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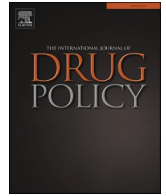
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Research Paper

## ‘Just a colour?’: Exploring women’s relationship with pink alcohol brand marketing within their feminine identity making

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** The pinking of alcohol products and marketing (i.e. the (over) use of the colour pink as a feminine aesthetic) is a form of gendered marketing that is used by the industry to target and appeal to the female market, and encourage sales and alcohol consumption. However, little is known about how women relate to and view such marketing, and how such products feature in their performance of femininities through drinking practice. **Methods:** Semi-structured individual ( $N = 39$ ) and group ( $N = 79$ ) interviews with 117 women who drank alcohol and participated in the night time economy in the city of Liverpool in North West of England were conducted to gain insight into their attitudes towards the use of pink in alcohol product design and marketing content, and how this relates to their feminine identity making in intersectional ways. Interviews with individuals ( $N = 23$ ) working in alcohol brand marketing locally, nationally and globally were also conducted to explore the use of pink marketing. Data were analysed using thematic analysis.

**Findings:** The pinking of products and marketing was considered the most obvious form of female targeted marketing by both women and marketers. Discussion of pink drinks generated in depth discussions of the femininities and connotations attached to the colour. Reflecting a conventional and normative femininity, women conformed to, and/or rejected pink products and marketing, within their feminine identity making. Four themes are presented that draw attention to the similarities and differences between marketers and women’s perspectives on pink marketing, and how women’s relationship with pink marketing and products were nuanced, varied in relation to their feminist identities, and intersected with other social positions such as sexuality and class.

**Conclusion:** The article makes an original and significant contribution to the field on gendered drinking practices and identity making and the influence of alcohol marketing on these processes, and is novel in addressing the usual omission of industry voice in discussions of marketing. It concludes that in the current context of contemporary feminism, in which (young) women are endorsing feminist identities, women’s relationship with feminism influences their attitudes to marketing such as pinking, and their likelihood of consuming such products.

## Introduction

Alcohol use and participation in drinking culture provide a means for individuals to shape, perform and express feminine and masculine identities (Atkinson et al., 2012; De Visser & McDonnell, 2012; Lennox et al., 2018; Nicholls, 2019). Gender is not fixed, and as an everyday social practice, alcohol consumption and related (inter)action, including participation in the night time environment (NTE), are ways in which gender is actively expressed and constructed, and individuals read as masculine and/or feminine. Rather than simply reflecting gender,

drinking practices help establish gender identities through everyday interactions and experiences, meaning alcohol and drinking practices are important to the “doing” of gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Nicholls, 2016, 2019, 2020). Certain ideas and norms exist regarding what is considered appropriate and ‘normal’ masculine and feminine practice, and this extends to drinking practices and nightlife participation (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Women participate in drinking culture, but also remain constrained by long standing social expectations on what is regarded as gender appropriate drinking practice, and this includes what is drunk (e.g. ‘girly’ drinks such as wine and pink products)

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and how (e.g. controlled drinking). These normative constructions of traditional femininity can be conformed to and/or resisted within feminine identity making (Atkinson et al., 2012; de Visser & McDonnell, 2012; Griffin et al., 2013; Measham, 2002; Nicholls, 2019, 2020).

Gendered alcohol marketing helps shape how these feminine identities are constructed, the gendered nature of drinking learned, and the social roles and femininities expected of women reproduced (Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016; Atkinson, Meadows, Emslie, Lyons, & Sumnall, 2022; Lennox et al., 2018; Nicholls, 2019). Studying the way women are targeted and represented in alcohol brand marketing is hence an important line of enquiry. This paper presents findings from an Economic and Social Research Council funded project that explored how women are targeted and represented in alcohol brand marketing, how this relates to and helps shape their feminine identities, and in turn, their drinking practices. It focusses specifically on the 'pinking' of alcohol products and marketing content as a feminine aesthetic used to target women, and how women perceive and relate to this within their own performance of femininity. It further draws on interviews with individuals working in alcohol brand marketing on the use of pink to target the female market.

### Women, drinking and femininity

Drinking has traditionally been a masculine practice, with women who drink being judged for public displays of intoxication, sexual expression, and for supposedly lacking respectability (Jackson & Tinkler, 2007; Griffin et al., 2013; Nicholls, 2019). Nonetheless, as a result and reflection of their shifting social positions and enhanced purchasing power, women are now active participants in drinking as a form of consumption that provides a sense of group belonging, female bonding, independence and empowerment (Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016; Griffin et al., 2013; Nicholls, 2016). Within a neo-liberal and 'post-feminist' society in which consumption is promoted as a key marker of identity making, and gender equality is taken as given, women have been said to 'have it all' (i.e. work, relationships, leisure, pleasure, sexual freedoms), with drinking and the NTE providing opportunities for them to perform and negotiate agentic and assertive contemporary femininities (Harvey, 2005; Griffin et al., 2013; Nicholls, 2019). In this context, the performance of hyper 'girly' femininity as the norm, could be framed as characteristically traditional, by reducing women's worth to appearance and reproducing heterosexual feminine aesthetics such as pinkness, through the consumption of pink products for example. Yet in a post-feminist context, presenting as unabashedly 'feminine' or 'girly' (including through the visual marker of pink), is instead read as a sign of empowerment through the right to (sexually) express, consume, indulge and enjoy within discourses of individualism, choice and agency (Banet-Weiser et al., 2022; Gill, 2008; Gill & Scharff, 2013; Griffin et al., 2013; Nicholls, 2019).

Importantly, it has been argued that a resurgence in (young) women identifying as feminist and an observed increased visibility and acknowledgement of feminism in popular media and marketing culture in recent years, may mark a departure from post-feminism, and in turn the femininities and gender expectations at play in drinking culture (Atkinson et al., 2022; Banet-Weiser et al., 2022). Yet, what is more visible in popular culture, is what has been referred to as 'popular', 'neo-liberal', or perhaps, 'choice' feminism, which rather than transcending the characteristics of equality and empowerment defined by post-feminism, has been discussed as reproducing them under a feminist label, in ways that are beneficial to market forces (Banet-Weiser et al., 2022; Gill, 2016; McRobbie, 2020; Retallack et al., 2016; Rivers, 2017; Schraff, 2020). This includes a reproduction of the post-feminist tendency to embrace the traditionally feminine and 'girly' aesthetic of all things pink and glittery as a celebration and expression of womanhood, in ways that associate feminism with femininity, and make feminism more palatable to young women (Bideaux, 2019; Crepax, 2020; Gill, 2016; Schraff, 2019). It is against this changing and nuanced social context of a 'feminist renaissance of sorts', in which traditionally

feminine, post-feminist and feminist sentiments co-exist and overlap, that marketers promote brands and products to women, including through the use of the colour pink (Banet-Weiser et al., 2022; Bideaux, 2019; Crepax, 2020).

### 'Pinking' of products and female targeted alcohol marketing

The gendered connotations applied to colours are socially constructed, and this includes the binary notion that 'pink is for girls and blue is for boys' (LoBue & DeLoache, 2011; Jonauskaitė et al., 2021; Koller, 2008). This connotation is arbitrary and conceptual; pink not only holds gendered connotations because it repeatedly occurs in feminine contexts visually, and is labelled as conventionally feminine, but also because it co-occurs with other feminine language such as 'girly(ness)', 'sweetness' and 'softness' (Jonauskaitė et al., 2021; Koller, 2008). Marketing forms a dominant context in which pink is used to denote something as feminine, and in turn, to target and attract the attention of girls and adult women through connotations of femininity and girliness (Koller, 2008).

