

Appreciating Drink Culture

A CALL TO RECLAIM THE WORD *DRINKER*.



I recently read an article penned by a “James Beard Foundation award finalist” that was essentially 1,400 words of lamentation about how there is no equivalent term for someone who likes and appreciates alcohol to the same extent that a *foodie* likes and appreciates food. My reply is half as long because there is definitive nomenclature for people with alcohol-centric interests, although it suffers from lexicographic mismanagement.

To best illuminate this word, I wanted to quote an authoritative source. I flipped through bar guides, recipe books, and the chronicles of people who’ve played outsized roles in alcohol’s history—from Adolphus Busch (cofounder of one of the world’s most important beer companies) to author Charles Bukowski (who drank)—in pursuit of a succinct

descriptor. I then opened *Everyday Drinking* by Kingsley Amis, knowing that his writings from the 1970s and ’80s were rife with an Englishman’s vernacular that is both clever and clear, and found this: “One infallible mark of your true drink-man is that he reads everything on the subject that comes his way, from full-dress books to those tiny recipe-leaflets the makers tend to hang round the necks of their bottles.”

Notice how foodie-like it sounds? It never even mentions the act of drinking, choosing instead to emphasize an appreciation of alcohol’s literary nature. Sadly, this is grossly outdated because of its allegiance to the myth about how, for a very long period of human history, only men drank alcohol. Alas, *drink-man* was destined to fail as that equivalent term to *foodie* right after we all discovered the real truth about women, >

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sometime in the late 1980s, I think.

But with a simple fix, *drink-man* becomes *drinker*—a straight-forward, gender-neutral term describing participants in every category of intoxicating spirits, beers, and wines. *Drinker* distinguishes a person from someone who doesn't consume alcohol and, one could argue, someone who doesn't appreciate alcohol to a notable degree.

I believe the word should, and does do more: I use it to cut through society's irreconcilable opinions on alcohol and announce my team spirit. To be a drinker is to venerate alcohol's myriad flavors and presentations, its exotic and compelling history, its place in modern life, its financial, cultural, and even religious significance to communities, or any of the countless aspects of its culture.

I'm a drinker and I'm not frightened to declare it. Longtime readers of *805 Living* might also remember that I've battled cancer twice, and the reality is that alcohol rarely passes my lips. Yet, if someone asks, "Do you drink?" my answer is always, "Yes, but probably not today." (Pro tip: Never add the word "alcohol" to the end of the question, "Do you drink?" Everyone realizes we're not talking about Darjeeling green tea.)

Still, *drinker* has historically been unfairly saddled with society's baggage, and Merriam-Webster's online dictionary certainly drops a grumpy on the whole issue. Among its definitions for *drinker* is "a person who drinks alcoholic beverages especially to a notable degree//a heavy *drinker*." Please notice how the adjective *heavy* gets slipped in, which is cheating if you're only supposed to be defining the word *drinker*, right? It also fails to mention how many ounces of alcohol is equal to one "notable degree." Finally, the damn thing goes on to include synonyms more closely aligned with the noun *drunk* than with *drinker*. These include *boozehound*, *drunkard*, *dipsomaniac*, *alkie*, *lush*, *sot*, *tosspot*, and *juicehead*.

Who's writing these? Carrie Nation? Dr. Seuss?

Fortunately, modern usage of the word *drinker* typically gets it right, namely, "one who drinks alcohol." Antiquated words like *imbiber* and *tippler* are no longer needed, and were just dancing around the obvious, anyway.

Despite any lingering undercurrent of disrepute that tags along with *drinker*, it still sounds classier than the cutie-pie *foodie*, which is under 50 years old, making it just a fad-term compared to *drinker*, which predates the 12th century. Anchored with an active, take-no-prisoners *er* ending, *drinker* should assume its rightful place as the best term for someone who likes and appreciates alcohol.

My fellow drinkers, be not intimidated by sinister dictionary definitions. We drink, therefore we are. ♦