

Young people in ‘drinking’ societies? Norwegian, Scottish and Swedish adolescents’ perceptions of alcohol use

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Abstract

The paper studies young people’s reported drinking behaviors and their views on various social aspects of alcohol, utilizing a sample of over 4000 rural adolescents aged 11.8–16.5 years in Norway, Scotland and Sweden. The methodology employed includes a common questionnaire and a range of varying qualitative approaches (essays and focus group interviews). The various venues and drinking contexts used by young people, their motives for drinking, and their ‘learning’ experiences with alcohol are described. Beyond nationality, the most powerful predictors of ‘high’ drinking are ‘involvement with friends’ and ‘participation in commercial leisure’. The predictors for ‘low’ drinking are ‘involvement in activities with parents’ and ‘parental concerns about drinking’. Results show that Scottish teenagers drink most, Norwegians least and no differences in the predictor variables are found that can explain this. Results are discussed in relation to social and cultural differences, and illustrated by quotations from rural young people in Scotland and Sweden.

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Introduction

Most countries in the Western world are ‘drinking societies’ in the sense that not only is drinking alcohol legal, but it is also part of the social *mores* of these societies and the majority of adults ‘use’ alcohol at least from time to time. That being so, the desire of many adolescents to experiment with alcohol is an aspect of their transition through adolescence towards adulthood. Sharp and Lowe, for example, describe young people’s drinking as part of the socialization process from child to adult and as a symbolic practice related to seeking social acceptance in adult society (Sharp and Lowe, 1989).

We already know something of the patterns of teenage drinking from previous European research (Heaven, 1996; Balding, 1997; Hendry *et al.*, 1998; Kloep, 1998; Seiffge-Krenke, 1998). However, we know little about the *motivations and reasons* adolescents give for their drinking behavior, and even less about young peoples’ drinking in *rural* areas.

Alcohol is readily available to teenagers by direct purchase (though this is illegal for minors in many European countries), and pub-going seems to peak in the late teens and thereafter ‘tail off’ into early adulthood [see, e.g. (Coleman and Hendry, 1999)]. Balding suggested that approximately one-quarter of British 15-year-old pupils reported having purchased alcohol from a supermarket or off-license in the previous week to his investigation and 10% had bought alcohol in a pub (Balding, 1997). In Norway and Sweden laws are stricter: alcohol can only be purchased at the governmentally owned wine and spirit stores, and age

legitimization (minimum age 20 years) must be proved on demand. Nevertheless, the illegal making of potent 'home-brewed' liquors is a tradition in these two countries.

Norwegian research by Hammer and Pape showed that young men reported more alcohol-related problems than women across adolescence and into early adulthood (Hammer and Pape, 1997). Nevertheless, a cautionary note is sounded by Pape and Hammer who claimed that young male abstainers and men who were late-comers to drinking showed indications of a delayed entry into adult roles, and a reluctance to adopt adult role-behaviors (Pape and Hammer, 1996). Thus, according to the authors, perhaps getting involved in drinking for the first time in mid-adolescence can be an ingredient in the normal developmental process.

In line with the secular trend of the earlier onset of puberty (Coleman and Hendry, 1999), reports from the Swedish Government showed that increasing numbers of young people are initiated into drinking earlier in adolescence than in former times. For instance, the number of 14 years old who drink more than 5 l of 100% alcohol in a year has been increasing since the mid-1980s (Socialstyrelsen, 1997). This mirrors the findings of Pedersen and Skrondal (Pedersen and Skrondal, 1998) in Norway and Balding (Balding, 1997) in the UK.

Turning now to the possible impact of location on conduct disorders such as drug use, under-age drinking or delinquency in adolescence, Wichstrøm *et al.* demonstrated that rates of misbehavior were similar in all levels of urbanization (apart from in the capital city, Oslo) (Wichstrøm *et al.*, 1996). Therefore, as the authors stated, there is little supporting evidence for differences in adolescents' behavior between urban and rural areas.

Given these aspects of teenagers' developmental transitions towards adulthood and their attitudes towards alcohol, it seems important to make comparisons among Nordic countries operating somewhat different laws and practices regarding alcohol, as a way of gaining insights into young people's drinking behaviors.

Hence the present study sets out to investigate young people's drinking, and their views on drinking, in rural Norway, Scotland and Sweden. In order to compare cultural influences as rigorously as possible, the samples were selected from similar rural areas in the three countries. In particular, we address the following questions:

- How much do rural adolescents claim to drink?
- When, where and with whom do they drink?
- Why do they drink?
- How do they learn to drink?
- What can we learn from cultural comparisons?

Method

The present report is part of an international study looking at lifestyles and health concerns of rural youth in Nordic countries. The main purpose of the survey was to develop a general picture of young people in a diversity of rural locations and settings in Norway, Scotland and Sweden.

