

# College Alcohol Use and the Embodiment of Hegemonic Masculinity among European American Men

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**Abstract** This article concerns alcohol use as it pertains to the construction of White masculinity through an analysis of students' accounts. Seventy-eight face-to-face interviews were conducted with volunteer female and male, African American, European American, heterosexual and homosexual students at a mid-sized university. Results suggest that the meaning of public drinking is to express a form of masculinity. In students' gendered descriptions of their own and peers' drinking behavior, alcohol use among White men was found to symbolize the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity. Masculinities were constructed via drinking stories, the body's ability to tolerate alcohol, and the relevance of drinking too little or not at all, which symbolized weakness, homosexuality, or femininity. Implications for social policy and future research are discussed.

**Keywords** Hegemonic masculinity · Embodiment · Gender · Alcohol · College · Qualitative research · Deviance

The reduction of alcohol-related problems among college students remains a formidable task. "Alcohol-related problems among college students" may be a euphemism for "European American (EA) college students who are men" given that the vast majority of college students are EA and those students who experience alcohol related problems are disproportionately EA men (Peralta 2005; Wechsler and Kuo 2003). An important aspect in promoting social and behavioral change is to understand the racialized and gendered

underpinnings that shape the desire to engage in heavy drinking in college.

High profile media reports have documented alcohol-related deaths and violence among college students. The recent alleged rape at Duke university by athletes at an underage drinking party is just one recent example (Saraceno 2006). Parents have filed suit in courts alleging that university campuses are unsafe and have been negligent in protecting their children.<sup>1</sup> Settlements have acknowledged the shared responsibility of universities in the culture of alcohol abuse that occurs on college campuses.<sup>2</sup>

The literature suggests that alcohol use or abstention from alcohol has been used for gender construction purposes (Campbell 2000; Montemurro and McClure 2005; West 2001). Although college campuses have been described in the literature as settings where men and women "do gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987), alcohol use among college students has received relatively little gender accomplishment analysis (for examples of gender analysis and college alcohol use see Miller et al. 2003).

<sup>1</sup> In 2000, a university settled with the parents of a student who died of alcohol poisoning; they gave \$1.25 million for a scholarship and \$4.75 million in compensatory damages. More recently, this university settled a wrongful death suit with the parents of another student by agreeing to fund a limited number of students in pre-orientation programs (Rivoire 2005).

<sup>2</sup> To put these individual stories into context, Hingson et al. (2002) estimated that in 1998 that more than 1,400 students aged 18–24 enrolled in 2- and 4-year colleges died from alcohol-related injuries (including motor vehicle crashes). Of the eight million college students in the United States, more than two million drove vehicles while under the influence, and over 3 million rode in a car with a drunk driver. Five hundred thousand full-time 4-year college students were unintentionally injured while under the influence of alcohol, and more than 600,000 were hit or assaulted by a student under the influence. More than 70,000 college women experienced date rapes perpetrated by another student who had been drinking.

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Research has documented the epidemiology of alcohol use by gender. Sixteen general population surveys from ten countries (Wilsnack et al. 2000) show men more likely than women to drink. Male drinkers consumed alcohol more frequently and in larger amounts, and were more likely than female drinkers to have alcohol-related problems. Differences in the magnitude of gender differences across countries have been found to be strongly influenced by socio-cultural factors (Gilbert and Collins 1997; Streifel 1997). This suggests that the relatively small biological differences in how alcohol affects women and men are magnified by cultural norms for how women and men should or should not use alcohol. Drinking behavior may be a useful way to symbolize more general differences in gender practices and to make gender role differences more conspicuous. Thus, many societies with major differences in men's and women's practices have also largely forbidden women, but not men, to drink (McDonald 1994).

National studies by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and the Monitoring the Future survey, each indicate that drinking quantity and frequency rates peak between the ages of 18 and 25 years. Whereas illicit drug use is higher among non-college students, alcohol use/abuse is higher among college students than among their non-college peers, which suggests normative age-related social patterns (Dowdall et al. 2002; O'Malley et al. 2002). Problematic alcohol use is of special concern for college students based on these national estimates.

A nationally representative study (Wechsler et al. 1998) showed that 42.7% of students had been binge drinking in the 2 weeks before they were surveyed. Twenty percent of these students binged three times or more per month. Gender differences in alcohol consumption by college students continue to be reported routinely in the literature, although differences are dwindling (Wechsler et al. 1998). Nineteen percent of female students and 24% of male students in one nationally representative study (see Wechsler et al. 1994, 1995a, b, 1998) reported frequent "binge drinking" (defined as imbibing five or more drinks in a single sitting for men and four for women) three or more times in a 2 week period. Twenty-three percent of those who drank three times per week drank ten or more drinks per week.

Although these studies provide important insight into college students' drinking, large nationally representative studies of college students overlook important sociological issues that pertain to gender. For instance, Wechsler et al. (1995a) analysis of gender in college students' alcohol use is limited to only three gender-specific qualifications. The first is a gender-adjusted measurement for "binge drinking" (described above). Second, Wechsler reported prevalence differences between men and women where women had a slightly lower prevalence rate of abusive drinking. Third,

Wechsler's data suggest that women face a disproportionately greater risk than men do for violent victimization.

Survey research has shown significant differences by gender, however, the researchers have not satisfactorily interpreted the nuanced impact of gender on the epidemiological distribution of drinking. In other words, we stand to gain from a more sophisticated understanding of the way in which drinking is implicated in creating and sustaining variant forms of masculinity. Although we know that gender differences exist, we have not fully understood their origins, their meanings, or the ways in which men's drinking exists in relation to women's or subjugated men's drinking (see Peralta 2002 for an analysis of women, fear of weight-gain, and alcohol use). Given the pronounced and routine differences reported in the scientific literature, it is important to investigate how gender accomplishment influences drinking behavior among college students. This approach provides insight into the meaning of alcohol use that is not possible within the traditional epidemiological approaches used by Wechsler and others.

### Research on Gender: Performance and Masculinities

Several aspects of gender have been established. Gender is not static nor a mere "pre-assigned" role. Gender is behavior that emerges actively from deeply held and typically unreflective beliefs about men's and women's "essential" natures. Gendered behavior is accomplished in the presence of onlookers. Furthermore, multiple forms of masculinities and femininities, rather than single dimensional categories of men and women comprise gender (Connell 1995; Donaldson 1993; Messerschmidt 1993; Messner 1992). The internal complexities of masculinity, however, have only recently begun to be researched.

