

"It's a kind of act of friendship, isn't it, saying 'do
you want a pint?'"

Men's drinking in mid-life

(**Quotations removed from slides as article
under consideration by journal**)

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(Glasgow Caledonian University from April 2012)

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Why focus on mid-life men?

- ⇒ Public & excessive drinking is traditionally linked to 'masculinity' (changing...)
 - ⇒ BUT men still drink more & more likely to die from alcohol-related causes than women
- ⇒ Current focus on young 'binge' drinkers but older men also engage in heavy drinking
 - ⇒ Alcohol-related death rates doubled in mid-life men over the last two decades



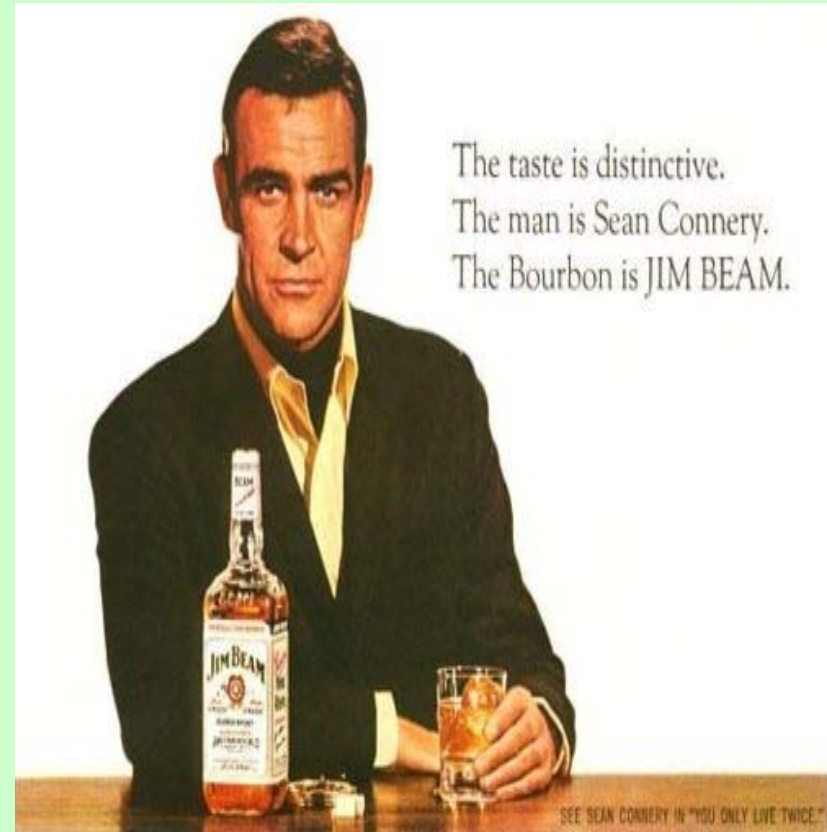
Why does 'masculinity' matter...?

BELONG



What sort of man are you?

- ⇒ What, where & how alcohol is consumed is a powerful way of showing what sort of man you are
- ⇒ E.g. to 'drink like a man'
 - ⇒ take it straight
 - ⇒ don't sweeten it
 - ⇒ drink beer or spirits
 - ⇒ don't hesitate
 - ⇒ be able to 'hold' your drink
 - ⇒ (Lemle & Mishkind 1989)



