

# Managing and balancing individual's alcohol consumption in the short and long run - narratives from students' lived experiences

Marketing  
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Nina Näsi  
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## **MANAGING AND BALANCING INDIVIDUAL'S ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION IN THE SHORT AND LONG RUN – NARRATIVES FROM STUDENTS' LIVED EXPERIENCES**

### **Objectives**

The main objective of the study is to illustrate how consumers manage and balance their alcohol consumption in the short and long run and what kind of strategies they employ to do so. The context of this research is particularly university students' alcohol consumption. The aim is to portray how consumers (students) perceive their drinking also in the long run and how drinking is structured: what are the forces fueling but then again obstructing drinking. This research also explores how drinking contributes to students' identity. The study falls into the consumer culture theory (CCT) research.

### **Methodology**

The research is interpretative and qualitative in nature. Six Finnish university students or recently graduated were interviewed and the interview transcriptions formed the empirical data of the study. Interviews, analysis and interpretation followed the existential-phenomenological research approach and method.

### **Key findings**

The key findings of the study include discovering and describing the strategies consumers employ to manage their drinking and keep control during a specific drinking occasion and also how these individual events contribute to the management of drinking in the long run. Drinking is also noted to be a highly social phenomenon whose effects also extend beyond the frames of just a certain occasion.

**Keywords:** Consumer culture, alcohol consumption, drinking, narratives, consumer research, existential-phenomenology

## **MANAGING AND BALANCING INDIVIDUAL'S ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION IN THE SHORT AND LONG RUN – NARRATIVES FROM STUDENTS' LIVED EXPERIENCES**

### **Tutkimuksen tavoitteet**

Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on kuvata kuinka kuluttajat hallitsevat ja tasapainottavat juomistaan lyhyellä ja pitkällä aikavälillä ja millaisia strategioita he käyttävät tehdäkseen niin. Tutkimuksen kontekstina on yliopisto-opiskelijoiden alkoholinkäyttö. Tavoitteena on myös esittää kuinka kuluttajat (opiskelijat) hahmottavat juomistaan ja kuinka juominen on strukturoitu: mitkä tekijät liukastavat ja mitkä jarruttavat juomista. Tutkimus myös perehtyy siihen miten juominen vaikuttaa opiskelijan identiteettiin. Tutkimus kuuluu kulutuskulttuurin teorian (CCT) tutkimuksen alle.

### **Metodologia**

Tutkimus on interpretatiivinen ja kvalitatiivinen. Tutkimuksen empiirisen datan muodostivat kuuden suomalaisen yliopisto-opiskelijan tai vastavalmistuneen haastattelut ja niiden puhtaaksikirjoitukset. Haastattelut, analyysi ja tulkinta noudattivat eksistentiaalis-fenomenologista menettelytapaa ja metodia.

### **Tutkimuksen tulokset**

Tutkimuksen tuloksiin kuuluvat kuluttajien juomisen hallintaa ja kontrollin pysymistä varten käyttämien strategioiden löytäminen tietyn juomistapahtuman aikana sekä myös se, miten nämä yksittäiset tapahtumat vaikuttavat ja osallistuvat juomisen hallintaan pitkällä aikavälillä. Juomisen on myös todettu olevan erittäin sosiaalinen ilmiö, jonka vaikutukset myös ulottuvat yhden tietyn juomistapahtuman ulkopuolelle.

**Avainsanat:** Kulutuskulttuuri, alkoholinkäyttö, juominen, tarinankerronta, kuluttajatutkimus, eksistentiaalis-fenomenologia

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# 1 Introduction

*There can be nothing more frequent than an occasional drink.*

-Oscar Wilde

An evening get-together with friends, a family dinner, birthday parties, New Year's celebrations, extempore picnics, and so on – the opportunities for alcohol consumption occasions are almost endless. After one comes of age, alcohol may be a part of basically any aspect of life: joy, sorrow, amusement, stress, celebration, and everyday life. Alcohol consumption and drinking are topics that resonate and divide people; therefore, they are always burning and timely issues. Alcohol has been present in our lives from the ancient times but still it provokes conversation among both ordinary citizens and policy makers alike. Drinking as an occurrence is complex and the influences of a certain occasion reach much further than just around the drinking itself. Hence, understanding the long-term nature of drinking and the structures and agents fueling but then again obstructing it is interesting and fascinating. This thesis studies those very factors and portrays how drinking is a far wider concept than just one night or occasion.

Recent alcohol consumption literature has been quite wide-ranging: from studies exploring one specific occasion and its rituals (Thurnell-Read, 2011) to studies dividing people into different categories or drinking cultures – like non-drinkers, social drinkers or binge drinkers – according to their general drinking behavior and cumulative drinking (Shim & Maggs, 2005). Binge drinking has been under inspection (Measham & Østergaard, 2009) and especially the boisterous and reckless drinking habits of the youth, young adults and college students (Hackley, 2012; Piacentini & Banister, 2006). Finnish literature has mostly studied Finnish drinking culture and the (changing) drinking habits (Tigerstedt & Törrönen, 2007) and Finns' views on alcohol (Hirschovits-Gerz et al., 2011). In summary, previous literature has discussed two extremes: a single alcohol consumption experience or how the long-term drinking defines consumers' identities. What is indeed missing is the relationship between those two. The study at hand explores and explains specifically that relationship.

Thus, most previous literature focuses on how individuals are perceived as and categorized in different types of drinkers or on drinking as one individual drinking occasion. This research contributes to previous literature by discussing and studying drinking as a social process. Drinking is viewed as a long-term process which occurrence depends on several structures: social aspects, control of self and others and the collision of these two elements. Insights to this multifaceted phenomenon are provided in terms of the sociality of drinking and independence of an individual. This research extends the view of alcohol consumption and provides interesting new directions for future research.

This research project takes a qualitative and interpretive stance to the subject to get an in-depth concept of the topic. Phenomenological interviews are conducted to collect the qualitative data. The interviewees are young adults and students who are assumed to provide a vivid and lively discussion on alcohol consumption, their experiences and views on how they perceive those experiences. Then the data is closely examined and coded into emergent categories. The analysis and interpretation are done somewhat simultaneously, as it usually occurs in qualitative research. The interpretation of the data is based on the views and experiences of the author, so the findings and discussion are both a portrait of the lived experiences and views of the interviewees and the constructions of the author.

## **1.1 Research objectives and research questions**

This study aims at explaining and portraying the structures of students' alcohol consumption, i.e. drinking. In the study individual drinking is regarded as a long-term phenomenon that does not limit only to the moment when the bottles are open or around one specific occasion, and therefore the research question is:

*What kind of strategies do consumers employ to manage and balance their alcohol consumption in the short and long run?*

The study explains the management and balancing of alcohol consumption in the short and long run. Consumers' strategies are also illustrated and explained through consumer narratives and existential-phenomenological analysis. The study concentrates particularly on Finnish students and young adults and their experiences. This study comes under the consumer culture theory (CCT) that has been comprehensively reviewed for example by Arnould & Thompson (2005). In CCT phenomena are conceptualized i.e. studied in different consumption contexts to create new constructs and to adjust or extend the existing theory. Following the fundamentals of CCT, the research at hand studies how everyday experiences of drinking, its cultural meanings and social dynamics shape the consumer's identity in the alcohol consumption context. Hence, the following two sub-questions are also examined in order to illustrate the phenomenon:

1. How is alcohol consumption structured and made inevitable by Finnish students' consumption narratives?
2. How does drinking contribute to students' identity?

## **1.2 Research structure**

This study contains two larger sections: the theoretical and the empirical part. First, previous relevant literature and studies are presented and reviewed in chapter two. In that chapter the theoretical framework of the study is structured and the phenomenon of alcohol consumption and the history of alcoholic beverages are shortly introduced. First, drinking is considered as a cultural issue and marketing phenomenon, then it is portrayed as a social issue. The last section of the theoretical part describes how the research at hand discusses with the previous literature. The empirical part of the study will present the methodology (chapter three), the findings (chapter four), and the discussion (chapter five) of this research. Finally, chapter six presents the conclusion of the study. At the end of the research the literature is presented. The appendix attached presents the suggestive question outline and the themes of the existential-phenomenological interviews.

## **2 Literature review**

In this section the theoretical framework of the study is presented. First, the issue and previous literature of drinking as a cultural issue and marketing phenomenon are covered. Second, drinking is considered as a social issue. Third, the conclusion will sum up the literature and argue how the study at hand contributes to the previous discussion.

### **2.1 Alcohol consumption as a cultural issue and a marketing research phenomenon**

This section provides insights to alcohol consumption from a cultural and marketing research perspective. The first chapter presents a short overview of the history of alcohol. Then alcohol consumption is considered as a cultural issue and the ritualistic nature of drinking is contemplated. Finally, the third chapter presents how drinking is considered as a marketing phenomenon.

#### **2.1.1 History of alcohol**

Dietler (2006) offers a comprehensive overview on the history of alcohol. The roots of alcoholic beverages lead us to the Neolithic Era. Dated back to the early seventh millennium BCE, evidence of producing alcoholic beverages by fermenting rice and fruits has been found from China. In the Middle East alcohol production started in the early sixth millennium BCE. By the third millennium BCE wine and beer were commonly produced and traded in Mesopotamia, Assyria, Anatolia and Egypt. Costly wine was considered a beverage of the elite, whereas the lower classes drank beer. In Egypt wine had also important religious meanings. In South America the Incas' maize-based beverage served as an element of feasting and state politics from the third

century BCE. In Europe Roman wine trade expanded in the last centuries BCE and by the second and first centuries BCE the Mediterranean wine trade had become very significant. It has been estimated that over a period of a century 55-65 million amphorae of wine were imported from Rome to France. Distilling alcohol was invented later on and its origins still remain a bit obscure. In Europe distilled alcohol was first produced by apothecaries and monasteries for medical reasons. By the seventeenth century their production was, however, widespread to merchants and commercial distillers, and therefore the recreational consumption of spirits also began.

The short introduction to the history of alcohol illustrates how alcohol had a significant economic, political, social and cultural role already in ancient societies. In contemporary times new drinks are developed and products are constantly improved, but still the same roles exist. Of all the intoxicants known, alcohol has been used by far the longest and widest (Heath, 1987). Alcohol consumption is a multifaceted phenomenon; people drink alcohol to fuel social interaction or to accompany a delicious meal, alcohol adds excitement and adventure to life and can offer an escape from stress and everyday routines, and yet it is also a possible vehicle of devastation or total chaos. Alcohol is quite often considered a risky intoxicant and its harmful effects are a concern of both policy makers and researchers. Alcohol is associated with many diseases and heavy drinking (total abstinence too) is associated with higher mortality rates than moderate drinking (Marmot et al. 1981). Until quite recently alcoholic beverages were, however, one thing we could actually be thankful for our survival. Before the availability of pure and clean water, wine and beer were important sources of hydration for people. In the Middle Ages wine was actually called *aqua vitae* or “the water of life” because it offered people hydration that was uncontaminated (Vallee, 1998).