Whilst pink is often discussed as a negative gender stereotype, it has taken on connotations of empowerment in a post-feminist context that redefines it as the colour of women who have achieved equality and are therefore able to embrace pink as a marker of their femininity, and to communicate fun, independence and self-confidence (Koller, 2008). In light of the recent increased awareness and attention to structural gender inequality and the reclamation of feminist identities among (young) women, who it is important to note, have grown up in a saturated post-feminist culture, pink has now taken on feminist connotations and has become a way for women to 'display' their feminism (Banet-Weiser et al., 2022; Bideaux, 2019). Feminism has thus become increasingly aestheticised through marketing, and its performance on social media such as Instagram; it no longer rejects frivolity, aesthetics and beauty canons, but embraces and reclaims stereotypically feminine or 'girly' aesthetics such as various shades of pink as valid, in a similar way to post-feminism (Crepax, 2020).

The pinking of products is a tactic commonly used by the alcohol industry to target the female market, and analysis of marketing content, and industry trade documents, provide evidence of its deliberate (over) use to appeal to women (Public Health Advocacy Institute & Cancer Counsel WA, 2019; Atkinson, Belgley, Jones, & Sumnall, 2019; Atkinson et al., 2022). For example, a recent analysis (Atkinson et al., 2022) of alcohol marketing content on Facebook and Instagram by 20 brands over an 18 month period, found that marketers promoted alcohol products to women through a feminine aesthetic including the pinking of products (e.g. pink liquid and product products) and the feminisation of marketing materials (e.g. posts with glittery and floral imagery), and this overlapped with a focus on 'girly' appearance (e.g. makeup, fashion) as a normative expression of femininity. These strategies could be considered gender stereotypes, and public health initiatives such as #dontpinkmydrink (Alcohol Focus Scotland, 2017; Emslie, 2022) aim to challenge and raise awareness of female-oriented alcohol marketing that is regarded as patronising women through the use of stereotypical content. However, Atkinson et al., 2022 discuss how whilst strategies such as pinking could be defined as traditional and stereotypical, in a post-feminist or (neo-liberal) feminist society, in which the celebration of traditional stereotypes associated with 'girliness' (e.g. makeup, the colour pink, shopping) are celebrated as a form of empowerment (Gill, 2008; Gill & Scharff, 2013; McRobbie, 2009), such products may hold appeal to femininities beyond those that are more traditional (Atkinson et al., 2022).

This is important as alcohol marketing influences alcohol-related attitudes and behaviours, by contributing to a culture where regular alcohol consumption is considered normal and desirable, and integrated in the lifestyles and identities of consumers (e.g. connotations of desirability, youthfulness, masculinity and femininity, class, sexuality, and sexual expression) (Atkinson and Sumnall, 2016; Banet-Weiser & Lapsansky, 2008, 2018; Critchlow et al., 2015, 2019; Jernigan et al., 2017;

Purves et al., 2018). Yet, to the best of our knowledge, no research has asked the question, do women want their drinks pinked? Drawing on research with women and marketers, the paper provides insight into the use of pink as a feminine aesthetic to target the female market with alcohol products, and how women conform to and/or resist such products, and their consumption, within their feminine identity making.

## Methods

Semi-structured, in-depth individual and group interviews were conducted with 117 women aged 17 to 38 who drank alcohol and participated in the night time economy in the city of Liverpool in the North West of England, UK. This sample included local women and students, and 13 people who at the time of being interviewed identified as non-binary but also female and feminine (i.e. she/they).<sup>1</sup> Liverpool is a port city in the north-west of England with a diverse population of 486,100 and a large student population of over 70,000 (Liverpool City Council, 2021). The global economic restructuring of the 1970s and 1980s led to population loss and a rise in social inequalities and deprivation in the city, and it currently ranks as the 3rd most deprived local authority out of 317 across England (Boland 2008; Liverpool City Council, 2023). Since the 1990s much urban regeneration led the city centre becoming an international tourist destination, with large numbers of visitors attracted by its many museums, art galleries, football clubs and thriving nightlife. It is known as a ‘party’ city and is popular among locals, students and tourists for its nightlife, including a well-known predominantly heteronormative mainstream area that consists of a mix of independently owned and chain bar establishments, and a gay or queer scene that participants themselves often referred to as ‘gay town’. Individuals born in Liverpool are referred to as ‘Liverpudlians’ or ‘Scousers’, and the local language spoken, known as ‘Scouse’, is one of the most widely recognised varieties of British English (Boland, 2008; Wilkinson, 2016, 2021). ‘Scousers’ are known for their friendliness and comedic qualities, and whilst in public and media discourse the scouse identity was once predominantly associated with urban working-class males (Boland, 2008), scouse women now hold a unique identity and to some extent have become a caricature (e.g. the ‘Scouse Bird’) due to their distinctive feminine expression (Wilkinson et al., 2021). They are known for their glamorous and exaggerated hyper feminine appearance and a femininity that is carefully crafted and aestheticized to produce an individual and collective working-class self (Wilkinson, 2021). This hyper-feminine and glamorous ‘scouse’ aesthetic is at its most perfected and performed in night life drinking contexts, and consists of perfected make up; false eyelashes, nails and tan; groomed bold eyebrows (i.e. ‘the scouse brow’), and high heels, as well as cosmetic surgery procedures such as lip-filler, and the use of specific beauty-regime practices such as hair rollers to perfect big hair. Whilst this aesthetic has received criticism and derision within middle class right wing national news media (Wilkinson, 2021), it is celebrated and often spoke of affectionately in a local context (as reflected in our data), and has been commodified through the branding of goods including alcohol products.

Women were recruited between July 2021 and March 2022 through a number of means including researcher networks (i.e. friends, family, colleagues), snowballing, flyers in public spaces such as bars, cafes and work places, a project Instagram page, and advertising to university and

college students and societies, and community groups. With the exception of a small number of studies on women’s drinking practices that have included LGBTQ+ experiences (Nicholls, 2020; Emslie et al., 2017), most research has tended to focus predominantly on heterosexual white women from working and middle class backgrounds. The project aimed to gain a diverse sample in order to explore how experiences and views differed in ways that were intersectional. By this we refer to the importance of considering differences in views and experiences according to women’s varying social positions such as class and sexuality, which intersect to create nuanced and contextualized accounts. It is thus not only gender, but other social positions and inequalities that are important to the study of alcohol marketing and drinking experiences (Crenshaw, 1991; Fjellerup Bærndt & Kolind, 2021). As such, the sample consisted of participants who were diverse with regards sexuality (32% ( $n = 37$ ) LGBTQ+) and ethnicity (84% ( $n = 98$ ) white, 16% ( $n = 19$ ) people of colour (Black, West and East Asian). We were also interested in whether women identified as ‘feminist’, as in light of a resurgence of feminism in recent years, and evidence of a commercialisation of feminist messages, women’s relationship with feminism was likely to influence how they spoke about their experiences, expressed their views on marketing, and performed their feminine identities. The majority (80%,  $n = 93$ ) identified as feminist, 14% ( $n = 16$ ) did not, and 7% ( $n = 8$ ) weren’t sure or didn’t know what feminism was, but said they agreed with ‘gender equality’.

