



Research paper

Studying ritual and individual orientations to alcohol use: Drinking motives and their connection to intoxication in Finland in the 2000s

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ABSTRACT

Background: Finland was an agricultural country until the 1960s. Thereafter, Finland modernized rapidly. Studies have postulated that as Finland becomes modernized, intoxication-oriented drinking would gradually decrease. Current studies, however, show that heavy episodic drinking has lately become more common among men and women. Simultaneously, drinking is seldom motivated by the purpose of getting drunk. The article tackles this conundrum by approaching drinking motives from a ritual and an individual perspective. We study what kinds of drinking motives currently exist in Finland, their prevalence among different population groups, how they vary by social background, and their association with intoxication.

Methods: The data were collected as part of the nationally representative Drinking Habit Survey in 2008. It consists of verbal descriptions on the most recent drinking occasion ($N = 521$), estimations of its blood alcohol content, and responses to pre-defined standardized motive questions related to the latest drinking occasions ($N = 8732$).

Results: Besides the motive 'to get drunk', also the motives of drinking as a 'time-out' ritual, 'to get into the mood' and 'I drunk to brighten up' predict a "wet" drinking occasion. Overall, Finns highlight drinking motives of sociability, relaxation, meal drinking and situational factors. The more educated orientate to their drinking more with motives that express mastery of cultural capital and individuality. The less educated and the young, again, orientate to their drinking more with motives that imply intoxication and external expectations.

Conclusions: Whereas the ritual perspective discloses what kinds of situations predict intoxication, the individual perspective reveals what kinds of individualistic orientations are associated with drunkenness. These perspectives partly speak past each other and are difficult to combine. The article proposes that situational perspective would serve as a bridge between them and enable the incorporation of results from different research traditions.

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Introduction

In the article we study drinking motives and their connection to intoxication in Finland in the 2000s. The analysis of motives is an important research topic since they define and anticipate how the action will proceed, as well as offer cause-like justifications for it. Finland offers an interesting context to examine drinking motives. Finland was until the 1960s a country where over the half of the population lived in the countryside. Thereafter, Finland modernized rapidly. In the 1980s [Simpura and Partanen \(1987, p. 222\)](#) presented a hypothesis of the "civilization" of Finnish drinking

habits. They postulated that as Finland becomes modernized, intoxication-oriented drinking would gradually decrease and the relation of the Finns to alcohol would be transformed into a more instrumental one. In this process, drinking takes on a subordinated position to other activities and the emphasis in its use shifts to individual enjoyment and symbolic meanings. Correspondingly, current Finnish studies show that drinking today is usually motivated by other purposes than intoxication itself ([Huhtanen & Raitasalo, 2010](#); [Törrönen & Maunu, 2007a](#)). At the same time it is paradoxical that in recent decades in Finland, heavy episodic drinking has become more common among men and women (see e.g. [Mäkelä, Mustonen, & Tigerstedt, 2010](#)). This article aims to give some answers to this conundrum. We might assume that as heavy episodic drinking has become more common, the motivation of drinking as a pursuit of intoxication would have transformed into a

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normal legitimization for drinking. Since this is not the case, it is worthwhile to study what kinds of drinking motives are related to intoxication and how they predict intoxication among different population groups.

Most of the studies on drinking motives have used quantitative survey data and examined orientations to drinking from individual perspective by understanding them either as referring to the internal psychological processes (Cox & Klinger, 1988) or as a cultural vocabulary of rationalizations with which the interviewees explain their drinking as a meaningful action (Mäkelä, 1969; Partanen, 1987). There exist also some qualitative studies on drinking motives. They usually are descriptive and explorative (e.g. Lo & Globetti, 2000) or based on diversified theories, like functional viewpoint (Boys, Marsden, & Strang, 2001) or ritual perspective (Törrönen & Maunu, 2007a).

In the article we propose that drinking motives should be analyzed in relation to situations and by combining different perspectives, as well as by using different type of quantitative and qualitative data (Törrönen & Härkönen, 2016). Otherwise, the analysis of drinking motives has a tendency to remain distant from concrete drinking practices (survey studies) or to lose some of its power to generalize (qualitative studies). There is a lack of studies that combine multiple perspectives and different types of data. We address this lack by analyzing drinking motives from a ritual and individual perspectives with representative quantitative and qualitative data. The article asks:

- (1) What kinds of drinking motives currently exist in Finland, what is their prevalence among different population groups and how do they vary by age, gender, and education?
- (2) How are drinking motives associated with intoxication and how do they predict the development of drinking into a wet event?

