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# Gender Expectations for Alcohol Use: A Study of the Significance of the Masculine Role[1]

**Hope Landrine,[2] Stephen Bardwell, and Tina Dean**
*California State University, San Bernardino*

*One hundred sixteen undergraduates assigned traditional gender-stereotyping adjectives and adjective phrases to two male and two female stimuli. Included in this set of traits were statements regarding drinking beer, drinking wine, and getting drunk. Results indicated that male stimuli were attributed stereotypically masculine traits (e.g., acts as a leader, is willing to take risks), and were attributed both beer drinking and getting drunk significantly more often than the female stimuli. By contrast, female stimuli were attributed stereotypically feminine traits (e.g., dependent, sensitive) and were attributed wine drinking significantly more often than the male stimuli. These data provide direct evidence that expectations regarding beer drinking and getting drunk are aspects of the traditional male gender role. The social and mental health implications of the findings are discussed.*

Widespread as alcohol consumption is in our society, it is not randomly distributed but instead is strongly related to sex, age, ethnicity, and other status variables (Cahalan, Cisin, & Crossley, 1969). Of the many status predictors of nonpathological drinking behavior, sex appears the single strongest predictor (Ray, 1983; Siassi, Crocetti, & Shapiro, 1973). On the whole, studies have found that men drink more frequently than women (Cahalan et al., 1969; Fillmore, 1974; Maxwell, 1952; Riley & Marden, 1947), tend to drink in bars rather than at home (Maxwell, 1952), drink with friends rather than family (Cahalan et al., 1969), and drink greater quantities than women (Calahan

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[2]To whom all correspondence should be addressed at Department of Psychology, California State University, 5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, CA 92407.



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et al., 1969, Garrett & Bahr, 1973), even when sex differences in body weight are controlled (Johnson, 1982). In addition, men are more likely than women to become heavy or pathological drinkers (Fillmore, 1974; Garrett & Bahr, 1973; Madden & Jones, 1972; Mulford & Miller, 1960; Stoll, 1974).

Sex differences in drinking behavior appear related to two variables: (1) sex differences in the purpose and meaning of drinking and (2) differences in attitudes regarding the acceptability of drinking and drunkenness among women and men. Regarding the first variable, data on sex differences in where, when, and how drinking occurs suggest that it has a different meaning for the sexes. Women tend to drink wine, tend to drink slowly, drink with family members or at parties, drink on special occassions, drink on Saturdays, and drink to celebrate events and dates (Becker & Kronus, 1977). This style of drinking suggests that drinking is a social ritual for women, serving to allow women to celebrate and solidify their bonds with others, and to reinforce and maintain their social roles (Becker & Kronus, 1977; Ullman, 1962).

Men, the other hand, tend to drink with same-sex friends or acquaintances, drink in bars (i.e., in the company of strangers), drink irrespective of special occassions, drink beer, and drink fast (Orford, Waller, & Peto, 1974; Ullman, 1962). In addition, men tend to drink for the effect of drinking—to get high or drunk (Ullman, 1962)—and their drinking is more likely than women's to be associated with antisocial consequences (Orford et al., 1974). This style of drinking is also a social ritual, serving in this case to allow males to denigrate, deny, or weaken bonds with others, and to violate rules and roles occupied vis-à-vis others. Thus, men's usual style of drinking has been called "individual-egoistic" (Ullman, 1962).

This literature indicates that drinking for women seems symbolic of attachments to others, and appears to serve expressive-communal purposes. In contrast, drinking for men seems symbolic of detachment from others, and appears to serve instrumental-agency purposes. Sex differences in drinking behavior, then, are partially a product of gender-stereotyped differences in the meaning or purpose of drinking.

