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Alcohol as a Gender Symbol*

Sidsel Eriksen

Whereas alcohol research formerly dealt with men's alcohol consumption (and abuse), in recent years we have seen much greater attention devoted to alcohol consumption among women.¹ Behind this attention lies the view that female alcohol consumption has been rising from a level that was "originally" low and unproblematic to an "unnaturally" high level (with the consequent increase in alcohol abuse among women) in pace with the increase in the numbers of women entering the labour market.² But is it so simple? What is a "natural" level of consumption for women, and how much do we know about the concrete development of alcohol consumption among women?

These are difficult questions to answer, mainly because there is no certain long-term data on the extent of consumption – or for that matter abuse – of alcohol among women, but another factor is that the increased attention to the issue may in itself simply have had the effect of making women's alcohol consumption or abuse more visible. The American sociologist Kaye Middleton Fillmore, for example, has shown that assessments of the scope of women's drinking, all other things being equal, depend on the political climate for women. She says that, although there is a great deal to suggest that women's drinking patterns have been relatively constant since data became available in the 1940s, the extent of women's drinking in the 1940s and 1950s was nevertheless underestimated in research, while it has been overestimated in recent studies, simultaneously with the growing interest in

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¹ A. Snare, "Women and Control", in *Women, Alcohol and Drugs in the Nordic Countries*, NAD Publication 16 (1989), pp. 134 f., and numerous other works.

² In modern sociological literature about women and alcohol, women's present-day drinking is regarded as unnaturally high in relation to former times. In this literature we also see the formulations of former times reproduced: "Female alcoholics were without exception the most excluded women in society"; see K. Salmose, "Kvinnors alkoholbruk i historisk belysning", in *Kvinnor, alkohol och behandling*, NAD-publikation 13 (1986), pp. 45 ff.

women's issues.³ Against this background, there is good reason to question the correctness of the supposedly original – and therefore natural – low level of alcohol consumption among women, and by extension, to consider how the idea arose, and above all to show what it means for what may be called specifically female patterns of drinking.

My point of departure here is that women's "originally" low alcohol consumption, or rather the view that alcohol consumption is not particularly associated with the female gender, is a historical construction created with the emergence of the modern Western world, and that the concept of "original" consequently does not necessarily refer back to a low and biologically "natural" and "harmonious" level of consumption, but to a specific historical discourse about the nature of female biology – what may also be called the historicity of naturalness.⁴ This discourse, however, may have been determinant for our way of thinking about women and alcohol, and hence for the character of female drinking patterns.

The idea of women's original sobriety has already been questioned by a group of anthropologists. They stick to the cultural determination of alcohol consumption: "What you drink, how you drink it, when, how much and with whom you drink, may evoke diverse responses in different cultural settings."⁵ The British anthropologist Mary Douglas, for example, is profoundly sceptical of the fact that, as she says, "in many civilizations women are habitually excluded from taking strong alcohol", and asks whether this is explicitly based on gynaecology or results from a happy convergence of medical and socio-cultural ideas?⁶

The idea of the sociocultural gender definition is in complete accordance with recent American work in women's studies. Joan W. Scott has argued in various contexts that the qualities associated with the genders are not absolute but are systems of meaning and concepts constructed at different times and with different content, depending on the prevailing power relations in society.⁷ Another American historian of women, Judith Butler, goes even further. She sees gender as a fiction, a collective fantasy, or what she calls a "matrix", which is socially constructed in different contexts.⁸ Several rival or parallel constructions often exist at the same

³ See K. Middleton Fillmore, "When Angels Fall: Women's Drinking as Cultural Preoccupation and as Reality", in S. C. Wilsnack & L. J. Beckman, eds. *Alcohol Problems in Women: Antecedents, Consequences and Intervention* (New York: Guilford Press, 1984), p. 7: "The evidence for the last 40 years has strongly indicated that female drinking patterns in this country have remained fairly consistent. However, during this 40-year stretch [i.e. since the 1940s], the scholarly literature has treated these findings in dramatically different ways." Kaye Fillmore does not have the statistical data on which to take her thesis further back in time.

⁴ On culturally determined female biology see E. Martin, *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction* (1989); using Danish material, Bente Rosenbeck has presented the same angle in *Kroppens politik: Om køn, kultur og videnskab* (Museum Tusulanum: Copenhagen, 1992), pp. 81 and 95 ff.

⁵ A recent anthropological study on the varying cultural impact of the relation between alcohol and gender in Europe is published in Dimitra Gefou-Madianou, ed., *Alcohol, Gender and Culture* (London and New York, 1992.), p. 2.

⁶ M. Douglas, *Constructive Drinking: Perspectives on Drink from Anthropology* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 7–8.

⁷ J. W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", *The American Historical Review*, vol. 91, no. 5 (1986), pp. 1063 ff. The concept of gender is developed by Scott in *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988).

⁸ J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990); D. M. Søndergaard, *Tegnet på Kroppen, Køn: Koder og Konstruktioner blandt unge voksne i Akademia* (Copenhagen, 1996); see also D. G. Simonsen, *Kønnets grænser* (1996:1).

time, and the one that best suits the prevailing social conditions dominates. By studying the emergence and use of the constructions, and attitudes to them, we can sense the dynamics in the development of gendered symbols, (e.g. alcohol), by which the individual expresses a belonging to a certain role, or “matrix”.

It is therefore interesting to note that alcohol presumably has had a less dangerous symbolic value in relation to women in different places outside the modern Western world⁹ or in earlier times. We thus have quite a lot of indications that women in pre-industrial society were presumably more integrated in the culture of drinking.¹⁰ The well-known Danish cultural historian Troels-Lund, for example, was in no doubt that the symbolic relationship of the sexes to alcohol has varied in different ages. He actually demonstrated back in 1908 – perhaps polemizing a little against contemporary temperance advocates – that in the 16th century there was only a slight difference between the sexes as regards intoxication: women were seen publicly drunk in church, in the convent, and at the local court.¹¹ There can thus be no doubt that women in pre-industrial society drank more than home-brewed weak beer; they also drank spirits, although perhaps not in the same quantities as men. It seems as if this practice underwent a change with the development and spread to all social classes of the bourgeois ideal of woman during the second half of the 19th century.¹²

Biological differences between the sexes thus do not dictate in advance which gendered symbols the sexes identify with. The main point is just that cultural oppositions between the genders are always accentuated. Naturally, we cannot dismiss the fact that women are physically incapable of tolerating alcohol in the same quantities as men and that they therefore – for that reason alone – may be less inclined to drink. Women’s biology is not pure discourse. But we shall see below that even in medical science the view of woman’s “natural” relation to alcohol at any particular time is obviously ambiguous, and depends more on the specific symbolic value of drinking than on the concrete quantities of alcohol consumed.

The idea of the “naturally” low alcohol consumption among women could undoubtedly explain the vast amount of evidence that women in the past did not consume alcohol to anything like the same extent as men, instead living a life of female sobriety. In the decades around the turn of the century, women ostensibly consumed much less alcohol than men did, and the concomitant problems were consequently much less prevalent. The available statistics on the number of drunks arrested in Copenhagen, for example, show that less than 10% were women, although the number was rising slightly during the period.¹³ Furthermore,

⁹ See, for example, M. O. West, “Liquor and Libido: ‘Joint Drinking’ and the Politics of Sexual Control in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1920s–1950s”, *Journal of Social History* (Spring, 1997), pp. 645–667.

¹⁰ B. A. Tlusty, “Gender and Alcohol Use in Early Modern Augsburg”, in J. S. Blocker & C. Krasnick Warsh, *The Changing Face of Drink: Substance, Imagery, and Behaviour* (Ottawa, 1997), pp. 22 ff.

¹¹ Troels-Lund, *Dagligt Liv i Norden i det sekstende Aarhundrede*, 3rd ed., vol. V (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1908), pp. 256–257.

¹² In Gothenburg, Sweden, women were part of the drinking culture, but the number of women charged with being drunk began to fall from 1886. See B. Skarin Frykman, *Arbetarkultur – Göteborg 1890* (1990), cols. 93, 270 ff. This might suggest that women changed their attitudes to alcohol at this time. Skarin Frykman refers to *Göteborg Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, 7/1 (1890).

¹³ *Statistiske oplysninger om København I* (1876) p. 64, II (1881) p. 77, III (1886), p. 108, IV (1891) p. 97, V (1896) p. 144, IV (1903) p. 196, VII (1907) p. 214, VIII (1914) p. 231, IX (1919) p. 242.

according to well-informed contemporary people, it was a matter of totally marginalized women. “Normal” women no longer drank or participated in drinking bouts.

“Modern” drinking patterns

Around the turn of the century, on the other hand, drinking was a familiar – and “natural” – form of behaviour among men. We know that many more public houses and licensed premises arose in town and country alike, and that they became a forum for male companionship.¹⁴ This “need” felt by men to fortify themselves with alcohol could simultaneously be satisfied more easily as a result of the cheap spirits and the spread of the new lager beer from Bavaria.¹⁵ However, L. Brandes, the senior physician at the Copenhagen General Hospital (*Almindelig Hospital*), did not view this male need for alcohol as “natural”. He had learnt from his colleagues that boys in the countryside, from early years, used alcohol as an attractive and *acquired* form of behaviour – a fad. The reason, according to Brandes, was that “boys often have a childish desire to do what adults do; drinking schnapps and smoking cigars is in their eyes a sign that they are grown-up, so they often show a great inclination to these two things. [They thus] gradually ... slip into the bad habit that every farmhand, right from confirmation age, insists on a certain number of schnapps daily ... and whoever is used to one schnapps with each meal as a boy, must be able as a man to take two with each meal, and with a few extra schnapps at other times, one reaches the quantum that makes one a chronic alcoholic.”¹⁶

The spread of the male drinking culture could apparently be explained by the boys’ need to acquire an important male attribute. The use of alcohol, and especially the combination with cigars, was explicitly associated with the attractive masculine world of urban life. At the turn of the century, the cigar had become readily available to broader strata of society.¹⁷ Perhaps even more than the male drinking culture, it can be regarded as a product charged with values, which had preserved its symbolism, even though it had now sunk down through the classes and ages and was spreading geographically. By copying and adopting such standards, the boys signalled to their surroundings that they belonged to the new urban masculine world.

