

# Contextualizing Students' Alcohol Use Perceptions and Practices within French Culture: An Analysis of Gender and Drinking among Sport Science College Students

Florian Lebreton<sup>1</sup> · Robert L. Peralta<sup>2</sup> · Jacquelyn Allen-Collinson<sup>3</sup> · Lia Chervenak Wiley<sup>2</sup> · Guillaume Routier<sup>4</sup>

Published online: 12 July 2016

© Springer Science+Business Media New York 2016

**Abstract** Although research has examined alcohol consumption and sport in a variety of contexts, there is a paucity of research on gender and gender dynamics among French college students. The present study addresses this gap in the literature by examining alcohol use practices by men and women among a non-probability sample of French sport science students from five different universities in Northern France. We utilized both survey data ( $n = 534$ ) and in-depth qualitative interviews ( $n = 16$ ) to provide empirical and theoretical insight into a relatively ubiquitous health concern: the culture of intoxication. Qualitative data were based on students

young people. As Szmigin et al. (2008) highlight, however, discourses of moral panic regarding young people's drinking have pervaded popular media, public policy, and some academic research in recent years, often seeking to differentiate the excesses of "binge drinking" from "normal" patterns of alcohol consumption. To better describe young people's ways of managing and controlling alcohol consumption that might be viewed by some as excessive, Szmigin et al. (2008) argue for a more nuanced analysis and understanding of such drinking patterns and for a conceptualization of

as well as in the United States, Germany, Spain (Zimmermann et al. 2011), Australia, New Zealand (Willott and Lyons 2012), and the United Kingdom (Allen-Collinson and Brown 2012), frequent and heavy consumption of alcohol is a cultural practice integrated into many festive and ritual practices (Masse 2002). These practices often directly or indirectly involve the construction of masculinity (Peralta 2007; Willott and Lyons 2012; Zimmermann et al. 2011), or more specifically, hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995).

It connotes aspiring or identifying with dominant assumptions of what it means to be a “real man,” and characteristics such as risk-taking, aggression, sexism, and heavy drinking are taken to be part of a socially constructed system of gender relations, specific to cultures and historic epochs. In addressing gender relations, Connell (1995) has argued for the existence of a gender order in which a range of different masculinities and femininities operate in a gendered hierarchy of power relations.

In this hierarchy (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), hegemonic masculinity is distinguished from, and placed above, other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities (for example those often linked with ethnic and/or sexual minorities). Relatively few men are thought to actually embody the total sum of physical, social, and emotional aspects of hegemonic masculinity (e.g., being strong/muscular/tall; powerful/resourceful/dominant/independent; stoic/aggressive). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue, however, that hegemonic masculinity requires men to position themselves in relation to the dominant ideal. Furthermore, hegemonic masculinity ideologically legitimates the subordination of women to men.

## Alcohol Use, Gender, and Social Meaning



literature from other countries (Allen-Collinson and Brown 2012; Peralta 2007; Sparkes et al. 2007). The present study contributes to the sociological literature on sport, alcohol use, and the construction of gender, particularly narratives of masculinity (Coates 2003). Our study is based upon both survey and interview data relating to alcohol use behavior within French university sport-science student cultures. We address two major gaps in the literature: We directly investigate college women's drinking, and we offer recent data on drinking practices among French college students in order to make

substance use preventive programing. The final item asked if students were involved in an alcohol awareness campaign during their curriculum studies and, if so, whether it had changed their behavior. Permission for data collection was provided by IRB. Participants provided informed consent when they accepted participation in the survey. Data were kept secure at the lead author's office and were anonymous.

Relationships among variables were mainly examined using chi-square tests, *t*-tests, and ANOVAs that were performed separately by gender. To control for confounding factors, we then used two logistic regression models to study the factors associated with frequent heavy drinking and heavy/dangerous drinking (as determined by the AUDIT-C measure) by gender (1 = men, 2 = women); past sports activity (1 = yes, 2 = no); individual sport/team sport (1 = individual, 2 = team); sport practice career (1 = less than 2 years, 2 = from 2 to



of men (84.4 %) were involved in formal sporting contexts compared to their female counterparts (70.7 %). Also, men were devoting more hours to sports practice compared to women. A minority of respondents (4.1 %) was involved in international completion.

