

# Beyond a binary gendered and a Western research focus in wine consumer research: an exploratory study of intersectionality in narratives of wine consumption in Kenya

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Increasingly, gendered wine consumer research is moving beyond the male/female binary to consider the relevance of multiple intersecting consumer identities. Taking a discursive approach to the construction of identity, this study aims to add to work on gendered wine consumption by analysing an interview with a young female Kenyan wine consumer in which gender intersects with other identities. The authors also intend to add to the limited work on wine consumption that focuses on non-Western populations.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Considering research interviews to be the topic of research, rather than a resource for researching, this paper takes a discursive approach to the analysis of the interview-talk. More specifically, the authors use positioning theory to analyse the way in which identities are discursively constructed and positioned relative to each other and wider social discourses of gender and wine consumption.

**Findings** – Findings indicate that wine consumers' gendered identities go beyond a priori binary demographics based on biological sex to reveal a kaleidoscope of intersecting and paradoxical identities.

**Practical implications** – Marketers stand to benefit from moving beyond gender stereotypes by adopting research approaches that reveal how gender is shaped in real-life contexts. This can lead to more targeted, relevant messaging and stronger connections with diverse consumer segments.

**Originality/value** – The study highlights the importance of the intersection of gender with other identities. Furthermore, it gives an insight into wine consumer identity outside Western populations. It also advocates an interdisciplinary approach to analysis, combining discourse analysis with wine consumer research, so as to provide fresh insights.

**Keywords** Gendered identity construction, Positioning theory, Discursive narrative analysis, Narrative, Intersectionality, Kenya, Wines

**Paper type** Research paper



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## Introduction

Historically, wine research and managerial inquiry have treated gender as a static category, focusing almost exclusively on the binary differences between men and women regarding purchasing behaviour and appreciation (e.g. [Forbes, 2012](#); [Kolyesnikova et al., 2009](#); [Thach, 2012](#)). However, this traditional lens masks the reality that wine is fundamentally bound up with a gendered social order and operates within longstanding, multilayered gender structures. Beyond a rather simplistic male/female divide, wine reflects multiple gendered expressions, shaped by ideology, beliefs, cultural rituals and social practices ([Almila, 2025](#)).

As [Almila \(2025\)](#) further points out, these gendered structures are complicated by generational shifts and geographic context. For instance, the experiences of women in wine participation vary significantly depending on whether they occur in well-established or emerging wine regions. Furthermore, existing research on gendered wine consumption and industry involvement has centred primarily on Western contexts (i.e. North American, European and Australasian), therefore marginalising much of the global wine community.

These shifting dynamics suggest that gender alone is insufficient to fully explore the world of wine. By focusing exclusively on a two-dimensional framework, existing scholarship has frequently overlooked how gender intersects with other vital social categories, such as age, class, ethnicity, race and cultural and geographic relations. Consequently, there is an invitation to move towards a more expansive, intersectional approach that accounts for the complexity of wine experiences ([Almila, 2025](#); [Caluzzi et al., 2024](#)).

Responding to this call, this paper uses data from Sub-Saharan Africa, notably Kenya, which remains an under-researched region in wine business literature despite its growing importance as an emerging wine market ([Clifton et al., 2021](#); [Dumbili, 2024](#)). Secondly, this paper draws on recent research that has started to develop a more nuanced, less binary approach to gender in consumer studies in general ([Tissier-Desbordes and Visconti, 2019](#)) and in wine consumption research more specifically ([Clifton et al., 2021](#); [Dumbili, 2024](#); [Törrönen et al., 2017](#)). Crucially, this work builds on recent scholarship that advocates for an intersectional approach, positioning gender as a category that must be understood in relation to other social identifiers.

For data, this paper uses transcripts of a series of narratives that emerged from one research interview with a 22-year-old Kenyan female student, recorded in 2019, in Nairobi, Kenya. To make visible, and therefore analysable, the ways in which she talked into being her multiple and intersecting identities, we use positioning theory ([Michael Bamberg, 1997](#)) to discursively analyse how she performs identity and positions herself in relation to others, as well as to wider gendered social discourses of gendered wine consumption. Treating such interview-talk as the *object of research*, rather than as a resource for doing research, the novelty of such an approach is that rather than abstracting interview-talk into themes and using extracts to exemplify such researcher-driven themes, we show, in fine-grained detail, how the gendered identity-work in stories of consumption evolves as the storytelling progresses in real-time and how various social categories such as economic status, age and education intersect with gender.

In sum, taking a discursive narrative approach to performing gendered consumer identity, we set out to answer the following research question:

*RQ1.* What intersecting wine consumer identities are constructed in the interviewee's narratives of wine consumption?

Importantly, because our approach to the examination of interviews relies on the close analysis of a series of connected narratives from one interview, we frame this paper as exploratory research. Exploratory research is often undertaken in under-investigated areas,

such as wine consumption in non-Western populations, where little systematic research has been carried out. Consequently, exploratory research may use limited data sets to investigate under-researched areas to provide tentative findings that suggest avenues for further research requiring more extensive inquiry using wider data sets (Stebbins, 2001). Thus, as Swedberg (2020) notes, while an “exploratory study may maximize the chances of being creative, it only has the power to suggest ideas, never to prove them” (p. 33). This is precisely the aim of this paper: to offer insights that can inform and inspire further, more comprehensive research into gendered identity construction in wine consumer research, and potentially in broader consumer contexts as well.