A dominant ideology of what it means to be a man or woman is reinforced, reproduced, and recreated through group consensus and the social interaction that is informed by this consensus (Komter 1989). "Hegemonic masculinity" describes a culturally specific ideal masculinity (Connell 1995). Hegemony is a concept that embeds certain notions and actions of consent and participation by subordinate groups (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Men in a given society are socialized to identify with a dominant definition of masculinity (Messerschmidt 1997). The ideal or hegemonic man in contemporary Western societies has been described as EA, young, heterosexually active, economically successful, athletically inclined, and self-assured (Connell 1987). Recent researchers have moved beyond an analysis of "traits" to thinking about work in the paid labor market, the subordination of women, heterosexism, authority, control, competitive individualism, independence, a capacity for violence, and the driven (hetero)

sexuality of men (Connell 1995; Messerschmidt 1993) and most recently the role of the *body* in masculinity construction (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

Crucial theoretical advancement on gender and masculinity has begun to emphasize men's and boys' practical relationships to collective images or models of masculinity (rather than simple reflections of them). As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) iterated, regional hegemonic masculinities provide cultural frameworks that are materialized in daily practices and interactions. The making of masculinities and the experience of men's bodies coincide in the production of gender (Connell 1987). The use of the body in risk-taking behavior among men and the subsequent harm that occurs has been well explained in the masculinity literature (Kimmel 1987). Ironically, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) noted that, in attempts to express masculinity, the body is at risk for harm as self-injuries are quite common in competitive athletic endeavors. Similarly, alcohol researchers routinely address the physical damage on the body caused by alcohol use (Wechsler et al. 1998).

Sport and masculinities research and theoretical discussions on the sociology of the body have bolstered support for the study of masculinities as a social construct. Messner's (1989) work on professional athletes and their use of their bodies as symbols of masculinity is exemplary of this research (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Analyses by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) and Messner (1992) support a "body-reflexive practice" where the body is seen as both an active agent and as an object of practice used to receive and produce gender differences. Use of the body to help to create a certain kind of masculinity (e.g., playing football) enhances the accomplishment of hegemonic masculinity yet the risk of injury undercuts the power of the body. Similar arguments can be made to suggest that men use alcohol to demonstrate their stamina, self-control, non-conformity, and willingness to take risks (Gotoh 1994).

### Where These Literatures Converge: Alcohol, Gender, and Normative Performances

The present study contributes empirically to the theoretical literature on gender construction by presenting illustrations of how alcohol is associated with the "doing" of masculinity and illuminating the process of masculine embodiment. This work is in accordance to Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) renewed call for empirical research on existing hegemonic masculinities analyzed at the local level with face to face interaction strategies. The evidence presented here documents college students' alcohol use as it relates to gender accomplishment.

The cultural processes of reward and punishment linked to gender conformity and gendered deviance appear to

influence alcohol use by both men and women (Wilsnack and Wilsnack 1997). Research reveals that gender norms largely determine abstinence versus moderate or heavy drinking in women. For example, in communities where women's drinking is not socially acceptable, drinking rates are relatively low for women (Montemurro and McClure 2005; R. W. Wilsnack and S. C. Wilsnack 1997). Other ethnographic research shows that women's and men's drinking patterns diverge significantly where gender roles are most clearly divided (McDonald 1994). Indeed, many cultures stigmatize women's alcohol use, which limits the development and maintenance of drinking behaviors among women (Gomberg 1997).

It has been suggested that men use alcohol to express their presumed superiority over women and marginalized men, who are prohibited from the same type of alcohol use (McDonald 1994). Belonging to male-dominated institutions (e.g., social fraternities) increases the likelihood of engaging in heavy drinking behavior, as does being younger in age, male, involved in organized athletics, and EA (Wechsler et al. 2000). Athletes report more binge drinking, heavier alcohol use, and a greater number of alcohol-related injuries than do students in general (Nelson and Wechsler 2003).

Some research (West 2001) suggests that alcohol is a facilitator of certain types of gender expression within specific contexts. Accordingly, alcohol may be used to avoid stigmatization and to conform to specific gender norms. For instance, the consumption of beer by blue collar men seems to be a potent resource for the enactment of "compensatory masculinities" (Hemmingsson et al. 1998; Janes and Ames 1989; Kaminer and Dixon 1995). More generally, Landrine et al. (1988) have suggested that "drunkenness may be an aspect of the concept of masculinity" (p. 705). In Western cultures, for example, advertisements display excessive alcohol usage exclusively as a men's activity (e.g., Ratliff and Burkhart 1984). Research has demonstrated that retrospective accounts of drunken or drinking behavior have implications for theories on the construction of identity (Giles 1999) as has discourse analytic research (Gough and Edwards 1998). Evidence suggests that stories about drunken behavior are an important part of identity construction (Giles 1999; Moore 1990), and this might be especially true for masculine gender identity.

Although there are numerous studies that link masculinity with alcohol use and abuse (e.g., Boswell and Spade 1996; Capraro 2000; Cohen and Lederman 1995; Schacht 1996), the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol's* (Goldman et al. 2002) supplemental issue on college students' drinking virtually ignored the role of gender and the expression of gender in its review of the state of science on college students' drinking. Nevertheless, researchers are beginning to reveal how alcohol use becomes an expression of

masculinity among college students, a group for whom alcohol use is a serious problem (Locke and Mahalik 2005; Wilson et al. 2004; Young et al. 2005).

The relevance of gender dynamics to the problems of alcohol use and alcohol-related violence is emphasized here in sociological terms. The present study focused on EA masculinity situated in a youthful context where the body is often used to express gender. Here, I explore the ways that drinking behavior is part of “doing gender” as men socially construct their identity as masculine.

### The Current Study

In the present study of alcohol use, I took an interactionist approach to view gender as (1) dynamic, (2) as emerging from situated interaction, and (3) as produced and reinforced through accomplishment (Coltrane 1989; Pyke 1996; West and Fenstermaker 1993; West and Zimmerman 1987). I interpret students’ accounts of alcohol use as reflections of their conceptualization of gender and the alcohol-related behaviors as necessary to engage in doing masculinity. I argue that alcohol is used by EA male students to align with hegemonic standards of masculinity. I use accounts from EA men and subjugated men and women (e.g., African American [AA], gay) enrolled in an institution of higher education to illustrate this process.

The purpose of this research was to explore the process of local hegemonic masculinity construction (as opposed to regional or national constructions) via alcohol use among a diverse sample of college students. Is the process of drinking and, in particular, heavy drinking a form of masculinity construction? Are ideological assumptions about masculinity expressed through drinking behavior in a social location where such expressions are accepted, legitimized, and often expected? Does heavy alcohol use among men become a resource where presumed “essential” characteristics of manhood can be expressed? Juxtaposing the experiences of AA, EA, homosexual, heterosexual, men and women was a critical aspect of analyzing the local construction of this form of masculinity.

### Method

#### Participants

Respondents were a volunteer sample of 78 undergraduate students at a medium sized state university in the mid-Atlantic region of the US (See Tables 1 and 2). Sixty-nine percent ( $N=55$ ) of the total sample was EA, and 27% ( $N=20$ ) was AA. Forty-four men and 34 women participated. Seventy-two percent ( $N=56$ ) self-identified as heterosexual,

**Table 1** Student interviews: race by gender ( $N$ ) %.

Race	Gender		Total
	Men	Women	
EA	(32) 72	(23) 66	(55) 69
AA	(10) 23	(10) 31	(20) 27
Latino/a	(1) 2	(1) 3	(2) 3
Asian	(1) 2	(–) –	(1) 1
Total	44 (100)	34 (100)	78 (100)

22% ( $N=17$ ) self-identified as gay or lesbian, and the remaining 6% ( $N=5$ ) self-identified as bisexual. Two respondents were both Hispanic and gay. One respondent was self-identified as a gay Asian man. Two AA men identified as gay; the remaining gay participants were EA ( $N=17$ ; ten EA gay men; seven EA lesbians).

