



Research paper

# Intoxicating stories: The characteristics, contexts and implications of drinking stories among Danish youth

Sébastien Tutenges<sup>a,\*</sup>, Sveinung Sandberg<sup>b</sup><sup>a</sup> Centre for Alcohol and Drug Research, Aarhus University, Artillerivej 90, 2300 KBH S, Denmark<sup>b</sup> Department of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo, ISS, P.O. Box 1096, Blindern, 0317 Oslo, Norway

## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 31 August 2012

Received in revised form 12 March 2013

Accepted 17 March 2013

## Keywords:

Alcohol  
 Drinking  
 Ethnography  
 Narrative  
 Story  
 Tourism  
 Youth

## ABSTRACT

**Aims:** To study the characteristics, contexts and implications of drinking stories among young drinkers.

**Methods:** Ethnographic fieldwork was conducted among Danish youth at a beach resort in Bulgaria. The fieldwork included three months of participant observation and 45 semi-structured interviews with a total of 104 tourists and 11 guides. The participants in the study were aged between 16 and 26 years.

**Results:** The participants often shared drinking stories with each other. The stories they told involved alcohol consumption followed by one or several acts of transgression such as stripping, fighting or vomiting. They generally told the stories with amusement or pride. However, some stories were told in a critical tone and focused on negative experiences. The data suggest that for many participants, part of their reason for engaging in heavy drinking and drunken transgressions was that they wanted to build a repertoire of personal drinking stories. Their drinking behaviour was subtly motivated, inspired and guided by the drinking stories that they heard from others, as well as by the drinking stories that they themselves wanted to create.

**Conclusion:** There is an intimate interactional relationship between drinking behaviour and drinking stories. Drinking behaviours can generate stories, but the stories, in turn, influence behaviours and attitudes related to alcohol. Drinking stories are therefore key to understanding drinking among youth.

© 2013 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

## Introduction

Throughout the world, alcohol is used for a great variety of reasons, including as a dietary supplement, status symbol, political statement, currency, medicine and psychoactive agent (Heath, 2000; Room, 1988). This paper examines another important but largely neglected reason for drinking alcohol, namely to generate good stories.

The terms 'story' and 'narrative' are often used interchangeably (Polletta, Chen, Gardner, & Motes, 2011). A story is a form of discourse that "has a temporal dimension. The story has a beginning, middle, and an ending...[and] is held together by recognizable patterns of events" (Sarbin, 1986, p. 3). Stories organize our experiences and give them meaning (Jackson, 2002; McAdams, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1988). They draw selectively on experiences (Presser, 2009), make a point (Polkinghorne, 1988) and reflect the identity or self-story of the narrator (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Narratives can be broken up into different categories, for example,

orienting information, complicating action, resolution and evaluation (Labov, 1972). Drinking stories, for example, typically involve people consuming alcohol and behaving in a particular way that is finally evaluated by the story-teller (Tutenges & Rod, 2009). However, because listeners are familiar with similar stories, they do not need all the details to understand what is being said. Sometimes a narrator only needs to present story fragments or merely hint at stories for the listener to 'hear' the whole version (Polletta, 2012).

Previous studies of drinking stories highlight that many people, particularly young people, place high value on being able to recount personal stories of heavy drinking (Abrahamson, 2004; Brown & Gregg, 2012; Fjær, 2012; Griffin, Bengry-Howell, Hackley, Mistral, & Szmigin, 2009; Pyörälä, 1995; Sheehan & Ridge, 2001; Tutenges & Rod, 2009; Workman, 2001). A number of functions of stories emerge in the literature. In a study of young Australian women, Sheehan and Ridge (2001) observed that the participants in their study used narratives of drinking to recall happy moments, to forge closer relationships with friends and to make sense of their own drinking, which remains a stigmatized activity for women in Australia. In a study of male college students from the U.S., Workman (2001) noted that they used drinking stories to entertain each other, to boast about risky deeds and to gain masculine

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +45 8716 5331.

E-mail addresses: [stu@crf.au.dk](mailto:stu@crf.au.dk), [tutenges@hotmail.com](mailto:tutenges@hotmail.com) (S. Tutenges).

recognition. He further argued that stories serve “to explore aspects of physicality, including sexuality, physical limits, body functions, and physical evolution” (Workman, 2001, p. 436).

In a study of British youth, Griffin et al. (2009) observed that drinking stories form a counterpoint to governmental discourses on responsible drinking and self-control. The stories “are told (and retold) for the entertainment of the friendship group, and serve to bind the group together” (Griffin et al., 2009, p. 470). In a study of Danish youth, Tutenges and Rod (2009) reported that people occasionally tell ‘tragic drinking stories’ and that these stories help story-tellers to rework negative experiences, to share their burden with others and thereby to make them more bearable. Fjær (2012) observed in a study of Norwegian youth that drinking stories serve to demarcate group membership, obtain information about intoxicated moments that they fail to remember and transform distressing events into positive memories.