In the contemporary rhetoric on the issue, there was nevertheless a sliding scale from the social drinking with friends in public – which could help to make a man’s life in the city bearable – to the problem drinking and inebriation that involved

¹⁴ In the period 1860–1880 alone, the number of places with the right to sell and serve alcohol rose from 511 to 771 and the number of public houses from 1810 to 4358. See, for example, *Beretning til Finansministeren om Drikfældigheds-Forholdene i Danmark*, Udgivet af det statistiske Bureau (1882), pp. 38–39. This development continued in the subsequent period until the actions of the temperance movement after the turn of the century reduced the number of pubs; cf., for example, *Beværetstatistik 1914*, Udgivet af det statistiske departement (Copenhagen, 1916).

¹⁵ I. Bundsgaard & S. Eriksen, “Hvem disciplinerede hvem? En kommentar til Poul Porskær Poulsens artikel: Afholdsbevægelsen som disciplineringsagent”, *Fortid og Nutid*, vol. XXXIII (1986), pp. 55–69.

¹⁶ L. Brandes, *Om Brug og Misbrug af spirituøse Drikke* (Copenhagen, 1877).

¹⁷ K. E. Spannow, *Tobak: Tilbedt og lugtet i 500 år, II, Menneke og Tobakken* (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag Arnold Busck, 1992), p. 55. An interesting section in the book is about tobacco and identity.

Table 1. Alcohol as a gender symbol c. 1900

Alcohol consumption	Gender role	
	Female	Male
Sobriety	Strong Pure, honourable and feminine	Weak Impotent and powerless
Drinking	Weak Licentious and lecherous	Strong Robust and manly

psychological repression more than relief. The story of men who frequented pubs, got drunk, and came home late with no energy, self-respect, or energy left, became a well-known characteristic of the “career” of male workers in the city.

It is natural to assume that the idea of women’s “natural sobriety” was developed as a Victorian alternative to the increased public drinking that followed industrialization,¹⁸ that the role of “the sober and controlling woman” was a deliberate construction – a way of adapting women to the necessary duty of preserving society – as a counter to the drinking, extrovert man. If male drinking symbolized strength, vitality, and manliness, then the opposite – sobriety or a restrictive attitude to alcohol – became an expression of femininity, showing that women had developed a harmonious and serene gender identity. Alcohol thus functioned not just as a drink but as a gendered symbol with a meaning that varied through time. Around 1900 alcohol was perceived as a symbol of masculinity and sobriety as a symbol of femininity. It is obvious that this dualism restricted the public consumption of alcohol by women; in other words, it became a way for a woman to demonstrate her femininity. And in modern society this female behaviour then became a confirmation that female sobriety had the character of something “original” and “natural”.

When women’s historically moderate alcohol consumption is used as a basis for an argument that women are less inclined to drink “by nature” (and therefore have a special biologically determined responsibility in society), this is an obvious confusion of what may be called the women’s practice, that is, the behaviour that is most appropriate in a given historical context – for example, in the decades around the turn of the century – and the notion of something original and given by nature, an essential quality of the female sex.

One can somewhat provocatively display the relation of alcohol to gender at the turn of the century in a table where the fields in the top left and bottom right designate alcohol as a symbol of masculinity and sobriety as a symbol of femininity, respectively. By following the gender-specific alcohol consumption, each gender strengthened its gender role. This meant that women’s drinking became unfeminine and men’s sobriety became unmasculine.

¹⁸ M. E. Lender, “A Special Stigma: Women and Alcoholism in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries”, in D. L. Strug, S. Priyadarsini & M. M. Hyman, eds. *Alcohol Interventions: Historical and Sociocultural Approaches* (New York, 1986); J. Frykman & O. Löfgren, *Culture Builders: A Historical Anthropology of Middle-Class Life* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), pp. 105, passim.

Table 2. Alcohol and gender constructions of female matrixes, c. 1900

Alcohol consumption	Context	
	Private sphere	Public sphere
Sobriety	Self-sacrificing. I Sober, pure strong, controlling, and true woman	Rebellious. II Militant, controlling, assertive, and unfeminine
Drinking	Resigning. IV Delicate, helpless, weak, pathetic, meek and womanish	Transgressive. III (a) Masculine woman, or (b) falsely emancipated, or (c) licentious woman

Women and men actively used alcohol as a marker in their “negotiation” of their own identity and hence of the meaning of the gender roles. When the relation to alcohol thus became a fulcrum for women’s behaviour, one could signal by means of one’s *public* consumption of alcohol whether one accepted or rejected the prevailing gender relations. We should thus view drinking patterns as “archaeological layers” through which one can dig in an attempt to understand both the creation of the female role and its limitations.

Women did not blindly accept the role assigned to them as guardians of sobriety in the home. Instead they reacted to it. Some of them drew the consequences and enjoyed alcohol by themselves at home or – worse – in public. Others took the almost equally dangerous step of starting a public crusade against male drinking habits. This behaviour provoked reactions from those around them, and these reactions in themselves testify to where the boundaries for women’s development were drawn.

The strength of the symbolic value of alcohol evidently depended on where it was consumed. It seems as if the reaction to women’s relations to alcohol depended less on the concrete consumption of alcohol and more on whether they appeared in a male or female context – in a public or private sphere (Table 2). It was worst, of course, if a woman drank openly in a pub and thus transferred herself to a male sphere (cell III) There is a great deal to suggest that sobriety was not preferable at any price. The woman lost some of her feminine and “self-sacrificing” charm (cell I) if this was proclaimed too actively and rebelliously in a public sphere. In other words, public temperance was not perceived as unconditionally feminine (cell II) whereas private, “resigned” drinking by women was not perceived as absolutely unfeminine (cell IV):

How could all this happen?

I. The construction of the sober and self-sacrificing woman

In the 1890s the folk high school man and social debater Ferdinand Nielsen was one among many who recognized and formulated women’s possible courses of action in all their simplicity: “When the breadwinner drinks, he mixes among

people outside the home. He gets into company, albeit not the best company. He drinks and does not think. But the wife, who stays in the poor, empty home, among hungry, ragged children, she has time to think. And the more she thinks, the darker her life becomes.”¹⁹ The breadwinner’s drinking led the whole family into a mess. The wife could stay at home alone, powerless and with no chance to change her situation and that of her family. The woman bore the heavy responsibility for whether or not the life of the family and the woman was to be successful. Ferdinand Nielsen therefore developed his real concern, in a rather schoolmasterly tone. If the women did not live up to their newly assigned role, they themselves were to blame for the men’s drinking:

It is not my intention to *blame* the women for the drinking, I admit that one should not be too quick to reproach them, and that one cannot demand excessively vigorous outward action against drinking, since their influence in society is too small, less than they might demand as a general human right. I know that many would like to drive the monster of drink out of the home, far, far away ..., but in spite of this knowledge I cannot refrain from saying: Many women have contributed to the break-up of the home under the pressure of the drink.²⁰

However reluctantly Nielsen claimed to admit it, there can be no doubt that he really believed that women bear a large share of the responsibility for men’s drinking. His reprimand is therefore one of many testimonies that the women’s role as guardians of sobriety was under development and was adjusted to suit the new social situation of the woman in the home and on the labour market. Women alone, according to Ferdinand Nielsen, could soften the effects of men’s natural inclinations by facing up to them with their – in his view – “special feminine attitudes”. If the women acted in opposition to this increasingly well-established discourse, it would be synonymous with abandoning one of the most essential feminine qualities.

If the text is read as such, it can be said that Ferdinand Nielsen does not describe the reality in his example; instead, his description of the “reality” helps to construct the framework for the role of “sober and controlling woman”, that is, the discourse that helps to maintain the woman’s focus on a particular pattern of action as “normal”. Nielsen’s description of the drinker’s wife, in other words, helped to “normalize” the perception of the woman as the sober contrast to the man’s drinking.

The theme could be infinitely varied – and it was – by the authorities from the medical world, some of them translated from foreign languages, who had expressed their views on the topic. One of the authorities most frequently cited – for various reasons – was the Austrian doctor Wilhelm Bode. It is interesting that Bode, in his chastisement of women, uses almost inquisitorial terminology about the opposite sex: they should not just admit their guilt but also refrain from accusing the men:

¹⁹ F. Nielsen, “Kvindens Stilling til Afholdssagen”, *Dansk Afholdsbld*, 12/6 (1891), p. 186.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 185–186.

“accusing others is never the right way to get out of trouble, so women should not accuse men; it is much better if they admit: women are to blame for men’s drinking. Certainly not always, and not as a rule, but unfortunately often.”

