Part I

The Phenomenon and Impact of Youth Drinking
Chapter 1

The phenomenon of youth drinking

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Key points

- Wide variations exist in young people’s drinking and attitudes to alcohol around the world, influenced by family, peers, schools, ethnic and religious upbringing, media, advertising, and national and cultural contexts.
- Uptake of alcohol consumption in early adolescence can mark both a rite of passage between childhood and adulthood and a phase of limit-testing, transgression, or deviance from adult social constraints.
- Cross-national studies have noted the emergence of heavy sessional consumption or ‘binge drinking’ for both young women and young men, in higher and lower income groups, with drunkenness in some youth cultures seen as an intended and desirable consequence rather than negative side effect of heavy drinking.
- It has been suggested that the reason for the growth in young people’s heavy sessional consumption is the globalization of cheap and high-strength alcoholic beverages across the world, associated with the expansion of an increasingly alcohol-oriented night-time economy appealing to youth and young adults.
- Evidence of convergence in drinking patterns between young women and young men in some developed countries has been linked to young women’s growing educational and employment opportunities. However, gender remains significant to aspects of consumption, such as beverage choice and attitudes to public drunkenness.

For young people, alcohol is a potent symbol both of socialization into adult society and of transgression and rule breaking. In many societies, the uptake of alcohol is a developmental rite of passage, a period of adolescent experimentation that forms part of a broader phase of transgression that precedes individual consolidation of the cultural and social norms for that society. Drinking is sometimes one of a cluster of teenage risk-taking or deviant activities associated with rebellion, including smoking, risky sexual activities, and experimentation with illicit drugs. This chapter explores the themes of socialization and transgression, looking at both continuity and change in patterns of youthful alcohol consumption, following young people from early adolescence through to young adulthood, and from underage to legal purchase age and beyond. Drawing on examples from across the
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Globe, these changes include increased binge drinking, determined drunkenness, gender convergence, global branding, and the acute and chronic health and social problems associated with such drinking patterns. While particular reference is made to the European and the North American literature, the authors would also like to note the challenge of making meaningful generalizations both within countries and across continents.

Childhood influences

Certain aspects of young people’s alcohol consumption and the concerns it invokes transcend the boundaries of countries, cultures, and classes. In countries where alcohol consumption is legal and socially sanctioned, the uptake of alcohol is interwoven with the transition to adulthood: surveys show that the first drink is often around the start of puberty, at the beginning of the teens. In Europe, for example, the first drink is at the age of 13 on average. About one in ten youth are already established weekly drinkers in many European countries and also in North America by the age of 13 (Table 1.2). Surveys show that drinking is a significant feature of relaxing and partying with friends for teenagers, as well as helping to boost confidence in social and sexual situations. Yet, even before young people start to drink, they already have developed certain attitudes and expectations around alcohol as a result of the influence of key socialization vehicles such as their families, peers, schools, local communities, and the media.

In terms of our understanding of these influences from childhood onward, reviews have noted a globalization of young people’s alcohol-related attitudes and behaviors alongside a multiplicity of factors that influence their future drinking. Regarding the role of ethnic and religious factors in socialization into alcohol, both in the United Kingdom and in the United States, a significant proportion of non-White young people drink less frequently, less heavily, and hold less positive attitudes to alcohol than

Table 1.1 Legal drinking age in selected countries.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Age: on premise</th>
<th>Age: off premise</th>
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<tr>
<td>France</td>
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<td>Italy</td>
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<td>Canada</td>
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<tr>
<td>United States</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

aICAP list (2010): On-premise sales refer to consumption on site; e.g., bars, pubs and restaurants.
bICAP list (2010): Off-premise retail sales refer to sales of alcohol for consumption elsewhere; e.g., wine shops and supermarkets.
cIn the United Kingdom, 16 for drinking with meals, accompanied with an adult.
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their White counterparts. “Nonintact” family structures such as those with stepparents or without biological parents are significantly related to adolescent heavy drinking and even more so in societies where alcohol is more freely available to teenagers.12 Children of alcohol-dependent parents are also at higher risk of developing alcohol-related problems themselves in later life.13 Other reviews suggest that alcohol advertising and indirect marketing both play a significant role in both increased consumption by young people and brand preferences in Europe14–16 and North America.17,18 A major systematic review of the relationship between children, socioeconomic status and alcohol, by contrast, found a lack of evidence to support an association between children’s socioeconomic background and later alcohol problems.19

Early teen drinking in “wet” and “dry” countries: transgression or rite of passage?

