

# *Research on the Right of Women in the Bar Space*

Yanfei Ma<sup>1,a,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*School of Humanities and Law, Northeastern University, Shenyang, 110000, China*

*a. yolandamyf@yeah.net*

*\*corresponding author*

**Abstract:** In China, the current behavior of going to bars shows a trend of degendering, and women also begin to enter bars to consume. In recent years, many female-friendly or female-only bars have emerged. As the emerging consumers of bar-related industries, female groups are growing, putting forward their needs to society, in order to let society hear their voices and give women equal rights and space to men. Based on China's current bar culture and gender-related social background and phenomena, this paper adopts the participatory observation method and semi-structured interview method to analyze the observed phenomena and interview contents, and finds that women are subjected to many explicit or implicit unequal treatment in bars, and further discusses the main causes of gender discrimination in bars. Through the analysis of the unequal treatment faced by women in bars, it is concluded that the cause of the discrimination against women is the deep-rooted pressure of male power in China, and the social root of this pressure is the inequality of gender rights and the shackles of traditional Chinese concepts. This paper finally attempts to discuss the solution of this inequality: female self-consciousness against traditional ideas.

**Keywords:** Bar, Women's Right, Sexism, Male gaze.

## **1. Introduction**

In recent years, as the participation of women in the workforce has continued to deepen, the enhancement of their economic independence has become particularly noticeable. Women's role in bar consumption has risen to an important position, becoming an indispensable consumption force in this field. As women become increasingly frequent visitors to bars, the phenomenon of discrimination against them in bars has also become more severe, even if they are drinking and paying for themselves. Their clothing, behavior, and very presence are all seen as "accompaniments" for male entertainment. This social phenomenon is rooted in the male-centered pressure and traditional rubbish that have persisted in China's patriarchal society. This paper takes the mobility and power of women in bars as the research theme, takes S nightclub in Fuzhou City, Fujian Province, China as the specific field interview and observation research scene, uses the participatory observation method and semi-structured interview method to analyze the phenomenon of women's unequal treatment, analyzes the causes of the phenomenon, and further traces its social roots. Table 1 shows the information of specific interviewees. Through this analysis, this study aims to explore the reasons and social roots of discrimination against women in bars, and ultimately to discuss possible solutions to this inequality. The research significance of this paper is to promote social attention to the unequal treatment of

women, as well as to call for the improvement of social concepts and evaluations of female drinking consumption, and contribute to gender equality and female liberation.

Table 1: Interviewee information

Number	Sex	Age	The frequency of bar visits	Job	Sequence number
1	Female	22	Often	Student	1FA01
2	Female	29	Once a week	Design director	1FB02
3	Female	27	Three times a week	Enterprise staff	1FC03
4	Male	23	Once a month	Student	1MD04
5	Female	24	Twice a month	Model	1FE05
6	Male	28	Often	Programmer	1MF06
7	Female	23	Twice a week	Student	1FG07

## 2. Literature Review

In international studies related to women and bars, M. L. Plant explores the consequences of female drinking and the positive effects of alcohol [1]. M. J. Lupton believes that women face social pressure and gender discrimination in bars, which puts female bar owners in economic difficulties [2]. M. Leyshon discusses the difficulties faced by young women in rural areas when drinking and points out that the bar space in rural areas has an important impact on young women's physical perception and identity recognition [3]. Lyons, A. C. , & Willott, S. A. explores the relationship between alcohol consumption, gender identity, and changes in women's social status was studied [4]. Many international scholars, however, focused on the safety issues of women in bar settings. Brooks, O. discussed the situations in which young women accepted or rejected safety advice while socializing in bars, clubs, and pubs, and her another article explored the safety issues faced by young women in these settings and their power, resistance, and control strategies in these situations [5-6].