### Theoretical background

As De Beauvoir (2011) famously claimed: “one is not born a woman, but becomes one”. Such an approach to identity has not been lost on feminist scholars (e.g. Butler, 1999; Connell, 1995) who consider that gender is not *a priori* and biologically determined; rather, it is a situated accomplishment. Foremost among scholars who promote the view of the performativity of gender is Butler (1999). She contends that gender, like any identity, is not an *a priori* natural “essence” that is “in there somewhere” at the core of the individual and which drives behaviours; rather, it is performative, which is to say that talk and action constitute “the identity it is purported to be” (Butler, 1999). Such a post-structuralist feminist perspective therefore places the emphasis on the way in which language is the medium through which a (gendered) sense of self is constructed and performed. As Butler (1999) says: “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (p. 33).

From this perspective, identities are not something that we have and which are brought along to social interactions and which drive (consumer) behaviours; rather, (gendered) identity is something that is enacted as part of social practice. It is, as West and Fenstermaker (1993) note, achieved through “the local management of conduct in relation to normative conceptions of appropriate attitudes and activities for particular sex categories” (p. 155). However, as Crenshaw (1989) noted in her critique of feminist scholarship, feminist research tended to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories, which had the effect of minimising the manner in which Black women are subordinated in the USA. Crenshaw therefore proposed that discrimination should not be considered through a single issue framework of either black or female, but rather that if feminist scholars hoped to express the aspirations of non-white women, they should consider the intersection of race and gender. More widely, this points to the need to move from a monist approach to social categories to take into account the intersection of several social categories such as age, gender, race and education.

Taking such a performative and intersectional approach to identity construction has implications for consumer research. This is because since consuming is social practice, and it is necessarily a site for (gendered) identity construction and so, as Seregina (2019) points out, “gender becomes inseparable from consumption, its practices, objects, and contexts” (p. 455). And, as Uduehi *et al.* (2025) argue, bringing the lens of intersectionality to bear on consumer research allows researchers to “engage in a more nuanced appreciation of consumers within the marketplace” (p. 11). Further, if (gendered) identities are enacted as part of social practice, it follows that discursive approaches to (gendered) identity construction, which focus on the way in which identities are talked into being, are an ideal way of making observable and thus analysable the manner in which consumers construct their, and others’, identities as part of this practice.

### The wine context

There are many assumptions about gender roles in a vinicultural context, where certain aspects of wine consumption are stereotypically associated with men, while others are conventionally tied to women. How male and female wine drinking is interpreted in a society depends largely on the manner and place in which drinking occurs. Wine consumption enacts – and is enacted by – wider cultural gendered discourses of what men and women should and should not be drinking.

Wine has been a gendered product since antiquity. In their historical overview of wine and gendered societal order, [Almila and Inglis \(2022\)](#) observed that for centuries, women's wine consumption has consistently been associated with chaos and viewed as a threat to patriarchal social relations and cultural formations. Consequently, it faced markedly stricter socio-cultural regulations and taboos than men's drinking, often framed by essentialising gendered stereotypes. Accordingly, across studies of gender and wine, there is a recurring theme that wine consumption is both shaped by, and participates in, broader cultural and gendered discourses about masculinity, femininity and social status ([Charters, 2006](#)). And yet, the impact of the social and cultural environment on the gendered nature of wine has not been studied with the necessary depth to reveal fundamental socio-cultural dynamics of gendered wine consumption. As [Almila \(2021\)](#) argues, to truly understand the enormous power of wine's genderedness, a deep cultural analysis is needed.

This essential scholarly inquiry is particularly lacking in markets not traditionally known for their wine culture, making their examination crucial to fully understanding the global complexity of gendered norms. Generally, Western scholarship on the relationship between gender and alcohol consumption has produced extensive insights into how masculinity and femininity shape drinking practices, behaviours and environments. However, it leaves a major gap in understanding these dynamics in non-Western contexts, such as sub-Saharan Africa.

Using Nigeria as a case in point, [Dumbili's \(2024\)](#) recent work highlights the near absence of sociological research on how gender norms influence both alcohol use and the social spaces where drinking occurs in non-Western contexts. This lack of research is particularly significant given Nigeria's deeply patriarchal and culturally complex society, where gender roles are historically rooted and evolving. [Dumbili \(2024\)](#) further argues that studying alcohol consumption in non-Western settings is critical because it demonstrates how global gender constructs interact with local cultural systems, thereby expanding theoretical perspectives beyond Western experiences and assumptions. In essence, [Dumbili's \(2024\)](#) pioneering exploration of alcohol consumption in places like Nigeria provides critical insights into the cultural diversity of drinking practices and directly challenges the Western-centric frameworks that currently dominate alcohol and gender studies.

Despite previous research into gendered wine consumption and a very new stream of research on alcohol in sub-Saharan Africa, what is missing from the body of research, with the notable exception of [Clifton \*et al.\* \(2021\)](#), is fine-grained analyses of how gendered identities are talked in being and performed as part of *in situ* social practice. To address this lacuna, and framing this paper as an exploratory study, we take a discursive approach to the construction of identity.

