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**A rapid narrative review of literature on gendered alcohol marketing and its effects: exploring the targeting and representation of women**

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## Executive summary

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

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

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

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

research explores its impact on women's lived experiences. There is also evidence that brand and NTE marketing can breach self-regulatory codes, particularly those surrounding sex, sexual success and attractiveness, thus raising questions surrounding the effectiveness of these regulatory systems.

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

## 1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

and females (see Stautz et al., 2016) and research has explored gender as a variable in the exposure to, and interpretation of, alcohol-related advertising messages (see for example, Andsager et al., 2002; Ringel et al., 2006).

A number of research questions were addressed:

1. How are women targeted by alcohol marketing and what is the effect on drinking practices?
2. How are women represented in alcohol marketing, what are the effects on drinking practices and what are the implications for gender equity?
3. How effective are self-regulatory codes that aim to prohibit the use of gendered connotations in alcohol marketing?

## 2. Methodology

A rapid review of literature was conducted with the aim of exploring the nature and impact of gendered alcohol marketing, focussing specifically on the ways in which women are both targeted and represented and the implications for women's drinking and gender equity. Literature on the effectiveness of marketing regulations aimed at regulating gender-related content (e.g. sexual success) was also considered.

Alcohol marketing involves a number of various integrated activities and strategies used to promote and sell alcohol products and venues through positive message and associations (Austins et al., 2006). This includes advertising on traditional media platforms such as television, as well as the sponsorship of events such as sports and music, and promotional activities on social media. Marketing aims to communicate an alcohol brand's attributes and 'personality' in a way that resonates with the targeted consumer group, through promoting both the tangible (e.g. taste, affordability, price) and intangible emotional benefits of the branded product (e.g. emotions, images and values, including those related to gender) (Purves et al., 2014;2018; Stead et al., 2007; 2011). The review aimed to include publications that commented on alcohol marketing on multiple platforms (i.e. television, magazines, newspapers, radio, billboards, social media, sponsorship), point of sales (on-trade and off-trade) (i.e. off licences, supermarkets, NTE), and marketing strategies used by different types of alcohol products and brands.

### 2.1 Search strategy

The strategy for searching the literature is outlined below. The review team was familiar with the literature related to gender and alcohol, the gendered nature of alcohol marketing, the effects of alcohol marketing and its self-regulation. This knowledge was used as a starting point.

- 1) Retrieval of relevant literature held within the research team's existing literature databases.
- 2) Retrieval of additional literature from the reference lists of held literature.

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

## 2.2 Search terms

An overview of the search terms used is outlined in Box 1. These were adapted to apply to the structure of each individual database. For some databases, the search terms required simplification and for others, more than one search was required. Although inclusion in the review was limited to English language studies only, language and date filters were not applied.

### *Box 1: Search terms*

Wom?n OR girl\* OR female\* OR feminin\* OR M?n OR boy\* OR male\* OR masculin\* OR gender\* OR sexual\*

AND

marketing OR advertis\* OR brand\* OR "social media" OR digital OR internet OR facebook OR twitter OR sponsor\* OR promot\* OR regulat\*

AND

alcohol\* OR drink\* OR "night-time economy" OR "night-time environment" OR night life OR nightlife OR booze OR wine OR beer OR spirit\* OR cocktail\*

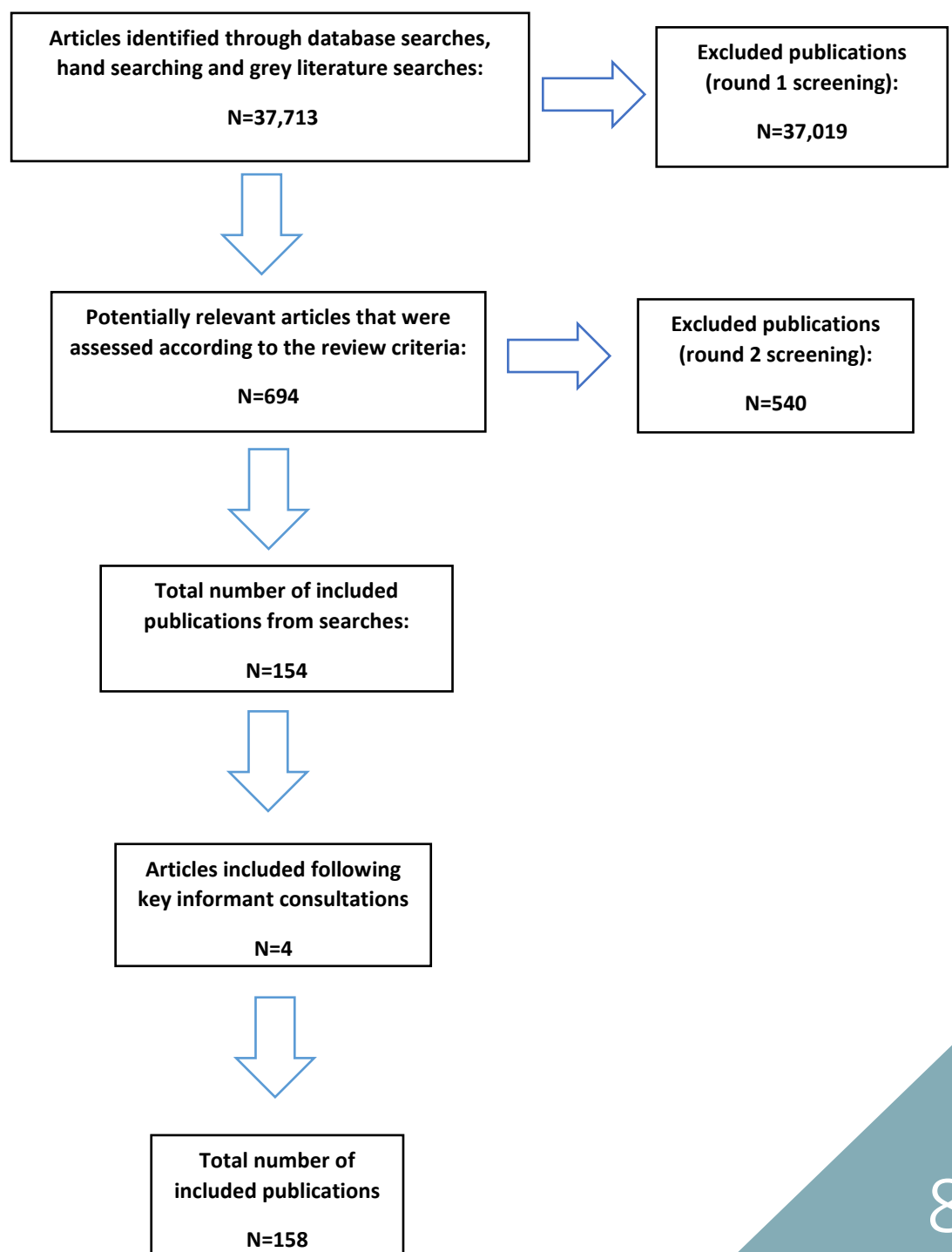
## 2.3. Data extraction, management, and analysis

The combined electronic and hand searches retrieved a total of 37,713 articles. Titles and/or abstracts were screened by two reviewers according to the review scope, and irrelevant articles excluded. Following this first round of screening, full texts were retrieved for 694 publications and downloaded into EndNote. The full texts were subject to a second round of screening by two researchers and irrelevant articles excluded, leaving a total of 154 articles. Key informants suggested an additional 17 publications, of which 4 met the inclusion criteria.



A total of 158 publications were included. In cases where there was uncertainty around the inclusion of literature, both researchers discussed the publication's relevance and a mutual decision was made. There were no cases in which a third researcher had to be consulted. Text relevant to the review scope (i.e. gender related) was extracted and organised (e.g. methods, overview, and country) in Microsoft Excel by the first researcher (AMA) and checked by the second (EB). The extracted content was themed (e.g. sexualisation, empowerment) and a narrative synthesis of the results undertaken. The narrative themes were reviewed by HS. Extracted data is presented thematically under each research question. Gaps in research were identified, and recommendations for future research, and UK policy and practice developed.

Figure 1: Flow of evidence



## 2.4. Limitations

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

## 2.5. Summary of publications included in the review

A total of 158 publications were included, 100 of which presented primary (e.g. interviews, focus groups, survey, participant observation) or secondary (e.g. content/marketing analysis, literature reviews) research from a total of 88 individual research studies (primary n=29, secondary n=53, both primary and secondary n=6). Commentaries (e.g. discussion of the 'feminisation' of alcoholic drinks and the NTE, and the 'sexualisation' of the NTE) were extracted from an additional 58 publications and were published in a range of countries in North and South America, Europe, Asia, Australasia, and Africa, although the majority were from the UK (see Table 1). As shown in Table 2, research studies were conducted in a number of countries, but predominantly in the UK, USA, and Australia. Thus, overall, the literature is Western centric. The majority of research used content analysis methods, and although qualitative research (e.g. interviews, participant observation, focus groups) has been conducted with young women and men, this did not tend to focus on gendered marketing *per se*. A small number of quantitative studies (e.g. surveys) have explored perceptions of sexualised and sexist marketing content, for example, its impact on purchase intentions, but no recent research in this area exists. There is a lack of research that specifically explores the effects of marketing targeted at women on drinking practices, and a lack exploring effects of depictions representing women on gender equity and women's lived experiences.