The most extensive surveys for cross-national comparison of underage drinking are the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) studies, collected about every 4 years in 41 countries among school pupils aged 11, 13, and 15 years, and the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD), also collected every 4 years in 35 countries among 15–16-year-old school pupils.

In Europe, a number of drinking typologies have been developed in order to map cross-national differences. A key one is the “wet” versus “dry” distinction.20 This does not refer to whether alcohol consumption is prohibited or not, but to how alcohol is integrated into everyday life and meal times. A “wet” pattern of consumption is common in Southern European countries, where small amounts of alcohol are consumed more frequently (e.g., at meal times), but consumption is less heavy. By contrast, the “dry” pattern of drinking, for example, in Northern European countries, places a greater emphasis on drinking to intoxication at less family-oriented social events. A second, related typology links traditional beverage preferences with specific geographical regions:21 Southern European wine cultures are contrasted with central European beer drinking cultures and Northern European spirit drinking cultures. In relation to young people, however, there is growing evidence that these traditional distinctions that associate specific alcoholic beverage types with specific regions are weakening; beer is increasingly the preferred drink among young people across most of Europe, with declining wine consumption in Europe’s traditional wine drinking countries.22 Nevertheless, as this chapter will illustrate, such cultural distinctions still have some value when mapping specific differences in young people’s drinking onto various countries.

This chapter considers young people’s drinking by comparing European countries representative of the traditional Southern wine drinking culture (France, Italy, Spain, and Portugal), Central European beer drinking culture (England, Ireland, and Denmark), and Northern European (former) spirit drinking culture (Finland, Norway, and Latvia), alongside young people in the United States, Canada, and China. In countries representative of the Southern wine culture, underage drinking is more prevalent since alcohol is consumed traditionally in small quantities at family meals on an everyday basis; yet, intoxication
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among adolescents is less common. In contrast, in Central and Northern European beer cultures, alcohol is less integrated into meal times; drinking occurs during leisure time socializing and festivities and therefore it is not to the same extent considered an “ordinary commodity.” In these countries, daily alcohol consumption is less prevalent among adolescents, but once they start to drink, they are more likely to drink to intoxication. In Northern European spirit countries, alcohol has been considered a rare and exceptional commodity traditionally, and therefore, it is a symbol marking the rite of passage from adolescence to adulthood.

Table 1.1 compares the legal drinking age for alcohol in both licensed premises and off-licensed premises for the selected countries mentioned above. Table 1.2 compares various rates of adolescent drinking patterns according to two recent international comparable surveys. The legal drinking age—18 years—for buying and drinking alcohol in licensed premises is the same for all European countries listed in the table excluding Norway, and for many other countries around the world including China, Australia, and New Zealand. In some countries, including the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Denmark, and part of Spain, and in some Canadian states, the law also allows the purchase of alcohol and/or underage drinking under parental supervision in some circumstances in licensed and/or off-licensed premises. (This does not mean that alcohol cannot be consumed legally elsewhere. For instance, in the United Kingdom, alcohol can be consumed legally under parental supervision within the home from the age of 5. However, there has been a shift away from the continental European model of children learning moderate consumption under parental supervision within the home.

The early teen years are a key period for young people in many developed countries to start experimenting with alcohol. In Table 1.2, the first column refers to HBSC data on the percentage of 13-year-olds who report drinking alcohol at least once a week. We see how Italian and French boys are more likely to be weekly drinkers by the age of 13 than adolescents in Denmark, Finland, Norway, the United States, and Canada. England and Latvia are notable for the large proportion of girls who are weekly drinkers by the age of 13. In contrast, Spain and Portugal appear similar to the Nordic countries, as the proportion of weekly drinkers in their early teens is low. Considerably fewer 13-year-old teens in the United States and Canada report drinking alcohol on a weekly basis.