In Chinese research, Huang, Yanhua found that the intertwining of the state's long-term cultivation of an equality view, the revival of traditional gender discourse, and the market discourse based on individualism has resulted in a complex and contradictory form of agency and practice among contemporary young women, with drinking and going to bars being one of the typical practices [7]. There is no doubt that drinking is a new way for women to relax and relieve stress. Meng, Yi's research found that Chinese urban young women use drinking to maintain, restore, and promote the "body, mind, environment, and intertwined world" upon which they depend for their "happy life" but the "female drinking stigma" phenomenon, involving media participation, still hinders women's new practices [8]. With the development of social thought, Chinese scholars have made many efforts to liberate women from stigma. Lu, Dan believes that by exploring the similarities and differences in the construction of female drinking images on different network media platforms and the stigmatization that occurs, we can better promote gender equality and social harmony [9]. Some scholars have also discovered the role that new media can play in promoting female awakening. Zhou, Zirou analyzed the female image presented in samples of online video wine advertisements to explore the presentation of female images in wine advertising and the deep-seated motivations that shape female images, concluding that the shaping of female images is becoming more diverse, which helps promote female consciousness [10]. Huang, Yanhua delved deeper into the gender power relations depicted in contemporary Chinese drinking culture in advertising, arguing that the study of Chinese drinking culture should extend to the study of the multiple power discourses behind the mass media, who are cultural producers [11].

### **3. The Analysis of Women's Behavior and Unequal Treatment in Bar Space**

#### **3.1. Dress Choice**

##### **3.1.1. Bold and Free Dress**

In the interview process, most of the female interviewees revealed that they would invest more time than daily before going to the bar for consumption activities to elaborate makeup and dress up, and even specially buy a “battle gown” dedicated to the bar occasion, in order to strengthen their female charm and meet the female aesthetic expectations generally held by the male group in the bar environment. 1FA01 said, “When I am asked for wechat by a lot of boys or good-looking boys, I feel a sense of achievement, which seems to be the real purpose of my consumption in the bar.” “I shower, wash my hair and apply a face mask before going to the bar. My makeup will be exaggerated in ways I wouldn't normally dare to wear. My clothes will also be bold halter tops, hot pants and miniskirts.”

##### **3.1.2. Unwilling to Compromise Everyday Style**

While some women may strive to change their bodies to conform to the image of a beautiful woman as perceived by men, with the widespread adoption of new feminist ideas, a considerable number of women have begun taking steps to actively undermine the instrumentality and symbolism of their bodies. These women are mostly successful businesswomen or leaders, who have a certain economic ability or social status. 1FB02 said, “I go to bars just to listen to music and drink. I want to relax, and sometimes I decide to go to a bar or am invited by a friend. Since I'm there to have fun, what the men think doesn't matter. I just want to have a good time.”

#### **3.2. Interaction between Different Genders**

##### **3.2.1. Women's Expectations of Erotic Relationships**

Some young women view accompanying men to drink as a way to expand their social circle and meet new potential partners. Given the absence of a partner role in real life, they are more prone to a daydreaming state when examining their surroundings, and tend to explore different paths to meet their personal emotional and social needs, and envision building deep connections with individuals who catch their eye during this process. 1FC03 revealed in the interview, “Because I had just broken up with my boyfriend and I was drunk, I had a one-night stand with a guy who was of the type I liked. The guy might think that the one-night stand was him taking advantage of the girl, but from my perspective, why can't it be me taking advantage of him?”

##### **3.2.2. Male Gaze**

Scholar Feng Weijun believes that bars are still a male-dominated consumption space, and in traditional beliefs, there seems to be a secret and unspoken connection between the space and female bodies. In other words, whether or not women are aware of it, as soon as they enter the space, they inevitably become a “sight” [12]. Consequently, this research involved interviewing male patrons who indicated that a significant factor driving their patronage was the opportunity to observe female patrons' physical appearance. When asked about his views on the female bar consumption behavior around him, 1MD04 said, “I don't socialize much and don't meet many girls. Many beautiful girls in bars dress very sexily. They are easier to approach in a bar setting than in daily life. My friends usually invite a few girls to come for free play when they go to a bar. It's just not fun for a group of guys to drink alone, so it's better to have girls around to play with.”

## **4. Root Cause Analysis**

### **4.1. The Need for Women to Pursue Self-worth**

First, bars serve as hubs for socializing, where women have the chance to present themselves genuinely while making connections with new acquaintances to expand their social circle. Within this context, women can express their distinctive identity, discriminating tastes, and inherent charm through verbal communication and personal style choices, resulting in recognition from peers that satisfy the pursuit of self-worth realization.

