

Young People, Well-Being and Risk-Taking: Doing Gender in Relation to Health and Heavy Drinking

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Abstract : Introduction: Alcohol consumption and health are areas where gender binaries have persisted. By intoxication, men have displayed their masculinity as strong, while matters of health have formed a feminine undertaking. However, in recent years young people's alcohol consumption has declined and been challenged by competing activities, including the rising health trend. This makes the comparison of young people's masculinities and femininities in health and heavy drinking an important case to study. Methods: The data consists of semi-structured interviews about alcohol, health, and leisure activities among young people aged between 15 and 19 (N=56). By drawing on Butler's work on "gender as performative" and Connell's understanding of gendered identities as "configurations of practices," the paper analyzes how the interviewees are doing masculinities and femininities in relation to health and heavy drinking, and how their gender performances are dichotomous, naturalized and contested. Results: The interviewees approach health from two perspectives, which are called "social health" and "physical health" approaches. They are both gendered. Especially in the "social health" approach, in which intoxication and risk-taking are used to increase well-being, the interviewees perform stereotypical gender binaries. The interviewees' gendered performances in the "physical health" approach show more variability and are more reflective and critical. In contrast to intoxication, in relation to which the interviewees perform biologically driven gender binaries, they perform culturally driven genders in relation to health. Conclusions: Health seems to provide for the interviewees a field in which they feel more liberated to perform flexible and alternative genders.

Keywords : young people, decline in drinking, qualitative interviews, gender, health, risk-taking

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