### Method: positioning theory

While [Butler's \(1999\)](#) notion of performativity is highly influential among feminist scholars, exactly how gendered identities are talked into being has been left to discursive psychologists (e.g. [Edley and Wetherell, 1997](#)), ethnomethodologists (e.g. [West and Fenstermaker, 1993](#)) and discourse analysts (e.g. [Lazar, 2014](#)). In this paper, we take a

discursive approach to identity construction, based on Michael Bamberg's (1997) notion of narrative positioning theory. Davies and Harré's (1990) seminal paper on positioning, later developed by Bamberg, claims that positioning has interesting parallels with feminist post-structuralist theory. This is because both feminist post-structuralist theory, as typified by Butler's (1999) notion of performativity, and positioning theory emphasize how "an individual emerges through the processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate" (Davies and Harré, 1990 p. 47). Moreover, Davies and Harré argue that stories are a prime site for studying the construction of (gendered) identities and so "in this way post-structuralism shades into narratology" (p. 48). However, Davies and Harré's (1990) seminal paper on positioning relied on fictional stories rather than naturally occurring talk. Furthermore, as Wetherell (1998) laments, post-structuralist theory is almost always lacking in fine-grained analysis of "what is happening right now, on the ground, in this very conversation" (p. 395). Therefore, to combine close narrative analyses of the discursive construction of gender *in vivo* with a post-structuralist performative and intersectional approach to gender, we use Bamberg's (1997) development of positioning theory, which is closely associated with narrative analysis. Positioning theory broadly refers to the way in which people are "positioned" in talk, and so it privileges "the close inspection of how speakers describe people and their actions in one way, rather than another and, by doing so perform discursive actions that result in acts of identity" (Bamberg *et al.*, 2011). Following Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008), acts of identity – gendered or otherwise – exist at three different levels, which they sum up as follows:

- *Level 1*: how the characters in the storyworld are positioned relative to each other and display their stance to each other.
- *Level 2*: how the participants (interviewer and interviewee) are positioned in the here-and-now of the interview-talk/storytelling and display their stance to the emerging story.
- *Level 3*: how the interviewees/narrators position themselves, and are positioned, with regard to dominant discourses (i.e. pre-existent sociocultural forms of interpretation).

At Levels 1 (the world of the story told) and 2 (the storytelling world), to be recognised and to recognize others as having a particular identity, participants have to "pull off" these identities by displaying morally acceptable actions, values, beliefs and so on, for the "right" audience, at the "right" time (Gee, 2025, p. 7). These "right" actions, values and beliefs are based on a shared and normative understandings of what is appropriate for a particular identity and so, as De Fina (2006) puts it, they "link local identities to shared ideologies and beliefs" (Level 3 positioning). This is especially relevant for gendered constructions because people construct identities so that they, and others, can be "evaluated in relation to normative discourses of manly and womanly behaviors" (West and Fenstermaker, 1993, p. 157). These discourses of manly and womanly behaviours are available in what Michael Bamberg (2005) calls "master narratives" or "pre-existent sociocultural forms of interpretation" (p. 287). These master narratives vehicle particular discourses that enable the telling of particular stories which are reflexively reproduced through the storytelling talk. In other words, the talk (re)produces particular gendered societal discourses, and, reflexively, these discourses (re)produce the talk. For example, as Michael Bamberg (2004) illustrates, the dominant discourse of hegemonic masculinity is enacted in the storylines of typical heteronormative fairy tales in which it is always the strong, handsome prince who saves the beautiful, but weaker, princess. Similarly, wider societal discourses, of, for example, normative and

gendered wine consumption, are used as resources for telling stories of wine consumption and, reflexively, the stories (often, though not always) (re)produce a discourse of hegemonic masculinity in which the male dominates the female. As a result of this interplay between discourses of masculinity and femininity and stories, narratives provide a rich resource for gendered identity construction. To render the interplay between wider societal discourses (Level 3) and the identities enacted in both the storyworld (Level 1) and the storytelling world (Level 2) visible, positioning theory relies on the close analysis of transcripts of stories as they emerge as part of *in situ* social practice. Moreover, following [Michael Bamberg et al. \(2011\)](#), stories can be analysed according to how the characters in the storyworld and the storytelling world navigate the dilemmas of sameness and difference and agency. Sameness and difference relate to the way in which the characters in the storyworld are positioned relative to others as, for example, male/female, educated/uneducated and rich/poor. The dilemma of agency relates to whether characters are constructed as active agents directing their lives or as undergoers of external forces.

### The data

The analyses presented here are part of a larger project concerning wine consumption in Kenya, for which the first author conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews. The interviews were not directed by any pre-structured questions, and so both the interviewee and the interviewer were able to select and move between topics in the flow of talk. The research project obtained ethics approval from the lead researcher's university and was carried out with full adherence to the ethical exigencies of the university.

The first author was a white European male in his 50s who had extensive business experience in sub-Saharan Africa, notably Kenya, and was acting in the capacity of the lead academic researcher for this project. Interviewees were selected using a snowballing sampling technique ([Noy, 2008](#)) whereby access was gained through the first author's acquaintance with wine consumers in Nairobi, Kenya. For a list of transcription symbols used, please see the [Appendix](#).