Current social attitudes regarding the acceptability of drinking and of drunkenness for women and men also contribute to sex differences in drinking. Although there was a time when it was socially acceptable for both sexes to drink heavily and to drink in taverns (1790–1840), industrialization led to changes in gender roles and norms for drinking behavior (Gomberg, 1982). Drinking became defined as male and masculine behavior (Gomberg, 1982; Pfautz, 1962). Heavy drinking, drunkenness, and drinking in bars were all redefined as a male prerogative, and thereby construed to be socially acceptable behavior for men but unacceptable behavior for women. Such norms still

persist, although about two-thirds of all women drink (Gomberg, 1982). In addition, although drinking has been steadily increasing among women over the years (Bacon & Jones, 1968; Cahalan et al., 1969; Gomberg, 1982), drinking is nonetheless considered masculine behavior, and it is far more socially acceptable for men than for women to drink heavily and to become inebriated (Gomberg, 1982; Pfautz, 1962). These norms contribute to the sex differences in the quantity and frequency of drinking.

When considered together, the research on sex differences in style of drinking and sex-based norms in the acceptability of drinking appear to suggest that drinking behaviors is influenced by gender roles. That is, there appears to be traditional gender-stereotyped expectations and norms for drinking behavior. The evidence from these studies appears to suggest that men are expected to be hard, heavy, and fast beer drinkers, to drink in bars, to engage in antisocial acts when drinking, and to become drunk. Drunkenness, in this sense, may be an aspect of the concept of masculinity. As such, drunkenness may be something that men are socialized for and which they accept as predictable "manly" behavior (Basow, 1980). On the other hand, it is expected that women will rarely drink, with the result that alcohol consumption has not become an aspect of female gender roles. If, however, women must drink, they are expected to drink wine at home on special occasions, and are not expected to become drunk. Quite surprisingly, however, there appears to be no empirical evidence indicating that drinking per se or that the style in which people drink are both aspects of traditional gender roles and gender expectations. In addition, there appears to be little evidence indicating that both hard-heavy-fast beer drinking and drunkenness are aspects of traditional male gender roles and expectations. Thus, the purpose of the present research was to examine these issues.

We hypothesized that if both drinking beer and getting drunk are aspects of the male gender role and gender expectations for men, then subjects should attribute both beer drinking and getting drunk more often to males than to females. Furthermore, if beer drinking and getting drunk are aspects of the concept of stereotypical masculinity, then they should be attributed more frequently to highly masculine men, followed by ordinary men, ordinary women, and feminine women. There should be a positive correlation, then, between expectations for beer drinking, and for getting drunk, and stereotypical masculinity. In addition, to the extent that wine drinking is more acceptable for women than for men, then wine drinking should be attributed to females more often than to males. Moreover, to the extent that wine drinking is construed to be feminine behavior, it should be attributed less often to masculine men than to ordinary men.

## METHOD

### *Participants*

The 70 women and 46 men in the sample ranged in age from 17 to 52 years (Mean = 28.7 years, Mode = 20 years). All subjects were undergraduates at California State University, San Bernardino.

### *Procedure*

Students were asked to participate in a social stereotyping study. Instructions to the questionnaire read as follows: "the purpose of this questionnaire is to help us learn about **society's** stereotypes of men and women. On the attached page, we would like you to give **society's** stereotype of men/women. Then, we want you to tell us whether **you personally** think that **society's** stereotype is true or not." The task was framed in this manner in order to counteract possible resistance to stereotyping; such a procedure has been successful in previous studies (e.g., Landrine, 1985). With these instructions, no questionnaire was refused. The remainder of the instructions read as follows: "If **society's** stereotype says that women/men **have** a certain trait, you check 'yes.' If the stereotype says that women/men **don't have** a certain trait, you check 'no.'"

The questionnaire consisted of 16 adjectives/adjective phrases from the Bem Sex Role Inventory, three adjective phrases regarding drinking, and one regarding fighting. These were given in a list, and followed by spaces in which the subject could indicate "yes" (the trait is part of our social stereotype) or "no" (the trait is not part of our social stereotype). With this set of instructions, the subjects responded to four different stimuli: "A really macho man," "an ordinary man," "an ordinary woman," and, "a really feminine woman." Each subject assigned the entire set of adjective phrases to only one of these four target groups, with the four types distributed equally across the sample. Twenty-nine of each type of stimulus were distributed.