In terms of drunkenness, the second column in Table 1.2, HBSC data show that the proportion of adolescents who experience intoxication aged 13 or younger is much higher in the Central European beer and Nordic (former) spirit countries compared to the Southern wine drinking countries. Among the Nordic countries, Norway stands out because of both
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Table 1.2  Age of onset and youth drinking patterns in selected countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First drunk at 13 years of age or younger (%)</th>
<th>Drunk at least twice (%)</th>
<th>Drunk in last 30 days (%)</th>
<th>5+ drinks in last 30 days (%)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13-year-old teens drink weekly (%)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Males</strong></td>
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<td>France</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>Italy</td>
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<td>Portugal</td>
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<td>Spain</td>
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<td>England (UK: ESPAD)</td>
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<td>31</td>
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<td>Ireland</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>59</td>
<td>51</td>
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<td>Finland</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>47</td>
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<td>Norway</td>
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<td>Latvia</td>
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<td>Canada</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>United States</td>
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<td><strong>Females</strong></td>
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<td>France</td>
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<td>Italy</td>
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<td>Portugal</td>
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<td>Spain</td>
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<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>England (UK: ESPAD)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Canada</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*a* HBSC 2006: The percentage of 13-year-old teens who report drinking alcohol at least once a week.

*b* HBSC 2006: The percentage of 15-year-old teens who report first intoxication at 13 years of age or younger.

*c* HBSC 2006: The percentage of 15-year-old teens who report intoxication at least twice in their lifetime.

*d* ESPAD 2007: The percentage of 15-year-old teens who report (subjective) drunkenness during the previous month.

*e* ESPAD 2007: The percentage of 15-year-old teens who report drinking five or more drinks on one occasion during the previous month.

*Denmark, Spain and the United States: Limited comparability – due to a low response rate; caution should be taken when interpreting the numbers from the ESPAD data from Denmark. Likewise, the data from Spain and the United States have been collected in different country-specific surveys, though using the same measurements as in the ESPAD study.*

its very strict alcohol policy (with a legal drinking age for spirits of 20) and its much lower levels of adolescent drunkenness. In North America, the number of adolescents drinking to intoxication in the United States appears similar to the Mediterranean wine drinking countries, whereas Canada seems to have a youth drinking pattern more similar to Central and Northern Europe.

When we compare the differences in the number of times 15-year-olds have experienced intoxication (Table 1.2, third column, HBSC data), the percentages fit well with...
the drinking typologies outlined above. More adolescents in the central European beer
drinking countries have been intoxicated than in other countries, including the United
States and Canada, where adolescent drinking patterns again seem very similar to those of
Southern Europe. If we compare all 41 countries participating in the HBSC study, we find
that young Danes take the lead, with 59% of boys and 56% of girls having been intoxicated
twice. England is fifth, very closely behind Lithuania, Wales and Estonia, with 50% of
boys and 44% of girls having been intoxicated at least twice in their lifetime. The same
pattern is revealed when we compare these data with the ESPAD survey. Adolescents in
Denmark and England lead in terms of both heavy episodic drinking (i.e., five or more
drinks on one occasion) and subjective drunkenness. Danish and English adolescents to-
gether appear to have set the stage for increased heavy episodic drinking since ESPAD data
were first collected in 1995, increasingly emulated by other European countries, leading
some to suggest that Denmark and the United Kingdom are the binge drinking capitals of
Europe.

As expected, more adolescents in the Nordic countries drink to intoxication compared
to adolescents in Southern European countries, but fewer do so compared to adolescents
in Central Europe. In the Southern wine drinking cultures, however, there is a much
larger discrepancy between “objective” measurements of intoxication and “subjective”
perceptions of drunkenness than in Central and Northern European countries. For instance,
in Portugal, more than half of girls and boys report heavy episodic drinking whereas only
one in ten reports having been intoxicated in the last 30 days. This illustrates the cultural
differences regarding perceptions of intoxication and acceptability of public drunkenness
among young people across Europe.

These cultural differences have also been identified with older cohorts. For example, in
a focus group study of 16–25-year-old people, all the young Italian respondents strongly
criticized drunkenness, stating that intoxication was an undesirable and unintended nega-
tive consequence of consumption. In contrast, for young people from the United Kingdom
(Scotland), drunkenness was one of the main goals of social drinking. Attitudes to drunk-
eness in the Chinese focus group in the same study reflected rapid socioeconomic change
in the country with a shift from drinking and toasting at traditional celebrations and ban-
quets to a more Westernized pattern with students and work colleagues drinking together
in the new bars and clubs, which have sprouted in urban areas in recent years. Ethnic and
cultural differences are also evident in North America where traditional Anglo-Celtic,
Afro-American, Hispanic, and Asian alcohol-related attitudes and behaviors are merging
with newer influences and an enduring concern with college campus binge drinking.