The respondents were evenly distributed across the college years; almost one-third were either freshmen ( $N=24$ ) or seniors ( $N=25$ ), 15% were sophomores ( $N=11$ ), and 22% were juniors ( $N=18$ ). The average age was at the median point of age of traditional college students: 20 years, 5 months. Fifteen percent ( $N=11$ ) of the sample reported that they were members of a fraternity or sorority. Nearly all (95%) respondents reported themselves as “middle” or “upper-middle class.”

#### Procedure

The University Office of Human Research reviewed and approved the protocol and granted ethical approval for the project. Data were collected primarily by the author of the study between 1997 and 2001. Twenty-two of the 78 interviews were conducted by a female research assistant trained in qualitative methods. I decided that it was necessary to obtain interviews with both a male and female interviewer to reach saturation with minimized interviewer effects based on gender. Interviews were 1–3 h long; the mean length was 1.5 h. The age difference between interviewers and participants was not large (median was 7 years), which possibly aided in the establishment of rapport.

Students who were between the ages of 18 and 24 and who were attending the university at the time of the study

**Table 2** Student interviews: sexuality by gender ( $N$ ) %.

Sexuality	Gender		Total
	Men	Women	
Heterosexual	(33) 74	(23) 69	(56) 72
Homosexual	(10) 23	(7) 19	(17) 22
Bisexual	(1) 2	(4) 13	(5) 6
Total	(44) 100	(34) 100	(78) 100

were the only criteria for inclusion. Twenty-four percent of the sample (18 students, all EA and heterosexual) was recruited with the assistance of the Dean of Students' office. These students were undergoing discipline procedures for first-time, minor alcohol-related violations (most of which were for possession or underage use) at the time of the study. The remaining 80 students were recruited via class announcements and advertisements posted on campus. Minority students were purposely over-sampled to give representation to those who have been traditionally excluded from research. To encourage minority student participation, \$10 stipends were offered to minorities for completion of the interview.

Rapport was established by assuring confidentiality; providing a safe, secure, and private interview space; and establishing a non-threatening, non-hierarchical atmosphere where the student was informed that he or she was the expert in the area of college students' alcohol use. All students were free to skip any question or to discontinue the interview at any time (all students completed the interview in full). All data were audio-taped and transcribed with participants' permission. Pseudonyms are used here to protect informants' confidentiality.

Data were analyzed using grounded theory techniques. Grounded theory as a methodology is the appropriate approach to these data because it was my intent to illuminate the social processes of gender in the context of alcohol use. I specifically intended to generate theory from data at the outset of the study. Themes were inductively generated from these data using a line-by-line open coding method (Strauss and Corbin 1990). My analytic goals were to identify the meaning in the relationship between gender and alcohol use, to discover how the social construction of masculinity contributes to alcohol use in a college context, and to generate concepts and hypotheses directly from these data (Glaser 1995; Glaser and Strauss 1967). I took a constant-relational approach to gender (Emirbayer 1997), so as not to abandon the central tenets of gender or masculinity.

An initial independent analysis of themes was done by both the author and the research assistant, and then the results were compared. We looked for gendered features of alcohol use and alcohol-related behavior in the accounts by listening to, reading, and re-reading interview data. It was necessary to read through all interview data several times with a focus on accounts of activities that reflected gender construction in general and masculinity specifically. After we had established agreed-upon emergent themes, I refocused on gender by placing gendered drinking activity at the center of my analytic framework. After compiling these data using this framework, patterns of gendered alcohol use were categorized. I also explored the contexts and influences that made these experiences possible. After having established agreed-upon emergent themes, I selected

representational accounts from these data. These accounts are used as illustrations of themes that stem from the analytic framework used in coding and organizing these data.

The understandings generated by the original interviews were augmented by the use of field notes, observation of students on campus, discussions with my colleagues about these data, and the data collection process. Field notes included documentation of students' characteristics (e.g., dress, voice inflection, the extent to which students became animated in discussing their drinking accounts).

### Measure

A semi-structured, open-ended interview guide that consisted of 12 main questions was developed and pilot tested by the author of the present study. Demographic questions were asked in addition to questions about drinking quantity and frequency, attitudes toward drinking, reasons for drinking, expectations of alcohol use, and consequences of drinking such as blackouts, inability to stop using, injuries, and failure to meet responsibilities. Questions were expanded through the use of probes and projective questioning to reduce the response effect of sensitive questions (e.g., I asked questions about friends' use of alcohol in addition to questions about interviewees' own use of alcohol).

Some of the main questions included: "How do you feel about getting drunk?"; "What have been your experiences with alcohol use on this campus?"; "Have you experienced alcohol-related violence?"; "What do you think of students who drink very little or who abstain?"; "What do you think of students who take risks when drinking?" Most relevant to this research, students were asked to discuss and elaborate upon any perceived gender differences they personally had experienced.

The terms "heavy alcohol use" or "heavy drinking" are used in this article to refer to accounts where five or more drinks were consumed in a sitting for men and four or more for women (Wechsler et al. 1995a). This quantity of consumed alcohol for men and women has been described as "abusive" or "problematic" in the literature due to its correlation with increased risk for violence, injury and morbidity (Wechsler et al. 1995a). "Alcohol use" and "drinking" in this article refer to accounts of alcohol use that constituted less than five drinks in a row for men and four drinks in a row for women respectively.

### Results

The data presented here are based on over 100 hours of interview data. Three themes that emerged from the interviews are reported here. I grouped the findings into

three distinct—yet interrelated—categories to demonstrate how masculinity operates and is understood within the context of alcohol use and heavy alcohol use. These three themes together exemplify the association between alcohol use and the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity construction for a specific group of men: EA college men.

#### Markers of Embodied Masculinity: Stories and Trophies

Drinking and heavy drinking is understood to be a form of “macho” or masculine behavior. Table 3 shows that a majority of students (70%), including similar numbers of men (68%) and women (73%), endorse this belief. Thus men and women alike believe that drinking, especially heavy drinking, is indicative of masculinity accomplishment for those who drink. Thus *evidence* of heavy drinking via stories and trophies (e.g., physical evidence of alcohol use) are used as markers of masculinity.

