

**Drink like a Man!**

A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON TOXIC MASCULINITY AND BIFURCATED CONSCIOUSNESS IN COLLEGE DRINKING NARRATIVES

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this project was to examine how gender influences problematic drinking on college campuses. In addition to close to 2000 college students dying per year, a host of other problems result from excessive alcohol consumption. We add to the extensive literature on gender and college drinking by employing a Feminist analysis of the "college drinking career narratives" of 20 females and 20 males found in qualitative research articles and on the internet, explicitly looking for instances of "toxic masculinity" and "bifurcated consciousness." Using NVivo qualitative analysis software we coded and performed content analysis on college stories centered on drinking and resistance to drinking. The findings indicate that toxic masculinity was very influential on excessive male drinking behavior, whereas bifurcated consciousness was highly influential on female drinking behavior. While the connection between gender ideology and social behaviors such as drinking are complex our results suggest that intervention strategies targeted towards prevention of problematic drinking, as well as interventions for problematic drinking, may have greater success if designed with consideration for the differential influences of toxic masculinity and bifurcated consciousness on men and women.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Gender is one of many studied characteristics that affects alcohol consumption in college environments and how it might influence the degree to which an individual chooses to participate in problematic drinking behaviors, particularly with binge drinking. Previous research has shown that males are more likely than females to assume positions of what they believe to be 'normal' towards alcohol increasing the likelihood that they will partake in problematic drinking behaviors. To the contrary, women were found more likely to be able to resist situational pressures in relation to drinking. However, the reason that this gendered discrepancy exists remains to be examined. As we theoretically analyze these gendered behavioral patterns related to drinking we hope to expose patterns and rationales pertaining to why these patterns persist.

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**THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Our research was focused on two main concepts, toxic masculinity and bifurcated consciousness at which derives from the feminist theory. These concepts were used during the development of our hypotheses.

**FEMINIST THEORY**

Focuses and shifts the assumptions away from the male viewpoint and experience towards the viewpoint of that of a woman. This shift then reveals the societal issues, trends, and problems that are typically overlooked by the historically dominant male perspective within sociological theory. From this perspective, we predict women will be more affected by bifurcated consciousness, men by toxic masculinity.

**BIFURCATED CONSCIOUSNESS**

Suggests the split of two 'worlds' that subsist within a woman; the world that one actually experiences, vs. the dominant view at which you must adapt to. Typically, marginalized groups (such as women), are accustomed to viewing the world from the perspective of the dominant group (males) because the perspective of that dominant group is implanted into every aspect of institutions across that world. During this process, the dominant groups are naïvely unaware of the perspectives of the marginalized groups as they never have to adapt to the oppressed worldviews. This privileged perspective from the dominant group is referred to as the "objective" reality, when really, a woman's voice provides existing realities that are overlooked or invisible to those not seeing the world through the eyes of a woman.

**TOXIC MASCULINITY**

A concept used to explain a set of principles and expectations of manhood and masculinity that are harmful to men in multiple ways. These principles revolve around power, status, aggression, and dominance. Strength is seen as everything while emotions and empathy are interpreted as weakness. These more 'feminine' traits fit outside of the constructed values of masculinity.

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**METHODS**

- Collected 20 Female and 20 Male drinking narratives from various qualitative sources across the web; including sites like reddit or public forums using search terms such as "my college drinking experience", college "why I got drunk", and college "why I don't drink (much)" to guide the research process
- Content analysis was coded through various pre-determined theoretically derived concepts from a Feminist Perspective, as well as relevant concepts that emerged during analysis
- A database was created for these narratives through NVIVO software analysis

**VARIABLES**

- Over 56 variables were utilized in the coding process
- The data was coded through common and uncommon drinking variables seen throughout the 40 narratives, such as "Drunk Driving, Brawling, Emotional Responses, and Peer Pressure"
- Variables were chosen and structured in attempt to test and expand on our main hypotheses

**DISCUSSION**

- As shown in Figure 2, Bifurcated Consciousness is widely present in college drinking narratives involving females, which supports the ideas expressed within the Feminist theoretical perspective. We believe college females who engage in drinking are more influenced by bifurcated consciousness rather than principles that derive from toxic masculinity. This is because men tend to interpret drinking experiences in one way (dominant group perspective), whereas females see situations, like drinking, in multiple ways (marginalized perspective).
- The results of our study clearly demonstrate, along with the theoretical perspectives, that toxic masculinity was extremely influential on excessive male drinking behavior. This can be explained by the high numbers of male drinking on college campuses as males use drinking to reaffirm their masculinity.
- We know that there is a complex relationship between gender ideology and social behaviors such as drinking, our outcomes indicate that intervention strategies directed towards prevention of problematic drinking, as well as interventions for already established problematic drinking, may have greater success if designed with consideration for the distinct effects of bifurcated consciousness and toxic masculinity relating to women and men.