### **2.1.2 Alcohol and culture**

Alcohol is a cultural artifact (Mandelbaum, 1965) that can emphasize modesty, intimacy, pleasure, joy or sociality (Kolbe, 2006). Mäkelä et al. (2009) define alcohol culture as an umbrella term gathering together the customs and practices of alcohol consumption of a certain

community, including, for example, attitudes, motives and drinking practices. Culture is said to define the appropriate level of drunkenness. Martinic and Measham (2008, p. 4) note that drunkenness is a combination of intoxication and cultural customs and expectancies about alcohol-related behavior. As Dietler (2006) notes, in addition to culture, alcohol also has a curiously close relation to the person and to the symbolization of concepts of identity and difference in the construction of the self.

Alcohol is also strongly related to rituals. Alcohol is said to act as a sign of ritual and it has an intensified valuation in ritual contexts. Because of the ritualized meaning of alcohol, its consumption also encloses many cultural rules and beliefs that are more emotionally charged than with other foods and drinks (Dietler, 2006). Treise et al. (1999) consider drinking of college students as ritual behavior. They argue that drinking offers security, fellowship and excitement and therefore it is ritualized in order to protect students from the obscurity, confusion and turbulent change of the student life. The authors also note that the students' ritualized drinking is a worrying issue because of the health hazards of binge drinking. It is also noted that: "Drinking requires an artifact (the alcohol itself), a script (rules about who can and cannot drink legally, when and where the drinking will occur, agreements about transportation to and from the places where drinking occurs), a performance role (how to drink, how many drinks to consume, how to behave while drinking), and an audience (peers, bartenders, campus personnel)" (Treise et al., 1999).

In their research Room and Mäkelä (2000) separate different typologies of the cultural position of drinking. They distinguish four ideal types of cultural positions that drinking has: abstinent societies, constrained ritual drinking, banalized drinking and communal fiesta drunkenness. In abstinent societies drinking is forbidden based on religion or legislation. Some Islamic societies are said to come under this category. Constrained ritual drinking is connected to Orthodox Jewish communities where the amount of alcohol drunk is quite small based on the constrained ritual pattern. Southern European wine cultures are instead categorized in banalized drinking. In these cultures drinking is a part of daily life and some alcohols, for example wine, are regarded more as food or thirst-quencher than an actual intoxicant. The last category of ideal types is communal fiesta drunkenness, for example the carnivals of Rio de Janeiro. In the past, fiestas may have been

the only occasions of drinking but in contemporary times it also occurs on top of other more regular drinking patterns.

However, Room and Mäkelä (2000) also suggest another more profound method of creating typologies of drinking cultures: the dimensional approach. According to this approach the position of a drinking culture can be measured by comparing the regularity of drinking and the extent of intoxication in that specific culture. The authors also propose additional dimensions that can be considered, for example the use values of alcohol, the behavior when intoxicated and the modes of social control of drinking. They also suggest that this kind of dimensional typology would be more fruitful than the ideal type typology, especially if also additional dimension(s) are considered too.

As previous typologies, also other literature often divides people into different categories according to their general drinking habits. Binge drinking is one drinking culture that has been under serious research. There are many ways to define binge drinking and the guidelines, describing what drinking is moderate and what is not, vary from one country to another i.e. there is no clear definition for binge drinking (Oei Tian & Morawska, 2004). Typically having four/five or more drinks by women/men per single occasion is qualified as binge drinking (Shim & Maggs, 2005). In Finland risk limits of binge drinking are five alcohol portions for women and seven for men per occasion and 16/24 (respectively) portions per week (Sillanaukee et al., 1992). Above these guideline levels of drinking, alcohol-originated diseases begin to increase considerably. Binge drinking can also be seen as a relative matter, where peers and drinking company limit and benchmark the amount regarded as binge drinking (MacNeela & Bredin, 2010). Purposive binge drinking can also be seen as an enjoyable action whose capability to increase self-confidence and sociability, loosen inhibitions and pursue personal freedom makes it justified (Hackley et al. 2012).

Martinic and Measham (2008, pp. 8-9) argue for a broader umbrella term of “extreme drinking” that draws most on cultural definitions and not on quantities, frequency or intoxication levels i.e. extreme drinking is not an absolute state or definition but defined by the context, culture and culture’s perceptions on drinking. The definition of extreme drinking includes intoxication,

intentional and controlled loss of control, enjoyment of the process, attention to the outcomes (positive and negative), and maturity or experience with alcohol that keeps the individual in control of his or her drinking. The authors note that extreme drinking usually is not accidental but a planned occasion with desired outcomes. Extreme drinking is said to occur in public places and in groups and the occasions of extreme drinking are perceived as a successful drinking experience. Binge drinking is also reframed by Szmigin et al. (2008) who introduce a concept of calculated hedonism that can be shortly described as balancing between the funs that drinking offers and the risks it delivers at the same time. Binge drinking is not just excessive drinking but also a calculated choice of pleasure containing possible dangers or opportunities for memorable episodes.

Kubacki et al. (2011) state that binge drinking is not a single one-sided phenomenon and they divide binge drinking into three types: initiation, indulgence and moderation. Initiation usually occurs already in high school when people begin to consume alcohol. Drinking might be just experimental and very mild but also binge drinking occurs, for example when a high school student drinks a bottle of wine when he or she has the chance to taste the forbidden fruit. Indulgence drinking takes place usually at university where students go out together in larger groups several times per week having the intention to get drunk and therefore drink anything that could get them there. After some boozy years at university people tend to move into moderation binge drinking and drink less frequently and smaller portions. Therefore binge drinking should not be viewed as one concept but be considered multifaceted, involving different behaviors and attitudes. This complexity can also be attached to drinking as a whole – alcohol consumption is not a simple phenomenon.

Drinking cultures vary across countries. For example Southern European countries are known for their drinking culture that involves alcohol often in everyday situations. Beccaria and Sande's (2003) study showed that in Italy young people drink for the purpose of intoxication but not for control-loss. Instead, in Norway young people drink aiming to get publicly drunk and this could be well applied to Finland too. Finnish alcohol culture has usually been characterized by purposeful binge drinking, especially when applied to men (Rämö, 2007). Recent studies have, however, indicated that Finnish women have adopted this habit of heavy drinking too (Mäkelä et

al., 2009). Finns' drinking habits have become boozier since the more composed times in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. During the past four decades the alcohol consumption in Finland has tripled, and consequently during the 21<sup>st</sup> century the total yearly consumption of alcohol converted to 100 percent alcohol was a bit over 10 liters per Finn (Karlsson & Österberg, 2010, pp. 14-15).

In Finnish alcohol culture drinking traditionally occurs on holiday seasons and national holidays (Mustonen et al., 2010, pp. 56-57), such New Year's Eve, May Day (Vappu), Midsummer (Juhannus) and, somewhat surprisingly, Christmas. Christmas is commonly perceived as a traditional family holiday and not a boozy or boisterous one. Nevertheless, at Christmas we can discover the highest spike in Alko's (the national alcoholic beverage retailing monopoly) sales, namely then the sales grow by about 3,4 million euros, which is almost double when compared to the comparison period (STT, 19.6.2013). In addition to holidays, Finnish culture also connects drinking to weekends, since four out of five intoxication occasions take place during weekends (Mustonen et al., 2010, p. 58). In other words, Finns drink to interrupt the weekday routines or to celebrate.

A moral lifestyle choice, the benefits of sobriety, health reasons and the worry of losing control are common examples of the reasons for Finns' abstinence. Men, older people and former heavy drinkers use control loss reasons to explain their sobriety more than other abstainers (Mustonen, 2010, pp. 179-182). The heavy consumption of alcohol always has its risks: alcohol dependence, health issues, social problems and so on. Hirschovits-Gerz et al. (2011) point out that there is a contradiction between Finns' self-change optimism and general worry about alcohol problems. At the same time Finns are somewhat optimistic of getting rid of the alcohol addiction on their own but also commonly worried about alcohol problems. Finns are said to be equally concerned about the risks of alcohol dependence as people in comparison countries (Canada, Russia, and Sweden) and place alcohol problems higher among other societal problems when compared to the other countries. The authors note that this cultural contradiction between self-recovery and general worry can be seen to contribute to the binge drinking tradition in Finland.

### **2.1.3 Alcohol consumption as a marketing research phenomenon**

Alcohol consumption is a multidisciplinary phenomenon: it has been studied for example in medicine, biology, public health, social psychology and anthropology. It is also a marketing issue and especially interesting from the perspective of consumer culture, consumer behavior, and advertising. Because of the subject, it is hard to draw differences between 'regular' alcohol studies and consumer research that focuses on alcohol. In the consumer research we are, however, interested in the perception of alcohol in the consumer culture context where alcohol is present.

Many marketing and consumer researchers have studied the differences between non-drinkers and drinkers (for example Kropp et al., 1999) and especially the difference between non-drinkers and binge drinkers (for example Shim & Maggs, 2005). Binge consumption of alcohol has been intensively noted both by researchers and policy makers. Especially binge drinking of the youth and students has been under scope. Researchers have been studying how to reduce or prevent binge drinking (Cismaru et al., 2008; Wechsler et al., 1994) and the negative consequences of binge drinking (Wolburg, 2001; Wechsler et al., 1995). Research shows that 44% of American college students are binge drinkers, including the 19% of frequent binge drinkers who are said to be more likely to experience serious health and other consequences of their drinking behavior than other students (Wechsler et al., 1994).

As alcohol consumption is in many contexts considered to be a harmful and even life-threatening habit, marketing and consumer research, as policy makers alike, has also been very interested in the influences of marketing and control laws on alcohol consumption. Barlow and Wogalter's study (1993) showed evidence that advertisements, presented in the right way, i.e. being salient enough, can communicate safety and health information about alcohol to consumers. Ornstein and Hanssens (1985) instead concluded that the greatest impact on distilled spirits consumption can be achieved by control laws that affect the price of alcohol, whereas beer consumption is related to laws concerning minimum legal age and Sunday sales. Darian (1993) also studied how marketing strategies can be used to influence the decision-making process and to reduce the alcohol consumption of different types of college students.