Bode believed that it was perfectly reasonable – or at least understandable – if men went to the pub when the home was not functioning, that is, if the woman was unable to fulfil her “natural” role as housewife, as guardian angel of the home:

A drinker may occasionally have a good wife, a true angel as regards patience and goodness. More often, however, we see that he has not found the right lifemate. Many young girls have been able to catch a man easily enough, but they have not been able to hold him because in the long run they did not have anything beautiful and good to offer him. Either she does not live, spiritually speaking, in his mental world, she disappoints and bores him, perhaps seems to him like a less valuable workhorse or a childish doll, or she does not show him the daily tenderness and gaiety that he seeks in his home, because his life is otherwise so serious and difficult; she torments him by making a fuss over trifles, by stubbornness and curtain lectures. Or she does not understand how to turn the four walls into a home: warm, comfortable, and pleasant, or she cannot cook properly, or she does not bother to look neat and pretty and does not take the trouble to appeal to him again. ... When a wife is not a heroine in love and forgiveness, she only makes bad worse.

By making such impossible demands on the wife’s tolerance, Bode almost justifies the men’s occasional drunken behaviour. (Or was he perhaps for a brief moment introducing and legitimating the role of the co-dependent, that is, always tolerant and always forgiving, wife?)²¹ However, as proof of his statement that women were to blame, Bode could conclude that: “Almost all men who are unhappily married are drinkers.” For obvious reasons, he did not go any more deeply into the causal connections.²²

Women’s responsibility for men’s drinking began with the upbringing of boys, but not in the sense that women were supposed to prevent their sons from drinking. Instead, it was suggested that women make them aware – preferably in a gentle way, which did not hurt their masculinity – of the extent of their drinking. There is a well-known exemplary story of a mother who “every day for a week asked her son, who was a student, how many mugs of beer he had drunk. And since she did not normally reproach him for anything, he told her the truth. On the Sunday morning she asked him to come into the bathroom with her, showed him the full

²¹ For a modern study of women’s natural role and responsibility in connection with men’s drinking, see M. Järvinen, “Kontrollerade kontrollörer – kvinnor, män och alkohol”, in *Nordisk Alkohol Tidskrift* (1991); J. Haaken, “From Al-Anon to ACORA: Codependence and the Reconstruction of Caregiving”, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 18, no. 21 (1993).

²² In England, female drinking was even seen as a threat to the family and responsible for the high mortality rate among children in the cities. This legitimated the widespread construction of inebriate reformatories *mainly for women* in the first decade of the 20th century. See G. Hunt, J. Mellor & J. Turner, “Wretched, Hatless and Miserably Clad: Women and the Inebriate Reformatories from 1900–1913”, *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 40, no. 2 (1989).

bath tub, and said, ‘That’s how much beer you have poured into your stomach this week; each morning I have poured in as many mugs as you have told me.’”

Women were also supposed to be constantly aware that they could easily lead men into drinking situations. They had to be careful about “workers, postmen, drivers, or servants to whom one shows attention. For when these people are constantly offered beer and schnapps everywhere they go, they cannot avoid developing into drinkers.” Above all, women should not forget their role of supervising social life: “Hostesses who offer their guests wine and liqueur, or even force it on them, at every meal and even between meals, perhaps are acting towards them in a hostile way, however friendly they mean to be. It may well be the case that our guest actually has a weakness for alcohol.” Bode nevertheless was forced to note that women showed a certain aversion to the natural female role that he prescribed. Although Bode invoked his medical expertise in the field, this version of the female role did not automatically strike women as very natural. For women it was and remained a role that had to be learned (from men): “Many attempts at reform unfortunately get stranded on their cowardice or lack of understanding. Half of our ladies suffer from being forced to drink wine at all the festivities and dinner parties, but why do they always wait before asking for water, until a male opponent of alcohol makes a start?”²³ Bode – eagerly supported by the Danish public sphere – thus constantly urged women to learn in earnest the role of guardian of sobriety.

The spearhead in shaping the ideal of “the sober and controlling woman” in 19th-century Denmark was – not surprisingly – the temperance movement and the ascetic religious movements. The publications of the Home Mission (Indre Mission) and the temperance movement devoted columns to contemporary debates about women and alcohol. They are thus an excellent source, or “seismograph”, for detecting the fluctuations in the discourse on alcohol and its relation to women, and hence a central point in the negotiation of gender roles in the decades around the turn of the century. This can also be seen as an indicator that the religious movements and the temperance movement, with these reactions and by helping to determine the agenda in Denmark – as in the Anglo-American world – helped not only to change and combat men’s drinking but also, as a precondition for this, to sharpen and define the new role of the sober and controlling woman, at a time when this women’s role was on the international agenda as well.

The involvement of the Danish temperance movement in this is thought-provoking when one takes into consideration that the movement as it acted in the public sphere seemed to be organized and managed by men, a large number of whom had overcome an alcohol problem through the movement. Strangely enough, it was often the temperance *men* who made the cause of temperance into a women’s concern. The argument was that the women could use the temperance movement to achieve their real goal, to keep a sober man in the home. Although Bode had previously declared that drinking primarily belonged to the male sphere, his formulation of the matter was used in Denmark in a well-meaning way to

²³ Wilh. Bode, “Kvinderne og Drikkeriet”, *Til Ædruelighedens Fremme: Et Tidsskrift udgivet af Samfundet til Ædruelighedens Fremme*, vol. 4 (1890), pp. 20–29.

proclaim that women should join the temperance movement for their own sakes. The temperance movement was a women's cause:

It is your cause that is now being negotiated, it is about your fate and that of your sisters, about your duties and your rights! And it concerns the welfare and future of the whole people; for the physical and moral health of the nation, the outer and inner blessings it possesses, depends on women's relation to drinking.²⁴

Ferdinand Nielsen actually called the temperance issue a "woman's cause" since it gave many women better living conditions and required and gave the same to men and women.²⁵ By that Nielsen probably meant that the temperance movement helped to secure the man for the woman, and she should be glad about that.

In spite of this, women were not a strong factor in the temperance movement. They made up just two-fifths of the members, and their position was far from being influential. From the membership lists of the temperance clubs we can often see that the man in the family joined the movement first, while the wife, if she joined at all, only came later, when her husband's greatest alcohol problems were over.²⁶ The men were the most active in the Danish temperance movement, and at times it was difficult to get women to join. There are many examples of how women not only refused to join but also prevented their husbands from doing so, either on the grounds that it was too expensive for them to take part in the lodge-like community of the temperance movement,²⁷ or that the movement was too mysterious for them, or else the reason was the no less interesting one that it ran against the contemporary ideal of manliness to submit to the asceticism of the temperance movement. It was almost equivalent to depriving a man of his potency to deny him the right to practise one of the natural functions of masculinity: drinking. It gradually became one of the central points of the temperance movement to change the prevailing masculine image and replace it with the view that "a man is not a man unless he can combat his bad inclinations".²⁸ In the opinion of the temperance champions, it was a problem that women were conservative – for better or worse – and preferred strong he-men to weak teetotallers. They were even willing to marry a "boozer" who could keep his end up in male company.²⁹

Many cautionary stories from the temperance literature show how badly things could go for women who for one reason or another did not support their husbands in their efforts to achieve temperance. One butcher in a state of intoxication had got into a fight and beaten his opponent to death. He was sentenced to several years in prison, and when taking leave of his wife and children he wept and said, "This would never have happened if you hadn't objected so much every time I wanted to

²⁴ Wilh. Bode, "Kvinderne og Drikkeriet", pp. 20–29.

²⁵ F. Nielsen, "Kvindens Stilling til Afholdssagen", p. 185.

²⁶ S. Eriksen, "Det andet stavnsbånd: Et lokalstudie i Thisted afholdsforenings ideologi og arbejde for at forandre mennesker og samfund", *Historie: fysiske samlinger*, vol. 18 (1991).

²⁷ Logen Jacob Molay, Forhandlingsprotokol (1882–1886), Vejle.

²⁸ "Kvinderne", *Dansk Good Templar*, 5/8 (1906), pp. 124–125.

²⁹ "Afholds festen i Aarhus", *Reform: Organ for den oprindelige Good-Templarorden. Tidende for Ædruelighedens og Moralens Fremme*, 15/7 (1886).

join the Good Templar lodge.” Despite many similar testimonies, women in general remained indifferent to the cause, according to the temperance press.³⁰ When women definitely did not dominate the temperance movement, it seems like a paradox that the movement continued to maintain that temperance was a particularly female concern.

2. *Female temperance rebellion in public?*

The idea of the sober and controlling role of women was not totally unfounded. It was an extension of the development in much of the Anglo-American world, where there were striking examples of the perception of women as guardians of sobriety. In the USA in the 1870s the women’s movement, which mainly consisted of white Protestant middle-class women, in their zeal to defend their ideal woman’s role, had taken up the struggle for temperance and started a crusade against the many new saloons of the Wild West. The Women’s Christian Temperance Union, WCTU, functioned almost like a school for American emancipationists – a first step towards more politically conscious commitment. American women had thus quickly combined temperance work with the campaign for the vote, that is, the right to have influence on conditions in society concerning the family and the home, and the same pattern was soon seen in England.³¹ From Sweden too, we know that the temperance movement, in particular the ascetic religious movements, played an overwhelmingly important role in shaping the contemporary perception of women. The Swedish historian Per Frånberg has nevertheless noted that in the Swedish temperance movement – as in Denmark – it was the male temperance supporters who defined and reinforced the new feminine ideal, partly through the temperance movement.³²

But the question is: how strongly did they really wish that women should play the role assigned to them as guardians of sobriety? What would happen, for instance, if women really took seriously the temperance cause as a women’s cause and, as in the USA, took matters in their own hands and stepped out into the male public sphere? The female temperance movement actually bore the seeds of a militant feminism. The American temperance woman Frances Willard based her commitment to the temperance movement on a series of “rebellious” demands for the right to determine her own life and property, and hence women’s chances to liberate

³⁰ S-n [Sofus Rasmussen], “Kvinderne og Drikkeriet”, *Nordisk Good-Templar*, 13/11 (1904), cols. 217–219.

