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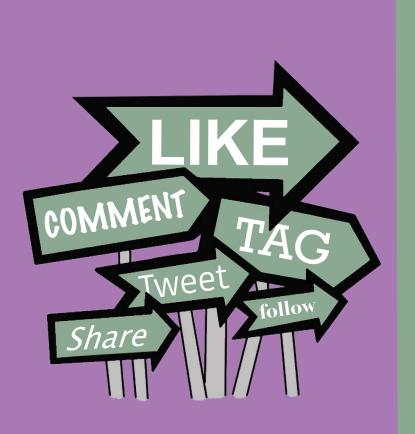*A Rapid Narrative Review of Literature on Gendered Alcohol Marketing and its Effects: Exploring the Targeting and Representation of Women*

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# Contents

# Executive summary

This report presents findings of a rapid narrative literature review exploring the gendered nature of alcohol marketing and its effects, focussing specifically on the ways in which women are both targeted and represented, and the implications for drinking practices and gender equity. Overall, the review found that although research has explored the nature of such marketing, there is a lack of research exploring its effects, both in terms of its impact on women's drinking practices, and how women are viewed and treated in society.

Whilst little research has specifically explored how female-targeted marketing affects women's drinking behaviours, literature has discussed how women in both westernised and lower and middle income countries (LMIC) are targeted by the alcohol industry through a number of strategies. This includes the creation of new products, the use of lifestyle messages that are underpinned by gender stereotypes (e.g. slimness/weight, pink, all-female friendships), offers of stereotypical feminine accessories (e.g. makeup) and messages of empowerment. Interactive techniques (e.g. competitions, photograph requests) on social media are also being used to involve the public, including women, in content creation and to encourage interaction with and the sharing of brand content on social media platforms, in ways that are gendered, and in ways that create a wider audience reach. Concern surrounds the regulation of social media marketing, including in the UK, and whether codes that aim to regulate marketing content are sufficient in regulating marketing that predominantly aims to instigate user interaction, and the co-creation of content.

With regards to the way women themselves are depicted in alcohol marketing, research suggests that the gender roles ascribed to women have changed over time, yet new representations of women as sexually active and empowered co-exist alongside their sexualisation and objectification. There is a lack of research exploring perceptions of such marketing and how it influences purchases and drinking practices, but the research that has been undertaken has produced conflicting results. Some suggests that women dislike the use of sexual images of women, including both passive and active depictions, compared to men, yet other research suggests women find sexualised imagery appealing when it is aligned with connotations of empowerment through sexual agency. Further research is needed to better understand the effects of such messaging.

Much discussion surrounds the sexualisation of the night time environment (NTE) and its marketing. Despite nightlife venues attempting to become more 'female-friendly' through targeting women as potential consumers, the marketing of such spaces reinforces traditional gender relations and the inequalities at play in the NTE, and wider society (e.g. sexualisation and objectification). Recent work highlights the use of women's bodies and sexualities, including photographs of female patrons, to promote nightlife venues on social media in a way that reproduces the male gaze. In light of such findings, concern surrounds the implications of both brand and NTE marketing content that normalises the objectification and sexualisation of women on attitudes towards, and the treatment of women, within society (i.e. unwanted sexual attention, male entitlement to women's bodies, 'rape culture'). Little research has explored the actual effects of brand and NTE marketing of this nature, and it is important that future research explores its impact on women's lived experiences. There is also evidence that brand

and NTE marketing can breach self-regulatory codes, particularly those surrounding sex, sexual success and attractiveness, thus raising questions surrounding the effectiveness of these regulatory systems.

A number of gaps in research are outlined that require further investigation to allow for a better understanding of the effects of female targeted marketing on women's drinking experiences, and the effects of marketing that uses women's bodies and sexualities on gender equity. Based on the findings and the suggestions for policy change discussed within the included studies, a number of recommendations for policy and practice in the United Kingdom (UK) are outlined.