## **2.2 Alcohol consumption as a social issue**

Many studies emphasize the social nature of drinking and social occasions where drinking occurs. Drinking is considered more a social act than a solitary one (Mandelbaum, 1965). This section presents the relevant literature concerning the social aspect of alcohol consumption. First, I will present how drinking is considered to promote social affairs. Second, the concept of peer pressure and its relation to drinking is presented. Lastly, I will present how the relationship between sociality and drinking has been researched in the context of students and student life.

### **2.2.1 Socializing and drinking**

Livingstone et al. (2011) note that drinking is a social process that involves social identities and norms, and hence it is not just an individual lifestyle or health choice. The motives for drinking are a topic that interests both researchers and marketers alike. It has been argued that drinking motives include, for example socializing, impressing peers and coping with stress (Siemieniako & Kubacki, 2013). Treise et al. (1999) instead argue that students' drinking motives include security, intimacy and the adventure it offers, whereas Orford et al. (2004) concluded that social life, fun and humor, and self-confidence are the benefits of drinking. Griffin et al. (2009) argued that the attraction of (extreme) drinking is specifically the cohesiveness, intimacy and care that people's social groups provide. In this process the relationship of drinking and the entertainment it provides is an essential factor. Shim and Maggs (2005) found similar results as they conclude that social-affiliation values may motivate to binge drinking more than self-actualizing values.

MacNeela and Bredin (2010) emphasize the social nature of drinking by suggesting that alcohol allows a temporary satisfaction of the need for competence in managing social situations. Drinking is a crucial part of youths' fun since it is said to boost sociality by raising feelings up and creating solidarity among people (Maunu & Simonen, 2010, p. 88). Maunu and Simonen (2010) note that in addition to affecting current relationships, drinking occasions offer a possibility for creating totally new relationships too and alcohol is actually defined as a social

lubricant. Drinking occasions are also characterized as even and genuine interaction occasions without strained feelings or comparing.

Heavy alcohol drinking and the disorder it causes can also be celebrated as a part of embodiment of masculinity. Peralta (2007) discovered that binge drinking and stories of boozy benders among Euro-American college students is a way for male students to construct their masculinity. By tolerating heavy consumption of alcohol and being in control in spite of great quantities of spirits, one can prove to be physically and socially masculine. Thurnell-Read (2011) instead states that the British premarital stag tourism to Eastern Europe, embodied in nudity, public urination, vomiting and the damaging physical effects caused by binge drinking, is specifically concentrated on celebrating the lack of control and the release from responsibility and normative pressures.

### **2.2.2 Peer pressure**

Peer pressure is a widely studied topic in alcohol consumption literature and it is in the interest field of policy makers and marketers too. Mandelbaum (1965) noted that drinking occurs usually in a group consisting of age mates and social peers. Especially with younger people peer pressure can be considered a heavy factor influencing their decisions (Elliot & Leonard, 2004) and affecting, for example, their alcohol consumption. Symbolic goods and peer pressure are said to have a strong relation (Brittain, 1963). As alcohol can be seen to represent and symbolize adulthood, also adolescences can be exposed to pressure from their social peers what is comes to alcohol consumption.

Orford et al. (2004) argue that heavy drinking is said to occur with heavier drinking social networks and thus heavy drinkers are exposed to more encouragement to drink from important people in their lives. They also conclude that in the maintenance of heavy student drinking, peer pressure and increased self-confidence are the main social factors influencing decisions. Pavis et al. (1997) reached similar results in their study: especially young women were said to drink in order to improve their social confidence. At the same time, however, they found out that peers

may also restrict drinking because people do not want to make fools of themselves in front of their peers. Thus, the connection between drinking behavior and peer pressure is a complex matter.

As drinking is considered a highly social activity the importance of peers and pressure also affects the efficiency of anti-drinking advertising. Veer & Kilian's study (2011) implicated that in social marketing campaigns emphasizing social pressure advertisements can discourage binge drinking. This, however, is said to call for great self-esteem and empowerment to regulate one's own behavior. In consequence, individuals that have lower self-esteem are less likely to assimilate the messages of such advertising.

### **2.2.3 Students and the sociality of drinking**

The connection between student life and alcohol has been studied a lot especially in the US and the UK. Darian (1993) concluded that in college drinking is considered mainly a social activity. Student life can be characterized by excessive drinking and alcohol plays a big role in many students' social leisure activities starting from the orientation of the new freshmen. Banister and Piacentini (2008) conclude that there are two separate "identities" in students' lives: the academic life and the social life. Academic life is characterized as serious and structured whilst social life is hedonistic and unstructured. Piacentini and Banister (2006) found out that many students perceive heavy drinking as a norm and a part of student life. Alcohol could be viewed as a part of students' identity since it has such a big role in student life. However, Piacentini and Banister's (2006) research also concludes that there is a large group of students who are not comfortable with this boozy image of student life and do not want to be associated with this stereotype. This creates a collision between social norms and pressure and independent will.

Interpersonal processes i.e. peer influence are said to influence the drinking behavior of college students too by direct influences, modeling, and perceived norms (Borsari & Carey, 2001). Rabow and Duncan-Schill (1995) note that if a college student refuses to drink at a party, his or her behavior is commented on. Refusal to drink causes feelings of being insufficient or out of

place, since the norm in college is to take part in parties and to drink. Refusing offers to drink may in the worst case lead to exclusion from social events. The need to succeed not only academically but also socially and the pressure to fit in are seen as associated with student life and drinking.

Students are also said to be affected by the common beliefs and assumptions that people have of their alcohol consumption and these beliefs are also said to excuse such behavior or even encourage the consumption of alcohol (Piacentini and Banister, 2006). The relationship between students' drinking and their environment i.e. the norms and culture is emphasized in Rabow and Duncan-Schill's (1995) research. They conclude that behaviors perceived as acceptable and unacceptable are socially defined. Those behaviors are then implemented through the interaction with other students. Banister and Piacentini (2008) view student life as an extended phase of liminality that permits drinking and behaving in a way that would normally be considered intolerable. They note that the concept of "disordered order" portrays this stage well since students actually talk about appropriate and inappropriate occasions to drink but also have a clear vision of when they will stop their (excessive style of) drinking.

## 2.3 Conclusion

Drinking has been studied as a cultural and social issue in many disciplines. In previous research drinking has sometimes been considered and analyzed based on one specific occasion and conclusions have been made according to that certain occurrence. In addition to one specific occasion, research has also studied alcohol consumption in wider contexts. Research has suggested different types of drinking cultures and their typologies but these determinations usually are based on general individual consumption habits. Once one is labeled, for example, as a binge drinker that mark is hard to get rid of. Accordingly, the literature review reveals a research gap in current alcohol consumption literature: it has not considered drinking as a cyclical long-term process. That process consists both of individual alcohol consumption occasions and long-term drinking identities and the cultures that the individuals are involved with. This thesis explains the relationship of one occasion and long-term drinking in particular. Drinking is considered a social occasion that influences relationships in the short and long run.

### 3 Methodology

This section presents the research approach and data collection method. In addition, the individuals interviewed for this study and the data analysis method are described.

#### 3.1 Research approach

*“To understand a text is to follow its movement from sense to reference: from what it says, to what it talks about.”*

(Ricoeur, 1976, pp. 87-88)

The study at hand is qualitative in nature. The aim is not only to explain the experiences and perceptions of people’s drinking but also to live and describe the experiences and the world through the interviewees’ eyes (Pollio et al., 1997). The lived experiences and the phenomenon of drinking are regarded as a long-term, even a lifelong process, and hence the research approach is interpretive or existential-phenomenological to be exact. In interpretive research reality is seen as socially constructed and holistic and people are seen to be proactive beings (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). The interpretive approach emphasizes that the research relationship is interactive and cooperative (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988) and this relationship can be seen both with the dialogic semi-structured interviews and the existential-phenomenological analysis.

Hycner (1985) notes that in phenomenology the researcher is trying to picture human phenomena but not to generalize the findings. This means that the knowledge is the portrayal of one or a few individuals’ experiences and perceptions. The phenomenological approach has been seen to grow steadily in its application within marketing. It is suitable for this particular study since it is usually used in consumer research to illustrate and describe complex issues – how alcohol consumption can be perceived – and it is also a beneficial methodology when interpreting and

theorizing, based on lived experiences (Goulding, 2005). Lived experiences can be comprehended to be everyday encounters and practical activities that individuals face during their lives (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998).

Existential-phenomenology emphasizes the importance of individual's experience and its uniqueness (Thompson et al. 1989). Pollio et al. (1997) present that in existential-phenomenology experience is not considered a static concept, whereas it is rather "a sensibly changing perspectival relatedness to the conditions, possibilities, and constraints of the world" (pp. 28-29). Following this thought, in phenomenology the concept *self* can be viewed as a lifelong project that forms constantly when we live and experience things and make some more or less dramatic choices. The independent choices we make then affect our future experiences and future selves, i.e. our perception of our experiences and the self changes throughout our lives. This means that the consumer's choices of consumption impact on the self. Consumption experiences shape our social and individual self-concept when we adjust our present perceived behavior, motives, and strategies closer to the ideal self. Self-concept can be viewed as "cognitive and affective understanding of who and what we are" (Schouten, 1991) i.e. the perception of oneself. Self-concept can also be understood to have dimensions of actual and ideal self-concept, the latter referring to the image that one would like to be (Sirgy, 1982).

### **3.2 Data collection method**

The basis of this qualitative study is in the in-depth existential-phenomenological interviews (McCracken, 1986; Thompson et al., 1989), which lets the observer view the world and experiences as the interviewee does. In phenomenological studies dialogue is an important object and method of examination (Pollio et al., 1997). The goal is to study concrete human existence and subjective lived experiences including the experience of free choice and action in concrete situations.

To address the objectives of the research, I interviewed six interviewees. The interviews were conducted as single person in-depth long interviews. The interviews were semi-structured,

including some predetermined open-ended questions and topics i.e. a loose structure. The questions and topics are attached as appendixes. The respondents for the interviews were selected among 20-30 -year-old Finnish students. The six interviews resulted in slightly over 400 minutes of recording, which were then transcribed in verbatim. These transcriptions or narratives actually, all 84 pages of them, were then taken under close examination.

