



Finding Identity in a Cocktail Glass: The Implications of Choice

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A tall, thin, yet busty brunette woman walks into a bar accompanied by two people; one a less tall, more curvy brunette and another of about the same height, yet of the male variety. Also a brunette.

The swanky low-lit joint is known as Cygnus, and the three dress to impress in order to enjoy an evening out. They find their usual seats at the bar, and immediately begin an exchange with the bartender, who knows “the usual” for these customers.

The tall brunette orders the Cloudy Skyy, a dry vodka martini with bleu cheese stuffed olives. The less tall brunette orders the sweet and tasty Blue Razz. The male brunette, well, he orders something along the lines of a root beer float, acting as the responsible designated driver.

Depending on whether or not the bartender is in a spunky mood, he’ll let the ladies sample his latest creation, on the house. As the empty martini glasses accumulate and glassy eyes give way to giggles, they pay for their tabs and tip their bartender well. Another successful night out on the town.

This situation is not unlike most bar settings. But all is not as it may seem. These women go out for martinis at Cygnus every Wednesday night not because they’ve got money to burn, but because the drinks are half off. The guy they came in with is business partners with the bartender, who often hooks the ladies up – not only with higher alcohol content per drink, but with deducting one or two drinks per tab. The woman with the Cloudy Skyy is watching her calories. The woman with the Blue Razz would never sacrifice taste. The guy with the root beer float, well, he gets his usual because he’s never touched a drink in his life. For one night, these women can dress up and feel fancy sipping their discount martinis.

The details of how this situation plays out can reveal some validity to certain societal and cultural perceptions within American traditions pertaining to the individual, although not without some danger of stereotyping or misinterpretation – as we see from the details of the previous example. What a person chooses to drink within a social setting does not simply reveal personal taste, but can allude to other ideas about where they are and where they would like to be within society.

Sound complicated? You'll find that the intricacies of this subject matter are so heavily invested within mainstream bar culture that the details hardly need to be spelled out for you. The ability to profile a person according to their mixed drink of choice is inherent within any individual invested in this particular social setting. You know a lot more than you think, but just to be sure, let's have you tag along for the ride. Perhaps you'll learn a thing or two along the way.

The Rise of the Mixed Drink

If you've been participatory in any media-related material in the past decade or so, you have been able to witness the ascension of the mixed drink, particularly the Cosmopolitan, in the phenomenon otherwise known as *Sex and the City*. Not only were Carrie, Miranda, Samantha and Charlotte retelling and relating their relationship woes to women across the country, they were emulating the environment in which mixed drinks were to be had. And did they ever have their mixed drinks. Sexy women having sexy nights out on the town and relaying their stories over a tasty pink drink is anything any American woman could ever want. Right? Regardless, it's safe to say that this is when the mixed drink was accepted with open arms in popular society as a whole.

A Splash of History

According to conversation starter #342 at *Cosmopolitan* online, a British lord created the largest cocktail in history in 1694. It included 250 gallons of brandy, 124 gallons of wine, 1,400 pounds of sugar, 2,500 lemons, 20 gallons of lime juice, and 5 pounds of nutmeg. That's quite the precedence for the modern cocktail party. But if people were making mixed drinks in the 1600s, when did they actually get their start? The exact history of the mixed drink is a bit sketchy, but you can bet that as long as there has been liquor, people have been thinking of ways to make it delicious. According to the Sazerac Company in New Orleans, Antoine Peychaud created the first ever recorded American cocktail of the same name in 1838. A combination of brandy, absinthe, and homemade bitters, along with a special little instrument known as a "coquetier" (where we got the term "cocktail") gave us the first cocktail. And the people loved it. We've been mixing ever since.

The Life and Times of the Classics

Saying that a margarita has the ability to provide insight into a person's soul may be a

bit much to claim, but let's explore. Not only does personal determine what type of drink is chosen, but the perceptions and interpretations created by society certainly account for some portion of this decision. To demonstrate, I've provided a handy list of mainstream drink interpretations sprinkled with even more pop-culture references in order to get you started.