Besides, in today's fast-paced world, new experiences are sought after to provide relief from daily responsibilities. Going to bars enables women to immerse themselves in an unfamiliar environment distinct from everyday life and partake in alcoholic beverages that bring about relaxation and euphoria, encouraging the emergence of bold inclinations conducive to nurturing self-realization.

### **4.2. Patriarchal Pressure**

In the long-standing power structure and function allocation system in China, women have been placed in a markedly disadvantaged position, while men generally occupy the pinnacle of reputation, interests, and power, taking a condescending view of "observing" women. The established social norms not only solidify and naturalize the dynamic relationship of observation and being observed, but also give rise to a series of detailed and complex "verbal norms". These norms not only define the scope of women's vision, but also subtly reinforce the dominant status and assertive behavior of men. Furthermore, the intertwining of social norms and cultural customs deepens the rootedness of men's "observing" behavior. They not only solidify the relationship between observation and being observed as a norm, but also define women's visual boundaries in detail through rich "instructional words" and encourage and maintain men's superior attitude.

This socialization process has gradually turned men's observation of the behavior of women into a widely accepted and taken-for-granted behavioral paradigm. Looking back at its social roots, the social cultural customs based on gender differences and deeply rooted traditional concepts jointly constitute an important cornerstone of the male observation phenomenon. Society creates a complex system of values, institutions, and cultural practices that sets very different roles and expectations for men and women. This differential role positioning makes women more likely to be the focus of male "observation" when they engage in behavior that is only slightly out of line with established norms. Under the influence of external pressure, this results in a deep and restrictive impact and limitation on women from the outside to the inside.

The deeply ingrained gender stereotypes cannot be ignored. Over the long term, outdated concepts such as "male authority and female subordination" have been particularly reinforced in social and cultural environments such as bars. These concepts not only shape the existing perception of men towards women, but also subtly influence the self-identification and self-positioning of women themselves.

What's more, the unique shaping role of gender culture also needs to be explored. As a subcultural form, the intrinsic logic of bar culture tends to emphasize the dominance of men and the subordination of women. In this cultural context, female consumers often unconsciously integrate and internalize this role framework, further deepening their image as marginalized or subordinate roles, which deserves in-depth analysis and reflection.

## 5. Solutions to Women's Rights Issues in the Bar Space

### 5.1. Empowering Women with Self-Awareness

Under the long-term influence of feminist ideology, combined with the implementation of the one-child policy and the booming market economy, young Chinese women in the contemporary era generally have full control over family resources. During the crucial period of character development, they seldom encounter significant gender stereotypes and adopt the individualist ideology advocating personal desires and choices earlier. As they grow up, they often face unprecedented challenges and uncertainty in the pursuit of pleasure and the delicate balance between desire and dignity in the bar culture. Due to the lack of sufficient awareness of the influence of male-dominated culture, they tend to adopt the strategies of other-identification and exceptionalization to alleviate the pressure from the bar environment, social expectations, and their own inner world, thus seeking compromise and constructing their identity as moral subjects.

Therefore, it is urgent to eliminate prejudices against female drinking behavior, challenge and reshape traditional gender norms to awaken and consolidate young women's gender consciousness, and encourage them to take more subversive, reflective actions and thoughts on gender issues. Meanwhile, this process should adhere to the principle of moderation, respect and understand the compromising attitude of some women towards traditional gender culture due to deeply rooted traditional concepts, adopt gentle and persistent incentive methods to encourage them to bravely fight for their own rights and gender equality, and achieve genuine gender liberation.