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**OTHER FINDINGS & EMERGING THEMES**

- We found that over 83% of women had emotional reactions to their specific drinking narrative while males demonstrated less than 17% which suggests that intervention strategies designed to target emotions in females may be effective
- Peer pressure has always been an area of concern when analyzing college binge drinking. We did not observe a difference in the effect of peer pressure on drinking between females and males with 54% of women drinking in response to peer pressure, and 46% of men
- There was a small sample of individuals who stopped drinking and interestingly, 71% of them were females
- Mental illness was also observed to play a role in drinking narratives with over 65% of females drank in response to mental illness, while less than 35% of men connected their drinking habits to mental illness

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**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS & SOURCES**


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Figure 1:

**Sample Anecdotes of Toxic Masculinity in Male Narratives**

"One of my friends off-handedly said, ‘Oh, you quit first, pussy!’ Because I can’t handle peer pressure or threats to my non-existent masculinity, I immediately ordered another pitcher of beer and drank the entire thing by myself."

"Let a friend of mine convince me that some guy I didn’t know was saying stupid things about me to my then girlfriend (now my wife) and when the guy later walked by me, I said a little altercation took place and I ended up putting him through my friend’s wall and breaking two fingers in the process."

"... Broke up with my girlfriend, punched my best friend, pulled all over my parent’s front door and cussed out my sister while she was cleaning it up.

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**BIFURCATED CONSCIOUSNESS MALE VS. FEMALE - RESULTS**

**Figure 1:** Effects of toxic masculinity in drinking on each sex. Toxic masculinity was measured as a means of dominance, aggression, recklessness, and control demonstrated through drinking behavior.

**Sample Anecdotes of Toxic Masculinity in Male Narratives**

"I carried a flask of whiskey to treat the searing depression that gripped me as soon as I put some distance between myself and my family. I alternated between giving people I loved the cold shoulder and flooding them with emotional drama. I knew they wouldn’t want me in their lives much longer.”

"I remember my mother coming to a bar one night and sitting on a stool next to me begging me to come home with her because she was worried about me drinking with strangers in the middle of the night. She had tears falling down her face and her heart was breaking, but I still wouldn’t come home. I had to turn off the part of my brain that cared about her so that I could continue to drink. I flipped it on her, thinking, ‘How dare she ruin my night. I am an adult and my decisions have no effect on her.’"

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**Figure 2:** Effects of bifurcated consciousness in drinking on each sex. Bifurcated Consciousness was evaluated through presence of analyzing ones drinking behavior through the eyes of the others.

**Sample Anecdotes of Bifurcated Consciousness in Female Narratives**

"I was handed a flask of whiskey to treat the searing depression that gripped me as soon as I put some distance between myself and my family. I alternated between giving people I loved the cold shoulder and flooding them with emotional drama. I knew they wouldn’t want me in their lives much longer.”

"I remember my mother coming to a bar one night and sitting on a stool next to me begging me to come home with her because she was worried about me drinking with strangers in the middle of the night. She had tears falling down her face and her heart was breaking, but I still wouldn’t come home. I had to turn off the part of my brain that cared about her so that I could continue to drink. I flipped it on her, thinking, ‘How dare she ruin my night. I am an adult and my decisions have no effect on her.’"

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**NEXT STEPS AND SIGNIFICANCE**

- For men, we believe intervention strategies that alter the connection between weakness and resistance to drinking, which has been reinforced from hegemonic masculinity, could make resistance to drinking a more masculine option
- For women, intervention strategies that are centered on expressing short/long term effects on their social relationships from drinking and resistance to drinking will impact female drinking rates in college environments

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**REFERENCES**


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