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The Collection

This document is part of a collection that serves two purposes. First, it is a digital archive for a sampling of unpublished documents, presentations, questionnaires and limited publications resulting from over forty years of research. Second, it is a public archive for data on college student drinking patterns on the national and international level collected for over 20 years. Research topics by Dr. Engs have included the exploration of hypotheses concerning the determinants of behaviors such as student drinking patterns; models that have examine the etiology of cycles of prohibition and temperance movements, origins of western European drinking cultures (attitudes and behaviors concerning alcohol) from antiquity, eugenics, Progressive Era, and other social reform movements with moral overtones-Clean Living Movements; biographies of health and social reformers including Upton Sinclair; and oral histories of elderly monks.

Indiana University Archives

Paper manuscripts and material for Dr. Engs can be found in the IUArchives

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Drinking Practices and Patterns Among Collegians

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Alcohol abuse among university students is not a new phenomena that emerged in the last decades of the twentieth century. Heavy drinking among students has been noted for centuries. It was mentioned in the classical literature of antiquity, was reported among the wandering monks - the Goliards - of the middle ages, and is even found in musical operettas such as the “Student Prince.” The campaign in the United States since the 1980s against college student drunkenness is a facet of the current American temperance cycles which is part of an even broader Clean Living Movement. Roughly every eighty years in the United States we enter into such a movement. During these surges sentiments against alcohol, tobacco, drugs, meat and in support of exercise, sexual purity, proper eating, food labeling among other topics emerges. During the early nineteenth century cycle, the focus of anti-alcohol sentiments was against ardent spirits. During the turn of the last century the focus was the elimination of the saloon. In the current movement which began in the late 1970s youthful drinking and drunk driving became the focus of anti-alcohol concerns (Blocker 1989; Engs 1997; 2001; Musto 1997).

Although the legal purchase age has been twenty-one-years of age since 1987 in all states, a majority of college students under this age have been and are consuming alcohol. When they have the opportunity to drink, many do so in an irresponsible manner. This is likely due to the fact that alcohol tends to be drunk in "underground drinking" situations outside of adult supervision in student rooms and off campus housing. Other factors include reactance motivation - "forbidden fruit" - that makes the consumption of alcohol enticing just because it is illegal, a "badge of rebellion against authority," and a symbol of "adolescence." As put by many students, "Since I am a legal adult that can sign contracts, vote, and be drafted and die for my country, why shouldn't I be able to consume alcohol?" (Engs 1987; 1999; 2000; Engs and Hanson 1989)

Several large national studies have been accomplished every year or so since the early 1980s of college student drinking patterns and problems. These include those by Engs and Hanson, by Greenfield and colleagues, and by Wechsler and associates. These and other surveys have established different parameters for measuring drinking patterns that have led to slightly different results. Most researchers, however, have focused upon problematic drinking behaviors. Some reports suggest that about 20 percent of students consume 5 or more drinks per sitting at least once a week. Other reports suggest that approximately 40 percent of collegians consume this amount of alcohol at least once every two weeks. At some colleges this can be as high as two in five. These levels have been termed, "heavy," "at risk," or "binge" drinking. Results for most surveys have suggested that current laws are flouted by a large proportion of under age students who are more likely to be problematic drinkers compared to legal age alcohol consumers. In one large national study approximately 22% of all students under twenty-one compared to 18% over twenty-one years of age fell into the at risk drinking category. Among drinkers only, 32% of under age compared to 24% of legal age were heavy drinkers (Engs, Hanson & Diebold, 1996; Engs and Hanson 1999; Greenfield, T. & Rogers, J. 1999; Wechsler et. al. 1998).

In the 1990s at risk, heavy or binge drinking also began to be defined as the consumption of over 21 drinks per week for males and over 14 drinks per week for females. At risk drinking was more likely to be found among certain sub-groups of students, and in particular males and fraternity members. A study by Engs, Hanson & Diebold (1996) of over 12,000 university students, for example, from every state found 72.0% consumed alcohol at least once a year (drinkers). A mean of 9.6 drinks per week was consumed by all students in the sample. Of males 31% consumed over 21 drinks per week and 19.2% of females consumed over 14 drinks a week. Of those who consumed alcohol at least once a year, 28.4% were heavy and 71.6% were light to moderate drinkers. They consumed a mean of 10.9 drinks per week. A significantly higher proportion of men, whites, under 21 year olds, Roman Catholics, individuals to whom religion was not important, individuals with low grade point averages, fraternity/sorority members, students attending college in the North East part of the United States, in small communities, private schools, colleges under 10,000 students and smokers exhibited heavier drinking and a higher incidence of problems related to drinking. More importantly at risk drinkers were more likely to experience health, academic, social, and legal problems (See Table 1). (Engs, Hanson & Diebold, 1996; Engs and Hanson 1999; Greenfield, T. & Rogers, J. 1999; Wechsler et. al. 1998)

