

2022

Beer Preferences of Women: Looking at Gender Stereotypes through the Consumption of Craft Beer

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**Beer Preferences of Women: Looking at Gender Stereotypes
Through the Consumption of Craft Beer**

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2 May 2022

Beer Preferences of Women

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Abstract

Centuries ago, beer brewing was done by women who were highly respected members of their communities. During the Middle Ages, priests and monasteries took over these duties, and since then, all things beer have become synonymous with masculinity. Through advertising, public drinking spaces, and even coming-of-age rituals, beer consumption has been geared toward men. Even beer styles themselves have been labeled either masculine or feminine with light, sweet and fruity beers being associated with femininity and dark, robust, and hoppy beers being associated with masculinity. Although the stereotype of craft beer consumption being a masculine activity still exists, the number of women consuming craft beer is increasing year over year. There are still assumptions made about both men and women who drink craft beers outside of the perceived gendered construct that questions the masculinity of men and the femininity of women. This study dives into the gendered perceptions of craft beer and the stereotype of craft beer drinking being a masculine activity by looking at the perceptions of the styles of craft beers women prefer and the styles of beer they actually drink.

Keywords: Craft beer, masculine, feminine, perception, stereotype

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Introduction

For centuries, beer and brewing have been associated with women, as brewing was seen as a domestic task. Women who brewed beer were called Ale-Wives and were highly respected as they played a profound role spiritually and culturally in society (Spitz, 2010). Sometime during the Middle Ages, priests and monasteries took over the job of brewing, and since then, beer, brewing, and beer drinking have been synonymous with masculinity. From public drinking spaces to advertising and coming of age rituals, beer has been geared toward men and has been seen as a cultural symbol of masculinity (Chapman et al., 2018, Corzine, 2010; Darwin, 2018; Lemie & Mishkind, 1989; Nanney et al., 2020).

Although women are typically identified as wine and fruity mixed cocktail drinkers, more and more women have been consuming and enjoying craft beer. Official data from the 2014 Great American Beer Festival as cited by Darwin (2017) reported that 37% of women in the United States are craft beer consumers. Another study by Watson (2018) who looked at craft beer consumption from a broader perspective, reported 31.5% of women drink craft beer several times per year, which is 2.4% higher than the 2015 results that reported 29.1% of women are craft beer drinkers (Watson, 2018). The style of beer in these studies is not identified, which begs the question, does the type of beer being consumed uphold or break the gender stereotypes?

There have been few studies done about how women's actual beer preferences relate to the gender stereotypes associated with beer. The fact that women's interest in and consumption of craft beer is increasing suggests that their preferences are shifting to include beers that are customarily associated with masculinity. The predilection for these masculine beers suggests that the gender stereotypes in craft beer culture are shifting to a more equitable state. If women's beer preferences are taken into consideration rather than basing assumptions on the perceptions of

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what styles of beer they favor, it would be found that beer is just as much of a woman's drink as it is a man's drink. The purpose of this study is to identify whether the stereotype of craft beer consumption and masculinity remains intact by conducting primary and secondary research about the perception of craft beer preferences of women and the styles of beer they actually prefer.

Literature Review

There are common themes that appear in the literature related to gender and craft beer. These themes include the belief that craft beer and beer, in general, can be equated to masculinity, within the domain of craft beer styles there are masculine beer and feminine beer styles, and there are perceptions of not only what styles of craft beers men and women prefer to drink, but of men and women who drink craft beers outside of the perceived gender norms. These motifs help to understand the basis of the stereotype that craft beer consumption is a masculine activity and help to understand how the craft beer styles women do prefer uphold or break this stereotype.

Masculinity of Beer

Beer consumption has been associated with masculinity and has been a way for men to define their manhood. Social drinking is a fundamental American cultural symbol of masculinity. A boy's first beer is a symbol of his initiation into manhood, and his first drinking experience and his first experience with getting drunk is something that is done with other boys (Lemle & Mishkind, 1989). Men also drink beer in groups at places and events that are considered to be more masculine like pubs and sporting events (Lemle & Mishkind, 1989), which reinforces the stereotype that beer is a masculine beverage.