For the purpose of this paper, we focus on one interview with a 22-year-old, middle-class, female undergraduate student of Kikuyu descent. The particular interview was selected because, as [Ryave \(1978\)](#) points out, stories often come in a series in which succeeding stories are designed with an observable relationship to the previous story. In the data discussed in this paper, there was a series of stories, each building on the other, concerning wine drinking and dating in different contexts. This, therefore, allowed us to trace the way in which the same interviewee negotiated numerous intersecting gendered identities that were relevant to her across different contexts. As [Caluzzi et al. \(2024\)](#) argue, static social identities are not enough to explain how such social categories are lived and embodied; rather, individuals make relevant multiple, simultaneous identities that "they navigate fluidly over time and in various cultural contexts" (p. 22).

### Analyses

*Extract 1. Storyline: typical campus person takes a girl on a date; he buys her wine; she treats herself:*

- (1) IR but do you think th-that issue of price affects the image of wine
- (2) IE yeah totally
- (3) IR yeah, in what respects
- (4) IE in that you know (.) maybe for the typical campus person (.) you can't take a
- (5) girl out and buy her = like by the time she gets to five glasses = three glasses

- (6) that's proper, you know, as opposed to a can of beer [a bottle of beer and you  
(7) IR [uhu  
(8) can have many of those [so maybe it's considered a bit of euh you don't do  
(9) IR [uhu  
(10) it every day [for a campus person to go out and have wine every day  
(11) IR [uhu  
(12) of the week it's difficult [so it's kind of like when you spoil yourself  
(13) IR [uhu

In Line 1, building on prior talk about the price of wine, the interviewer shifts the topic to the interviewee's thoughts on how the price of wine affects the image of wine. The interviewee responds with a habitual narrative of the "typical campus person" dating, and therefore, she co-constructs the interview by initiating a shift of topic to dating. In the there-and-then of the storyworld (Level 1), the "typical campus person" is has agency in taking the girl out and paying (Line 4: "you can't take a girl out and buy her"). However, despite projecting what the typical campus person cannot buy her (Line 5), the interviewee continues with the quantity the girl drinks (signalled by "like"): "like by the time she gets to five glasses – three glasses that's proper". Proper [1] therefore stresses the normative aspect of the amount of wine a girl on a date should drink as opposed to the "many" cans or bottles of beer that "you can have" (Line 8). The evaluation, marked by so, is that: "you don't do it every day 'so' it's kind of like when you spoil yourself" (Line 12).

The identity-work in this habitual narrative of what a campus person and girl can and cannot drink, talks into being a form of masculinity in which the male is has agency in taking out a (passive) girl and he pays for the drinks, which, as [Muthuki \(2006\)](#) points out, is a common trope in contemporary Kenyan society. Moreover, the use of the word "girl" makes age, as well as gender, relevant. At Level 3 analysis, the narrative therefore draws on, and reflexively, re-enacts the dominant discourse of "conventional narrative of heterosexual romance, taking up a passive position as a woman who waits for the man to make arrangements" ([Benwell and Stokoe, 2010](#)). Moreover, the man pays, which could suggest that there is some kind of unspoken transactional quid pro quo in which sexual favours are bought through gifting ([Hartsock, 2004](#)). However, paradoxically, in the evaluation of the narrative, the girl in this narrative is not entirely passive: she is active in spoiling herself (Line 12: "when you spoil yourself"). She thus has agency in choosing and negotiating her own dating behaviour. And, she has agency in the production of enjoyment, thus exploiting the male partner for her own pleasure and subverting the normative roles of active males and passive females.

*Extract 2. Storyline: older guy takes girl out, orders, buys and drinks wine*

For reasons of space, we jump ten lines in which the interviewee continues to talk about the typical campus person, and we pick up the analyses when the topic shifts to the older guy:

- (14) IR but he could have whisky or beer [while the girl's having wine  
(15) IE [yeah  
(16) IR and that would be okay↑ for everybody or↑ would the girl want him  
(17) to join her on the wine or↑  
(18) IE okay, so it depends on the type of guy [if it's a normal campus guy  
(19) IR [uhu  
(20) IE like twenty = in his early twenties, it's okay for him to have another drink

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- (21) like probably (.) like a whisky you know [that's okay, but even a beer's  
(22) IR [uhu  
(23) IE fine, but like let's say if a guy older than (.) you know, twenty-seven  
(24) is going out with you, expect him to be like okay, first of all, let's  
(25) get a bottle you know and he'd know what to-he'd probably do the  
(26) ordering of the wine [so let's say and probably he's working  
(27) IR [uhu  
(28) making good money, that's when he can afford to take you out  
(29) to this restaurant and so therefore it would be expected you know  
(30) for him to know his wines [and that would probably earn  
(31) IR [uhu  
(32) him some points [because he could order £good wine for you£  
(33) IR [<————— laugh —————>  
(34) IR £yeah£  
(35) IE yeah, so I guess it's a guy who's more cultured [and who has  
(36) IR [uhu  
(37) enough money to spend on a bottle of wine at a restaurant as  
(38) opposed to a guy you know on campus trying to impress you  
(39) you know, there you would just go easy on him and let him have  
(40) his yes

In Line 25, co-constructing the interview by building on the interviewee's prior story, the interviewer suggests a hypothetical scenario in which the typical campus person could have a beer or whisky while the girl has wine. In the here-and-now of the interview (Level 2), he then asks the interviewee to give her opinion on the imaginary scenario. In response to this question, the interviewee sets up two contrasting identities: "the normal campus guy" (Line 29) and the "older guy" (Line 34), therefore making difference and the intersection of age and gender a relevant social category for understanding wine consumption. The use of the adjective "normal" stresses the generic quality of her description (cf. "typical" in the prior talk). For this normal campus guy, who is in his early twenties (Line 31), it is "okay for him" to have beer or whisky. This sets up a gendered difference: campus guys drink beer and whisky, girls drink wine, thus making wine consumption a gendered activity (Clifton *et al.*, 2021).