## **Interviewees**

The data were collected from six interviews with six different people; four of them females and two of them males. All interviewees were students or recently graduated young adults between the ages of 21 and 25. I picked students and young adults to be the subject of the study since I believed that they would provide vivid and versatile conversation on alcohol consumption. The interviewees were selected among the friends of the author. The decision to interview friends was made in order to make the best of the data available. Alcohol consumption is quite a private and sensitive subject, and as a result some individuals may not be very keen on sharing their drinking experiences with a total stranger. Next the interviewees are shortly presented in order to give the reader an idea who these interviewees are. The names of the interviewees have been changed in order to protect their privacy.

Lauri is a 25-year-old full-time business student from Helsinki, but who also works part-time. He describes himself to be a moderate alcohol consumer whose drinking habits have reduced during the year of the interview. In his free time Lauri does exercising and music. Paula is a 24-year-old 3<sup>rd</sup> year dentistry student from Helsinki. She is a full-time student but she works occasionally at the stables too – where she also spends some of her free time. Paula considers herself a variable drinker, who has more and less boozy phases in her life. Pekka is a 24-year-old business student from Helsinki who studies or works half-time depending on the season. Pekka tells that in his free time he plays computer games

and sometimes goes out with friends. Pekka describes his alcohol consumption to be quite heavy.

Pinja is a 25-year-old business student who works full-time. Work is said to take most of her time at present but in her free time Pinja meets her friends and relaxes at home. She describes her drinking to be context-bound: sometimes less, sometimes more. Saara is a 24-year-old recently graduated physician working at a hospital. In her free time she exercises, goes to the movies and spends time with her friends. Her alcohol consumption is defined as quite moderate. Tuuli is a 21-year-old business student from Helsinki, and she studies or works full-time depending on the season. Her free time she spends engaged in various activities but seeing friends is the most important one. She explains that she likes to think that she drinks less than her average friend.

### **3.3 Data analysis method**

Analyzing can be comprehended as examining the data methodically (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). In this research the data analysis and translating the interviewees' descriptions and stories into etic constructs were a time-consuming process and included many phases. Spiggle (1994) has presented a classification and description of analytic operations that the qualitative data analysis includes: categorization, abstraction, comparison, dimensionalization, integration, iteration, and refutation. I allied all these operations systematically in the analysis and interpretation process.

The analysis process started by reading the transcriptions i.e. emic stories repeatedly to get a comprehensive view on the data. When reading the texts of different interviewees I tried to detect shared themes and connections between the interviews. After some numerous times of only reading, I underlined the text with different colors and used symbols to separate them into thematic categories emerging from the data. This emergent coding process is aimed at finding different themes, factors, feelings, motivations and causalities that explain the phenomenon at

hand. I also made notes during this phase. The interviews were read countless times in order to find causalities, similarities, differences and the meanings of the phenomenon.

I also used excel tables to get a picture of the whole data and to code and classify it. In one table the columns represented different themes or questions under examination while the rows represented interviewees. Another table tried to portray and piece together the process of drinking. This kind of tabulation was really helpful and useful for conceiving the big picture of the interviews. I used different colors of highlighters to categorize data under the themes discovered in the previous phases. Notes and bullets were again made. It is noteworthy that, in consequence of the data analysis method, the knowledge generated from the data is subjective and dependent on the interpreter herself. During the analysis and writing process an external advisor commented and criticized the interpretation of the interviews at numerous points.

## 4 Findings

In this section the findings of the study are presented. Analyzing the six interviews yielded two larger themes: the social patterns that affect drinking in the long and short run and the control or management of drinking. First, the social structures affecting drinking are interpreted, followed by an introduction and analysis of individual control on alcohol consumption. Lastly, the agency-structure tensions are discussed. In this study the experiences and perceptions of the interviewees are discussed as texts, stories, and narratives (Thompson, 1997).

### 4.1 Social structures affecting drinking

*“...consumption is not the end, but a moment where much is created and produced.”*

(Firat & Venkatesh, 1995, p. 251)

The purpose of this section is to offer a more descriptive view of when and how drinking occurs. When considering consumption from a postmodern perspective it can be argued that it is not the end of things but rather the moment where for example meanings and relationships are created and recreated, as Firat and Venkatesh (1995) comment. This can be argued to hold true in alcohol consumption too: it is much more than just drinking or quenching one's thirst. Social relationships, friends and the social structures are linked to drinking very strongly, and relationships are created and recreated when drinking.

*Pinja: If I'm having a really good time, it involves having fun with others. If I'm not having a good time, it means that there is something social involved, for example that I've crossed swords with someone. If there is a disaster related to the arrangements at a party, it doesn't ruin the feeling. Like, it doesn't matter if a table falls apart or we are driven away from a place. Usually these practicalities don't matter at all.*

Pinja's story, cited above, condenses the importance of friends to drinking and the success of a specific occasion. The data analysis shows that sociality and a good group of people belong together with drinking very strongly. All six interviewees consider drinking a very social activity and especially friends are an essential part of a drinking occasion and the success of it. Pekka also summed up the meaning of having fun as: "When you have good company, that is friends, with you, anything you do brings about good vibes and that is what I call having fun." Only two interviewees tell that they may also drink alone. It, however, occurs only occasionally and it happens to relax while watching TV, or to get the evening and party started already at home. As other research has previously discovered social matters are crucial motives for drinking (Orford et al., 2004; Siemieniako & Kubacki, 2013; Treise et al., 1999).

The analysis of the data indicates there are certain social patterns, motivations, situations or impulses that spur people to drink alcohol. These structures can be divided into two subclasses according to their temporality: patterns that affect drinking on a specific occasion and patterns that have an effect in the long run. Next the patterns affecting an occasion are discussed and after that the structures having an impact in the long run are taken under consideration.

#### **4.1.1 One occasion**

My analysis of the interviews shows that there are certain social patterns and factors that have an effect on people's drinking on a specific occasion. Related to this theme, the following concepts emerged from the data: grooming social relationships; good mood versus stress; holidays and drinking; party-aspect and justifiability; and other consumption opportunities during drinking. Next the above-mentioned themes will be presented respectively.

#### 4.1.1.1 Grooming social relationships

As stated, the data analysis suggests that friends and social relationships are extremely important when considering drinking. They are mentioned as the most important things related to drinking by all interviewees.

*Tuuli: Well, for instance last Friday when I went to my high school friend's house-warming party... In the afternoon we went with another high school friend... The party started at six and we thought that we'd leave at six so that we'd be there round half seven. First, we went for a meal and pondered on the house-warming gift and decided to go for a bottle of champagne and some strawberries and other romantic stuff for the new couple.*

...

*Tuuli: Most of the people there [at the party] were my old high school friends and crowd that I hadn't seen in a long time. This friend of mine, with whom I bought the present, had actually come a week before from London where she studies, so I hadn't seen... Well actually I had seen her a couple of times before the party, but there were some friends that I hadn't seen in a long time, and it was nice to talk again after a long time. [They were] very close friends anyway and not like acquaintances. And it went so that we reminisced on 'the good old times' and so there was this basic nostalgic atmosphere. And so the ambience was really warm.*

Drinking with friends can be seen as a way to improve or deepen the relationship with a certain friend or group. The story above indicates that alcohol is used in occasions aimed to nurture social relationships. Individuals keep up their relationships to their friends and group of friends by meeting them more or less regularly and these meetings on occasion include alcohol. These occasions might occur quite seldom, as in Tuuli's narrative, or more frequently. Pinja tells about one group of friends that meets every other week or monthly to drink sparkling wine and catch up. These meetings actually involve catching-up-rounds where all in turn fill everyone in on what is going on in their lives and how everything is going. Pinja says that the meetings could also

occur over coffee but sparkling wine is a better choice for it is nice to be more festive when seeing that group. Catching up over drinks can be seen as grooming of a relationship. Reminiscing the “good old times”, described by Tuuli, can also be seen as a way to nurture the friendship, but it may also indicate that sometimes people need others to remind them of just how much fun they have actually had together and how good friends they actually are.

In the context of Tuuli’s narrative it can also be assumed that drinking is a way to define which people are friends and which are not. In the interviews the importance of good company and good friends is emphasized. Pekka, for example, describes good company to drink with as: ”Those friends with whom one can... Like talk about anything, joke about anything and like take it easy without any special presumptions about anything.” This indicates that not everyone is accepted and acknowledged to be one’s drinking company – and not to be a friend either. Based on this we can presume that drinking can be also a way to express that these particular people belong to one’s inside circle and are special. In the context of the data, it can also be suggested that a relationship where individuals have not drunk together is considered a shallower one and that drinking actually defines who your true friends are.

In this context it is also interesting to consider if drinking can also help to make friends. If a group of strangers drink together, can drinking make them become friends?

*Paula: There [at festivals] I use alcohol very much just to lower my inhibitions. So that I can like look for a nice looking crowd, I’ve done it several times actually... So I just go there - it always follows the same pattern - I just go and say: “Hi, who are you? Are you having fun?”, and then I stay there to have a talk. I’ve actually made friends, like some friends have actually remained from similar occasions.*

As Paula’s story indicates drinking or drinking occasions can actually help make friends too. Drinking improves confidence (for example Orford et al., 2004) and removes inhibitions, which can then result in people being more open and bold. Once one has had a couple of drinks, it becomes easier to approach strangers and introduce oneself to them. In consequence, drinking

together can be seen both as a means to enrich or deepen an existing relationship, but also as a lubricant to develop new relationships with total strangers.

Drinking can also contribute to self-disclosure. Most interviewees mention that drinking usually results in more relaxed feelings, it lowers one's boundaries and removes social inhibitions. Under the influence of alcohol, people are more willing and eager to reveal things about themselves, which are considered more private, or things to be shared with only the important people, for example details about a challenging life situation or a problematic relationship:

*Lauri: Well, I have in a way maybe like a different feeling [when I drink] so that I can chat more relaxed or so and I may tell stories more easily and like... Sometimes I may have a more social feeling when I drink.*

*Interviewer: What do you mean by 'telling stories'? ('lähtee stoorii' in Finnish)*

*Lauri: (Laughter) The social aspect then. Even though I don't like perceive that I'm too quiet otherwise either but in a way that... I don't know, most people somehow may open up when they drink so... So like, maybe I end up talking about many things in a bit different way than when being sober.*

...