Because the majority of students in this sample asserted that alcohol use expresses a form of “macho” or masculine behavior (70%), these data suggest that drinking is within the repertoire of behaviors associated with “masculinity” as it is defined in this specific college environment. Although many students’ associated drinking with (EA) masculinity, the tone of men’s responses differed from that of women’s responses. Men’s stories about their own alcohol use and the use of alcohol by their peers were in reference to their own perceived power and strength as men. This power was evidenced by the extent to which their *bodies* could endure and withstand the effects of alcohol consumption. These qualities were demonstrated by their stated ability not only to withstand heavy alcohol use, but also to *enjoy* the act of drinking heavily. For example, Ronald, an EA heterosexual student, discussed the party he had planned for his fraternity:

...so I went and got 25 cases of Corona, got a sorority involved...We consumed about 19 of the 25 cases!  
There were about 30 brothers and about 40 girls, and we did it all in one night!

**Table 3** Percent who assert that drinking is expressive of masculine behavior by gender, race, and sexuality.

	Percent	Number
Men	68	37
Women	73	30
EA students	76	50
AA students	53	15
Homosexual students*	71	18
Heterosexual students	62	49
Total**	70	67

\*Includes gay and bisexual students

\*\*N=67 due to missing data

Ronald was boastful in his story telling, as were many EA male interviewees. To illustrate further how men discussed alcohol excitedly and with pride, consider Keith, an EA heterosexual student, who said:

One night last semester we started drinking at 10 A.M. and didn’t stop until 4 A.M. the next day! It was like 18 hours of drinking. That was straight beer. The hard alcohol part started out at a brewery...we had three beers there, then we bought a 6-pack at a liquor store, went to a micro brewery, had three big beers there, had dinner, went to a bar, and started doing shots, and then went to some other bar, and after that we don’t remember. We just woke up. And this one time, I put down a whole bottle of vodka just straight down!

EA male undergraduates talked about their alcohol use as if “drinking” and “getting drunk” were badges of honor. It is perhaps not surprising that it was EA men who more often discussed alcohol as an approach to a local construction of hegemonic masculinity, as previous researchers have found that EA college men are among the heaviest of drinkers. EA men’s drinking accounts often had the tone of battle stories told by war veterans. They were more likely to discuss their alcohol use and their male friends’ alcohol use with awe and as symbols of essential masculine strength, ability, stamina, and, most important, power.

Drinking stories for men are important because they are expressions of a specific type of masculine identity—one that is wild, tough, popular, youthful, aggressive, competitive, confident, and anti-feminine (Schacht 1996). This identity is reminiscent of regional hegemonic masculinity, as discussed by Messerschmidt (1993) and Connell (1987), where power and control are tantamount. The telling of drinking stories, particularly heavy drinking stories, is part of the imagery of gender accomplishment for this particular local setting. The reference group is specific: the college students’ peers. This style of drinking did not take place in front of older adults. This is important and perhaps relevant to the tone of their accounts. Students may have exaggerated their drinking experiences. But regardless of the actual amount consumed, their efforts to convey a particular image reflect “doing gender” in general, and “doing masculinity” in particular.

An AA heterosexual man and former university athlete spoke of his heavy alcohol use as if it were an achievement in and of itself. In fact, he had “trophies” to prove it. His account paralleled that of EA male students’ accounts. Consider Adrian’s statement:

Like I said, last year we used to drink all the time. As a matter of fact, we had this, I wish I had a picture to show you, we had bottles along the whole shelf on the wall. Empty liquor bottles across the whole thing. There must have been 40 bottles...would buy a bottle

of something, or maybe someone would bring something over, and we just collected them. We just saved them all. And we looked back on that and we were like, wow!<sup>3</sup>

A recent history in active athletics participation has been typified as a component of hegemonic masculinity (Messner 1992). It is interesting that empty bottles of liquor are displayed much like athletic trophies might be displayed as a measure of athletic accomplishment. Adrian's description demonstrates how signs of alcohol use are associated with pride and performance. Men counted the number of bottles consumed as evidence of masculinity accomplishment. In the need to address masculine standards as defined by their reference group, empty alcohol containers were used as symbolic markers of achieving that goal. These men drew a sense of pride from the amount and frequency of alcohol use. Kristen (EA, heterosexual) substantiated this observation by saying: "Guys value that (drinking) more than girls. Guys pride themselves on that and they have to prove they can drink and hold their liquor." The types (e.g., beer versus wine coolers) of drinks appear to serve as trophies as well. Take Karen's statement (EA, heterosexual) as an example: "Girls are supposed to drink girly drinks, and guys are supposed to drink beer."

Many men interviewed were brimming with pride when they discussed their heavy alcohol use.<sup>4</sup> If excessive alcohol use among men is perceived to be an expression of masculinity, power, and authority, what is the perception of women's alcohol use according to respondents? Women who openly drink heavily were regarded as infringing upon traditional masculine behavior according to both male and female respondents. Seth, an AA man, for example, said:

I think that if a female is tanked [drunk], like I don't think that she is at all attractive. I'm not being sexist, but there is something about a woman chugging back a beer that looks so masculine, you know what I mean? Just like why doesn't she just burp or fart in front of everybody or something? Men drink. They get violent, rape. When women drink, that is really masculine. It looks masculine.

<sup>3</sup> Note that AA students in the present study did not drink as often or as much as EA students. This student was an exception. Perhaps his identity as an AA college student athlete explains his use of drinking symbolism to compensate for hegemonic masculinity given his required association with EA college men.

<sup>4</sup> "Heavy" alcohol use, as a term, is based on research that suggests that the amount of alcohol consumed on average by those who were interviewed (college students) exceeds that of the general population and is often referred to as "heavy alcohol use" (Johnson et al. 1998).

It appears Seth, similar to other male respondents, does not approve of women drinking because it violates gender norms, which calls into question her gender status and also his.

Alcohol was often said to be the primary reason for men's get-togethers. Masculinities, however, were understood by women to be embodied in men's ability to tolerate heavy alcohol use. Respondents assumed that men's bodies can absorb more alcohol than women's and are more likely to withstand its effects. Succinctly put: Men reminisced proudly and boasted about their alcohol use in terms of masculinity accomplishment. The use of it in and of itself was meaningful. Heavy alcohol use demonstrated bodily power and superiority. Ironically, however, heavy and prolonged alcohol use in fact *weakens* one's body.

#### "Liquid Courage," "Beer Muscles," and "Case Races": Alcohol Induced Risky Behavior, Aggression, and Competition

Body practices such as risk-taking behavior in the context of alcohol use were evident in the present study. The gender and masculinities literatures illustrate how hegemonic masculinity emphasizes the representation and use of men's bodies as a process of social embodiment. Male students "do" a specific type of masculinity by reproducing hierarchical images of what a "real man" is thought capable of doing. Here, alcohol use is assumed to fuel strength, aggression and confidence creating contexts where risky behaviors are more apt. In this context, competitive activities surrounding alcohol use also emerge. This section exemplifies how the use of alcohol in risk taking, aggression, and competition is a form of gender embodiment which is different from the gender construction involved in story telling and trophy display discussed above.