## RESULTS

Table I shows the frequency of subjects' attributions of the 20 adjective phrases to the four gender stimuli, the chi-square analyses of these attributions, and the correlations (*C*) between the categories and each adjective phrase. As indicated in Table I, subjects made traditionally gender-stereotyped attributions to the four gender stimuli: intelligent, acts as a leader, aggres-

sive, self-confident, willing to take risks, is forceful, gets in fights, takes a stand, and dominant were attributed more often (a "yes" choice) to the male than to the female stimuli. This finding is consistent with studies using these Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) items (e.g., Bem, 1974; Hungerford & Sobolew-Shubin, 1987), with studies of the masculine role (e.g., David & Brannon, 1976; O'Neil, 1981), and with studies based on Snell's Masculine Role Inventory (e.g., Snell, 1986; Snell, Belk, & Hawkins, 1987). On the other hand, passive, dependent, helpful, sensitive, compassionate, soft-spoken, shy, and gentle were attributed more often (a "yes" choice) to the female stimuli, in a manner consistent with previous studies using these BSRI items. In addition, the traits attributed more frequently to the male stimuli were positively correlated with masculinity: The frequency of attribution of these traits decreased with decreases in stereotypical masculinity (decreased progressively from the macho category, to the really feminine category). Traits more frequently attributed to the female stimuli were negatively correlated with masculinity, such that the frequency of attribution of these increased from the really macho category to the really feminine category. These results suggest that subjects responded to the four stimuli with traditional gender stereotypes, such that the categories and responses to them represent traditional gender stereotypes and expectations. We can now ask how expectations for drinking beer, drinking wine, and getting drunk are related to these traditional gender stereotypes, and can investigate the correlation between these and stereotypical masculinity. As indicated in Table I, both drinking beer and getting drunk were more frequently attributed to the male stimuli than to the female stimuli. In addition, both beer drinking and getting drunk were positively correlated with stereotypical masculinity, increasing steadily across the categories as stereotypical masculinity increased. The correlation between drinking beer and masculinity was .59, and between getting drunk and masculinity it was .60, where the maximum correlation possible was .87. On the other hand, drinking wine was attributed more frequently to the female than to the male stimuli, and the correlation between wine drinking and stereotypical masculinity was $-.47$. Finally, summing across the three types of drinking for the ordinary woman and the really feminine woman categories reveals that ordinary women were attributed drinking (drunk, wine, and/or beer) significantly more often than really feminine women (total "yes" across the types of drinking for ordinary women = 37, and for really feminine women = 24; total "no" across the types of drinking for ordinary women = 50, and for really feminine women = 63; $\chi^2 = 4.27$, $p < .05$). Drinking was thus not an aspect of traditional female gender roles, for if it were, we might have expected it to be attributed to the really feminine category more frequently than to the ordinary woman category. Sex of subject was not related to these results (see Appendix).