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In public drinking spaces like bars, pubs, and breweries, men are usually looked to for information about craft beers and are assumed to be knowledgeable no matter what they order and how much they know (Nanney et al., 2020). In a study done by Nanney et al. (2020), men stated that they were perceived as having knowledge of craft beers and looked to for recommendations and information even if, in actuality, they had no knowledge. Women were judged or critiqued about what they ordered, especially if they ordered a type of beer that wasn't considered a *real beer*. This implies that beer drinking and masculinity go hand in hand no matter the reality of the situation. Even if men have no knowledge or expertise, they are still held in higher regard in public beer spaces.

Advertising has also contributed to this link between manliness and beer (Corzine, 2010; Darwin, 2018; Lemle & Mishkind, 1989). In the early 20th century, after the end of prohibition in America, beer became the substitute for “the feminized cocktail” (Darwin, 2018, p.4), and became a common alcoholic beverage choice for men. During World War II, beer advertisements augmented the perception that beer consumption was a masculine activity portraying it as a domestic comfort that soldiers were fighting for (Darwin, 2018). Brewers wanted the public to view beer as part of the American culture and used imagery in advertising of an idealistic American society where beer drinking represented masculinity, and of men being leaders, providers, and protectors (Corzine, 2010). Women in these advertisements were shown as facilitators of beer consumption rather than consumers of beer (Corzine, 2010; Darwin, 2018).

Women being sexualized and objectified has been the core of beer advertisements throughout the 20th century as well portraying “women as beers,” as an object that can be enjoyed with friends (Poon, 2021, p.20), adding to the illegitimacy of women as beer consumers. Even in modern advertising, beer consumption is still geared towards a male audience. Men's

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magazines feature advertisements for beer in masculinized spaces like sports arenas and pubs, associating beer drinking with manliness, while women's magazines highlight advertisements not only for alcoholic beverages like wine or hard seltzers but also ads for other products that portray women as social elites that drink these types of feminine beverages (Chapman et al., 2018).

Gendered Beers

Along with the stereotype that beer is a masculine beverage, there is also a stereotype that within the realm of beer styles, there are masculine beers and feminine beers. There is a vast array of beer styles in the craft beer culture. Dark and/or domestic beers are deemed masculine (Chapman et al., 2018; Darwin, 2017). These beers are considered to be *real beers*. These are the beers that are heavier and robust in flavors like porters and stouts and hop forward like India pale ales (IPAs) and American pale ales (APAs). They tend to have a higher alcohol by volume (ABV) content and a higher international bitter unit (IBU) (Chapman et al., 2018; Nanney et al., 2020). Sour, fruited and wheat beers are considered feminine (Chapman et al., 2018; Darwin, 2017). These beers are analogous to wine or mixed cocktails and are lighter, sweeter, and fruitier in flavor. They are also referred to as “chick” or “pink” beers. They are oftentimes undervalued and not seen as *real beers* (Nanney et al., 2020, p. 452).

Darwin (2017) found that both men and women described beers that are stereotypically assigned to their own gender with descriptive words that are usually associated with that gender. Men used words like rich, powerful, and bold when characterizing masculine beers and women use words like pretty, aromatic, expensive, and flowery when describing feminine beer. Both genders are in agreement that feminine beer is light, sweet, and refreshing, and masculine beer is heavy, strong, bitter, and rough. These descriptions not only describe the masculinity and

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femininity of beer, but they describe the attributes of traditional masculinity and ideal femininity, inferring that gendered consumption can either confirm or refute the prevailing gender stereotypes (Darwin, 2017).