³¹ I. Tyrell, *Woman’s World – Woman’s Empire: The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880–1930* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); J. S. Blocker, “Give to the Winds thy Fears”: *The Women’s Temperance Crusade, 1873–1974* (London: Greenwood Press, 1985); R. Evans Paulson, *Women’s Suffrage and Prohibition: A Comparative Study of Equality and Social Control* (Brighton, 1973); J. S. Blocker, “Separate Paths: Suffragists and the Women’s Temperance Crusade”, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 10 (1985).

³² See, for example, P. Frånberg, “Den sanna kvinnan och politiken: En studie av röstuppdelningsdebatten 1922”, *Scandia*, vol. 49, no.1 (1983), pp. 147 ff.

themselves from a drinking husband. She demanded the right to divorce, economic independence, and especially suffrage, which could give women influence in safeguarding the interests of the home, the children, and – not least – women themselves.³³ Similar feminist ideas were as vigorous in the Danish temperance movement, but they undoubtedly found it difficult to make themselves felt with the same force as the prototypes in the American women's movement.

For Sofie Kauffeldt, the female temperance champion in the Danish branch of Hickman's (American) International Order of Good Templars, it was thus important that women should take part in temperance work, to show men the way by example. For her, however, the aim of female participation was not to keep women in the sober, controlling position, but in accordance with her American sisters to achieve "the liberation of women and equality with men". The point was that the two sexes should come close to each other and learn from the behaviour of the opposite sex. Only thus would it be possible to put an end to a male form of behaviour that was hostile to society, and for that matter to end a ridiculous form of female behaviour:

Let us try in the future to blend the woman's gentle mind with the more resolute tone of the man. Women in our society are becoming more like men, and men more like women, they are both learning so much from each other's language that they are able to talk to each other and take pleasure in each other. The women's notoriously silly gossip over coffee and the men's notorious boozing disappear within our order and give way to free and unforced conviviality.³⁴

There is a great deal to suggest that the role of sober and controlling woman was desirable enough as long as it was exercised in a domestic context, but it was viewed with other eyes if it was practised in public. After writing a series of articles, Sofie Kauffeldt became almost invisible in the temperance movement. It seems natural to ascribe the negative reaction to her opinions to the fact that, in her negotiating gambit, she strove to break up the dualism in the relation of the genders to alcohol and to assign men and women equal roles in the social community of the temperance order. Above all, Sofie Kauffeldt absolved women of any guilt in men's drunkenness. They were equally to blame and had to assume joint responsibility for their vices, whether these took the form of "coffee gossip" or "boozing sessions".

A better example of women having problems in making their presence felt in the temperance movement was the work of the female temperance agitator Lene Silfverberg. In full keeping with the spirit of the American women's abolitionist movement, in 1889 she became involved in the work of the Christian women's

³³ O. Banks, *Faces of Feminism: A Study of Feminism as a Social Movement* (1981); O. Banks, *Becoming a Feminist: The Social Origins of "First Wave" Feminism* (1986); J. S. Blocker, "Separate Paths: Suffragists and the Women's Temperance Crusade", *Signs*, vol. 10, no. 3 (1985); R. Bordin, *Women and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873–1900* (Temple University Press, 1981); R. Bordin, *Frances Willard: A Biography* (1986).

³⁴ S-K-dt. [Sofie Kauffeldt], "God Tone", in *Reform: Organ for den oprindelige Good-Templarorden*, 1/5 (1886), p. 66; Sofie Kauffeldt did not receive any real backing for her feminist views.

temperance society, The White Ribbon (*Det hvide Bånd*). This was a branch of the World Women's Christian Temperance Union (WWCTU). At first she professed the "man-friendly" interpretation of the female temperance programme, travelling throughout Denmark to propagate the ideal of the self-sacrificing woman, the message being: "It is the duty of the woman to keep the home in such a state that the man has no desire to leave it."³⁵ Lene Silfverberg received a great deal of male support and sympathy for this. However, when she committed herself to starting a petition for female suffrage in the 1880s, she was evidently going beyond her expected role. At any rate, her husband, Emil Silfverberg, was opposed to the idea, even though it was well known that the right to vote would give women a chance to further the temperance cause through political channels.³⁶ It is tempting to interpret the resistance as showing that it was considered nice to have the women in the movement, so long as they practised their temperance in the home, assumed the blame when the men failed, and did not draw the political – or marital – consequences of male weaknesses.

Lene Silfverberg later got divorced when it turned out that her "abstemious" husband drank. This personal experience gave her the radical but dearly bought awareness that men's alcohol problems could not be solved merely by a strategy that required the constant intensification and refinement of the women's controlling and supportive tasks. It was not a great leap from a personal struggle *for* men's sobriety in the temperance community into a personal struggle *against* the drinking man. By taking the temperance cause into her own hands, she began to develop the women's temperance movement into a proper oppositional culture, in which women placed the blame for drinking on the men's own shoulders. In this she was inspired by American women and followed by several leading temperance women in Denmark. She derived ideological strength by enlisting the aid of God – the "Lord" who governed her male partners in the temperance movement. A logical consequence of making temperance into a female concern was that the female temperance movement became a critique of male culture. Whereas according to the traditional ideology of the Danish temperance movement the struggle to solve the alcohol problem had to be waged in the home of the drinker's wife, in Lene Silfverberg's interpretation it became a struggle for independence from men and their "male" habits.

We can see from the comments on Lene Silfverberg's work that this independent female temperance initiative was particularly unpopular. One of the male leaders of the movement went as far as to describe her – in a private letter – as having an unfeminine and unpleasant nature and, referring directly to her feminist agitation, that she largely "lacked the sociability that people [the temperance men] expect". In addition, she was not very important as such: "at any rate not outside a rather

³⁵ L. Silfverberg, "Forspildte Menneskeliv", *Dansk Good Templar*, 1/1 (1889), pp. 6–7.

³⁶ S. Eriksen, *Søster Silfverbergs Sorger: En historie om hvordan en søndagsskolelærerinde blev afholdagsagitator og feminist* (Copenhagen, 1993).

narrow circle of female members”.³⁷ Another temperance man showed a similar lack of enthusiasm for her, at least in discussions with other men: “If I were to tell you my private opinion of Mrs S[ilfverberg], I believe that she has had greater influence on the women – she often repels the men by her masculine nature, whereas Mrs Drøhse, for instance, attracts men by her feminine nature. We men are certainly not fond of masculine women.”³⁸

Lene Silfverberg’s manner conflicted with the preferred female role of the temperance movement. Her “masculine nature” no doubt referred to her public image, which was perceived as unfeminine, even though it was necessary to promote the female temperance project.

We can see how the ideal temperance woman was conceived from a portrait of Mrs Drøhse in a temperance newspaper the following year. It was clear from the portrait that she was a “beautiful lady”, who had a “pure and noble view of life”, with “something modest and unassuming about her entire behaviour”, and it was understandable that she had gained many “friends and benefactors” everywhere and won many good new members to the cause of temperance. The text continues in a no less interesting way: “Mrs Thora Drøhse is certainly not one of the great thinkers”, but this was not to be held against her, for later the author concludes: “She is a breath of air from the age of the great emotions; she therefore does more good for the temperance cause than many men with much greater ability and knowledge”, and “May Mrs Drøhse grace the ranks of the temperance cause for many years to come!”³⁹ Thora Drøhse’s mild nature, appearance, and lack of intellect evidently, according to the temperance men, made her better qualified in the eyes of the temperance men than Lene Silfverberg.

Lene Silfverberg’s lack of understanding for her divorced former temperance man was even seen by some mutual friends in the movement as the cause of his drinking: “if [Emil] Silfverberg had found a really good wife, things would surely not have gone so wrong. For she lives for ‘her own temperance cause’ ... She was an old maid when he met her”,⁴⁰ wrote one of the couple’s friends many years later. The term “old maid” designates an asexual and unloving woman – a masculine woman.

If the women rebelled against the temperance movement’s well-defined ideal of the self-sacrificing, loyal, helpful wife, the temperance men could no longer regard her as a “real woman”; she became an indefinable variant species, which the men in the movement at least did not need to take seriously. The marginalization of Lene Silfverberg took place because she revolted against the idea that women were to blame for men’s drunkenness. Her outward work for temperance conflicted with the project by which women were supposed to discipline men through the temperance movement. She was dangerous for her own sex, whereas the many

³⁷ Undated letter (two pages) from an unknown writer from the N.I.O.G.T. That the letter was written by the head of the N.I.O.G.T., Jørgen Lund, is clear from Anton Schmidt, *Mindeskraft*, (1924, in Afholdsselskabernes Landsforbunds Arkiv), p. 27, where the positive parts of the same passage are cited with the name of the writer.

³⁸ Undated private notice from an HB probably from Anton Schmit’s collection in 1919, in Afholdsbevægelsens Landsforbunds Arkiv.

³⁹ S-n. [Sofus Rasmussen], “Fru Thora Drøhse”, *Nordisk Good-Templer*, 15/12 (1895), cols. 87–88.

⁴⁰ S. Eriksen, *Søster Silfverbergs Sorger*.

male spokesmen of the temperance movement had previously established the unproblematic woman's role in the solution of the alcohol problem, it was too much when women like Lene Silfverberg and Sofie Kauffeldt independently and publicly began to question the role assigned to them.