*Lauri: Well yes, in my case it is related to the matter that I can talk about such things, or say things, I would not tell for example if I was completely sober. Mmm. Maybe I have a bit contradictory relation to this matter. Like sometimes it might be even quite nice to talk about such things when the inhibitions are lower but sometimes it may bother me that I've said something that I would not have wanted [to share] otherwise.*

Self-disclosure has been defined for example as “revealing personal information about oneself to others” (Archer 1980, p. 183). As Lauri's narrative indicates, drinking makes it easier to talk about things that normally would probably remain private, and hence self-disclosure materializes and is promoted by alcohol. The drinking companion might feel privileged and included to hear

things that are not for anybody's ears and that might make the teller vulnerable. Self-disclosure proceeds from non-intimate or shallow matters to more intimate and deep ones (Cozby, 1973). Thus, people start to share more and more intimate stories over time, which further contributes to deepening the relationship even further.

One's self-disclosure feeds the disclosure of others too (Cozby, 1973), since self-disclosure usually causes reciprocity and people expect quid pro quos to be shared. If the other side also opens up and shares some intimate stories, the feeling of being privileged is mutual. All this deepens and enriches the relationship (Weijo, 2013) and develops the social aspect of drinking even further. If disclosure is not mutual the trust between individuals fades and at the same time the importance of that particular relationship might be challenged (Weijo, 2013), therefore self-disclosure can be seen as an essential part of a relationship. Hence, alcohol consumption situations might be crucial occasions to pursue self-disclosure and nurture relationships.

We may engage in self-disclosure when we want to let certain people in our lives and sometimes drinking might even be intentionally used to boost self-disclosure but sometimes it is subconscious or just a by-product of drinking. Due to contributed self-disclosure, alcohol may ease the first steps of getting acquainted with new people, as alcohol usually makes people feel more relaxed and open. Expectation of increased self-confidence has also been identified to have an influence on motivation to drink and maintaining heavy drinking (Orford et al., 2004). Breaking the ice with alcohol and little by little entering more intimate areas of discussion can be also seen as a way to bring new dimensions into a relationship. For example, colleagues may want to get drunk together to stretch their relationship beyond the office walls. Doern and Kates (1998) for instance argue in their study of restaurant employees' recreational alcohol consumption that new recruits usually accept invitations to drink in order to become members of the restaurant community or "family".

Self-disclosure, however, is not always a good thing. Occasionally, when being drunk, individuals blurt things they do not necessarily want to even share, or slip a comment that is not appropriate. The following day people might feel embarrassed that they went too far, shared too much or told things that were meant to remain private, as Lauri's narrative illustrates. Lowered

inhibitions might result in intimate revelations and thus awkwardness. Though, sometimes the feelings of embarrassment may be only in the individual's own head. The individual may create an image of what he or she thinks others think and try to avoid creating that kind of image. What individuals think how others consider them is, however, not always accurate and does not match with the reality. In conclusion, alcohol can be perceived as social glue and lubricant for consumers.

#### **4.1.1.2 Good mood versus stress**

One motivator of drinking has been identified to be the fun and entertainment it provides (for example Griffin et al., 2009). My data analysis indicates that in order to be able to enjoy the fun offered by drinking, the starting point is particularly a good mood. The interviews indicate that drinking occurs especially when the mood is good, as almost all interviewees discuss the mood and the importance of good vibes.

*Interviewer: How would you describe a good drinking occasion? What things have to be in order?*

*Paula: Well, maybe the very matter that I have my feelings right. I don't always have the feeling to drink, so I need to have such... So that I feel like going and like I don't feel very tired. And I have to crave for alcohol. I don't even have to always drink so much. And everyone else has to have a feeling too that "Now we go!" and "Fun!" and "Yay!"*

The above story of Paula shows that good mood is a foundation for drinking and for a successful occasion. In addition, both the individual himself or herself and friends alike have to be in a good mood so here, again, the social aspect of drinking is easily discovered. If someone deviates from the expectation of good mood, the others might also feel down since the presumption is that the group is cohesive and feels the same way about the evening. This is a way to ensure that everyone is having fun, which ultimately is the overall goal of the evening. When everyone is

having fun, the expectations of a successful evening for every single individual are also higher. In addition to good mood before alcohol consumption, drinking also contributes to mood alteration. If the mood is right and good, Paula tells that drinking has the possibility to boost the spirits sky-high. Pavis et al. (1997) suggested similar results in their study of teen drinking. They conclude that mood alteration is one of the main motives for drinking: as a result of drinking personal feelings are altered and become happy.

However, drinking does not always save the situation and enhance one's spirits. When one's mood is low, drinking might have some negative effects on the experience, since bad things may seem to accumulate:

*Paula: Well, one time was really really bad. Then I had a two-day hangover after the occasion. We had a little reunion of friends, or old study buddies, there in the Lappeenranta region and the first evening went quite well, we drank a bit less. But on the second evening we decided that we're gonna booze the hard way. I began the drinking with Salmari (a Finnish liquorice-flavoured vodka), which never means anything good. And at the time we ordered a taxi, I drank a couple of cups of coffee really quickly. I don't normally tolerate coffee very well, and when the taxi came I was pretty drunk already and trembling and running around since the coffee had kicked. And then we ended up in a bar where I drank more and eventually at some point I was totally wasted. And then came the sobering-up-crying-drunkenness so that we wept there... I and a friend of mine had a slightly miserable situation in life at that point, and so we wept there together, and it took half of the evening when the rest of the group tried to comfort us there. Well, it [the situation] did calm down, and when it was time for the last orders we went to get pizzas. And then we ordered a taxi and the rest of the taxi drive I told stories for the pineapples squatting in my pizza.*

Bad mood or bad life situation affects drinking experiences quite considerably, as Paula's text indicates. The evening might turn into crying and pouring problems to friends and then no one is having fun anymore. Pekka also comments that: "When I'm pissed off, I don't really go drinking.

It's a bit depressing thought in the first place." The common belief or cliché of drowning one's sorrows and relieving stress by drinking does not materialize in this context. Alcohol, however, can be seen as a means to get away from routines, but it is not a stress medicine when stress levels are high, i.e. it is a means to pursue escapism:

*Lauri: Maybe so that in a way some things appear really clear when I'm drunk like, "This is how it is" and like, "How come I've been thinking about this for the past couple of weeks since this is how it is". And the next day things are not necessarily in the same way. Yet, things seem to be solved very easily when drinking.*

Martin et al. (1992) suggest that drinking to cope or to escape the everyday life is associated in workers' alcohol consumption and that in that context higher consumption levels occur. My analysis indicates that only some interviewees indeed use alcohol to escape the world or the troubles they have. But it also suggests, contrary to Martin et al.'s (1992) argument that heavy alcohol consumption does not occur when the life situation is very problematic. My finding is yet similar to Rabow and Duncan-Schill's (1995) study that suggested that drinking does not occur when the stress levels are high and that drinking can be seen as a time out from, not a relief of, stress. They also suggest that drinking does not follow increased stress and that, for example, during students' final exams drinking is not regarded as a coping mechanism against stress.

Lauri's narrative above also illustrates how sometimes problems might seem to be solved easily when drunk, since then reasoning becomes simplified and the possible good mood brought by the alcohol influences one's thoughts. However, as Lauri notes, the next day the same problems tend to return to normal when the escape trip from routines stops and reality hits the individual. Nevertheless, alcohol is sometimes used to forget the problems and to get away from the everyday routines and stress (Darian, 1993), as Paula's story reveals:

*Interviewer: How about, you said about the relaxing aspect that you take one or two, so does it involve something else?*

*Paula: Well, usually [it involves] that I just lie at home and watch TV in the evening and when I've drunk one or two drinks, I will be sound asleep. And sometimes I go to a bar to have one drink with a friend, so that can be counted as drinking to socialize or to relax.*

*Interviewer: Is it relaxing for stress or a habit?*

*Paula: Well, a bit of both and alike. But maybe a bit more like if... If I have school stress or I've been inside the whole day and have a stuffy feeling, as if I would not be able to fall asleep, and so at that point I think that what if I take that one cider... And another is also when I watch a good show on TV; it is nice to have a cider there to accompany it.*

In addition to means of escapism, drinking can in some contexts be seen as a stress medicine that aids relaxing and falling asleep. This finding is dissimilar to Rabow and Duncan-Schill's (1995) research that concluded that in college drinking after classes and on weekends can be seen as a time out from stress. It is, however, noteworthy that in my study only one interviewee admitted having drunk for actual stress relief. Thus, it can be argued that drinking is particularly a time out from everyday routines and not so much an actual "stress medicine".

#### 4.1.1.3 **Holidays and drinking**

There are certain events or occasions during the calendar year that usually include alcohol and are celebrated year in year out. These events are typically national holidays whose tradition is long and cherished by almost every Finn throughout the country.

*Lauri: Mmm. Well, for instance on May Day (Vappu) I had a great time. Because like student's Vappu is anyway always a special occasion and and... Like it lasts almost the whole day and it involves a certain special feeling. And then like really diverse things took place actually. First we were at KY (student association house) and then we were in a park hanging out and then in the evening there was a party held in Kaivohuone and... So there was a good feeling during the whole day. And of course it involved drinking as well.*

The interviews indicate that there are some occasions or festivities when drinking is more or less a national norm, since all interviewees mention them. It seems that certain calendar celebrations push people to drink because it is a tradition and everybody else is drinking too. For example, the Finnish May Day “Vappu”, Midsummer “Juhannus” or New Year’s Eve are calendar events when many Finns get together on the streets (Vappu) or summer cottages (Juhannus) to celebrate that emerged from the data. May Day is an international working class holiday but in Finland it is also a carnival of (university) students. There are many traditions cherished year in year out related to Vappu, for example capping Havis Amanda’s statue, picnic brunch at Ullanlinnanmäki Park, and drinking.

Vappu is also sometimes, especially in the student circles, looked on as an epic carnival and the highlight and culmination of the academic year, as Pekka’s narrative indicates: “Vappu is Vappu, all students love Vappu, or at least the most part.” On Vappu also the upper years’ students shell from their business suits and put on their overalls to have fun and party as students while they still can. The interviews also indicate that students’ Vappu is quite a versatile event that includes, for example hanging out with friends in a park, dancing, eating, pre-parties, after-parties, and so on. Vappu is described to be a special and dear celebration for students. Because the event is

perceived to be so epic and special, it can be assumed that no one wants to be left out from or miss anything fun that might happen either. Therefore many join the ranks to party and drink.

In addition to tradition, Vappu is also a celebration to be spent with friends. A survey conducted by the Association for Finnish Work and The Central Organization of Finnish Trade Unions (SAK) found out that the majority of the respondents (59%) thought that the best thing about Vappu is being together with friends and family (Vappututkimus, 2010). Individuals want to enjoy the company of their loved ones and groom the relationships and what would be a better chance than a national holiday when everybody is allowed to party. On May Day many friend groups meet at brunch and in many cases these groups date back quite far and the tradition of the get-togethers is long.