In Line 34, the interviewee, using the introductory phrase "let's say", takes the initiative to set up the first hypothetical narrative in a series. The protagonists in the story, Level 1, making the intersection of gender and age relevant, are the "guy older than (.) you know 27" and, using the generic "you", an undisclosed, yet generalised, "girl". The consumption experience is performed through the use of an imagined hypothetical story detailing what the generic "you" would *expect* (Line 35), so underlining the moral obligations of the older guy in an imagined dating scenario. The predicates (i.e. clusters of expectable features that can be inferred from attributing, or claiming, particular identities) associated with the older guy of the storyworld (Level 1) are related to his actions; state of knowledge; and situation.

Firstly, in terms of actions, the interviewee uses an imagined utterance "let's get a bottle of wine" to "put words into the mouth" of the male protagonist, who would have agency and

be expected to suggest that *both of them* drink wine. Moreover, the man would be expected to order the wine (Line 37).

Secondly, the interviewee sets out the expected state of knowledge of the “older guy” as protagonist in the story (Level 1). In this case, knowledge of wine is projected (Line 36: “and he’d know”), and then confirmed (Line 40: “it would be expected you know for him to know his wines”). At Level 3, this identity work (re)produces the discourse identified by [Thach \(2012\)](#) that having knowledge of the technical aspects of wine and wine drinking is associated with males rather than females. Furthermore, this morally expected state of knowledge “would probably earn him some points” (Line 43). This again stresses the normative judgement involved in the identity-work, which positions, Level 3, the older guy within a gendered discourse of masculinity and holds a dating partner accountable for his actions. In this case, the utterance prompts the interviewer to laugh, which could be seen as laughing *at* the interviewee for introducing a game metaphor, which involves making an obvious moral judgement by attributing points to dating partners. As the laugh is in progress, the interviewee adds an increment to her utterance accounting for rating her dating partner “because he could order £good wine for you£”. This increment is spoken with a smile voice (i.e. “a markedly higher pitch and an intonational contour comparable to laughing during speaking but without any laughter tokens” ([Buttny, 2001](#)) and therefore aligns with the interviewer’s laugh and laughs with him. This, therefore, co-constructs the irony of the situation, underlining that it is not “just” wine that could be ordered but good wine, so reinforcing the prior assessment of wine consumption while dating as a lavish event.

Thirdly, in terms of situation, the older guy is “probably working, making good money that’s why he can afford to take you out” (Line 39), and explicitly has “enough money to spend on a bottle of wine at a restaurant (Line 48). This, therefore, makes economic wherewithal, or class, a relevant social category which intersects with both age and gender. In sum, at Level 3, this identity work related to predicates associated with older guys draws on the dominant discourse or master narrative (Level 3 analysis) of heterosexual romance in which the woman takes a passive role and waits for the man to make arrangements and pay ([Benwell and Stokoe, 2010](#); [Eaton and Rose, 2011](#)). As noted before, paying for the wine could be interpreted in terms of giving gifts for sex, in which women are treated as commodities that can be bought and in which gift giving is considered to be an instrumental act designed to achieve the transactional goal of having sex. Yet such a quid pro quo is not articulated by the interviewee; no mention of sex is made, and such a discourse of commodification is not made relevant.

At the end of the hypothetical story, the interviewee, signalled by “so”, sums up the gist of the talk and differentiates the “older guy” from the “normal campus guy”. The older guy is more cultured, has money to spend and implicitly impresses, whereas the campus guy is “trying to impress” (Line 49). Significant here is that the interviewee does not treat men as a homogeneous block: there are different masculinities with different moral obligations in terms of what they are normatively expected to do, know and be. One masculinity – the typical campus guy – enacts the stereotypical beer or whisky drinking man, the other – the older guy – enacts the cultivated, new man who can afford to drink wine ([Clifton et al., 2021](#)). This, therefore, underlines, from the interviewee’s emic perspective, the importance of the notion of difference within the category male, and hints at the inability of binary categories (male and female wine consumers) to capture the nuances of gendered consumer identities.

*Extract 3. Storyline: older guy takes girl out, drinks whisky:*

- (41) IR okay, so if it was a guy who was let’s say twenty-seven, twenty-eight
- (42) and he came in and ordered a whisky for himself and a glass of
- (43) wine for you, you’d just go eugh, I’ll step back from this one, yeah †
- (44) IE yes coz I mean in fact if he did the ordering for me and assumed

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- (45) that I would drink a glass of wine, it would be like okay, you know  
(46) I can drink whisky too, you really don't know me like that  
(47) but yes, if it's someone you know who's working [and who has  
(48) IR [uhu  
(49) experience and exposure, you'd- I would expect him to know  
(50) his wine  
(51) IR so it makes a statement, it's an image  
(52) IE yes, it's an image, yes  
(53) IR it's saying this is me  
(54) IE this is me  
(55) IR and I understand you girls  
(56) IEI'm more cultured, and I don't believe I don't fall into the  
(57) societal norms, a man only drinks beer. I enjoy wine, so that  
(58) would bring him off as very exposed well-cultured