Risk-taking behavior and feeling invincible are central to the construction and embodiment of local masculinities (Kimmel 2004; Messner 1992). With what is known about the deleterious effects of heavy and long term alcohol use, alcohol is a form of risk-taking in of itself. Beiner (1987, p. 335), for example, noted that heavy drinking is a "risk-taking style which is accepted, if not expected, in men." The vast majority of students discussed the associations among alcohol use, risky behaviors, and the induced sense of courage or "invincibility" that occurred particularly among EA men. Table 4 reveals that a majority of all groups think that alcohol use in some way induces feelings of invincibility or courage among men.

Being "courageous" and engaging in risk-taking behavior are indicative of local hegemonic masculinity (Messerschmidt 1993). Courage is a sign of power and thus a potent ingredient of masculinity. "Liquid Courage" was defined by students as the courage that emerges because of alcohol use. Six men reported feeling "invincible" when drinking. An

**Table 4** Percent who assert that drinking induces “invincibility” or courage in men.

	Percent	Number
Men	73	40
Women	75	29
EA students	73	50
AA students	60	16
Homosexual students*	70	18
Heterosexual students	69	50
Total**	74	69

\*Includes gay and bisexual students

\*\*N=69 due to missing data

additional four men and seven women reported how men, when drinking, thought they were “invincible.” Over one-half of the sample discussed or referred to “liquid courage.” “Invincibility” was a term used frequently by both men and women to describe feelings that “men” express when binge drinking. Again, the male body is implicated in the embodiment of gender as illustrated in the accounts that follow. Consider Henry’s (EA, heterosexual) account:

I’ve done all kinds of stupid things [when drinking]. One of my friends was driving my jeep, and I tried to jump out of it and into my friend’s pick up doing like 80 on the freeway. We used to do flips off my roof and into the pool back home. We used to do all kinds of stupid stuff.

Commitment to risk-taking practices as a means of establishing a masculine reputation in a peer group context was evident in students’ accounts. These behaviors appeared to be expected, as evidenced by respondents’ assumptions about the “natural” links between masculinity, alcohol use, and risk-taking. These assumptions are a product of negotiations between EA men, women, and other subordinated groups. The power of expectations should thus not be underestimated. There is no emphasized effort to curtail or prevent alcohol-related behaviors because so many expect it to occur as part of a “natural” byproduct of men’s drinking (see Peralta and Cruz 2006). The statements below exemplify this. Jerry, an EA, heterosexual fraternity brother stated:

When you are wasted, that’s when you have a head change. Alcohol brings out the mean side. It definitely causes problems...it definitely gives you beer muscles. People think that they can fight better, can be tougher. They can take a beating and they just feel invincible a lot of times. I mean it happens to me, it happens to everyone I know.

This account reveals the fine-grained production and negotiation of masculinities as a configuration of practice.

An EA, heterosexual woman stated: “...guys get very care free, and they don’t think about it because people just don’t think about what they do, they don’t care, and they are destructive, or if they hurt anybody, they think they are invincible or whatever.” “Beer muscles” (a term invoked by two-thirds of the sample) are thought to be produced as a result of alcohol. Susan, an EA heterosexual woman discussed “beer muscles” and her experiences with alcohol-related violence:

Like they behave violently, they are more apt to get into fights and arguments, and they have their beer muscles, and they feel like they can run through walls of brick and just things like that. Someone I know (college student) that lives right beside me just got into a huge fight with people in a fraternity, and he got his whole nose broken, and his face is all puffed, um, he didn’t even feel it afterwards. He said he was so drunk when it happened. And obviously they are not in their right minds you know.

Another EA woman said: “I think drinking changes your mentality, like beer muscles. Guys think they can be brave or strong. I think it is mind over matter.” The acquisition of “beer muscles” is a cultural phenomenon where men are assumed to feel hyper-masculine, tough, strong, and invincible. The general expectation for drinking-induced invincibility to happen was common for both men and women. Michelle, for example, talked about her male friends’ propensity to drink and drive. She (EA, heterosexual) stated:

I think with guys, they think they are more invincible when they are drinking. Like my woman friends are like, ‘I don’t think I can drive; let’s call somebody.’ And the guys are like, ‘oh yeah, I can drive, no problem!’

Drinking and driving is a criminal act predominantly committed by men and perhaps tied to the construction of gender. The alcohol-related act is rebellious, risky, and may serve as a sign of bravado signified by the willingness to overcome the effects of alcohol and or evade formal control agents such as police officers. Shana, an AA heterosexual female student, elaborated upon this theme while making connections among men’s alcohol use, masculinity, power, and violence. The capacity for violence is a part of the masculine construct (Messerschmidt 1993). The link between violence and substance use, particularly alcohol use, has been well documented in the literature (Bachman and Peralta 2002; Cruz and Peralta 2001). Shana evoked this link as follows:

... the *main* reason why I don’t like dating guys who drink is because a lot of them do get aggressive...I know that if I was ever in a situation where (my intimate partner became intoxicated) they better not hit

me for no other reason...I am not giving them that excuse, I'm not going for it either way. I don't care if you are in your right mind or not! I think that (alcohol and violence) is a bad combination. Especially when it is like a man against a woman. I think especially with guys... when they are drunk you know their drinking gives them this power I guess (laughter), and you know...they just start hitting everybody... I feel that they think they have this power or something when they drink.

Shana said the reason she will not date a person who drinks is because she does not want to be the victim of alcohol-related violence and does not want to have to be in a situation where this behavior can easily be excused away. Shana emphasized the word *power*. She stated that alcohol, in the minds of men, evoked a *power* to do what they want. The connection between alcohol use and *power* was not necessarily an expression of admiration. Shana laughed at the thought of this situation, but, at the same time, the association appeared to be feared. Shana expressed uneasiness at the connection between *power* and drinking by men. In her account, she located the association between men's alcohol use and women's victimization as a source of oppression that occurs between men and women.

Because the concept of hegemonic masculinity is based on a practice that permits men's collective dominance over "others" to continue, it is not surprising that, in some contexts, hegemonic masculinity refers to men's engagement in toxic practices including physical violence, which works to stabilize gender dominance in particular settings. Sexual violence and sexual risk-taking emerged as themes as well. Consider the following account that illustrates this from an EA, heterosexual women recruited from the Dean of students' office.

Faye: I know too much about what goes on with alcohol and sexual aggression at frat parties and alcohol contributes to that, like my guy friends act invincible when they drink...and with the sorority and fraternity stereotypes of girls are good and boys can be bad, I had a friend who was raped by a fraternity brother.

Many students discussed the centrality of drinking games in the culture of college drinking. Drinking games are contests where the ability to tolerate alcohol is instrumental in the social embodiment of masculinity. Students talked about the importance of drinking games in expressing power and control as evidenced by the male body's ability to withstand intoxication. The accounts grouped below concern competition ("I" or "we" can drink more than "him" or "them") and risk-taking. Competition and risk-taking are characteristics of local forms of

masculinity expression, and alcohol appears to be used as a vehicle to approximate the local ideal of masculinity situated in the context of the college environment. Janice, an EA female student, said:

Males go on longer (drink for longer periods), and they would take the drinking (game) more seriously. Who wins tells you who can hold their liquor better. I know for myself and a lot of my girlfriends, you kind of fake it, like you were full or you couldn't do it anymore you would fake it. And guys, they drink the beer till it is gone. I think it was more of a guy thing; they took the games more seriously than girls. It is all about winning for the guys. They think it is everything.

