



Turning Point
Alcohol & Drug Centre

Who wants to get drunk? Intoxication as a pleasure and a purpose

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The social position of intoxication

- Drinking as socially enclaved
 - Not at work (for most of us; the longest-lasting effect of the temperance movement)
 - Not while caretaking, particularly of children
 - Not while driving
- Intoxication even more so
 - “time out” behavior (MacAndrew & Edgerton; Cavan); “TGIF”
 - semi-private
 - not in public
 - but often collective
 - not acknowledged or referred to afterwards?
 - less private than sexual behaviour or illicit drug use, but still some boundaries of disclosure
 - a shifting boundary of privacy – for example:
 - “habits insurance” in the temperance era: drinking behaviour as a legitimate area of inquiry for the insurance company
 - mostly dropped as impinging on privacy by the 1960s

Drunkenness in public disapproved in law

- “Any person found drunk in a public place shall be guilty of an offence and may be arrested by a member of the police force...”
 - Summary Offences Act 1966, Victoria, §13
- “A licensee or permittee ... must not supply liquor to a person in a state of intoxication; ... must not permit drunken or disorderly persons to be on the licensed premises ...”
 - Liquor Control Reform Act 1998, Victoria, Part 8, §108 (1)c & e

Attitudes in the public arena: moderate drinking is good, intoxication is bad

- “sensible drinking” (UK guidelines), “controlled drinking”
 - “TRUE AUSSIES DRINK RESPONSIBLY” (slogan on Diageo cans and bottles)
- the “dream of a better society” (Olsson)
 - “continental drinking”, “café society”
- Self-definition of Australians as drinkers:
 - (of those defining themselves as a current drinker; NDS Household Survey, 2003)
 - 2% “binge drinker”, 4% “heavy drinker”
 - 34% “occasional drinker”, 26% “light drinker”, 35% “social drinker”

Expectations about intoxication – cognition, intention, control, action (Ontario, CA 1998)

If someone gets very drunk, so that they are slurring their words, how likely is it... (% saying **very likely** or **somewhat likely**):

12%	... that they will be able to think straight
77%	... that they will not be able to predict the consequences of their behaviour
64%	... that they will be not be able to tell right from wrong
76%	... that they will do things without having any intention of doing them
92%	... that they will do something on impulse that they may later regret
90%	... that they will become aggressive and possibly violent
70%	... that they will behave like a sleepwalker – someone not in control of their behaviour

What's so good about intoxication? Lessons from unofficial culture

- Novels: *Lucky Jim*, *The Sun Also Rises* ...
 - Films, plays: *Don's Party*, *The Thin Man* ...
 - Poems & verse
 - He didn't exactly fall off that chair in Prince George, and he wasn't pushed, and he didn't jump, this was poetry.*
 - Poetry and drunkenness, haven't you ever heard of that, where have you been the past three thousand years?*
 - George Bowring (Canadian Parliamentary Poet Laureate), "The figure of outward"
 - Drinking and other songs
 - Well I've played the wild rover for many a year, And I spent all my money on whisky and beer...*
 - Jokes
 - The problem with the world is that everyone is a few drinks behind. --Humphrey Bogart
 - One more drink and I'd be under the host. -- Dorothy Parker
 - I'd rather have a bottle in front of me, than a frontal lobotomy. --Tom Waits
 - Reality is an illusion that occurs due to the lack of alcohol. – W.C. Fields
- Do you fancy a drink
Just the one
To clear your head
We won't be long
It's a beautiful day
To waste away
There's plenty of time
For another one.
-- "Just the one", The Levellers*
- Wine comes in at the mouth
And love comes in at the eye;
That's all we shall know for truth
Before we grow old and die.
I lift the glass to my mouth,
I look at you, and I sigh
-- "Drinking song", W.B. Yeats*

What's bad about drunkenness for the bystander? What's good about drunkenness for the drinker? -- many overlaps

- BAD --
 - Inattention
 - to contextual danger, to social boundaries
 - Clumsiness
 - lack of coordination, dulled reactions
 - Disinhibition
 - violence
 - sexuality
 - lose moral constraints
- → Unpredictability, out of control
- GOOD –
 - Forgetting ...
 - worries, boundaries, everything
 - Sociability
 - Commensality, solidarity
 - Disinhibition
 - acting out
 - sexuality
 - time out from ordinary rules
- → Spontaneity, letting go

Societies vary in how many and what proportion of drinking occasions are heavy

	No. of binge drinking occasions (bottle of wine +) in year		Binge drinking occasions per 100 drinking occasions	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Finland	20	6	29	17
Sweden	12	4	32	17
Germany	13	4	13	7
UK	47	16	40	22
France	11	3	9	5
Italy	23	14	13	12