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In Line 52, in the here-and-now of the interview (Level 2), the interviewer formulates the gist of the prior story and, building on the prior stories, displays his understanding by setting out an alternative hypothetical scenario which confirms the understanding that an older guy drinking beer or whisky on a date would be open to moral censure. In this alternative hypothetical narrative, the protagonist is an older guy (Line 52: “twenty-seven twenty-eight”). Rather than ordering wine, in this scenario, he orders “a whisky for himself and a glass of wine for you”. The use of the pronoun “you” shifts from the hypothetical generic girl to the interviewee. Voicing the interior dialogue of the interviewee in such a situation, the interviewer projects that in such a situation she would “just go eugh I’ll step back from this one” (Line 54). This hypothetical evaluation of the interviewee’s reaction is followed by “yeah” spoken with a rising intonation, which co-constructs and affects the flow of the interview by soliciting confirmation or disconfirmation of this hypothetical scenario.

In Line 55, the interviewee aligns with the story (“yes”) and adds to this story by describing the imagined mental state of the male protagonist. This is presented as a two-part if-then-structure. The if-clause describes the hypothetical action (“if he did the ordering and assumed that I would drink a glass of wine”) and the then-clause evaluates the action (“it would be like okay you know I can drink whisky too you really don’t know me like that”). The evaluation is presented as a voicing of her thoughts. Thus, whisky becomes a possible, though morally accountable, choice of drink on a dating occasion. An older guy who drinks whisky is judged as neither knowing about the girl nor her consumption habits. In the continuation of talk, the interviewee confirms this moral judgement: “if it’s someone you know who’s working and who has experience you’d – I would expect him to know his wine” (Line 60).

Formulating the gist of the interviewee’s talk, in the here-and-now of the interview (Level 2), the interviewer adds a coda to the story (i.e. its relevance to the here-and-now) and so co-constructs the story in progress. The coda is that male dating partners drinking wine “makes a statement it’s an image” and “it’s saying this is me and I understand you girls”. This adds another predicate to the identity of the older wine drinker – understanding girls. Significantly, the interviewee co-constructs this identity-work by not only confirming it (Line 63: “yes, it’s an image, yes”) but also by voicing the “older guys” thoughts: “I’m more cultured and I don’t believe I fall into the societal norms ‘a man only drinks beer’ I enjoy wine” (lines 67–68). At Level 3 analysis, this talk (re)produces the societal gendered norm of

men drinking beer and of men who break this norm being more exposed and cultured (Clifton *et al.*, 2021). Further, it also makes the link between wine consumption and projecting an explicitly cultivated image so that the man “pulls off” (Gee, 2025), in a morally accountable way, being exposed and cultured and so earns points on the dating market (cf. Line 43). Thus, the identity of being cultured, or educated, also intersects with gender and age.

*Extract four. Storyline: girl/interviewee goes out on a date with older men; she orders wine; she is a classy lady:*

- (59) IR and for the girl ordering wine at the meal, what type of statement  
(60) would that be making?  
(61) IE I think it’s like the go to [what are we having oh wine if I say  
(62) IR [yeah okay  
(63) something like I’ll have a martini [that would come off as oh, okay  
(64) IR [uhu  
(65) that’s different  
(66) IR that’s interesting, so wine would be the norm?  
(67) IE wine is the norm  
(68) IR whereas anything different would be stepping outside the norm?  
(69) IE yes [because, if I go and sit down and I order like a Snapp or a  
(70) IR [okay  
(71) IE Redds, you know it doesn’t convey -it depends on what kind of  
(72) image you’re trying to convey [but for me I would want to  
(73) IR [uhu  
(74) IE convey something like I am a strong, independent woman  
(75) [I enjoy my wine, so it puts up a better message, you know  
(76) IR [laugh  
(77) IE and so it’s the standard I guess if you want to look like you know  
(78) your stuff you’re a classy lady, you have wine  
(79) IR okay, that’s great, just a couple of questions now about how and  
(80) when you started to drink wine, how you were introduced to wine  
(81) how did you begin, and that sort of thing

In Line 70, using the conjunction “and”, the interviewer adds an increment to the emerging series of hypothetical narratives, i.e. the hypothetical scenario of the girl ordering wine. The interviewer then asks the interviewee to evaluate this action (Line 70: “what type of statement would that be making”). In Line 72, the interviewee evaluates the action positively as a morally acceptable action (Line 72: “I think it’s like the go to”) and co-constructs the story format by quoting an imagined question/response dialogue “what are we having?” “oh wine”. She then contrasts this with an alternative hypothetical scenario in which her response to “what are we having” would be “something like I’ll have a martini”, which she evaluates, quoting an imagined observer who would say/think “okay that’s different” (lines 74–76).

