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prevalence rate of alcohol use among “gay” or homosexual populations has been constructed as a problem related to the stress of being marginalized, a product of heterosexism, and a tension reliever used to reduce feelings of low self-worth (Stall

the higher prevalence rate of alcohol use as a social resource and as a disinhibitor.

rendered taboo outside the gay bar. These researchers suggest alcohol becomes a tool to negotiate sexual intimacy and to celebrate sexual differences in a safe public space. The point of alcohol use, the authors state, is “to decrease the normal agency of the people involved,” thereby creating a context where norm violations are more

to the social construction of gender expands the existing literature in terms of what social construction theory can add to the existing literature on gender in relation to

the ways in which these literatures converge.

women engage in the doing of gender displays and practices (e.g., gendered hairstyles

are accountable to their assigned sex and subject to condemnation for violations of gender performance depending on the situated context. Those who violate gender and sexuality norms are likely to be labeled deviant. Thus, social structure itself appears to be gendered, the performance of gender is situated, and gendered behavior reproduces structure.

and those who engage in gender difference have been referred to as transgenderists

norm violation by arguing that gender is a mechanism through which situated social action reproduces social structure. That is, normative beliefs for men and women

## **ALCOHOL ALLOWS YOU TO NOT BE YOURSELF**

purposeful or accidental gender difference occurs. Thirdly, the accounts literature is expanded to address the relevance of situational contexts (e.g., alcohol use) in

and thus a form of deviant behavior.

## **THE CURRENT STUDY**

women and men and/or those they interact with to engage in or ignore inappropriate

time of the study. Thirty percent had undeclared majors and the remainder were

*SAMPLE RECRUITMENT AND ELIGIBILITY*

for this study. The majority of participants responded to announcements in sociology 0099 08



*ANALYSIS*

The paper uses in-depth interviews to gain a nuanced understanding of young people's attitudes and beliefs about gender norms, gender norm violations, and alcohol use. Qualitative methods, grounded theory in particular, provide the tools necessary to address the study of gender difference in the context of alcohol use.

consent. Themes were inductively generated from the data using a line-by-line open

thorough examination of the transcripts was conducted for emergent themes.



was described by participants in virtually every interview, albeit in varying degrees.

situated context of alcohol use and (b) purposeful gender difference and accidental gender blunders among men in the situated context of alcohol use. Table 1 below

of participants who used alcohol as an excuse for gender difference while in college and the number of participants who recalled receiving at least one alcohol-related excuse from peers during college for a gender norm violation. The table is meant to provide data on the distribution of themes and is not meant to be generalized beyond those interviewed.

While previous research suggests that alcohol is used to express traditional

purposeful or not. Below, accounts are used to illustrate how the use of alcohol allows individuals to successfully excuse gendered behaviors deemed deviant.

**TABLE 1**  
**PERCENT OF MEN AND WOMEN USING ALCOHOL-RELATED EXCUSES FOR EXPRESSING GENDER DIFFERENCE AND PERCENT OF MEN AND WOMEN RECEIVING ALCOHOL-RELATED EXCUSES FOR EXPERIENCING GENDER DIFFERENCE**

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said "...you don't go into the bathroom and like put your makeup on when you're drunk. You don't even think about it." These statements represent the preoccupation with appearance and beauty in everyday femininity performance. Julia states that women in general, when drinking, no longer need to worry about some forms of

be suspended. Thus, drinking can be understood as an alluring reprieve from one labor-intensive component of doing femininity.





use both meaningful and positive in terms of improving self-esteem.

type of account, minimize or absolve responsibility when behavior is challenged. The common belief that individual-level factors (i.e., biological, psychological) explain much of human behavior, such as the presumed individual effect alcohol has on the body, is appealing as an excuse when social norms are broken. Thus,

robust conviction works to suspend gender norms follow. The section below will elaborate on how alcohol is used to do gender differently, whether purposefully or accidentally, for heterosexual and gay men.

**PURPOSEFUL GENDER DIFFERENCE AND ACCIDENTAL GENDER BLUNDERS AMONG MEN IN THE SITUATED CONTEXT OF ALCOHOL USE**

in accordance with their gender identity was purposeful for some heterosexual

concept of “gender blunder,” which refers to accidental gender norm violations

being “too butch”

to be gender blunders. When a behavior that is expressive of the opposite gender

acceptable explanation that worked to neutralize gender blunders according to actors and audiences. The following accounts illustrate what gender blunders are, how they take place in student’s lived reality, and how accounts of alcohol use provide the context necessary to permit gender difference.

that are outside the realm of his masculine identity-appropriate practices. Sammy



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To cry is to be soft. To be soft is not masculine, it is feminine, and feminine traits among men are not acceptable unless alcohol is involved. Through alcohol, men were



induced by alcohol, which blurred the distinction between appropriate sex partners and inappropriate sex partners. The blurring effect caused by “beer goggles” to an extent was supposed to excuse normative infractions involving sexual behavior.

experience with men understood to be heterosexual.

Well these friends had a few guy friends that didn't like me much  
got...drunk. Well these guys suddenly wanted me to perform oral

The experience described above reveals how situated behavior occurs. Situationally,

the construction of gender via practices understood to be feminine or masculine.

between desire and cultural sexual standards make alcohol a powerful device to

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the excuse to be different and facilitated the ability to be different in the accepting space of the gay bar. The gay bar is a social space, centered on alcohol, where gender-based norms can be left at the doorstep and the construction of gender can take on alternative forms. Bars are thus locations where the boundaries of gender are redrawn, recreated, and reinvented because of the time-out period afforded

construct gender in ways not afforded by their gender identity. These constructions involve emotional expression, poetry writing, dancing, and sexual encounters with

difference and the structure of gender to remain in place (Lucal, 1999) through its power to excuse gender norm violations.

While participants accepted the excuse of drunkenness for gender blunders, they simultaneously believed that a drinking person has control of the body and mind. This discrepancy reveals that the mysterious psychopharmacological nature of

structure, social control, or social norms. These accounts reveal that self-control is not entirely lost when heavy drinking occurs. Thus gender, in the face of heavy alcohol use, is being actively and purposefully constructed. What is more, while all participants agree that alcohol should never be accepted as an excuse for improper

and invokers of alcohol-related excuses.

## NOTES

1

as heterosexual use alcohol to blur the constructed dichotomous identities of explored situated actions that reproduce gendered social structure.

examples of gender segregation, emphasized femininity, and hegemonic

Students learn to actively avoid behaviors understood to be deviant in order to

Secondly, college and university students are routinely found to be among the heaviest of drinkers relative to other social groups according to nationally

support, and the students who shared their stories.

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