**Table 1: Country of publication of commentary pieces**

| Country                              | Number of commentaries |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|
| United Kingdom                       | 21                     |
| United States of America             | 16                     |
| New Zealand                          | 7                      |
| Australia                            | 3                      |
| Europe (discussed generally)         | 1                      |
| Canada                               | 1                      |
| Middle income countries (e.g. India) | 1                      |
| Africa                               | 1                      |
| Japan                                | 1                      |

**Table 2: Countries studied in research papers**

| <b>Country</b>           | <b>Number of research studies<sup>1</sup></b> |
|--------------------------|---|
| United Kingdom           | 30  |
| United States of America | 19  |
| Australia                | 9   |
| Germany                  | 5   |
| Italy                    | 5   |
| New Zealand              | 3   |
| Sweden                   | 4   |
| The Netherlands          | 4   |
| Finland                  | 4   |
| France                   | 3   |
| Nigeria                  | 3   |
| Brazil                   | 3   |
| Bulgaria                 | 2   |
| Canada                   | 2   |
| Denmark                  | 2   |
| Ghana                    | 2   |
| India                    | 2   |
| Poland                   | 2   |
| Spain                    | 2   |
| Uganda                   | 2   |
| Gambia                   | 2   |
| Argentina                | 1   |
| Austria                  | 1   |
| Belgium                  | 1   |
| Czech Republic           | 1   |
| Estonia                  | 1   |
| Hungary                  | 1   |
| Ireland                  | 1   |
| Kenya                    | 1   |
| Latvia                   | 1   |
| Lithuania                | 1   |
| Malawi                   | 1   |
| Mexico                   | 1   |
| Namibia                  | 1   |
| Norway                   | 1   |
| Portugal                 | 1   |
| Romania                  | 1   |
| Singapore                | 1   |

<sup>1</sup> Some studies were comparative and included more than one country. As such the total number of countries presented in the table exceeds the total number of research studies.

|                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Slovakia                             | 1 |
| Slovenia                             | 1 |
| South Africa                         | 1 |
| South Korea                          | 1 |
| Ukraine                              | 1 |
| Eastern Europe (discussed generally) | 1 |

### 3. Narrative synthesis

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

The literature suggests that since the 1990s there has been a clear feminisation of alcohol products, drinking spaces (e.g. development of bars and clubs in addition to the traditional pub, ‘Ladies’ nights’) and drinking culture, and a targeting of women through a number of strategies. These changes were discussed as both a reflection and response to the changing social positions of women (i.e. professionalization, economic prosperity, delays in marriage and maternal age, increased independence) and changes to the alcohol industry (i.e. liberalisation of licencing hours, economic deregulation) (e.g. Day, 2003; Day et al., 2007; Emslie et al., 2012; 2015; Griffin et al., 2013; Lennox, 2018; Lindsay, 2005; Mackiewicz, 2012; Measham and Moore, 2009; Nicholls, 2012; 2015; 2016; Plant, 2008; Szmigin et al., 2008; 2011). Such feminisation has contributed to the way in which women now play an active part in the culture of “extreme drinking” and drinking to intoxication in countries such as the UK (e.g. Bailey and Griffin., 2017; Chatterton et al., 2001; Day, 2003; Griffin et al., 2013). Concern also surrounds the targeting of women in low and middle income countries, given the relative lack of any marketing regulations (including self-regulation) (e.g. De Bruijneu, 2011; Dumbili, 2018; Esser and Jerhidan, 2015; Murdeshwar et al., 2019; Robaina et al., 2012). However, there is a relative lack of research in these countries to date.

Strategies used to target women include the development of new products such as fruit beers, ready to drink beverages (RTDs), low calorie/carbohydrate drinks, and low alcohol products (e.g. De Bruijin et al., 2012; 2018; EUCAM, 2008; McCreanor et al., 2005; 2008; Measham and Østergaard, 2009; Petticrew et al., 2017; Purves et al., 2014; 2018). The use of specific media such as women’s magazines is also an established tactic used to target women in both Western and non-Western countries, with various studies focusing on such platforms when exploring the extent and nature of alcohol marketing women are exposed to (e.g. Adams et al., 2011; Beccaria et al., 2018; De Bruijin, 2011; Duerksen et al., 2005; Krupka and Vener, 1992; Lyons et al., 2006; McEwan et al., 2013; Minkler et al., 1987; Törrönen, 2011; 2014; Törrönen and Simonen, 2015; Törrönen and Rolando, 2017).

A range of lifestyle messages that appeal to gender stereotypes, such as a focus on slimness/weight, pink packaging, all female friendships, motherhood and sexiness are also commonly used to target the female market, as are offers of free stereotypical feminine

accessories (e.g. make up, jewellery) (e.g. Atkinson et al., in preparation; Emslie, 2015; Beccaria et al., 2018; De Bruijin, 2011; De Bruijin et al., 2012; 2018; Griffin et al., 2018; Lyons et al., 2006; McEwan et al., 2013; Törrönen and Simonen, 2015; Törrönen and Rolando, 2017). More recently such stereotypical messages have been accompanied by messages of empowerment, including sexual assertiveness, the promotion of equal gender representation (i.e. Smirnoff's Equalizer campaign), and the celebration of women (i.e. associations with International Women's Day) (e.g. Atkinson et al., in preparation; Kauppila, et al., 2019; Mackiewicz, 2012; Törrönen, 2011).

Little research has specifically explored how female targeted marketing affects women's drinking practices, and research is needed in this area. Research exploring young women's drinking more generally suggests that they have clear perceptions on what drinks are marketed as 'feminine', and choose their drinks accordingly (e.g. Atkinson et al., 2014; 2016; Day, 2003; Nicholls, 2016; Purves et al., 2014; 2018). Whilst some women are attracted to alcoholic products that are stereotypically feminine, research suggests that others resist and reject the gendered connotations aligned with such products as a form of gender resistance (Cullen, 2011). There was also a small amount of evidence (Purves et al., 2014; 2018) that smaller and slimmer cans promoted more rapid consumption among young women in the UK, and that the perception of certain products as 'feminine' by young women in Nigeria led to the consumption of drinks with higher ABV, and in turn, more intoxication (Dumbili, 2015; 2016). The strategies observed within the literature discussing female targeted marketing are outlined in more detail below.

### 3.1.2 Product development

New products have been developed to target women such as premixed spirits (i.e. 'alcopops', RTDs) (de Visser and McDonnell, 2012; Hutton et al., 2013; Mackiewicz, 2012; McCreanor et al., 2005; McEwan et al., 2013; Measham and Moore, 2009; Measham and Østergaard, 2009; Petticrew et al., 2017; Rúðólfssdóttir and Morgan, 2009) and specialty beers, ciders and spirits with sweet and fruity flavours (De Bruijin et al., 2012; 2018; EUCAM, 2008; McCreanor et al., 2008; Petticrew, 2017). Product packaging has also become increasingly gendered, with products such as slim beer cans (De Bruijin et al., 2012) and colourful drinks and packaging emerging to appeal to the female market (Plant, 2008; Lyons et al., 2006; Purves et al., 2014; 2018). For example, De Bruijin et al., (2018) discussed how the 'elegant' and 'trendy' Heineken Slim can was developed in The Netherlands, and suggested that products such as this have been successful in increasing the consumption of beer among women.

The recent development of alcohol free beer and alcohol with lower alcohol volumes has also been discussed as a tactic to target a range of groups, including women (De Bruijin et al., 2018). Whilst the development of such products is noted as positive by providing alcohol free alternatives, it has been argued that they allow brands to market their original alcoholic products to groups they are prohibited from reaching, such as younger audiences and pregnant women (De Bruijin et al., 2018). Moreover, 'light', 'low calorie' and 'low carbohydrate' drinks (EUCAM, 2008; Griffin et al., 2018; Lyons et al., 2006; Mackiewicz, 2012; Novak, 2004; Plant, 2008) have also been developed and the health claims (e.g. weight control) associated with such products described as a deliberate attempt at targeting women (Siegel, 2016; Smith

et al., 2014). For example, in the UK, the low calorie ‘*Skinny Original*’ Lambrini was marketed as a product ideal “*for those shaping up for summer*”. These gendered connotations of weight and appearance draw on women’s insecurities and anxieties over body image to present low calorie/carbohydrate products as a solution to concerns over the calorific content of standard brands, and use the ideal of female slimness to influence brand choice (Mackiewicz, 2012).

### 3.1.3 Lifestyle messages and interactive strategies

It is not only new products that have been created to appeal to the female market, but the variety of lifestyle associations that surround them. For instance, new female-friendly beer brands alone are not enough to attract women, but the use of lifestyle messages such as linking beer drinking to different social occasions, is needed to persuade women to purchase such products (De Bruijin, 2018). An analysis of alcohol advertising in magazines published in the USA (Jung and Hovland, 2016) found that although the content of marketing messages (i.e. ‘*what to say*’) was the same for men and women, with a primary focus on emotion, they differed in terms of presentation (i.e. ‘*how to say it*’). For example, the importance of wine in social settings was identified in marketing for both men and women. However, consumption in social and business settings was promoted to men in a way that suggested they could demonstrate their level of knowledge of alcohol, whilst for women, the focus was on the perceived pro-social functions of alcohol consumption itself.

A number of specific gendered lifestyle messages and associations have been discussed as being used to persuade women to purchase and consume specific brands. The sponsorship of culturally oriented events (e.g. Valentine’s Day) popular among women is one commonly used tactic (Atkinson et al., 2011; De Bruijin, 2011; McEwan et al., 2013), as are collaborations with non-alcoholic brands with high feminine (and youth) appeal (e.g. Hello Kitty, makeup, jewellery), which are promoted as free gifts or as competition prizes (Atkinson et al., in preparation; De Bruijin et al., 2012; 2018). Themes of sophistication (EUCAM, 2008; Hall and Kappel, 2018; Lyons et al., 2006; Mackiewicz, 2012; McEwan et al., 2013; Warsh, 1998), fun (McCreanor et al., 2008; McEwan et al., 2013), all female friendship, partying (Brooks et al., 2010; Griffin et al., 2018; McEwan, et al., 2013; Szmigin et al., 2008; 2011; Törrönen, 2011; 2014; Törrönen and Rolando, 2017) and ‘girls nights out’, have also been discussed as strategies used to appeal to women. Themes of all female drinking have also drawn on the notion and culture of ‘pre-drinking’ (i.e. see Atkinson and Sumnall, 2017 for a gendered account of this practice in a UK context), to encourage women to drink specific brands before attending public drinking spaces (Atkinson et al., in preparation; Brooks et al., 2010). For example, the popular female targeted Perry brand Lambrini defines itself as a ‘*firm favourite amongst friends before a night out*’ (Brooks et al., 2010). Content analysis from the USA and the UK have also found that women are targeted through connotations of wealth, glamour, sensuality (Atkinson et al., 2011. DEPIS, 2004; Lyons et al., 2006; Warsh, 1998), and health consciousness (Novak, 2004).