The interviewer then sums up the gist of the story and the stance displayed “that’s interesting, so wine would be the norm”, “whereas anything different would be stepping outside the norm” (lines 77–79). The interviewee aligns with this by contrasting her

normative hypothetical narrative with a habitual narrative: “if I go and sit down and I order like a Snapp or a Redds [2] you know it doesn’t convey” (Line 82). However, before the “what” that is conveyed is given, she contrasts drinking (fruit flavoured) beer with wine drinking. Drinking wine conveys “something like I am a strong independent woman I enjoy wine so it puts up a better message” (Line 86) and “so its standard I guess if you want to look like you know your stuff you’re a classy lady” (Line 89). Difference is therefore made relevant because the identity classy lady and woman is set up in contrast the identity girl, thus going beyond the simple identity “female” to encompass the intersection of gender with cultural maturity and age. Ordering wine, therefore, contrasts favourably (cf. comparative “better”) with beer-drinking and enacts a denial of lower consumption habits (beer drinking) in favour of more refined habits (drinking wine). This enacts a superior and classy identity for the girl, which serves to underscore the morally accountable difference between female wine drinkers on a date and female beer drinkers on a date. Further ordering the wine enacts a gendered identity that resists, at Level 3, hegemonic masculinity because the woman is enacted as “strong [and] independent” (Line 85). However, at the same time, this identity-work is mitigated because the woman wants to *look like* she knows her stuff, which is contrasted with the “older guy” identity of the previous story in which the man *does* know his stuff. Therefore, somewhat paradoxically, at Level 3, the interviewee both resists and accepts a form of masculine hegemony while consuming wine in a dating situation.

### Discussion

Returning to our research question (*What intersecting wine consumer identities are constructed in the interviewee’s narratives of wine consumption?*), the following observations should be emphasised. Firstly, adopting a research mentality associated with exploratory research, we note that a close analysis of the interviewee’s narratives reveals that four identities are constructed: *the girl, the classy lady, the campus person/guy and the older guy*. This suggests that approaching gendered wine consumption from a binary perspective of male/female does not give a fully nuanced picture of the consumer’s own sense-making concerning the gendered consumption of wine. In these narratives, men are differentiated and divided into two discrete identities (the campus person/guy and the older guy), each with their own consumption habits, predicates and normative rights and responsibilities when taking a girl out on a date. It is acceptable for the campus guy to drink either beer or whisky on a date because he does not have the financial wherewithal to pay for wine (Line 12). On the other hand, the “older guy” normatively drinks wine on a date. If he fails to do so, the interviewee would “step back” from him and treat his behaviour as morally accountable. In terms of actions and agency, the older man is expected to order and buy the wine. He is also expected to know about wine and girls, and to be cultured. In terms of lifestyle, he is expected to have a job and to be earning good money. While to some extent the interviewee’s construction of the “older guy” enacts a discourse of romantic masculinity (i.e. the caring, thoughtful and emotionally responsive male), nevertheless, as Allen (2007) points out, this discourse is not necessarily devoid of power and dominance. It reproduces, to some extent, the archetypal romantic storyline of the fairy-tale masculine hero who sweeps the woman/princess off her feet and which is shot through with notions of male power over women (Michael Bamberg, 2004). Consequently, such identity work enacts, and is reflectively enacted by, stories that reinforce a highly patriarchal Kenyan society in which gender differences, imbalance and inequality are normative (Maina and Caine, 2013). Moreover, since it is the older man who pays (cf. extract two), this could be seen as (re)producing a discourse of the commodification of women who can be bought through gifting, which assumes an exchange, gifts for sex, said to be common in Sub-Saharan Africa (Moore *et al.*, 2007). However, such a discourse is not

articulated by the interviewee, rather (Line 8) though being bought wine, she spoils herself. In other words, the interviewee has agency in spoiling herself and talks herself into being a strong, independent woman and classy lady. The third identity that is enacted is the girl who is passive in allowing the man to take her out, and to order and pay for the wine. However, despite this passive positioning, which draws on a hegemonic form of masculinity, there is a hint of resistance. The girl is active in the production of enjoyment, thus exploiting the male partner for her own pleasure and subverting notions of hegemonic masculinity in which males are active and females are passive. The fourth identity made relevant in the storytelling talk is that of “classy lady” who orders wine and is strong and independent, which also challenges hegemonic norms and the deeply rooted attitude embedded in Kenyan society that women should have an inferior position in relation to men (Barnett *et al.*, 2016). However, this positioning is also nuanced since the woman, rather than knowing about wine, *looks like* she knows about wine. Real knowledge is still a male preserve.

Thus, in this case, the interviewee’s storytelling talk is paradoxical – drawing on both discourses of female liberation and hegemonic masculinity. Such an observation should not be glossed over as an anomaly. Rather, as Sitz (2008) notes, it points to a blind spot in consumer and marketing research, which generally considers consumer attitudes to be fixed and reflected in talk. Taking a discursive approach to the construction of identities and the way that they are positioned relative to wider societal discourses reveals that “attitudes” are often inconsistent and even contradictory. Consequently, they should be seen as fleeting constructions responding to the exigencies of the flow of interaction, rather than fixed psychological states that are “in there somewhere” and are simply reflected in talk. Further, it may be that binary conceptions of consumer preference that gloss “female” and “male” attitudes to wine consumption are necessarily missing the nuanced and even paradoxical construction of gendered consumer identities that a close discursive analysis can reveal. In this respect, this paper underlines the importance of taking an intersectional approach to wine consumption, which argues that discrete social categories such as gender, class and age cannot be mobilised independently of each other to understand phenomena. Rather, as Caluzzi *et al.* (2024) argue, “a more refined focus on the dynamic intersections of gender and other social feature of women’s lives is needed” (p. 8). Responding to this lacuna, this paper has shown that wine consumers cannot be understood as either male or female, but that the interviewer and interviewee make sense of wine consumption in terms of gender intersecting with age, class (or at least financial abilities) and education.

