

December 2023

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Recommended Citation

Davey, Claire (2023) "Sober Women's Feminist Resistance to Alcohol Marketing and Cultural Representations of Women's Drinking Practices," *Journal of International Women's Studies*: Vol. 25: Iss. 8, Article 2.

Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol25/iss8/2>

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Sober Women's Feminist Resistance to Alcohol Marketing and Cultural Representations of Women's Drinking Practices

By Claire Davey¹

Abstract

Alcohol is marketed to women as a glamorous and empowering reward for juggling the demands of work and family life. This essay explores the ways in which women who do not drink reject the feminization of alcohol and drinking practices and frame this rejection within discourses of feminist resistance. This essay draws on data collected as part of a mixed-method ethnographic research project that investigates women's use of, and participation in, online sobriety communities. Findings suggest that women who lead or utilize online sobriety communities have considerable awareness of the feminized marketing of alcohol, and some express strong ideological opposition to it. The marketing of alcohol is positioned as a predatory force that takes advantage of women's exhaustion as mothers and perpetuates the double standards associated with women's drinking. Sobriety may prompt a feminist awakening regarding the connections between the feminization of alcohol and women's inequality within society and, in turn, disrupt women's identification with post-feminist cultural representations of women's drinking practices. Through the public identification and critique of these marketing practices, women critically engage with feminism while raising consciousness and building a community of sober women.

Keywords: Alcohol, Feminism, Marketing, Online sobriety communities, Sobriety

Introduction

This essay explores the ways in which sober women who lead or utilize online sobriety communities reject the marketing of alcohol products to women, including the feminized positioning of women's drinking practices as girly, empowering, feminist, or as a coping strategy for motherhood. In doing so, I examine how women challenge these often visual symbols from a feminist standpoint, in order to situate them within a broader framework of structural inequalities that women experience.

First, this essay contextualizes the recent trends and research concerning the gendered marketing of alcohol and women's non-consumption of alcohol, including online sobriety communities. Next, detail is provided regarding the ethnographic mixed-methods that were utilized for the research project which this essay draws on. Illustrative examples are then presented from the datasets to support a discussion regarding the different ways in which women's critiques of cultural references to women's drinking practices and the feminization of alcohol are a form of feminist resistance against, and response to, society's subjugation of women and a dismissal of their needs.

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The Gendered Marketing of Alcohol and Women's Non-Consumption of Alcohol

Women's alcohol consumption has increased substantially in Great Britain since 1992, more so than men (Smith & Foxcroft, 2009), partly due to women's increased earnings and the relaxation of social norms regarding women's drinking in public spaces, particularly the "night time economy" (Plant & Plant, 2006). It has also been informed by the development of marketing strategies to feminize alcohol products and drinking practices. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the marketing of alcohol products became increasingly gendered in order to expand sales by targeting a new customer demographic who increasingly had social and financial independence: women. Products such as wine, gin, and prosecco have been feminized through pinkification, glitter, and slogans such as "mummy wine time." Marketing campaigns draw on themes of self-care, reward, and time-out within their marketing to portray alcohol as a glamorous and empowering reward for juggling the demands of work and family life (Atkinson et al., 2012; Atkinson et al., 2021; Gallage et al., 2020). This has been perpetuated by popular cultural references, such as *Sex and the City* (Bushnell, 1996; Star et al., 1998-2004) and *Bridget Jones's Diary* (Fielding, 1996; Maguire, 2001), that position alcohol as part of women's liberation in the neoliberal, post-feminist era (Rottenberg, 2014; Gill, 2017).