The use of lifestyle messages extends to the marketing of brands on social media, with brands popular with women (e.g. Malibu, Lambrini, Smirnoff, Echo Falls) having an active

social media presence that is highly gendered in nature. Alongside the use of lifestyle messages, such platforms are used to engage and involve women in the creation of brand marketing content (e.g. through interactive competitions, requests to upload photographs consuming brands) and the sharing of content among their online peers (e.g. Atkinson et al., 2014; 2016; Carah, 2014; Griffin et al., 2018; Purves et al., 2014; 2018). For example, analysis of alcohol brand Facebook posts in Australia (Carah, 2014) and the UK (Atkinson et al., 2014; 2016) found that the platform was used to target both female and males through gender specific messages, and to encourage them to interact with brand content as part of their gender identity making and cultural practices. Carah (2014) found that brands such as Baileys, Midori and Rekorderlig targeted Australian women through the use of questions related to male attractiveness, engagement in stereotypical topics of conversation (e.g. shopping, fashion, sex), the concept of a 'girls' night out, and the consumption of brands as a 'reward' after activities such as shopping. Research in the UK (Atkinson et al., 2014; Atkinson and Sumnall, 2016) also found that the culture of nightlife photography in the NTE was more meaningful to young women and that photographs taken by venue staff formed an important part of a highly managed expression of femininity on social media. Young women's desire to monitor whether photographs taken by nightlife venues had been uploaded to social media led to further interaction with venue's online presence and facilitated further exposure and interaction with additional marketing content, including drinks promotions.

An unpublished UK analysis (Atkinson et al., in preparation) of marketing messages and strategies used by alcohol brands to target women on Facebook also found a variety of gendered lifestyle messages and interactive strategies being used. This included a focus on pre-drinking, female friendship and bonding; relaxation and 'me time'; motherhood, gendered events and activities such as Mother's Day and shopping; a focus on appearance, fashion and beauty, and the feminisation of marketing imagery (e.g. the use of pink, glitter and floral imagery). The sponsorship of events popular with women (e.g. fashion events) and collaborations with feminine consumer items such as makeup and beauty products were also used, as well as collaborations with female celebrities and 'influencers' (e.g. lifestyle and fashion Vloggers). Moreover, a range of interactive techniques such as competitions (e.g. to win feminine accessories, tickets to fashion events), questions and requests for users to upload and share their own photos, encouraged women to share marketing among their online peers, and female friendship groups specifically. Combined, these studies highlight how gendered lifestyle messages are used alongside interactive techniques to encourage women to interact with and share brand content, thus reaching a wider audience of potential female customers with gendered messaging that is endorsed by the peer group.

### **3.1.4 Empowerment**

As discussed, the targeting of women by alcohol marketing reflects changes in the social positioning of women that has led to opportunities to pursue activities traditionally defined as masculine. This includes alcohol use, and public drinking in particular (Day, 2003; Törrönen, 2011; 2014; Warsh, 1998). Willott and Lyons (2012) discuss how the repositioning of gender identities has both constrained and resourced alcohol marketing, which has had to adapt to societal changes to sell more products and maintain (and increase) sales, including those by females. Thus, advances in gender equality, gender roles and the changing nature of gender

norms around drinking have meant that alcohol products, their marketing, and drinking spaces have needed to appear more 'female-friendly'. This explains why alcohol marketing links alcohol with empowerment and equality, and implies that gender equality can be achieved through participating in traditionally male activities such as drinking (Griffin et al., 2013; Månsson, 2012; SHAAP and IAS, 2017; Young et al., 2005). For example, a recent (Kauppila, et al., 2019) audit of social media marketing activities in Sweden and Finland found that posts for beer brands presented the production and drinking of beer as an emancipatory act, and as a way of breaking down traditional gender roles. Of note, is recent policy changes by the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA), a consumer organisation in the UK that hosts regular beer festivals across the country. A new code of conduct has banned the use of demeaning and sexist imagery of women at its festivals in an attempt to address outdated discriminatory attitudes, and to increase beer sales among women (Smithers, 2019).

A number of authors (Bailey, 2012; Bailey et al., 2015; Bailey and Griffin, 2017; Day, 2003; Hui tan, 2013; Griffin et al., 2013; Mackiewicz, 2012; Månsson, 2012) have highlighted the ways in which more contemporary alcohol marketing aimed at women draws on post-feminist<sup>2</sup> discourses of (hetero) sexual assertiveness, empowerment, independence, choice and autonomy (e.g. the notion of a bold, 'sassy' and 'up for it' femininity). A shift from a focus on women pleasing others (e.g. men), to pleasing themselves (i.e. partying) and self-indulgence, and the use of masculine symbols, such as women wearing suits, drinking beer and drinking (alone) in public, have also been used to symbolise equality (Kilbourne, 1999; Månsson, 2012). In the UK, the historic '*Lambrini Girls just want to have fun*' campaign has been widely discussed as a prime example of marketing that uses sexual stereotypes and messages of empowerment and sexual assertiveness (e.g. Cullen, 2011; Emslie et al., 2012; 2015; Galloway et al., 2007; Griffin et al., 2018; Hastings et al., 2010; Mackiewicz, 2012; Szmigin et al., 2008; 2011), and there is some evidence that such messages are appealing to young women. For example, qualitative research (Galloway et al., 2007) with young people who drink on the streets in Scotland, UK, found high recognition of the 'Lambrini Girls' advertising campaign, with female participants frequently (and unprompted) quoting this phrase, and reproducing the campaign's message that the brand was "fun" to drink. The authors argue that the campaign influenced the purchasing patterns of young women, with the construction of the brand as a highly gendered product influencing their brand choice.

Alcohol marketing also draws on the discourse of women as liberated, active and desiring sexual subjects to encourage them to drink as an expression of this empowerment (Kilbourne, 1999; Mackiewicz, 2012). Such shifting representations from objectification to self-sexualisation have been described as a form of 'commodity feminism', which attempts to appease women's hostility to marketing messages that represent them as passive objects for the male gaze (Mackiewicz, 2012; Watts et al., 2015). However, they co-exist alongside gender stereotypes, traditional notions of femininity and the sexualisation and objectification

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<sup>2</sup> Post-feminist refers to the way in which young women are positioned as gaining control and empowerment through the commodification of their appearance and the expression of active (and hyper) sexualities. In turn, feminism is viewed as an unnecessary ideology of the past, as empowerment is perceived as being achieved through choice and agency (see Gill 2007; and McRobbie 2009 for theoretical overviews).



of women to target the male market (Fedorenko, 2015; Kilbourne, 1999; Sirr, 2015; Törrönen, 2011; 2014). This framing of empowerment through sexual expression could be interpreted as a continuation of the objectification and commodification of women's sexualities, but in a way that is better accepted by women, and in turn, preventing alienating the female market.

Analysis of the depiction of women in alcohol adverts in Swedish (Månsson, 2012; Törrönen, 2011; 2014) and Finnish (Törrönen, 2011) magazines from the 1960s to 2000s exemplifies this co-existence and a shift to self-sexualisation and empowerment. The research found that despite notions of equality being used to target women as active and autonomous consumers of alcohol from the 1990s, traditional gender norms have not disintegrated or been replaced completely by equal gender norms. For example, whilst women drinkers were presented as autonomous, self-sexualising and pleasure seeking, they were still presented as stereotypically feminine (i.e. slender, heterosexual). An unpublished analysis (Atkinson et al., in preparation) of marketing messages and strategies used by alcohol brands to target women on Facebook in the UK, found that gender stereotypes were the most common tactic used to target women (e.g. pink, shopping, beauty, fashion and appearance), yet brand marketing had begun to draw on messages of gender and sexual equality. This included marketing aimed at increasing equal gender representation in the workplace (i.e. Smirnoff's Equalizer campaign) and marketing that celebrates women and promotes gender equity (i.e. marketing surrounding International Women's Day).

Despite such theoretical discussions and a small number of primary research, few studies have systematically analysed examples of marketing that use such discourse and there is an over reliance on isolated and historic campaigns (i.e. *Lambrini*) when presenting such arguments. Importantly, there is a gap in research into women's views and interpretations of brand content that uses gender stereotypes and messages of empowerment and equality, how they influence purchasing and how they correspond with women's experiences of drinking and night life environments more generally. Research conducted in the UK (Atkinson et al., 2011b; Day, 2003; Watts et al., 2015) suggests that females are aware of such underlying messages. For example, Day (2003) found that women drew on examples of drinks they felt marketers presented as allowing women to 'look sexy' and 'beautiful'. A study of 'professional women's' drinking in the UK (Watts et al., 2015) also found that such discourse was reproduced in women's talk, with particular drinks being described as "sexy" and drinking perceived to have become 'glamorised' among young women as a result. It is important that the significance and impact of such messages are considered within the historical and cultural context in which they are targeted. For example, a content analysis of alcohol marketing in Bulgaria (Ibroscheva, 2018) concluded that alcohol advertising has attempted to break away from the ideology of an oppressive Communist past, under which women were presented as lacking sexuality. The authors suggest that a new form of active and exaggerated sexuality has since been used to appeal to young women by offering a reference point in the creation of post-Communist feminine identities. Further research must take account of such socio-political contextual factors, and provide an analysis of the extent, nature and impact of marketing messages that targets women at the micro level, whilst considering the global nature of alcohol marketing.

### 3.1.6. Targeting women in developing and middle income countries

Whilst the majority of articles discussed the targeting of women in western countries, a number (De Bruijn, 2011; Dumbili, 2018; Esser and Jernigan, 2015; Murdeshwar et al. 2019; Robaina et al., 2012) commented on the way in which the alcohol industry has begun to target the female market in lower and middle income countries (LMIC), where marketing is less regulated, and in contexts in which gender roles are changing (SHAPP and IAS, 2017). For example, quoting industry interviews with the media, Esser and Jernigan (2015) describe how the alcohol producer Diageo is increasingly targeting young women in India for growth opportunities, through attempts to make brands more 'bilingual' and less 'male centric'. The authors also suggest that corporate social responsibility initiatives such as Diageo's programme which aims to 'empower' women through education and work skills, may be attempts to empower women through economic independence, and in turn, create new alcohol consumers.