Gender Perceptions Through the Consumption of Beer

There are perceptions of men and women who drink beers outside of their perceived gender assignment. In a study done by Darwin (2017, p. 17), the majority of men answered “no comment” when asked for their assumption of a man who prefers feminine beers. She also found that men who did comment mostly excused the act by giving them a hypothetical reason for doing so. A small number of men, 6.35%, referred to men who drank feminine beers as homosexual (Darwin, 2017). Women were a little harsher when commenting on their male counterparts, with 23.3% making condemnatory comments about their sexuality and masculinity, but again, when asked for their assumption of a man who prefers feminine beers, there was an overwhelming amount of “no comment” responses (Darwin, 2017, p. 17).

Women on the other hand are held in high regard by both men and women if their beer preference lies in the realm of masculine beer. Men see these women as more knowledgeable, less pretentious, and find them attractive (Darwin, 2017), but they also see them as gender-inverse seeing them as one of the guys or tough and intimidating (Darwin, 2017). Women see them as being empowered, knowledgeable, experienced, and think highly of women who drink masculine beer, but like with men, Darwin (2017) found in her study that many women had a neutral opinion of other women who drank masculine beer.

Darwin (2017, p.17) made it a point to recognize the overwhelming amount of “no comment” responses she received in her study. This is an indication that craft beer culture could

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be open-minded and non-judgmental towards transgressive beer drinkers, or men and women are defending their own gender when they drink craft beer styles outside of the gendered standards (Darwin, 2017), suggesting that, especially with male transgressive drinkers that there is still a stigma about stepping outside of the perceived gendered norms in the craft beer community.

Methodology and Data Collection

Mixed-method research was used for this study by conducting primary and secondary research. Secondary research was done by searching through the databases Google Scholar, the Johnson & Wales University Library, and industry publications to find current and relevant peer-reviewed articles relating to gender stereotypes and craft beer consumption. These articles will be reviewed to find similarities and differences in the research to find out how they compare with the original research.

Primary research was conducted through the distribution of a survey given to participants in breweries in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. These surveys consisted of two open-ended questions and one question that required a yes or no response. If the participant answered yes, then an open-ended question followed. The sampling method used was a convenience sample which is a sampling method in which participants are chosen based on being conveniently located to the location of the study (Edgar & Manz, 2017). The sample size consisted of 41 participants, 24 women (59%) and 17 men (41%). Along with gender, the only other personal information asked was age range, with the largest age group being 26-35 (34%) as shown in Table 1.

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Table. 1

Gender and Age Demographics

Gender		Total	Percentage
Male		17	41%
Female		24	59%
		41	100%

Age	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
21-25	1	3	4	10%
26-35	5	9	14	34%
36-45	4	6	10	24%
46-55	5	4	9	22%
56+	2	2	4	10%
	17	24	41	100%

Three breweries were visited, two in Massachusetts and one in Rhode Island on three different days of the same week between March 28, 2022, and April 3, 2022. Two of the breweries were visited in the evening and the third was visited in the afternoon. The varying days and times were done to obtain a representative sample size. Brewery managers were asked prior to handing out the survey if the survey could be conducted. The purpose of this research was explained to the managers and how the survey related to the research. Permission was granted by the managers of the three breweries and copies of the research were offered to them at the culmination of this paper.

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Participants were approached inside the breweries and asked if they would be willing to participate in a survey relating to the beer preferences of women and how it relates to the stereotype of beer being a masculine beverage. All people asked to participate agreed and were handed a three-question survey asking which styles of craft beers they prefer, which styles they believe women prefer, and if they consider any craft beer styles to be masculine or feminine. If the participant answered yes to this question, they were then asked to identify which styles. The complete survey is displayed in the appendix. The surveys were collected and analyzed to determine if they confirm or dispel previous research on the topic.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to determine whether women's beer preferences affirm or dispel the stereotype that craft beer consumption is a masculine activity. Participants were asked if they thought that there were any beer styles that were masculine or feminine. It was almost an even split down the middle with the total number of participants. 20 people, 48%, responded that they believe there are styles of craft beer that are considered masculine or feminine, and 21 people, 51%, thought that the different craft beer styles were gender-neutral. More women than men however thought that there were masculine and feminine craft beer styles, 62.5% and 29% respectively. The results of this question are listed in Table 2. If respondents answered yes to this question, they were then asked to list which styles they considered masculine and which styles they considered feminine. Answers to this question varied as some participants listed specific beer styles such as sours, IPAs, and stouts, and others listed descriptions such as light, fruity and dark. Most participants listed multiple styles in answer to this question. Overall, an overwhelming amount of both men and women believe that sours and fruited beers are feminine beers and IPAs are masculine beers. Complete results are listed in Table 2.