Learning underage drinking in the company of friends

When studying underage drinking, the general assumption is that adolescent drinking
patterns mirror those of their national country and, as revealed in Table 1.2, this is mostly
ture. There may be, however, more similarities between cross-national youth drinking
than differences and therefore new drinking typologies such as the “damp” model have
been suggested, as a refinement of the “wet” versus “dry” dichotomy. A “damp” youth
drinking model captures how the traditional drinking cultures are merging, as young people not only drink to intoxication but also do so regularly. Furthermore, a consistent finding in youth alcohol studies is that intoxication is not simply an individual’s choice, but a learned behavior, socially and culturally context specific. As Douglas noted: “drinking is essentially a social act, performed in a recognised social context.”

Research suggests that in many countries friendships are more influential than family, and it is among friends at parties rather than with parents at home that adolescents and young people learn to become alcohol users. Three examples of this are discussed here: The Spanish botellón, the Norwegian russefeiring, and the Danish “house party.”

**El botellón**

In Spain, a Southern European country known for a “wet” drinking culture and for a low tolerance of public drunkenness, the phenomenon of the botellón has become widespread among young Spaniards. El botellón, which translates in English as “the big bottle,” began in Madrid in the late 1970s. Today, however, it is increasingly popular among young adults and adolescents as young as 12 years across Spain, where cheap alcohol is obtained from the supermarkets and the young people gather in public streets and squares to socialize, listen to music and to drink large quantities of cheap alcohol. This scenario supports the notion of a new “culture of intoxication” relating to alcohol and illegal drugs, emerging among young people in an increasing number of countries and beyond the central European beer drinking countries where it was previously characteristic.

**Russefeiring**

In Norway, a phenomenon known as russefeiring—an annual event of consecutive graduation parties taking place from the beginning of May—has elements similar to the Spanish phenomenon of el botellón. A distinction, however, is that russefeiring is more like a traditional rite of passage to adulthood, where alcohol along with other acts such as skinny-dipping, kissing police officers, and sexual experiments are the key symbols in distinguishing the period between youth and adulthood. A similar pattern, called “schoolies week,” is evolving in Australia in which high-school graduates have week-long celebrations following the end of their final high-school examinations.

**Danish “house party”**

In Denmark, while prolonged graduation parties are also popular among high-school students, house parties tend to be where Danish adolescents learn to drink. A house party is a gathering held for invited friends, usually in a private home or rented premises.

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*When elected Mayor of Madrid, the elderly university professor Enrique Tierno Galvan encouraged indulgence in relaxant substances when he told a crowd ‘el que no esté colocado, que se coloque . . . y al loro!’ One translation of which is ‘get stoned and do what’s cool’. His comment in Madrid prompted young people from across Europe to visit the city, and the movida madrileña—whose literal translation is ‘the Madrid scene’—was born.*
Here, the collective consumption of alcohol (specifically getting drunk at the same speed as friends) is vital in transforming the (usually parents’) lounge into a space for teenage partying. The collective drinking marks that something different will happen; for instance, that it is now socially acceptable and expected that the adolescents take part in gender games, sexualized dancing, and flirting. One’s refusal to drink could be seen as a refusal to participate in the process of what is considered integral to the creation of a coherent group in their friendship network. Danish house parties therefore play a crucial role not only in young Danes learning to drink but also in reaffirming their social networks and close friendships. In this regard, partying and drinking to intoxication is more part of a leisure “time out” from the structured and restrained everyday life associated with school and work than a traditional rite of passage celebration (as is the case with the Norwegian *russefeiring*). The integral role of intoxication in Danish partying is illustrated in that 48% of Danish 15–16-year-olds attend parties at least once a month and 44% report having been drunk in the last month, whereas although half of French 15–16-year-olds attend parties at least once a month only 9% report having been drunk in the last month.

