

Title: What is going on with Binge or High Risk Drinking? An American concept and its Background

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Abstract:

A new term has started to become popular: “Binge Drinking”. For a long time Germany has not conducted systematic research on the drinking culture, that is why no one knows nearly anything about this type of drinking. There is no doubt that the suggestion to review the phenomenon of excessive drinking comes from the USA. The starting point to deal with the phenomenon of excessive drinking gives the impression that the concepts developed in the USA are absorbed and redistributed indiscriminately with the perception of the phenomenon, how to define it as a problem and how to treat it. In consideration more attention needs to be paid to the cultural differences between the USA and Europe. That is why it is very important to remember the origin of the discussion and the basic conditions of these concepts just as the experiences and critical objections of this approach that already exist.

## **What is going on with Binge or High Risk Drinking? An American concept and its Background**

### **1 Binge Drinking – an American concept before its Settle Down in Europe?**

Those who follow German scientific publications /a.o. Pauly 2003/ and political statements /cf. Caspars-Merks 2003, S. 9/, get the impression, that a new term has started to become popular: “Binge Drinking”. Originally this term was used to describe alcohol consumption, with the sole goal to get drunk over a longer period. But recently, this is often used as ‘intoxicated drinking’ or some times a synonym for high risk drinking. For a long time Germany has not conducted systematic research on the drinking culture, that is why no one knows nearly anything about this type of drinking. There are only certain questions that come to mind: Is this really a problem in Germany? If it is – is this an old or new phenomenon? How extensive is it and in what social groups? What are the circumstances of this drinking pattern? Which social consequences are connected with it? For Germany, such questions about motivations and situations, rituals, set and the setting connected with this style of drinking still have no answer.

There is no doubt that the suggestion to review the phenomenon of excessive drinking comes from the USA. Since the beginning of the 90’s, there have been many popular and scientific discussions about the drinking culture among the youth; especially involving college students. A lot of money has been pumped into that theme since then, many programs to prevent high risk drinking have been initiated; not only a lot of task forces and coordinating groups have been worked, but long-term research and evaluation projects been also. This is reason enough for European scientists, practitioners and politicians to be interested in the theoretical and practical concepts surrounding excessive drinking.

In Germany, the starting point to deal with the phenomenon of excessive drinking gives the impression that the concepts developed in the USA are absorbed and redistributed indiscriminately with the perception of the phenomenon, how to define it as a problem and how to treat it.

In consideration more attention needs to be paid to the cultural differences between the USA and Europe. These differences extend especially into the alcohol culture. That is why it is very important to remember again and again the origin of the discussion and the basic conditions of these concepts just as the experiences and critical objections of this approach that already exist.

They advise not to copy exact concepts dealing with Binge Drinking in the United States without seriously asking could it be adequate and successful for Germany, and if it seems so then start a process of adoption.

## **2 Important to consider: the basic political conditions for alcohol consumption for youths in USA**

As a middle European, being exposed to the alcohol culture at an early age made it an astonishment to discover the strictness of the American alcohol policies and how the regulation of drinking is executed; especially for the youth.

In Germany, the process of learning how to deal with alcohol starts early encompassing a lot of small steps within the family, and on average, actually finish at the age of 16 years – the age in which one is allowed to drink alcohol in public places. These German conditions are totally different to the USA; where it is much more restrictive. In the US, young people are allowed to drive a car if they are 16 years, smoke at some public places at 18 years, to marry or to take part in an election if they are 18 years, and most American states fix the age for drinking alcohol at 21 years. In contrast to Germany where violations against “Underage Drinking” are looked at with a blind eye, the US ensures that these rules are heavily enforced. For this type of crime, the police actively look for violators at different public or private places (bars, restaurants, discos, private parties) using both uniformed and undercover agents. Violations of these laws are punished severely. For instance, those who are caught for the first time as an underage drinker in the state of Delaware must pay a fine between \$ 200 and \$ 500 and lose their driver's license for 30-180 days.

A look on the crimes committed in connection with underage drinking shows that not only the youth is held responsible for an underage drinking violation. The adults who facilitate or support underage drinking find themselves involved with the legal system: Buying or supplying alcohol for a person underage is punished by a fine between \$ 200 and \$ 1000, and threatened in addition to 30-60 days in jail. One who collects entrance money for a party to offer guests alcohol also risks a prison sentence of 3-6 months. Sanctioning laws also hit parents of underage children. Drinking alcohol in public is not permitted for teenagers less than 21 years even if they are in the company of their parents. Parents could even be punished if they allow their own children to drink alcohol within the home, and this is what causes unreasonable behaviour in public or due to drunkenness or accidents when driving a car under the influence of alcohol.

The requirement of abstinence for underage drinking corresponds to the regulations, in surroundings of schools and universities are not allowed to offer alcoholic drinks, or install machines with alcoholic drinks available to dispense, as well as no alcohol in supermarkets.

Therefore, selling alcoholic drinks is only possible in expelled shops (Liquor shops), those profit obtained is cut by the high charges for the license.

These "Liquor shops" are subject to a number of obligations; its compliance is checked and strictly called in by sanctions. One who enters the shop as an underage person alone or in company of an adult is punished with a fine between \$ 200 and \$ 1000 - in addition to this a prison sentence of 30-60 days can be imposed also.

The owners of the Liquor shops are obliged to expel teenagers less than 21 years from the shop otherwise threat a fine of \$ 50. The staff in these shops is required to check the identity of any customer whose age could be estimated up to 30 years. The fine in which a worker of the shop could receive if these duties are not followed depend on the pre-

annual turnover of the shop. It can be very high if the shop is frequently visited, this fact also immensely increases the probability of no control.

If alcohol is sold to teenagers less than 21 years, or to adults in situations with a big probability that they will pass on the alcohol to an underage teenager, the owner could receive a fine of \$ 250-500.

These sanctions combined with an intensive control practice may be a cause in a recent survey among college students where only few indicated being able to buy alcohol without identity control in Liquor shops (25 %) or bars and restaurants (36 %) /cf. Harvard School of Public Health 2001/.

The regulations and the system of the sanctions that are arranged respectively around alcohol consumption and its age - like regimentation is slightly different in the federal United States. But this short summary clarifies the example of the state of Delaware and its carried out alcohol political intentions of the USA and the differences in Central Europe. Logically, the outlined requirement places a clear focus on the consistent prohibition of alcohol abstinence for a teenager less than 21 years and do not remain without influence on the youthful alcohol culture.

### **3 Alcohol culture at American high schools and universities – to understand what figures and facts say**

The effectiveness of the American Prohibition for Underage Drinking shows that it does not prevent indulging in alcohol consumption and developing a habitual drinking pattern before the 21st year of age.

#### **Age of beginning to drink and prevalence of alcohol consumption**

According to a representative survey conducted by the state of Delaware, 25 % of 5<sup>th</sup> graders, 57 % of 8<sup>th</sup> graders and 77 % of 11<sup>th</sup> graders reported having drunk alcohol ( in a life time prevalence). As for a close to regular alcohol consumption (prevalence per month), reported 25 % of 8<sup>th</sup> graders and 44 % of 11<sup>th</sup> graders. Binge drinking (which for this social group is defined as 3 or more drinks at a time in the past 2 weeks) is reported to be 12 % of 8<sup>th</sup> graders, 32 % of the male and 26 % of the female of 11<sup>th</sup> graders /cf. Gealt et.al. 2001, S. 4/.