One other probable reason for the weak position of the rebellious women in the Danish temperance movement was that they did not manage to get any great support from the politically and socially emancipated women in the major Danish women's organizations: the Danish Women's Society (*Dansk Kvindesamfund*), the Women's Progressive Society (*Kvindelig Fremskridtsforening*), and so on. The temperance women were too focused on a single issue. For Lene Silfverberg, one aim of the agitation among Danish feminists was to get them interested in the cause of temperance and to convince them that it was not only for people who were prone to excess drinking.⁴¹ But only a small proportion of the politically active feminist circles in Denmark regarded temperance as part of their political programme and simply did not want to have anything to do with that cause. At the Nordic Women's Rights Meeting in Copenhagen in 1888, the women expressly rejected participation in the temperance movement by saying that "it was beneath human dignity that a man joined an association and promised to be able to control his vice".⁴² Judging by the temperance newspapers, the reason for the lack of interest shown by leading feminists was that they were not keen, for various reasons, to give up their own alcohol consumption.⁴³ Temperance people often deplored the fact that "the ladies who lead the women's cause here in Denmark all belong to the 'better classes', whose help is particularly needed, they know how to capture attention and should therefore act by example".⁴⁴ Whatever the reason might be, lack of interest is probably the explanation why the Danish temperance women, unlike their American sisters, were unable to build a secure ideological and power-political foundation in the women's struggle.

3. *Women's transgressive drinking in public*

Perhaps something else, something greater, was at stake in the more progressive women's circles, that alcohol consumption as a masculine characteristic was

⁴¹ Undated "Henstilling til Danmarks Storloge af N.I.O.G.T. fra Sp D O T. Søstrene". This appeal is written in Lene Silfverberg's hand and probably dates from around 1900.

⁴² "Afholdssagen på nordisk Kvindesagsmøde", *Dansk Good Templar*, 1/8 (1888), p. 114.

⁴³ According to Bente Rosenbeck, *Kvindekøn: Den moderne kvindeligheds historie 1880–1980* (Viborg, 1987), pp. 97 f., 313 ff., there is an obvious parallel here to the dispute in 1887 on sexual morality, in which one of the participants was the Danish feminist Elisabeth Grundtvig; the debate concerned whether the idea of women's sexual abstinence before marriage should be the norm for both sexes, or if they had the right to equality with the men in practising a more active sexual life before marriage. Whereas the majority of the Danish feminists took the former ascetic position and dropped equality in the sexual question, unlike their American sisters they were less restrictive in the case of alcohol.

⁴⁴ Ed Carstensen, ed., "Hvor er Danmarks Kvinder", *Agitatoren: Ugeblad for Oplysning, Ædruelighed og sund Lævevis*, 26/4 (1902).

becoming attractive as a symbol of strength and freedom for the forward-looking women. If so, this attitude was not without difficulties. The problem was not necessarily that the women themselves actually drank; it was the way they did it – in public – that caused anxiety.

3.1. Masculine women

The idea of the sober and controlling woman meant that public drinking was seen as abnormal, that is, an “acquired” male behaviour. This is probably why women’s public alcohol consumption was often described as “women drinking like men”.⁴⁵

Evidently not all women could or would live up to the ideal of the sober, controlling woman. The temperance literature was profoundly concerned:

It is not just among men that drunkenness is on the advance. There are clear signs that, unless powerful measures are taken to open women’s eyes to dangers in the use of strong drinks, the day is not far away when the pubs will be frequented by as many women as men. Some might say that this is an exaggeration, and that women cannot sink to that level of brutishness; yet anyone who has seen the state of affairs in our big cities knows that it is no exaggeration. Visit the finest restaurants and variety theatres where music and singing are the bait, and there you will find women represented in large numbers. There you can see a young girl at her fiancé’s side, downing one glass after the other; there you can see a young wife accompanying her husband to these dubious places; and you not infrequently see older married women with their half-grown-up children sitting down at the table on the pretext of wanting to hear the music, simultaneously draining the cup ... and how often it happens that, when the entertainment in the pub or the music hall is over, the women are half-carried out to the cab by their half-drunk husbands.⁴⁶

Judging by the quotation, these women were not sufficiently aware that the character of their “true femininity” was incompatible with their drinking behaviour.

Like the men, modern women had acquired an “unnatural” taste for the alcohol industry’s many new products, according to the temperance people: “Things

⁴⁵ H. Olafsdóttir & M. Järvinen, “Drinking Patterns among Women in the Nordic Countries”, in *Women, Alcohol and Drugs in the Nordic Countries*, NAD Publication 16 (1989), distinguish four different female drinking patterns: (1) total abstinence, (2) the traditional feminine drinking pattern characterized by “a low drinking profile”, never beer, (3) the new feminine drinking pattern, “a controlled relation to alcohol”, including beer and occasional annual situations of inebriation, (4) the masculine drinking pattern, according to which “the choice of drink is more evenly distributed with some stress on spirits, and beer has taken a equal position alongside wine. The quantities consumed are greater ... than in the new feminine drinking pattern, but even women who fall into this category are not drinking more often.” These drinking patterns are primarily characterized by the quantity and kind of alcohol, and although associated with different age groups, the authors do not attempt to explain the dynamics in the drinking patterns.

⁴⁶ S-n [Sofus Rasmussen] “Kvinderne og Drikkeriet” (from *National Kuréren*, *Nordisk Good-Templar*, 13/11 (1904) cols 217–219.

ranging from our own indigenous flow of lager beer to countless ‘wines’, liqueurs, absinthe, cognac, and whatever this poisonous trash is called – why, even sweets with an alcoholic content – are enjoyed by far too many women in far too many homes and in far too many public places.” And it was by no means the poor and unenlightened women who led the way. To the astonishment of the temperance people, “many of the so-called ‘better ladies’, despite all their enlightenment, are unaware of the harmfulness of these drinks than the women of the lower class, who are more aware because they know more far more about the temperance cause than the others. If the ‘better ladies’ knew that even the slightest amount of alcohol is harmful, both physically and mentally, they would scarcely touch it.”⁴⁷

Some accounts also testify that women, like men, also drank the new bottom-fermented lager beer, which was beginning to conquer the market in the 1870s, ousting the weaker and generally top-fermented indigenous beer. To the great vexation of Lene Silfverberg, the women’s lager drinking was becoming visible in the streets of the city: “Why, when walking in the streets of Copenhagen, one can even see a lady go up to a brewer’s dray and put a lager to her lips! What has happened? At parties a few years ago, a lager was placed only at every other cover.”⁴⁸ According to Dr H. P. Ørum, the reason for the beer drinking was that women had the mistaken impression that “lager beer could not be reckoned as an alcoholic beverage”,⁴⁹ just like the weak beer that they had always drunk.

We may suspect, however, that this female alcohol consumption, which was interpreted as something new, a sign of the growing degeneration of women, was in reality just a result of the fact that women’s drinking had become problematic with the construction of “the sober and controlling woman”, and that they had still not learnt the new feminine ideal, instead continuing a traditional drinking pattern.

The temperance men were not wholly unaware that the circumstances that had stimulated drinking among men – the separation between home and work and the need to establish new social communities – were also having an effect on women. The women of the bourgeoisie, like the men, had become interested in getting out in public. The process that increased men’s drinking was also starting among women, but it seemed to have different consequences: The man looks for his entertainment ‘out and about’ and the woman finds it boring to stay alone at home when she knows that the man is enjoying himself in so-called decent restaurants and places of entertainment, and that is the reason why women, like men, are starting to shun the home and choose public places as their home and place of education. For modern families the home has increasingly become a place where one sleeps at night and where one has one’s meals, but nothing more. The joy, the well-being, and the refinement that can only be found in the home and the assembled family are now sought outside the home.⁵⁰

The occurrence of public social drinking, a masculine drinking pattern among women, was thus far from unknown, but no less problematic.

⁴⁷ F. Schamowsky, “Kvinder”, *Agitatoren*, 3/5 (1902).

⁴⁸ L. Silfverberg, “Forspildte Memmeskeliv”, *Dansk Good-Templar*, 1/1 1889, pp. 6–7.

⁴⁹ H. P. Ørum, *Om Brugen af Spirituøse Drikke i Danmark udenfor Kjøbenhavn* (1889), p. 19.

⁵⁰ S-n, “Kvinderne og Drikkeriet” *Nordisk Good-Templar*, 13/11 (1907), cols. 217–219.

The fact that women drank outside the home was perceived as a signal to the surroundings that she was in the process of relaxing, ignoring, or perhaps completely abandoning the sobriety that was desirable and necessary in modern society and the guiding star of the temperance movement. If the ideal of the sober and controlling woman began to disintegrate, then the home was in danger of dissolution: “Women insist on going to restaurants where they smoke and drink alike. They start with cigarettes and sipping drinks and then switch to cigars and large quantities of spirits... From the restaurants, the drinking is brought into the home, and it is alarming the way it can flourish there.”⁵¹ If we recall L. Brandes’ description of the young cigar-smoking boys’ attempts to behave like grown men, the parallel is clear: that was what the women wanted. At any rate, they cannot have been unaware of their use of symbols and the way this must have been interpreted by the people around them.