Participants were given a choice of being interviewed individually, or in their friendship groups, with 39 individual interviews, and 24 group interviews with 79 participants, being conducted. Individual and group interviews provide different contexts in which data is produced and constructed. Whilst it may be the case that women held back certain viewpoints and experiences in a group context, and worked with their friends to co-produce accounts, no obvious differences were observed between data produced in individual compared to group interviews. They were also given a choice of being interviewed in person or online via Microsoft Teams, with the majority choosing the online option (four individual interviews and 11 group interviews were conducted in person). Participants were asked to discuss their drinking practices including what they drank and why; what they did not drink and why; their experiences of drinking including in night time environments, and the pleasures and risks involved; their views and experiences of alcohol brand marketing, and how it targets and represents women. Following discussions of alcohol marketing, they were shown images of examples (i.e. pink marketing) of marketing collected from an analysis of social media marketing posts (Atkinson et al., 2022) and asked to discuss their general views on these including whether they would and wouldn’t purchase and consume such products, and how they felt about how women were being targeted and depicted. Discussions lasted between 24 min and 2 h and 5 min (mean 69 min), which resulted in 70 hours of recorded discussion.

Online interviews ( $N = 22$ , 21 individual, 1 paired) using Microsoft teams were also conducted with individuals ( $N = 23$ , 21 female, 4 male) working in alcohol brand marketing locally, nationally and globally. Roles included brand managers, social media managers, graphic and product design, brand owners, creative agency CEOs, and trade organisations. Leading marketing and creative agencies, and individuals, working in the alcohol sector were identified through internet and LinkedIn searches, and then emailed and/or private messaged inviting them to take part in the research. We also drew on existing contacts with a small number of individuals working in alcohol marketing, advertised on LinkedIn and used snowballing techniques to recruit participants. They were asked to comment on how women are targeted and represented, and how this may have changed over time. We also asked for feedback on findings of an analysis of female targeted marketing and content that features women, and preliminary findings from interviews with women. Discussions lasted between 25 min and 1 h and 23 min (mean 48 min) and resulted in 18 hours of recorded discussion. Here we draw specifically on discussions around the pinking of products to target

<sup>1</sup> We acknowledge the complexities of non-binary participants in a sample of individuals who define as ‘women’. Due to our non-binary participants experiences of being socialised as women and previously identifying as such, and many still presenting a feminine gender expression including wearing pink, we felt their contributions on the topics were still valid. All of our non-binary participants were happy to be included alongside cis women in this way, which is consistent with some (though not all) non-binary experiences where despite their gender, their socio-cultural life still interacts with womanhood.

the female market, and present similarities and differences in the perspectives and experiences of consumers and marketers.

Online discussions with both women and marketers were recorded and automatically transcribed using Microsoft Teams, and in person discussions were audio recorded. Microsoft Teams transcriptions were used as a guide and recordings were listened to and the transcription edited to provide a verbatim account. In person discussions were transcribed verbatim by the researchers and a professional transcription service. Interviews were analysed using thematic analysis in NVivo to develop patterns, themes and sub-themes using both pre-determined and emerging coding, that involved identifying commonalities and differences within and across interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Deductively, a list of pre-determined potential codes related to the women's drinking experiences, and the targeting and representation of women by alcohol brands, were considered and applied where appropriate to the data. This allowed flexibility for new codes to be identified, and for pre-existing codes to be developed and amended, inductively. Pre-determined codes were firstly applied to the data to organise discussions into broad categories. An integrative approach to thematic analysis was used, with new codes identified being included into the pre-determined frame and then applied to previously and yet to be coded transcripts. Coding and analysis were predominately carried out by the lead author, with input from the second. Participants received a £15 retail voucher in recompense. Ethical approval was granted by the University ethics committee and informed consent gained from each participant.

## Findings

Drink choice acted as a tool in 'doing' femininities in different ways, individually and collectively, and this was informed by female targeted brand marketing. The pinking of products, including the liquid itself, packaging and marketing aesthetics, was considered the most obvious form of female targeted marketing by both women and marketers. Four themes are presented that draw attention to the similarities and differences between marketers and women's perspective, and how women's relationship with pink marketing and products varied, and were nuanced and complex.

### **'As girls we're brought up to like that colour a little bit more': promoting, performing and negotiating 'girly' femininities**

Pink drinks were felt to epitomise normative 'girly' femininity. Regardless of whether women defined themselves as 'girly', such products were labelled as aesthetically 'appealing', 'girly', 'pretty', 'nice', 'soft', 'fluffy', and 'sparkly'. This was common among women who did and did not define as feminist, and the former appeared to attempt to justify and negotiate their compliance with pink as a traditional and stereotypical feminine aesthetic. Such connotations were reflected and confirmed in discussions with brand marketers, who discussed the pinking of products as a long standing strategy to target women ('It's huge', female food and drinks marketer), including those who could be defined as 'girly'. For example, a brand manager for a well known female targeted drinks range, discussed a product that was 'very pink and girly', and having collaborated with a number of female influencers whose femininities had fit the brands 'girly image', to the promote the product to women on Instagram. Many women complied with these societal and marketing expectations that they should find content and products with a pink feminine aesthetic appealing, and they unapologetically consumed them, based on the product's symbolic value in expressing their 'girliness'. They expressed how they 'loved' and 'enjoyed' the colour, explaining that women are socialised ('as girls we're brought up to like that colour a little bit more', Zoe, bisexual, Black, 20 s, not a feminist) and 'subliminally wired' (Jess, 20 s, white, heterosexual, feminist) to like all things pink from a young age. For example, Ellie (early 20 s, white, heterosexual, feminist), who defined herself as 'quite girly', consciously purchased pink products based on aesthetics and as a reflection of her 'girliness', stating that she'd "deffo be buying pink...because I find it quite appealing, it's girly and it's like 'Oh this is a nice bottle'".

Pink drinks were not only important to women's individual, but also to their collective feminine identity making through associations with female friendship. Zoe (20 s, bisexual, Black, not a feminist) highlighted how as well as being chosen for their aesthetic value, pink drinks were consumed as they played a meaningful role in enhancing the enjoyment of 'getting ready' with friends for a night out drinking, itself a highly feminine collective process in which women perfect appearance ('It can help with the getting ready process if you have a nice drink and you're like 'yeah this is good'). Jess associated pink drinks with 'Galentines day', an alternative to Valentine's day that is promoted by (alcohol) brands to encourage alcohol consumption through a post-feminist and fourth wave feminist rhetoric that places importance on prioritising female friendship over relationships with men (Atkinson et al., 2022). She described how on this day, her Instagram feed 'was all pink drinks for Galentines, like everyone having pink prosecco and pink gin', suggesting a symbolic value of pink in expressing female friendship and shared girliness.

Overall, these women had a positive relationship with pink and it did not denote negative connotations ('I've never felt negative connotations with pinkness', Charlie, 20 s, white, heterosexual, feminist). Some acknowledged pink marketing as stereotypical but this was not framed as problematic, as discussed by Zoe when stating that 'It is so stereotypical [but] I do feel like I go for like the pretty brand...sparkling gin, it's so pretty'. Yet, whilst these women openly embraced pink drinks as an expression of their girly femininities, others consumed them but also slightly distanced themselves from the perhaps limiting femininities and stereotypes such normative feminine consumption practices were implied as representing. They were keen to express how despite liking the colour pink and pink drinks, and being girly, the girly femininities applied to these consumption practices only represented one aspect of their identity. For example, Rina (20 s, white, heterosexual, feminist) described how she identified with products that were 'very girly...pink and prin',<sup>2</sup> but dissociated herself from the 'certain type of girl' such marketing targets by stating it only represents 'certain parts of my personality'.