An EA heterosexual man further elaborated upon this theme.

Fred: A case race is when we get a pledge and an older brother together to form a team against another pledge and brother. Then we get a case of beer and whichever team finishes it first, wins. It's like a fun thing.

Many women discussed "faking it" to avoid losing control and thus rendered vulnerable to the men in the group. Other women reported having been given a "handicap" by the men in the group during drinking games. "Handicaps" infer protection in that women are protected from the harms of alcohol by men or from men during drinking games. This is important because it is tied to the embodiment of gender (e.g., men can withstand more alcohol than women and therefore women cannot, and should not, imbibe as much), which differentiates men from women, and thus helps to establish masculine superiority.

Jon (an EA heterosexual man) exemplified how men's identity, dominance, and difference is forged by alcohol use.

Jon: You take a bunch of guys and we try to out do each other...we make it a game like you know? Let's see who can drink the most... most guys can handle their liquor better so you will drink more with guys than you will with girls. Probably cause (the guys) are trying to outdo each other, but, I mean it's not (as if) they're winning (something) but it (competition) always happens.

Drinking games illustrate how ideological hegemonies present dominant interests as everyone's interests (Pyke 1996). Drinking heavily is expected, as it is the point of the game in the local context of "the party." Sanctions are imposed upon those who do not participate in these games or align themselves with hegemonic standards in general. To avoid sanctions, many students discussed turning to alcohol as a means of compensating for the lack of fundamental components of hegemonic masculinity, such as heterosexual identity.

## “Two-beer Queers” versus “Real Drinkers”: Exaltation and Stigmatization of Drinking and Non-drinking Behavior

Alcohol is a readily available and socially legitimized tool that is gendered in terms of how and when it is used. Its use (particularly its heavy use) was observed to be associated with demonstrations of power, whereas abstention or light use was associated with “weakness” or otherness. Who drinks, who drinks heavily, who drinks frequently, who can withstand heavy alcohol use, and who can relationally distance themselves from drinking styles characterized as feminine are important components of the gender work discussed here.

Gough and Edwards (1998) found that men’s bonding talk and/or talk about alcohol-related activity demonstrates the dependence of hegemonic masculinities on the discursive subordination of the “other,” most notably women and gay men. Similarly, most students who engaged in the drinking culture marginalized those who do not drink by decrying the later as outcasts. Students were relegated to, or relegated themselves to, less influential, less popular, less glorified, less powerful positions of college life (as defined by the students). If a student did drink, that is, if the student adopts the notion that drinking is and should be a dominant activity to be taken seriously, then he or she is rewarded with a prized social life, social outlets, networking opportunities, status, and positive reputation.

Table 5 provides the percentage of students in the current study who regarded light drinking or abstinence as weakness or femininity. Seventy-six percent of EA students thought that this type of drinking is expressive of weakness. Again, fewer AA students adhered to this belief (51%). For “men” not to drink, or to drink little, was considered by respondents as a departure from the dominant and stereotypical forms of masculinity. Via alcohol use, hegemonic masculinity embodies the currently most honored way of being a man. It requires all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and, it ideologically legitimates the subordination of women and marginalized men at the local level of college.

**Table 5** Percent who assert that abstention or “light drinking” is expressive of weakness.

	Percent	Number
Men	74	41
Women	70	30
EA students	76	50
AA students	51	16
Homosexual students*	68	20
Heterosexual students	74	49
Total**	73	71

\*Includes gay and bisexual students

\*\*N=71 due to missing data

Gender theorists have called for theorizing about the embodiment involved in hegemony. For boys and young men, skilled bodily activity becomes a prime indicator of masculinity. This is instrumental in the linking of heterosexuality and masculinity in Western cultures and how prestige is conferred onto boys and young men (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Peralta and Cruz 2006). Bodies are both agents in social practice and objects of social practice (Connell 2002). Alcohol use is a conspicuous way to display endurance and strong bodies in young men’s leisure practices. It is the practice of social embodiment involving institutions such as higher education and legitimized alcohol use on which their privilege as EA heterosexual men rests.

Mike, an EA gay man exemplified this theme by *not* using his body in socially proscribed ways (Mike was openly gay during these situations):

Last spring semester, I lived in the dorm and I was the fruit of the group because I only drank three times a semester.

This account suggests that infrequent, little, or no drinking is not necessarily socially acceptable among men. Mike’s reference to feeling like a “fruit” refers to his feelings of emasculation that were rooted in his lack of participating in what he thought was “masculine” behavior. In this case, Mike’s body was not active in the performance of alcohol use. As in calls for research to link the body as active in the construction of gender, the reverse (inactivity) also reveals the nuanced pattern of gender expressions. It has meaning when the body is not intimately and intricately active in social processes. The assumptions held by Mike and others are that “real men” hold their liquor and that those deemed less than “real men” are identified by the fact they cannot “hold” their liquor, drink very little, or refuse to drink at all.

Sean, an EA gay man, reinforced how alcohol use is viewed as an important aspect of being the “standard” type of man. Consider his thought about what it is heterosexual “men” do:

...during the past 2 years, I have kind of stopped hanging out with straight men, and I’m not quite sure why. I think part of it is because they do nothing but drink. I don’t mean to make stereotypes or anything, but the straight guys I used to hang with, their social life revolved around drinking. So lately I have been hanging out mostly with women.

It is important to note Sean’s reference to “straight guys” and the behavior he believes to be associated with “straight guys” (i.e., heavy alcohol use). This differs from his perception of how women use alcohol, hence his conscious decision to socialize with those who are assumed to drink little or not at all—women. Sean relied on the stereotype that heterosexual men engage in drinking behavior and that this

behavior is normative. Additional evidence that drinking heavily is indicative of youthful EA heterosexual masculinity was provided by James, a heterosexual EA man.

James: (A terrible drunk is when a person after using alcohol) can't walk, can't talk. (They) spill other people's beer (due to their intoxication). You spill it on yourself. You know, (when some one behaves like) the old "two-beer queer".

Interviewer: "Two-beer queer?"

James: You never heard that expression, the "two-beer queer?" (For instance, if I were to say) "That girl is a "two-beer queer" (it means) she can't hold her drink; she has no tolerance, um, that's what it is, having no tolerance.

"Two-beer queers" are a subset of the population who are less able to handle liquor in the prescribed masculine tradition. That is, those who literally cannot withstand a total of two beers are not in compliance with hegemonic expectations. This "lesser" group is linked with a pejorative (i.e., "two-beer queer"), not because it rhymes but because queers are an inferior class of people (i.e., males who are not really men). In the account, gay men (as understood by the term "queer") and all women are referred to with the derogatory "two-beer queer" as a way to distinguish collectively between those who can drink (i.e., hegemonic men) from those unable to "handle" excessive alcohol consumption. It is believed that heavy alcohol use and the concurrent maintenance of control thus "make the man" and simultaneously define those who do not meet the ideal hegemonic masculine standard. Consider Fran's statement (EA, heterosexual).