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Table 2

Perception of Craft Beer Being Gendered

Gender	Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage
Male	5	29%	12	71%
Female	15	62.5%	9	37.5%
	20	48%	21	51%

Style of Beer	Male		Female	
	Masculine	Feminine	Masculine	Feminine
Sour		4	1	9
Fruited		2		3
Light				2
Wheat				2
Pilsner			2	1
Lager			2	1
Pale Ale				2
IPA	3		8	4
Porter			2	
Stout	2		8	2
Dark			1	

Respondents were also asked which types of craft beers they believe women prefer.

Again, as shown in Table 3, both men and women thought that women prefer sour, 51%, and fruited, 22%, beers, but women also believe that women prefer IPAs. Women were also found to be more specific when listing the different styles of beers. For example, they were found to list coffee stout instead of just stout or New England IPA (NEIPA) instead of just IPA. Several respondents, like with the answers to which craft beer styles they considered masculine and feminine, responded with the adjectives light and fruity.

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Table 3

Styles of Beers Believed to be Preferred by Women

Style of Beer	Male	Female
Sour	12	9
Fruited	3	6
Light	2	8
Pilsner	1	3
Lager	2	
Wheat		1
IPA	2	6
Pale Ale	1	2
Stout	2	1
Porter		
Kolsch	1	

The top three craft beer styles that women preferred in this study were sours, IPAs, and stouts. Table 4 shows the complete list of the craft beer preferences of the 41 men and women surveyed. Ten women preferred sours and ten preferred IPAs with two women stating that they prefer both styles. The third highest ranked beer preferred by women was stout, which is typically has been stereotyped as a masculine beer (Chapman et al., 2018; Darwin, 2017). Men overwhelmingly preferred IPAs over any other craft beer style. While men's preferences were more narrowly focused and stuck to the stereotypical styles preferred by men, with the exception of two men who favored sour beers, women's preferences were broader and as a group, favored craft beer styles outside of the perceived gender stereotype.

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Table 4

Beer Preferences

Style of Beer	Male	Female
Sour	2	10
Lager	3	3
IPA	12	10
Pale Ale		5
Stout	1	7
Porter	1	
Brown Ale	2	
Wheat		2
Belgian		1
Saison		1

Discussion

This study was done to compare the findings of this small survey with a convenience sample size of 41 participants, to the findings in the existing literature on the topic of the gender stereotypes of craft beer preferences. This study shows a disparity between the craft beer preferences women are perceived to prefer and the craft beers they actually prefer. The general consensus of this survey indicates that both men and women believe that the stereotype of women's beer preferences being light and fruity still exists. This aligns with the research done by Chapman et al. (2018) in which the researchers looked at online beer communities and found that it is perceived that women prefer lighter, sweeter styles of beer and men prefer darker, robust styles of beer. These attributes- light, sweet, dark, and robust, among other descriptive words that have now been assigned to craft beer styles have been used to describe the female and male

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genders for many years. These gendered stereotypes could influence perceptions as well as preferences as gender identity is an important social construct that helps people express their personal identities (Pinar et al, 2021). This suggests that there is a preconceived notion that women will choose feminine beers and men will choose masculine beers. These are gender stereotypes that have been instilled in men and women since childhood