### 5.2. Deepening Social Awareness of Gender Equality

In the realm of gender studies, educators and scholars ought to collaborate in embedding gender equity theories within the educational continuum, spanning from foundational levels to tertiary institutions, to incrementally nurture in students a heightened sensitivity and awareness of gender parity. This necessitates the deployment of dedicated gender studies curricula, the organization of seminars and workshops, and the exploitation of digital educational platforms, all aimed at disseminating the fundamental principles and perspectives of gender equality on a broad scale. Concurrently, the media, as a pivotal conduit of information, must proactively embrace its societal duties by presenting authentic narratives of women's experiences, which challenge and dismantle entrenched gender role stereotypes. For instance, by portraying women in bars as active participants in social gatherings, professional networking, and cultural appreciation, the media can steer public opinion towards a more enlightened and inclusive understanding of gender roles.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper explores the causes and social roots of unequal treatment of women in bar scenes by analyzing their behaviors, including clothing choices and interactions with men. It concludes that women's pursuit of self-value leads to unequal interactions with men in bar scenes, which is rooted in male dominance pressure stemming from long-standing gender rights imbalances in China. The paper proposes solutions and future directions for female self-awareness, emphasizing the importance of both women themselves and society understanding. However, despite the efforts of many women, the situation remains challenging due to patriarchal influences ingrained through traditional societal education. Notably, some women have internalized individualistic values early on, enabling them to assert their own free will, pursue pleasant experiences, engage in rational thinking, and advocate for gender equality in bar settings.

Furthermore, the limited score of experimental scenarios and interview subjects in this paper fails to encompass all types of bar scenes, and fewer references are available, which results in certain

limitations in this paper. Nonetheless, whether bravely entering bars amid prevailing social prejudices or delicately seeking a balance between joy and potential risks, inner desires and personal dignity within this specific context, these women assert their freedom and equality beyond gender boundaries while engaging in profound reflection and active resistance from an individual perspective on traditional gender concepts. As they strive to explore more ideal life paths, they also consider core issues such as freedom, equality, and rights, which coincides with the advocated ideas of postmodern feminism. However, it remains uncertain whether individual power, freedom pursuit, and equality concepts can actually promote the realization of gender equality to a certain extent without further validation through time-tested and in-depth research.

## Acknowledgment

Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Professor Daniel, for his theories on gender discrimination, which helped me understand related social phenomena and make analyses. His course content provided me with many research inspirations and directions.

Secondly, I would also like to express my gratitude to my thesis supervisor and academic advisor, who taught me how to write an academic paper according to the norms and standards. They also provided me with a lot of help and guidance in the arrangement of the outline, the logical analysis of the research, and the analysis of related phenomena.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my interviewees, who provided valuable data for my research by answering my questions. These data enhanced my understanding of the research problem.

## References

- [1] Plant, M. L. (2008). *The role of alcohol in women's lives: A review of issues and responses*. *Journal of Substance Use*, 13(3), 155-191.
- [2] Lupton, M. J. (1979). *Ladies' entrance: Women and bars*. *Feminist Studies*, 5(3), 571-588.
- [3] Leyshon, M. (2008). 'We're stuck in the corner': Young women, embodiment and drinking in the countryside. *Drugs: education, prevention and policy*, 15(3), 267-289.
- [4] Lyons, A. C., & Willott, S. A. (2008). *Alcohol consumption, gender identities and women's changing social positions*. *Sex roles*, 59, 694-712.
- [5] Brooks, O. (2011). 'Guys! Stop doing it!': young women's adoption and rejection of safety advice when socializing in bars, pubs and clubs. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 51(4), 635-651.
- [6] Brooks, O. (2009). *Negotiating power, resistance and control: young women's safety in bars, pubs and clubs*.
- [7] Huang, Yanhua, Liu, Zixi. *Femininity negotiation and moral dilemmas in bar consumption [J]*. *Chinese Youth Research*, 2021(11):63-72.
- [8] Meng, Yi, and Ma, Yao. *Sending Care to Wine Bottles: A Practical study on drinking behavior of young urban women in Contemporary China [J]*. *Youth development Forum*, 2021,(31.2): 56-65.
- [9] Lu, Dan. *Construction of online media reports on female drinking issues [D]*. Beijing Foreign Studies University, 2022.
- [10] Zhou, Zirou. *Research on Female Image in Online Video Wine Advertisement [D]*. Shanghai Normal University, 2020.
- [11] Huang, Yanhua. *Gender Power Relations in Drinking Culture [D]*. Xiamen University, 2018.
- [12] Feng, Weijun. *Space, Body and Symbol: A Study of Young Female Bar Consumption Behavior*. *Social Sciences* 2024(2): 1-82.