Fran: It is a good thing if you can hold your own with the guys. If you are taking too long to finish your beer, they will ask, "Do you need a nipple for that beer?" because you are taking too long to finish it.

Alternatively, heavy drinking embodies exalted masculinity, as suggested by the following account from an EA male heterosexual student.

Rick: I took this job at a college bar for a month...and it was expected that you drink with your coworkers after work. The first night you work there, they make you drink this drink called a "Schlag." They essentially take a pint glass, and they fill it with hard alcohol, like with everything behind the bar like whiskey, tequila, vodka, everything. They would throw other stuff too, lemon juice, salt, pepper, olives. Everyone would get around you and expect you to drink it. I mean, I am six foot one and 180 pounds, that would knock me on my feet. Essentially, what I did was, I just played it off, I played it cool, and I

asked for a chaser after I had that just to kinda show them up, you know, I had a beer, and I downed it. I put the beer down, walked outside, ran around the corner, and forced myself to throw up cause there is no way I wanted that much alcohol in my body.

Perhaps one of the most important examples of how alcohol is used to approximate and embody the ideal, dominant, and expected form of masculinity came from a gay male student. David, an EA student, reflected on how and why he used alcohol. David first talked about his dread of participating in the expected and lauded masculine activity of team sports and then discussed the creative way he used alcohol to avoid the doing of masculinity through sport by doing gender through heavy alcohol use and in a competitive fashion. It is important to note that David was not openly gay when situations like the one described below occurred. David stated:

If I ever got put into competition, I hated it. I couldn't hit the ball. I could serve in volleyball once in a while, but other than that I was useless...drinking was a way to get out of (the pressures of participating in team sports). I just drank until I passed out, usually after many of the bigger guys. I did shots with them, I stayed up with them. I never got into sports but it was okay cause I could drink with them [David here refers to his heterosexual male friends]. I just hung with the crowd and when they played sports, I was an insider in the group because I drank with them. So it was okay for me to just sit by the radio and watch. I would hold their cigarettes and shit like that. They didn't care that I didn't want to play because I was one of them in the party mode. My straight friends thought the "faggy" (i.e., gay) dude was okay because he could put down the alcohol just like them. I could drink them under the table and that impressed them. They knew I could party with the boys.

The account above highlights the effectiveness of alcohol in substituting for athletic ability, a requisite of this local hegemonic masculinity. The action of heavy alcohol use allowed David, a marginalized gay student, to remain among the ranks of "real" men. Although he felt unable or inadequate in performing athletically, he used his drinking prowess as an accepted substitute to athletic performance. His heavy alcohol use and reputation for such use symbolically worked as a marker of hegemonic masculinity. For many EA male respondents, alcohol reportedly was used with regularity and was expected of other EA men. These behaviors and expectations reinforce and reproduce a local, yet specific vision of masculinity. Students in the present study exhibited the strong social ties found to be associated with binge drinking, which include masculine

gender role socialization. Within this context, the pressures to engage in masculinity work can be significant, and the consequences are potentially deleterious. As such, it is important to note that hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily translate into a satisfying experience of life.

## Discussion

The present article expands upon the existing gender and alcohol research by integrating the study of drinking with the broader issue of gender construction, specifically, the embodiment of masculinity. In the present study, I examined alcohol's role as a resource in the expression of hegemonic masculinity among men in comparison with subjugated masculinities and femininities. I discuss the role of alcohol, as both a substance and a symbol. This research follows the symbolic interactionist tradition where alcohol is viewed as a symbol through which meaning (hegemonic masculinity) is created in the privileged local context of the college campus.

Hegemonic masculinities do not exist in the statistical sense, yet their qualities are considered normative. Masculinity is defined as a configuration of practice organized in relation to the structure of gender relations. Masculinity needs to be reproduced actively in social settings. For youth, sport is among the most common means of masculinity reproduction. Among youth in college, the prevalence and centrality of drinking alcohol suggests that it is an area in which masculinity will be of issue. As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) stated, the local level is where hegemonic patterns of masculinity are embedded, that is, in specific social environments.<sup>5</sup> Thus the college setting is an ideal location to study the situated accomplishment of masculinity.

However, it is important to recognize the limitations of the present study. The data collection procedure that produced the sub-sample of students recruited by the Dean of Students' Office may have biased the sample. It is important to note that the accounts of drinking provided by these students did not differ from those who were contacted by other means. Respondents who were not recruited through the Dean's office also could have easily been sanctioned by the university's judicial system for their illicit alcohol-related behaviors. Nevertheless, accounts used from the Dean of Students' sub-sample may have distorted the emergent themes. Next, these data were reliant upon students' memories of alcohol use. It is possible that students did not accurately report events. However, the manner in which students constructed their drinking stories is telling of the gender dynamics at play within college drinking cultures.

Finally, because the data were collected between 1997 and 2001, drinking cultures may have shifted since this study was conducted (e.g., Day et al. 2003, 2004). Although it is important to acknowledge this, it is also important to recognize that the purpose of the present study was not to generalize, but to provide a snapshot of the significance of gender in drinking cultures and to illustrate the fluidity of gender in situated contexts.

Given these limitations, aspects of gender within college settings are highlighted in these data. Human social practices, such as the common cultural practice of public alcohol use, create and reinforce gender relations. In the study of masculinity, it is useful to differentiate hegemonic masculinity from subordinated masculinities. The hierarchy of masculinities is a pattern of hegemony (i.e., unquestioned) and not a pattern of simple domination based on force. Hegemony works through the use of exemplars of masculinity—symbols have authority despite the fact most boys and men do not fully live up to them. "Cultural consent, discursive centrality, institutionalization, and the marginalization or delegitimation of alternatives are widely documented features of socially dominant masculinities" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, p.846). This research highlights these inter-relationships through an analysis of accounts of alcohol use.

I argue that the process of drinking and, in particular, heavy drinking for EA college men is a form of embodied masculinity construction. Ideological assumptions about masculinity are expressed through drinking behavior in a social location where such expressions are accepted, legitimized, and often expected. Heavy alcohol use among men becomes a resource where presumed "essential" characteristics of "manhood" can be expressed. In addition, how men and women discuss drinking behaviors illustrates the nuanced nature of gender performance.

West and Zimmerman (1987) suggested that gender should be understood as a situated accomplishment. Subsequent research (for a review, see Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) has affirmed this position, as does the current study. Based upon accounts that reveal the symbolic meaning of alcohol and drinking, alcohol use in and of itself appears to be an important resource with which to do gender in the situated context of the college campus. For example, hegemonic and subordinated masculinity operate according to the ability to express masculinity or compensate for it when primary resources are unobtainable. Gay men, who are denigrated as "not real men," can engage in alcohol consumption as a compensatory strategy. Heterosexual men use alcohol consumption to maintain ascended masculinity thereby subjugating other genders.