**Is the gender gap closing?**

One recurrent theme in cross-national comparisons of young people’s alcohol consumption is that men drink more than women across the world. More recently, however, in some developed countries, there is evidence that women are drinking in ways that increasingly resemble men’s patterns of consumption. A key explanation for this convergence is that women are becoming emancipated from traditional female roles and increasingly equal to men in terms of their aspirations and achievements both in higher education and their position in the labor market. In this process, it is argued that as women’s lifestyle increasingly resembles men’s lifestyle in all sorts of ways, it is to be expected that their consumption habits—including alcohol—also increasingly emulate men’s. The gender gap in youth drinking has been studied using this reasoning and it is argued that in countries with greater gender equality (such as Nordic countries), girls’ drinking patterns are increasingly resembling boys’ and vice versa in countries with less gender equality.

This point is illustrated in Table 1.2, which shows that in Southern wine drinking countries more boys than girls consume five drinks on one occasion. Hence, in countries where public drunkenness is less acceptable, girls are also less likely to be heavy drinkers, although girls in Portugal do stand out. By contrast, in countries characterized by extensive drunkenness—such as the United Kingdom, Norway, and Finland—the gender gap is closing.

“Girls drinking like boys” calls for new interpretations of the meaning of alcohol in relationship to gender. However, testing the convergence theory only by comparing gender differences in quantity and frequency of consumption limits our understanding of how drinking among both boys and girls is governed and constrained by different norms and ways of being together (i.e., collectiveness). Learning to become an alcohol user can be a much more risky process for young girls compared to boys. Teenage girls, similar to boys, experiment with alcohol-related risky behavior. But the boundaries surrounding girls’ alcohol-related attitudes and behaviors can be more constrained. For instance, while
parties can still be seen as fun even having drank alcohol to the point of blacking out for teenage boys, this is less the case for girls. Such gender differences in attitudes to intoxication can carry through into young adulthood.

Late teen drinking: binge drinking and integration into the adult night-time economy

As young people reach their mid and late teens, a key debate relates to recent changes in sessional drinking, the harms associated with this pattern of consumption and the wider cultural context to this change. The term “binge” was originally applied in clinical practice to refer to a pattern of alcohol consumption where the key feature was an extended period of consumption to the point that the drinker’s usual daily activities and obligations were subsumed or until the drinker lost consciousness. In the early 1990s, a group of American researchers attempted to quantify the amount of alcohol consumed in a drinking session, which could lead to a significantly increased risk of physical harm: five standard drinks for men and four standard drinks for women. This so-called “five/four” measure of binge drinking has led to an increasing tendency among social and medical researchers and practitioners toward quantifying binge drinking in terms of standard drinks or units of alcohol consumed in a drinking session, rather than the clinical definition of prolonged drinking beyond the boundaries of “normal” life.

Extreme drinking

Studies have noted that drunkenness is both an aim and an outcome of heavy sessional drinking for many young people, with the twenty-first century marked by increased “determined drunkenness” in a range of different societies. For example, a series of studies across four continents noted that young people were drinking excessively, purposefully, as part of a risk-taking, pleasure-seeking leisure time where drinking resembled extreme sports. This led researchers to characterize this style of consumption as “extreme drinking.”

It appears not only that some young people are drinking greater quantities of alcohol during a drinking session but also the changes relate to who is drinking, where they are drinking, and what they are drinking. Thus, a key reason cited for this increased binge drinking, or extreme drinking, has been the emergence of high-strength spirit mixers and beverages appealing to young people (“alcopops”), along with a growing diversity, sophisticated design, and niche branding of the leisure venues supplying alcoholic beverages, appealing to “new” demographics of consumers. The design of the recent generation of café bars, with advanced sound and light systems, modern designs, and DJs, is seen as having enticed a broader demographic of young people than was previously the case in traditional bars and pubs that had been associated with a lower income and predominantly male customer base.

The perception is that not only are young women and young people from higher income and professional groups drinking more per session but also the restraints or inhibitions surrounding public intoxication previously identified in these groups are also being eroded.
Comparisons of male and female, higher and lower income groups, and different age clusters suggest that youth drunkenness and associated public order concerns are more than just an adolescent limit-testing phase. Such behavior is increasingly extending into young adulthood at a time when adolescence itself is lengthening due to the increasing need to acquire greater education skills, as well as delayed marriage, parenthood and other key life stage responsibilities. At the international level, WHO reports suggest that this recent trend toward increased sessional consumption and drunkenness by young people could be partly linked to global branding, advertising and marketing, the funding for which outpaces economic growth around the world.