(Leifman, 2002)

... but not so much in expectations about drunkenness

"Anyone might become violent if they drink too much". Percent Responding "Strongly" or "Somewhat Agree" in Six Country Sub-Samples by Sex, Age, and Regular Heavy Drinking

Country	Total **** %	Sex		Age Group (years)			Heavy Drinking	
		Male %	Female %	18-29 %	30-49 %	50-64 %	Males %	Females %
Finland	45	40	51 ***	50	43	46	43 *	48
Sweden	54	48	60 ****	52	55	55	43	65
UK	66	62	70 **	72	60	71 ***	55 **	70
Germany	53	49	57 *	57	54	47 *	36 **	52
France	65	60	71 ***	59	67	71 **	46 ****	54 *
Italy	73	70	76 *	67	75	74	71	87 *

* p<=0.05, ** p<=0.01, *** p<=0.001, ****p<=0.0001
(Room & Bullock, 2002)

The experience of intoxication for youth – both functional and symbolic meanings; e.g.:

- age-graded rebellion
- sensation-seeking
- providing pleasure
- alleviating boredom
- satisfying curiosity
- facilitating social bonding, solidarity
- as a marker of style and subcultural membership
- boundary setting, excluding others
- escape/coping
- "fortifying", excuse

In Europe nowadays, cross-cultural variations in youth intoxication seem to be fading



Russefeiring (graduation fiesta) in Norway

el botellón (the big bottle) in Spain



British student-oriented website –

“StudentMAX is written by 3 former students who want to give today's students and perspective [sic] students a view of how fun life at university can be. The site also covers serious issues and aims to help students through university life.”



•The Ultimate Drinking Games Selection Got your own - why not add it to the pile!

View our wide selection of cracking drinking games and really get your night started with a BANG. You can add your own drinking games and even add comments to the ones in our database!!!

'Av IT!!!!

... and closer to home – Schoolies Week, Surfers Paradise, 2004



Some drunkenness is accidental, other is intended: Intending to get drunk among Victorians aged 16-24 (Victorian Youth Alcohol & Drug Survey, 2003-2004)

- How often, on an occasion that you drink alcohol, do you intend to get drunk? (drinkers only)
 - Every time 5%
 - Most times 15
 - Some times 27
 - A few times 25
 - Never 28

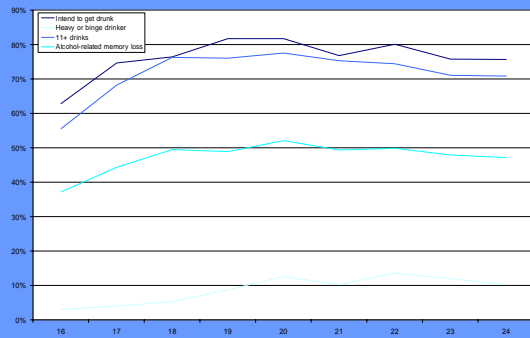
Frequency of intending to get drunk, and of drinking at various levels (VYADS 2003-2004)

How often ...	~ daily	weekly	monthly	less	never
intended to get drunk*	3%	31	11	26	28
unable to remember	0%	2	7	34	57
afterwards what happened					
20+ drinks	0%	4	10	24	63
11+ drinks*	1%	10	31	18	41
7+ drinks*	2%	22	39	15	22
5+ drinks*	4%	33	41	9	13
3+ drinks*	10%	41	37	6	6
1+ drinks*	18%	47	29	5	1

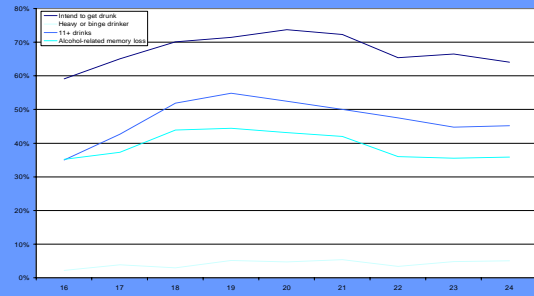
* computed estimate

In cross-tabs (not shown), frequencies roughly balance for “unable to remember” & 20+ drinks; for “intend to get drunk” and 7+ or 11+ drinks.