We defined 'rural locations', using Randall's definition of rural districts, as small communities that were located at least 40 km from large urban conurbations (Randall, 1992). Variability with regard to socio-demographic profiles, such as fishing, farming or tourism-based communities, geographic location, such as inland, coastal or island areas, and settlement size was taken into consideration in selecting the catchment areas. This resulted in a sample in which 17% of the young people defined themselves as coming from a rural township, 35% from a village and 48% from the countryside.

The samples were stratified by age (12, 14 and 16 year olds) and clustered by community in each of the three countries. Thus, a school was selected in each area and, within that school, whole year-groups completed the questionnaire. This resulted in a sample of 4000 rural young people aged 11.8–16.5 years who took part in the school-based questionnaire survey (mean ages and number of respondents: Norway 14.25 years, $n = 1312$; Scotland 14.25 years, $n = 2212$; Sweden 13.86 years, $n = 867$ —due to differences concerning

ages on entry, the Swedish group was significantly younger than the two others). The questionnaire survey had its genesis in a series of pilot qualitative interviews with young people. It was distributed during school hours in the classrooms in autumn 1996 and answered under the supervision of a researcher, who guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality.

Subsamples were involved in a variety of qualitative approaches—an essay competition in Sweden, 16 focus group interviews in Scotland and writing an essay in Norway.

In *Scotland* five focus group interview study locations were chosen where selection was guided by responses to the baseline questionnaire survey which had been conducted the previous autumn. The interview sites provided similar variability of geographic location, community size and socio-demographic profiles as the questionnaire survey. It was decided to interview two different age groups in the second half of 1997: a group of girls and a corresponding group of boys from the fourth year of each of five secondary schools (15/16 year olds) and the sixth year groups along with some who had left school (17/18 year olds). Having completed the survey questionnaire in the previous year, these young people were now 1 year older. One boy and one girl in each age group was chosen by a teacher after discussions regarding the characteristics to be represented in the sample (i.e. coming from a local family or being an incomer and living in a rural town, village or countryside). These volunteers were asked to choose three or four friends to be interviewed as a focus group. In total, 20 15/16-year-old girls and 18 15/16-year-old boys were interviewed, along with 19 17/18-year-old girls and 16 17/18-year-old boys, across the five sites.

In *Sweden*, an essay competition was undertaken in co-operation with the local newspaper. Young people between 13 and 17 years were asked to describe in their own words: 'How it is to be young in Jämtland: describe how your life is now and how you want it to be'. They were informed that their essays would be used in a research project. Participants were entered in a prize draw.

In total, 134 girls and 106 boys sent in essays varying in length between 1 and 12 pages.

The qualitative study in *Norway* involved essays on organized leisure activities—but not about alcohol. Since these are not relevant to the findings, no quotations of Norwegian youths are presented here.

Interviews were transcribed from tape to written text. Then, the Scottish interviews and the Swedish essays were analyzed, and narrative themes were extracted and categorized by finding meaningful units and common trends (Knizek, 1998). These categories can be regarded as susceptible to inter-cultural comparison.

The procedure also involved checking validity of interpretations by having the interviews analyzed *independently* by two researchers, who then compared their categorizations. A high level of concordance was found between the two separate analyses of emergent themes. For each category found, quotations were selected on the basis of their representativeness and/or illustrative power and presented in the findings section.

Questionnaire

In order to find statistical predictor variables for the amount of drinking in the 4 weeks preceding the survey and to test for cultural differences, young people were asked a series of questions concerning their leisure time activities, their relationship to parents—including a question about parental views on their adolescent children's drinking—peers and school. Different scales of the questionnaire were factor-analyzed and yielded the following factors [the variables comprising each factor and the internal consistency (Cronbach's α) for each subscale are given in parenthesis]:

Leisure time activities

- Social activities with peers (visiting each other, hanging around in the streets, telephoning; $\alpha = 0.70$)
- Sports (engaging in competitive or casual sports; $\alpha = 0.81$)
- Commercial activities (going to a cinema, a disco, concerts, pubs, eat in a snack bar, window shopping; $\alpha = 0.63$)

Table 1. Percentage of Norwegian, Swedish and Scottish youth between 11.8 and 16.5 years who endorsed various statements about alcohol consumption

	Sweden (%)	Norway (%)	Scotland (%)	Total (%)
I have not had an alcoholic drink in the last 4 weeks	52.6	60.1	35.6	46.3
I've had a drink, but I've not been drunk	27.8	20.3	32.6	28.0
I have been drunk once	7.8	9.8	11.3	10.2
I have been drunk twice	4.6	6.2	9.3	7.4
I have been drunk 3 or more times	7.2	3.5	11.2	8.1
Number	806	1219	2041	4066