Similarly, some who drank pink and 'girly' products, sometimes appeared to be embarrassed by such conformity, and deliberately acknowledged this in negative ways to assert agency. By expressing an awareness of the stereotypical nature of such marketing and their drink choice, and stating how they were a 'victim' by 'falling for' and being 'suckered into it', they were able to distance themselves from being viewed as duped and easily manipulated by an obvious form of female targeted marketing. For example, Megan (20s, white, heterosexual, feminist), criticised the over use of pink to target women and expressed a need to 'educate' women in learning what they like as individuals as opposed 'being told that you like 'cause you have a vagina'. However, she went onto explain how pink is 'actually [her] favourite colour', how this reflects her identity as a 'wee girly girl', and how she 'loves pink and all those obviously very stereotypical types of advertising'. Despite noting the potential 'unconscious' influence of pink marketing on her consumption, by stating that she does not 'buy something just because it is pink, I buy something 'cause I like it', she attempts to distance herself from women who purchase pink products purely based on the feminine aesthetic and their gender as woman. In turn, other women are framed as being easily influenced, but not herself, who she presents as relatively agentic.

Presenting oneself as 'girly' and expressing a love of all things pink did not determine the consumption of pink drinks. However some spoke of pink as an important aspect of their feminine identities, but also outwardly resisted the 'sweetness' of such drinks which they felt women are assumed to prefer ('there's a stereotype, like girls tend to gravitate towards sweet drinks. And it's like, why is that?', Rina, 20 s, white, heterosexual, feminist). Moreover, they expressed a resentment that they were

<sup>2</sup> 'Prin' is short for 'princess', and is a local colloquial term commonly used in Liverpool to refer to the specific hyper-feminine aesthetic and appearance performed by local women.

targeted based on the assumption that women *should* drink pink (see theme *‘resistance and rejection of the pink’*). For example, Eleanor (30 s, white, heterosexual, feminist), stated how pink marketing *‘Does my head in. I’m not falling for that. I’m gonna drink a drink because I like it not cos it’s pink. If it’s pink and I like it, then that’s great, but I’m not one to go ‘Oh look at my pink gin’. I just don’t buy into that at all. I think it’s so very clear, obvious, that you’re targeting women’*. Thus, whilst pink drinks were regarded as ‘girly’ and consumed by women who presented as such, identifying as girly did not guarantee women would consume pink products, in the ways some marketers assumed (*‘the thought wouldn’t have crossed my mind really that pink would put women off’*, female brand manager).

***‘The Scouseness like Pink gin, French Bulldogs, crushed velvet couches, very pink gin’: class, locality and shades of pink***

Pink drinks were discussed as implying connotations of a ‘glamorous’ femininity and lifestyle. For example, Chella (20 s, white, queer, feminist) explained how the marketing of these products is *‘glamorised, it’s like, you’re already glam, but to be even more glam, have gin, have prosecco’*. Similarly, associations with expense and exclusivity were made by some, who described a *‘pink gin stereotype’* of women who consumed *‘very much the high expensive drinks’* (Ari, 20 s, white, feminist, queer). This was reflected in how some female students who were girly and preferred to consume pink products that *‘look nicer’*, were unable to afford them (*‘Pink ones and flavoured ones tend to be a bit more expensive and we’ll just go for the cheapest option’*, Fran, 19, white, lesbian, feminist). Classed connotations were also apparent in some discussions. For instance, Ari, a self defined *‘working class feminist’*, discussed that despite being willing to *‘drink anything’*, she was conscious of the *‘whole aesthetic thing and how you feel you might have that Pornstar or a glass of prosecco, that feminine middle class vibe’*. As shown in extract 1 below, whilst she discussed consuming feminine drinks herself, including pink gin when on offer, she distanced herself from the femininities associated with pink gin, by discussing in detail the consumption of products that were aesthetically pink and feminine as a deliberate form of conspicuous consumption as part of the performance of a very localised working class femininity (i.e. *‘scouseness’*). She associated pink gin with other symbolic consumer items that are often associated with working class women, and considered these consumption practices as attempts at displaying (i.e. *‘wearing’*) wealth and attractiveness.

Extract 1

*‘The Scouseness like Pink gin, French Bulldogs, crushed velvet couches. Like very pink gin...I feel like working class people and people from more marginalised groups have grew up like inherently missing what they haven’t had, so when they get a bit of economic success, they’re wearing it because they want that bit of external validation... it’s that trying to fight to look bigger and better and more successful and more rich and more gorgeous and more young. It impacts that. Like a performance’*

(Ari, 20 s, white, bisexual, feminist)

Yet, whilst Ari outwardly framed pink drinks as tools in the *‘performance’* of working-class femininities, she did not do so with disdain or judgement, but understanding and awareness, and this was reflected in all women’s discussions regardless of their class backgrounds. Whilst many women did not relate to this form of femininity, unlike past previous research the *‘performance’* of working-class femininities through drink choice (e.g. Nicholls, 2019) was not discussed in an explicitly negative or moralistic manner, neither did they overtly distance themselves from it through the moralistic process of classed Othering. Rather, they expressed respect and admiration (*‘I love it’*, Rina; *‘It’s iconic’*, Isa; both white, 20 s, heterosexual, feminist) for the working class femininities of local women who were considered to drink pink gin, who were described as *‘pretty and prin<sup>1</sup>’* (Maya, white, heterosexual, feminist, 20 s). Distain was instead expressed towards societal perceptions and media reporting that mocked local women’s appearance and drinking

practices. This angered many women, including Poppy (30 s, white, bi-sexual, feminist), who expressed that such media judgement *‘makes me sad really when I see it ‘cause I just know the text it is paired with and it’s like ‘Girls out of control’*. In contrast, local women who fit the pink gin stereotype were framed as fun, as expressed by Rina, when stating that *‘a scouse girl is probably gonna be the laugh on a night’*.

There was discussion of how this version of girly femininity had been appropriated by one local business in the marketing of a pink gin that displayed a cartoon caricature of a ‘scouse’ woman, with *‘rollers in [their] hair and wearing juicy [Juicy Couture, clothing brand] tracksuits in the day, and then dressing really really glam and loads of makeup’* (Amy, 20 s, white, queer, feminist). Reflecting women’s admiration for this look, the brand was considered as reclaiming (a process common in fourth wave feminism) a negative stereotype created by ‘outsiders’ and the media, by *‘taking it back [and] making it their own again, putting people in a good light instead of all the bad connotations that come with being a scouser’* (Laura, 30 s, white, heterosexual, not a feminist). Whilst some discussed purchasing the brand as a novelty gift, it was regarded as targeting *‘the Scouse women who are very like proud of their history and they’re not embarrassed’* (Luna, 20 s, non-binary she/they, white, feminist). This example highlights the intersecting role of locality and class to feminine identity making within drinking culture, and that despite an increasingly globalised alcohol market, the gin market has become simultaneously localised in ways that promote products through local (feminine) identities. As stated by one gin marketer, local smaller gin products predominantly target women and have *‘boomed’* in recent years, establishing *‘a novelty factor [that] drives a lot of purchases...that allow smaller companies to make a name and to enter into a market’* (Female brand and sustainability manager).