Alcohol consumption is used by women as a way to "do" gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987) and perform femininity in public spaces (Mackiewicz, 2015), which has been specifically explored within studies of "ladette" culture (Jackson & Tinkler, 2007) and the idea of Girls' Night Out (Nicholls, 2019). Women consume alcohol throughout the life course, sometimes in domestic spaces, as a ticket to "transformation and timeout" (Emslie et al., 2015, p. 437; see also Rolfe et al., 2009 and Nicholls, 2022), which reflects the themes identified by Atkinson et al. (2021) within alcohol brand marketing. Despite this increase in women's alcohol consumption and the expansion of women's drinking practices, women still experience gendered stigmas in response to alcohol consumption. This is particularly the case for consumption practices which disrupt heteronormative (reproductive) and respectable femininities (Skeggs, 1997; Day et al., 2004), such as binge drinking (Griffin et al., 2009) and addiction (Ettore, 2007). These stigmas impact the extent to which women seek help for so-called problematic alcohol consumption and the recovery modality they pursue (Davey, 2021).

The past decade has seen the emergence and proliferation of online sobriety communities, typically hosted on social media platforms and predominantly founded by women. These communities help individuals to change their drinking behaviors through a range of services, including recovery coaching, peer to peer support, webinars, and in-person events (Davey, 2021). The majority of their members are women, particularly white women of higher socio-economic means. Thus, members are more likely to be "already responsabilised" (Robert, 2016, p. 646) and protected by racial and economic privilege against the extremities of health inequalities. However, this demographic is less likely to utilize traditional treatment pathways for stigmatized drinking (compared to men) due to gendered and classed stigmas and the lack of sex-specific consideration regarding women's needs in recovery (Bogg & Bogg, 2015; see also Davey, 2021). In addition, there are growing numbers of women sobriety influencers and online sobriety community founders who promote alcohol-free living on Instagram (Atkinson et al., 2023; Davey, 2022; McHugh, 2019). This new cultural phenomena, and women's engagement with them, remains significantly under-researched. More broadly, however, sobriety as a form of anti-consumption (Piacentini & Banister, 2009) can be viewed as a form of lifestyle activism and resistance (Haenfler, 2004). While recent trends towards abstinence have been interpreted as symptomatic of neoliberalism's responsabilization of individuals through healthism (Caluzzi et al., 2021; Nicholls, 2021; Atkinson

et al., 2023), sobriety can also be a site of “meaning, making, identity construction, and social negotiation” inseparable “from concerns with altering state power” (Portwood-Stacer, 2013, p. 156, p. 6). Emerging research has shown how sobriety can be conceptualized by women as an act of feminist self-care—a form of resistance against, or disillusionment with, state healthcare provision that dismisses women’s bodies (Davey, 2022). This essay will further explore the interconnections between contemporary practices of alcohol-refusal and feminism through the analysis of sober women’s critique of the feminized marketing of alcohol and gendered cultural representations of women’s drinking practices.

Methods

Despite the trends outlined above, women’s experiences of alcohol use and recovery remain under-explored, and their sex-specific treatment needs are often overlooked within both research and policy (Agabio & Sinclair, 2019; Wincup, 2016). For these reasons, women’s experiences are the sole focus of this research project and essay. This essay draws on datasets collected as part of a mixed-method ethnographic research project that investigated women’s use of, and participation in, online sobriety communities. These datasets include transcripts from semi-structured interviews, online ethnographic observations from sobriety communities, and Instagram posts from sobriety influencers.

Ethnographic observations within eight online community platforms (n=186) and the collection of 14 sobriety influencer’s posts on Instagram (n=216) were conducted during the last week of three consecutive months (September to November 2021). Any posts that were older than 12 weeks were excluded from collection. In addition, any posts by women who were evidently not sober, or within their first 30 days of sobriety, were also excluded. This was to ensure that the research project remained focused on the practices and experiences of those with an established period of sobriety and were actively utilizing the community platforms. The online sobriety communities and sobriety influencers were initially selected based upon the researcher’s “intimate insider” (Taylor, 2011, p. 9) knowledge of using online sobriety communities and was subsequently supplemented using snowballing methods. A pseudonymized overview of the communities and influencers/founders are detailed in Tables 1 and 2 respectively.