Analyzing drinking motives from ritual and individual perspectives

The ritual perspective

A study done by Törrönen and Maunu (2007a) shows that when people describe their latest drinking occasion in their own words, they seem to orientate to drinking as socially regulated, ritualistic action. This observation was based on the analysis of drinking diaries written by young adults aged 23–35 from the fields of information technology and service branches. The diary writers ($N = 60$) were asked to tell about each of their nights out, starting with a pre-story in which they describe their prior expectations for the evening, and as a realized story of that how the events actually started, transpired and ended ($N = 1022$; Törrönen & Maunu, 2007a).

In the study the motives were defined as attributes or “instruments” that situationally “mediate” action, anticipate in what direction the action is going to proceed and regulate its course (Mills, 1940). Thereby, in a stage with similar physical and material elements, the character of action varies according to the motives involved in orientating towards it (Goffman, 1974).

By analyzing the diary data with this definition of motive, Törrönen and Maunu (2007a) identified 7-category motive typology (see Table 1). The study showed, firstly, that young adults' drinking is typically motivated as part of different types of social or collective rituals where one focuses together with other people on common activities. In this way, their drinking motives emphasize a need to produce a momentarily shared reality, through which, in accordance with Collins' definition of a ritual (2004, p. 7), they generate “solidarity and symbols of group membership” (p. 7). Secondly, the study indicated that drinking is

Table 1

7-Category motive typology.

1. <i>Alliance ritual</i> : Boys'/girls' night, friends' night, couples' night, family feast, home parties, work occasions/colleagues' night, club-members' night, regulars' night
2. <i>Time-outs</i> : Partying, weekend, holiday/day off, pre-drinking before moving to a bar or a night-club
3. <i>Motivation by side-activities</i> : Having a meal, barbecue, cooking, sauna night, watching a match, playing games
4. <i>Rites of passage</i> : Birthday, graduate party, housewarming, moving in, engagement, bachelor party, wedding, own baby's birth, reunion, return, farewell party
5. <i>Calendrical ritual</i> : May 1st, Midsummer, Christmas, New Year, Easter
6. <i>Festival ritual</i> : Cruise, regatta, summer cottage trip, summer festival, trip abroad
7. <i>Individual ritual</i> : Mood treatment, curing flu etc., curing hangover, source of pleasure

motivated only rarely by an individual ritual where the focus is on one's own personal or psychological issues.

When young adults motivated their drinking by *alliance ritual* (1), they explicitly associated it with strengthening of social networks, personal ties or intimate relationship. In *time outs* (2) drinking was predominantly driven as a counterbalance to work or everyday life routines. When motivated by *side-activities* (3), drinking was oriented to seeing it as part of other activities, like going to the sauna, having a meal and watching a match. When young adults framed their drinking as *rites of passages* (4), they celebrated changes in someone's age, status or residence. With *calendrical ritual* (5) and *festival ritual* (6) they described drinking situations of the most intoxication-oriented with carnivalistic undertones. With all these six motive categories young adults categorized their drinking as a social ritual. In addition to this, they sometimes oriented to drinking by *individual ritual* (7). In this case, the use of alcohol was explained by mood treatment, curing one's own hangover or flu, finding a partner or as a source of pleasure (Törrönen & Maunu, 2007a).

In their diaries, young adults motivated their drinking either in relation to everyday life contexts or non-everyday life contexts (Simpura, 1983). In everyday life contexts the orientation to drinking was straightforward. Drinking was explained by one motive, such as a side-activity, popping into a bar or an alliance ritual. Non-everyday life contexts often served as a setting for heavy drinking. In this case, drinking was usually motivated by many reasons. Then, any of the motive categories described above could serve as an acknowledged reason for getting intoxicated.

The narratives on drinking situations by young adults were dominated by intoxication-orientation but getting intoxicated was not presented as the uppermost motive for drinking in the diaries. In them, intoxication was motivated by reasons that are associated with sociability and in this alcohol has a positive role to lubricate the celebrators into a common mood of partying and maintain their team spirit (Törrönen & Maunu, 2007a, 2007b). Normally partying occurred on Fridays, Saturdays or in vacation-time and it was explained by motives that are associated with alliance rituals, time-outs, side-activities and rites of passage. Partying differed from carnival drinking, where drinking was heavier and often framed as a calendar ritual or festival ritual. In the diaries, carnivalistic drinking rarely took place in contrast to sociable partying where it appeared as a normal and often occurring weekend activity of having fun (Törrönen & Maunu, 2007a).

The individual perspective

In survey context, drinking motives have been studied with pre-defined categories. In recent years, survey studies on drinking

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