- Organized activities (taking part in a youth group, political party, a church or religious group, a charity or voluntary help organization; $\alpha = 0.52$)
- Activities with parents (talking, going out, watching TV, playing games, having fun, sharing household chore with them; $\alpha = 0.71$)
- Relaxation (hanging around doing nothing, listening to music; $\alpha = 0.20$)

Parental styles

- Support (being good at helping with problems, encouraging, listens to children, getting on well with each other; $\alpha = 0.81$)
- Conflict and Control (arguing, parents disapprove of friends, expecting too much, strong views about appearance, strict about time of coming home at night; $\alpha = 0.62$)

School

- Positive attitudes to school (learn interesting things, like school, find school work easy, try hard, see teachers as helpful; $\alpha = 0.62$)
- Negative attitudes towards teachers (teachers treat pupils like little kids, fed up with teachers, try to stay away from school; $\alpha = 0.67$)

The variable measuring how often young people got drunk during the 4 weeks preceding questionnaire completion (see Table I) was regressed on the above predictor variables, using multiple regression analyses (one for each country separately and one for all three together) with backward elimination of non-significant predictors (Berry and Feldman, 1991).

Additionally, to get a clearer picture of the effects of nationality, three path models were

constructed for pair-wise comparison among the three countries (see below, Tables II–IV). First, the predictor variables were correlated with the variable measuring how often young people reported that they got drunk in a 4-week period, *with the linear effect of nationality controlled for*. Next, the partial correlation between nationality (dummy variables, country A = 0 and country B = 1) and alcohol consumption was calculated, *with the linear effects of the other predictor variables controlled for*. Lastly, the bivariate correlation between nationality and the other predictor variables was calculated.

Findings

The results presented in the five sections below consist of both qualitative and quantitative data.

How much do rural adolescents drink?

The questionnaire contained, amongst other items, the question: ‘Sometimes when people drink alcohol, they get drunk. Have you ever been drunk in the last 4 weeks?’. Over 60% of the Norwegian, 50% of the Swedish and about 35% of Scottish young people indicated that they had *not* had an alcoholic drink at all, while 3.5% of the Norwegian, 7.2% of the Swedish and 11.2% of the Scottish sample stated that they have been drunk 3 times or more (Table I).

These self-reports showed that Scottish youth drink more than Norwegians and Swedes. Particularly, there were more Scandinavian teenagers who had not touched alcohol at all during the 4 weeks preceding the questionnaire. ANOVA showed

Table II. Path model showing partial correlations between variables, significant predictor variables and multiple regression coefficient for the comparison between Scotland and Sweden

Nation	Bivariate r	Significant predictor variables	Standard β	Partial $r_{\text{predalc.nat}}$	Outcome variable
Scotland (0)	-0.12	Age	0.29	0.42	Times drunk
Sweden (1)	NS	Gender	-0.05	NS	$R = 0.63$
Partial correlation	-0.24	Commercial leisure	0.34	0.44	adj. $R^2 = 0.39$
with outcome variable	0.09	Activities with parents	-0.16	-0.24	d.f. = 2276
$r_{\text{natalc.pred}} = 0.04$	NS	Activities with friends	0.14	0.12	
	0.27	Parents mind drinking	-0.09	-0.25	
	-0.24	Parental conflict/control	0.05	0.07	
	-0.14	Organized leisure activities	-0.04	-0.10	
	-0.24	Negative attitudes towards teachers	0.07	0.15	
	0.13	Positive attitudes towards school	-0.07	-0.20	
	0.10	Sports	-0.04	-0.08	

Table III. Path model showing partial correlations between variables, significant predictor variables, and multiple regression coefficient for the comparison between Norway and Scotland

Nation	Bivariate r	Significant predictor variables	Standard β	Partial $r_{\text{predalc.nat}}$	Outcome variable
Norway (0)	NS	Age	0.30	0.44	Times drunk
Scotland (1)	NS	Gender	-0.06	NS	$R = 0.64$
partial correlation	0.28	Commercial leisure	0.30	0.42	adj. $R^2 = 0.41$
with outcome variable	-0.08	Activities with parents	-0.15	-0.24	d.f. = 2330
$r_{\text{natalc.pred}} = 0.15$	-0.16	Activities with friends	0.17	0.15	
	-0.23	Parents mind drinking	-0.06	-0.24	
	NS	Negative attitudes to teachers	0.08	0.18	
	-0.08	Positive attitudes towards school	-0.07	-0.21	
	-0.25	Relaxation	0.05	0.08	
	0.07	Organized leisure activities	-0.06	-0.10	
	-0.10	Sports	-0.03	-0.08	