A number of marketing monitoring exercises conducted for EUCAM have explored alcohol marketing in LMIC, and have observed its gendered nature. For example, analysis of alcohol marketing activities in African countries such as Ghana, the Gambia, Nigeria, Uganda (De Bruijn, 2011; Robaina et al., 2012), Kenya, Malawi and Namibia (Robaina et al., 2012) found that females were targeted through the sponsorship of female-orientated cultural events (e.g. Miss Africa competition), marketing in high end female magazines; through messages of western lifestyles and wealth; and associations between alcohol, sexual attractiveness and sexual success (see section 3.1.5). Whilst such monitoring is useful in providing examples of the ways in which women are targeted, there is a lack of research into how these messages are interpreted by women and how they feature within, and influence, their drinking practices.

In an ethnographic study of drinking among a group of young middle class urban women in India, Murdeshwar et al. (2019) discussed the gendered nature of drinking culture against a backdrop of international-brand alcohol marketing. The research found that a range of on- and offline corporate marketing practices influenced women's perceptions of alcohol use as 'cool', and as an act of freedom, individualism and equality. The authors describe how the young, middle class, urban population, including women, has been recognised by Diageo as a way to expand its market in the country, through a range of messages including linking alcohol to women's empowerment and marketing that explicitly associates European alcohol brands with 'Indian-ness'. Despite such messages of equality, the research found that women's drinking experiences were influenced by the gendered inequalities and national identities at play within the country's wider social context. For example, women who drank were at risk of sexual harassment when out drinking in the NTE, and were morally judged as being 'against Indian culture' through participating in activities seen as western such as drinking. Such research highlights that whilst marketing may target women through western values, they are interpreted, and as such accepted or rejected, in local cultural contexts. It is thus important that research exploring the effects of female targeted marketing takes an intersectional approach to explore the interplay of gender, class and nationality.

Of concern is how despite being banned in other markets, marketing that relies on myths and false health claims is present in LMIC countries. An analysis (Dumbili, 2018) of an annual beer symposium in Nigeria, sponsored by Heineken-Nigerian Breweries, found evidence of beer being deliberately associated with health and nutrition, with experts such as professors, medical doctors, and nutritionists, as well as celebrities, recruited to promote such messages, in ways that were gendered. For example, female speakers encouraged women to consume beer as a way of enhancing vitality and improving skin and general physical beauty. None of the speakers discussed the negative consequences of alcohol use and the author concluded that such symposiums are strategically organised to encourage beer initiation and/or higher consumption through the use of biased (and gendered) information. Other qualitative research (Dumbili and Henderson, 2017) conducted with female and male undergraduate students in Nigeria, suggests that such health messages may influence women's drinking practices. Dumbili and Henderson (2017) discussed how the 'health benefits' of Guinness are marketed in the country, and that the product is in turn believed to be helpful during menstruation and thus drunk by women to treat menstrual pain. More research is needed that explores the extent, nature and effects of marketing in LMIC, including marketing that relies on myths, false health claims and gendered connotations, to inform regulatory approaches.

### 3.1.7 Influence on drinking practices

Little research has specifically explored how female targeted marketing effects women's drinking practices, and research is needed in this area. Research exploring young women's drinking more generally suggests that they have clear perceptions on what drinks are marketed as 'feminine', and choose their drinks accordingly (e.g. Atkinson et al., 2014; 2016; Day, 2003; Nicholls, 2016; Purves et al., 2014; 2018). These practices reflect and reinforce alcohol use as important components of gender identity-making (e.g. Atkinson et al., 2011; 2016; Day, 2003; Kitsa and Mundra 2018; McCreanor et al., 2005; 2008; Niland et al., 2016; Purves et al., 2014; 2018), and serve to highlight differences in male and female drinking practices in a way that allows men and women to perform and reproduce masculinity and femininity through brand choice (Atkinson et al., 2011; 2016; Day, 2003). For example, a study exploring alcohol marketing on social networking sites and young people's (aged 16-21 years) perspectives and experiences in the UK (Atkinson et al., 2014; 2016) found that young women were aware of the gendered lifestyle associations within marketing, and that such connotations informed their decision making with regards what brands they chose to consume. They paid attention to the aesthetics of drinks and viewed brands and beverages (i.e. cocktails) that were viewed as 'nice' and 'pretty' as feminine, and as such chose to consume such products to express their femininity. Other qualitative research in the UK has reported similar results (Cullen 2011; Day, 2003; de Visser and McDonnell, 2012; Nicholls, 2015; 2016) and this gendering of alcoholic drinks and brands has also transcended to young people's display of drinks and drinking on social media. For example, research conducted in the UK (Atkinson et al., 2016; Purves et al., 2014; 2018) found that being seen drinking the 'right' alcoholic beverage for ones gender was important in maintaining social status within the peer group, and this transcended to young people's representation of self on social media, in which they

uploaded photographs of certain drinks and brands that were regarded as gender appropriate. Such examples highlight how the use of social media in alcohol marketing creates the opportunity for brands to further align themselves with gender and young people's (gender) identity-making practices in an attempt to influence consumption.

These gendered associations develop at an early age, with young people having clear perceptions on what drinks and brands are perceived as acceptable for men and women to consume, and with connotations of masculinity and femininity influencing their consumption. For example, in an analysis of alcohol brand marketing on social networking sites (i.e. Facebook) and focus groups with young people aged 14-17 in Scotland, UK (Purves et al., 2014; 2018), 'brightly-coloured', 'bright' and 'eye-catching' packaging appealed more to females, with such drinks being labelled as 'girly', "pretty" and "feminine". Females described such beverages as '*standing out*', which in turn, provided them with the opportunity to be noticed and invite attention (i.e. people asking where they purchased them) through the choice of drink. Whilst females viewed drinks as fashion accessories and were more likely to '*try something new*' and experiment with their choice of drink, generally male tastes and preferences were more conservative. Even the size and shape of the container appeared to influence female alcohol consumption, with smaller and slimmer cans (see section 3.1.2) felt to be more feminine, yet believed to promote more rapid consumption. This suggests that the design of products as 'slim' as a way of targeting women may influence women's drinking patterns, and may lead to more harmful drinking.

Whilst most research in this area has been conducted in westernised countries, research (Dumbili, 2015; 2016) conducted in Nigeria has reached similar conclusions. Dumbili (2015; 2016) found that participants (aged 19-24 years) made clear distinctions between what were regarded as alcoholic drinks for male (i.e. beer, bitter drinks) and female (i.e. sweet drinks, spirits such as gin, wine, RTDs such as Smirnoff Ice), and these were chosen as an expression of gender within the NTE. Whilst women discussed avoiding masculine drinks like beer in favour of sweet drinks such as RTDs, they were aware that these products often have higher ABV<sup>3</sup>. A desire to conform to gendered norms around the acceptability of beverage choice thus impacted on their levels of drunkenness. Moreover, normative ideals of femininity were at play in men's views on what drinks were acceptable for women to consume, with men believing that women should not drink beer but rather spirits to help them maintain a desirable slim feminine figure. Research from other countries also suggests that an emphasis on calories influences and reflects women's decision making around alcohol use and beverage choice, and that low calorie products are perceived as 'feminine'. For example, qualitative research conducted in the UK (Atkinson et al., 2011; 2014) found that young women's choice of alcoholic drink and the amount drunk was influenced by decisions around calorie intake and weight management. Other qualitative UK research (Day, 2003) found that some women regarded asking for a 'slim line tonic' in bars and venues as a 'girly' practice, and as a way for them to present themselves as feminine in nightlife spaces. Thus, marketing underpinned by messages of weight control appear to influence women's drinking practices.

In contrast, other research suggests that some women may reject products and brands marketed as 'feminine' (e.g. Cullen, 2011; Day, 2003; McCreanor et al., 2005). For example, a qualitative study with young women (aged 14-19) in the UK (Cullen, 2011) found that drinks

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<sup>3</sup> Alcohol by Volume, the measure used to assess the alcohol content of beverages. The higher the ABV, the higher volume of alcohol.

marketed and defined as 'feminine' were rejected by some participants, and those framed and perceived as 'masculine' favoured as a form of gendered resistance. Female targeted brands such as *Lambrini* were viewed negatively (i.e. derogatively renamed as '*Tramp's piss*'), and were associated with 'cheapness' both in relation to their low cost and the perception of them as being consumed by women from lower socio-economic groups. This highlights how connotations of social class influence young women's choice of alcoholic beverage within their gendered and classed identity-making, leading to the rejection or acceptance of certain brands. Research (McCreanor et al., 2005) conducted in New Zealand also found a gender differentiation in young people's perception and consumption of drinks such as RTDs. Males felt that the sweetness of such products was a way of masking the taste of alcohol, and as such associated them with '*learner or female drinkers*' (McCreanor et al., 2005; 942). Young men rejected such products based on these connotations of femininity and immaturity, and some young women rejected them as 'feminine alternatives' in favour of beer, as a way of presenting themselves as more mature. This body of work suggests that women were not influenced by alcohol marketing in a linear and passive manner, with the deliberate marketing of certain drinks and brands to women having the reverse of the intended effect on some.

Overall there is a lack of research exploring how female targeted marketing effects women's drinking practices. However, it has been argued, for example, that the sizeable proportion of the growth of the wine and RTD spirit market is a consequence of increased alcohol consumption among women (McEwan, 2013) and that such product development and consumption trends contradict the industry's position that advertising responds to trends in consumption, rather than leading them (Petticrew et al., 2017). Whilst the literature search did not identify any research that has mapped the development of female targeted products in line with trends in women's drinking, data from countries such as the UK and Denmark confirm that women consume beverages such as wine and RTDs to a greater extent than men (ESPAD, 2015; NHS Digital, 2019; Measham and Østergaard, 2009; ONS, 2018). Qualitative research does however suggest that drinks and brands influence women (and men's) drinking through the symbolic value (i.e. symbolic of femininity and masculinity) attached to them within the process of gendered identity-making. Drinks (and packaging) perceived as 'feminine' (e.g. slim cans) can also lead to more rapid consumption and the consumption of drinks with higher ABV, thus impacting on levels of intoxication. Research is needed to specifically explore how female targeted marketing effects women's drinking practices and how this differs according to class, age, race and sexuality.