## Introduction

Alcohol use and related harms are more prevalent among men, but a narrowing of the gender gap has been reported in recent years in countries such as the UK (e.g. Slade at al., 2016). This is partly explained through factors such as the changing social positions of women and the increased affordability of alcohol, the restructuring of the UK night time environment (NTE) towards deregulation, and feminisation, and gender-segmented alcohol marketing (e.g. Griffin et al., 2013; Plant, 2008). Alcohol brand marketing has long been highly gendered, with gender stereotypes being used to segment the market, attract male and female consumers, and increase sales (e.g. Atkinson et al., 2014; 2016; De Bruijn et al., 2012; Hastings, et al., 2010; Purves et al., 2014; 2018; Törrönen, 2011; 2014). Whilst such marketing influences the drinking practices of men and women (e.g. Atkinson et al., 2014; 2016; Purves et al., 2014;2018), the use of negative gender stereotypes in marketing may also influence normative expectations of gender roles (e.g. Hall and Kappel, 2018; Messner and Montez de Oca, 2005; Rogan et al., 2016; Sirr, 2015; Towns, 2012). Female drinkers have traditionally been stigmatised for their drinking and intoxication, and portrayed as lacking femininity, as sexually promiscuous, out of control and neglectful of traditional roles (e.g. mothers, wives, carers, passive, domestic) (Day et al. 2007; Emslie et al., 2012; Jackson and Tinkler, 2009; Lyons and Willott, 2008). Although increases in women's drinking reflect their changing social positions, gender double standards surrounding their drinking persist (e.g. Griffin et al., 2013) and changes in drinking patterns have led to the negative effects of alcohol use extending to women (Plant, 2008; Slade at al., 2016; Wilsnack and Wilsnack 1997; 2000). Health issues of particular relevance to women drinkers include the increased risk of breast cancer (Choi et al., 2018; Key et al., 2006) and risk of harm from alcohol use by men, through associations with intimate partner violence, sexual violence and unwanted sexual attention in the NTE (Abbey et al., 2004; Gunby et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2019; Kavanaugh, 2013). Thus, whilst it is important to study the nature and effects of alcohol marketing and the implications for society's relationship with alcohol, including the impact on women's drinking, the messages of femininity, masculinity and gender relations presented have important wider implications for relations between men and women, the treatment of women within society and gender equity more generally.

In the UK, marketing, including alcohol marketing, is self-regulated by the advertising industry's Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) and the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) via the British Code of Advertising Practice (ASA and CAP, 2014a;b). The Portman Group (2009; 2014; 2019), an alcohol industry funded self-regulatory body, also issues guidance and self-regulates, drawing on the CAP codes (which cover for example, non-broadcast and broadcast advertising, sponsorship, websites and social media). Co-regulation is provided through referral of advertisers by the ASA to the statutory broadcasting regulator Ofcom (established under the Communications Act 2003), although no alcohol advertising has ever been referred for review. These codes and guidance include rules related to gender, for example, codes that prevent marketing activities linking '*alcohol with seduction, sexual activity or sexual success'* and implying '*that alcohol can enhance attractiveness'* (ASA, CAP; Portman Group). Marketing by licensed premises is enforced through local licensing strategies or in response to public complaints via the reactive ASA system. More recently, the ASA and CAP, and the Portman Group, introduced a new rule that aims to self-regulate marketing material that is likely to '*cause offence in relation to race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability or age'.* Following a review of gender stereotypes in advertising, the ASA and CAP (2019) also recently announced new guidance to prevent all adverts from including '*gender stereotypes that are likely to cause harm, or serious or widespread offence', 'sexualised imagery if this is irrelevant to the product'*, content that sexualises and objectifies both women and men, and adverts that '*mock people for not conforming to gender stereotypes'.* This suggests that a change in the way in which women are depicted in alcohol marketing may be occurring. Amendments to the regulatory system may therefore be both a response to, and instigator of change.

With such issues in mind, a rapid narrative review of literature exploring the gendered nature of alcohol marketing and its effects was undertaken. It focussed specifically on the way in which women were both targeted and represented, and the implications of such marketing on drinking practices and gender equity. Gaps in research were identified and recommendations made for UK policy and practice. This was not a systematic review, but incorporated a systematic approach to literature searching, selection of publications, and data extraction. Literature discussing the regulation of such content, and the effectiveness of self-regulatory codes in relation to gender (e.g. sexual success and attractiveness) were also considered.

The review specifically focussed on alcohol brand and NTE marketing that was regarded as gendered in nature (e.g. marketing that targets men and women through particular messages, messages associated with femininity and masculinity), and took a broad perspective of effects (e.g. drinking practices, purchase intentions and preferences, perceptions on content (i.e. liking or disliking)). It did not review literature that had examined the effects of (non-gendered) alcohol marketing on women's alcohol consumption more generally. Research in this area tends to focus on the effects of exposure to alcohol marketing on young people's drinking, through cross-sectional or longitudinal surveys, or experimental studies. Such research suggests that there is a positive association between alcohol marketing exposure and drinking among both young males and females (see Anderson et al., 2006; Jernigan et al., 2017; Scott et al., 2017; Smith and Foxcroft, 2009). Experimental studies have also shown an immediate effect of alcohol marketing exposure on drinking among males and females (see Stautz et al., 2016) and research has explored gender as a variable in the

exposure to, and interpretation of, alcohol-related advertising messages (see for example, Andsager et al., 2002; Ringel et al., 2006).

A number of research questions were addressed:

1. How are women targeted by alcohol marketing and what is the effect on drinking practices?

2. How are women represented in alcohol marketing, what are the effects on drinking practices and what are the implications for gender equity?

3. How effective are self-regulatory codes that aim to prohibit the use of gendered connotations in alcohol marketing?

This summary report provides an overview of the key findings, gaps in research, and recommendations for UK policy and practice. Examples of references are provided, but a full report is also available to download on the IAS website.