Different shades of pink were regarded as signifying different classed positions. For example, Luna reflected on the local identities associated with pink gin. Explaining how *‘class has a lot to do, I don’t think that anyone ever thinks that Scousers are anything more than like lower class’*, she considered the femininities at play in such consumption practices as denoting a working class identity. Whilst she did not judge or degrade such femininities herself, she felt that the consumption of pink products by working class women *‘connotes pink to be quite cheap [and] gimmicky’*, compared to the pink consumption practices of middle class women, which she describes as *‘quite sophisticated, like, pink pearls, pink silk’*. The difference between a *‘hot pink rather than a pale pink’* could thus make all the difference to the feminine identities attached to products, and the likelihood of consumers purchasing and consuming them.

The importance of shade was also expressed by marketers, who whilst not outwardly referring to class, discussed different shades of pink in ways that invoked classed connotations. Those who had worked in marketing of more affordable or *‘cheaper’* female targeted products had used brighter and bolder shades of pink in their product marketing, and as discussed, this was a way in which they targeted *‘girly’* consumers. However, others discussed such shades judgements, and deliberately distanced their products from brands that used this palette, which was regarded as *‘cheap’*, *‘tacky’* and *‘gaudy’*. For example, one brand and sustainability manager discussed a new product that was *‘not overly feminine’*, and how they had deliberately not *‘gone down any of that over kind of it’s almost sort of gaudy, isn’t it? The pink and glitter and sparkle’*. Noting that *‘we’re trying to go after quite a broad audience and the audience are people who care about provenance, who care about how the things that they purchase and consume are made in terms of quality’*, she framed her brand as superior to those who overtly pink their products. The use of the word gaudy, a term often used to describe working class aesthetic and culture, denotes conspicuous consumption, excess and vulgarity (Lockyer, 2010), and as such suggested a subtle classed distinction at play in her discussion of pinking. Consequently, some avoided the use of pink, and when pink was used, palettes that were *‘not purely pink’* but more *‘neutral’* (Female, social media marketer, gin brands) such as *‘pastels’* (Female, food and drink marketer) were preferred, to distinguish their products from that of other *‘cheaper’* brands (*‘our product is*

pink in colour, it's a very soft pink, it's not bright pink', female brand manager). Therefore, the symbolic connotations attached to drinks were not only gendered but were intersectional, and related to concepts of exclusivity, class and locality, and this was a consideration for both marketers and consumers.

**'Not everyone's gonna like pink because I would say it's a girly colour': resistance and rejection of the pink 'girly' 'stereotype'**

Other women, who all identified as feminist, actively resisted and rejected the 'stereotype' of pink products, and refused to consume pink drinks due to its association with normative femininity. They regarded pink targeting as 'uncreative' and 'outdated', and as promoting a traditional construct of femininity that they found 'patronising', 'condescending', and 'not relatable'. For example, Tory (20 s, Black, queer, feminist) described such products as 'still not me, it's not a reflection of me' and Luna (20 s, non-binary she/they, white, feminist) explained that they could 'appreciate' pink products, 'but I don't see myself in them, I don't see myself taking pictures of my pink gin'. Many regarded these products as 'not aimed at them', and as not reflecting their 'type of femininity' and how they 'see themselves' as women. The traditional 'girliness' associated with such products was regarded as 'outdated' and 'old fashioned' and as such off putting, as hinted at by Evy when explaining that marketers assume that 'If I'm drinking pink wine, I need to be this type of woman that straightens my hair and gets all glammed up'. As expressed by Harper in extract 2 below, this strategy was felt to 'put [women] in a box' in ways that prevented them from exploring their individual preferences and authentic selves. By targeting what was described as the 'generic women' (Olivia, 20 s, white, heterosexual, feminist), brands thus alienated a large group of women who 'stay[ed] away from it, just because I do not want those sorts of stereotypes' (Daisy, 18, white, heterosexual, feminist).

Extract 2

I think the stereotype as well, like the pink, like not everyone's gonna like pink just because I would say it's a girly colour. But I think you know just to emphasise that not everyone loves pink. It's restricting women as well 'cause I feel like they're just like in one box and it's just not allowing them or feeling like they can kind of like get out of that box and just be who they wanna be. I feel like it's very kind of limited and it's just representing like the pink and stuff

(Harper, white, heterosexual, feminist, 20 s)

Negative associations were further reinforced by the view that the pinking of women's drinks and products 'babied' and 'patronised' women, as expressed by Ruby (30 s, white, heterosexual, feminist) who stated that such marketing presented women as 'really frivolous and silly and not serious'. She felt it 'infantilised women' and refused to consume such products. Like others, she assumed such 'stereotypical' marketing was designed by 'a room full of men' set with the task of marketing a product to women, and deciding upon 'pink, pink, pink, sparkly, put a Unicorn on it'. As adult women, they thus rejected these drinks, despite some expressing a general like of the colour.

These women's perspectives reflected discussions with brand marketers who framed the pinking of products as 'stereotypical', 'outdated', 'uncreative' and 'boring'. Whilst they showed an awareness that such products did not appeal to all women and reproduced stereotypes, pinking was discussed as a 'safe' and 'reactive' form of marketing. For example, a female wine brand manager expressed that whilst pink was 'very done', there was an unwillingness by some to do so as 'the beverage industry is quite safe, and we have a lot of rules that we have to abide in order to sell our products. So it is quite rare that you see someone step outside'. The continued use of a strategy that many regarded as outdated and stereotypical, was further explained by a male brand manager through the concept of 'copycat brands'. As opposed to conducting research to inform product design, smaller brands were discussed as copying the trends of larger brands, who had success with the female market and a large market share- 'Say for example Gordon's Pink, they obviously launched and then Whitley Neill, they launched their Pink

Grapefruit, so we call it copycat. They are very reactive rather than proactive'. The power of supermarkets in dictating the use of pink to attract female shoppers was also raised. For example, a female marketer discussed how a leading supermarket approached them to design a product to 'attract women into the beer fixture'. Having designed a purple label, they were told "No, we want it pink", and were contracted to redesign the product.

**'My girlfriend, she felt embarrassed with a pink gin': negotiating the gender binary and heterosexual connotations of pink drinks**

As an extension of the rejection of pink as a symbol of 'girliness' discussed above, pink products and marketing were critiqued for reflecting and reproducing long standing and outdated binary distinctions between men and women, and the drinks they were expected to consume. Pink was rejected as a gender 'stereotype' that was used by marketers who were accused of 'assuming' women should find pink drinks appealing. Women were offended by this assumption, which was seen as an extension of the long standing problematic belief that 'if it's a boy, it's blue, if it's a girl, it's pink' (Poppy, 30 s, white, bi-sexual, feminist). Some discussed 'hating' the marketing assumption that 'you're a particular gender and therefore this is how you should identify', and as a result these women rebelled, as explained by Poppy (30 s, White, bi-sexual, feminist)- 'it actually makes me go the other way and I want to rebel, I want to absolutely rebel and I want to challenge it'. Similarly, discussing a dislike of pink wine, Chella stated that whilst she finds the product tastes 'gross', her aversion to the product was based on 'people assuming that you would drink [it] because you're a girl and girls like pink things'.