These previous studies mainly treat stories as retrospective constructs that revisit and rework past events for present purposes. Less attention has been given to how stories connect people with the future, pointing ahead and inspiring conduct. Indeed, substance use generates stories, but stories also motivate substance use. Narrative psychology depicts the stories people ‘live by’ (McAdams, 1993) and narrative criminology depicts how narratives constitute action (Presser, 2009). These developments in narrative theory emphasize how people act in accordance with stories that are familiar to them and that prevail in their social environment.

The main objective of this study is to explore the ongoing interaction between, on the one hand, drinking behaviour and, on the other hand, drinking stories. Our three closely intertwined research questions are as follows. (1) What are the characteristics and uses of drinking stories? (2) What characterizes the situational context in which drinking stories are told? (3) How do drinking stories influence the use of alcohol? Data are from a population of heavy-drinking youth from Denmark. As the study was designed for a purpose other than studying drinking stories, findings and conclusions are only explorative and suggestive.

## Methods

### *Setting and population*

Data for this study were collected in Sunny Beach, Bulgaria, in the summers of 2007 and 2008. Sunny Beach is a holiday destination renowned for its warm weather, long beach strip, low prices and wild nightlife. Since the 1990s, the resort has grown rapidly in size and, during the summer, it attracts large numbers of tourists of all ages from many countries. The resort may be considered a ‘nightlife resort’ (Bellis, Hughes, Bennet, & Thomson, 2003) or a ‘party tourism’ destination (Bell, 2008); it is designed for excessive forms of consumption including heavy drinking (Briggs, 2013).

The study used a mixed-methods design to explore the risk behaviours of tourists and guides from Denmark aged between 16 and 26 years. Four surveys were conducted at the resort, all of which indicated high levels of drinking but low levels of drug use among the Danish youth. One of the surveys was conducted in the summer of 2008 with 1168 Danes who were on their way home from the resort: 79% of this group reported drinking 12 or more units on at least one day of their holiday; 40% reported drinking 12 or more units per day on six or seven days per week; and 8.5% reported that they had visited a doctor during their stay (Tutenges, 2012). Similar levels of drinking were found in the summer of 2007 (Tutenges & Hesse, 2008). The surveys indicated, moreover, that although the Danish youth tended to drink alcohol regularly at home, their drinking increased significantly in Sunny Beach.

Both the quantitative and qualitative data indicated that the Danish youth at the resort came from a wide spectrum of social backgrounds. Most were students in upper secondary education, but there were also students from technical schools and individuals who had completed their education. This variation contrasts with studies conducted among British tourists at similar nightlife destinations (e.g., San Antonio and Magaluf in Spain) where the majority are working class (Andrews, 2005; Briggs, 2013).

### *Data collection and analysis*

The study used qualitative data such as ethnographic observations, interviews and informal conversations. The first author and four research assistants collected the data. All members of the research team were in their twenties at the time of the fieldwork and were thus slightly older than most of the research participants. The first author conducted all of the interviews and most of the observations. The assistants’ work mainly consisted of administering survey questionnaires. The present paper is informed by the survey studies but focuses on the qualitative data.

As is often the case in qualitative studies of young drinkers (e.g., Jørgensen, Curtis, Christensen, & Grønbaek, 2007), the observations did not involve full participation (Dewalt & Dewalt, 1998). The researchers refrained from heavy drinking and drug use but tried otherwise to take part in the activities and conversations of the tourists and guides. Observations were conducted both during the day and at night in the places where the young Danes spent most of their time, such as bars, nightclubs, restaurants, hotel rooms, pool areas and the beach.

Forty-five semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of 115 Danes (55 female and 60 male); 104 of the interviewees were tourists and 11 were guides. The people taking part in the interviews resembled the survey respondents in that they were Danish, between the ages of 16 and 26 years, and from a variety of educational and social backgrounds. Thirty-eight of the interviews took the form of group interviews with up to six participants at a time, while seven of the interviews were single-person interviews. The group interviews consisted of friendship groups that were mostly made up of participants of the same gender and age; tourists and guides were interviewed separately. To create a relaxed ambience conducive to creative exchanges (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995), it was left to the interviewees to decide how long the interviews should last and where they should take place. Thus, interviews varied from 15 to 90 min and the typical locations were the beach, cafés and hotel rooms.

Interviews were based on an open-ended questionnaire that started with a few simple questions. For example, the interviewees were asked about basic demographic variables and if they had visited a nightlife resort before. These questions served as a warm-up for the more abstract questions that followed including: “Try to describe the atmosphere at the pub crawl!”, “How would you describe your condition when you first woke up today?”, and “Try to tell me about the best/worst thing that has happened to you during your stay”. The questions relating to bodily sensations and emotions generally prompted short responses whereas questions about concrete events resulted in more detailed accounts. With the permission of the participants, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Qualitative research on drugs studies “the social meanings that participants attach to drug use and the social processes by which such meanings are created, reinforced and reproduced” (Neale, Allen, & Coombes, 2005, p. 1584; Rhodes, 2000). One of the main advantages of such an approach is flexibility in formulating research questions (Gobo, 2008) and qualitative studies are generally less structured than quantitative studies (Neale et al., 2005). Although not in the original research design, the importance

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1075663>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1075663>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)