**Table I.** Gender Stereotypes and Chi-Square Analyses[a]

| Adjective phrase | Macho man | Ordinary man | Ordinary woman | Feminine woman | $\chi^2$ | $C$ | $p$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Intelligent | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 17 | 24 | 14 | 6 | 23.06 | .41 | [b] |
| No | 12 | 5 | 15 | 23 | | | |
| Passive | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 2 | 4 | 21 | 27 | 63.89 | −.60 | [b] |
| No | 27 | 25 | 8 | 2 | | | |
| Dependent | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 1 | 9 | 21 | 22 | 42.62 | −.52 | [b] |
| No | 28 | 21 | 8 | 7 | | | |
| Drinks beer | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 27 | 24 | 7 | 2 | 63.34 | .59 | [b] |
| No | 2 | 5 | 22 | 27 | | | |
| Leader | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 25 | 20 | 7 | 3 | 45.18 | .53 | [b] |
| No | 4 | 9 | 22 | 26 | | | |
| Aggressive | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 27 | 20 | 8 | 2 | 53.08 | .56 | [b] |
| No | 2 | 9 | 21 | 27 | | | |
| Self-confident | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 27 | 26 | 12 | 7 | 44.23 | .53 | [b] |
| No | 2 | 3 | 17 | 22 | | | |
| Helpful | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 6 | 17 | 29 | 27 | 53.13 | −.56 | [b] |
| No | 23 | 12 | 0 | 2 | | | |
| Takes risks | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 29 | 22 | 12 | 5 | 48.04 | .54 | [b] |
| No | 0 | 7 | 17 | 24 | | | |
| Sensitive | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 2 | 11 | 29 | 28 | 75.65 | −.63 | [b] |
| No | 27 | 18 | 0 | 1 | | | |
| Forceful | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 27 | 18 | 8 | 2 | 50.43 | .30 | [b] |
| No | 2 | 11 | 21 | 27 | | | |
| Compassionate | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 1 | 15 | 27 | 27 | 66.15 | −.60 | [b] |
| No | 28 | 14 | 2 | 2 | | | |
| Fights | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 27 | 13 | 4 | 2 | 56.06 | .57 | [b] |
| No | 2 | 16 | 25 | 27 | | | |
| Soft-spoken | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 1 | 6 | 21 | 28 | 66.02 | −.60 | [b] |
| No | 28 | 23 | 8 | 1 | | | |
| Gets drunk | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 28 | 23 | 8 | 1 | 66.02 | .60 | [b] |
| No | 1 | 6 | 21 | 28 | | | |
| Is shy | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 4 | 7 | 18 | 27 | 53.27 | −.56 | [b] |
| No | 25 | 22 | 11 | 2 | | | |
| Takes a stand | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 29 | 24 | 11 | 2 | 63.69 | .60 | [b] |
| No | 0 | 5 | 18 | 27 | | | |
| Is dominant | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 28 | 24 | 5 | 2 | 71.56 | .62 | [b] |
| No | 1 | 5 | 24 | 27 | | | |

**Table I.** Continued

| Adjective phrase | Macho man | Ordinary man | Ordinary woman | Feminine woman | $\chi^2$ | $C$ | $p$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Is gentle | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 1 | 7 | 29 | 28 | 86.61 | −.65 | [b] |
| No | 28 | 22 | 0 | 1 | | | |
| Drinks wine | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 3 | 13 | 22 | 21 | 32.11 | −.47 | [b] |
| No | 26 | 16 | 7 | 8 | | | |

[a] $df = 3$ for each chi-square above. Numbers in the table represent the number of subjects choosing "yes" or "no." $C$ = the contingency coefficient, a correlation coefficient for categorical data. $C$ was calculated as $C = \sqrt{\chi^2/(n + \chi^2)}$. Unlike other correlations, the maximum value of $C$ is not one (1.00). Rather, it is calculated as $C_{max} = \sqrt{(k-1)/k}$. The maximum possible $C$ for this study is thus $C = .87$. This limit must be considered when examining the data. As indicated by the equation, $C$ is necessarily positive. Negative signs have been added here to indicate directionality given that the categories are ordinal. See Hinkle, Wiersma, and Jurs (1979) for a discussion of these analyses.
[b] $p < .01$.

## DISCUSSION

As predicted, beer drinking and getting drunk were found to be aspects of a traditional male gender stereotype, and were positively correlated with stereotypical masculinity. By contrast, drinking was found to be unrelated to traditional female gender stereotypes. Likewise, wine drinking was not an aspect of the traditional female role, but emerged instead as something women can do if they decide to drink.