What Your Mixed Drink Says about You

Not that this list needs to be a guide to live by, but here are some common mixed drink associations to get you heading in the right direction. These associations have established themselves well within our culture. They have even been interpreted by such pre-pubescent pop-culture ridiculousness as "What type of drink are you?" MySpace quizzes. Okay, okay, I admit I've taken one, but for the sake of research purposes, of course. Apparently, I'm an Appletini. But I digress. Let's jump in and see what we can find.

Dry Martini - Traditionally made with gin, vermouth, and an olive garnish, this is the drink of a refined, mature, intelligent person who knows what they want and how to get it. To take it from the dry martini poster boy, we'll have it shaken, not stirred. Who doesn't think of James Bond and the illustrious Bond women, or perhaps, for the younger generation, Brian Griffin? I'll let you draw the connections.

Margarita – Exciting and full of life, this is the choice of the extrovert, most typically, the college sorority girl. Made with tequila, this drink choice demonstrates, well, what we all know about the type of person that drinks tequila: always looking for a good time. Either that or they are from Hispanic decent. We'll leave it at that.

Cosmopolitan – The beloved Cosmo, created with vodka, Cointreau, cranberry juice, a dash of lime juice and a twist of lemon, is the drink of choice for Carrie Bradshaw. This is a classic drink for a classy person who enjoys the finer things in life – without the smallest ounce of sacrifice in taste. If you are a mixed drink novice, this is your best bet.

Gender and Identity: The Nature of the Bluff

With varying mixed drink prices depending on the quality of the liquor, a financial hierarchy exists that not only reflects financial status, but the intentions of the individual. Most often, we see this best demonstrated by the guy who buys a drink for the pretty girl at the bar in hopes of getting laid.

Putting on the façade that your financial status can allow for Patron margaritas for every pretty girl that walks by allows for essential insight into the type of person who uses the bluff. It may demonstrate that the guy actually does have the cash to treat the lady well, or, it could show that this is the only trick he has up his sleeve. Whether it is a one-time

deal or a frequent occurrence is relevant as well. In most cases, the woman knows what's going on and will have the guy figured out eventually – sometimes even instantaneously. Once she's onto the bluff, she'll enjoy the drink and pretend to enjoy your company, at least for a little while if you are lucky. Here we see that striking a conversation or leading with your charming personality might not be a bad idea instead.

Coinage of the Girlie Drink

Perhaps as a result of such pop-culture phenomenon as *Sex and the City*, cocktails were given the term *girlie drink*, mainly for their generally feminine colors, or the fact that they also come in a chocolate variety – a well-known necessity of the female species. But *girlie* may not be an accurate representation of the drink itself, if we are in fact sticking with the traditional ideas of femininity within the American culture. If judging by alcohol content alone, in comparison to beer (a typical *man* drink) or even wine, the percentage is staggering. I'm not so sure that there's anything delicate or docile about two to three times more alcohol content within a singular drink.

It would also be wise to consider the names many mixed drinks are given. To be fair, expecting a typical man to feel comfortable ordering a Skittles or Gummy Bear mixed drink in a sports bar might be a little too much to ask. Perhaps a Jack and Coke would be more appropriate. But surely plenty of men would prefer the tasty combination of vodka, raspberry liqueur, orange juice and a lime wedge to a draft any day. Perhaps their masculinity or the societal interpretations thereof limit this type of beverage to the privacy of their own home. Whatever the case, no one should feel embarrassed about enjoying high-alcohol content.



Side note: To say that the drink is girlie as a result of being delicious, desirable, and an all-around good time might be a better representation

of the definition, rather than the typical stereotyped ideas that are associated with the claim. If people are comfortable with calling beer a *manly* drink – that is, if masculinity in general would rather be associated with something that takes forever to satisfy and leaves a bad taste in your mouth – then give me my girlie drink any day.

Authority and the Mixed Drink

Over the years, an idea of authority in this field has developed within our culture. The typical bartender is essentially seen as an authority on mixed drinks. However, the definition of a savvy bartender varies from one consumer to the next. One knowledgeable bartender might be able to whip up a key pie lime martini, complete with a graham cracker rim, with both hands tied behind their back. Another might be able to give you the thrilling history of the domestic draft. Regardless, we liquor-lovers now have the ability to seek out those individuals who actually have an education in what we most love and desire. Enter the world of mixology.