**Night-time economy**

Furthermore, such heavy sessional consumption is seen by some commentators as linked to the broader economic regeneration in both developed and developing countries, with a proliferation of alcohol-oriented leisure venues in the growth of what has been termed in the research literature as the “night-time economy.” The expansion of the urban night-time economy and young people’s alcohol-related attitudes and behaviors within it has led to a growing body of research on the management and regulation of the night-time economy. In part, as discussed earlier in this chapter, there has been a conscious effort to remodel Northern European cities on the Mediterranean “café bar culture” to encourage more moderate and sociable alcohol consumption rather than frenzied binge drinking. The extent to which this cultural transplant has been successful, has been questioned by some researchers who have suggested that in countries such as the United Kingdom and Denmark this has led to “the worst of both worlds” in terms of stimulating more frequent consumption later into the evening while perpetuating “binge and brawl” cultural traditions.

**The costs of consumption: young people, alcohol, and harm**

Young people are particularly vulnerable to the impact of alcohol. The consequences of young people’s drinking and drunkenness can be broadly characterized as health-related or social, as well as acute and longer term or chronic, discussed further in later chapters. In terms of health consequences, young people risk problems such as alcohol poisoning, liver damage and some cancers, with teenage frequent and heavy consumption reflected in the increased diagnosis of liver disease earlier in adulthood, despite improvements in diagnosis and treatment. In France, for example, the number of young people aged 15–24 hospitalized for alcohol poisoning has doubled between 2004 and 2007. In the United Kingdom, hospital admissions for any alcohol-related condition have increased by 69% in the 5-year period from 2002–2003 to 2007–2008.

The acute social consequences of young people’s consumption inflict a heavy burden on society through the associations between consumption and road traffic accidents, public disorder, antisocial behavior, violent crime, and so forth. The longer term impact of drinking in adolescence and young adulthood also can be seen in the association identified, for
example between alcohol consumption, educational and labor market outcomes. In the United States, a 40-year review of the evidence concluded that raising the minimum legal drinking age and enforcing this action appears to have reduced the harm to young people from alcohol, particularly the number of fatal road traffic accidents involving drink drivers across the 50 states. This saves an estimated 1,000 lives each year. Consideration is now being given to whether the successful attitudinal shift in the acceptability of drink driving, smoking, and speeding could also be translated into a shift in young people’s attitudes to public drunkenness and alcohol-related disorderly behavior.

Such concerns are counterbalanced by evidence that the millennial increase in sessional consumption has now peaked in Europe and North America, particularly in the regions that witnessed the greatest increases a decade earlier. Indeed, one of the interesting and as yet underresearched areas regarding young people and alcohol relates to the increase in teenage light drinkers and abstainers in some developed countries, which may relate not only to ethnic and religious influences but also to an anticonsumption stance by some.

**Conclusion**

Wide variations exist in young people’s drinking and attitudes to alcohol around the world, influenced by family, peers, schools, ethnic and religious upbringing, media and advertising, and national and cultural contexts. Starting to drink in adolescence has been seen both as a traditional rite of passage between childhood and adulthood, and also a phase of limit-testing, transgression, or deviance from adult social norms. This phase appears to be both intensifying and extending, with cross-national studies identifying the emergence of heavy sessional consumption or “binge drinking” for both young women and men, in higher and lower income groups, and extending into young adulthood. Furthermore, there is evidence of a convergence in drinking patterns between young women and young men in some developed countries, possibly linked to young women’s growing equality and education and employment opportunities. There is also a convergence between “wet” and “dry,” wine drinking and beer/spirit drinking cultures. The switch to drunkenness as an intended and desirable consequence rather than a negative side effect of heavy drinking in many countries has led some researchers to suggest that this behavior might better be understood as “extreme drinking.” The reasons for this growth in young people’s heavy sessional consumption have been postulated as influenced by the globalization of increasingly cheap and high-strength alcoholic beverages across the world, associated with the expansion of an increasingly alcohol-oriented night-time economy. Thus adolescents, at the symbolic crossroads between childhood and adulthood, themselves face a crossroads regarding cultural and commercial influences on youthful alcohol consumption.

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