The craft beer styles that women prefer tell a slightly different story. In this study, the two beers most preferred by women with an equal number of votes are sours and IPAs. Sours are deemed a feminine beer style and IPAs are considered a masculine beer style (Chapman et al., 2018; Darwin, 2017; Nanney et al., 2020). Stouts and pale ales were also at the top of the list of women's craft beer preferences. Being that stouts are dark and robust, and pale ales are hoppy and bitter, they too fall under the scope of masculine beers (Chapman et al., 2018; Darwin 2017; Nanney et al., 2020). Women's preferences discovered in this study shift the paradigm of craft beer drinking being a masculine activity to an activity that is gender equitable. Chapman et al. (2018) found that although beer styles are still gendered and there is a belief that masculine beers are considered superior to feminine beer, many people believe that beer styles and beer drinking should have a gender-blind perspective, and people should drink whatever they want with no judgment. This backs up Darwin's (2017, p.17) research that refers to her interviewees' responses of "no comment" could signify that the craft beer community is open-minded.

Conclusion

There is still an existing stereotype that there are masculine craft beers and feminine craft beers, and that beer drinking is an inherently masculine activity, one that has been in existence for many years. This can be seen in public beer spaces, in online beer communities, and through marketing and advertising. The number of women in the craft beer community is increasing, not

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only in the number of women who enjoy consuming craft beer but in the number of women who brew and own breweries. The findings in this study both confirm and dispel findings in the existing literature. A large number of women do prefer sour beers which fall into the feminine beer category, but an equal amount prefers IPAs which are classified as masculine beers. Not only do women prefer the masculine IPA, but other masculine beers are also high on the women's list of preferences. The perception still exists that women prefer lighter, sweeter, fruitier beers, but actual preferences prove that the craft beer styles that are considered to be masculine are becoming more gender-equitable.

Limitations and Implications

There are some limitations that should be addressed with this study. The paper was to be completed within an eight-week time frame. The time constraint allowed for only a minimal amount of research to be done on the beer preferences of women and how they contribute to the stereotype of craft beer being a masculine activity. The sample size presents another limitation. The sample size consisted of 41 participants, and although the central limit theorem states that given a large enough sample size, the distribution of the mean, in this case beer preferences, will approximate the normal distribution as the population gets larger, with 30 being a minimum sufficient sample size (Kwak & Kim, 2017). There is a possibility that this sample may not be a general reflection of a larger population. Along with the small sample size, the surveys were only distributed to people in three breweries in relatively the same geographical area, and different results may be found in different parts of the country or the world. Another limitation is that participants were at the brewery in groups, the smallest consisting of two people and the largest consisting of seven. Although it appeared that the surveys were being filled out individually, there is the possibility that filling out the survey in a group setting may have affected their

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responses. They were also consuming beer, and although no one who appeared to be intoxicated was approached, the consumption of beer may have affected the participants' responses.

Women's consumption of craft beer is increasing and knowing their preferences can be useful to breweries in their marketing and advertising endeavors. Not only for small local breweries but large mainstream breweries as well. Women present a large target market for breweries and knowing their preferences can help them in their marketing strategies. Understanding the gender stereotypes in beer culture can also enable public drinking spaces more inclusive and equitable for both genders.

Future Research

This study looked at the masculinization of beer, beer as being gendered, and gender perceptions through the consumption of beer with a focus on how women's beer preferences contribute to the stereotype of craft beer consumption being a masculine activity. There has been research conducted about gender perceptions through craft beer consumption and the gender stereotypes that are associated with craft beer culture, but beyond the studies done by researchers looking at online beer communities and blogs (Chapman et al., 2018; Darwin, 2018), I have found little information about how women's preferences uphold the gender stereotypes of craft beer. Future research should be done on this topic with larger population sample sizes in other geographical areas to see if the findings in this study can be confirmed.

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drinkers

Appendix

*Craft Beer Preference Survey***Beer Preference Survey**

Gender:	Age:	21-25	26-35
		36-45	46-55
		56+	

1. Which style of craft beer do you most prefer?

2. Which types of craft beer styles do you believe are preferred by women?

3. Do you consider any craft beer styles to be “masculine?” To be “feminine?” Yes
 No

3a. If Yes, which ones? Masculine Feminine