An Education in Mixology

People actually pay for an education in this. Classes can be taken in order to become a certified mixologist. In the world of bartending, however, it's hard to say how far it will get you. It might give you an edge over the average bartender applying for the job, but it also might put you out of the running for fear of having to pay extra for your skills. In addition, classes might not be able to trump experience. At the very least, you're sure to find some fans within the culture of mixed drinks enthusiasts. Maybe even some groupies.

But by looking at the world of mixology, we can see the evolution of the now essential elements that go into creating a mixed drink. If you want to be the best, you've got to know your stuff. From a highball to a hurricane, an olive to an orange, the intricacies are the necessities. Each different type of liquor, liqueur, juice, spice, garnish and glassware are a must know. Take a moment to consider the vast amount of what has come from people using their creativity to make something new. What is now commonplace had to be thought up by someone along the way. Next time you order, you'll think twice about how those little olives got to the bottom of your glass in the first place.

Entertainment and a Cocktail: Flair Bartending

A tasty mixed drink and entertainment? Enough said. We've managed to create somewhat of a sport out of this element of mixed drinks. Apart from drinking games that tend to take place outside of the bar setting, this is one way to keep yourself entertained for the evening. The tricks are hard to come by. The fantasy of having Tom Cruise-like bartenders flipping liquor bottles around and catching them behind their back is not a frequent reality. You've got to look around to find that type of fun. Perhaps the era of

flair bartending slowly went by the wayside, much like the adorable 1980s Tom Cruise, and all we are left with is out of date talent – but interesting talent nonetheless.

What's In a Name? The Evolution of the Shot

Anyone who travels to a bar these days, especially with the intentions of getting real drunk real fast, knows a lot about the evolution of the shot. Nowadays, a shot of Jose Cuervo with salt and a lime just won't cut it. Sure, there is a variety of tame tasty shots, like Pineapple Upside-Down Cake or Chocolate Covered Cherry. But we've entered into a world where the name of the shot itself offers just as much fun. You know which ones I'm talking about. The Slippery Nipple. The Pink Panty Dropper. The Dirty Girl Scout. The list goes on.

But the entertainment doesn't stop there. Who the consumers are in reference to the shot only adds to the experience. Certainly a girls night out might find it empowering to get the liquor version of an Orgasm, or even a round of Red-Headed Sluts in order to provoke a double-take or two. And how about the recent of-age college student ordering a round of Liquid Cocaine for his lovely parents at the evening dinner?

These shots have managed to take on their own personality while simultaneously create a whole other atmosphere within the bar setting. If not extremely scandalous in name, it's expected that the consumer at least get a good laugh when perusing the shot list. A Barack O'Bomb was even created in light of election fever.

The shots continue to expand as variations of the originals are created. Thus, the Slippery Nipple has allowed for the Dirty Nipple or the Pierced Nipple, depending on how the ingredients are modified to create something different yet similar to the original recipe. The evolution of shots as a whole is yet another art that has creatively flourished within the realm of mixed drinks, and yet another element to enhance the bar setting entirely.

Defining the Individual: How Choice and Identity Coincide

Does the martini choose the person, or does the person choose the martini? Mixed drink selection will always be extremely multi-faceted and unique, as long as society continues to shape and embrace how we drink. Not only do mixed drinks have something to say about who we are in the present and where we would like to be in the future, but they also carry with them elements of a personal, social, and cultural experience – both on an individual and collective level. Perceptions will continue to evolve along with the art of the mixed drink, but surely the significance of what these ideas communicate will remain.

And let's not forget the elements of creativity we've stumbled upon along the way. If we can take a step back and look at the very basic technical elements surrounding the

mixed drink, it's impossible to ignore how far we've come. It's likely we take these elements for granted. In the end, what's most important to understand is that the implications of our choices and the perceptions of society only provide some insight to who we are. The greatest reflection of our identity as a culture can be found in the development and evolution of our creativity.