Because Vappu as a celebration has a traditional nature, it makes it more acceptable that people, regardless of their gender, age or class, let themselves loose and maybe empty a bit more bottles than they normally would. In their research of alcohol culture typologies Room and Mäkelä (2000) point this out as a drinking culture of communal fiesta drunkenness that probably describes Finnish Vappu the best. Room and Mäkelä (2009) also note that the communal fiesta drunkenness is not necessarily just an overall culture of drinking, but more like one of the many drinking patterns inside a culture. Hence, it can be suggested that on Vappu the drinking culture in Finland changes or gets a bit carried away for two days and it is more or less accepted since the pattern is communal and it is a yearly tradition.

#### **4.1.1.4 Party-aspect and justifiability**

As the previous chapter illustrates, Finns are said to drink most on holiday seasons and national holidays (Mustonen et al., 2010, pp. 56-57), i.e. on occasions deviating from everyday life. The analysis indicates that drinking indeed occurs primarily at parties or situations deviating from the everyday life, for example in graduation parties, bachelor or bachelorette parties or on national holidays.

*Tuuli: Well, one thing is that maybe quite often it [drinking occasion] is kind of... Like that it is an evening gathering, so that it is some event, some party: a friend's birthday party, a friend's graduation party, a friend's house-warming party, a gig or concert or something like that. So that in a way there is a reason to go out and kind of celebrate something. And maybe also if one goes for one drink and the evening doesn't proceed anywhere... But still I like to go like to a nice place and it is like kind of... Just that you go with friends and... Like a certain event or a thing brings us together. And then, we in a way maybe raise our glasses to something, even though we don't necessarily do it in practice. But as a thought that we go out and celebrate something. Usually I've like dressed nicely for the evening and I'm in a good mood, friends together and we've dressed up nicely... Even though not everyone is dressed up, but I personally do it. But still, maybe the idea that we are celebrating something, even though it is a really small thing or there is no special cause to party, like a birthday for instance. So even though there is no such reason, but still kind of, like, we can celebrate friendship or something.*

In addition to the obvious party drinking, Tuuli's narrative lets us assume that drinking occurs on completely casual occasions but still an excuse for drinking is discovered or made up and that drinking is also a way to shift from weekday to celebration. This implies that people may feel that on parties and special events it is justified to drink. Also other interviewees indicated into this direction and the analysis discovered some possible excuses for drinking. The excuse might be for example praising friendship, celebrating a reunion, rejoicing in a new job or enjoying the good weather and mood. Even though the excuse is shallow and made-up, people still like to think that there is an actual reason for drinking. This kind of excuse development can suggest that it is easier to justify drinking to oneself and to others too when there is a more or less reasonable cause for it. Celebrating may also embrace dressing up that in its turn enhances the festive feeling even more, as Tuuli's narrative demonstrates.

Drinking just for the sake of drinking itself is not considered an option, and hence there must be a reason even though the reason is quite trivial and purposely created. In Finnish alcohol culture getting drunk is usually associated with occasions deviating from everyday life, for example a party (Mäkelä, 1999, p. 99). Based on the interviews it can be argued that drinking is reserved

particularly for special occasions that deviate from everyday life, i.e. parties and celebrations. In addition, drinking can be seen as a means to alter a normal day into a celebration based on an actual or made-up reason. Paula describes alcohol to be a “party upper” that makes everyone feel more festive. Thus, alcohol can be comprehended as a party device that alters even weekdays into celebration.

#### **4.1.1.5 Other consumption opportunities**

Drinking as an occasion is very rarely just drinking since it usually involves also other activities, consuming opportunities and practices. Sauna, music, food and cosmetics are examples of other consumption related to drinking that emerged from the data analysis. Previous research has concluded that social smoking is also associated with drinking alcohol (Moran et al., 2004), but this relation, however, did not arise from my data. The other consumption practices occur before, during and after the drinking occasion itself:

*Pekka: [Getting ready includes] not so much anything else than, mmm ugh well, buying the drinks and grooming oneself so that one dares to go out, like shaving depending on the stubble, shower and other similar things whatever normal people do anyway.*

...

*Pekka: And then for example one summer cottage occasion last year. It was a cottage event organized by the Nordic Economics Students' Union and there were dozens of friends. And I personally like cottage trips since there usually is a sauna, and a jetty, and a lake where to swim, so everything a good cottage trip cries out for. And so, I went there with a bunch of people. We went there by ourselves. There then, well, we went quite early there. It was agreed that in the early evening there would be a sitsi party (sittning) and before that we basically reserved sleeping beds by throwing our stuff on the beds in the cottage. Then we circled around and drank a few cans of alcohol and kind of had a pre-party for the sitsi party or so. Since the weather was so nice, we lay in the sun or so. The jetty was a really nice place at that point since the sun beamed down on it. Then the sitsi party began and the*

*extra alcohol brought an even better and better feeling. And after that we heated up the sauna and the rest of the evening we were basically in three places: we were either in the sauna, on the jetty or in the lake. And people came and went and we were just having fun. When we'd had enough of the sauna we moved inside the cottage. We played a bit of Alias, I think, with friends and against them. We also barbecued, which naturally belongs to Finnish summer and cottage life. We ate and at the end of the day we ended up sleeping.*

...

*Interviewer: Can you tell how you feel after drinking?*

*Pekka: My head hurts and, well mmm, I feel like I should have eaten before going to bed and should have drunk a bit more water. I feel very dehydrated. I feel like I'm not tempted to do anything for several hours, or probably the whole day. It is a bit like a passivized feeling. I just want to lie down at home and maybe order a pizza and watch TV and eat the pizza while watching. All efforts seem tiring and I don't want to... I don't want to put myself out for anything after drinking.*

As Pekka's narratives illustrate, there are many other activities and products related to drinking than just alcohol. These activities and consumption practices take place not only during the drinking occasion but also before and after the actual drinking. All interviewees mentioned that make-up and/or grooming is a part of getting ready for a party. The urge to look good indicates that people want to look as pretty as possible when going out. Based on Pekka's text about grooming, it can be assumed that people also feel that one has to groom and do make-up, since it is a "normal" thing to do and it is generally expected. If one shows up at a party looking messy and smelling bad, others will frown on him or her. Paula stressed about getting ready that: "Well, what it includes... Of course that one gets ready, paints one's face. Otherwise I don't usually manage to do it so it creates a more festive feeling when I look better than I normally would." Accordingly, looking better than one normally would, brings also party vibes. This backs up the presumption that people tend to drink for a celebration or want to shift weekdays into one. Make-up and grooming are done to highlight the celebration aspect and the deviation from everyday

life. It can be argued that people feel more festive when they think they look better than usual but it may also make them feel more prepared, which then adds confidence.

Sometimes grooming is done alone as Pekka does but especially women do it also in a group with friends: “Mostly with girl groups what we do is that we go someplace and everyone has their make-up kits with them and we go there without any make-up or anything. Usually we get ready and drink some sparkling wine for instance and raise our glasses and anticipate what is about to happen during the night.” The previous description from Pinja illustrates well how women gather and get ready together. These meetings include grooming, making each other pretty and drinking, but also arousing the feeling and enjoying the ambiance. This can also be seen as a way for old friends to meet, catch up and chill out, i.e. nurture the relationship and spend quality time with the most important people before the big party starts. Some interviewees note that usually at bigger parties friend groups tend to split and mingle with others and therefore they are not the best occasions for good friends to meet and chat with each other. This indicates that grooming and getting ready is not just to look good but also to socialize and spend time with close friends.

Especially in the Finnish alcohol culture summertime offers many co- and by-activities to drinking: sauna, (drinking) games and barbecue are examples that can all be found in Pekka’s narrative. Beer has had a central role in Finnish culture as a factor uniting the community in transitional rites, including Saturday sauna (Isokallio, 2008). Midsummer’s sun, sauna, lake and beer – that is a combination that many Finns relish and wait for through the long and dark winter. These things unquestionably belong together, even though this is not carved in stone. Playing games and grilling is also an essential part of Finnish drinking during summer. The games can be for example board, drinking, console or outdoor games. All these games have one thing in common: friends have come together to spend time with each other and have fun. Often these game events also include drinking. It is yet again a social meeting that incorporates friends, fun activities and drinking. As noted, drinking is a very social activity and when friends meet to play games, it gives them a good excuse to have a beer or two. Since the event is a social one and deviates from everyday routines why not have some drinks to celebrate the reunion and to accompany the game.

After drinking the so called “hangover food” is a fairly common consumption practice to relieve the hangover and survive the next day without leaving the house. Pekka mentions pizza in his narrative but also kebab and other junk food is said to work fine too. It can be assumed that pizza and kebab especially are in favor with many, since in Finland we do not have a very wide range of home delivery meals available and those are the few things one can get delivered. When the hangover hits one hard and the mood is passivized, going out or even cooking food oneself might sound as mission impossible. Hangover makes people lazy and the easier the food obtaining, the better. Eating also occurs before and after the drinking itself and Saara, for example, answers “Salted peanuts”, when asked what drinking occasion includes. Eating before and during the occasion happens usually to control the level of intoxication or to avoid hunger during a long night out. This topic will be discussed further in Section 4.2.1.

#### **4.1.2 Long time-span**

As stated, there are also social patterns affecting drinking in the long run. The following section will focus on this topic. First, the temporal aspect of drinking is considered. Second, seasonal drinking is analyzed. Lastly, the relationship between student life and alcohol consumption is taken under consideration.

##### **4.1.2.1 *The temporal aspect of drinking***

The data shows that some interviewees consider that the drinking occasion starts when bottles are swished open and ends when one leaves the party or goes to bed. Drinking, however, has a temporal aspect since the drinking occasion does not necessarily begin and end only when the bottles are open. One interviewee actually ponders if one can assume that the drinking occasion itself is not over until one has survived the hangover. The analysis also shows that the preparation for an event starts usually before the actual event: drinks for the evening have to be bought and schedules have to be sorted out so that one can actually go to the party. The actual drinking can

also be interrupted during the night and start all over after some time. Sometimes one occasion can last many days as Paula's comment about music festivals indicates: "They are always [regarded as] one occasion but they are drinking around the clock anyway." Based on the analysis we can suggest that drinking as an occasion that has a clear starting and ending points is not that univocal.