The percentage with having consumed alcohol among pupils in Delaware approximately corresponds to the national average. At the national level, it is assumed that teenagers under the age of 21 drink 19 % of the complete consumption of alcohol, 91 % of all pupils drink alcohol at the end of their schooldays, and 31 % admit to Binge Drinking or high risk drinking at least once a month /cf. Bollinger at al. 2003/.

The large distribution of alcohol consumption continues among college students as well for example: surveys conducted at the University of Delaware in Newark, a student town with more than 24,000 students, showed a low rate of 10 % abstaining from alcohol consumption - in contrast astonishing because 64 % of the students surveyed were under the age of 21/cf. Harvard School of Public Health 2003/.

Clearly, the majority of the student body use alcohol. A large amount prefer beer (57 %) and spirits (27 %), sometimes drank as a mix –with other alcoholic drinks not as popular /ibid/.

As to the quantity of alcohol consumption, the rate of non-binge drinking was 33 %, the rate of bingers 57 % - in this group Binge Drinking was defined as the consumption of at least five drinks in a row for men or four drinks in a row for women during the two weeks before the completion of the questionnaire /cf. Wechsler 2000b, S. 66/. Among the binge drinkers, the rate of occasional bingers (1 or 2 times in past two weeks) was 25 %, the rate of frequent bingers (3 or more times in the past two weeks or more than once a week on average) was 37 % /cf. Harvard School of Public Health 2003/.

### **Access to alcohol**

To understand the effectiveness and the effects of the Prohibition for Underage Drinking it is remarkable to read the students statements concerning access to alcohol: 15 % of 5<sup>th</sup> graders, 24 % of 8<sup>th</sup> graders and 52 % of 11<sup>th</sup> graders know where and how to get alcohol – a thoroughly relevant part of the school children. But students questioned reported they have a better knowledge in where to get cigarettes (35 % of the 8<sup>th</sup> graders and 64 % of the 11<sup>th</sup> graders). In obtaining marijuana; 40 % of the 8<sup>th</sup> graders and 68 % of the 11<sup>th</sup> graders /cf. Gealt loc. Cit., S. 47-49/!

Also, 88 % of the college students reported having an easy access to alcohol /cf. Harvard School of Public Health 2003/.

In summarizing these empirical results, it is clear that with the present Prohibition politics practiced in the USA the accessibility to alcohol was affected. For those under 21, it is difficult to get alcohol but not impossible. However, these efforts have only a small influence on the age alcohol consumption begins and the distribution of alcohol consumption among young teenagers under the age of 21. But as far as it is known in connection to Germany, there is no other prevalence among young teenagers /cf. Bzga 2001/.

In this respect, it is indicated that the political efforts to reduce under age drinking in the USA has had only a limited influence to the distribution of drinking in youths.

Even in states like Delaware and in university towns like Newark; where state, local and university laws restricting alcohol consumption were intensified within the last five years /cf. Finkelman 2002/, the rates in the prevalence of drinking alcohol remained relatively constant in all groups /cf. Gealt loc. Cit., S. 3/.

### **Drinking culture among youth**

In consideration of the questionable effectiveness with respect to the age of first beginning alcohol consumption and the distribution of drinking among youth, there are a number of notes about the influence of the alcohol political measures regarding the setting of the drinking among youth. That is why there are a lot of questions about the effects of the alcohol policy.

Teenagers avoid the regulations by asking older friends or siblings (77 %), find careless employees in Liquor shops (8 %) or get it from parents or relatives (19 %). Part of the "obtaining strategies" involve deception, forged documents and a loose construction of the black market: students obtaining alcohol from someone who was older than 21 (77

%), from someone who was under 21 (52 %), using a fake identity (11 %) or from a stranger 21 years or older (5 %) /cf. Harvard School 2003 loc. Cit./ - these are crimes which can be punished both as violations of the alcohol laws and as criminal crimes. So it becomes clear that the prohibitive efforts pressure teenagers to participate in criminal actions for the obtaining of alcohol that they are referring to as abstinence.

Because the consumption of alcohol by teenagers in public areas is a crime, teenagers are drinking at less controlled areas like parks, beaches, parking lots and cemeteries /cf. Weitzman, Nelson, Weichsler 2003/.

These effects can be seen among college students of the University of Delaware too – an institution that fights against underage drinking with its own regulations trying to eliminate its image as a party-school upheld for more than 7 years /cf. Building Responsibility Coalition 2003/. The regular controls and harsh sanctions by local and university police obviously have discovered the majority of students reckon to be discovered for underage drinking in their own living quarters as following: students reported a high probability for getting caught for underage drinking if they drink at their doom room (45 %) or at a doom party (58 %); in contrast they felt more secure drinking at an off-campus party at a 19 % probability for getting caught for underage drinking, 26 % at a Greek party, and 34 % at off-campus bars /cf. Harvard School of Public 2001 loc. Cit./. It seems that Greek houses are places where it is easy for students to buy alcohol without being carded (87 %). And opposite, students also discovered alcohol is easily obtainable at off-campus restaurants (36 %) and at Liquor shops (25 %) /ibid/.

### **Retreat from public places**

It is clear that the alcohol prohibitive regulations force American teenagers to retire to drink in social settings in which they can protect themselves and their peer group from the control efforts and threatening sanctions imposed by the adults. A side effect of this tendency is drinking teenagers retreat from other controlling and regulating patterns of the regular alcohol culture also. These regulating patterns normally can be used to moderate alcohol consumption at public drinking places and within a mixed age drinking community. These helpful patterns are handled offensively at times, yet a considerable part subtly; largely mediated by informal social control to reduce the risks of drinking and alcohol-related problems. More supervised venues for drinking and adult involvement also contribute to a more integrated socialization into a moderate alcohol culture.

The teenagers turning to non-public places and under the sole direction of their peer groups additionally become important because that is the setting in which young Americans start to experiment with alcohol.

In most cases, youth's first experiences with alcohol selectively exceed the capability limits of oneself. Obviously these effects are not reducible. We know that from Germany too – more than 60 % of young people between 12 and 25 have experiences with drunkenness, and more than 20 % have already been drunk more than 6 times in their life /cf. BzGA loc. Cit./. So it seems understandable; exceeding the capability limits sometimes comes as a normal step in the learning process. It is recommended to look for methods to reduce the risk of that behaviour.

Testing the limits of capability; a process receiving a special quality from the circumstances in which the American youth have to manage their drinking. It seems a matter of fact that many times the youthful alcohol consumption removes the activities - that in the adult drinking culture normally accompany. The coupling with other activities does not only take into account the motivation and the setting of drinking diversified. With that a concentration on alcohol and its psycho-active effect broken open. If the structure of drinking situations is multidimensional, it binds alcohol consumption at special places, times and arrangements, and in that way, regulate drinking. It also creates possibilities to impart aspects to enjoy alcoholic beverages.

In the drinking setting of the American teenagers, there is a lack of essential prerequisites for the process of enjoying alcoholic drinks - time, quiet, détente, calmness, and the possibility of dividing drinks up over a longer period of time for the concentration of the event. The removing of other activities often reduced the motivation to enjoy a drink and promote a focus on the psycho-active effects of alcohol consumption.

As a consequence, this combination of influences is what American teenagers define to be drunk and is obviously not a selective result of an overly offensive approach towards alcohol. Instead, becoming drunk seems to be an expressed goal. It creates a better understanding on the distribution of drunkenness among college students as follows: students polled at the University of Delaware reported have been drunk 3-4 times in the last 30 days /cf. Harvard School of Public Health 2003/. With the view that only 14 % of the students did not know their own capable limits, showing a high rate of drunkenness as an intended and desired event.