## Methodology in short

A rapid review of literature was conducted, which took a systematic approach to searching, literature selection, and data extraction. Key search terms were used to search a number of databases and journals, and the reference lists of included publications were searched for additional literature (see Appendix). Key informants (N=5) working in the field of alcohol studies were also contacted and asked to provide feedback on the included studies and to identify any relevant publications that the search did not capture. The combined searches retrieved a total of 37,713 publications. Titles and/or abstracts were screened by two researchers according to the review scope, and irrelevant articles excluded. Full texts were then retrieved for 694 publications, downloaded into EndNote and subjected to a second round of screening by two researchers. In cases where there was uncertainty around the inclusion of literature, both researchers discussed the publications relevance and a mutual decision was made. There were no cases in which a third researcher had to be consulted. Irrelevant articles were excluded, leaving a total of 154 publications. 17 additional studies were provided by the key informants. These were screened, with 4 meeting the inclusion criteria. A total of 158 articles were included in the review and data was extracted into Microsoft Excel. The extracted content was themed, and a narrative synthesis of the results conducted. Gaps in research were identified, and recommendations for UK policy and practice developed.

## Summary of findings

A total of 158 publications were included, 100 of which presented primary or secondary research from a total of 88 individual research studies (primary n=29, secondary n=53, both

primary and secondary n=6). Commentaries (e.g. discussion of the 'feminisation' of alcoholic drinks and the NTE, and the 'sexualisation' of the NTE) were extracted from an additional 58 publications. The majority of publications were from the United Kingdom, North America, Europe and Australasia countries. Although studies have been undertaken in lower and middle income countries, overall, the literature is Western centric. The majority of research used content analysis methods, and although qualitative research (e.g. interviews, participant observation, focus groups) has been conducted with young women and men, this did not tend to focus on gendered marketing *per se*. A small number of quantitative studies (e.g. surveys) have explored perceptions of sexist and sexual marketing content, for example, its impact on purchase intentions, but no recent or UK research in this area exists. Little research specifically explores the effects of marketing targeted at women on drinking practices, and there is a lack of research on the effects of depictions representing women on gender equity more generally.

## *How are women targeted by alcohol marketing and what is the effect on drinking practices?*

The literature suggests that since the 1990s there has been a clear feminisation of alcohol products, drinking spaces and drinking culture, and a targeting of women through a number of strategies (e.g. Griffin et al., 2013; Plant, 2008; Szmigin et al., 2008; 2011). This includes the development of new products such as fruit beers, ready to drink beverages (RTDs), low calorie/carbohydrate, and low alcohol products (e.g. De Bruijin et al., 2012; 2018; EUCAM, 2008; McCreanor et al., 2005; 2008; Measham and Østergaard, 2009; Petticrew et al,. 2017; Purves et al., 2014; 2018). A range of lifestyle messages that appeal to gender stereotypes, such as a focus on slimness/weight; all-female friendships; motherhood; appearance, fashion and beauty, and sexiness (see #dontpinkmydrink) are also commonly used to target the female market, as are offers of free stereotypical feminine accessories (e.g. make up, jewellery), the feminisation of marketing imagery (i.e. pink, glitter, floral imagery) and a focus on gendered events and activities such as Mother's Day and shopping (e.g. Atkinson et al., In preparation; Beccaria et al., 2018; De Bruijin, 2011; De Bruijin et al., 2012; 2018; Emslie et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2018; Lyons et al., 2006; McEwan et al., 2013; Törrönen and Simonen, 2015; Törrönen and Rolando, 2017). More recently, these have been accompanied by messages of empowerment, including sexual assertiveness, 'me time', the promotion of equal gender representation (i.e. Smirnoff's Equalizer campaign), and the celebration of women (i.e. associations with International Women's Day) (e.g. Atkinson et al., in preparation; Kauppila, et al., 2019; Mackiewicz, 2012; Törrönen, 2011). Concern has been expressed regarding the targeting of women in low and middle income countries (LMIC), given the relative lack of marketing regulations (e.g. De Bruijneu, 2011; Dumbili, 2018; Esser and Jernigan, 2015; Murdeshwar et al., 2019; Robaina et al., 2012). However, there is a relative lack of research in these countries to date.

Little research has specifically explored how female targeted marketing effects women's drinking practices, and research is needed in this area. Research exploring young women's drinking more generally suggests that they have clear perceptions on what drinks are marketed as 'feminine', view alcoholic drinks as fashion accessories and choose their