Table IV. Path model showing partial correlations between variables, significant predictor variables, and multiple regression coefficient for the comparison between Norway and Sweden

Nation	Bivariate r	Significant predictor variables	Standard β	Partial $r_{\text{predalc.nat}}$	Outcome variable
Norway (0)	-0.15	Age	0.34	0.45	Times drunk
Sweden (1)	NS	Commercial leisure	0.29	0.45	$R = 0.64$
Partial correlation	NS	Activities with parents	-0.13	-0.25	adj. $R^2 = 0.41$
with outcome variable	-0.17	Activities with friends	0.17	.12	d.f. = 1099
$r_{\text{natalc.pred}} = 0.20$	0.08	Parents mind drinking	-0.10	-0.28	
	-0.11	Parental conflict/control	0.06	0.11	
	0.06	Positive attitudes towards school	-0.09	-0.21	
	-0.27	Negative attitudes to teachers	0.11	0.19	

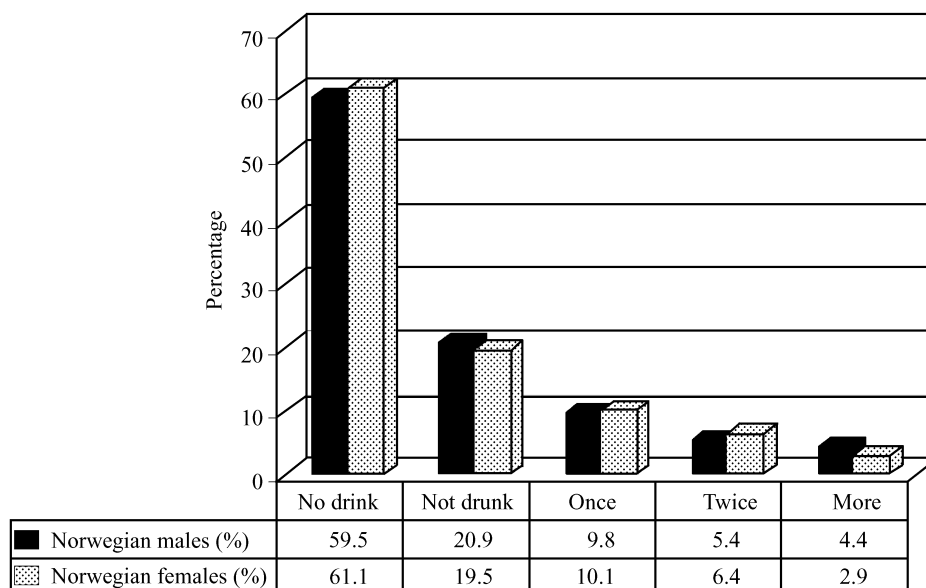


Fig. 1. Percentage of Norwegian girls and boys who have drunk certain amounts of alcohol in the last 4 weeks.

significant main effects for country (Scottish youth drank most, Norwegian least) and age group (older adolescents drank more) and interaction effects for country×age group, country×gender and country×age group×gender: in Norway and Scotland, younger girls drank less than boys, but caught up their male peers in the oldest age group. This was not true for the Swedish group, where girls drank consistently less than boys in all age groups (Scheffé *post hoc* tests showed that the difference for gender was significant for the Swedish group only) (Figures 1–3).

When, where and with whom do they drink?

From the qualitative data it emerged that most young people who drank alcohol did so mainly on weekends, some on every weekend, others only now and then. Venues for drinking were parties and dances, as well as street fairs, mostly in the company of friends. The places selected varied greatly across the rural communities in the study: Friends' homes (who either had a flat of their own or who had a 'parent-free' weekend), streets or woods, pubs, nightclubs and discos. One Swedish

girl described a Friday evening in the following way:

You can always go down town. That is quite cold, you know, but who cares? Once you fill yourself up with half a bottle of moonshine or why not three-quarters, you don't freeze anymore... When the clouds lift, you can go up to the church. There it is warm and people are nice to you. But when you are at your worse, you do not go there. Then it is best to be alone and vomit in peace... [Swedish girl, 16]

In Scotland, where much adult drinking traditionally is centered in pubs, the youngest teenagers in our sample reported difficulties getting into bars and that they had to meet in the streets or at somebody's home to drink. However, nobody particularly liked to drink in the streets:

When I was younger I used to get drunk every weekend. Just doon the street. I don't see the point anymore. I don't really want to go out and get drunk the whole time. I'd prefer to go somewhere and have a few beers and something like that. [Scottish boy, 15]