Because of the special focus on drunkenness, the number of highly dangerous alcohol overdoses which require medical attention speaks for itself. Official statistics speaks about 50 cases of youths that died every year from alcohol poisoning, because students drink too much and/or too fast /cf. Student Health Center, 2003/. To prevent the risk of dying from alcohol the University of Delaware started a campaign among students to call for help in the case of alcohol poisoning /cf. Building Responsibility Coalition loc. Cit./. As a consequence, the number of rescues rose from 30 in 1999 to 69 in 2002. For these empirical results it is also important to understand if a case of alcohol poisoning becomes public; the person will be penalized by the university. In this respect, one must come to the understanding that there is a rather hesitant claim for help, so the public cases of alcohol poisoning present less than most of the reality.

At the one hand this result shows the success of the campaign regarding alcohol poisoning, but on the other hand it shows how serious the situation around the students drunkenness really is.

Although there is no comparable data about the situation among German students there is the impression that the drinking behaviour and the alcohol relevant problems between German and American teenagers are very different. Therefore it is highly recommended to take into account this context during a discussion of Binge Drinking.

### **Symbolic upgrading of the drinking**

For American students drinking alcohol is a symbolic part of growing up. Symbolically upgrading, behaviour or drugs in special social groups is well known in Germany too. Here it is by the use of cigarettes and alcohol among very young people and by illegal drugs among older teenagers. As a result, many times the use of these substances is not only because of the psycho-active effects, but the consumption is binding into the striven processes of discussion between teenagers and adults /cf. Kappeler 1991, S. 330/. That is why the forms of consumption are very demonstrative and should present the youths point of view, the standards, as well as the critical objections in regards to the dominating adult culture; which are symbolically never the last to adopt a behaviour reserved for adults.

Obviously the denial of access to the alcohol culture for American teenagers gives a special dynamics to the symbolic upgrading of alcohol consumption. In the USA the symbolic growing up of alcohol drinking is deduced by the uncompromising exclusion of teenagers from the adult alcohol culture. Consequently, drinking alcohol is associated with a most wanted symbol for being an adult. Another way is teenagers specifically breaking the norms imposed by adults to express their claim to be included provoked by drinking. This also starts an inviting game between youth and adults regarding the forced concealment of alcohol consumption given from adults on one hand, and youthful drinking and the risk of being discovered for drinking at the other hand.

That alone does not speak to the number of drinking opportunities per month but does help serve as a reference to the motives and great lengths students will go to in order to consume alcohol:

- As reasons to drink alcohol include: "To celebrate" (very important 23 %), "To have a good time with my friends" (very important 23 %), "To relax or relieve tension" (30 %), "I like the taste" (important 29 %), "As a reward for working hard" (important 26 %). In comparison to that other motives are unimportant /cf. Harvard School 2003 loc. Cit./. It is clear that American students obviously drink alcohol with a motivation to bind them into their social group and to celebrate their commonality as well as "student" free time.
- A Probable part of youthful drinking is a certain excess – a contrast, students answer to the alcohol abstinence called in: 30.7 % of the male students and 16.5 % of the female students reported to have had drank on 10 occasions in the past 30 days; 47.3 % of the male students and 42.6 % of the female students have had five (male) or four (female) or more drinks in a row therefore were defined as a binge drinker. In the past 30 days 35.9 % of the male students and 24.8 % of the female students reported to have had at 3 times enough drinks to get drunk – an effect, that 54.4 % of the male students and 42.7 % of the female students want to have particularly /cf. Wechsler, Lee, Kuo, Lee 2000a, S. 205/.
- The high symbolic upgrading of youthful drinking still clearly presents more from the standards and revolves around drinking games and drunkenness. From the view of German conditions, there is an astonishing consent of the immense distribution and excess that drinking games have among American students. Studies showed that 73 % of the freshman and 38 % of older students have experiences with drinking games themselves, 92 % of the students took part at such games in the past month and ended these games only if they got drunk /cf. Crawford, Nellis 1991/. The majority of all people questioned referred that not only drinking games are approved



strongly to very strongly among students (94 %) but having 6 drinks at a party (91 %) and coming back to the dorm drunk (80 %) also /cf. Harvard School 2003 loc. Cit./ - among alcohol connected behaviour the most acceptable.

- Finally impulses for a symbolic upgrading of drinking alcohol are given from a culture to "keep free" younger by older students, seems to gain acceptance as shown: 22 % of college students reported to pay nothing for alcoholic drinks, why it is typically free. This is to avoid the laws that forbid the sale of alcohol to underage drinkers. It can be suspected that buying alcoholic drinks also promotes the cohesive strength under each other as it relates to a punishable behaviour. However tied into the high esteem by drunkenness the practice to "keep free" creates at the same time group pressure which finally results in alcohol consumption higher than wanted from the individual.

### **The development of youthfully alcohol drinking under the condition of Prohibition**

If we put this all together, the USA has developed two different and strictly separated alcohol cultures: one is the legal alcohol culture among adults and the other is the illegal culture among teenagers; taken shape under the condition of Prohibition. Both have hardly few common reference points but by the strict exclusion of the youths from the adult alcohol culture are confronted rather often against each other.

As a consequence, the opposed position of one culture to the other promotes a symbolic upgrading of drinking alcohol among teenagers and suggests to the production of very different scales and drinking patterns. These differences are stylising a youthful alcohol drinking approach, which the adults seriously provoked with its norms and standards, settings, as well as quantity and distribution.

To follow this point of view, the discrepancies in the weighting of the youthfully drinking culture that is labelling by the misuse of alcohol by adults on one hand, and on the other hand receiving a lot of acceptance and social welcome by teenagers that these discrepancies thoroughly desire /for empirical results cf.. Wechsler et. al. 1994, S. 1677/. It seems that problem labelling from the adults and idealizing from the youth are contrasts' with a strong relationship to each other – both compete and are causal.

It cannot be ignored that youthful alcohol drinking in the USA is obviously dominated by rules from peer groups, which confirms a problematic upgrading of alcohol drinking. But since American teenagers are exclusively oriented by their peer groups, developing attitudes are difficult to correct by themselves. The interventions of the culture of adults dominated by checking and sanctioning is reduced on the uncompromising enforcement of abstinence for "Underage Drinkers" and offers hardly any support for correcting the developed values, and adjusting the standards of youthful drinking.

Because of the strict exclusion of youth criticism, requests for an alteration of drinking are being rejected and circumvented as rather not acceptable principles - even if quite obviously considered negative physically, emotionally and socially as consequences connected to this drinking. Visibly are the dynamics of a process, through that, a Perpetual Mobile like, not wanted developments are initiated again and again and which designs a circulation which cannot be broken open under the given circumstances.

There is no doubt that youthful Binge Drinking is connected with multiple health problems and social second hand affects. Adults often define this kind of drinking among teenagers as a “rite of passage”, that they do not want to accept any longer. Public discussions or scientific debates seldom establish a reverence to the prohibitive circumstances and groundings of this culture / accept cf. Hanson 2003/.

#### **4 Alcohol-related problems in American schools and universities**

The excessive alcohol consumption of American young people causes a variety of problems connected with direct consequences for the personal drinker and problems for the immediate and distant social surrounding.