drinks accordingly (e.g. Atkinson et al., 2014; 2016; Day, 2003; Nicholls, 2016; Purves et al., 2014; 2018). For example, a study exploring alcohol marketing on social networking sites and young people's (aged 16-21 years) perspectives and experiences in the UK (Atkinson et al., 2014; 2016) found that young women were aware of the gendered lifestyle associations within marketing, and that such connotations informed their decision making with regards to what brands they chose to consume, and what images of drinking they chose to upload to social media. They paid attention to the aesthetics of drinks and viewed brands that were viewed as 'nice' and 'pretty' as feminine, and as such chose to consume such products to express their femininity. However, other research suggests that some women may reject products and brands marketed as 'feminine' (e.g. Cullen, 2011; Day, 2003; McCreanor et al., 2005). For example, a qualitative study with young women (aged 14-19) in the UK (Cullen, 2011) found that drinks marketed and defined as 'feminine' were rejected by some participants, and those framed and perceived as 'masculine' favoured as a form of gendered resistance. Female targeted brands such as *Lambrini* were viewed negatively (i.e. derogatively renamed as '*Tramp's piss'*), and were associated with 'cheapness' both in relation to their low cost and the perception of them as being consumed by women from lower socio-economic groups. This highlights how connotations of social class interact with gendered messages, and influence young women's choice of alcoholic beverage within their gendered and classed identity-making.

Whilst most research in this area has been conducted in westernised countries, research (Dumbili, 2015; 2016) conducted in Nigeria has reached similar conclusions. Dumbili (2015; 2016) found that participants (aged 19-24 years) made clear distinctions between what were regarded as male (i.e. beer, bitter drinks) and female (i.e. sweet drinks, spirits such as gin, wine, RTDs such as Smirnoff Ice)) drinks, and these were chosen as an expression of femininity within the NTE. Whilst women discussed avoiding masculine drinks like beer in favour of sweet drinks such as RTDs, they were aware that these products often have higher ABV[1]. A desire to conform to gendered norms around the acceptability of beverage choice thus impacted on their levels of drunkenness. Research conducted in the UK (Purves et al, 2014; 2018) also found that young women felt that smaller and slimmer alcohol beverage cans were more feminine, yet reported that they promoted more rapid consumption. These studies suggest that the design and perception of products as 'feminine' can influence young women's drinking patterns, and may lead to more harmful drinking.

Despite brands and venues attempting to become more 'female-friendly', this has generally meant that marketing targets women as potential consumers, rather than attempting to transform traditional gender relations and address inequalities at play in the NTE (Chatterton and Hollands, 2002). In an ethnographic study of drinking among a group of young (aged 22-24 years) middle class urban women in India, Murdeshwar et al. (2019) discuss the gendered nature of drinking culture against a backdrop of international alcohol brand marketing. The research found that a range of on- and offline corporate marketing practices influenced participants' perceptions of alcohol use as 'cool', and as an act of freedom, individualism and equality. The authors describe how the young, middle class, urban population, including women, has been recognised by drinks company Diageo as a way to expand its market in the country, through a range of messages including linking alcohol to

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[1] I.e. Alcohol by Volume, the measure used to assess the alcohol content of beverages. The higher the ABV, the higher volume of alcohol.

women's empowerment and marketing that explicitly associated European alcohol brands with 'Indian-ness'. Despite such messages, the research found that women's drinking experiences were influenced by the gendered inequalities and national identities at play within the country's wider social context. For example, women who drank were at risk of sexual harassment when out drinking in the NTE, and were morally judged as being 'against Indian culture' through participating in activities like public drinking that were seen as western. This highlights how whilst global marketing messages may draw on Westernised values, they are interpreted in local contexts. It is thus important that research exploring the effects of female targeted marketing takes an intersectional approach to explore the interplay between gender, class and nationality.

With the increasing use of social media as part of the alcohol industry's multi-platform marketing, a range of interactive techniques (e.g. competitions, requests for photographs of female drinkers consuming alcohol) are also being used to involve consumers, including young women, in content creation and to encourage them to interact with and share brand and venue content, in ways that were gendered (e.g. Atkinson et al., 2014; 2016; Carah, 2014; Griffin et al., 2018; Purves et al., 2014; 2018). Analysis of alcohol brand Facebook posts in Australia (Carah, 2014) and the UK (Atkinson et al., 2014; 2016) found that social media was used to target both female and males in ways that attempted to influence and interact with their gendered identity making and cultural practices. For example, Carah (2014) found that brands such as Baileys, Midori and Rekorderlig targeted women on Facebook through the use of questions related to male attractiveness, engagement in stereotypical topics of conversation (e.g. shopping, fashion, sex), the concept of a 'girls' night out, and the consumption of brands as a 'reward' after activities such as shopping. Research in the UK (Atkinson et al., 2014; Atkinson and Sumnall, 2016) also found that the culture of nightlife photography in the NTE was more meaningful to young women and that photographs taken by venue staff formed an important part of a highly managed expression of femininity on social media. Young women's desire to monitor whether photographs taken by nightlife venues had been uploaded to social media led to further interaction with venue's online presence and facilitated further exposure and interaction with additional marketing content, including drinks promotions. Combined, these studies highlight how social media encourages women to interact with and share both brand and venue content among their online peer groups, thus allowing marketing to reach a wider audience of potential customers with gendered messaging that are more meaningful as they are endorsed by the peer group.

## How are women represented in alcohol marketing, what are the effects on drinking practices and what are the implications for gender equity?