It is important to understand masculinity in terms of its supposed antithesis, the construction of femininity (Schacht 1996). In contrast to men's accounts, EA and AA women

<sup>5</sup> Socially legitimated hegemonic models of masculinities are found on college campuses, and thus these sites provide an ideal setting for research on the questions posed in this study.

did not assert that women's heavy alcohol use was a way to express power. Their drinking stories did not symbolize strength or power as women. Women largely viewed heavy drinking among women as potentially problematic, shameful, and stigmatizing behavior unbecoming of women.<sup>6</sup> Some women had fond memories of the "party atmosphere" associated with drinking, but did not present alcohol use as symbols of femininity. Drinking was not the focus of their social events. For women, drinking was secondary to the primary goal, which was to socialize and/or meet potential romantic partners. During these interviews, the majority of women simply did not espouse gender pride through their drinking accounts as did the men. Women's accounts of alcohol use did not reflect feminine accomplishment; they did, however, reflect a form of masculinity.

For many women, the costs associated with drinking, both physical and educational, were often discussed. Thus, many women discussed controlling and managing drinking. It appears women do gender by limiting their alcohol intake so as not to appear as bad, promiscuous, or masculine women. The handicapping of women's alcohol intake in drinking games may also be a means of accomplishing femininity.

The findings presented here are consistent and resonate with those of previous researchers, who peripherally reported alcohol to be associated with specific forms of masculinity construction outside of the college campus (Bird 1996; Boswell and Spade 1996; Schacht 1996; Tomsen 1997). For example, heavy and abusive alcohol use behaviors have been found within traditionally masculine institutions such as fraternities (Wechsler and Kuo 2003), the military (Bray et al. 1999), and policing (Obst et al. 2001). Perhaps the pressure to fulfill narrowly defined masculine constructs within these institutions (due to limited exposure to *masculinities*) leave men with little option but to use alcohol heavily in the face of increased social pressure stemming from a narrow, male-dominated audience, in order to approximate hegemonic standards of masculinity. Increased social pressure, coupled with little-to-nonexistent gender diversity, may exacerbate the masculinity problem.

Research routinely suggests that marriage significantly reduces the quantity and frequency of drinking (known as the "marriage effect") across social strata (Leonard and Rothbard 1999). Note that this is a different local setting with different gender relations. In this setting, heterosexual

intimate relationships and fathering children are prominent symbols of hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, marriage and family are not prominent features of collegiate lifestyles and are therefore not typically associated with masculinity accomplishment for this population. Perhaps marriage and family replace alcohol as symbols of masculinity in a culture where if one's (masculine) gender is questioned, one's (masculine) identity is threatened.

These considerations are relevant to the sociology of alcohol use and gender. Drinking behaviors appear to have the potential to reinforce, create, or challenge existing dominant hierarchical systems of gender. How much alcohol is used and how often, for example, relays culturally understood messages about identity. By choosing to drink or not to drink, individuals position themselves in the larger context of dominant, subordinated, sexualized, and racialized categories. These behaviors thereby reemphasize and normalize the domination of men over women and other types of men (West and Fenstermaker 1993).

Future researchers should focus on establishing a clear understanding of how gender influences expectations for the effects of alcohol or for the motives behind drinking. How are expectations linked to the construction of identity? Does the degree to which individuals align themselves with racialized and sexualized categories play a role in the etiology and epidemiology of alcohol use? In answering these questions, it would be prudent to factor in the institutionalization of gender inequalities, the role of cultural constructions, and the interplay of gender dynamics with other structural factors such as race, class, and religion.

We know that gender accomplishment is manifested differently depending upon culture and social class. Certainly not everyone pursues drinking as a way to construct masculine identity due in part to the values and culture with which individuals identify. For certain local contexts, the constructions of gender perhaps influence how different groups drink (or "choose" not to drink) and subsequently effect problems associated with alcohol use. Perhaps the "negligence" of universities discussed in the introduction can be addressed by acknowledging the role of masculinity construction in prevention and education initiatives.

Alcohol abuse prevention programs in colleges and universities have revealed mixed results at best (see Cooper 1999; Donohue et al. 2004). If more effective social programs are to be implemented, a better understanding of the gender-related norms and meanings associated with alcohol use among college students specifically is needed (for recent interdisciplinary contributions to college specific research in this area, see Locke and Mahalik 2005; Miller et al. 2003; Williams and Ricciardelli 1999; Wilson et al. 2004; Young et al. 2005). This is true particularly in an era of concern over violence, deaths, and other alcohol-related social problems that occur in colleges and universities.

<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to note here that the gender gap in drinking for young people in the US appears to be closing for this age group (Dawson et al. 1995). This may be in line with research that suggests that it is more acceptable for women to adopt traditionally masculine activities than it is for men to adopt activities traditionally reserved for women (Schur 1984). However, women in the present study were subject to social control from other women and men. Although drinking was tolerated, women were likely to be stigmatized more readily for heavy drinking often referred to as "sloppy" drinking.

The question of race and drinking is of relevance here. Studies suggest that young racial and ethnic minorities tend to drink less than their EA counterparts (Peralta 2005; Jones-Webb et al. 1998; Wechsler and Kuo 2003). Social structural conditions shape the understanding of what gender means and inform how gender work is carried out differently depending on demographic differences. Gender accomplishment depends upon cultural definitions of gender and the availability of resources necessary to meet those standards (Messerschmidt 1993). Because socially acceptable resources, skills, and physiological assets needed to “do gender” are limited and/or unequally distributed, masculine and feminine definitions often differ across categories of race, class, and sexuality. This may be indicative of why minority students tend to drink less often than their EA counterparts. Models of gender that differ from those adopted by dominant members of society could help to explain the disparity.

In conclusion, these data illustrate that, for some, alcohol is a vehicle used to express a form of embodied masculinity on a specific college campus. Moreover, these data reveal that gender is not static, but a culturally produced and fluid accomplishment, as evidenced, for example, by women “appearing” masculine through heavy drinking. Finally, alcohol use appears to serve a complex function overlooked by traditional epidemiological examinations of alcohol-related problems. The use of alcohol has meaning; it serves a purpose in doing gender work. For some students, alcohol can be used to align themselves with ideal models of manhood. Alcohol use among college students is thus not only about “drinking to get drunk,” but also about constructing racialized and sexualized status. The social context of college drinking provided a social setting where gender and sexuality as social categories were being constructed and where alcohol use, besides its legitimized use in recreational drinking, is part of several rites related to the very construction and or disruption of the gender/sexuality structure.

Finally, I do not purport that hegemonic masculinities are identified on an individual basis. Hegemonic masculinities are models of relations with women and subordinated masculinities and provide responses to problems of gender relations. Hegemonic masculinities communicate ways of living in the every day. To the extent that they do this, they contribute to the society-wide gender order as a whole, and alcohol is only one vehicle by which to do this.

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