These results imply that men may drink more often than women in part because such behavior has been defined as an aspect of the male gender role. To the extent that drinking is an aspect of masculinity, men may experience a need to drink, to drink beer, and to drink to excess in order to live up to this gender expectation and to prove their masculinity. In addition, to the extent that stereotypical masculinity includes expectations of drinking and drunkenness, it is often expected that more stereotypically masculine people will drink more and will do so simply because drinking is one of their masculine characteristics. Recent research is consistent with this interpretation. Spence, Helmreich, and Holahan (1979) and Mosher and Sirkin (1984) report that high masculinity scores—particularly hypermasculinity (macho) scores—are strongly associated with alcohol abuse. Similarly, Snell et al. (1987) indicate that high masculinity scores (measured by Snell's Masculine Role Inventory) are highly predictive of alcohol abuse for both sexes during periods of high stress. Likewise, other research indicates that lower class women's gender role tendencies are more stereotypically masculine than those of higher status women (Landrine, 1985), and that lower class women not only drink more than higher status women but also drink in a stereotypically masculine

style (Beckman, 1975). Similarly, among higher status women, "out of role" (nontraditional) women have been found to drink significantly more than "in-role" (traditional) women, and employed women have been found to drink more than housewives (Johnson, 1981). All of these findings indicate that drinking often increases directly with the presence of stereotypically masculine tendencies simply because it is the "masculine" way to behave and because it is expected of all masculine-typed persons irrespective of their sex.

We might speculate from the results here that gender expectations for alcohol use are a diathesis predicting gender differences in psychopathology. Under conditions of stressful life events, perceived loss of control, and perceived meaninglessness, men tend to exhibit alcohol abuse (Conger, 1956; Kraft, 1971; Newcomb & Harlow, 1986) whereas women tend to exhibit depression (Stoppard & Paisely, 1987; Whitley, 1985). Stereotypical masculinity may thereby be a necessary predisposition for alcoholism in either sex—it may be the diathesis without which stressful events result in depression or some other disorder. Thus, the results of this study have serious social and mental health implications.

This study was a preliminary investigation designed to demonstrate that expectations for drinking are an aspect of gender roles and gender expectations, and are a component of stereotypical masculinity. Further research is necessary to clarify this relationship. Specifically, research using larger samples, continuous dependent variables, and the entire BSRI will clarify the relationship by permitting multivariate and regression analyses, and an examination of gender of subject by gender of target interactions. Analyses of the correlations between the BSRI items and beer drinking, wine drinking, and drunkness will also further clarify the relationship. Finally, given that stereotypical masculinity appears multidimensional (Deaux & Lewis, 1984; Spence & Sawin, 1984; Thompson & Pleck, 1987), future studies that investigate the relationship between the various facets of masculinity (e.g., toughness vs. status vs. antifemininity vs. control) and expectations for drinking would be beneficial. Such research may elucidate the role and function of drinking for masculine-typed persons and thus add to our capacity to predict pathological drinking among them.

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## APPENDIX

An analysis for differences between male and female subjects in attributing "drinks beer" and "get drunk" to the male and female stimuli was run. All other items (standard sex role items) were not analyzed for possible sex-of-subject effects because research does not indicate that there are major sex differences in sex role stereotyping. The question to be answered in the analysis was whether there was a difference between the women and men in the sample in attributing drinking beer and getting drunk to the male stimuli as a whole vs. to the female stimuli as a whole.

*Drinks Beer: Analysis of "Yes" Attributions*

| *Macho Man* + Ordinary Man | Ordinary woman + Feminine Woman |
|---|---|
| Female subjects | 31 | 5 |
| Male subjects | 20 | 4 |

$\chi^2 = .001$, not significant

*Gets Drunk: Analysis of "Yes" Attributions*

| Macho Man + Ordinary Man | Ordinary Woman + Feminine woman |
|---|---|
| Female subjects | 30 | 6 |
| Male subjects | 21 | 3 |

$\chi^2 = .196$, not significant