**Summary box 1: the targeting of women with alcohol marketing**

- A wide variety of literature has discussed the various ways in which women are targeted by alcohol marketing and how this has coincided with, and contributed to, the feminisation of public drinking spaces and drinking culture more generally.
- New products have been developed that specifically target women such as fruity beers, RTDs and low calorie/carb products.
- A range of lifestyles messages that rely on gender stereotypes (e.g. slimness/weight, pink, all female friendships, sexiness) are used alongside messages of empowerment (e.g. sexual assertiveness, gender pay gap, International Women's day) to target the female market.
- A range of interactive techniques (e.g. competitions, photograph requests) are used to involve women in marketing content creation and to encourage them to interact with and share content.
- Concern surrounds the targeting of women in LMIC given the relative lack of any marketing regulations in such countries, and anecdotal evidence of marketing that would be unacceptable in higher-income countries. There is a relative lack of research in non-western countries.
- Little research explores the influence and effect of gender-specific messages and products on women's drinking. Qualitative research suggests that both women and men have clear perceptions of what drinks are perceived as 'masculine' and 'feminine' and what is 'acceptable' for men and women to drink. These messages are reflected in alcohol marketing, and reproduced in women's (and men's) choice of drink. However, gender normative beverages are at times rejected.
- Drinks and packaging perceived as 'feminine' (e.g. slim cans) can lead to more rapid consumption and the consumption of drinks with higher ABV, thus impacting on levels of intoxication.

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

Content analyses of the depiction of women in alcohol marketing have been conducted in a range of countries, and have found that the gender roles presented have changed over time. The literature suggests that historically, women have been represented to a lesser extent than men, and in a way that reflected traditional gender roles, such as being passive, submissive, domestic, and sexual objects. In response to the shifting social positions of women, alcohol marketing has evolved and now presents women as active participants in public drinking spaces, and as active sexual subjects. However, these new active gender roles co-exist alongside the sexualisation and objectification of women, particularly in the marketing of brands targeted at males (e.g. beer) (e.g. Castaneda, and Haines, 2009; Hall and Kappel, 2018; Kilbourne, 1999; Törrönen, 2011; 2014; Törrönen and Rolando, 2017; Sirr, 2015). The presentation of women as sexual objects has implications for normative expectations of gender roles, and how women are positioned and treated within society. For example, some authors have suggested that such content can lead to the acceptance and normalisation of (sexual) violence towards women, and that such depictions undermine anti-violence messages (e.g. Jones and Reid, 2010; Sirr, 2015; Towns et al., 2012). The use of humour, irony and 'banter' (e.g. Jones and Reid, 2010; Towns et al., 2012) and the framing of women as active self-sexualising subjects (e.g. Jones and Reid, 2010; Lass and Hart, 2004) have also provided ways for brands to deflect accusations of sexism. There is a lack of research exploring public perceptions of such marketing, and how it influences purchasing and drinking practices, as well as attitudes towards, and the treatment, of women. Research is required to explore the influence and effects of such content on both drinking and gender equity.

#### **3.2.1 The extent and nature of female gender roles in alcohol advertising**

A number of content analyses conducted in the 1980s (Finn and Strickland, 1982; Funkhouser, 1985; Marsteller and Karnchanapee, 1980; Postman et al., 1987), as well as more recent analysis of alcohol brand marketing on social media (Atkinson et al., 2016) and TV (Friedman et al., 2018; Hall and Kappel, 2018) have found that women tend to be depicted to a lesser extent than men in alcohol marketing, and are less likely to be protagonists. As might be expected, this differs by brand, and women are depicted less in adverts for male-targeted products such as beer. However, research (e.g. Beccarcia et al., 2018; Marsteller and Karnchanapee, 1980; Törrönen, 2011; 2014; Törrönen and Rolando, 2017; Walker et al., 2009; Warsh, 1998) suggests that there has been an increase in female representation over time, and changes in the way women's roles are presented.

Various analysis of alcohol-related advertisements in Finnish, Italian, and Swedish women's magazines between 1960s and 2000s (Beccaria et al., 2018; Månsson, 2012; Törrönen, 2011; 2014; 2015; Törrönen and Simonen, 2015; Törrönen and Rolando, 2017), have found that the gender roles ascribed to women have developed in both similar and

differing ways across countries. In all countries, women were traditionally presented as being responsible, set within the domestic sphere and as serving the needs of others (e.g. husbands, family) through a range of consumer roles (e.g. cleaners, interior decorators, caretakers/janitors). However, over time, and particularly in Sweden and Finland, new roles were introduced, in which women's own time and pleasures, independent of men and the family, were drawn on, alongside depictions of women's increased independence and economic agency through work and access to public space. By the late 1990s and early 2000s young women were depicted as 'partying', 'hyper-sexual' in their self-expression, as drinking for pleasure like men (e.g. 'the ladette' discourse) and as possessing male qualities such as boldness, confidence, and aggression. In Italy, the role of the 'partying consumer' differed however, in that this role was portrayed as one that involved communal celebrations in which various generations drank and socialised together, as opposed to young women drinking together as an expression of empowerment. Such research suggests that there has been both continuity and variability in the gender roles ascribed to women in alcohol-related advertising, and that this varies across time and space.

The gender norms presented in alcohol marketing have not disintegrated or been replaced by equal gender norms, but instead, have continued to be reproduced alongside messages of empowerment. For example, the use of women's bodies, sexualities and stereotypical feminine beauty has long formed part of the alcohol industry's marketing (ARUK and Alcohol Concern, 2018; Atkin and Gantz, 2009; Ducan and Aycock, 2009; Hastings 2009; 2010; Horne and Whannel, 2009; Hill, 1999; Jackson et al., 2009; Kilbourne, 1999; Jackson et al., 2009; Joseph, 2012; McEwan, 2013; McKay et al., 2009; McCreanor et al., 2008; Mean, 2009; Nowosenetz, 2007; Rowe and Gilmour, 2009; SHAPP and IAS, 2017; Sherman, 1985; Slate, 1991; Wenner and Jackson, 2009; Wenner, 2008). Recent examples discussed include alcohol advertising exploiting male sexual fantasies such as 'simulated lesbianism' (Noel, 2017a; Novak, et al., 2004), and the use of sexual innuendoes in attempt to gain a greater share of the heterosexual male market (Horne and Whannel, 2009; Wenner and Jackson, 2009).

The use of imagery that objectifies and sexualises women has been reported in analyses of marketing on a range of marketing platforms, including magazines (Rhoades and Jernigan, 2013; Smith et al., 2014), television (De Bruijneu et al., 2018; Hall and Kappel 2018; Messner and Montez de Oca, 2005), music videos (Lindsay and Lyons, 2018), brand websites (Caroll and Donovan, 2002; Gordon et al., 2011) and social media (Brodmerkel and Carah, 2013; Carah, 2014; Gee, 2010; Griffin et al., 2018; Kauppila, et al., 2019). Hall and Kappel (2018) examined the portrayal of men and women in alcohol TV commercials in the USA and found that although portrayals of women were higher than in the past, they were hyper-sexualised, set within narrow definitions of beauty (i.e. as 'skinny'), presented as objects for male pleasure and as undermining a man's freedom to enjoy erotic pleasures and bond with other men. Research analysing alcohol (including brand) content in music videos and lyrics (which are unregulated) (Lindsay and Lyons, 2018) also reported a high level of sexual objectification, with women being presented as commodities that function to satisfy men's sexual desires and symbolise male power. For example, videos featured woman's buttocks being touched by men holding alcohol products (i.e. Vodka bottles) and lyrics that are reported as excusing sexual harassment and coercion. In a content analysis of the activity of the top 20 alcohol brands on Facebook in Australia, Carah (2014) found that female promotional staff



were used to promote brands to men in the NTE, for example, through photographs in which they are depicted posing with mostly young male patrons in provocative and sexualised manners. Analysis of the content of brand websites (Carroll and Donovan, 2002) in Australia also discussed the use of sexual innuendoes and women's bodies such as 'pin-up' videos and posters and 'Australia's sexiest calendar', as sending inappropriate messages to young males that the objectification of women is acceptable.

Brand marketers have also been accused of promoting certain forms of masculinity and gender relations that have negative implications for how women are viewed and treated in society. This includes, themes of violence and loutish behaviour (Nowosenetz, 2007; Towns et al., 2012), the exclusion of women from public drinking spaces (Amis, 2009), messages that men should prioritise alcohol use and drinking with friends over meaningful relationships with women (Duncan and Aycock, 2009; Hall and Kappel, 2018; Messner and Montez de Oca 2005; Postman et al., 1988; Town, 2015; Wenner 2009; Wenner and Jackson 2009), women as emasculating men, and as interfering with men's freedom to consume alcohol and socialise with male friends (Duncan and Aycock, 2009; Hall and Kappel, 2018; Home and Whannel, 2009). Overall, there is consensus that such themes may have negative implications for gender relations.

A move away from the sexualisation and objectification of women has also been noted, due to industry concerns that such content may alienate women as potential consumers (e.g. Mackiewicz, 2012; Novak, 2004; Wenner, 2008). For example, Wenner (2008) discussed beer companies in particular as facing a dilemma in that they must target men with sexually appealing messages, whilst building their appeal among the female market and avoiding alienating women through sexist, sexualised and objectifying content. However, research has consistently found that women are sexualised and objectified, and it appears that this co-exists alongside marketing that targets women through messages of empowerment (Atkinson et al., in preparation, SHAAP and IAS, 2017) (see section 3.1.5). More research is needed to confirm such observations.

