FG2)



Appropriately 'masculine' way to communicate & form friendships in the west of Scotland (& elsewhere in UK?)



What and how we drink is related to our identity and advertisers make use of this

“Guys are inherently lazy!
... Guys want easy slices of
masculinity ... Guys want
badges of masculinity that
can be worn without the
effort of earning them.”

*(Advertising agency pitch to
Smirnoff Black, Hastings
2010)*



What about women?



RUTH: If I was out with you .. shopping & we went into a bar we would have a cocktail just to be girly...

ERIN: Depends what you're wearing: if you're wearing your trainers it's a beer, (if) you're wearing your high shoes, might be a glass of wine. [laughter]! ...

LYNN: If I was going to a party.. dressed up, I don't think I would go for a beer. Like I wouldn't have a pint .. I think I would have some kind of a smaller glass or a wine

ERIN: I think a bottle of beer, though, does look more girly than a pint. There's probably part of my brain that's still my dad saying [whisper] 'Girls don't drink out of pint glasses' and just giving me a dirty look .. I think if you're sitting with your jeans and .. a big pint that's great.. but if it's in a nice party dress it does look a bit incongruous to me. [laughter] – FG12

Women drinking pints – still contentious?

ANDY: The thing with seeing women drink is that when women drink a pint of Tenants (lager), I think that's horrendous, to be honest. That image...a pint glass in a woman's hand at the bar, I just think that's .. I just find it utterly bizarre.

DEBBIE: Butch?

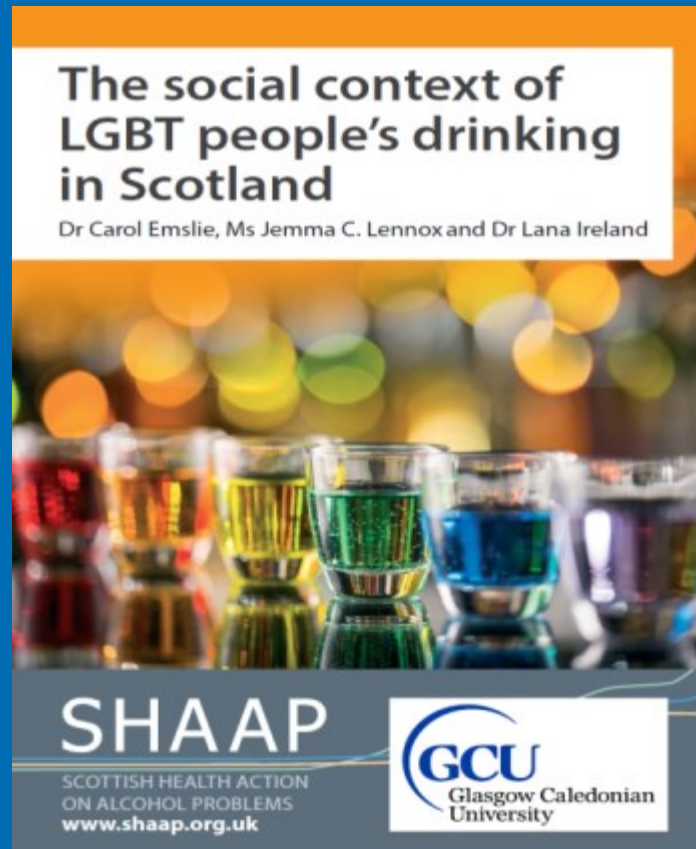
CRAIG: Too butch... as a man, it's too butch (FG1)

‘Girly girl’ or ‘playing the lad’?

MADELEINE: When you're out with a bunch of blokes (in a work context), sometimes you feel like they're kind of watching you like as you have your first or your second pint and somehow I feel like there's a little pride thing not to the point where you sort of like try and drink them under the table!

I'd be MORE likely to have a pint if I'm out with a bunch of blokes who are all having pints but I could equally have a glass of wine. But I suppose there's maybe part of me ..that thinks I'm kind of playing the lad a little bit. Not very convincingly in a girly-girly kind of way! (FG15)

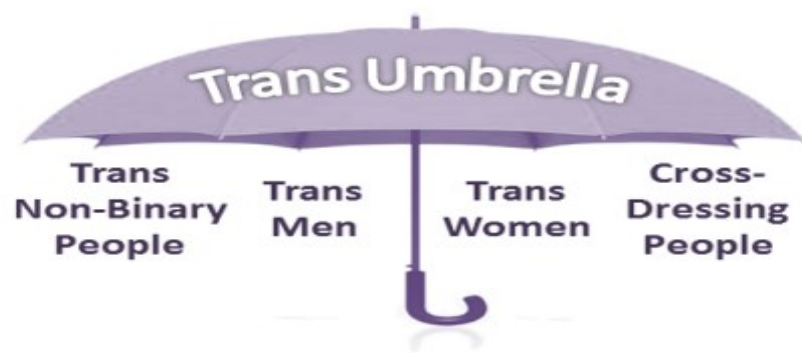
What about LGBT people?