#### Alcohol Use and Non-Consumption Characteristics by Gender

Table 2 reports drinking behavior among French sports students. We observe that the average age of first intoxication is 13.87 ( $s.d. = 2.71$ ) years-old for men and 14.53 ( $s.d. = 2.32$ ) years-old for women,  $t(612) = 6.43, p < .032, d = .46$ . With regard to overall alcohol use, data suggest that repeated intoxication is not as high as in other general surveys of young people aged 17 from the same French regions (Legleye et al. 2009), and there seems to be less drinking compared to French youth in 2009 (Choquet and Com-Ruelle 2009). Results do, however, show significant gender differences related to the frequency of intoxication  $\chi^2(4) = 39.97, p < .001$ . Women who do not consume alcohol at all ( ) seem to be over-represented and are underrepresented among regular drinkers ( ) in contrast to men. We further observe in Table 2 that men and women are significantly different in terms of their non-drinking behaviors,  $\chi^2(1) = 36.38, p < .001$ . The results suggest that women tend to report going without alcohol “very often” compared to their male peers. These results reveal significant gender differences in consumption and thus support Hypotheses 1 and 2, which predicted that men would be more likely to drink to intoxication compared to women and that women would be more likely to report non-consumption in social settings compared to men, respectively.

Table 2 further indicates that there are gender differences concerning the kind of alcohol consumed. Men and women differed significantly in their consumption of beer,  $\chi^2 = 100.63, p < .001$ , and their consumption of spirits, (e.g., whiskey, vodka),  $\chi^2 = 28.03, p < .001$ . Furthermore, young people drink less wine than do older adults (Lorey and Poutet 2011), and no gender differences in the present data are apparent in wine consumption as well as other types of alcoholic beverages (see Table 2). These findings offer support for Hypothesis 3 which hypothesized that men would be more likely to consume spirits and beer compared to women.

Whereas slightly over 18 % of men in Lorente et al.’s (2003) study of southern French students reported consuming beer 2–6 times per week, significantly more men in our northern French sample (30.3 %) reported consuming the same amount,  $\chi^2(1) = 74.76, p < .008$ . Furthermore, only 13.1 % of men in our sample said they “never” drank beer compared to 27.5 % of men surveyed in the south of France (Lorente et al. 2003). The consumption of beer specifically is more pronounced among students in the north,  $\chi^2(1) = 91.96, p < .006$ —especially among men, which perhaps illustrates

certain regional differences in the French culture of beer drinking.

#### AUDIT-C Scores

In order to compare means on the AUDIT-C scale for the variables of interest,  $t$ -tests and one-way ANOVAs were conducted. Table 3 reveals significant gender differences for AUDIT-C scores such that men’s scores were significantly higher than women’s. In addition, the mean score for men is 5.41 and indicates that their consumption is in the category of participants “at risk” ( $n = 5,015$ ) (read 1909757500164, val(y)0783(at



Table 2 Alcohol use/non-consumption and type of alcohol use for men and women

Indicators	Men (%)	Women (%)
Age of first drink ( )	$\chi^2(1) = 6.43, p < .05, \eta^2 = .46$ 13.87 (2.71)	14.53 (2.32)
Frequency of intoxication	$\chi^2(4) = 39.97, p < .001$	
1. Never	46 (14.2 %)	56 (32.2 %)
2. Less than once per month	59 (18.2 %)	45 (25.9 %)
3. Once per month	124 (38.3 %)	54 (31 %)
4. Regularly	91 (28.1 %)	19 (10.9 %)
5. Almost every day ( )	4 (1.2 %) 3.63 (1.50)	0 2.72 (1.43)
Number of drinks on typical drinking day	$\chi^2(4) = 22.39, p < .001$	
1. One or two	98 (20.2 %)	76 (15.6 %)
2. Three or four	64 (13.2 %)	31 (6.4 %)
3. Five or six	54 (11.1 %)	35 (7.2 %)
4. Seven to nine	51 (10.5 %)	20 (4.1 %)
5. 10 or more ( )	46 (9.5 %) 2.63 (1.43)	11 (2.3 %) 2.10 (1.21)
Frequency of non-consumption	$\chi^2(4) = 36.38, p < .001$	
1. Never	30 (9.4 %)	6 (3.4 %)
2. Occasionally	159 (49.8 %)	56 (32.2 %)
3. Rather often	91 (28.5 %)	57 (32.8 %)
4. Very often ( )	39 (12.2 %) 2.44 (.84)	55 (31.6 %) 2.97 (.87)
Type of alcohol use: beer	$\chi^2(4) = 100.63, p < .001$	
1. Never	41 (13.1 %)	75 (43.1 %)
2. Less than once per month	54 (17.2 %)	34 (19.5 %)
3. One to four times per month	117 (37.3 %)	52 (29.9 %)
4. Two to six times per week	95 (30.3 %)	13 (7.5 %)
5. Daily use ( )	7 (2.2 %) 2.90 (1.03)	0 1.98 (.98)
Type of alcohol use: wine	$\chi^2(4) = 8.33, p = .08$	
1. Never	123 (39.5 %)	83 (48.3 %)
2. Less than once per month	86 (27.7 %)	43 (25 %)
3. One to four times per month	82 (26.4 %)	41 (23.8 %)
4. Two to six times per week	19 (6.1 %)	5 (2.9 %)
5. Daily use ( )	1 (.3 %) 2.05 (.99)	0 1.92 (.91)
Type of alcohol use: spirits	$\chi^2(4) = 28.03, p < .001$	
1. Never	8.2 (23 %)	23 (40 %)
2. Less than once per month	24.4 (77 %)	32.2 (56 %)
3. One to four times per month	55.7 (176 %)	39.7 (69 %)
4. Two to six times per week	11.7 (37 %)	5.2 (9 %)
5. Daily use ( )	0 2.65 (.83)	0 2.28 (.85)
Other alcohol use	$\chi^2(4) = 7.39, p = .117$	
1. Never	69 (22 %)	32 (18.5 %)
2. Less than once per month	101 (32.2 %)	64 (37 %)
3. One to four times per month	111 (37.3 %)	69 (39.9 %)
4. Two to six times per week	23 (7.3 %)	8 (4.6 %)
5. Daily use ( )	4 (1.3 %) 2.35 (.96)	0 2.25 (.84)