### 3.2.3 Humour as a diversion technique

A number of studies (Atkinson, 2014; Carah, 2014; Duncan and Aycock, 2009; Jones and Reid, 2010; McKay et al., 2009; Mean, 2009; Towns, 2010; Wenner and Jackson, 2009; Woodruff, 1996) highlight the use of humour (including what is labelled as 'Gender opposition humour' - humour that sets men and women in opposition to each other) (Duncan and Aycock, 2009), irony and 'banter' in alcohol adverts that rely on sexual and sexist messaging to target men as a tactic to dismiss criticism. Such humour is also reflected, and reproduced, in men's responses to alcohol marketing on social media. For example, an analysis of alcohol marketing on Facebook (Carah, 2014) found that beer brands encouraged and prompted their male fans' sense of humour (i.e. asking what they will buy their wives or girlfriends for Valentine's Day) in a way that generated mostly sexist responses that were intended to be amusing. In a review of the literature on the depiction of women in alcohol advertising, Towns et al., (2010) discussed how humour is used to consolidate hegemonic masculinity and to appeal to the male market in a way that masks the sexism at play. The use of humour in this manner creates difficulties in regulating against problematic gendered or

sexist representations, and as such, provides a device to circumvent any critical response and to overcome self-regulation. Research is needed to confirm the extent to which the use of humour as a protective mechanism applies in contexts such the UK, where new codes have been introduced to prevent the use of content that may cause offence on the grounds of gender, as well as sexuality, age and race.

### **3.2.4 Implications for gender relations and equity**

Little research has explored the effects of sexualised and objectifying images of women in alcohol brand marketing on attitudes to women, gender norms and relations, and women's lived experiences. Concerns have however been raised over the potential for such content to have a negative impact by creating a climate in which women are dehumanised and hostility towards them condoned (Hall and Crum, 1994; Sirm, 2015; Towns, 2012; Wenner, 2008; Woodruff, 1996). One study conducted in California, United States (Parker et al., 2013) explored the impact of the presence of sexual alcohol adverts (e.g. adverts featuring provocatively dressed female Latino models in sexually suggestive manners, and connotations of sexual availability) targeted towards Latino communities in alcohol outlets in three cities. Observations found a higher presence of sexual marketing in Latino areas, and that adverts associated sexual behaviour and sexual availability with alcohol use. After controlling for confounding factors, a significant positive relationship was found between the level of sexual content observed in Latino areas, and the level of sexual violence perpetrated towards both Latino and non-Latino young women in the corresponding area, with a stronger effect observed for Latino young women. The findings highlight the need for prevention intervention policies directed at the sexual and sexist content of alcohol marketing, and the importance of future research to explore the impact of alcohol adverts on sexual violence in other localities and populations. Although the participants from this study were drawn from specific communities in the USA, more generally, it suggests marketing effects should also be explored across the intersection between gender, culture, and ethnicity.

### **3.2.5 Public perceptions on sexist and sexual alcohol brand content and its impact on purchase intentions**

There is a lack of research exploring perceptions of sexist and sexualised (e.g. sexualisation, objectification) content in alcohol marketing and how it influences purchases and drinking practices. A limited body of research exploring public responses to content of this nature, and its influence on purchase intentions, have reached conflicting results. Some research suggests that women dislike the use of sexual images of women, including both passive and active depictions, compared to men (e.g. Jones and Reid, 2010; Polonsky et al., 2001; Rouner et al., 2003; Waller, 1999; van Zanten et al., 2005), whilst other work suggests women find sexualised imagery appealing when it is aligned with connotations of empowerment through sexual agency (e.g. Lass and Hart, 2004; Polonsky et al., 2001). For example, Jones and Reid (2010) explored the use of female sexuality in Australian alcohol advertising and the relationship between types of sexual imagery and attitudes to the

advertisement, stated reasons for (dis)liking the advertisement, and purchase intentions (PI) among 268 Australian male and female university students. Adverts included those depicting the traditional stereotype of women as passive sexual objects, as well as new stereotypes of women as strong, active, provocative and desiring. Discussions with young males and females revealed that males liked all the advertisements significantly more than females, and reported higher scores of purchase intention, thus confirming the view that sexual stereotypes exist for the male gaze. However, this was not true of all men, with such content negatively affecting the purchase intentions of some and with variation in male attitudes towards advertisements that were perceived to contain sexist or demeaning humour (see also Friedman et al., 2018). Some women did react favourably to sexual imagery that depicted women as being in control, but many disliked such images and felt that they degraded women by portraying them as promiscuous, and instead favoured the use of the traditional passive sex object stereotype.

A comparative study using in-depth interviews with men and women aged 18 and 25 in the United Kingdom, Germany, and Italy (Lass and Hart, 2004), also found that sexual imagery was more appealing to men than women in all three countries. However, acceptance levels were higher among Italian participants, and those from the UK were less accepting and comfortable with the use of sexual imagery, particularly women. Two groups were uncovered. Firstly, those who disliked the use of sexual imagery and the depiction of women as sex objects and found them offensive. Secondly, and in contrast to the study conducted by Jones and Reid (201), those that were not offended by the use of sexually explicit imagery as long as women were presented as strong, independent and/or in control of men. This relationship was also apparent in research conducted by Hardy (2007) who found that although some female participants were critical of the way in which 'Barbie doll' femininity (i.e. slim, large breasts and blond hair (a key feature of post-feminist femininities)) was depicted as desirable within beer brand marketing, some acted out such femininity in their own gendered identity-making. Other research has explored whether holding feminist beliefs results in women holding more negative views towards the use of sexual images of women in alcohol adverts. Polonsky et al., (2001) examined whether self-defined 'feminist' women were more critical of the portrayal of women in Australian beer advertisements than non-feminist women. Focus group and survey results found that generally, all participants interpreted sexist content as unfavourable and felt that women were presented in a negative way, yet the level of sexism in the advertisements and the respondents' level of feminism did not negatively impact on purchase intentions. This suggests that this sample of women were not alienated by sexist content and some liked sexualised content in that it was perceived as exerting sexual agency and autonomy. However, the study is limited in that it did not compare women's liking of adverts to men's.

Overall, such studies suggest variation in the perceptions of sexist and sexual stereotypes in alcohol marketing among both men and women, and the importance of the context of the sexual appeal and sexual stereotypes presented, in determining whether adverts are considered offensive, and in turn purchased, rather than the presence of sexual content itself. They also suggest that through messages of active sexuality, brands may be able to use sexualised content to target male audiences in a way that does not receive criticism from women. More research is needed to explore such issues.

**Summary Box 2: How are women represented in alcohol marketing, and what are the effects on gender equity?**

- Historically, women were presented in alcohol marketing to a lesser extent than men and in a way that reflected traditional gender roles such as women as passive and submissive, domestic and sexual objects.
- In response to the shifting social positions of women, alcohol marketing has evolved and now presents women as active participants in drinking and public spaces, and as active sexual subjects.
- New forms of femininities co-exist alongside the use of traditional stereotypes, and the sexualisation and objectification of women, particularly in marketing for brands targeted at males (e.g. beer).
- Concerns have been raised over the impact of marketing content that sexualises and objectifies women on attitudes to women, and the acceptance and normalisation of violence towards them.
- Humour, irony and banter are used by marketers to deflect accusations of sexism, and to prevent breaching self-regulatory codes that aim to regulate the use of sexual imagery.
- There is a lack of research exploring public perceptions of such marketing, how it influences purchases and drinking, and attitudes to women, gender relations, and gender equity more generally.
- A limited body of research suggests that women like the use of sexual images less than men. However, some prefer such content when it is aligned with connotations of empowerment through sexual agency. Further research is required to investigate whether sexual content underpinned by empowerment messages provide a way for the alcohol industry to continue to sexualise women to appeal to the male market, whilst preventing accusations of sexism and the alienation of the female market.

### 3.2.6 Sexualisation of the Night Time Environment

The NTE is a highly sexualised environment, and its marketing uses women's bodies and sexualities to associate drinking with sexual success in order to promote venues and alcohol purchases. Articles published predominantly in the UK describe various features of the NTE which have led to its sexualisation. This includes the mainstreaming of pole and lap dancing clubs (and the marketing of such establishments); the use of female sexualities (i.e. young women in revealing clothes) and sexual imagery to promote venues, brands and the purchasing of alcohol by men; the commercial 'draw' of prioritising entry to young women; DJs encouraging sexualised behaviours (e.g. undressing, pole dancing, sexualised); and sexually themed club nights (Atkinson and Sumnall, 2016; Griffin et al., 2013; 2018; Gunby et al., 2016; 2019; Hadfield, 2015; Hubbard, 2013; Hubbard and Colosi, 2015; Lennox et al., 2016; Measham, 2004; Nichols, 2016; Phipps and Young, 2013; Rogan et al., 2016; Smith, 2010; SHAPP and IAS, 2017; Thurnell-Read, 2009; 2012). Concern has been raised over the impact of content that normalises the objectification and sexualisation of women on attitudes towards, and the treatment of women, within the NTE and wider society (Gunby et al., 2016; 2019; Phipps and Young, 2013; Smith, 2010; Rogan et al., 2016; SHAPP and IAS, 2017). The negative impact of focussing on women's appearance and the promotion of a narrow definition of the feminine beauty in NTE marketing on women's internalised attitudes and body image has also been raised as an issue of concern requiring future research (Atkinson et al., 2014; Griffin et al., 2013; SHAPP and IAS, 2017). Whilst the 'sexualisation' of the NTE in a number of countries (e.g. UK, Nigeria, Singapore, Australia) has been discussed, and such concerns raised, there is a lack of research focusing on NTE marketing and its effects on women's lived experiences.

Rogan and colleagues (2016) conducted qualitative research with young women (aged 18-28) in the UK and raised concerns over the sexualised nature of NTE marketing (including on social media) and the underlying "lad culture" it promotes. Heteronormative constructions of sexuality were found to dominate the marketing of mainstream drinking venues, with venues being promoted through the promise of sex to men and narrow definitions of female beauty. However, a move away from the objectification of women to the depiction of women as self-sexualising, active and knowing sexual agents was found to be increasingly common. As with the use of sexual imagery by alcohol brands, this raises questions around whether such marketing provides a way of using women's bodies and sexualities to promote venues to men, whilst at the same time drawing on messages of sexual empowerment to attract young women and deflect criticisms of sexism. Of concern is how the research found unwanted sexual attention and the fear of sexual violence to be a normalised aspect of young women's experiences of the NTE, which the authors suggest are influenced by the mainstreaming of sexualised culture, including within NTE marketing.