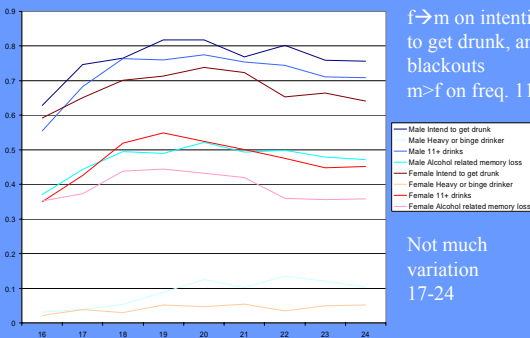
Ever getting drunk and drinking a lot, males, by age



Ever getting drunk and drinking a lot, females, by age



Putting the genders together ...



f → m on intention to get drunk, and blackouts
 m > f on freq, 11+

Not much variation 17-24

Interplay with drinking norms:
 thinking it's wrong for someone their age to drink regularly → less likely to intend to get drunk, and less often

How wrong for someone of your age to drink regularly ...	Very wrong	Wrong	A little bit wrong	Not wrong at all
~ daily	1%	1%	2%	5%
weekly	15	13	26	38
monthly	5	9	11	12
less	24	29	30	23
never	55	47	31	22

Ns 404 907 3778 5708

Intending to get drunk sometime in last year, weekly + :
who and where

Odds Ratios in logistic regressions

Intended to get drunk:	Ever in last year	Weekly +
Age: 16-17 (vs. 18-24)	0.62	0.58
22-24 (vs. 16-21)	0.81	0.72
Gender: male	1.54	1.72
Metropolitan (vs. country)	0.65	0.78
N'b'hood status (vs. high):	0.86	0.87
Upper middle		
Lower middle	0.72	0.71
Low	0.60	0.63

More:

males than females,
 18-21 year olds than younger or older
 in the country than in Melbourne
 in affluent than in poor neighbourhoods

Intending to get drunk sometime in last year, weekly + :
who, where & current circumstances

Odds Ratios in logistic regressions

Intended to get drunk:	Ever in last year	Weekly +
Age: 16-17 (vs. 18-24)	0.72	0.70
22-24 (vs. 16-21)	0.82	0.72
Gender: male	1.53	1.66
Metropolitan (vs. country)	0.64	0.76
N'b'hood status (vs. high):		
Upper middle	0.83	0.84
Lower middle	0.69	0.69
Low	0.57	0.60
Lives w/ roommates/alone	-	1.41
Working full-/part-time	1.44	1.21
In high school or graduated	0.76	0.73
>\$40/week for recreation	1.49	1.72

Not significant (>5%): variables marked '-'. Lives with parents,
 Lives with partner

No relation for:
 living with parents
 living with partner
 More for:
 working
 recreation money
 in pocket
 not a HS graduate
 roommates/alone
 (freq. only)
 Who & where ~
 unchanged

Intending to get drunk sometime in last year, weekly + :
who, where, current circumstances & drug use

Odds Ratios in logistic regressions

Intended to get drunk:	Ever in last year	Weekly +
Age: 16-17 (vs. 18-24)	0.75	0.74
22-24 (vs. 16-21)	0.80	0.68
Gender: male	1.43	1.56
Metropolitan (vs. country)	0.60	0.71
N'b'hood status (vs. high):		
Upper middle	0.89	-
Lower middle	0.76	0.75
Low	0.65	0.68
Working full-/part-time	1.47	1.23
>\$40/week for recreation	1.33	1.52
In last year: Ecstasy	1.74	1.44
Amphetamines	-	1.43
Cannabis	3.98	2.98
Tranq's or painkillers	-	1.33

Not significant (>5%): variables marked '-'. Lives with parents,
 Lives with partner, Lives with roommates/alone,
 In high school or graduated, Heroin, Cocaine, Hallucinogens

Ecstasy and cannabis
 use ↔ sometime
 intention

Ecstasy, Cannabis,
 Amphet, Tranqs/
 Painkillers ↔ freq.
 Intention

Who, where, circ's
 not changed much:
 Roommates/alone,
 HS graduate gone

A few conclusions

- Who wants to get drunk among Victorians aged 16-24?
 - a big majority of drinkers (72%) sometimes
 - one-third of drinkers at least weekly
- Intending to get drunk (sometimes or frequently) is partly an economic matter
 - More in rich neighbourhoods, fewer in poor
 - More among those with >\$40/week in pocket for recreation
 - More among those working full- or part-time
- More who intended to get drunk (sometimes or frequently)
 - in the country than in metro.
 - among 18-21-year-olds than among younger or older
 - among men than among women
 - among those who also use drugs (ecstasy & cannabis; also amphetamines and pain/tranq. pills for frequently intending to get drunk) : alcohol as just another drug
- Intentional intoxication as a rite of passage?
 - Between emancipation and "settling down"
 - Fiesta drinking – but is it a fiesta if it's every weekend?
- But ...
 - Many casualties along the way
 - What about those who don't mature out?