Abstract

I report my tests of the hypothesis that wine consumers cannot distinguish the difference between regular and reserve bottlings of otherwise-similar wines. My results suggest that only about one purchaser in five should even consider buying the reserve bottling of a wine, rather than the regular. But since I cannot tell you how to distinguish that one person out of five, we can all aspire to drinking the reserve. I have more than 800 observations of wine drinkers’ who engaged in the following experiment. The drinker faces 3 glasses of wine, two of which contain identical wines [either the regular or the reserve] and the third contains a different wine [the other one]. I record whether the drinker can distinguish wines whether he can tell the singleton from the doubleton and, if the drinker can distinguish, which wine he prefers. I find that just over 40 per cent of the drinkers distinguish correctly, whereas one-third could if the process were random. Of those 40 percent who can distinguish, 52 percent prefer the more expensive, reserve wine, whereas half would if the process were random. For this data set, 52 percent does not differ significantly from the expected-if-random half. I have recorded the sex of the testers and I can find that men can distinguish the wines better than random, but women cannot. The differences are so small, even though significant, however, that the Exact F test detects no significant difference between the ability of men and women in these tests. The results span tests of wines from Bordeaux, Burgundy, the Rhone, Spain, New Zealand, Italy, California [both red and white], Oregon, and Australia; the tests include still and sparkling wines.