### Alcohol brand marketing

The literature suggests that historically, women have been represented in alcohol marketing to a lesser extent than men, and in a way that reflected traditional gender roles, such as being passive, submissive, domestic, and sexual objects. In response to the shifting social positions

of women, alcohol marketing has evolved and now presents women as active participants in public drinking spaces, and as active sexual subjects. However, these new active gender roles co-exist alongside the sexualisation and objectification of women, particularly in the marketing of brands targeted at males (e.g. beer) (e.g. Hall and Kappel, 2018; Kilbourne, 1999; Sirr, 2015; Törrönen, 2011; 2014; Törrönen and Rolando, 2017). The use of humour, irony and 'banter' (e.g. Jones and Reid, 2010; Towns et al., 2012) and the framing of women as active self-sexualising subjects (e.g. Jones and Reid, 2010; Lass and Hart, 2004) have provided ways for brands to deflect accusations of sexism, and violations of self-regulatory codes. The presentation of women as sexual objects has implications for normative expectations of gender roles, and how women are positioned and treated within society. For example, some authors have suggested that such content can lead to the acceptance and normalisation of (sexual) violence towards women, and that such depictions undermine anti-violence messages (e.g. Gunby et al., 2016; Jones and Reid, 2010; Sirr, 2015; Towns et al., 2012).

Little research has explored the effects of sexualised and objectifying images of women in alcohol marketing on gender norms, gender relations and the negative treatment of women. One study conducted in California, United States (Parker et al., 2013) explored the impact of the presence of sexual alcohol adverts (e.g. adverts featuring provocatively dressed female Latino models in sexually suggestive manners, and connotations of sexual availability) targeted towards Latino communities in alcohol outlets in three cities. Observations found a higher presence of sexual marketing in Latino areas, and that adverts associated sexual behaviour and sexual availability with alcohol use. After controlling for confounding factors, a significant positive relationship was found between the level of sexual content observed in Latino areas, and the level of sexual violence perpetrated towards both Latino and non-Latino young women in the corresponding area, with a stronger effect observed for Latino young women. The findings highlight the need for prevention intervention policies directed at the sexualised content of alcohol marketing, and the importance of future research to explore the impact of alcohol adverts on sexual violence in other localities and populations. Although the participants from this study were drawn from specific communities in the USA, more generally, it suggests marketing effects should also be explored across the intersection between gender, culture, and ethnicity.

There is also a lack of research exploring perceptions of such marketing and how it influences purchases and drinking practices. A limited body of research has found conflicting results. Whilst some research suggests that women dislike the use of sexual images of women, including both passive and active depictions, compared to men (e.g. Jones and Reid, 2010; Lass and Hart, 2004; Polonsky et al., 2001), other research suggests women find sexualised imagery appealing when it is aligned with connotations of empowerment through sexual agency (e.g. Lass and Hart, 2004; Polonsky et al., 2001). For example, Jones and Reid (2010) explored the use of female sexuality in Australian alcohol advertising and the relationship between types of sexual imagery and attitudes to the advertisement, stated reasons for (dis)liking the advertisement, and purchase intentions (PI) among 268 Australian male and female university students. Adverts included those depicting the traditional stereotype of women as passive sexual objects, as well as new stereotypes of women as strong, active, provocative and desiring. Discussions with young males and females revealed that males liked all the advertisements significantly more than females, and reported higher scores of purchase intention, thus confirming the view that sexual stereotypes exist for the

male gaze. However, this was not true of all men, with such content negatively affecting the purchase intentions of some and with variation in male attitudes towards advertisements that were perceived as containing sexist or demeaning humour. Some women did react favourably to sexual imagery that depicted women as being in control, but many disliked such images and felt that they degraded women by portraying them as promiscuous, and instead favoured the use of the traditional passive sex object stereotype.

A comparative study using in-depth interviews with men and women aged 18 and 25 in the United Kingdom, Germany, and Italy (Lass and Hart, 2004), also found that sexual imagery was more appealing to men than women in all three countries. However, acceptance levels were higher among Italian participants, and those from the UK were less accepting and comfortable with the use of sexual imagery, particularly UK women. Two groups were uncovered within the research. Firstly, those who disliked the use of sexual imagery and the depiction of women as sex objects and found them offensive. Secondly, and in contrast to the study conducted by Jones and Reid (201), those that were not offended by the use of sexually explicit imagery as long as women were presented as strong, independent and/or in control of men. Such studies suggest variation in the perceptions of sexual stereotypes in alcohol marketing among both men and women, and the importance of the context of the sexual appeal and sexual stereotypes presented, in determining whether adverts are considered offensive, and in turn purchased, rather than the presence of sexual content itself.