The large distribution of high-risk drinking has considerable influence particularly on the rates of alcohol conditional accidents and acts of violence: 500,000 students aged 18 to 24 are unintentionally injured under the influence of alcohol, each year 1,400 students die (about 4 a day) from alcohol-related injuries, more than 600,000 students are assaulted by another student who has been drinking, each year 70,000 students are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape, 150,000 students develop an alcohol-related health problem, and 25 % of college students report academic problems because of drinking /cf.. Hingson et. al. 2002, S. 136-144/. In Germany these connections between heavy drinking and social problems are well-known too, so it seems they do not possess a special quality. For the most important problems in college - because of alcohol drinking, students reported to “Miss a Class”(34 %), “Get behind school work” (27 %), “Do something I later regretted” (40 %); “Drove after drinking alcohol” (38 %); “Forget where you were or what you did” (30 %); “Argue with friends” (25 %); “Engage in unplanned sexual activity” (23 %); “Not use protection when having sex” (11.3 %) and “Damage property” (11 %) /cf. Wechsler et al. 2000a, S. 73-75/.<sup>1</sup> Along with these problems, added penalties from the alcohol prohibitive law of the state, the commune and the university: 7 % of the students reported getting into trouble with the campus or local police /ibid/.

Among American young people, there exists a clear connection between the level of alcohol consumption and the alcohol-related problems one might have. The probability to have several of these problems increases with the level of drinking: In comparison to non-binge drinkers occasional binge drinkers and frequent binge drinkers were more likely to experience alcohol-related problems than those who drank alcohol but did not binge. Occasional binge drinkers were five times as likely as non-binge drinkers to report they had experienced five or more different alcohol-related problems, whereas frequent binge drinkers were 21 times as likely to do so /cf. Wechsler et. al. 2000b/.

The extent of alcohol-related problems for the social environment also depend very strongly on the number of Binge Drinking students who live there: A nationally representative study at 119 universities in 39 states defined for 35 % of the students asked have to live at a high-binge (more than 50 % of students are binge drinkers) and for 33 %

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<sup>1</sup> Particularly with respect to the statements of the students in connection with their study obligations there imposes itself the question how far actually drinking alcohol is a cause and how far an socially accepted alibi of an lack in study discipline.

have to live at a low-binge level (up to 35 %) institution /ibid/. Compare to low-binge campuses students who live on high-binge campuses reported much more often “had studying or sleeping interrupt” (71 % High vs. 43 % Low-level Binge Drinking Campuses), “had to take care of a drunken student” (57 % vs. 37 %), “been insulted or humiliated” (36 % vs. 21 %), “had a serious argument or quarrel” (23 % vs. 14 %), “experienced an unwanted sexual advance”(23 % vs. 15 %), “had property damaged”(16 % vs. 7 %) or “been pushed, hit or assaulted” (11 % vs. 6 %) /cf. Wechsler et. al. 2000a, S. 75/.

With all that data summarized, it stands out that the excessive drinking of students not only expels against the moral and ethical ideas that have been formulated for youthful drinking in the USA, but at the same time, the youthful drinking culture, developed under the condition of Prohibition, is connected with multiple health problems and social risks for the drinking person as well as for the social environment.

## **5 Concepts to alternate the students culture of drinking – theoretical baselines and practical implementations**

In response to the various alcohol-related problems among young people that have been shown since the early 90’s by reporters with reputation from research and practice /cf. Wechsler et. al. Harvard School of Public Health 1993/, the Congress of the USA became invested in the issue in summer of 1998 with the passage of the “Kennedy Resolution” as a part of Higher Educational Reauthorisation Act. That resolution called on college and university presidents to adopt an “Alcohol Code of Principles” with the following components:

- Appoint a task force made up of students, administrators, and faculty that would recommend policy changes to cut the use of alcohol and drugs
- Provide maximum opportunities for students to live in alcohol free housing
- Enforce a “zero tolerance” policy on illegal alcohol consumption by students and limit opportunities for faculty, staff, and alumni to drink on campus
- Strictly enforce sanctions and penalties for those who violate campus alcohol polities
- Eliminate sponsoring of athletic or other campus activities by alcohol companies
- Form alliances with community officials to limit underage student access to alcohol /cf. Bishop loc. Cit., S. 17/

With this initiative, the American Congress clearly exemplified objectives and baselines of methods for the alteration of alcohol drinking among students. These objectives have to essentially orientate the enforcement of abstinence for the majority of the students in first line with the help of penalties and a strict enforcement of sanctions.

### **The „Environmental Approach“**

In the course of the implementation of these orientations, many of the universities developed the strategy of the so-called "Environmental Approach". This approach takes the experiences from the anti-smoking movement. Proving that simply warning people of the adverse effects and health risks associated with smoking did not result in much of a

cultural change. However, when the rights of non-smokers to breath clean air became more emphasized, people became empowered to object to the behaviour of smokers and that has led to both policy changes about where smoking is permitted as well as less social acceptance to habit smokers /cf. Wechsler 1995/.

From the view of the Environmental Approach, high risk drinking is an environmental and public issue. At the same time, this perspective represents the definition of the problem carried out and corresponding intervention strategies deduced.

This concept offers the chance to back away from an individualizing view and break down a pathologicalizing position on drinking problems in a community. With the focus no longer on the lone single drinker and his/her behaviour; often only defined as a result of illness and explained by needing therapy for solving. A more socio-cultural perception understands drinking in social groups as result of a complex development; in which economic, cultural, social and ecological factors are causally involved. A part of that are the social and cultural convictions, behaviour norms and attitudes for drinking that existed in a community, as well as the state and institutional alcohol policy just like advertising, marketing and other economic practices for alcohol.

The entitlement for a community to proceed against high risk alcohol consumption is avowed, because this kind of drinking is not only a private problem for the person engaging in this activity. High risk drinking causes a lot of effects for the community too, along with interference in living together and touching important interests of those who do not drink heavily. For that it is referring to second-hand effects of risk drinking which include and cause strange damage of injuries and accidents, physical and sexual assaults or violence, property damage, vandalism or other disturbances of lives of others and last but not least disturbances of public security and order /cf. Bishop loc. Cit. S. 18/. That is why heavy drinking should not remain in sole responsibility alone.

To reduce high risk drinking among students, hopefully a lot of American colleges and universities will take on the baselines of the Environmental Approach. Approximately the same problems and a closed network between these institutes are caused in similar ways, how single institutions transform this concept into practice and the experiences received. In 1996, with funding provided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the University of Delaware was one of the first schools that started to develop and to implement model approaches to reduce high-risk drinking on campus and in the surrounding communities. The basic tenor of the alcohol political efforts of the University of Delaware was confirmed in the following basic principles /cf. Bishop loc. Cit., S. 19/:

- The welfare of the community is considered to be most important than the wishes or actions of an individual.
- Individual have the right to make there own decisions about when and how they choose to use alcohol, as long as those decisions do not have a negative consequence for other people.
- The violence, vandalism and other public disruptions that are often associated with the heavy use of alcohol have reached an unacceptable level and disrespectful of the campus community.
- Excessive drinking is not an acceptable excuse or alibi for antisocial, violent or disruptive behaviours.

- Changing the culture of high-risk drinking will ultimately depend on the willingness of individuals to exercise their personal rights and sensibilities when they suffer the second-hand consequences of someone else's drinking behaviours

These principles clearly show a considerable withdrawal from the perception pattern that put only personal health risks of drinking as well as the danger of alcohol abuse and addiction as the central themes – that focus greatly dominating the discussion about alcohol problems in Germany. The baselines rather show the American tradition; to accept the private rights and therefore the personal decisions for one's own life for every individual in a unique way. As opposed to Germany, there is not a superficially announced moral norm such as alcohol abstinence or controlled consumption.