Table 1: Online Sobriety Communities

Community (Pseudonymized)	Main Technology Platform Utilized	Members/Followers	Features
A	Facebook & Web-Based	10,000-25,000	Free peer-to-peer support access. Further support services for one-off fee. Free podcast. In-person and virtual events.
B	Facebook & Web-Based	100-250	Peer-to-peer support and services for a monthly subscription fee. Free podcast.
C	Facebook	0-100	Peer-to-peer support and services for a monthly subscription fee.
D	Facebook & Web-Based	250-500	Peer-to-peer support and services for a monthly subscription fee. Free podcast.
E	Facebook	0-100	Peer-to-peer support and services for a monthly subscription fee. In-person and virtual events.
F	Facebook	100-250	Peer-to-peer support and services for a monthly subscription fee. In-person events.
G	Facebook	500-1,000	Free peer-to-peer support access. Further support services for one-off fee. In-person and virtual events.
H	Facebook	1,000-10,000	Free peer-to-peer support access. Further support services for monthly subscription fee. Free podcast. In-person and virtual events.

Table 2: Sobriety Influencers/Community Founders

Influencer/Founder (Pseudonymized)	Age Range	Instagram Followers as of 9/20/2021
Anna	41-50	10,001-25,000
Beth	31-40	5,001-10,000
Clara	41-50	1,000-2,000
Georgie	41-50	5,001-10,000
Jamie	41-50	1,000-2,000
Jessica	21-30	10,001-25,000
Leah	61+	5,001-10,000
Melissa	21-30	25,001-50,000
Mia	31-40	10,001-25,000
Olivia	41-50	50,001-100,000
Rita	31-40	2,001-5,000
Sandy	51-60	2,001-5,000
Suzy	41-50	10,001-25,000
Tunde	21-30	100,001-250,000

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews between December 2021 and May 2022 with 25 self-selecting United Kingdom-based women who were members of online sobriety communities (not limited to the communities referenced in Table 1). The pseudonymized research participants are detailed in Table 3. The participants were aged between 25 and 72 and all self-identified as female when recruited to the study; however, no further data was collected regarding gender identity. Participants were predominantly white (24 out of 25), one participant was British Indian, and the majority were educated to at least undergraduate level. These demographics are representative of women who use online alcohol support groups highlighted by existing research

(Davey, 2021) but are limited in their reflection of the diversity of women's recovery cultures that remain under-represented in research and policy (Dimova et al., 2021; Fox & Berg, 2022; Serrant, 2015; Wincup, 2016). To ensure that the data reflects women's experiences in stable recovery, and to protect the wellbeing of participants, it was required that participants had at least six months of continuous sobriety and were not undergoing medical treatment for their drinking at the time of the interview. Prior to the interview, research participants were provided with five broad discussion topics which sought to understand their experiences of sobriety at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. Interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom and lasted an average of 69.9 minutes.

All data items were read twice by the researcher prior to coding to ensure the understanding and identification of patterns across the data. This process was guided by the research question, "To what extent is sobriety embodied as a form of activism or resistance by the communities and the women who use them?" which was developed from the radical feminist standpoint that the "personal is political" (Hanisch, 1970/2006). Codes were then applied during thematic analysis to link data to concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2006) using NVivo 12. All items coded as "feminism" were subjected to a second round of thematic analysis and coding. "Marketing" was subsequently identified as a prominent sub-theme whereby women engaged with the issue of feminized marketing of alcohol and women's drinking practices, and thus became the focus of this essay. While there is potential for errors during the manual collection of data and transcription, data triangulation (Denzin, 2006) across data-sets helped to identify patterns and outliers. Furthermore, manual methods facilitated a close reading of the data by a researcher who is respectful of community practices and the privacy of individuals within the communities, which was essential from the researcher's feminist standpoint (Letherby, 2003; Fonow & Cook, 1991). This research project received approval from the Ethics Committee at Canterbury Christ Church University in February 2021.