### Conclusions, limitations and future research

While foundational research often focused on comparative analyses of binary sex categories, a growing body of recent work has begun to explore the multidimensionality of gendered wine consumption (Almila, 2025; Almila and Inglis, 2022). Our study builds upon existing multidimensional approaches and serves as a discursive extension to this scholarship by shifting the focus from static variables to the interactional processes of gendered identity construction. By providing a deep discursive analysis, we illustrate how intersecting categories such as gender, class and age are “talked into being” within specific social contexts. Consequently, we build on, and add to Caluzzi *et al.*’s (2024) work on narratives of alcohol/wine consumption that, while focusing on intersectionality, did not take a specifically discursive approach to analysis that highlights the performativity of gender.

Firstly, we note that, as recent work has suggested, going beyond biological sex gives a more nuanced picture of gendered wine consumption. Understanding these intersections is crucial for gaining a comprehensive understanding of wine consumers and their preferences, and as Uduehi *et al.* (2025) point out, “without an intersectional understanding, marketing risks continued exploration of the same patterns and populations” (p. 22). As illustrated in this paper,

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dividing “men” into two gendered categories, the “older guy” and the “campus guy” and women into the “girl” and the “classy lady”, shows that gender does not exist in isolation: it interfaces with age, culture, states of knowledge (knowing about women and wine) and economic wherewithal (being well-off). Thus, rather than categorising wine consumers for research and/or marketing purposes in demographic terms of an *a priori* male/female dichotomy, the findings of this paper point to the need for a more subtle approach to gender which captures the nuanced and intersectional aspects of identity whereby consumer identities do not depend on a single dimension, such as gender, but on the intersection of several dimensions such as age, economic status and product knowledge (Gopaldas and DeRoy, 2015).

Further, taking a discursive approach to the single-case analysis of stories allows the researcher to make observable the interviewee’s/storyteller’s own gendered sense-making of her consumption experience as it is constructed *in situ* – even if this is paradoxical at times. We thus join calls for a greater “plurality of theoretical and methodological approaches capable of capturing rich and complex consumption phenomena” (Bristor and Fischer, 1993). More specifically, we argue that a discursive approach to gendered identity construction enables the researcher to go beyond simplistic binaries (male/female) to provide a thick description of the way in which multiple intersecting identities are “talked into being” by the consumers themselves in accounting for their gendered wine consumption habits.

Diversifying the theoretical and methodological lens through which gendered wine consumption is investigated may also have a payoff for marketers since it nuances a simplistic male/female divide and provides a more complete picture of market segmentation. This is because interpreting how consumers understand their consumer identities in relation to their product choices is an important issue to consider when dealing with competitive markets in which products need to be designed to target evermore specific niches. In short, as Sitz (2008) points out, the discursive analysis of narratives is “one way to make marketers more fully aware of their potential for creating (experiential) value for their consumers”.

This paper also adds to the scant work on wine consumption outside so-called Western contexts (i.e. Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand). Findings from previous research on wine consumption have predominantly focused on traditional markets, often overlooking the vast potential and unique dynamics of non-traditional markets. Taking an example of gendered wine consumption in Kenya, this paper offers a more comprehensive understanding of global wine consumption patterns. As our study suggests, non-traditional markets present diverse cultural contexts and evolving consumption patterns. By examining the gendered identity construction through wine consumption, we offer valuable insights into the interplay between culture, consumer behaviour and market trends, ultimately enabling industry stakeholders to tailor their strategies to meet the demands of the growing markets.

Finally, we note that while this research offers many new insights into the construction of gender, especially in non-Western contexts, certain limitations of exploratory research should be noted. This is particularly so because this paper presents the voice of one person, in one context (dating), in one particular geographic region (Nairobi, Kenya) and social demographic (young, female student). To complement the findings of this paper, further work using a similar approach could be developed to investigate, for example, gender identity constructions outside of a dating context, or, staying within a dating context, a similar approach could be used to investigate the possible transactional nature of gifting wine. Further, we also advocate caution in extrapolating our findings to either apply to Kenyan, Sub-Saharan or African “culture” in general or to women in general. To make such generalisations, we would recommend, at the risk of losing the individual’s voice, a more quantitative approach to complement and build on the “single case” analysis that we provide here.

## Notes

- [1.] Contemporary slang meaning: awesome or cool.
- [2.] Both Snapp and Redds are fruit beers that target female consumers.

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#### Appendix. Transcription symbols used

£word£	spoken with a "smile voice"
[word	overlapping talk
word†	spoken with rising intonation
(.)	slight pause
word	stressed word

#### About the authors

Tim Clifton was studying for a PhD in Wine Marketing at the Department of Agricultural Economics at Stellenbosch University. His research focused on consumer perceptions of wine in sub-Saharan Africa, notably in Kenya and Angola. He died of malaria in 2019, leaving a wealth of field notes and interviews but an unfinished PhD. In this paper, we have posthumously completed a co-authored and transdisciplinary paper that was in progress at the time of his death. We dedicate this paper to Tim.

Jonathan Clifton, brother of Tim Clifton, has a PhD in applied linguistics and he is an Associate Professor at the Université Polytechnique Hauts-de-France, France. He has written two monographs on narrative analysis and has published widely on narrative in such journals as *Gender Work and Organization*, *The International Journal of Business Communication* and *Pragmatics in Society*.

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