In countries such as the UK, there is some evidence that brands have begun to move away from using content that sexualises and objectifies women, and recent changes to the CAP code aim to prevent the use of content that causes offence on the grounds of gender and the use of gender stereotypes. There is also evidence that marketing has now begun to draw on messages of empowerment and gender equity (e.g. Atkinson et al., In preparation) such as marketing that promotes equal gender representation in the workplace (i.e. Smirnoff's Equalizer campaign) and marketing that celebrates women and promotes gender equity (i.e. marketing surrounding International Women's Day). Such changes may be a response to the re-emergence of feminism in society, and an intolerance of sexist and sexualised content in marketing more generally. They are also an economic necessity for the alcohol industry to avoid alienating the female market including a new market of feminist-aware young women, and men. Whilst a move away from the use of sexist and sexual content to content based on messages of equality is a positive step for gender equity, it is still a technique used to sell a potentially health-harming product to women. Research is needed to determine how women and men interpret such messages, and the influence on their drinking practices.

## *Night time environment marketing*

The NTE is a highly sexualised environment, and its marketing uses women's bodies and sexualities to associate drinking with sexual success in order to promote venues and alcohol purchases. There is a lack of research focusing on NTE marketing, but based on the small amount of research that has been conducted, NTE marketing can sexualise and objectify women and present them as both passive sexual objects, and active sexual subjects (e.g. Home Office, 2008; Griffin et al., 2013; 2018; Gunby et al., 2016; 2019; Rogan et al., 2016). Rogan and colleagues (2016) conducted qualitative research with young women (aged 18-

28) in the UK and raised concerns over the sexualised nature of NTE marketing (including on social media) and the underlying "lad culture" it promotes. Heteronormative constructions of sexuality were found to dominate the marketing of mainstream drinking venues, with venues being promoted through the promise of sex to men and narrow definitions of female beauty. However, a move away from the objectification of women to the depiction of women as self-sexualising, active and knowing sexual agents was found to be increasingly common. As with the use of sexual imagery by alcohol brands, this raises questions around whether such marketing provides a way of using women's bodies and sexualities to promote venues to men, whilst at the same time drawing on messages of sexual empowerment to attract young women and deflect criticism and accusations of sexism. Of concern is how this research found sexual harassment and the fear of sexual violence to be a normalised aspect of young women's experiences of the NTE, which the authors suggest are influenced by the mainstreaming of sexualised culture, including within NTE marketing.

Social media also allows night life venues to use and involve female patrons in the marketing of venues. Research conducted in Australia explored the promotion of alcohol, clubs and venues on social media through interviews with nightlife promotors and consumers, and found that the use of women's bodies was a common component (Carah and Dobson, 2016). Women that conformed to the ideal 'heterosexy' standard of beauty were used to promote venues and alcohol use within nightlife venues. Sexualised photographs of female patrons and women paid as 'promoters' to create images, were used to market venues and attract the attention of both male (men who wished to attract and interact with such women) and female (women who wished to be like them) customers. The authors argue that such tactics reinforce the NTE as an environment that women experience through the male gaze, and the objectification of women (e.g. Carah and Dobson, 2016). Research in the UK has also found that photographs of female patrons are perceived by young adults as *'bait'* in attracting male customers into venues (Griffin et al., 2018) and that venues are felt to strategically objectify women to attract men, with some women reporting avoiding certain establishments as a result (Phipps and Young, 2013).

Whilst most research in this area has been conducted in developed markets, a study of NTE drinking and promotions in Nigeria (Dumbili, 2015;2016) found that female students identified as 'beautiful' were strategically employed in low paid work as promoters (or '*walking billboards'*) to target men with a range of alcoholic brands (usually beer). These tactics were effective in increasing sales, with male participants reporting that they drank more than they had planned as a result. However, the expectation of female promoters socialising in bars to persuade male customers to purchase more alcohol, placed women at risk. They were pressured by employers to develop unwanted relationships, which some men misinterpreted as the first step towards initiating a sexual relationship, and in some cases, this led to sexual violence.

These studies highlight that women's bodies and sexualities are used in NTE marketing to attract patrons and increase alcohol sales. As a result, women are sexualised and objectified and the male gaze is reproduced, whilst narrow definitions of female attractiveness are reinforced. Such marketing has important implications for women's experiences of the NTE and despite venues becoming more 'female-friendly' through the targeting of women as consumers, its marketing reinforces harmful gender norms and

traditional gender relations, and in turn fails to address the inequalities that exist in the NTE. Whilst there is only a small amount of research in this area, NTE marketing has been shown to objectify women, and present them as active sexual subjects. Involving women in the creation of such sexualised content through the use of venue photographers, may limit the extent to which it is perceived as offensive. Further research is needed to explore women and men's interpretations of NTE marketing of this nature, its impact on drinking practices, attitudes towards women, and women's lived experiences. Such research is important to inform policy and practice aimed at reducing alcohol-related harms and increasing women's safety in the NTE.