Table 3: Research Participants

Research Participant (Pseudonymized)	Age (in years)	Length of Sobriety (in years)
Alice	45	5
Alison	72	0.75
Bobbie	41	2
Donna	45	0.6
Emma	49	2
Erin	56	4
Francesca	34	4
Gina	25	0.5
Helen	44	4.5
Jo	29	10
Jules	45	6
Katie	29	2
Linda	58	1
Lisa	44	2.5
Louisa	49	4
Melanie	59	0.5
Monica	51	4
Nicola	56	0.5
Payal	41	2
Petra	41	3.5
Rachel	44	8.5
Stephanie	46	2.75
Susan	48	2.5
Tina	28	5
Violet	30	1.25

Sober Women's Feminist Critiques of the Feminization of Alcohol in Marketing

The findings presented in this section explore the ways in which sober women adopt a feminist standpoint to reject the marketing of alcohol products to women, including the feminized positioning of women's drinking practices. First, a community member's post is used as a starting point to reflect on the ways in which women within online sobriety communities share their critiques of feminized alcohol and other consumer products to raise awareness regarding gendered marketing practices. Next, an extract from Mel's interview is considered alongside an Instagram post by Georgie to specifically explore the controversial and contested nature of alcohol brand marketing to mothers. Interview extracts from Jules, Violet, and Jo are then analyzed to understand how sobriety may prompt a feminist awakening regarding gendered alcohol marketing and women's inequality within society. Lastly, interview extracts from Monica and Emma are drawn on to discuss how sober women reflect on, and reinterpret, post-feminist cultural representations of women's drinking.

Raising Consciousness Regarding Feminized Marketing Practices

Within online sobriety communities there was a strong awareness of the tactics used by alcohol brands to sell alcohol products to women. The following text from a post by an anonymous community member speaks to this issue: "This completely winds me up...pink, glitter, 'mummy

wine time'...how the ways marketers sell drinks to women can be patronising—and damaging” (community post). There was a sense of anger by members and founders of online sobriety communities regarding the ways in which women are marketed to, particularly for a harmful product. “Mummy wine time” is deemed “patronising” for its infantilization of women through the use of child-like language. Furthermore, the use of hyper-feminine colours and materials such as pink and glitter could be perceived as simplistic stereotyping. Research participants, community members, and sobriety influencers also raised awareness of the “insidious” (Jules, interview extract) and persistent “nudges” (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008) that they receive from the marketers of other gendered products. Their critiques of marketing messages were not limited to alcohol itself, but the consumer culture predicated upon women's alcohol consumption: “you can't buy a card for somebody without alcohol on it. It's on babygros for babies, it's on tea towels” (Donna, interview extract).

While sharing pictures of alcohol was generally not permitted within online sobriety communities, this rule seemed to be excused for posts such as this when the member was evidencing and critiquing alcohol marketing practices. Sharing pictures of alcohol products in order to shame alcohol brands enabled women to share their experiences and knowledge with a group of people who were likely to empathize with them. It also served to raise awareness among women within the communities, some of whom may still be drinking or considering a return to drinking, regarding the ways in which they were being targeted. These images provide a stark, visual medium that emphasizes the message that Big Alcohol wants to make money from women by entrenching heteronormative femininities (pink and glitter) and traditional gender roles (“mummy wine time”). These examples of consciousness-raising within online sobriety communities convey some similarities to historical feminist practices of self-help groups created by the Women's Liberation Movement (Dudley-Shotwell, 2020). Such practices facilitate a sense of sisterhood through the identification of shared experiences amongst women and enables women to contextualize their past drinking behaviors within a broader, macro-level, capitalist context.

Contesting the Marketing of Alcohol to Mothers

Specific critiques of “mummy wine time” marketing messages abounded within the interviews. Mel, a research participant who is a grandmother, said that she felt sorry for women who are entering motherhood today due to the marketing messages they receive:

I have thought about all the mummy wine culture, you know, and how immoral it is really, how utterly immoral it is. Yeah. So, I do feel quite strongly about that. You know, the goods that you can buy: “mummy drinks wine” and all of this is just pervasive, and it normalises it doesn't it? (Mel, Interview extract)