Based on the Environmental Approach, the starting point for the alcohol political effort are the interests of the community, which become a considerable preference. In this respect the concrete arrangement of the Approach directly depends on the possibility to articulate, to collect and to bring in interests of different groups into negotiations about alcohol policy<sup>2</sup>.

Logically enforcing the Environmental Approach into action, the work of committees holds a central place.

A campus-community partnership was formed at the University of Delaware to change attitudes, policies and enforcement on campus and the surrounding community. Under the roof of this so-called "Building Responsibility Coalition" there are 8 working groups. Everyone has a special focus in the alcohol drinking of college students. As the most important representatives of interests, organizations are cooperating such as: the municipal political tracking and administration of the University, different neighbourhood organizations and citizens' action groups, landlords, police, owners of restaurants, bars and Liquor shops, business people from the off-campus environment, employees of student hostels, members of faculties, employees of the medical care system of the university and student organizations.

These different representatives of interests took various social ecological factors for the risky drinking of students and carried out alterations in the socio-cultural environment /cf. Finkelmann loc. Cit. S. 7/:

- The number of restaurants, bars and sales outlets, in which it is possible to drink or to buy alcohol was strongly reduce in radius of the campus
- Applying the basic idea, that alcohol's caused costs shall be carried from those which sell, buy or consume alcohol - the taxes on a bar permission were repeatedly increased within the commune.
- Round the campus an infrastructure of business was developed which does not address students alone, but wants to recruit a mixed audience from old and youths, students and inhabitants.
- Business practices which particularly promote alcohol consumption by low prices, (Happy Hours, special offers, discounts) were largely reduced in the radius of the campus.

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<sup>2</sup> The question is how interests of drinking people represented at all under the condition of problemazing.

- Restaurants with a bar license were asked to change their character as a Pub, a Club or a Bar by selling alcohol only in connection with a meal.
- The advertising of alcohol on campus and its surroundings was forbidden. For this also locked up the sponsoring of student activities and events by the alcohol industry.
- The university confesses for a policy of "Zero-tolerance" to underage drinking which forbids all accounts to alcohol for students under the age of 21 years, even in smallest quantities.
- Strict rules of controls and sanctions were developed within the mind set that underage drinking shall be stopped: using room inspections in student hostels, controls of on-campus parties, controls of persons on campus, controlling the honesty of identity papers and others.
- A control and assessment system has been installed for student organizations and Greeks with respect to their alcohol pattern. With the new system, it can be forbidden to take in new members for a semester or longer.
- A system of penalties was installed. For the first violation, a fine of \$ 100, the obligation to visit a three-hour alcohol class and a letter sent to the parents – it ends at a third violation with a suspension from the university. Unlike regular penalties, these strikes will never be deleted and they are current until the end of one's time at the university. These penalties shall also stop older students to consume alcohol and shall refrain them from alcohol-related problems like violence, vandalism and bad behaviour in the public.
- With respect to the enforcement of punishing students engaging in drinking, the police of the city of Newark and the police of the university work together side-by-side. Violations inside the community in which students are involved in are immediately notified to the university where they are sanctioned for the school to take on their own measures.
- In applying the idea that a system of penalties is only effective if there are close checks and in the case of transgression sanctions for violators follow immediately, there were new jobs created for three additional Newark police officers. Their responsibilities include; having to enforce the alcohol laws and are responsible to report regularly to the working groups. So there is a lot of pressure to identify every alcohol offence.
- With the argument of additional costs needed to create order and safety, those which are responsible for the alcohol-related problems should have to pay and the money for these additional police officers is gained by the community in efforts of raising the parking fees in the main business streets, by raising costs for sales licenses for alcohol in bars, restaurants and Liquor shops, and by additional charges for students organizations and Greeks.
- A working group regularly designs alternative student events, which are not only sponsored financially but supported with man power. This man power comes from alcohol violators who have to work within the events too. The minimum condition to be promoted to an alternative event is the compliance to be alcohol free.
- On campus, there are regularly carried out campaigns to show the negative consequences of risky drinking for the social environment and to encourage persons affected by alcohol relevant problems to defend themselves against trouble with alcohol drinking from others.

It becomes clear, getting the Environmental Approach into action has taken shape due to three large main emphases: The predominant number of the measures is orientated on reducing the supply of alcohol by economic mechanisms, on obstructing its accessibility and on stopping sales volume increasing methods of the alcohol industry. The second direction contains the installation of a comprehensive system of controls and sanctions with which it is possible to react to unreasonable alcohol consumption of students. The third area covers efforts around clearing up problems connected with drinking for the social environment and an encouragement of those who are confronted with alcohol-related problems to defend themselves against trouble from alcohol drinking from others. This last main point presupposes a sensitive degree path not to work with methods that in the end discredit and frown upon the alcohol drinking in general and all persons who drink.

It is evident that during the transformation into practice, the basic ideas of the Environmental Approach were cut considerably. The remarkable central idea; to limit excessive drinking of students by an alternation of the drinking culture, which means by an alternation of norms, attitudes and convictions connected with alcohol consumption – this central baseline is in the present American practice essentially reduced to "Law and order" politics. It seems that the alcohol consumption is given a more prohibitive frame than directly working on the process of forming patterns to deal with alcohol. That is why there are the same voices that criticize these approaches as a "modern Prohibition" /cf. Hanson 2003 b/.

## **6 Which results show the efforts to reduce the Binge Drinking**

The idea of the Environmental Approach, to change an excessive alcohol culture in a way that alcohol-related problems for the social environment are reduced continuously, presupposes socio-cultural developments which need longer-term time periods. Therefore, it is fair to assume that results of the political efforts preventing alcohol consumption will be seen only after an elongated process of continuous work. For the evaluation it means these efforts cannot be tested based on the success of this approach with short-term alterations. That is the reason why the scientific evaluation of alcohol political programs in American colleges and universities also run for a long time. Since 1997, regular research has been watching the student's attitudes and standards towards alcohol consumption as well as the drinking behaviour and the alcohol-related problems of risky alcohol consumption, which the youths have responded on.

Based on the epidemiological results, the effects of the efforts around the reduction of Binge Drinking are rather small. The students themselves still focused on addressing certain drinking styles, those of which were unacceptable to the administration /cf. Harvard School 2003 loc. Cit./:

- Essentially unchanged is the relatively easy ability to obtain alcohol, reported at 89 % in 2003 by students /ibid/.