Generally, discussions on pink drinks led to binary talk around societal expectations of 'men's and women's drinks', and as other research has discussed (e.g. Nicholls, 2019; Emslie et al., 2017), women felt that traditional connotations that beer and pint consumption is a masculine practice that women should avoid in favour of products such as pink gin, continued to be engrained in society. Judgement was regarded as being placed on women who preferred pints over pink gin, as summarised by Matilda (20 s, white, bi-sexual, feminist) when stating there is a 'stigma' around women taking a picture with a pint, as opposed to guys taking a picture with a pint, like that women shouldn't drink beer'. These women critiqued and rejected these stereotypes, but discussed them as powerful associations that influenced people's drinking practices (Emslie et al., 2017), and associations that are reinforced by pink marketing.

Reinforcing gender binary expectations through the use of pink was not only viewed negatively for impacting the drinking practices of women, but also men's. Men were discussed as being restricted from consuming pink drinks, due to the risk of being labelled 'feminine' ('He gets so much stick for it, saying, "That is so feminine.", Kate, 18, white, heterosexual, feminist) and 'gay'. This highlights an awareness of a misogynist and homophobic discourse that is attached to men defying binary expectations of drink choice, with gay men being assumed to be feminine, and as such, feminine drinks framed as inappropriate for heterosexual men to consume. Many recalled stories of male friends and partners refusing to drink pink drinks, or recalled examples of men using derogatory language when discussing men's consumption of such products. For example, Kate described how a group of male student friends were 'giving each other stick' for drinking pink gin- 'they were all drinking it and they were all saying, "That is so gay." Because you are drinking a pink drink... They were all just winding each other up, even though they were all drinking the pink gin, which just made no sense'. As such, pink drinks were regarded as denoting more than gender but also sexuality, and the heterosexual and feminine connotations attached to pink was something some queer women also negotiated within their drinking choices. For example, in extract 3, Ari discusses connotations of gender and sexuality being attached to pink gin relative to pints of beer. She describes how her girlfriend was 'embarrassed with a pink gin' and how this was an example of her applying a form of 'toxic masculinity on herself', as a result of feeling societal pressure to consume masculine rather than feminine drinks as reflection of her identity as a masculine

presenting lesbian. Whilst this account is second hand, it highlights how some women applied an intersectional feminist critique of gender and sexuality to pink marketing and its effects.

### Extract 3

'My girlfriend, she felt embarrassed with a pink gin and it's obviously because she feels like she's got to fight for her masculinity because she feels like she doesn't particularly fit in with anyone. Like she's got friends who are boys but she's not a boy. And then she's got friends that are proper girl girls, like her best mate's had like her nose and tits done, and she's like 'I'm not girly enough for them but I'm also not a boy'. So it does kind of feel like it's making a choice of, do I drink a pint or a gin?'

(Ari, white, feminist, queer, 20 s).

The creation of a gender binary in drink choice was not only viewed as problematic for being restrictive and creating social judgement on women and men who do not conform, but for also creating the concept of gender as a binary construct itself. For example, in a group discussion with feminist and queer women, the pinking of drinks was regarded as 'very stereotypical' in that it assumed 'girls have to like it. Whereas boys, they have to like blue'. This raised the question of 'what if you're non-binary, what colour are you meant to like? There's no colour specific to you'. Here the gender and sexual politics at play in identity making mediated how women interpreted the pinking of drinks, and their intersectional identity making impacted the effectiveness of pink marketing.

From a marketing perspective, the binary use of pink particularly angered women working in the (craft) beer industry, who described its use to target women beer consumers as a 'microaggression' (Female marketer/ beer distribution manager), and something that owners of craft beer brands discussed deliberately avoiding ('I don't think that any brewer should be trying to change the font or make it pink for women', Female brewer). Instead, they asserted that 'beer has no gender' (Female craft beer owners/brewers) as an alternative marketing pitch to appeal and include women within the craft beer scene. Some contested the pinking of beer through the infusion of fruit flavours to pink products to appeal to women, regarding this assumption as 'a little simplistic' (Female beer marketer). Yet, others discussed the use of fruit and sweet flavours as a standard way to attract female drinkers through colour and taste ('when Kopparberg wanted to get girls drinking, they made Kopparberg fruits', Female beer brand/marketing space manager).

Marketers also considered the impact of the binary use of pink on male consumers, yet other than one male brand marketer discussing an historic use of the colour to target the 'pink pound' of gay men, pinking was not discussed with reference to sexuality. For example, a brand marketer and manager for a number of globally popular brands, framed pinking as 'ridiculous' for asserting the simplistic view that 'Oh yeah, that's target women, we'll use pink'. Labelling this strategy as 'outdated', he went onto discuss the limiting nature of using pink to exclusively target women, stating that 'many people like pink drinks, men and women like pink drinks, so it's just a very old school portrayal, it lacks imagination, it's very limiting'. Some discussed examples of using more neutral pink shades to appear more 'gender neutral' and an emerging resistance among some men to the gender binary. For example, a male brand manager discussed witnessing a 'flip around the male consciousness and the machoism and they're [now] comfortable with [drinking pink products]', attaching this to younger men when suggesting this trend is 'generational'. However, some avoided the use of pink when targeting the male market in ways that reproduced the binary. One marketer discussed examples of changing the colour of products from pink when re-targeting products to the male market as 'pink puts men off' (Female marketer, female targeted brand).

### 'Reclaiming pink' as feminist?: debating and reworking the girly connotations of pink

Some women, all feminists, debated and attempted to rewrite the

meanings associated with pink drinks and the colour more generally, beyond its traditional girly connotations. They debated and negotiated the tension point between pink as appealing and pink as stereotypical, and this impacted their attitudes to pink drinks. This debate and negotiation played out in two main ways. Firstly, some talked in ways that suggested they were attempting to 'reclaim' pink as part of their feminist identities, but given the long-standing stereotype of the colour this was a complex process. The tension point between conforming to the gendered assumptions at play in society, including marketing, and identifying as feminist, is highlighted in the conversation between Chella and Evy in extract 5. In response to being asked whether pink aligns with her feminism within a discussion on pink drinks, Chella describes how generally she may be 'reclaiming' pink. However, her friend Evy reveals how the tension between liking pink and being feminist, is a 'conversation she has with herself' within her purchasing practices.

### Extract 5

Chella: I think I might be reclaiming pink. I think that might be a thing I'm doing. I feel like Evy would have recognized me doing this more than I would recognize myself doing it, but I do seem to wear a lot of pink and I do talk a lot about pink

(White, queer, feminist, 20 s)

Evy: It's a conversation I have to have with myself because I am like 'Oh no, it's pink, I don't want that'. And then I'm like 'Why? Why don't I want that then?' It's like an ongoing monologue, constantly of like, 'Can I wear pink? Should I wear pink? Do I like pink? Why don't I like it?'