Mel deemed the consumer culture predicated upon mother's alcohol consumption to be “utterly immoral.” Interestingly, questions of morality have typically been associated with women's drinking practices that breach social expectations of femininity and women's gender roles, most starkly during the British temperance movements when women's drinking was positioned as a threat to children's health and the success of the nation (McErlain, 2015). Indeed, Mel's sentiments suggest that historical connections between anti-consumption, morality, and motherhood remain (see also Portwood-Stacer, 2012). However, she subverted this discourse by using the term “immoral” to describe the practices of the alcohol industry, who market alcohol to women based on their role (and challenges) as mothers, when formerly immorality was ascribed to the woman

who succumbed to drink. As such, sober women's increased awareness and articulation of these structural issues disrupts persistent historical discourses regarding women's morality and alcohol.

Some sobriety influencers used their Instagram accounts to disrupt marketing connections between motherhood and alcohol. Georgie's post below critiqued an advertisement for Champagne, which features a woman wearing a t-shirt that says "Maman a besoin de Champagne" (translated from French to English as "Mum needs Champagne"):

There is nothing more depressing than when you see toxic marketing spread. 😞 😞 😞 Non [No], Mum doesn't need Champagne. Alcohol is the last thing you need as a Mum and if you *à besoin d'alcool* [need alcohol], then there is a problematic relationship there, and I am sorry you are struggling. How can we support you? Let's not pretend this is some flippant amusing quip about pushing an addictive drug as a solution onto a vulnerable highly stressed group of people because the t-shirt has sparkly paillettes [sequins] 😊." (Georgie, Instagram post)

Georgie's Instagram post affirmatively challenged the structural issues associated with the marketing of alcohol to mothers; instead of providing mothers with the help that they need, society markets an addictive drug as the solution. She framed those responsible for the advertisement as drug pushers who are abusing vulnerable people. The language that Georgie used, such as "toxic," conveys a sinister undertone and intention behind this marketing. This presents an emotive and stark re-reading of the advertisement; Georgie created a counter-narrative of the untold messages of feminized alcohol marketing that emphasizes the pressures on women's mental health caused by motherhood and the lack of structural support.

With thousands of followers on Instagram, Georgie's use of her platform to offer a feminist critique of alcohol marketing could be interpreted as a form of digital activism (Mann, 2014). Instagram offers women the ability to "displace culturally established, male-oriented narratives" (Caldeira, 2021, p. 6) regarding alcohol and increases feminism's accessibility (Kanai, 2020). However, Georgie's critical engagement with a Champagne advertisement, which features a picture of a happy, relaxed, young, slender, white woman, does not speak to the diversity of women's experiences with alcohol (or of motherhood). Yet, it works, to some extent, to deconstruct Instagram's privilege of the white, heteronormative female aesthetic (Kanai, 2020; Marwick, 2013) by confronting the false representations that underpin it. Indeed, more work needs to be done to understand the role and issues of privilege within online sobriety communities and sober Instagram as sites of feminist activism (Portwood-Stacer & Berridge, 2014). Georgie was one of few sobriety influencers who used their platform to critically engage with alcohol-related issues from an overtly feminist standpoint. To do so may risk being perceived as a "feminist killjoy" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 11); Instagram followers are less likely to share, like, or comment on posts which convey serious or political messages (Caldeira, 2021), including posts about alcohol (Atkinson et al., 2023).

A Feminist Awakening?

It is clear from the findings presented in this essay that many research participants experience anger and resistance towards the feminized marketing of alcohol. However, they had typically been unaware of its pervasiveness prior to entering sobriety, as explained by Jules: "It's only when you stop drinking that you just kind of go, 'holy shit, I had no idea that that was happening.' I think it's so insidious that we didn't even see it coming" (interview extract). This anger is, in part, an anger at themselves for having believed or been oblivious to the marketing

messages. Suggested in Jules's comment, and in other interviews like Monica's ("we bought into it hook, line and sinker" (interview extract), is the sense that they felt duped. Indeed, Jules conveyed a sense of awakening regarding the marketing practices which in turn could also be interpreted as a feminist awakening—a causal factor in prompting sober women to see how they are coerced and subjugated via marketing practices. During her interview, Violet drew on examples of the feminization of alcohol to argue that women's drinking practices are intimately entwined with women's subordinate roles in society more generally:

Society wants us to drink, it wants us to drink wine, mostly white wine and gin. Mostly pink gin. Glittery gin. But it doesn't want us to drink too much. It wants us to be socially dependent on alcohol—drink if your kids are annoying you, drink if you want to go out, be on your husband's arm occasionally whilst he drinks. You can have one or two, but society doesn't want us to get drunk. (Violet, Interview extract)

Violet explained how women are allowed to have their pink, girly fun (much like a parent would indulge a child), but only in the service of society's expectations of child-rearing and being a trophy wife. She suggested that there is an expectation that women should engage with alcohol and be "socially dependent" on it, but should not undermine respectable femininity through a loud, drunken display of the messy body (Day et al., 2004). Women are meant to remain quiet, in control of their body, and be able to perform their role in service of men (be that reproductive or social). As such, she also critiqued the neoliberal ideology that perpetuates an imperative to consume whilst mandating individual responsibility for health and social consequences. Violet used the term "society" to reinforce that the feminization of alcohol and the marketing of alcohol to women is part of a broader web of structural inequalities created through this socio-economic and political model.

While this ideological awakening was not the reason that the research participants entered sobriety, this anger at their past coercion may serve to reinforce their decision to remain sober. Jo explained how overt feminized marketing of alcohol to women plays a role in her ideological engagement with sobriety:

Everything's about bloody prosecco and gin...there's this culture around drinking. You see these plaques that are like "it's gin o'clock" and I think it's crap, but it takes a lot to stand up against things that are telling us to do something differently. We're being told that it's part of being a woman....There's the feminisation of alcohol, so this kind of like alcohol being glamorised for women—your glittery drinks, your pink drinks, "look at all these new mixers we've got, two for one cocktails." There's all this going on in the background. To actually go against that and go "no I'm not doing that and I'm not being part of that culture," there's something to that. (Jo, Interview extract)

Jo's extract exhibits the attributes that Haenfler (2004) assigns to resistance when speaking in the context of straight-edge culture which also promotes abstinence as resistance. She exhibited "disapproval" for the alco-centric culture that draws on heteronormativity, infantilization, and consumerism to sustain itself. She questioned these "dominant goals," made her "invisible ideology visible," and suggested "an alternative" path: sobriety (Haenfler, 2004, p. 429). For Jo, sobriety has become a form of lifestyle activism through anti-consumption (Portwood-Stacer, 2012; Piacentini & Banister, 2009). Similar to the previous findings, Jo drew on vivid descriptions of tangible phenomena to assist in the articulation of her ideological position: plaques, mixers, and sales deals. This may be particularly useful and impactful when seeking to articulate a

philosophical position which is based upon the “non-doing” of something, such as non-drinking, which can be rendered invisible (Banister et al., 2019, p. 745; Scott, 2019, p. 3). This affirmative decision to publicly “go against” (Jo) the UK’s alco-centric culture by referencing and sharing pictures of tangible drinking phenomena, as many of the women featured in this essay have done, is to subvert sobriety from a passive identity or positionality of “non-doing” to one of “doing” resistance, particularly feminist resistance.

Reinterpreting Post-Feminist Cultural Representations of Women’s Drinking

As part of the feminist awakening discussed above, research participants persistently critiqued past cultural representations of women’s drinking as feminist, as shown in the extracts below:

That was the *Sex and the City* generation then. So that really dovetailed quite nicely into Bridget Jones and her cigarettes and her counting her units of alcohol along with you know, Carrie Bradshaw and her writing and her beautiful outfits... And I feel that we shared it. Oh my God, we bought into it, hook, line, and sinker. (Monica, Interview extract)

