

Exploring gender stereotypes at the bar

By Aliza Kellerman, VinePair

“Clear liquor is for rich women on diets.”

So says Ron Swanson, one of the most quotable characters on television today. In this case, I find myself disagreeing with his typical wiseness, but the goal of this article isn't to give a takedown of an internet meme, but rather to ask why? Why are certain spirits and tastes considered feminine while others are considered manly?

Let's first consider taste. Do women really like sweets more than men? Try to recall food commercials you see on TV. Without thinking too hard, which foods do you associate with women, and which do you associate with men? When it comes to female-targeted commercials, the first thing I think of is chocolate. When was the last time you saw a chocolate commercial geared toward men? In the U.S., they're nearly always marketed toward women, typically as an indulgence. CollegeHumor parodied this theme in their skit “If Chocolate Ads Were Honest.”

The skit plays off of how chocolate is often advertised as a guilty pleasure, something women should eat in secret, hilariously enough giving the candy both sexualization and shame. The food commercials aimed toward men, however, typically tell a different narrative. First off, they don't push candy, they push meat. And men aren't shown nibbling burgers in private, they're shown chomping down on steaks or grilling proudly. Thus, meat – a savory taste – is shown as “strong,” something to aspire to like, while chocolate – a sweet taste – is shown as “weak,” something to be ashamed of enjoying. I'm afraid to say this line of marketing is more

sinister than simply sweet equals weak. It's also saying sweet equals weak and therefore equals female. This is an idea that's played ad nauseum in American advertising and media. It must at least partially contribute to why sweetness in a drink is thought of as embarrassing. Perhaps this is why ordering a Margarita is more embarrassing than, say, a Manhattan.

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