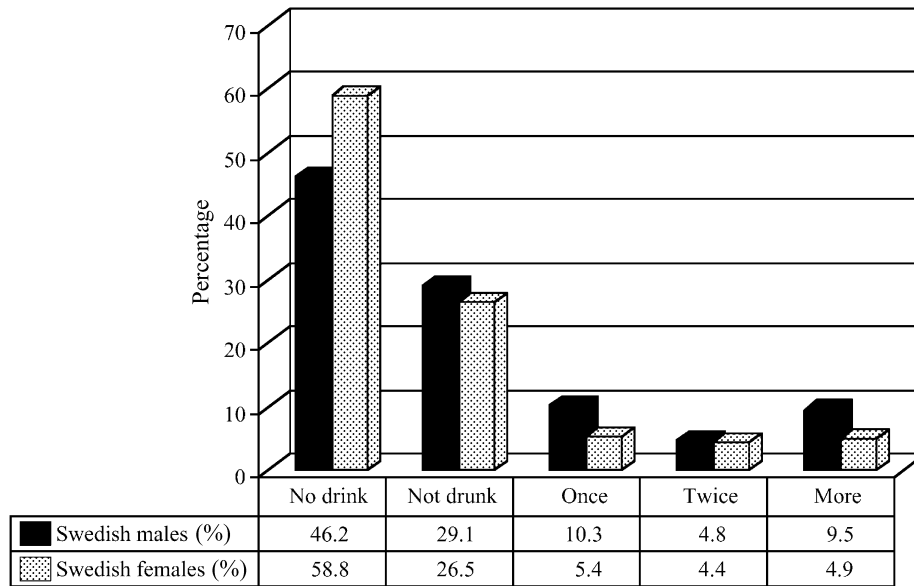


Fig. 2. Percentage of Swedish girls and boys who have drunk certain amounts of alcohol in the last 4 weeks.

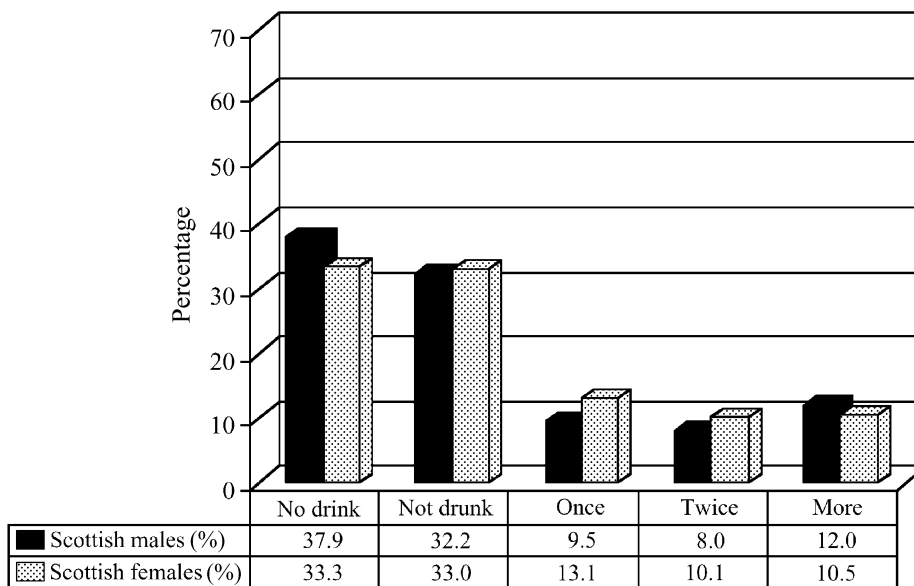


Fig. 3. Percentage of Scottish girls and boys who have drunk certain amounts of alcohol in the last 4 weeks.

Most young people started evenings out with drinks in a friend's house and then tried to get into a pub, which was not always perceived as being easy, but challenging. As some young people told us, pub owners would not serve those locals they knew were under age.

In the Scottish and the Norwegian questionnaires, young people were asked *with whom* they had an alcoholic drink in the preceding 4 weeks.

Over half (51.2%) of the Scots and 44.6% of the Norwegians stated they had drunk with their friends (the difference between countries is significant, $P < 0.05$); 42.2% of the Scots and 15.8% of the Norwegians stated they had drunk with their parents ($P < 0.05$); those who drank in the *youngest* age-group, did so more often with their *parents* than the older age-groups (main effect for age $F = 43.88$; $P < 0.05$). Within the *older* age groups, drinking was more often done with *friends* than in the younger groups ($F = 680.75$; $P < 0.05$).

Why do they drink?