The influence of a drinking occasion can also reach much further than just around the occasion itself. Stories and shared experiences are created during drinking occasions:

*Pinja: ...one does some whacky things, and they usually are really funny or like weird things that I do or others do. And we tell about those [things] and we for instance reminisce a lot like "Do you remember that one time when we did this and that?" Yeah, they are talked about. We talk about what has happened on certain occasions. (Thinking) And it like joins friend groups together that they have these shared occasions that have also included alcohol. And the stories may be told even after many years and we reminisce what we did and how we were totally wasted and ran there wild and did some crazy things. Yeah, they remain as a connective matter between friends and friend groups.*

In my previous analysis I suggested that drinking contributes to social interaction during one occasion. However, Pinja's narrative shows that shared experiences and good memories of a drinking occasion can be seen as a string that binds individuals and groups together in the long run too. Drinking together creates solidarity and memories that are looked back after many years. These shared experiences and stories (re)told, once again, enrich the social nature of drinking and emphasize its influence on friendships (Griffin et al., 2009). This means that the social influences of drinking are actually wider and more long-running than previous research has suggested. Alcohol does not affect only during the occasion, but the memories of the event may carry friendships and feelings years forward.

#### 4.1.2.2 Seasonal drinking

*Paula: Summer is a time of decadence. Then one can be more outdoors and oneself and all the others too may have a more jolly feeling or so. And then all sorts of things are organized, like festivals and cottage trips and picnics and so on, and well, Kaljakellunta (a beer floating event held in Helsinki). All sorts of things and generally like events and occasions to which alcohol is more related. And maybe I personally have an attitude that "Hey, it's summer, let's drink!"*

...

*Paula: But then again, in the winter maybe when I have school stress or so, it may even at its worst bring thoughts like "Oh crap, do I have to go again!" Especially the school parties and stuff that might sometimes feel even a bit... Well, not like a duty but that I have to manage to go out and so on.*

It appears that summer is optimal time for drinking: picnics, beer gardens, music festivals and summer cottage parties are all examples of the drinking occasions of summer that emerged from the data. Paula describes summer as a jolly time when it is nice to go out, enjoy the sunshine and have a few drinks. Paula's story above indicates that in the summer Finns come out of their shells and crowd the parks and terraces with their friends. The analysis showed that there are numerous drinking chances in the summer because there are so many events and bars open their terraces for the thirsty crowds. Summer offers better opportunities for extempore drinking too, since the good weather and more laidback mood can spur people to drink. People do not need an actual reason to drink since just the good mood, sunshine or the nice terrace with the sun can be a motive and an occasion to celebrate, according to the interviews.

In the autumn with the winter approaching Finns brace themselves and crawl back to their homes to escape the dark and the cold. Then drinking takes place mainly at home or in bars since the snow covers the land and bars close their terraces and the opportunities for spontaneous drinking are less frequent. For students student parties offer chances and occasions for drinking, so

students do not necessarily even drink otherwise or in other situations. As Paula's story shows, some students might actually be slowed down by the winter and the stress that studying entails.

#### **4.1.2.3 Student life and drinking**

*Pinja: Well, generally my alcohol consumption habits have changed quite a lot. Before I started my university studies I didn't really use it that much. Then there was a phase when I consumed alcohol more, quite generously actually, but nowadays quite a bit less. Like, of course, because I'm working and I don't have so much leisure time. And so I don't drink that much at parties these days.*

Drinking is associated with student life quite strongly (Wechsler et al., 1994) and this subject emerges clearly from the data. Drinking during one's studies is considered a social activity (Darian, 1993). Pinja, who is in the last year of her studies mentioned that in the beginning of her studies drinking occurred more often and in larger quantities. Also some other interviewees in their upper classes pondered this issue: when people start to work more regularly there is no more time, energy or will to party all the time. During the studies there are many party opportunities on offer and the social life circles around those parties and occasions (Piacentini & Banister, 2006). In the beginning of their studies, people may also make a conscious choice to drink, get to know people in alcohol-related occasions and enjoy life while they are still young and free. When people graduate they may feel that the years of youth are over and it is time to settle. Similar results were suggested by Moran et al. (2004) of college social smokers that have the belief they will quit smoking sometime after graduation.

Student life, especially the first couple of years, can be seen as a phase in life when heavy drinking is somewhat tolerable since it is only a momentary state that ceases when people graduate at the latest and move on to working life. It can be argued that in student life it is a norm to drink and therefore it is acceptable and justifiable and if the same way of partying would continue in working life, one would be despised and people would think that one cannot let go of the student life. The temporal aspect of college drinking has also been noted by Rabow and

Duncan-Schill (1995) who concluded that college lifestyle provides students with an acceptable reason to gather together and have a drink. Drinking can be seen to be a part of students' everyday life and identity.

## 4.2 Control on alcohol consumption

*Tuuli: For instance, one thing that I don't like at all is if I wake up to the fact that I've drunk more than the people I'm with. Since I don't mind being with drunken people when I'm sober, it's not such a... It bothers many people so that they are totally irritated when a friend tells that semi-funny story for the fifth time but... That doesn't, it doesn't bother me at all and I think that it is quite funny actually. But if I sort of notice that the situation is the opposite and I'm much more drunk than the people around me, then I feel kind of hmm... How to put it? (Thinking) Self-conscious.*

In this section the control aspect of drinking is interpreted. As the text above suggests, people want to be in control of their own drinking and the image the others get from them. People have a will and capacity to make independent decisions and decide when and how much they drink. MacNeela and Bredin (2010) state that drinking can satisfy an individual's need for autonomy by enabling the freedom to act independently. This self-regulation is, however, proclaimed through group norms that are made accessible only through alcohol. To support their decisions individuals have strategies that affect control. The data analysis showed that there are strategies to control both one's own drinking and intoxication and the drinking of the group. The timely aspect of control also emerged from the data, and hence the topics of control before and after drinking are covered.

### 4.2.1 Strategies to control one's own drinking

The data analysis highlighted strategies that people use to manage and control their own drinking during the drinking occasion itself:

*Tuuli: For instance last Friday when I was at my friend's housewarming-party and I had a couple of drinks. But I had arrived by car and I had to leave by xx o'clock at the latest and I thought that I'm not going to drink anymore after... Well okay, sometimes I think that I'm not going to drink more than a certain amount or that I'm going to drink until a certain time. Like, for example if I have come by car and have to be sober by a certain time then I drink accordingly. But maybe I think more that I'm not going to drink more than a certain amount. Like when I talked about the fact that I don't like to drink so much that my command or control is lost in any way. I don't want to sort of be surprised by anything I say or do. I think that I might do like odd things when I'm quite sober too, but when I like... Even though no one else notices it, if I'm surprised by something, like "How come I said that?" That means that I've drunk that one extra drink. And one thing is that if I know that I've drunk faster than usual, at a faster speed, so then I might... Well, it doesn't always go that way, but quite often I might notice that "Oops, I've drunk quite many already". Like if I've drunk a shot or some wine, which I might drink faster than fizzy drinks and then I notice, for instance that "Oops, I've drunk three already and the night is still young". And at that point I might well say to myself like "Now, you're gonna sip some water for the next couple of glasses", and then I drink the water and I might have a drink after that too but... I don't know. In a way I kind of keep a mental record of the drinks and how many I've drunk. I don't like having a quota or anything but when I've drunk a certain amount, I might state that at this point it is a good time to stop.*

Tuuli's narrative displays that controlling one's own drinking can be quite systematic and emerge even on a drink level during the evening. People may have a quota or "a mental record" for the number of drinks allowed per day or a certain occasion. Another strategy is to stop drinking at a certain time. This kind of control is very systematic and logic and therefore it is easy to keep up,

but also to lose if there is no concrete reasoning behind it. Driving a car offers enough reasoning to keep drinking under control, but what if there is no such strong argument not to drink?

Eating and drinking non-alcoholic beverages are also mentioned by most interviewees as a strategy to control the actual level of intoxication during the night. Eating during the drinking occasion is said to occur in order to defuse the effects of alcohol. Eating before the occasion is to keep one going without hunger the whole night through and to soothe the speed and intensity of becoming intoxicated. As is visible from Tuuli's narrative above, water or other non-alcoholic beverages are also used to ease the level of intoxication. Eating and drinking to control the actual intoxication level is quite a concrete strategy for managing one's drinking but it is also relatively common since almost all interviewees mention it during the discussion. Eating and drinking water is a pre-emptive action to control the level of intoxication and ease the approaching sickness and dehydration but it is also a means to survive and relieve the hangover of the next day.

When control has been lost there are also strategies to save one's face. Most interviewees discussed retreating. Tuuli's description of retreating and the story of what happened after she lost control and gave an embarrassing and confusing speech during a party illustrates well how people use the retreat strategy to keep control:

*Tuuli: Like if I didn't do anything stupid and though it sometimes happens, no one even necessarily notices it. But if I feel that way I think like "I need to get out of this situation fast", and like "I have to go now", and then I leave because like... I don't know... Because like if I'm sober with others that are drunk and they are like fooling around, I don't ever feel like "Gee, they are stupid", or "Gee, they are behaving foolishly", and don't, like, think badly of them. But if the situation is the other way round, I have a fear that others may think that of me. And like if others are half sober and I'm like "Yay, a party!" It's like... I don't know, I think that others may perceive me as stupid and bad and like a person that can't control herself in a way and... I don't want to give that kind of impression. Sometimes it happens though. It's not like "My life is going to end now due to this", but I feel some regret and like "Why did I do that?"*

...