It was just positioned as something glamorous for young women, or women of my age when we were young, to sort of aspire to. And in the media, you had people like *Sex and the City*, and people like Bridget Jones and you had all these characters who are all probably 10 years older than me, and living these cosmopolitan lifestyles, and we all thought we could do it. And we all thought we could drink the same as our male partners, because that’s feminism—it’s not. (Emma, Interview extract)

Bridget Jones’s Diary and *Sex and the City* were the most commonly cited examples of cultural representations of women’s drinking as feminist, which was likely informed by the average age of research participants; those in their 30s and 40s at the time of interview would have come of age during the 1990s-2000s period when these series were most popular. Some research participants also referred to “ladette” culture. The research participants suggested that these representations falsely framed women’s drinking as a symbol of post-feminist empowerment and independence (Ortner, 2014) with their “cosmopolitan lifestyles” (Emma, interview extract) and “beautiful outfits” (Monica, interview extract). Typically, participants felt uncomfortable about their past identification with and embodiment of these representations because they felt that they had been “suckered in” (Lisa, interview extract). In sobriety, women changed their positionality to reject these depictions of women’s drinking as feminist; in a few instances (such as Emma above), participants disputed the idea, attributed to “ladette” culture, that drinking as much as men is an act of feminism or equality. These examples suggest that some women experienced a shift in their feminist ideologies in sobriety, particularly regarding alcohol consumption.

The persistence and frequency with which these cultural references were recalled across the data confirms Emma’s and Monica’s assertions that these representations became a “shared” experience of women’s drinking culture amongst their generation: “we all thought we could” (Emma, interview extract). In turn, these iconic depictions of women’s drinking have served as a shared reference point over which women in sobriety can locate a bonding commonality in their experience. Quite understandably, it may also be the case that women use these cultural reference points to challenge ideas of individual responsibility for stigmatized drinking due to the popular and feminized nature of these influences. To say that they were “suckered in” (Lisa, interview

extract) to these ideas of glamour, sophistication, and liberation works to offset gendered and classed stigmas associated with women's so-called "problematic" drinking.

Conclusion and Limitations

This essay has built on existing research regarding the feminized marketing of alcohol and women's gendered drinking practices to show how UK-based women in sobriety critically engage with these Western cultural norms. It has also contributed to the limited emerging research on online sobriety communities and women's experiences of participation within them.

Women who lead or utilize online sobriety communities have considerable awareness of feminized marketing of alcohol and demonstrate ideological opposition to it. They affirmatively and articulately position alcohol marketing as a predatory force which takes advantage of women's exhaustion as mothers and perpetuates the double standards associated with women's drinking. Through the public identification and critique of such marketing content, women seek to raise awareness about its role in harming or patronizing women; it serves as a relatable and visual representation of the broader structural factors that contribute to women's alcohol consumption. It is evident that the feminization of alcohol and drinking practices was deemed a shared experience by women and provided common ground around which they raised consciousness within their communities and on public social media platforms.

It is important to note that the most overt and challenging feminist critiques were shared by research participants within the confidential setting of an interview—not on social media or community platforms—which conveys the limitations of online sobriety communities as sites of feminist activism. Nevertheless, it is evident from these interviews, which offered the space for vulnerable conversation, that participants experienced an awakening regarding the marketing and cultural representations of alcohol once they entered sobriety, which facilitated a shift from embodiment to rejection of dominant cultural representations of women's drinking (as girly, empowering, feminist, or a coping mechanism), which suggests that women may experience a change in feminist ideologies in sobriety. In turn, their feminism may serve to inform or reinforce their decision to remain sober and frame it as a form of lifestyle activism.

This essay is limited in its representation of the diversity of women's recovery cultures and feminisms; those within online sobriety communities, and thus reflected in the data, are predominantly Western, white, and middle-class. While the data sample was diverse across age groups and geographical location across the UK, it was limited to the UK and thus may not be reflective of women's experiences internationally. Future research should continue to investigate the diversity of ideological and experiential motivations for women's contemporary alcohol refusal and consider the extent to which online sobriety communities serve as potential sites of exclusive/inclusive feminist resistance.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the 25 research participants who shared their experiences as part of this study.

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