The motives for drinking that we derived from our qualitative data closely parallel the findings of Pavis *et al.*'s (1997) study:

- Excitement and fun—boredom and 'nothing to do'
- Sociability and relaxation—easing shyness with the opposite sex
- Group 'pressure'
- Parents' reaction—too strict or neglective
- Adult symbolism—looking grown-up

The first reason to be discussed is the capability of alcohol to take the individual away from the problems of the everyday world to something more *exciting*:

If you are not sober you can have fun with everything. It feels so good to laugh, it can be silly sometimes, it is so nice to laugh out loud, you know. [Swedish girl, 16]

At a few dances, I've had quite a lot to drink. I would say that I've actually been drunk but only once to the point that I was being sick. Most of the time I just have enough to feel really, really good, you know. [Scottish girl, 17]

Sometimes you drink yourself stupid and everything changes to a wonderful world full of handsome guys. [Swedish girl, 15]

Some young people said they got drunk at weekends because there was *nothing else to do*:

I think of all these weekends that were used to do absolutely nothing... The weekends all follow the same pattern. You go down to the youth club, talk some shit, then up and down the main street. Is that what life is about? I understand why more and more get drunk on weekends. [Swedish girl, 15]

Social facilitation was another reason teenagers gave and noted that alcohol made it *easier to contact other people*:

It is difficult to come into contact—not with pals, but with birds, I mean, without alcohol...I met a girl at the school party, I was not sober then, but she has talked to me several times afterwards, last time was on Saturday... [Swedish boy, 16]

Sometimes they approach you and talk if they are pissed—though that is no fun, neither. In the beginning, it can be like this, they are smashed when you meet them, then they are sober again but nevertheless they come over and you feel shit-happy...it is often like that, drunk you meet wow shit-many friends like that. [Swedish girl, 16]

A third reason was so-called *group 'pressure'* or, as one Scottish girl put it, '*gentle persuasion*'. Young people denied the existence of group pressure in its strictest sense:

There are many tee-totallers—and nobody teases them for that, it is almost admirable—me, I find it tough. [Swedish girl, 16]

Group pressure—definitely not. In the clubs I am in, there are three who never drink anything, so, on those parties we always offer alcohol-free alternatives, that is cheaper, too, because everybody has to pay a certain

amount—they are totally accepted those who do not drink. [Swedish boy, 16]

These young peoples' views on group acceptance reflect findings in the UK [e.g. (Shucksmith and Hendry, 1998)] and USA [see (Coleman and Hendry, 1999)].

Another influence on drinking behavior was *parental attitudes*:

People drink for different reasons, just to be out and with friends. But some young people have an agenda about it, especially if their parents are hard on them, or if they are the oldest kid. They need a break...from their parents. From being a little person all of the time. [Scottish girl, 14]

Not *all* parents were informed about the weekend activities of their offspring and some *would* have minded them drinking—if they had known about it.

They don't know. When they find out there is usually trouble... They are worried about the health risk. That their kids will get addicted to alcohol, if they drink a lot or drink regularly. [Scottish boy, 17]

But if parents knew everything we do on weekends, they would die. Some of my pals' parents would not even in their wildest fantasies imagine that their son/daughter was drunk every weekend and always was the worst. [Swedish girl, 15]

Many parents tried a harm-reduction approach combined with trust—something young people regarded as socially and morally more effective than attempts at authoritarian control:

My mother has said so: 'The only thing I want is that you, in case you drink, you should drink beer, no moonshine, no spirits' and that...it is better she says this than to forbid me to drink at all, because then you would drink moonshine and everything. They say often 'if you drink, drink sensibly' and that is what you most often do. [Swedish girl, 16]

But if I were to come in drunk she would be so disappointed because I've always like, she's

always expected more out of me than my sister. She trusts me not to do something like that and it's even more pressure not to do it because she trusts you. [Scottish girl, 15]

An unsuccessful attempt to control adolescent behavior by authoritarian methods is illustrated by the following quote:

I had a joint before I went to the pub, went to the pub, had a few drinks, got onto the bus, went to X, came home. My old dear searched my room... She said I had something. She searched my room, she didn't find it like... A can of lager. She says 'come in here' when I got home. I stamped my foot. Then I went out, put the can of lager down my trousers and she searched my room and she didn't find it. [Scottish boy, 15]

Some young people considered their drinking to be more of a problem for their parents than for themselves:

I get on the same with my mum but my dad has got annoyed with me recently going to a nightclub. I think some of it is about us growing up and them not wanting to let go or something and wanting us to come in at 9 o'clock at night [giggles]. [Scottish girl, 15]

Most young people—in Sweden and Norway even more than in Scotland—thought their parents would mind it if they drank alcohol without their parents' knowledge (the difference among all three countries was significant, $P < 0.05$; see Figure 4).

Another key reason for drinking was *adult symbolism*, looking 'cool' and 'grown up'. Some young people described their efforts to get served in a pub—and the fun associated with it—as long as they were under age:

Now it's much more sexy not to, when we started to drink, there was that age limit, then it was shit-sexy to drink... [Swedish girl, 16]

How do they learn to drink?