- The quota of those students whose drinking corresponded to the defined pattern of the Binge Drinking in 2003 was 57 %. Among them, 20 % were occasional Binge Drinkers and 37 % frequent Binge Drinkers. A look at the quotas shown per annum over a period of more than seven years clearly shows a general trend in the development can not be recognized.
- Again and again, an encouraging decrease in the number of Binge Drinkers in one year follows a renewed increase in the subsequent year /cf. Building Responsibility 2003/. It Seems that the data favours towards the concept that any new matriculated generation of students creates its own measures for drinking. Most generations of freshmen receive stimulations from various social examples – not only from the university – and fit these examples into their own life style. In conclusion, creating a more similar style of drinking every year.
- Obviously the same also applies to the quota of those who are not qualified as Binge Drinkers – it also shows, except for annual fluctuations, there is not a general trend; 2003 showing 33 % /ibid/.
- At the beginning of the alcohol political efforts, the quota of the abstainers rose a little (from 7 % 1993 to 12 % 1997). In the meantime it is oscillated on a relatively constant standard of 10 % for 2003 /ibid/.
- Consequences of drinking for the drinkers themselves show the already described fluctuations with increasing and decreasing affects - but not a trend in general. The only exception is problems with the campus police for students who drink. In conclusion, a trend exists with an insignificant rise /from 6 % 1997 to 9 % 2001/, which is no longer stable (7 % for 2003) /ibid/.
- With the beginnings of the alcohol political efforts, students first reported alcohol-related problems in their own social environment showing a reduction, those that were most promising: “Had a serious argument or quarrel” (1997 23 % vs. 14 % 1998), “Had your property damaged” (25 % vs. 17 %), “Had to baby-sit or take care of another student who drank too much” (51 % vs. 38 %), “Found vomit in the halls or bathroom of your residence” (52 % vs. 39 %), “Had personal studying or sleep interrupted” (66 % vs. 51 %). However, these developments have to be understood better as short time effects. All these consequences seem to indicate a return to the old standards since the 2001 year - meaning only after three years.
- The alcohol political measures are obviously connected with atmospheric alterations at the university, in a way that students critically taking a stance about drinking now be encouraged to talk to other students. Yet the number of those who never asked others to refrain from drinking dropped continuously (from 58 % in 1997 to 41 % in 2003), while a group of those, who already intervened two or more times with other students raised steady (from 17 % to 28 %) /ibid/. It is not clear, what these results represented: Is this understandable as a development of a critical corrective of an excessive drinking culture or does it more rather suggest a separation of the critics? The references to a polarization between drinking and abstainers speak in favour of the later suggestion of a separation.
- A small but promising matter of fact shows the development of the reason to drink “Drink to get drunk”. Of course the quota per annum over a period of more than seven years shows ups and downs, but as a general trend in the development a small decreasing can be recognized (from 64 % in 1997 to 54 % in 2003).



- However, it is unclear for what this development stands for. In viewing the attitudes about drinking and driving, constant rate is shown and not an apparent change in greater responsibility: There are further considerable rates for such responses: “Drove after drinking alcohol” (31 % in 2003) and “Rode with a driver who was high or drunk” (22 %) /cf. Harvard School 2003 loc. Cit./.
- Obviously the threatened penalties have only a limited influence on the patterns of obtaining of alcohol, for example: In the complete evaluation, most of the main sources constantly are students who are 21 or older (77 % 2003). The increased control practice focuses on the rate of the younger obtaining alcohol and its study as the second largest resource decreased (from 62 % in 1997 to 52 % in 2003) paralleling the possibilities to avoid controls during the purchase of alcohol (from 17 % to 8 %) or to use a fake identity card (from 17 % to 11 %) /ibid/. It becomes clear that the changed punishing practice is absolutely reflected from the students and that students form an arrangement with that.

The National College Alcohol Study, which regularly evaluates the efforts of a large number of American colleges and universities around alteration of the student drinking culture, did not find essential alterations of the students drinking behaviour.

As one of the few effects, a trend in polarization peels for ways the students deal with alcohol /cf. Wechsler et. al. 2000b, S. 76/. It becomes visible that both percent quotas of the abstainers and the regular Binge Drinkers have increased continuously since 1993 /ibid/.

In consideration, these alterations might possibly be based on costs of the quota of those who drink only occasionally or very seldom excessive until now. This trend also must be judged as rather problematic for two reasons: First, under the impression of the alcohol political efforts, those who do not drink with risk completely give up the consumption of alcohol are lost as a role model for the youthful drinking culture as well as those which drink only occasionally excessive. With that, a separation of the minimal drinker and the excessive drinking culture create a loss for a regulatory and corrective influence for the excessive drinking pattern.

Second, in coalition with the increased conditions of control and criminal prosecution, the drinking seems to arouse in a certain way; “a phenomenon of a breach in a dyke”- according to the motto "then spare if"- in reference to ignoring the demand of abstinence connected with readiness and not respecting others drinking limits - an effect which might possibly result in a stronger enforcement of Binge Drinking as a trend among students.

The evaluation of the alcohol political efforts represents itself differently if the focus is on the assessment of the students' knowledge about alcohol-related problems:

- There is a rising rate of those, who take note of information about someone having a drinking problem (from 51 % in 1997 to 66 % in 2003), what are the long term effects of heavy drinking (from 51 % to 60 %) and what are the dangers of an alcohol overdose (from 55 % to 79 %) /cf. Harvard School 2003, loc. Cit./.
- Obviously, bringing alcohol problems into public attention that promote a higher sensibility but at the same time the single one can strongly critique an analysis of his/her own alcohol consumption. Of course, the quote per annum of those who

- consider themselves as a problematic drinker go back and forth, but finally raise from 9 % in 1997 to 15 % in 2003 /ibid/.
- The changed punishing practices were reflected in the students responses about the probability of penalties for alcohol obtained crimes as follows: The new punishing system introduced by the administration of the university becomes visible at larger probabilities; reported now as “Will be fined” /from 30 % in 1997 to 43 % in 2003), “To send to an alcohol education program (from 13 % to 34 %) and “Parents will be notified” (from 26 % in 2001 to 40 % in 2003) /ibid/. It is questionable how this punishing practice supports the development of personal correctives among students - in fear of such formal consequences. With this background, the probability that other punishing patterns gain official acceptance seems rather low.
  - While the total number of alcohol policy violations reported to the student judicial system has increase slightly from year to year, the recidivism rate dropped. That fact is, interpreting the new sanctions for alcohol offences may be effective in decreasing the number of repeat offenders /cf. Bishop loc. Cit. S. 28/.
  - Within the city of Newark, there was a 29 % decrease in the number of alcohol-related arrests in 1999 when compared to 1998. This data has allayed the fears of some that efforts on-campus would result in greater problems outside in the community neighbourhoods /cf. Bishop a .a. O. S. 29/.

Finally within the results of the evaluation, there are contradictory effects about the effort of the administration of the university around the reduction of the availability, the accessibility of alcohol, the raise of control density and sanction probability. These empirical results draw attention to rather important, critical side-effects:

- The reports of the students given in the years between 1997 and 2003 show a very different quota of probabilities discovered by alcohol consumption. Therefore, it is hard to derive general trends from these results. This discontinuity discusses the control practices as its specific main emphasis. Over the indicated time period of the alcohol political efforts of the university, the probability raises for discovering alcohol drinking particularly in a dorm party (from 52 % in 1997 to 65 % in 2003), at a fraternity or sorority party (from 16 % to 28 %) and an off campus party (from 15 % to 24 %). According to programmatic statements of the university, control among these social gatherings also remained one of the main emphasis of attention. But obviously the practice of control does not touch strongly in dorm room parties (10 % in 2003), while the probability to be caught during alcohol consumption in bars and clubs outside the campus has decreased over time (from 60 % to 42 %) /cf. Harvard School loc. Cit./.
- Resulting in problematic development because of teenage exposure from the culture of students into bars and clubs, which are dominated by adults. With respect to handling alcohol, drugs and the sexuality that is woven into this celebration culture, a different atmosphere is exposed. Naïve teenagers are not always able to familiarize with this scene adequately.
- It becomes clear, that the control effort to end alcohol consumption take away more social rooms where students are allowed to follow their needs for offside calmness and celebrations. It is evident, that events offered by the university do

not offer an appealing alternative. They also have the false quantitative dimension for so many students on campus. Obviously with the strict prohibition on alcohol on campus, university events are not very attractive for the majority of students as follows: 84 % of students reported not attending intercollegiate home athletic events, 86 % did not attend a on-campus dance or concert, and 78 % did not attend a campus-pub. It was much more acceptable to take part in off-campus parties (only 24 % not attending) /ibid/. In consideration of these attitudes, there is a danger of generalization. With this, students decline nearly every official offer of having an on-campus party. Such trends promote a separation of student life and exclude important social regulations of the students' daily activities in their effectiveness of alcohol consumption.