Since the early 1980s results of many studies and federal statistics have suggested that drinking and driving related variables and the amount of alcohol consumed has decreased not only among collegians but also among the population as a whole in the United States. On the other hand, an increase in health, academic, personal, social and legal problems related to drinking increased after 1987 when the 21 year old purchase laws were mandated. Some research, in fact, suggests that current laws have led to these increased problems and to the criminalization of 18-20 year olds. Problems related to drinking have continued to rise, or to be higher, than in the era prior to the change in the laws. For example
from 1982 until 1987 about 46% of students reported "vomiting after drinking." This jumped to over 50% soon after the law change. Significant increases were also found for other variables: "cutting class after drinking" jumped from 9% to almost 12%; "missing class because of hangover" went from 26% to 28%; "getting lower grade because of drinking" rose from 5% to 7%; and "been in a fight after drinking" increased from 12% to 17% (Engs 2001b; Engs and Hanson 1994, 1999; Wolfson & Hourigan 1997).

As a nation we have tried prohibition legislation twice in the past for controlling irresponsible drinking problems - during National Prohibition in the 1920s and state prohibition during the 1850s. Because they were unenforceable and because the backlash towards them caused other social problems including the criminalization of otherwise law abiding citizens, these laws were finally repealed. Based upon research findings that suggest our current laws appear to be counterproductive in terms of personal, academic, social, and legal problems among our college youth, perhaps alternative approaches taken from the experience of cultures that have few problems with alcohol need to be explored. Groups such as Italians, Greeks, Chinese, and Jews tend to share some common characteristics. Alcohol is neither seen as a poison or a magic potent, there is little or no social pressure to drink, irresponsible behavior and drunkenness is not tolerated, young people learn at home from their parents and from other adults how to handle alcohol in a responsible manner. Young adults and college age students are allowed to consume alcohol in public places such as restaurants, taverns, and pubs and there is societal consensus on what constitutes responsible drinking (Blocker 1989; Heath 1995).

Selected References

Musto, David F., Alcohol in American history, Scientific American 274 (April 1996), 78 - 83.
Table 1: Comparison of selected alcohol related health, academic, social, and legal problems experienced at least once during the previous year due to drinking between all male (N=3,658) and female drinkers (N=5,704), low risk male and female drinkers (under 21 and 14 drinks per week) and high risk male and female drinkers (over 21 and 14 drinks per week).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alcohol Related Problem</th>
<th>All Drinkers</th>
<th>Low Risk Drinker</th>
<th>High Risk Drinkers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males %</td>
<td>Females %</td>
<td>Males %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nausea and vomiting</td>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>51.0*</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A hangover</td>
<td>76.1</td>
<td>69.0*</td>
<td>50.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missed classes due to hangover</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>18.6*</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut classes after drinking</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>7.8*</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower grade because of drinking</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>4.5*</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used a fake ID</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damaged Property</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>4.1*</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driven a car after drinking</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>33.2*</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driven when drunk</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>19.1*</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrested for drunk driving</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0.6*</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had trouble with the law</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>3.4*</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+ p < .05   * p < .001  Table adapted from Engs, Hanson & Diebold (1996) and unpublished material.

Youth Alcohol Use: A Comparison of the United States and Spain

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Alcohol use on the part of youth in both the United States and Spain reflects to a great extent the usage patterns of their respective adult generations. In a study conducted in New York State specifically designed to compare patterns of parents and their offspring of high school age, Barnes (1977) found that the drinking patterns of adolescents closely paralleled that of their elders, both in frequency and in type of beverage used. Most youth alcohol consumption in Spain occurs in bars in that the legal age is 16 years; however in practice, this legal technicality is not taken seriously. The bars patronized principally by young persons are located in the central business districts of urban areas in which adolescents from all parts of a city gather to make and to renew friendships. Even in middle-sized cities in Spain, between 20 to 30 bars located in a 5 or 6 square block...