## *How effective are self-regulatory codes that aim to prohibit the use of gendered connotations in alcohol marketing?*

There is evidence from a number of countries, including the UK, that brand marketing regularly violates self-regulatory codes and guidance (i.e. UK ASA/CAP, Portman group) that prohibit the use of sexual content and alcohol from being associated with sexual success and attractiveness (e.g. ARUK and Alcohol Concern, 2018; Brooks, 2010; Gosselt et al., 2017; Gupta et al., 2017a;b; 2018; Hastings et al.,  2010; Griffin et al., 2018; Noel et al., 2017a;b Noel and Babor, 2017; Winpenny, 2012). This includes marketing on social media (Brooks et al., 2010; Brodmerkel and Carah, 2013; Winpenny, 2012), websites (Gordon et al., 2011), traditional media (e.g. magazines, TV) (e.g. ARUK and Alcohol Change, 2018; Donovan et al., 2007; Hastings, 2009; Hastings et al., 2010; Noel et al., 2017a;b; Noel and Babor, 2017; Smith et al., 2014; van Zanten et al., 2005) and NTE marketing (Griffin et al., 2018).

Studies across a number of countries have concluded that such systems fail to restrict the content of marketing related to sex. Noel and Babor (2017) evaluated compliance with self-regulatory codes among 50 Budweiser and Bud Light ads posted on Facebook within 1 month of the 2015 NFL Super Bowl and found a code violation rate of 82%. Adverts were assessed as in breach of various codes (e.g. association between alcohol and social success, health benefits) including those that regulate the use of sexuality and the depiction of female characters. Further evidence of the failure of self-regulation is provided in the results of a systematic review (Noel et al., 2017b) that found that the most commonly violated guidelines were those that prohibited the association between alcohol consumption and social or sexual success (as well as guidelines intended to protect youth). This included adverts that contained sexually explicit content (e.g. Canadian advertisements that used 'simulated lesbianism') to attract the heterosexual male market. Comparative research has reported similar findings. Winpenny et al., (2012) conducted a comparative analysis of alcohol adverts in online and broadcast media in the Netherlands, Germany and the UK and found that adverts generally adhered to self-regulatory codes. However, there were examples in all countries that could be considered to be in violation of specific codes, including those that prohibit alcohol being linked with sexual success or seduction, or as enhancing attractiveness. UK research (Griffin et al. 2018) has found similar results. Griffin et al (2018) reported that the content of both alcohol brand and nightlife venue marketing on social network sites was a times in breach of codes related to sex and gender, for example, the ASA and Portman Group Code that states that

marketing communications must not contain material that is likely to cause offence, including in relation to gender and sexual orientation. Such content may also cause more offence among women. Van Zanten (2005) explored the complaints levelled at alcohol advertisements within the self-regulatory system in Australia and found that television beer commercials were the category that received most complaints. Adverts generated more offence among women, with complaints being most likely to come from women on the grounds of discrimination, and the portrayal of sex and nudity.

Research has also assessed the adherence of alcohol marketing to self-regulatory codes with input from young people. De Bruijn et al., (2018) found that young participants often rated content as associating alcohol consumption with sexual success, yet the complaints submitted to regulators had regularly been rejected by advertising committees. Moreover, research has found that community members, including young people, assess content as in breach of such codes to a greater extent than public health experts. It has thus been suggested that members of the community, including young people, should sit on industry expert panels to assist raters in evaluating content and to inform them about the perceived meaning of advertising messages from the perspective of audiences (Babor et al., 2013).

Based on the studies included in the review, there is evidence that self-regulation fails to prevent potentially harmful and offensive content from appearing in alcohol marketing, including content of a sexual nature. This suggests a need to rethink the content and enforcement of self-regulatory codes, and the role and purpose of self-regulatory approaches more generally.

## Gaps in research

A number of gaps in research have been identified that require further investigation. Addressing these will allow for a better understanding of the targeting and representation of women in alcohol marketing, and its effects on drinking practices, women's lived experiences and gender equity.

- Research should specifically explore the influence and effects of female targeted marketing, not only among young people, but among older populations. Work is needed to better understand what gendered messages women are susceptible to, and the influence of such messages on their drinking practices. It is important that such research takes an intersectional approach to explore the interplay between gender, class, sexual orientation, race and age.
- There is a lack of research that explores the use of gender equity and feminist themes and framing in alcohol marketing. No research has considered how this type of content is viewed and received by both male and females, and how it influences their purchase intentions, brand choice and drinking practices.
- Considering reductions in young people's drinking, research is needed to better understand how recent commitments towards removing sexist and sexual advertising might be used as a marketing strategy by the alcohol industry to appeal to the youth market.
- There is a need for research that explores the association between alcohol (brand and NTE) marketing that sexualises, objectifies and demeans women on attitudes towards women, and the treatment of women, including sexual violence and women's experiences within the NTE such as unwanted sexual attention. This is important research with respect to the development of interventions in the NTE deigned to reduce violence, and alcohol-related harms.
- Research is needed that considers how the use of images in alcohol marketing that present a narrow definition of the ideal female body influences women's internalised attitudes, body image and self-identity.
- In light of recent changes to the CAP code which aim to prevent the use of content that causes offence on the grounds of gender and the use of gender stereotypes, research is needed to assess the effectiveness of such codes in restricting content of this nature.
- Given concern over the targeting of women in LMIC and a relative lack of regulation, more research is needed that explores the gendered nature and influence of alcohol brand and venue marketing across different cultural contexts.