As a result of amplified control, not only the number of the alcohol offenders rose from year to year, but at the same time the penalties further tightened involving alcohol crimes resulting in a serious consequence or even destroying a youth's personal reputation, speaking for the numbers of suspensions from the university, as an cut in important educational paths for young adults – for 2002 it were 40 cases. Penalties for alcohol offenders also get filed into the criminal records of students. Making these offences important impediments in respect to finding a job, starting a personal business or any other plans. This is not only a temporary condition; it will remain on record for life!

- Particularly for freshman, who are unfamiliar with the regulations and consequences, the system of controls and penalties has the power to enforce a fast punishment and a quick suspension from the university /cf.. Finkelmann loc. Cit. S. 7/. Therefore, broadly calculated campaigns are used by the administration of the university to inform others about the regulations created and what it means to be in compliance with. These campaigns are part of the so-called “Harm Reduction” with respect to alcohol. With this in mind, many efforts flow and a main emphasis is set on the information regarding criminal consequences. Resulting in a considerable question on what proportion to apply for the given attention in resources on informing one about physical and social ecological effects for the heavy drinker, and the social environment.
- There is also the problem of considerable trash that arises in the neighbourhoods by alcohol bottles and cans being thrown away. The 2001 costs to eliminate alcohol relevant garbage and damages by vandalism alone, on Main Street (about 1 km long restaurant section of the city of Newark) amounted to \$ 26,000 /cf.. Building Responsibility Coalition loc. Cit./. The regulations concerning open containers on streets, sidewalks and other private property and in motor vehicles, might significantly involve those costs. As known in Germany, there is a similar connection with splashing flatware for illegal drugs, which are removed after use as quickly as possible to offer fewer starting-points for criminal ascertainment. In this respect, the criminal regulations directly involve the unsatisfactory ability to contribute to a proper disposal.
- As a clear trend, it becomes evident that the acceptance of the alcohol policy of the university among students continues to diminish (from 58 % in 1997 to 38 % in 2003) /cf. Harvard School 2003 loc. Cit./. The decreasing acceptance of the alcohol political efforts of the university adds the danger of generalization among

the students. Causing the increased probability that the measures taken by the university are also being ignored, which are definitely important for the risk management that can be bound to alcohol consumption.

- The penalties for alcohol consumption and the solid consequences in regards to alcohol problems, instil a fear among the youths creating a process with which the correction of problematic behaviour must be handled with reference to a peer group and without any help. In consequence, more and more drinking problems have to be solved in the management of themselves as follows: only 23 % of students approve of “Reporting a roommate who often drinks too much to the Health Center”, and 91 % never complained to a college official or Resident Advisor about a student who was intoxicated / cf. Harvard School 2003 loc. Cit./.
- By youths’ having to shut themselves from the insights of adults, the danger increases that the needs of help are not articulated, or when they are, there already exists a very problematic and complicated problem.

## **7 The scientific discussion about Binge Drinking in the USA**

An agreement about the phenomenon of the Binge Drinking does not exist in the USA; neither on how to definite it, nor the theoretical strategies and practical approaches to take. Since the end of 90<sup>th</sup>, critical objections increased in opinion-forming points of view, which particularly amounted from the Harvard School of Public Health.

### **The definition of Binge Drinking**

An essential point of the critical discussion about Binge Drinking is its definition. In discussion, there are chosen scales with which a certain alcohol consumption is confirmed as Binge Drinking, and how it really became a problem with its extent and qualitative dimensions.

Referring to the researches of the Harvard School of Public Health about alcohol consumption of teenagers, part of since the 1993 ongoing national college Alcohol Study, asserted itself to form a definition of Binge Drinking, providing a differentiation between age and sex.

One must attest to the different physical compatibility limits that distinguish the younger (pupils) from the older (students) teenagers and between women and men.

Many epidemiological studies define alcohol consumption among pupils as 3 or more drinks at a time in the past 2 weeks as Binge Drinking /cf. Geal, loc. Cit., S. 4 /.

Researches referring to alcohol consumption among students define a Binge-Drinking-Episode as a male student drinking five or more drinks and a female student drinking four or more drinks in a row during the past two weeks /cf. Wechsler 2000b, loc. Cit., S. 66/.

Another qualification of Binge Drinking is carried out by the number of such drinking episodes: Frequent binge drinkers are defined as those students who had binged three or more times in the past two weeks (or more than once a week on average), and occasional binge drinkers are those students who binged one or two times in the same period /ibid/.

The entitlement to such a concept is derived from the empirical founded results that occasional binge drinkers and frequent binge drinkers were more likely to experience

alcohol-related problems than those who drank alcohol but did not binge /cf. Wechsler 2000b, loc. Cit., S. 73/.

The objections to this kind of the definition primarily concern the establishment of a problem at a pre-ascertained quantity of alcohol, which does not necessarily describe the effects of drinking adequately.

It is criticized that the aspects of the socio-cultural background of drinking are not taken into consideration, for example: the time in which the respective alcohol quantity is consumed /cf. Hanson 1996/. In connection with this, it is also pointed out in the American culture, that a social get-together containing a duration period of five and more hours is highly usual. According to a research study, such "bingers" might very well have no measurable blood alcohol content (BAC), because the typical college social event lasts about six or seven hours /cf. The New York Times 1999/.

If the quantity of five drinks is distributed over the course of an evening, then approximately one drink is consumed per hour - creating a quantity; no conditional alcohol effects arise for the drinker.

Studies in which the drinking was quantified via the blood alcohol level relatively show how the problem of Binge Drinking can be represented among American college students.

The majority of the students in this study, which of whom completed the quantity of alcohol are defined as binge drinkers, had such a moderate blood alcohol level that under no circumstances could be classified as an alcohol intoxication /cf. Thombs 2003/.

In this concept did not however, consider the influence of the social setting of drinking; that models the fundamental behaviour of the drinker. Studies show a setting where friends are eating and drinking together having no alcohol-related problems in 90 % of all cases – a considerable reduction which refers to the meaning of the socio-cultural frame and its connection with drinking /cf. Clapp et al. 2000/.

With this background, the present, most-used definition of Binge Drinking is criticized as counter-productive and obliged to a prohibitive pattern of thought /cf. Hanson 2003, loc. Cit./. In this sense, it is rejected as substance-fixated.

### **The emotional connotations of Binge Drinking**

Criticism takes reference to the emotional connotations in which the concept 'Binge Drinking' is formulated.

As a concept, Binge Drinking has its origin in the medical and therapeutically areas. In that case, bingeing refers to a period of extended intoxication lasting at least two days during the time in which the drinker neglects usual life responsibilities. Binge drinking, with that stated, is connected with drunkenness and with the symptoms of alcohol addiction or heavy alcohol-related problems /cf. Hanson 2002/.

Suggesting that 44 % of college students are intoxicated for days on end is useful - only if the intent is to inflate the extent of the problem and mislead the public. But the real rate of Binge Drinking on US college and university campuses is not 44 %, as it often claims, instead it appears to be less than one-half of one percent /ibid/!