What is the social context of drinking among LGBT people in Scotland?(Emslie, Lennox & Ireland)

7 focus groups recruited from sports groups, bars, LGBT groups & charities, workplaces

- 14 gay men, 11 lesbians, 4 bisexual, 4 straight or 'other'
- 29 cisgender (i.e. gender assigned at birth, body & identity are consistent / not transgender) & 4 transgender respondents
- 18-52 yrs. Half frequently / sometimes use gay scene
- 0-76 units in last week



Matching drink to (perceived) identity?

Chris: *The obvious kind of stereotype is that straight men drink beer and that gay men drink cocktails. There is a certain pressure to drink what you're expected to drink. I've got a male straight friend who doesn't like beer .. he asks for like a vodka lemonade, ..he gets teased about it and it's a joke. I always find that quite ridiculous just cause I think why does it matter?*

Simon: *I think there's a stereotype and it works both ways. I've been in gay bars and had a pint of real ale or something and people have looked at me and "What's that you're drinking?" (FG1)*

LGBT



‘Poof juice’

(FG6) Paul: *With gay men, if you drink a pint that means you’re straight.. They get shocked when you drink a pint, they’re like, “Oh, I’ve never seen that. I thought you were on like poof juice or whatever.”*

Pippa: *Yeah, the very term “poof juice”..!*

Caroline (FG2): *Personally, for me, I don't like tae get pissed in the house so if I'm gonnae be drinking it'll be something.. like Malibu or poof juice. (laughter)*

(Echoes of Peralta’s “two beer queer”: ‘real men’ v gay men & all women?)

Identity: Appearance & drink

***Jacqui:** All my pals from school are straight. I don't drink as much when I go out with them because I'm not gonnae sit with a pint and dress and heels and stuff so I'm sitting with a vodka.*



Drinking pints: “I’m one of you!”

FG6 Pippa: *If I wasn’t in a relationship and did have any intention of going out on the pull on the scene, I would drink pints, simply because no one looks at me and immediately recognises “Well, she looks like a dyke...”...I’m the imposter on the gay scene - everyone just looks at me and makes the automatic assumption that I’m straight ‘cause I’ve got long hair. Drinking pints is like my ticket to ride. “Look ladies, I’ve got a pint, I’m one of you!” Whereas if I was sitting with a blue WKD, I’m pretty sure everyone would just be like “Straight chick in the corner, we’ll just ignore her.”.. I mean I do enjoy pints anyway. I drink pints quite often, but...*

Eva: *It wouldn’t just be because you fancied a pint?*

Pippa: *Naw, it would be because I fancied the chicks ... (laugh) want them to notice that I’m not the straight chick in the pub!*



Awareness of signifiers

Some transgender / non binary respondents were particularly aware of how their choice of drink and appearance might be interpreted by others...

I did get criticised for not drinking a half pint.. somebody actually walked up to me: “What are you doing with a full pint? Women should drink half pints”. ...And I went, “I don’t give a shit. I used to be a man!” (Stella, FG3)



Explicit gender performance

Naomi: *If I'm all in drag I like to drink like the manliest drink that I can find just to piss people off. ..My drag is kind of subversive, and really obviously gender fucking .. like with beard .. and a monobrow, .. I tend to then on purpose kind of play around with these stereotypes. .. I'll make a point of drinking a pint because it's like, part of my performance. (FG6)*

Conclusions: drinking alcohol is closely interwoven with identity

- Choice of drink, volume of alcohol consumed & drinking vessel demonstrate 'who you are' to (potential) friends and partners
- Enduring stereotypes about what people 'should' drink (gender & sexual identity)
 - Homophobic insults used to police men's behaviour: 'gay', 'ponces', 'two beer queers', 'poof juice' (de Visser & Smith 2007; Peralta 2007; Willott & Lyons 2012) / women as 'butch'
 - 'Banter' acts to subordinate women & gay men, thus reconstructing & reinforcing hegemonic masculinity
- Women's discussions suggested they used alcohol, drinking vessels and clothing for appropriate performances of femininity ('girly girl', 'playing the lad', 'NOT the straight chick in the pub')



Conclusions (2): fluidity of gender constructions

Explicit and deliberate use of alcohol (and dress) to 'perform' gender identity – encouraging gender 'transgressions' and reconstructions of identity (in certain spaces)?

“Their performance sprinkles with interrogations of heterosexuality and identities dependent on genitalia, their living bodies providing the agency of their election over the assignments of 'nature'... their performances insinuate that the audiences' gender may be in doubt as well.. (Alcohol acquires) an almost ritualistic necessity as the washing away of a certain part of the self” (Caceres & Cortinas 1996)



I LIKE MY
VODKA
STRAIGHT
BUT MY
FRIENDS
CAN GO
EITHER
WAY.



Van Gogh. **BLUE**
triple wheat vodka



ABSOLUT PRIDE

Brighter futures begin with GCU



“One of alcohol’s most beguiling qualities is how it allows us to be shapeshifters, actors taking on complicated roles in the cinematic version of our lives.”

Marcia DeSanctis www.drinkingdiaries.com

Any questions?

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Smirnoff

- “The SMIRNOFF brand aims to empower a more inclusive world via cultural actions”.
- <http://www.psfk.com/2016/05/future-of-advertising-why-alcohol-brands-are-selling-lifestyle-instead-of-product.html>