## Recommendations

Based on the review findings, and the suggestions for policy change discussed within the included studies, a number of recommendations for UK policy and practice are suggested:

- In many countries (e.g. UK, US, most European countries) self-regulatory codes are in place that prohibit content that associates alcohol with sexual success and attractiveness, and some countries include self-regulations to prevent offence based on gender (e.g. UK). However, these codes are ambiguous and are frequently violated. Given concerns regarding the impact of such content on gender equity, women's lived experiences and young people's drinking behaviours, the UK Codes should more explicitly outline what content falls under existing codes.

- The effectiveness of recent UK ASA/CAP Codes that prohibit content that causes offence based on gender and the use of gender stereotypes should also be independently evaluated. New guidance aimed at restricting the use of gender stereotypes including sexualisation and objectification, should be outlined in the alcohol specific Codes, and incorporated into Portman Group guidance.

- Applying the CAP code to user-generated content on social media is complex and does not prohibit user-generated content from being created and shared by the public on social media in ways that violates the codes, including those related to gender and sex (unless brands use this content themselves in their own promotions). Moreover, the code aims to self-regulate content, and does not address the use of engagement techniques which lead to women (and men) interacting with brand content, co-creating content and sharing widely among their online peer networks. A review of existing codes related to online and social media marketing should be undertaken. This should address the use of interactive strategies, and should also consider marketing by NTE venues and events.

- The UK system of self-regulation, including online marketing, should become more proactive. This would involve more regular reviews to identify marketing that breaches the Code, including those related to gender and sex. This process should include young people, as well as public health experts and experts working in the area of gender equity and gendered violence. These groups should also sit on regulatory decision making panels.

- If the updated Codes are found to consistently fail to reduce the number of breaches, consideration should be given to how approaches taken in other countries (e.g. the 'Loi Évin' in France) can be adapted to the UK context. These approaches differ to current regulation in the UK, in that currently marketers are instructed on what they *can't* depict, rather than what they *can*.

- Whilst individual level approaches to reducing the effects of alcohol marketing will not be effective in isolation, approaches that aim to educate women about the strategies used to target them, including those that both subvert and promote feminism, should be considered.

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## Appendix

*Definition of marketing employed*

Alcohol marketing involves a number of various integrated activities and strategies used to promote and sell alcohol products and venues through positive message and associations (Austins et al., 2006). This includes advertising on traditional media platforms such as television, as well as the sponsorship of events such as sports and music, and promotional activities on social media. Marketing aims to communicate an alcohol brand's attributes and 'personality' in a way that resonates with the targeted consumer group, through promoting both the tangible (e.g. taste, affordability, price) and intangible emotional benefits of the branded product (e.g. emotions, images and values, including those related to gender and sex) (Purves et al., 2014;2018; Stead et al., 2007; 2011).

*Limitations*

A number of limitations should be acknowledged. A narrative methodology was employed, which lacks the rigour of a systematic review, and so did not include a quality assessment of included articles. The review was also limited to English language publications. Publication bias may also have been important as studies that did not find that alcohol advertising was gendered, sexualised and/or sexist, may have been less likely to be published. However, this is a limitation of many literature reviews.

*Box 1: Search terms*

> Wom?n OR girl* OR female* OR feminin* OR M?n OR boy* OR male* OR masculin* OR gender* OR sexual*
>
> AND
>
> marketing OR advertis* OR brand* OR "social media" OR digital OR internet OR facebook OR twitter OR sponsor* OR promot* OR regulat*
>
> AND
>
> alcohol* OR drink* OR "night-time economy" OR "night-time environment" OR night life OR nightlife OR booze OR wine OR beer OR spirit* OR cocktail*

*Box 2: Search strategy*

1) Retrieval of relevant literature held within the research team's existing literature databases.
2) Retrieval of additional literature from the reference lists of held literature.
3) Identification of key terms used within the literature retrieved from step 1 and 2 to inform the search strategy for additional searches.
4) Database searches using the search terms developed in stage 3 (using Google scholar, Web of Science/Social Science Citation Index via Web of Science, SCOPUS, ETHOS). This included key journal articles (i.e. Addiction; Critical Public Health; BMC Public Health; Sociology; Feminist Media Studies; Drugs: Education, Prevention, Policy; International Journal of Drugs Policy; Addiction, Research and Theory; Journal of Gender Studies).
5) Searches for grey literature on key websites (i.e. IAS, Alcohol Change, WHO, EUCAM, European Commission, Drinkware, Department of Health, Public Health England, Alcohol Focus Scotland, SHAAP, ASA, NICE, Cochrane).
6) Hand searching the reference lists of retrieved articles.
7) Key informants (N=5) working in the field of alcohol studies were asked to provide feedback on the included studies and to identify any relevant publications that the search did not capture.

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