There was evidence that young people can learn the 'skills' of sensible drinking through trial and (sometimes dreadful) error:

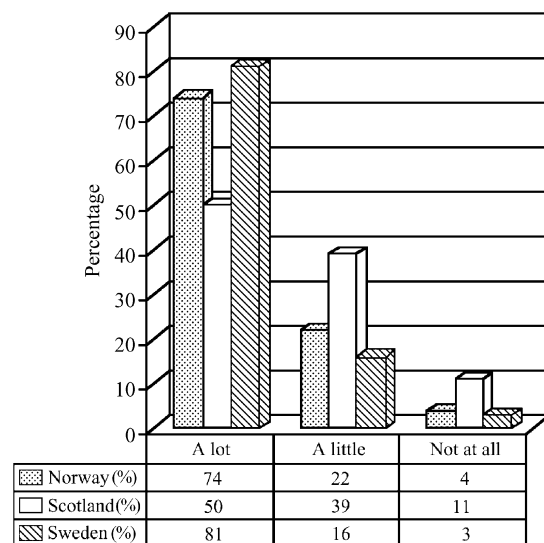


Fig. 4. Percentage of Norwegian, Scottish and Swedish teenagers perceiving how much their parents would mind if they drank alcohol without their knowledge.

Yeah, I ken now, but not when I first started. I was drinking too much and I was just totally over the top. I want to be able to control what I am drinking and sensibly. [Scottish boy, 15]

You must do this [find out your limits]. Try to. You do it because if you're going to drink it is essential. It is part of growing up. [Scottish girl, 14]

Sometimes they got help with this from an older mentor who already had had some experience:

It was my brother, he helped me to understand alcohol and drink and all the rest of it. He taught me all about it and showed me what it can do to you and how it could ruin you and I didn't really want that and well, I got carried over the top and that, but I learned not to let that happen by being more careful, like... [Scottish boy, 15]

Not many wanted the necessary drinking information to come from adults. Only 11% of Scottish and 15% of the Norwegian sample wanted to receive more health education about alcohol, com-

pared to about 40% who would have liked more information about how to develop study techniques and how to cope with examination stress. (This question was not included in the Swedish questionnaire.)

Cultural differences

As described earlier (see Method), the variable measuring how often young people got drunk during the 4 weeks preceding questionnaire completion (see Table I) was regressed on a series of predictor variables, using multiple regression analyses (for each country separately and for all three together) with backward elimination of non-significant predictors. Additionally, to examine the effects of nationality, three path models were constructed for pairwise comparison among the three countries.

In all analyses, apart from age, the strongest predictors for *higher* alcohol use were 'time spent within commercial leisure activities' and 'time spent in activities with friends'.

The strongest predictors for *lower* alcohol use were 'time spent with parents' and 'how much parents would mind their offspring's drinking'.

Nationality, which was converted into dummy variables, had the strongest effect on (low) drinking behavior, when Norway was compared to the other countries (Norway = 1, all others = 0, $\beta = -0.11$). When Sweden or Scotland were compared to the other two countries the effect of nationality was considerably weaker (Sweden = 1, all others 0, $\beta = 0.04$; Scotland = 1, all others = 0, $\beta = 0.05$). Thus, 'being Norwegian' was among the strongest predictors of (low) drinking behavior in a cross-cultural comparison. This emerged also from the bi-cultural comparisons below.

In comparing Scotland and Sweden (Table II), some differences between the two countries emerged. Scottish adolescents engaged more in commercial leisure, were more negative towards their teachers and less positive towards school, had more conflicts with their parents, and thought they minded their drinking less than Swedish adolescents. All these variables were associated with *more* drinking. On the other hand, the Scots

were somewhat more engaged in organized leisure activities, which predicted *less* drinking. Independent from these national differences in the predictor variables, 'being Swedish' *alone* was only slightly associated with drinking: In other words, if the influence of nationality on all other predictor variables was controlled for, Scottish and Swedish adolescents did not differ much from each other in their drinking.

Compared to Norwegians, Scottish adolescents were more engaged in commercial leisure activities and thought their parents minded their drinking less. This may partly explain why they drank more than Norwegians (though Norwegians were more engaged in activities with friends, which was associated with *more* drinking). Further, cultural differences appeared: 'being Norwegian' *in itself* was significantly associated with *less* drinking in *addition* to the national differences on the predictor variables. If these differences were *controlled for*, there was still an effect of nationality on drinking behavior. The *partial* correlation between nationality (Norway = 0, Scotland = 1) and drinking behavior was significant, indicating that Norwegians drank less than Scots, independent of national differences in the other predictor variables.