To the great surprise of the temperance movement, women’s drinking could result in the highly worrying situation that the temperance cause was no longer just a way to rescue men. Women might also need the redeeming influence of the movement. This at least was the view of the Copenhagen temperance man Sofus Rasmussen:

As a rule women, in their relations to intoxicating drinks, have hitherto been angels in comparison to men. They have considered it beneath their dignity to drink aquavit and other similar strong drinks. And we may all agree that this is greatly to their honour and credit. Unfortunately, however, a storm is growing on the horizon which could very easily destroy their purity and femininity. What is certain is that women need an explanation of the importance of the temperance cause, so that they may be warned against the use of all the many seductive and treacherous intoxicating drinks, especially lager beer and equivalent drinks, and to prevail on them to devote their best efforts, and some of their love, to the temperance cause, with loyalty and interest.⁵²

Naturally, the articles in the temperance newspapers scarcely paint a complete picture of the true extent of drinking among women, but it is worth noting that these and many other examples by no means concern the outright problem drinking. Instead, they show clearly that any form of drinking by women was considered dangerous. The female philanthropist Charlotte Sannom, for example, was profoundly worried for her bourgeois sisters: “Just think how common it is now that women have to have a lager with every meal.” And if that was not enough, “So many ladies drink cognac with their coffee, having first drunk numerous glasses of wine at the dinner table. I have even heard it said – although I have not seen it myself, since I very seldom frequent such places – that it is fairly common for young ladies from the educated classes to sit in the cafés of Copenhagen and drink absinthe! What is certain is that in the summer it is quite common in the gardens of country taverns to see visiting ladies sitting smoking and drinking various

⁵¹ L. Silverberg, “Tale ved den 2. danske Afholdskongres”, *Agitatoren*, 7/9 (1901).

⁵² S-n, “Kvinderne og Drikkeriet”, *Nordisk Good-Templar*, 13/11 (1904), cols. 217–219.

intoxicating drinks together with the gentlemen. And one cannot explain the matter by saying, "They must be less respectable ladies."⁵³

With their public drinking behaviour the women had placed themselves in a negotiating position where they challenged the limits to the freedom of action of their sex. With their conduct in public, they were shifting the boundary of the female matrix.

It must have been particularly tricky for women to establish "social drinking communities" in the public sphere and hence to establish what we could call, using a cliché, the relaxed, collective settings which modern men could enjoy at the pub and in the club. When this drinking was noticed, it became even more difficult for women (despite great perseverance) to use the drinking community to provide relief and create networks in the same way as men.

To illustrate how silly such female drinking situations could be, the temperance newspapers reported, with biting sarcasm, that the tea clubs in England were notorious as hotbeds of drinking for women. These places had originally been for drinking tea and eating orange marmalade, but "when the conversation among the ladies dried up because of a shortage of topics, liqueur and sherry were introduced as an artificial way to liven things up".⁵⁴ If the women could not see for themselves how scandalous this drinking was, they could at least read about it in the temperance newspapers. The temperance men would make sure of that.

3.2. Falsely emancipated women

There is thus good reason to qualify the contemporary assumption, quoted at the start of this article, that drinking was a problem only for marginalized women, even though (or because!) the assumption was based on contemporary testimony. Were these observations perhaps a product of the interpretation filter of the day?

It cannot be ruled out that it was the clear rejection by the Danish feminists of the temperance issue as a specifically female concern that inspired the temperance press to associate women's emancipation with the unnatural and unfeminine use of alcohol by women. The public drinking was undeniably an excellent way to signal the rejection of what the women perceived as a "traditional" and sober women's role.

The famous Jutland vegetarian, champion of health, and sanatorium doctor Mikkel Hinhede entered the debate and described, with dry sarcasm, the women's newfangled whims. He particularly seized on the fact that women's drinking had become more visible. He was fully convinced that the sole reason for this was "fashion" and "emancipation", that it reflected a "false" need that the women felt to manifest themselves in public:

So, my ladies, you have learnt to smoke in ten years, why should you not learn to drink in twenty years? There is so much more reason to believe this, since the ladies of Copenhagen have already started. ... It has proved necessary to

⁵³ C. Sannom, "Ere de danske Kvinder drikfældige?" *Kristeligt Afholdsblad*, 1/12 (1900), pp. 90–93.

⁵⁴ O. Benedicsten, "Kvinder og Alkohol" (1907), p. 5, offprint from *Liv og Kultur*.

set up asylums for these well-to-do female alcoholics. This is a sure warning that it is now time for the provinces to follow suit. ... when a chic Copenhagen woman comes over to us and shows us with what elegance she can handle her cigarette and turn her cognac, then our ladies do not hesitate to aspire to that ideal. They do not want to appear like stupid, prudish provincial geese who only dare to do what old women say! ... *Women's emancipation* is on the agenda nowadays. Women are to become equal to men. Unfortunately, it seems to be mostly men's vices that women are acquiring. I think that women should first acquire the men's good properties, their energy and working capacity, and then such things as tobacco, wine, and lack of prudery could come when the opportunity arises!⁵⁵

The use of the word *emancipation* in this context is an open expression of men's perception that public female drinking was an attempt to adopt one of the attributes of the male gender, and deliberately to do so in male spheres.

The women's new negotiation of the female role did not pass unnoticed. There is undeniable confirmation that the problem consisted more of the symbolic and thus visible behaviour in public with male symbols – cigarettes and cognac – than of the quantity the women actually drank. With customary support from medical authorities it was often underlined that women could not control their drinking. One doctor, Olav Benedictsen found drinking totally incompatible with women's biology and called it a “misunderstood emancipation” which easily led to the imitation of conspicuous behaviour. In Benedictsen's opinion it seemed comical that women adopted male symbols to identify with and thereby thought that they could transcend the limits set by their sex. However, he was in no doubt that it was ideas like this that were decisive in certain female settings: “It is therefore quite common to see emancipated women smoking tobacco, drinking spirits, putting their legs up on tables and chairs – all in all behaving in a way that could be called undergraduate.” And Benedictsen was specifically thinking of women in boundary-transcending or public walks of life: “female students, artists, office women, etc.”⁵⁶ Female emancipation was disquieting. When the doctor proclaimed his opinion on the subject, it had a tone of professional legitimacy.

The temperance man Sofus Rasmussen warned women that this kind of behaviour would take them beyond their depth:

Women have hitherto been ashamed to enter a public house to drink strong liquor, but now they are on the broad road leading there. It has started; we can see them in all our big cafés, music halls, and places of entertainment, drinking their wine, punch, porter, and lager beer, both draught and bottled. They are no longer ashamed, for fashion and emancipation have won a new triumph, but they have simultaneously sown the seeds of drunkenness among women. All good women should view with dismay this new drinking fashion among women... Intoxicating drinks have led many thousands of Danish men

⁵⁵ [M. Hinhede], “Drikkeri blandt Kvinder”, *Dansk Good Templar*, 25/1 (1903).

⁵⁶ O. Benedictsen, “Kvinder og Alkohol”, op. cit.

to the depths of misery, to decadence and crime, and if this now finds a haven among women too, then the misery will be proportionately greater, for the old rule will prove to be valid here too, that ‘when a woman falls, she always falls deeper than a man’.⁵⁷

That last claim is true, since excessive alcohol consumption meant a greater fall from the sober female ideal than from the ideal of the drinking man.

3.3. Licentious women

People were in no doubt about what this “new” drinking among women would lead to. If a woman had too much contact with alcohol she was almost by definition less respectable. Pouring alcohol into a weak female individual meant that she lost her female self-control and became both brutish and governed by base instincts, thus becoming licentious or prostituting herself. Gossip in the capital could name one example after the other of how the two things went together:

Here in Copenhagen we know numerous places where the publicans use their own daughters and other girls as bait, let them drink with the guests and go to bed with them. The parents drink, the girls drink, and so they do not give a fig for morals and laws. It will not get better until places serving alcohol are prohibited. This of course cannot happen at present, but we can point out what establishments of this kind entail: all manner of evil, theft, fornication, venereal disease, tuberculosis, mental illness, violence, fraud, rape, and much besides.⁵⁸

Decent women naturally had to relate to these connotations and above all avoid becoming identified with them.

The fact that a woman drank alcohol was often perceived by people at the time as evidence that she had abandoned not only her husband and children but also her purely feminine qualities. And if women moreover drank in male company it was particularly serious: “It is not an uncommon sight to see young girls at balls or excursions drinking their beer and schnapps together with the men, smoking, and laughing at the men’s often equivocal sayings. It is horrifying what women can be guilty of. Women must stand higher than men when it comes to drink and immorality. That is an ideal which we women must not trample in the dust in order to achieve equality with men”,⁵⁹ wrote a woman in the temperance newspaper *Danske Good Templar*.

As we have seen, it was not just a misunderstanding that women, by adopting one of men’s symbols, thereby also took over men’s strength. It was also humiliating, degrading, and even repulsive. The example shows that the dualistic gender symbolism of alcohol can also be described in anthropological terms of purity and

⁵⁷ S-n, “Kvinderne og Drikkeriet”, *Nordisk Good-Templar*, 13/11 1904, cols. 217–219.

⁵⁸ “Homo novus: Spiritus og Kvinder”, *Agitatoren*, 12/7 (1905), p. 1.

⁵⁹ “Kvinderne”, *Dansk Good Templar*, 5/8 (1906), pp. 124–125.

impurity. For women, temperance was pure, alcohol was impure or disgusting. Contemporary descriptions of women's drinking show many examples of this: "One often sees women in cafés and variety theatres drinking lager, porter, and punch, while the men drink coffee or tea. This is deplorable, since this does not make women become manly or worth more; they merely lose the femininity and the fragrance of purity and only achieve the prospect of potentially becoming addicted and disgusting."⁶⁰

Moreover, male intoxication was something that women could not attain: "The inclination of women to drink may also be possibly due to a certain ambition to be on the same level as men. But they fall short when it comes to drink. On the way home from our places of entertainment in the evening, one can often see more or less inebriated ladies who lack the relative security that long familiarity with drinking gives. With bloated red faces and hampered by their corsets, they are the picture of broken resistance, and when the intoxication has stifled their modesty, they are also the picture of indescribable shame."⁶¹ This is in fact the first time examples of seriously intoxicated women are mentioned directly. Previous examples have been about the problem of women drinking in public at all.

