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## It's not easy being green...

Irish people will feel compelled to drink alcohol to celebrate St Patrick's Day this Sunday – whether they want to or not – according to a Northumbria University academic.

Alcohol consumption is romanticised in Irish culture and many Irish people regard drinking on St Patrick's Day as a symbol of patriotism to their country, the research reveals.

Marketing lecturer Matthew Kearney asked 70 Irish people in their 20s and 30s to keep shopping diaries and analyse their feelings about their spending as part of his PhD into the experiences of and attitudes to shopping with a

particular focus on excessive shopping habits. He then conducted in-depth interviews with a third of those who took part.

The research revealed that every single person who took part in the research celebrated St Patrick's Day and many maxed out their credit cards and borrowed from friends and family to support the celebrations.

Even those who declared themselves as teetotal the rest of the year felt compelled to drink alcohol to celebrate St Patrick's – a day when it is estimated that more than 13,000,000 pints of Guinness will be consumed around the world.

Matthew, from Coleraine in Northern Ireland, said: "Alcohol consumption, when placed in the context of Ireland becomes instantly romanticised, attributed to one's underlying Celtic soul. Ireland is synonymous with alcohol; although Ireland boasts world heritage sites, titanic museums and the birth and death sites of numerous authors and poets, its most popular tourist attraction is the Guinness Storehouse.

"When Barack Obama and Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip make a point of publicly enjoying a Guinness experience while visiting Ireland, it starts to become even more apparent that alcohol consumption is so completely intertwined with 'Irishness.'"

The research highlighted the perceived cultural importance of celebrating St Patrick's Day. While everyone who took part in the research 'did something for St Patrick's Day,' not all those with a partner celebrated Valentine's Day, for example.

The fact that the research sample was split almost equally between men and women shows that St Patrick's Day celebrations are far more than a symptom of 'lad culture.' Participants who had no intention of celebrating eventually gave in to the mockery and cajoling of their Irish friends and spent considerable amounts of money on the day with one woman recalling spending £350 on celebrating.

Other participants recalled spending the day away from Ireland but being pressured to join in the celebrations by their English counterparts.

Matthew added: “Many of the people who took part in the research seemed to feel an inescapable pressure to drink as though it is part of Irish consumers’ culture and heritage. When this is combined with the expectations of others, created by the concerted efforts of marketers, the result appears to be inevitable.

“However, many of those I interviewed expressed extreme regret in the aftermath of the day while others demonstrated a learned helplessness towards stopping drinking on the day. There seems to be a perception that it’s their duty,” he added.

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