



The Crime and Deviance Channel

Updates: Women and Binge-Drinking

Online Classroom Ltd
PO Box 104
Hinckley
Leicester
LE10 2WW
Registered in England Number 5896648

tel / fax: 0845-505-0664
www.onlineclassroom.tv
enquiries@onlineclassroom.tv

Women and Binge-Drinking

“International Study of Heavy Drinking: Attitudes and Sociodemographic Factors in University Students”: The Journal of American College Health September/October 2006, Vol. 55 No.2.

Specification

This topic is relevant to the social construction of gender and especially changing gender identities, deviance, media and sociological theory, particularly postmodern theory.

Background

While a new government health campaign warns of the dangers of drink, the government is also criticised by health experts for allowing the drink industry to target young women with female friendly drinks. Research by the Department of Health suggested that 1 in 6 women have health problems due to alcohol and that alcohol consumption carries particular risks for women and girls.



1. Women are more likely to become drink dependent than men.
2. Alcohol does more harm to women’s health than men’s: if a man and woman drink the same amount, the woman’s body will suffer more (as men have more of the enzymes that help to break down alcohol).
3. Binge drinking increases women’s risk of being assaulted. In 80% of sexual assaults the woman victim had been drinking.

The Research

The study is based on a survey of 7,846 male and 9,892 female students aged 17 to 30 from 21 countries.

According to this research, British and Irish women are officially the world’s biggest binge drinkers, with 1 in 3 women aged 17-30 classified as binge drinkers. British women top the international binge drinking league, but British men don’t even make the top 10. Britain is one of the few countries in the world where alcohol consumption is rising.



1. Modernity to Postmodernity

One of the characteristics distinguishing supposedly late, or post, modern societies from modern societies is the blurring of boundaries between categories. The blurring of more traditional 'gender roles' provides a good general example of this. Changing patterns of alcohol consumption – especially amongst younger people - provide a very good specific illustration of this cultural phenomenon. Even a couple of decades ago, going out in groups with the specific purpose of getting drunk was confined almost exclusively to men. Now it is gender neutral.

Is this development a sign of female emancipation as increasing numbers of women now feel free to go out and get drunk like men? Or have women been targeted and hence victimised by the multinational drinks industry?

Discussion

Do women need greater 'protection' from alcohol than men, as the government suggests, because their health is at greater risk and because they are at greater risk of assault. Or is this an example of patriarchal attitudes trying to protect the supposedly 'weaker sex' from the dangers of excessive alcohol consumption?



2. Deviance

Is binge drinking deviant?

Media reports tend to suggest it is and warn of the dangers of increasing alcohol consumption, especially to young women ([The Independent: 2006](#)). But is binge drinking amongst women 'deviant' behaviour? For example the study cited above suggested that 57% of Irish female college students were binge drinkers. Therefore, is it deviant not to binge drink if you are a female Irish college student?

Can a form of behaviour be 'deviant' if a majority of people in a population are doing it?

Discussion

3. Methodology

The data cited above were obtained by survey methods. What are some of the limitations of this method? How might they have affected the results? What other methods could have been used to study drinking habits amongst young people? How might the findings have been different?

Discussion

4. Media

The research cited above is from a study of a part of the population – i.e. people who are young and are at university. However, media headlines do not make this clear. They simply say ‘British women top the drinking league’.

Discussion

Why do students think the newspapers reported the research in this way?

What does this tell us about the ways the media report scientific research?



5. Sociological Theory

Structural theories tend to explain people's behaviour in terms of the organisation of society, while social action theories tend to give more weight to individual psychology and individual choice.

How might the increase in alcohol consumption by young people (and young women in particular) be explained by a) structural theory and b) action theory?

Discussion

Structural Theory – The drinks and advertising industries have targeted young people in a series of campaigns that associate alcohol with, for example, having a good time, being sophisticated and making friends. The multinational drinks and advertising industries have – in part at least – increased alcohol consumption, particularly among women.

Social Action Theory -

Liberated from social conventions such as ‘nice girls don't drink’ or ‘being seen drunk in public is bad if you're female’, young women now feel freer to make choices over their lives and increasing numbers are making the choice to go binge drinking.