Sample size for each category varies due to uneven responses

determine which predictors accounted for unique variance in each of two criterion variables, frequent heavy drinkers and AUDIT-C risk behavior. Two variables (gender and age of the first drink) emerged as significant predictors. As shown in Table 4, the predictor set had a significant effect on heavy drinking,  $\chi^2(7) = 33.08, p < .001$ , and AUDIT-C risk behaviors,  $\chi^2(7) = 63.72, p < .001$ . The

Hosmer and Lemeshow inferential test was not significant for both regressions (Frequent heavy drinkers = 10.80,  $p = .21$ ; AUDIT-C risk behavior = 15.29,  $p = .28$ ), indicating that the data fit the model well. These variables correctly identified 76.6 % of the student-athletes with elevated frequent/heavy alcohol consumption and 65.5 % with AUDIT-C risk behaviors.

age of the first drink was the next strongest predictor, but only for AUDIT-C risky drinking (Odds Ratio = .879,  $p < .01$ ); for a one-unit increase in age of the first drink, student athletes have 8.7 greater odds of being an AUDIT-C risky drinker. Table 4 shows the logistic regression coefficient and odds ratio for each of the predictor variables. These additional analyses offer further support for Hypothesis 5 which associates level of sports participation with risky drinking behavior.

#### Qualitative Findings

In the following, we present brief interview data in order to illustrate the salient findings surrounding sportswomen's and sportsmen's accounts of their alcohol-related behavior. We report these findings under four key themes that emerged from data analysis: (a) Drinking to excess: Male privilege and women's concern for safety; (b) Alcohol use and the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity; (c) Beer is for boys: The gendering of drink; and (d) Gender, social integration, and pressure to conform. These qualitative data provide brief illustration of our participants'

The predictor variable that best distinguished heavy and AUDIT-C risky behavior from non-heavy/risky student-athlete drinkers was gender status in both analyses ( $p < .001$ ). In other words, for a one-unit increase in gender status, student athletes have 3.6 (Odds Ratio = .367) greater odds of being a heavy drinker and 2.7 (Odds Ratio = .275) times greater odds of being an AUDIT-C risky drinker. The

well together” when asked about her personal experience concerning the question “Have you consumed alcohol during

} } i i } i

As noted in relation to our survey data, differences are especially pronounced among the “once per month



of non-consumption compared to their female counterparts.  
We also found men reported consuming beer and spirits more







(5), 941–946. doi:[10.1016/j.addbeh.2004.02.039](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2004.02.039).

Lorey, T., & Poutet, P. (2011). The representations of wine in France from generation to generation: A dual generation gap. (2), 162–180. doi:[10.1504/IJESB.2011.040758](https://doi.org/10.1504/IJESB.2011.040758).

Macdonald, D., & Kirk, D. (1999). Pedagogy, the body and Christian identity.

Sparkes, A. C., & Smith, B. (2014).