(White, heterosexual, feminist, 20 s)

The concept of 'reclaiming' raises the question of whether pink has taken on feminist connotations in recent times, reflecting post-feminist and fourth wave feminist practice of reclaiming all things traditionally girly and stereotypical as a celebration of womanhood, in ways that declare femininity and feminism compatible (Gill, 2016; Schraff, 2020). Whilst this may be at play among some, the conversation highlights how women's relationship with pink is complex, and negotiated in ways that attempt to rework the traditional girly connotations the colour represents. Chella, who makes the statement of reclamation, went onto state that she still at times 'dissociates herself' from pink drinks. As shown in extract 6, she critiqued her own consumption of such products, which she interpreted as 'rewarding [the] bad behaviour' of marketers who use stereotypes to target women. Whilst she previously discussed reclaiming pink as feminist, she justifies her consumption of pink drinks as being based on 'taste' and in turn dissociates herself from the stereotypical 'person that drinks very typically girly drinks'. This highlights a tension between her identity as a feminist and the concept of 'girliness' pink drinks denote. Similarly, one young feminist (19, Kim, white, queer) discussed embracing the colour 'ironically', which suggests that whilst the colour may not align with her perception of feminism, through the use of irony she was able to distance herself from any un-feminist connotations. Although dissociating oneself from these girly connotations reflects the viewpoints of the women discussed earlier who outwardly rejected pink, these women attempted to correct the tension point between consuming pink and their feminist identities, rather than refusing to consume pink products.

### Extract 6

'I think this is my thing with the whole like alcohol branding thing. It can be like 'Oh, pink gins? Girly pink gins?' All this, but I like it as it also tastes nice. So you have this whole thing about, you don't want to be that person that drinks very typically girly drinks but also it tastes nice. So, you end up rewarding bad behaviour on the part of the market share because you're not buying it because they market it as a girly drink, you're buying it because you like the drinks to taste pink'



(Chella, white, queer, feminist, 20 s)

Secondly, others commented on the association between pink and girliness, and how having rejected the colour as children, they now embraced the colour stating that *'it's just a colour'*, in ways that endeavoured to remove its feminine connotations. They discussed the *'social construction of pink as feminine'*, which was considered as an *'arbitrary'* social and marketing creation. Rather than rejecting the colour, they argued against such connotations, as some women surmised: *'I feel like, get over it a bit. Like it's a colour. I like pink, it's pretty. That's it'* (Darcy, 19, white, queer, feminist) and *'Girl doesn't mean pink'* (Kerry, 30 s, white, heterosexual, feminist). Older feminists discussed how having rejected the colour when younger, they now embraced it as *'when you get older colours get a bit more neutral'*, and as such less *'girly'* (Nel, 20 s, white, heterosexual, feminist, late 20 s). In extract 7 below, Roxy describes the process through which her relationship to the colour had changed with age. Stating that *'it's just a colour'* compared to her past view that *'pink is for girls'*, she reflected on her previous *'rejection'* all things pink on the basis of this stereotype as *'ridiculous'*.

Extract 7

*'When I was younger, anything that was pink I'd be like 'it's disgusting', but now I really like pink and I'm trying to not let it define who I am as a woman. It's just a colour. I always kind of thought because quote unquote 'pink is for girls', and I really kind of rejected it. And I decided I don't wanna like it, because I don't want to fall into that stereotype. But then I was like 'this is ridiculous. It's a colour. If I want to like it, I can like it', you know'*

(Roxy, 20 s, white, queer, feminist)

Yet despite at times attempting to rework the connotations attached to the colour and the consumption of pink drinks, Roxy went onto discuss pink drinks negatively and her reworking of the colour did not extend to alcohol products *'all things pink and fluffy, I wouldn't want to be perceived as liking that. Cause I wanna be perceived as more of a strong independent woman and I feel like I can't do that if I've got a pink gin'*. She associated pink alcohol with *'fluffiness'*, and as such she regarded them as *'too'* girly, and at odds with the post-feminist and fourth wave feminist concept of female independence and empowerment. Similarly, Gemma (white, 30 s, heterosexual, feminist) who did drink pink products, discussed how as a child she'd *'hated pink because of the stereotype [as she] didn't want to be the girly girl that it was associated with'*. However over time the colour had *'grown on her'* and she asked the question of *'Why shouldn't we [women, feminists] like pink?'* Whilst she challenged the interpretation of feminism and femininity as mutually exclusive, she concluded that liking pink as a feminist was *'difficult, as I guess there's other ways to represent women other than pink'*. Some even framed their recent liking of the colour in relation to their changing relationships and attitudes to men. Maggie (white, 20 s, heterosexual, feminist) who drank pink drinks, described in detail how when she *'was young [she] rejected pink and I really wanted it known that I didn't like the colour'*, as she was *'trying not to be like other girls [to] appeal to men'*. Now that she no longer *'gives a shit about what men think'*, she was willing to consume the colour.

Others criticised the use of the pink to imply feminist connotations in marketing, labelling it *'millennial pink'* and critiquing it through a capitalist lens to distance themselves from the market and individualised based feminism the colour was felt to represent. Ari who did drink pink drinks, discussed how she had a book entitled *'Feminists Don't Wear Pink (and other lies)'* [Scarlett Curtis, 2018], and how in the past when *'feminism was less mainstream'*, the public held negative perceptions of feminists as women who were *'all ugly women with cats who didn't wear pink'*. Whilst she felt this stereotype was problematic, she also critiqued the recent use of the colour in popular feminism as a form of *'capitalism that markets the whole 'girl boss', bad bitch', 'pink', 'Eurocentric beauty'*. Here she reflects academic criticism of the book's message, that argues that the fusing of feminism and femininity in popular feminism does not

only leave heterosexual norms intact, but also reifies white privilege through its embrace of normative femininity (Schraff, 2019). Angela (White, 30 s, heterosexual, feminist) similarly critiqued the notion that pink instils feminist associations. Describing a marketing strategy that is *'aggressively this style of everything is glittery, everything is pink and it's all like 'Oh, girl boss' put glitter on your tits'*, she dissociated herself from popular *'girl boss'* market-based feminism, which she describes as *'con-descending'*. Thus, whilst some debated and reworked pink to rid it of its girly connotations to address the tension point between pink and feminism, others rejected this compatibility and went further to critique, and reject, the possible feminist connotations of the colour and the feminist identities attached to it. Such active and nuanced negotiating and reworking had not been considered by the marketers interviewed. When asked about the relationship between feminism and pink, and the use of the colour to denote feminism, none disclosed using this as a strategy to target women.

## Discussion

The paper presents findings that provide insight into women's and marketers' perspectives on the 'pinking' of alcohol product design and marketing content to target the female market (Public Health Advocacy Institute & Cancer Counsel WA, 2019; Atkinson et al., 2019; Atkinson et al., 2022). As might be expected when considering the findings of past research (Nicholls, 2016, 2019), some feminist and non-feminist women unapologetically conformed to pink marketing within their expression of a more traditional and normative 'girly' femininity. This reflected the intentions of some marketers, with those who had worked for stereotypically 'girly' brands, discussing the deliberate use of pink to appeal to 'girly' women. Pink drinks allowed women to individually and collectively feminise their drinking, as an accessory, in the same way as different (hyper) feminine and sexual dress is deployed for the performance of girliness (Emslie et al., 2017; Nicholls, 2019). By visually drawing on the longstanding cultural association between pink, femininity and girliness, brands were able to successfully feminise their products, which for some women, became an aesthetic and accessory that symbolised and celebrated a very specific form of normative femininity. Yet presenting oneself as girly did not guarantee that women would drink pink drinks, and many resisted and criticised pinking as an easy and obvious way to target women. Moreover, whilst for some women who were feminist, pink and girliness were compatible with their feminism, others rejected the assumption that they purchased such products *because* they were women. This was to prevent their identities being reduced purely to the stereotype of the 'girly girl', who was framed as being easily influenced to consume such stereotypical products because of their gender. The ways in which some women discussed pink products and marketing was not only gendered but classed. At times the consumption of pink alcohol was associated with a very specific form of working-class femininity. Some marketers wished to dissociate their products from this through the use of different shades of pink. Thus, gendered and classed connotations intersected to influence women's attitudes towards certain brands (Lindsay, 2006; Nicholls, 2019) and the femininities certain products were felt to represent and appeal to.