Other UK research (Gunby et al., 2016; Phipps and Young, 2013; Smith, 2010) with University students has suggested that the sexualised nature of the NTE and its promotion, perpetuates and exploits 'lad culture', the promotion of cheap alcohol, the objectification of women, and the promise of sexual activity, which has implications for gender relations and equity. For example, young women in Phipps and Young's (2013) study felt that venues strategically objectified women to attract men, with some women avoiding certain

establishments as a result (Phipps and Young, 2013). Moreover, in a qualitative study of male student's perceptions of anti-rape campaigns in the UK NTE, Gunby et al., (2016) concluded that the objectification of women, sexual imagery and sexism in NTE marketing undermined prevention messages that aimed to challenge the dynamics that foster the perpetration of sexual violence against women. Focus groups revealed that participants failed to notice the anti-rape campaign under study, as it was felt to be invisible in the context of sexualised NTE and drinks marketing.

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

An important development is how social media allows night life venues to use and involve female patrons in the marketing of venues. Research conducted in Australia explored the promotion of alcohol, clubs and venues on social media through interviews with nightlife promoters and consumers, and found that the use of women's bodies was a common component (Carah and Dobson, 2016). Women that conformed to the ideal 'heterosex' standard of beauty were used to promote venues and alcohol use within nightlife venues. Sexualised photographs of female patrons and women paid as 'promoters' to create images, were used to market venues and attract the attention of both male (men who wished to attract and interact with such women) and female (women who wished to be like them) customers. The authors argue that such tactics reinforce the NTE as an environment that women experience through the male gaze, and the objectification of women (e.g. Carah and Dobson, 2016). Research in the UK (Atkinson and Sumnall, 2016; Griffin et al., 2018; Lennox et al., 2018) has reported similar results, with the use of in-house photographers to capture images of patrons, particularly (hyper-sexualised) images of young women, discussed as a common strategy in the promotion of venues on social media, which is perceived by young adults as '*bait*' in attracting male customers into venues (Griffin et al., 2018).

These studies highlight that women's bodies and sexualities are used by venues to attract patrons and increase alcohol sales. As a result, women are sexualised and objectified and the male gaze is reproduced, whilst narrow definitions of female attractiveness are reinforced. Such marketing has important implications for women's experiences of the NTE and despite venues becoming more 'female-friendly' through the targeting of women as consumers, its marketing reinforces harmful gender norms and traditional gender relations, and in turn fails to address the inequalities that exist in the NTE. Whilst there is only a small amount of research in this area, the research that has been conducted suggests that NTE marketing both objectifies women, and presents them as active sexual subjects. Involving women in the creation of sexualised content through the use of venue photographers, may also limit the extent to which it is perceived as offensive. Research is needed to explore women

and men's interpretations of NTE marketing of this nature, its impact on drinking practices, attitudes towards women, and women's lived experiences. Such research will provide a context to inform policy and practice aimed at increasing women's safety in nightlife spaces.

### Summary box 3: Sexualisation of the Night Time Environment

- The NTE has become more sexualised in recent years. This includes NTE marketing which uses women's bodies and sexualities to promote venues and the purchasing of drinks, and marketing that associates drinking with sexual success.
- Whilst there is only a small amount of research in this area, NTE marketing appears to objectify women, as well as presenting them as active sexual subjects.
- The increasing importance of social media in venue marketing has led to the use and involvement of female patrons' bodies and sexualities in the promotion of venues and events (and in turn alcohol sales), in a way that reinforces women's participation in the NTE as being experienced through the male gaze.
- The depiction of women as active self-sexualising subjects and involving female patrons in content creation through photography, may provide a way for venues to use women's bodies to appeal to men, whilst drawing on messages of empowerment through sexual agency to appeal to women, thus avoiding accusations of sexism.
- The use of images of female patrons in NTE marketing allows gendered marketing messages to spread on social media through customers' own online social networks, and leads to further interaction with venue content.
- A focus on appearance and a restricted notion of ideal femininity and appearance within NTE marketing may also influence women's attitudes towards themselves and body image, leading to anxiety, especially when they do not meet these normative ideals.
- Concern has been raised regarding the implications of content that normalises the objectification and sexualisation of women on attitudes towards, and the treatment of women. For example, by condoning sexism and behaviours such as unwanted sexual attention and sexual violence.

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

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

All EU countries have at least one regulation on alcohol marketing (van Dalen, 2007). In the UK, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) is funded by the advertising industry, and self-regulates marketing activity through the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) and the British Code of Advertising Practice (ASA and CAP, 2014a;b). Co-regulatory activity is provided through referral of advertisers that fail to comply with ASA rulings to the statutory broadcast regulator Ofcom. However, this rarely occurs, and to the best of our knowledge, has never happened with respect to alcohol marketing. The Portman Group (2009; 2014; 2019), an alcohol industry funded self-regulatory body, also self-regulates marketing in line with its own guidance which reflects the rules laid out in the CAP Code. Hence UK alcohol marketing is primarily self-regulated.

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

UK research (ARUK and Alcohol Concern 2018; ASA, 2009; Brooks et al., 2010; Gordon et al., 2011; Griffin et al. 2018; Hastings 2009; Hastings et al., 2010) has found similar results. For example, Griffin et al (2018) recently reported that the content of both alcohol



brand and nightlife venue marketing on social network sites was in breach of codes related to sex and gender, for example, Codes that states that marketing communications must not contain material that is likely to cause offence, including in relation to gender and sexual orientation. A study of internal alcohol industry marketing documents (Hastings, 2009; Hastings et al., 2010) also found clear evidence that brands intended to encompass prohibited themes, including sex, sexual attractiveness, masculinity and femininity, but in ways that did not obviously transgress the codes. A small number of breaches as a result of linking alcohol with sexual success and attractiveness were also found in a survey of compliance with ASA self-regulatory codes (2008).

Studies conducted internationally in Australia (van Zanten, 2005), The Netherlands (Gosselt et al., 2017), the USA (Noel and Babor, 2017; Smith et al., 2014), across Africa (De Buijn, 2011; Robaina et al., 2012) and South America and Spain (Noel et al., 2017a) have reached similar conclusions. For example, Van Zanten (2005) explored the complaints levelled at alcohol advertisements within the self-regulatory system in Australia and found that television beer commercials were the category that received most complaints. Adverts generated more offence among women, with complaints being most likely to come from women on the grounds of discrimination, and the portrayal of sex and nudity. However, differences between countries have been observed in comparative analysis. In an analysis of brand marketing on social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) in Australia (where self-regulation is intended to restrict the portrayal of alcohol as contributing to sexual success) and India (where such restrictions are absent), Gupta et al., (2017a;b; 2018) found evidence of sexually suggestive content in Indian but not Australian Twitter and YouTube marketing. For example, engagement techniques (i.e. competitions, requests for interaction) were used to generate user-created sexual content, such as requesting females to upload sexual photographs of themselves to win the chance of featuring in brand calendars. Such content did however appear on Australian Facebook pages, which the authors suggest may reflect different target markets, and how compared to Twitter, Facebook is a more visual platform that allows for the documentation of photographs in a more accessible manner. This latter point highlights how the unique features of differing social media platforms can influence the nature of content uploaded in the promotion of alcohol brands. Such differences should be considered when drafting regulatory codes.

The usefulness of self-regulation that focus on content restrictions (e.g. sexual success) in regulating marketing on social media which uses interactive strategies and the co-creation of content has also been questioned. In an analysis of alcohol advertising in Finnish and Swedish social media profiles, Kauppila, et al., (2019) examined social media alcohol marketing in relation to the alcohol industry's own marketing codes. Whilst the research found no incidences of violations, the authors note that applying content-based restrictions on social media such as those that prohibit associations between alcohol use and sexual success is difficult, as social media marketing is based on public engagement and the co-creation of content, which provides brands with the opportunity for content to be created on their behalf, and content and comments that might violate regulatory codes. Self-regulations that focus on brand content, and not engagement techniques and user content, may therefore be inadequate.

Adherence of alcohol marketing to self-regulatory codes has been assessed with input from young people. A trend analysis of the content of alcohol adverts in Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands conducted for EUCAM included an assessment of content by youth panels and comparison with decisions to complaints by the countries' advertising regulators (De Bruijn et al., 2018). The research found examples of content that was judged by the youth panel as linking the consumption of alcohol to sexual success, yet the majority of complaints had been rejected. Based on the high level of rejection, the authors suggest that the self-regulatory codes in each of the five European countries failed to protect young people against appealing alcohol marketing and product promotion. Other research has found that untrained youth raters, assess content as in breach of such codes to a greater extent than public health experts. For example, Babor et al. (2013) evaluated industry-developed advertising code violations using the Delphi rating technique in the USA, applying the methods to all beer adverts (N= 289) broadcasted nationally during a University basketball tournament between 1998 and 2008. Public health professionals and community group members, including young people, rated each of the advertisements using quantitative scales and concluded that between 35% and 74% of the advertisements had code violations, including those related to the use of sexually explicit activity. However, public health experts were less likely to rate such content as violating the codes than members of the community group. The authors suggest that members of the community, including young people, should sit on industry expert panels to assist raters in evaluating content and to inform them about the perceived meaning of advertising messages from the perspective of audiences (i.e. message receivers). Of relevance here is a study conducted by Austin et al., (2007), which compared differences in the interpretations of alcohol marketing messages, including those related to the use of sexual content, between untrained youth coders and those that were trained, and found that untrained coders perceived content to be of a sexual nature to a greater extent. This suggests that everyday audiences are likely to interpret sexual content differently, which has implications for understanding message effects, and implications for reactive regulatory systems that are based on public complaints and self-regulatory systems that rely the decision making of experts (i.e. marketers).