Swedish and Norwegian adolescents did not differ much in the more powerful predictor variables for alcohol use (i.e. commercial activities and activities with parents). Where they did differ, it was Norwegians who scored higher on variables associated with *more* drinking (more activities with friends, more parental conflict, less impression that parents mind their drinking, less positive attitudes to school and more negative attitudes to teachers). However, as we have seen in Table I, it was Swedish adolescents who drank more than Norwegians—a difference that can *not* be explained by differences in the predictor variables used in this study. This was further emphasized by the high partial correlation between nationality and drinking behavior, *when the predictor variables were controlled for*: 'Being Norwegian' alone was significantly associated with drinking less alcohol.

Overall, results of the cross-cultural comparisons indicated that nationality, besides having a *direct*

impact on alcohol consumption, also had an *indirect* impact by influencing other predictor variables, mainly relationship with parents and leisure time activities: Scottish adolescents reported more conflicts with parents, believed that parents minded their alcohol consumption less, and engaged in more commercial leisure activities than their Norwegian and Swedish peers.

Apart from these, nations differed from each other in some pair-wise comparisons, while they were similar to each other in certain other factors (see Tables II–IV). It is interesting to note that the different amounts of alcohol drunk by adolescents in the three countries (Scotland most, Norway least) mirrors adult consumption: in 1996 the sale of alcohol was 4.1 l pure alcohol per capita in Norway, 4.9 l in Sweden and 7.6 l in Great Britain (CAN, 1999).

Discussion

From the findings of this study a number of points emerge which raise interesting issues about rural young people's transitions to adult society and the cultural variations which occur when countries operate different regulations towards alcohol consumption.

Firstly, despite media reports to the contrary, the majority of rural adolescents in all three countries indicate that they do not drink at all; and amongst those who do there are wide variations in the frequency and amount drunk. Drinking is often restricted to weekends and to somewhat infrequent social meetings with friends or at community celebrations and festivals. This seems consistent with Gofton's ideas about the 'transformational' use of alcohol within adolescents' commercial leisure ventures at weekends (Gofton, 1990). There are also some indications that stages might exist in the ways young people in the three countries think about drinking: from excessive early-age drinking, with loss of control and the crossing of acceptable 'boundaries', to 'sensible' patterns and drinking according to one's 'limits'. Additionally, it is evident that adolescents consider that they are already well informed about the dangers of alcohol.

Hangovers and other ill effects are accepted as part of the learning process. It seems that young people perceive that drinking is a skill and like any skill has to be learned. However, no one *really* teaches them to drink so that much 'trial and error' learning occurs, often with resultant ill effects. Sometimes older siblings or friends act as mentors (Philip and Hendry, 1996), advising about how to drink or looking out for younger adolescents at parties, but this is not an aspect of most adolescents' early learning experiences.

Secondly, adolescents' stated reasons for drinking appear to be very similar to the range of reasons adults give—sociability, relaxation, companionship, excitement, group pressure and a tradition of drinking in their local area or in their country. Unlike Gofton (Gofton, 1990) and Parker *et al.* (Parker *et al.*, 1998), our findings show that sensation seeking and excitement, whilst a component part of drinking, is not a *major* reason for alcohol consumption in any of the three samples. Young people in our study wish to be accepted as an adult within their own culture and so they try to be similar to adults in many ways, including drinking. They perceive such behavior as their growing acceptance into 'the drinking society'. In doing so they are likely to ignore or discount evidence, that particular activities may pose a potential threat to them in the short term (e.g. 'getting into trouble') or long term (e.g. health problems). A society that tolerates alcohol [a 'wet' culture (Plant and Plant, 1992)] will always have youngsters who—as they become socialized into that society—imitate adult drinking behaviors. Too harsh control and authoritarian rules are seen by several adolescents in our investigation simply as attempts to prevent young people from gaining entry to adult society. Thus, they are challenged to break the law as they struggle to develop an 'adult' identity. By contrast, those young people, who perceive that they have a good relationship with their parents and teachers, drink less, as do those who perceive that parents are concerned about their drinking (but in a caring, not controlling way).

Thirdly, and finally, national differences are evident, not only in the predictor variables used in the project, but also others which are inexplicable from the measures used in the quantitative part of this study. This is an interesting finding in the Scandinavian context, given that alcohol laws are similarly stringent in both Norway and Sweden, and that prices are comparable. The cultural similarities of the two Scandinavian countries make the discrepancies in teenage drinking between Norway and Sweden an important research question, because no differences in the predictor variables are found that could explain why the Swedes drink more. It is clear that future research needs to probe deeper than was possible in the current study in order to tease out the societal and psychological reasons for cultural differences in alcohol consumption.

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