In the most common strategies of research about drinking among youths, the original definition of Binge Drinking was given up and with that, the orientation of extended drunkenness /cf. Wechsler 2000b, loc. Cit. S. 64/. In this definition, the concept Binge Drinking expresses itself as a type of drinking-style that leads to serious problems. In this sense, more it is risky drinking /ibid/.

The critics object that the using of Binge Drinking as a catchword in the current studies is misleading. It is criticize that the term of Binge drinking is connected with a emotional overloading, support a dramatizing and problemazing of youthfully drinking and that those who insist on misusing the term "binge" are actually doing more harm than good /cf. Dolgonos, Heineman 2001, loc. Cit./.

Also there is the question how useful such an unrealistic definition is. The objects are that it is very useful if the intent is to inflate the extent of a social problem. But it is not very useful if the intent is to describe accurately reality to the average person. There is the reproach that this definition is highly unrealistic and inappropriate and that it applies a prohibitionist definition to describe the drinking in the United States today /cf. Hanson 2003 loc. Cit./.

Therefore indeed leading alcohol researchers have demanded to come back to the origin ideas of the term Binge drinking and not use any more the idea of the Binge Drinking for riskily drinking. The proposals are there should at least require that a person have a certain minimum level of alcohol in the bloodstream as a prerequisite to be considered a binger or perhaps there could even require that a person be intoxicated before being labelled a "binger" or perhaps there should define Binge Drinking as any intoxicated drinking that leads to certain harmful or destructive behaviours /cf. IATF Proclamation 2000/.

### **Binge Drinking a Self-fulfilling prophecy?**

The criticism of the popular strategies referred at the same time to the negative effects for the youthful Binge Drinking, that a dramatizing representation of the drinking among youth groups in media, in political statements as well as in prevention could have.

Most important is the fact that such gross exaggeration contributes to the problem of alcohol abuse. There is send a reminder that a permanent public discussion about riskily drinking popularised that style of drinking while there is no a presentation and communication of alternative acceptable models of drinking. The concentration on dysfunctional drinking patterns could promote the idea that drinking strongly is part of the standards in the social reference group. That call in heavy drinking among students, because people tend to conform to expectations. In that way such a negative approach tends to create a self-fulfilling prophesy - it tends to bring about the very behaviours that it seeks to prevent.

With this background there is the reproach to the present opinion leading representatives of studies with focus on drinking problematically and the overvaluation of the distribution of Binge Drinking among students according to a self-fulfilling- prophecy to give directly kick-offs for further problematic development /cf. Heath Cit. in Hanson 2003c/.

In a similar direction argue objections count of the theory on Reactance. These send a reminder to follow the train of thought, that the traceable behaviour styles particularly of youths in many other areas too is, preferable to act to the pattern of the "forbidden fruits" and the opposing behaviour. Finally people act exactly in that way how it is advised to them not to act this. From this point of view the problemizing of the Binge Drinking among students by representatives of the adult society could sent out unwanted impulses, these more promote than stop a problematic development /cf. Engs, Hanson loc. Cit./.

### **Methods of evaluation**

The discussions about positive and negative effects of the matter of perception, problemizing and the practical action strategies derived the attention at the kind of the evaluation of approaches which want to reduce problematic forms of the alcohol consumption among students.

For the majority of strategies to prevent Binge Drinking the starting point for the argumentation are the alcohol-related problems for the social environment. With reference to it reproaches to a prohibitive focusing on the quantity of the alcohol consumption are strictly shown back. Instead of this it is argued that the concrete way of the alcohol consumption shall be provided under the responsibility of the single one as long as the social environment isn't concerned of it. It is surprising that the scientific company and evaluation of the programs many times leave this alone sedate starting point. Instead into the centre of interest moves the development of the different standards of drinking as fixed on the consumed quantities and the number of drinking opportunities /cf. Wechsler 2000b, loc. Cit./.

A detailed turning to the connections between the development of the Drinking, in its quality the result of complexes interactions and the alcohol-relevant problems arising from it is hardly to find /ibid/. It astonished that this part of the evaluation is both methodically and in the representation of the results rather scantily carried out. That is especially surprising because there are multiply indications from other studies that the drinking quantity doesn't produce automatic and logical problematic behaviour and with that alcohol-related problems for the social environment. The interdependences between alcohol quantity, Setting and the expectations bound to the inebriated behaviour rather stamp how the inebriated person behaves finally /cf. Clapp et al.2000/.

These contradictions and gaps in the evaluation of efforts for the reduction the Binge Drinking then get particularly problematic, if to the previous strategies the Environmental Approach is transforming alternatively with new approaches and if the experiences connected with that process check and at the end conclusions rashly derived for the practice.

Exemplarily for that are the discussion between researchers and practitioners about the effectiveness of the current programs for the reduction of alcohol problems. While researcher scientifically accompanied the putting into action of the so-called "Multifaceted Social Norms Approach to Reduce High-Risk Drinking" rather come to the end that these marketing techniques hardly influence alcohol abuse /cf. Wechsler 2003/, these objections are rejected sharply by researchers who are involved in the putting into action.

With respect to that they are expelling faults on the methods of the evaluation and putting questions at the correct transformation of the approach. However, it is interesting that all those, who are involved in this dispute rather argue with epidemiological quota of drinking quantities and numbers of drinking opportunities among students /cf. Perkins 2003/. Also in these expositions a discussion about the development of the alcohol-relevant problems on campus and for the environmental is carried out rather secondarily.

In summary it gets clear that the very contradictory details on the kind and on the extent of the developments initiated with the prevention programs to Binge Drinking allow hardly a judgment on its effectiveness and productivity.

Inestimable is that both - the epidemiological researches and the practical efforts to reduce riskily drinking and alcohol-related problems increase the public interesting and the sensibility for this topic. And it has increased the perception of dimension of problems with are connected with the alcohol consumption.

In the face of a number of unintentional side-effects, many of them connected particularly with a dramatizing and scandalisizing, it has to be remain open, how far it is able to derive positive effects.

## **8 The concept of Binge Drinking and conclusions for its settle down in Germany**

It gets clear that for the discussion about the American concept of the Binge Drinking not alone has to be taken into account the very different socio-cultural background of handling with alcohol in comparison with Germany. The American alcohol culture doesn't have only other historical origins and traditions which are historical and stamped by the alcohol Prohibition. Traces of prohibitive ideas can still be funded today. /cf. Hanson 2003 b/. They are marking the system of value, standards and attitudes which are around the regulation of the alcohol consumption. With a German view they get impressive visible how the legislature and executive is established.

The alcohol consumption is embedded in a generally more strongly Puritan way of living, that gets clear among others also in the social way to go round with sexuality, body cult and pleasure. That is why in the USA there is a special socio-cultural background which is very different from Germany.

In this light arise not only questions in respect of the necessity and usefulness of a transformation of the approaches to Germany but also regarding the social acceptance and feasibility in the German culture. This questions show the limits for a transferability very fast. Nevertheless the discussions of single facets of the prevention of a risky drinking in the USA then prove to be productive, if the approach to this is cautiously and critically. In this respect it is necessary to follow the discussions at this and at the other side of the Atlantic attentively. It seems necessary not only to look at single particular large-scale projects and companying researches but to profit as much as possible from experiences that are gained with very different approaches. Last but not least it is important to note the critical objections for which always it is difficult to assert themselves against the opinion leaders - as in the USA as in other countries too.



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