Examples from other countries conveniently ratified the disquieting assumptions that it was only "the degradation of women ... to imitate the men's craving for strong drinks and life in pubs." Particularly exposed to danger were the many women around the world who "seek employment in the various jobs that the sale of intoxicating drinks can offer". These were jobs which "as a rule bring much debauchery and much misery in their train".⁶² Women who drank in public – and those who became intoxicated – became by definition public women and marginalized in relation to proper, sober women. The consumption of alcohol in public could lead to the sexualization of women.

4. Resigned female drinking in the private sphere

Paradoxically, there was nevertheless a well-known form of female alcohol consumption. For there is nothing to suggest that the known drinking in public represented all drinking by women. If a woman felt the need for alcohol, she was forced to avoid allowing herself to be identified with degrading drinking situations. It may be suspected that alcohol problems were greatest among the (bourgeois) women who did not transgress the limits of their gender role by drinking in public, and who therefore were never or only rarely reflected in the statistics.

This at any rate was what Dr Olav Benedictsen believed:

From time immemorial, men have, so to speak, been permitted to drink whenever and wherever they pleased, without losing their civic respect to any extent. It is different with women, who conceal their state as much as possible and whom one therefore very rarely encounters intoxicated in the streets, restaurants, and reception rooms... Women who are addicted to drink can be

⁶⁰ S-n, "Kvinderne og Drikkeriet", cols. 217–219.

⁶¹ Ignotus, "Kvinder og Alkohol", *Agitatoren*, 9/8 (1902).

⁶² S-n, "Kvinderne og Drikkeriet", cols. 217–219.

found within the four walls of the home, where they can tittle – but in stealth, as they are not entirely without shame, for women’s innate modesty and sense of beauty persist as long as possible. But this secret drinking makes it highly difficult to discover a woman’s weakness for the drink, and if there is any context in which the old saying that ‘a woman’s cunning knows no end’ is true, then it is here; for one can spend months in a home where the woman drinks, without having the slightest idea of it, so well is she able to conceal her proclivity. A man cannot conceal himself so long, he is soon discovered.⁶³

One can only wonder how Benedictsen could still speak about women’s innate modesty and sense of beauty.

There are many examples, and unlike the descriptions of women’s public drinking they are in fact serious. For if women had a problem with alcohol, according to Wilhelm Bode, they simply could not drink in public. “Above we have praised the moderation of women, but there are unfortunately many exceptions to the rule. Only very few people suspect how many. When a man becomes a drunkard he tries to hide and deny it, but a woman does even more to keep her addiction to drink secret, since she herself feels that it is a great shame. One fine day it is nevertheless discovered, and then come some of the bitterest hours in her life.”⁶⁴

It is in the nature of things that we have no visual illustrations of women’s “feminine” problem drinking – in secret – but we do have many graphic descriptions in words. The temperance literature contains a whole catalogue of female strategies to keep their drinking from being scrutinized in public or by posterity. And in these cases it was not social drinking that the women were interested in, but the deliberate satisfaction of a physical need for the pure alcohol that made it possible for her to survive (in the modern nuclear family!). To aid her in concealing this abuse she had her famous female cunning, or the female inventiveness and creativity. Around the turn of the century a whole spectrum of stories circulated about women’s drinking. The Danish temperance newspaper *Agitatoren* was evidently more than willing to print them. The stories did not warn of either emancipation or prostitution. The women were presented as modest, not to say pathetically dependent victims with a (quite understandable) physical need for the substance: alcohol.

Above all it was important not to smell of alcohol. For “it is not nice to drink so that everyone can see it, and as long as a lady has not become totally addicted to the consumption of alcohol and has consequently forgotten all femininity, then she will try as much as possible to conceal her vice.” But the means for this were available in the female universe: “100% eau-de-Cologne both smells better and intoxicates faster than 40–60% proof spirits.” Stories were told about this, each one more fantastic than the last:

⁶³ O. Benedictsen, “Kvinder og Alkohol”, op. cit.

⁶⁴ Willh. Bode, “Kvinderne og Drikkeriet”, *Til Ædruelighedens Fremme: Et Tidsskrift udgivet af Samfundet til Ædruelighedens Fremme* 4 (1890) pp. 20–29.

Female drinkers have a special fondness for ‘gum grapes’. These artificial grapes are deceptively like real black grapes, but they consist of thin gum capsules filled with liqueur or eau-de-Cologne, giving them the look of real grapes. On journeys or summer excursions the uninitiated think that the ladies are eating grapes, but it is these artificial grapes that they are popping into their mouths one after the other, after which they suck out the alcohol and throw away the empty capsules.

A keen female drinker had had a fan made which could contain a sizeable quantity of alcohol. All the ribs of the fan were hollow and had at the top a small valve through which the contents could be sucked out. No one found it strange when the lady held the folded fan up to her lips, until the secret was finally discovered when she suddenly showed signs of being seriously addicted to alcohol.

Another lady always wore on her left shoulder a bouquet of artificial flowers. Concealed in this was a metal mouthpiece stuck in a length of rubber hose, and this hose was connected to a little rubber ball hidden in her dress, and this was filled with alcohol. Now and then the woman would turn her head to the left and act as if she were looking at her shoulder bouquet, and by constant practice she had developed such skill that none of those present noticed that she was putting her mouth to the little metal tip and by squeezing the ball squirting alcohol into her mouth.

The temperance newspaper concluded that “women who go to such trouble to conceal their propensity to drink from their husbands often hide alcohol in the piano. Many a husband has only discovered after the death of his wife that she was a drinker who had used the instrument as a secret storage place for her bottles.”⁶⁵ We do not know anything about the reality behind the stories. They are good stories, and they may be true as well. The important thing in this context, however, is that the stories served as a reminder of the existence of women’s drinking. But did it not thus become an open secret that drinking existed in the modern female sphere? The secret drinking was at any rate not abnormal, and it was undeniably viewed with an admirable understanding and forbearance in comparison to the condemnation that was the reaction to women’s overt drinking in situations where they transcended public gender boundaries. It was evidently not alcohol as a substance that was incompatible with female biology; on the contrary, the women in these examples evidently *needed* alcohol because of their weak female nature. Alcohol only became dangerous and unnatural for women if it was consumed in a public and male context. It was the symbolic value more than the alcohol content that was decisive for the evaluation of women’s alcohol abuse. And the symbolic value depended on which sphere – public/private, male/female – the alcohol was consumed in.

⁶⁵ F.S., “Kvindelige Drankere”, *Agitatoren*, 14/6 (1902).

There is a great deal to suggest that this secret drinking was in reality a well-known and hence accepted “feminine” form of drinking in opposition to the sober and controlling women ideal with its restriction of the scope of female action; in other words, the same phenomenon as the hidden drinking and tablet abuse that we know from today’s situation.

It was in the home that women really felt a need for the purely intoxicating effect of alcohol: as a tranquillizer, to repress or alleviate anxiety in problematic situation. Examples of such situations were: “unhappy love affairs, broken engagements, disappointments in the extensive realm of erotica, economic worries, marital conflicts, jealousy, and so on. Worries about the children, reasons for drowning fatigue and sorrow and seeking oblivion with the aid of spirits”, as Dr Benedictsens summed up his experience.⁶⁶ It was obviously a matter of surviving in the women’s role, not challenging it together with the emancipated women in the restaurants in the city.

A tale was told about a lady, for example, who was married to a ship’s captain. Her husband had come back from one of his voyages with “a cask of sweet wine” which he had bought cheaply for her. When the man set sail again, “the boredom led the woman to seek comfort in the sweet wine. The wine naturally gave her a greater thirst, which was then quenched with beer, and in the course of a couple of years she was an outright alcoholic. Another lady, an actress, had used alcohol like a whip to steel herself to be able to perform as well as her vocation demanded: “but because she constantly had to increase the helpings to achieve the desired effect, she soon ended up a drunkard.”

Above all, the temperance newspapers had cautionary examples of the use of alcohol to cure specifically female problems, since it was prescribed by doctors for its intoxicating and tranquillizing effect: “A third lady had lost her husband and had to undergo a difficult childbirth during the first days of her mourning. The doctor prescribed strong wine, and she followed the prescription so well that she was soon totally addicted.” The point of the tale was that this kind of doctor’s prescription was popular. For example, when one woman was recommended “to drink an occasional glass of sherry for lunch to fortify her stomach”, after 25 years the doctor was able to observe that “this prescription was still being followed in the most conscientious manner”.⁶⁷ Even the temperance agitator Lene Silfverberg often described how – obviously before she became a temperance champion – she had to drink half a lager to get to sleep in the evening, on the recommendation of her doctor.⁶⁸

It was not exceptional for doctors to prescribe alcohol. Aquavit was in general use as a cure for everything in the 19th century, for its disinfecting, febrifugal, tranquillizing, and analgesic effect. And this applied to physical and mental pain alike. It seems to have been a familiar practice to prescribe aquavit for menstrual ailments and menopausal problems, and this appears to have been regarded as the

⁶⁶ O. Benedictsens, “Kvinder og Alkohol” Offprint from *Liv og Kultur* (1907), p. 4; O. Benedictsens, “Protestmødet i Koncertpalæet”, *Folkevennen*, 19/5 (1905), p. 131.