Others, who were mostly feminists, outwardly rejected pink products and marketing as negative gender stereotypes, that reinforce a binary difference between women and men, and reduce women to appearance, girlhood and innocence (Atkinson et al., 2022; Koller, 2008). They wished to distance themselves from the girly connotations and identities such drinks signalled, which were at odds with their identities as feminists. Pinking prevented the consumption of pink products among these women, but not consumption *per se*, with other drinks being consumed instead. These women's perspectives reflected discussions with brand marketers who had moved away from pinking, whilst simultaneously framing it as an effective form of generic female-targeted marketing. Whilst pink marketing is effective in appealing to some women as part of their feminine identity making, the pinking of products actually acts to

prevent others from purchasing and consuming such products as it is deemed unrelatable to their identities.

Some women critiqued pink products in relation to the gender binary, with such products being felt to reinforce an unnecessary and harmful binary notion of gender. Such notions were discussed as feeding into the social judgement of consumers who defy gendered expectations; for example, men should not consume 'feminine' drinks and that women should not drink pints of beer (Nicholls, 2016). The binary created by pink marketing also conflated gender and sexuality, and the intersecting connotations of gender and sexuality attached to pink drinks were negotiated within consumers' gender and sexual identity making. The colour encompassed connotations of 'gayness' or 'queerness', through a hegemonic discourse on gender and sexuality that assumes that a 'violation' of the heterosexual norm is equated with gender inappropriateness (i.e. gay men are assumed to be feminine and gay women to be masculine). As such, for women, pink indicates and signifies a heterosexual femininity, and for men, homosexuality (Koller, 2008). The conventional binary opposition that pink products signify 'femininity', was felt to be reversed for gay men to signify non-heteronormativity, and women were critical of the way pink drink consumption among straight men is often met with homophobic insults (i.e. 'gay') that police men's drinking behaviour (Emslie et al., 2017). Moreover, there was discussion that suggested additional identity work is at play among some queer women, with examples of them avoiding pink drinks as a sign of heteronormativity when signalling their identity as lesbian and more masculine. Such examples highlight the importance of considering intersecting identities within wider debates about gender performance and the construction of masculinities and femininities, and how this is achieved by drinking practice, and informed by marketing. A number of marketers raised the binary nature of pink marketing as problematic, including a reluctance by men to consume such products, but discussed some shades of pink as more 'gender neutral', and an emerging resistance among some men to the expectation that they should avoid such products.

Some feminist identifying women aimed to challenge and subvert the negative connotations attached to the colour pink and pink products, by reclaiming it as feminist and a celebration of womanhood, in ways reminiscent of post-feminist and fourth wave feminist aesthetics that aim to address the tension between traditional femininity and feminism (Gill, 2016; Schraff, 2019). This meant that the gendered associations attached to the colour pink and its use in alcohol marketing, appeared to hold wider appeal than the traditional girly femininities it is often associated with. Pink drinks were appealing to both non-feminist and feminist women and this can be understood in two co-existing and intertwined contexts. Firstly, a post-feminist resurgence in the popularity of pink and girly aesthetics amongst (young) adult women who have reclaimed it as an expression of empowerment and celebration of womanhood (Gill, 2008). Secondly, a more recent reclamation of pink by some young feminist women and its use within popular neo-liberal feminism- a feminism born out of post-feminism- which meant for some the colour held feminist undertones (Koller, 2008; McRobbie, 2020; Rivers, 2017; Schraff, 2019). Such reclaiming is exemplified in the pink woollen hats worn by (white) feminists at the Women's March Against former US President Donald Trump, or the shade 'Millennial pink' that forms part of fourth wave 'Instagram' feminism, that aims to assert a feminine colour with a positive value for 'women who do not want to choose between traditional femininity and feminism' (Bideaux, 2019:5). For some then, pink is more than just a stereotype, and it holds consumers' attention aesthetically, symbolically and perhaps, even politically, but in ways that have been argued to leave heterosexual norms intact (Schraff, 2019).

Despite these alternative connotations, for some, a tension point was still at play between pink and feminism, and they dismissed and reworked the gender connotations and binary pink was regarded as symbolising and reinforcing, by stating it is 'just a colour'. Such active and nuanced reworking of the connotations attached to pink had not

been considered by marketers, and whilst the sample is by no means representative of those working in alcohol marketing, this suggests the identity of women as feminists and how this relates to popular forms of marketing such as pinking, had been overlooked. That said, in recent years alcohol brands have begun to use the language and imagery (e.g. raised fists) of gender equality and the commodification of feminist messaging to target the female market (Atkinson et al., 2022), which suggests some are targeting feminist aligned women as a new market.

A number of limitations should be acknowledged. Whilst the study gained a large sample of women from varied backgrounds, the view points and experiences should not be considered to be representative of all women's views. This is not problematic however, and as the research highlights, it is important to consider social positions beyond gender-sexuality, class, local context-when studying women's views and lived experience. Secondly, whilst the paper is novel in providing insight into marketers' perspective, these too are not representative of the alcohol industry. Individuals who agreed to take part may be very different in their attitudes to female targeted marketing than those who declined or did not respond to our invite. There is also the potential that marketers withheld particular view points and discussion of certain marketing practices. Despite reassurances, considering wide academic and public discourse about the marketing of alcohol to women, they may have perceived they would be judged by public health and gender researchers.

## Conclusion

Pinking forms one strategy through which the alcohol industry relates its products to the feminine identities of consumers. The research suggests that the way that women draw on and incorporate such products into their performance of femininity in drinking contexts is complex, nuanced and intersectional, in ways that repudiates some participants' claims that pink is 'just a colour'. Pink alcohol products and marketing content related and appealed to a number of traditional and non-traditional feminine identities, and promoted the consumption of alcohol to a larger range of women than those who could be defined as 'girly'. Women who consumed pink and 'feminine' products both rejected and endorsed feminist identities and some attempted to subvert the traditional and negative connotations attached to pink, including the dissonance between feminism and the traditional femininity associated with the colour. For them the two were no longer regarded as mutually exclusive and they attempted to reclaim pink as feminist, whilst also attempting to detach the girly connotations the colour denotes. Others outwardly rejected attaching feminist connotations to the colour, critiqued the form of market-based feminism pink was felt to represent, and distanced themselves from the girly femininities and stereotypes such products were believed to symbolise. Given that the use of pink is a common tactic used to promote alcohol brands globally, more international research should explore consumer attitudes towards pinking, and the consumption of such products among different genders, taking an intersectional perspective that also considers the importance of locality.

## CRedit authorship contribution statement

**A.M. Atkinson:** Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Data curation, Conceptualization. **B. R. Meadows:** Investigation, Writing – review & editing. **H. Sumnall:** Writing – review & editing.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## Ethics approval

The authors declare that they have obtained ethics approval from an appropriately constituted ethics committee/institutional review board where the research entailed animal or human participation.

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