Identifying breaches of self-regulatory codes is important, because as suggested by Noel and colleagues (2017a;b), by presenting drinkers in sexual situations, alcohol commercials suggest that drinking is a particularly positive activity and create social norms in favour of alcohol use. For example, research conducted in Brazil (Vendrame et al., 2010; 2015) confirmed such claims, and found that sexual themes including success and attractiveness were commonly used in alcohol adverts, in ways that school pupils found attractive. Jones and Donovan (2001) conducted a survey using two samples of young people (15-16 and 19-21 years, N=87) in Australia, who were exposed to one of three radio advertisements (two of which included sexual intercourse after the consumption of the brand). Whilst this was a small sample, the research found that generally participants believed that the consumption of the product enhanced 'sexual/relationship' and 'social success' and that alcohol use would make them less inhibited with the opposite sex. This was particularly true of older participants. Qualitative research (Waiter et al., 2002) with young people in the USA also found that participants drew on the weight and attractiveness of characters in alcohol adverts when discussing content they found appealing, with older students in particular noting sexual undertones in the commercials as persuasive devices. Thus, it seems that content of

a sexual nature, including sexual attractiveness and success, is appealing to young people. This not only has implications for young people's drinking practices, but sexual relations, in that alcohol use is presented as a key and necessary aspect of sex.

Based on the included studies, there is evidence that alcohol marketing uses sexual imagery that associates alcohol with sexual success, facilitation and attractiveness, and that such content is often in breach of self-regulatory codes. Thus, regulations that attempts to restrict content by telling marketers what they *cannot* depict, fails to prevent potentially harmful and offensive content from appearing in alcohol marketing, including content of a sexual nature. This suggests a need to rethink the content and enforcement of codes, and the role and purpose of self-regulatory approaches more generally. Gallopel-Morvan et al., (2017) assessed the effectiveness of the 2015 version of the French Loi Évin Law that was implemented in 1991 with the objective of protecting young people from alcohol advertising. A survey questionnaire measuring exposure and receptivity to alcohol advertisements was included in the 2015 European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) among a representative sample of school pupils (mean age 17.3 years) across 198 French schools. Results suggested that the law did not appear to prevent young people from being exposed to alcohol advertising completely, but like Rigaud and Craplet (2004), the authors highlight how the restrictiveness of the law prevented young people from being exposed to attractive content such as that which associated alcohol with sexual success. Approaches that instruct marketers on what they *can't* depict, rather than what they *can*, thus appear to be more effective.

#### **Summary box 4: How effective are self-regulatory codes that aim to prohibit the use of gendered connotations in alcohol marketing?**

- Research conducted in various countries has found that alcohol brand and NTE marketing often breaches self-regulatory codes, particularly those surrounding sex, sexual success and attractiveness.
- Associating alcohol use with sexual success and facilitation has implications for drinking generally and the take up of drinking among young people who may find such content appealing.
- The use of social media has complicated the way in which brand content is assessed against self-regulatory codes. Applying existing content-based restrictions such as those that prohibit associations between alcohol use and sexual success may not be adequate for the regulation of social media marketing, which instigates user interaction and co-created content.
- Evidence from France suggests that approaches that instruct marketers on what they *can't* depict, rather than what they *can* (*i.e.* Loi Évin Law), are ineffective in preventing young people from being exposed to attractive content, including content that associates alcohol use with sexual success.

## 4. Summary

This rapid narrative review explored how women are both targeted and represented in alcohol brand and NTE marketing, and the implications of such marketing for drinking practices and gender equity. Literature discussing the self-regulation of such content and the effectiveness of marketing regulations in relation to gender (e.g. sexual success and attractiveness) was also considered. The majority of literature was published in the Europe, North America, and Australasia, although studies have also been undertaken in lower and middle income countries. Most research used content analysis methods and there was a lack of research that specifically explored the effects of marketing targeted to women on drinking behaviour, and little on the effects of depictions representing women on gender equity more generally.

Addressing question one, *how are women targeted by alcohol marketing and what is the effect on drinking practices?* The literature suggests that since the 1990s there has been a clear feminisation of alcohol products, drinking spaces and drinking culture. New products have been developed to target women (e.g. fruity beers, RTDs, low calorie/carb products, low alcohol products) and a range of lifestyle messages that appeal to gender stereotypes, as well as messages of empowerment, have been used to target the female market. Social media marketing has also changed the relationship between brands and consumers, and through a range of interactive techniques (e.g. competitions, photograph requests), women are now involved in content creation and interact with and share brand content (including content that is gendered) to their online peers. There is little research that specifically explores how such marketing influences women's drinking practices, but research exploring young women's drinking more generally suggests that they have clear perceptions of what drinks are regarded as 'feminine' and choose their drinks accordingly. However, some women have rejected products and brands marketed as 'feminine' as a form of gendered resistance. The targeting of women in LMIC is an important area of research given the relative lack of marketing regulations, in such countries, and the decline in alcohol use in young people in more developed markets.

Addressing research question two, *how are women represented in alcohol marketing, what are the effects on drinking practices and what are the implications for gender equity,* content analyses have found that the gender roles presented have changed over time. Historically, women were represented to a lesser extent than men, and in a way that reflected traditional gender roles (i.e. women as passive, submissive, domestic, and sexual objects). In response to, and reflection of, the shifting social positions of women, alcohol marketing has evolved and now presents women as active participants in drinking and public spaces, and as active sexual subjects. However, these new active gender roles co-exist alongside the sexualisation and objectification of women, particularly in the marketing of brands targeted at men (e.g. beer) (e.g. Hall and Kappel, 2018; Kilbourne, 1999; Törrönen, 2011; 2014; Törrönen and Rolando, 2017; Sirr, 2015). In the UK, recent changes to the ASA/CAP (2019) code also aim to prevent the use of content that causes offence on the grounds of gender and the use of gender stereotypes. Such changes may be a response to the re-emergence of feminism in society, and an intolerance of sexist and sexual content in marketing more generally. Such changes also an economic necessity for the alcohol industry to avoid alienating the female market including a new market of feminist-aware young women, and men. Whilst a move away

from the use of sexist and stereotypical content to content based on messages of equality is a positive step for gender equity, it is still a technique used to sell a potentially health-harming product to women.

The presentation of women as sexual objects has implications for normative expectations of gender roles, and how women are positioned and treated within society. For example, concern surrounds how such content can lead to the acceptance and normalisation of (sexual) violence towards women (e.g. Jones and Reid, 2010; Sirr, 2015; Towns et al., 2012). There is a lack of research exploring public perceptions of such marketing, and how it impacts on attitudes towards, and the treatment of women, as well as how it influences purchasing and alcohol use. The extent of sexualised alcohol marketing has however been found to be associated with the extent of violence towards women in some US communities (Parker et al, 2013). Further research is needed to explore the impact of such marketing in other localities. A limited body of research also suggests that women like the use of sexual images less than men. However, some prefer such content when it is aligned with connotations of empowerment through sexual agency. The question as to whether the use of empowerment messages provides a way for the alcohol industry to continue to sexualise women in a way that appeals to the male market, whilst preventing alienating the female market, requires further investigation.

The NTE is a highly sexualised environment, and its marketing uses women's bodies and sexualities to associate drinking and social/sexual success. There is a lack of research focusing on NTE marketing, but based on the small amount of research that has been conducted, as with brand marketing, some NTE marketing both objectifies women and presents them as active sexual subjects. Again, this raises questions regarding whether marketing that presents women as self-sexualising provides a way for venues to continue to use women's bodies to appeal to men, whilst appealing to women through messages of empowerment. Social media also allows venues to use and involve female patrons in marketing, for example through the use of in house photographers who are employed to take (sexualised) images of female patrons for uploading to social media, and the use of female promoters who are paid to produce sexualised images of themselves to promote venues. It has been argued that such tactics reinforce the NTE as an environment that women experience through the male gaze. Moreover, such engagement techniques are beneficial to venues, as created content is more meaningful to customers, provides data on customers that can be used in designing future marketing, and allows (gendered) marketing content to be distributed via customer's online peer networks, thus extending the audience reach (see Atkinson et al., 2016; Carah, 2014).

Lastly, in addressing whether self-regulatory codes are effective in prohibiting content that relies on gendered and sexual connotations to promote alcohol and venues, we found evidence from a number of countries that brand marketing regularly violates codes that aim to prohibit alcohol from being associated with sexual success and attractiveness. Of note is the suggestion that content-based restrictions, such as those that prohibit associations between alcohol use and sexual success, cannot be easily applied to brand and venue marketing on social media which relies on user engagement and the co-creation of content. Based on these findings, we outline a number of key areas for future research, and the implications of the findings for UK policy and practice.

## 5. Gaps in research

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

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

## 6. Recommendations

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

- In many countries (e.g. UK, US, most European countries) self-regulatory codes are in place that prohibit content that associates alcohol with sexual success and attractiveness, and some countries include self-regulations to prevent offence based on gender (e.g. UK). However, these codes are ambiguous and are frequently violated. Given concerns regarding the impact of such content on gender equity, women's lived experiences and young people's drinking behaviours, the UK Codes should more explicitly outline what content falls under existing codes.
- The effectiveness of recent UK ASA/CAP Codes that prohibit content that causes offence based on gender and the use of gender stereotypes should also be independently evaluated. New guidance aimed at restricting the use of gender stereotypes including sexualisation and objectification, should be outlined in the alcohol specific Codes, and incorporated into Portman Group guidance.
- Applying the CAP code to user-generated content on social media is complex and does not prohibit user-generated content from being created and shared by the public on social media in ways that violates the codes, including those related to gender and sex (unless brands use this content themselves in their own promotions). Moreover, the code aims to self-regulate content, and does not address the use of engagement techniques which lead to women (and men) interacting with brand content, co-creating content and sharing widely among their online peer networks. A review of existing codes related to online and social media marketing should be undertaken. This should address the use of interactive strategies, and should also consider marketing by NTE venues and events.
- The UK system of self-regulation, including online marketing, should become more proactive. This would involve more regular reviews to identify marketing that breaches the Code, including those related to gender and sex. This process should include young people, as well as public health experts and experts working in the area of gender equity and gendered violence. These groups should also sit on regulatory decision making panels.
- If the updated Codes are found to consistently fail to reduce the number of breaches, consideration should be given to how approaches taken in other countries (e.g. the 'Loi Évin' in France) can be adapted to the UK context. These approaches differ to current regulation in the UK, in that currently marketers are instructed on what they *can't* depict, rather than what they *can*.
- Whilst individual level approaches to reducing the effects of alcohol marketing will not be effective in isolation, approaches that aim to educate women about the strategies used to target them, including those that both subvert and promote feminism, should be considered.

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