⁶⁷ “Hvorledes kvinder bliver Drankere”, *Kristelig Afholdsbld*, 1/2 (1899), pp. 15–16.

⁶⁸ L. Silfverberg, “Erindringer fra Good-Temparismens første Dage”, *N.I.O.G.T.s Aarvog* (1900), p. 84.

main reason why women, and even children, acquired a taste for alcohol as a way to repress problems.⁶⁹

Dr Olav Benedictsen was convinced that “pain of a purely biological nature leads women to drink, because they seek relief with the aid of port, sherry, cognac to assuage the more or less irritating states in which they find themselves – something to brace them for a moment”. But they could also be led to the use of spirits through “doctors’ thoughtlessness”. Benedictsen meant that women were predisposed to nervousness: “From birth they have a body under nervous strain, constantly out of equilibrium and constantly needing something to restore the balance and stiffen them” – and aquavit had an age-old reputation for being able to strengthen the nerves. Alcohol was consequently a problematic but familiar way for women to cope with their nervous bodies.⁷⁰

The first Danish edition of a medical book on women’s diseases also considered this prescribed and hence medically legitimated alcohol consumption among women as a well-known phenomenon: “As a household remedy against these [menstruation] pains, aquavit and other narcotic substances are used much too often.” The same book went on to say that the “most common cause of drunkenness among women is the painful state that accompanies the so-called change of life at the age of 46–50 ... Men have no such torments to go through, and they become addicted to drink at all ages, their excesses may be attributed to completely different causes than is the case with the purer and more self-sacrificing sex at their side.” It was important to show that men’s alcoholism was due to other factors. This avoided compromising the male role: women did not become men by drinking. There were completely different specific biological reasons for women’s drinking. The book rejected the suggestion that this female alcoholism was an expression of a special amorality among women, attributing it instead to ignorance of the dangers: “Let every mother and everyone to whom the upbringing of a young woman is entrusted therefore take good care not to teach her to relieve menstruation ailments with the aid of the aquavit bottle or other narcotic substances.” The book ended with a critique of and a warning against male doctors’ presumably well-known practice of prescribing spirits to women instead of treating the cause of their “physical pains” and internal weakness.⁷¹

Dr Bode likewise knew of this excessively common curative use of aquavit among women and warned against it: “They have their difficult times, days and weeks, when they are depressed and ill, hours spent in anxiety and despair. Unfortunately, they often find some person or other who praises that false friend, alcohol, whether a relative or an acquaintance, a nurse or a doctor. There are many well-meaning but ill-informed women with a desire to play the doctor, and this or that liqueur seems to give quick help.”

Bode admitted that it was not harmful to use strong drinks as medicine on occasion, but the temptation to use them more frequently was dangerously near.

⁶⁹ F.S., “Kvindelige Drankere”, *Agitatoren*, 14/6, 1902.

⁷⁰ O. Benedictsen, “Kvinder og Alkohol”; O. Benedictsen, “Protestmødet i Koncertpalæet”, p. 131.

⁷¹ L. Tait, *Om Kvindernes særlige Sygdomme og hvorledes de bedst forebygges* (Copenhagen, 1893), pp. 23–24.

One learns to appreciate them as ways to improve one's humour and uses them regularly. The original pain is thereby further augmented with the shame of becoming addicted to drink. For alcohol has a much stronger effect on women than on men; just as they become inebriated more quickly, they also become addicted faster, and they seldom have the strength of will to expel the tyrant; they conceal their fancy, their passion, get entangled in a tissue of hypocrisy and lies and their fear of being discovered. The first fault is often committed by a doctor, at least many doctors used to be rather incautious about prescribing strong beers and stimulating wines as 'tonics'.⁷²

Such statements testify that the phenomenon of female medicine abusers or "female problem drinkers" was very well known. It is interesting, however, that contemporary doctors – including those who supported the temperance cause – actually believed that women had a special psyche associated with their female cycle and their biology, and that this psyche was vulnerable and the reason for a woman's nervousness and hence her leaning to the soothing effects of alcohol. The connection was described in 1886 by the gynaecologist and psychiatrist Knud Pontoppidan (known from Amalie Skram's novels about her experiences at the St. Hans mental hospital): "in modern times there is undoubtedly a tendency to recognize that in nervous patients we are often dealing with complaints from the genital sphere which are not caused by any local pain and therefore require no treatment for that", and he thus gave biological justification for women who drank to ease their anxiety, saying that it was both an understandable and a "natural" pattern of behaviour for women! Pontoppidan also showed that precisely this biologically determined nervousness made women receptive to the (ab)use of narcotic substances:

It is one of the consequences of nervousness that the patient feels an urge for stimulating and narcotic substances ... it is not uncommon to meet nervous ladies at dinner parties who drink rather frequently, and in all the larger quantities the more poorly they feel. But the narcotic substances have an effect on nervous patients, and I have shown on a previous occasion how this nervous constitution can give a disposition to the abuse of narcotics, because these individuals have a greater need for stimulants, and because narcotic substances have the seductive capacity of restoring resilience and energy to the exhausted nervous system. In this way one can regard both the chronic alcoholism and the chronic morphinism as sequelae of neurasthenia.⁷³

Pontoppidan thus foresaw that psychotropic drugs would become a preferred intoxicant among women, based on his knowledge of the increased "morphinism" among women. This often arose as a consequence of treatment with morphine in connection with hospitalization, besides which the drug was too readily available via the pharmacies. It was still therefore mainly men in the medical and

⁷² Wilh. Bode, "Kvinderne og Drikkeriet", pp. 20–29.

⁷³ K. Pontoppidan, *Neurasthenien, Bidrag til Skildringen af vor tids Nervositet* (1886), pp. 25–27.

pharmaceutical professions who became addicts. Pontoppidan nevertheless maintained that he was inclined to assume that women “in accordance with their psychic constitution are at least as disposed as men to succumb to the abuse of stimulants”.⁷⁴

We are thus in the paradoxical situation that the medical profession proved that women were particularly sober by virtue of their biology and simultaneously argued that women could have special needs to be able to cope with their distinct physical and mental nature. There can be no doubt that the view of women held by Pontoppidan and several of his fellow doctors helped to keep women in their paralysing (drinking) position in the home.

We shall not look any more closely at the finer medical details of Pontoppidan’s and others’ biological proof of this female predisposition. Instead, we shall regard Pontoppidan’s statements as confirmation of the previously formulated opinion that the very concept of female nature or female biology in contrast to that of men is a metaphor constructed by the medical profession in the 19th century that suited the power relation prevailing between the sexes at the time.

Perspectives

Public drinking by men was a symbol of manliness, and sobriety in the private sphere was a symbol of femininity. Yet this symbolic value of alcohol was decisively weakened when women’s temperance in the home was considered more preferable to women’s temperance in public. In the same way, women’s drinking in the private sphere was less provocative and also more “feminine”, in contrast to women’s drinking in public, which was regarded as “masculine” – and this was evidently regardless of the quantity of alcohol consumed.

It is well known, however, that the content of gender roles is changeable. We have already seen that masculine drinking behaviour among women was a sign of emancipation – a manifestation of emancipation that was not without dangers, but which nevertheless became relevant again in the women’s movement of the 1970s. The women’s “right” to drink was now proclaimed in earnest as a sign of independence.⁷⁵

In the same way, it can be said that male drinking also found its antipole in the creation of a new, career-conscious, forward-looking, controlled male type who had no need to reinforce his masculinity by drinking. (The beginnings of this new male

⁷⁴ K. Pontoppidan, *Den kroniske Morfinisme* (Copenhagen, 1883), pp. 15–17. One example of a female morphinist giving birth to a child addicted to morphine is described in “Arv”, *Nordisk Good-Templer*, 27/12 (1903), p. 103.

⁷⁵ An interesting area of research in alcohol and gender has been to discover the symbolic values of alcohol in gay and lesbian communities. “Some of the changes in attitudes about alcohol abuse within the lesbian community may be closely tied to the evolving symbolic role of alcohol for gay women. Prior to the 1970s the setting for most public lesbian social activity was the lesbian bar. It was here that lesbians felt it was safe to congregate. There is a possibility that in this era of lesbian history alcohol became associated with rebellion: women came together over that drug, risking society’s ridicule and stigmatization. Today abstinence from alcohol in the lesbian community is a symbol of the ‘serious person’, much as it was in 19th century England for some working class”. See, for example, “Alcohol and the Lesbian Community: Changing Patterns of Awareness”, in *Drinking and Drug Practices Surveyor*, 18 (August 1992), pp. 3–7.

Table 3. Alcohol as a new gender symbol c. 2000

Alcohol consumption	Gender role	
	New female role	New male role
Sobriety	Weak Self-sacrificing, devoted, and traditional	Strong Self-controlled and career-conscious
Drinking	Strong Independent, secure, and self-confident	Weak Spineless, powerless, and impotent

type may possibly be found in the temperance movement's ideal of the sober man, but that is another story.)

Now it is almost the case that it is a sign of impotence if a man is forced to drink to cope with his male role. "Career water", as mineral water is known, has become the new symbol of the man who wants to get on in life. Could the reason for the change in symbolism be that a symbol loses its value when it is taken over by other groups – in this case women? When women can also drink in public, is alcohol no longer an unadulterated symbol of masculinity?

And when women have shown that it is no longer dangerous to drink in public, they may as well take over the new man's abstinence as a symbol of self-control.