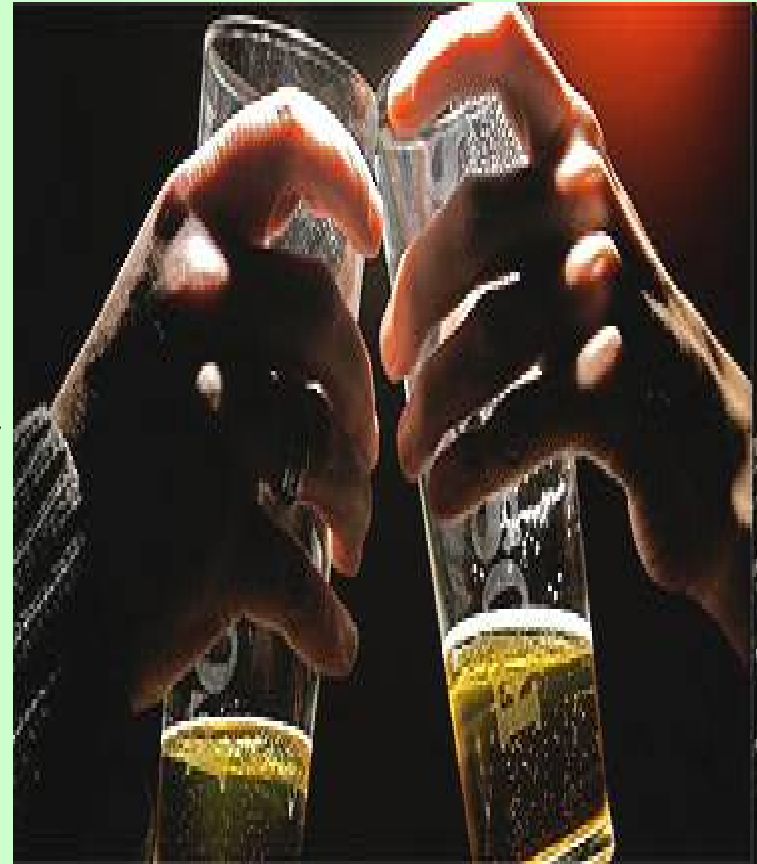
Drinking Attitudes in Midlife: focus group study

- ⇒ How do women and men in mid-life in the west of Scotland perceive (excessive) drinking?
- ⇒ Talked to 15 pre-existing groups (work, friends, community) aged 30-50 years. Single & mixed sex
 - **Today: 10 focus groups which included men**
- ⇒ Wide range of drinking (0 - 92 units in last week)
- ⇒ Half of the men reported drinking over 21 units
- ⇒ Socio-economically diverse sample



Findings: Drinking as 'act of friendship'

- ⇒ Drinking pints & buying rounds in the pub integral part of male friendship
- ⇒ Idea of men going out for dinner or coffee together greeted with laughter or disbelief



'Friendly' pressure to drink



- ⇒ Intention not to drink – or to stop drinking alcohol – simply not accepted by others, even in mid-life
 - ⇒ “Go on, go on, just the one!”
 - ⇒ “Just leave the car, just leave the car!”
 - ⇒ “Another one for the road!”

- ⇒ (Emslie C, Hunt K, Lyons A. (in press) Older and wiser? Men’s and women’s accounts of drinking in early mid-life. *Sociology of Health & Illness*.)

- ⇒

Drinking and mental health

- ⇒ Topic raised by respondents not by interviewer
- ⇒ Negative aspects of alcohol acknowledged but drinking with male friends perceived as uplifting & improving wellbeing.
- ⇒ Awareness of poor mental health of men compared to women.

A problem for public health?

- ⇒ How can public health messages compete with alcohol which is perceived to cement friendships with other men & improve wellbeing?
- ⇒ Some suggestions. ...
 - ⇒ Discussions of masculinity
 - ⇒ Men's own strategies



(A) Awareness of (changing) masculinity

PLACE

- ⇒ “Men in the industrial west of Scotland, aren’t going to start hugging each other saying: let’s do a latte”
- ⇒ Continental Europe: men drink coffee in bars & “nobody buys their round!”

LIFECOURSE – older & wiser?

(B) Men's own strategies: pacing through pints

- ⇒ Ordinary strength beer – consume less alcohol at a steadier pace than wine or spirits. Keep 'sensible', in 'control', 'disciplined'



**SELF-
CONTROL**

Conclusions: men's drinking in mid-life

- ⇒ Buying a pint for a friend = an act of friendship.
- ⇒ Drinking in the pub was perceived as a 'natural' way for men talk to each other, improve mood & provide social support.



Where next?

- ⇒ 1) Build on men's own strategies for moderating drinking
 - ⇒ Sport / pacing through pints
 - ⇒ Importance of retaining 'control' as a man (gender) & as an experienced - rather than novice - drinker (mid-life)

- ⇒ 2) Wider cultural discussion
 - ⇒ Our findings illustrate men's awareness of variability of 'masculinity' over time and between places
 - ⇒ Question inevitability of the 'macho' Scottish stereotype in order to break the link between masculinity and heavy drinking? (nb SHAAPs campaign about changing culture?)



Or we leave it to the alcohol industry...

- ⇒ “Guys are inherently lazy! ... Guys want easy slices of masculinity ... Guys want badges of masculinity that can be worn without the effort of earning them.”
- ⇒ *(Advertising agency pitch to Smirnoff Black, Hastings 2010)*