*Tuuli: It was like, yeah, one and a half years ago when I had started my studies. That fall, we had this Interpeksuaali-sitsi party, I remember. Hmmm, and at the sitsi Tuomas was sitting opposite to me and he was (laughter) giving me these, like these, shots and stuff to drink and... It was like. How did it go? Beside me there was this guy to whom drinks had been poured, but he was like "I'm driving", or like "I'm not drinking anything tonight". And then like Tuomas decided that the two of us together are gonna take his drinks. And I think that he [Tuomas] did not take all and he had like a hip flask with him or something. But anyway, my portions like at least doubled because of that. And somehow I just thought that it's no big deal. Maybe it was, like because I didn't... That I didn't like order those drinks myself and didn't pay for each one of them and they just were standing there and I kind of thought like "Well, I'm thirsty and I'm gonna drink this cider". And well, at some point I was a little drunk. I remember going to the bathroom and coming back. Then there was this group of people, I don't know, it was like their inside thing or something. But anyway they awarded ummm, they awarded, like, gave a flower or something. I don't know what it was but they sang 'Lady in Red' and like gave a rose and because I was wearing red, they grabbed me there. And I had just come from the toilet and was like "What the fuck happened?!", like I had no idea. They came in front of me and I was like "Oh, thank you, thank you", and I went to my seat. And then came like this "Speech, speech!" I was like "Oh fuck, but okay". Like, of course at that point it felt like such a great idea. I would've given a speech anyway but, let's say, at that point it would have been better not to, but... And I remember everybody just staring at me because I waffled on something... There were tech students and I somehow... I gave like a salute to them because I have so many friends and so many family members that are tech students. And somehow a hat off to them, which at that point was a bit... In my head it sounded really good and when I was talking, everybody was like... Nobody understood what I was talking about and like total freezing up and everybody was quiet and I'm like talking there and standing on a frigging chair. Ummmm. At some point Maria says from the other side of the room like: "Tuuli, sit down!" And it was like, I froze up totally and like sat down quickly. I'm like quiet the next... And I remember that I didn't drink anything for the rest of the sitsi. I was so startled. It was like, I was having so much fun and this was the first Interpeksuaali-sitsi party to be arranged. It was the sitsi party that we arranged so... I went to the after-party since it was like fifteen*

*minutes or so to it. I ordered a glass of water there. I gave... We had like some drink coupons and I gave mine to some tech student, I guess. And then I was like now I have to go. I was like... At that point I was quite sober already and I could've stayed there since there was a good party going on and it would've been really nice to stay. But like I felt like "No, like, they all remember me", and like "I'm the guy in the red outfit who was terrible and giving a strange speech there".*

Hamilton and Hassan (2010) suggest that people may experience self-discrepancy when their actual self and ideal self collide in a risky consumption context (smoking) and my analysis in alcohol consumption context indicates the same. The narrative above illustrates how control loss is felt when in an uncomfortable situation after drinking more than usual and what results from such a control loss. It can be stated that one's drunken behavior is challenged through a self-assessment process and that individuals want to protect their identity and self-concept. When control is lost, one's self-concept suffers a blow and this must be corrected by retreating and reclaiming the control. Tuuli's text also shows how the retreat strategy, i.e. leaving the situation, is used to control drinking or the level of intoxication. In a situation where control loss is possible or has even happened, retreating can be seen as a strategy to cope with the self-discrepancy, to keep control and also to save one's face.

In addition to self-concept, people also want to protect the image of how others perceive them. Individual's self-perception is said to be heavily influenced by how he or she thinks others view and evaluate him or her (Cooley, 1902) and this process has been referred as reflected appraisal (Felson, 1985). My analysis indicates that people do not want others to perceive them as stupid, unrestrained or as someone who cannot keep control. The narrative also implies that people do not want to end up in the public spotlight where others might notice the drunkenness and loss of control. The fear of the others' negative perceptions may make people try to protect the image they give and flee from the situation. Tuuli's story may also indicate that people are concerned about the image they give to others and how others see them. Related to retreat some interviewees expressed their worry and fear of losing some incident or fun thing that might

happen during the night. People need to balance their will to control their intoxication and leave at the expense of possibly losing something epic or funny.

#### **4.2.2 Strategies to control the drinking of a group**

*Paula: And maybe we plan where we might be going tonight and think if we have any desires and what is going to happen tonight and try actively to induce the ones that have intended to participate only in the beginning of the evening to join us and to drink with us.*

Paula's story above shows that direct social pressure is put on friends or drinking companions to drink. If one or several individuals are not drinking the others might try to recruit them to drink too. People want others to join the activity of drinking and try to create solidarity among group members. Especially with adolescents and students the effects of peer influences and pressure on drinking have been noted widely in research (for example Borsari & Carey, 2001; Pavis et al. 1997). Sometimes it might be that the consensus of the group is to abstain from drinking or drink in a civilized manner and then people encourage others to abstain from alcohol. These occasions might be, for example, fancy dinner parties where drunkenness is regarded as rude and unmannerly. If someone is noticed to be drinking a bit too fast, the others may try to restrain the drinking by offering water or food to reduce the effects of alcohol. If the limit of acceptable intoxication is exceeded, the others might feel ashamed and try to get rid of the problem: the boozy one is advised or assisted to go home. This way the others minimize their own embarrassment.

*Pinja: Well, it is quite essential: if we are somewhere with friends and the others don't drink, then I don't drink either. I'm quite like... The fact that it [alcohol] is related to social situations as a whole and I'm quite a social animal in that respect that I don't dare [to drink] by myself. Like I think that it is very important that we try to be at the same level. Vice versa too, if others are much more drunk than I am, I don't feel comfortable either. So I like that everyone is at the same level.*

The data analysis indicates and Pinja's story above illustrates that in a group people want to be equally drunk. If others are considerably more or less drunk, it might have an effect on the amusement of an individual. The desire to remain at the same level of intoxication within the group might indicate that people want to maintain the group cohesiveness. If someone deviates from the level agreed consciously or unconsciously, it might spoil the evening for the others or him/her. Different groups also have different culture, norms and values, i.e. what is acceptable and what is not. In some groups being totally hammered is strongly disapproved and criticized while in others it might even be a norm or presumption. The drinking company can therefore be seen as a major factor in keeping or loosening control. Similarly the drinking environment may affect the drinking, since in some places the environment may hinder or lubricate drinking. In this way also the choice of the drinking place or the bar can be a control strategy. These two topics, the environment and company, are discussed further in Section 4.3.1.

### 4.2.3 Control before drinking

Based on the analysis, planning a drinking occasion can be very systematic and thought through even beforehand:

*Paula: I have work or compulsory lessons on certain days and I don't sort of dare to go there with a hangover. But like mostly, if I know weeks ahead that on a certain Friday I'm going to party, I won't fix anything with anyone for the next day. Or that, I was suddenly like asked to work last Saturday... Or I was asked like on Thursday, was it, if I could come on Saturday since they needed a stand-in. And I just told my employer, whom I know quite well, and I said to his face that "No, I won't come. I'll have a hangover then." And then I had a hangover. So like, I need a bit of this kind of organizing time. But then like, I have always work on Sunday mornings and it is no problem not to drink if I'm somewhere on Saturday. Maybe more like I have even taken the job on Sunday mornings because it is a good reason not to drink sometimes. It saves my money and it saves my liver.*

As Paula's description indicates, orderliness and advance arrangements can be a way to manage drinking. People may have events the day after drinking where one just cannot show up being hung-over or tired and then drinking is not an option. Sometimes one knows that drinking will occur and refuse to appoint anything on the next day. The story also lets us assume that in order to limit their drinking, people schedule their long-term calendar purposely so that they cannot, for example, drink on both days of the weekend. This is an interesting strategy to control drinking since it suggests that people may need an actual incentive to be able to control drinking. Work is seen as an important enough reason not to drink but the line of what is acceptable depends on the individual.

Paula's narrative also reveals the opposite of control: purposeful control loss. Sometimes control loss and high intoxication are accidental, but as the text above indicates, it may also be very intentional and planned too. It can even be argued that sometimes letting go or permitting oneself to lose control is also in its way a control strategy. Once the individual has decided to let go and

drink and has organized his or her schedule accordingly, control loss is justified and therefore possible. This finding is similar to Rook and Fisher's (1995) research on impulsive buying that argued that sometimes consumers want to be bad and consume products and spend money even though they know it is not necessarily a good or healthy thing to do.

The decision to drink or not to drink can actually be highly systematic and rational:

*Paula: I'm perhaps such a person that I can't go [to drink] totally u unexpectedly because there's always the thing that I have to calculate whether I can drink that day. Because there's always the next day to suffer so I have to plan beforehand. And then there are like parties or festival trips or cottage trips or some occasions when we go into a bar. Quite rarely do I go anywhere extempore, if so, just for one drink max.*

*Interviewer: Is it that you have other obligations so that you can't go extempore?*

*Paula: Pretty much yeah. And I'm also the sort of person who easily feels regrets. Like if I go suddenly and get wasted and the next day I'll be thinking like if it was a smart and a very thought-through thing. Like then I think that "Oh boy, I spent much money", and "This day will be wasted due to a hangover", and if... It's like if the risks and benefits have been calculated beforehand then... If I've discovered that now drinking is worth it and now I have that kind of feeling, then I can, like, go. But otherwise I easily will have a drinker's remorse.*

This narrative shows that people need to be in control of the occasions they are drinking. Calculating the risks and benefits of drinking illustrates that the decision to drink might even be very organized and the decision to drink is not necessarily a sudden idea but a well-thought and calculated decision, as also Martinic and Measham (2008) noted. Declining drinking can also be very rational and reasoned. In their research Borsari & Carey (2006) found similar behavior of weighing of the social benefits (expectancies) and risks or punishments (poor grades, fines) of drinking especially among male first-year students. This notion of calculating the risks and benefits also complements the perception of drinking as calculated hedonism presented by

Szmigin et al. (2008). According to my interviews, declining typically results from work, a bad feeling, or being the designated driver but sometimes it might also occur when an individual knows that drinking in a poor situation could lead to a bad night. In addition to being in control of their drinking, people also need to be in control of their mental well-being. If past experiences have shown that drinking in certain situations is a bad thing, those situations are being avoided:

*Paula: ...then I had just encountered sad things totally unrelated to alcohol like on the day and week before actually. And then we had a party with friends that I had indeed been waiting for. But I knew that it was not going to work, like if I drank even one drink the whole night would again be only crying. So then I didn't feel like drinking anything and the evening went quite well actually so it was a good decision.*

#### **4.2.4 Control after drinking**

There are also strategies to relieve the drinker's remorse and justify the drinking of the previous night when control has been lost. Sometimes people feel regret after drinking. Emerging from the data bad behavior, memory and control loss, things said and done, and all the money spent are examples of factors causing regret the next day. The remorse is said to melt away in a couple of days but there are also strategies to control the regret right away. Paula told about phone calls with friends that she calls "therapy conversations", which can serve as an example:

*Paula: Well, we do call to each other almost always, since everyone has more or less memory lapses and we try to restore those lapses for each other. And it's like part of the previous night's fun that the fun actually can continue on the following days too when we reminisce how much fun we had the night before and, like, can laugh at our foolishness when we are sober. And when I hear that the others have done stupid things too, it also therapizes my own regret because you hear that others were in a silly mood the previous day too. Maybe it is also that I'm afraid of having possibly done something that I don't*

*remember. Like I fear something like that and when I call my friends, it turns out that no one remembers me doing anything that stupid and then I start to believe that I actually haven't. So these kinds of things... But mostly the purpose of these calls is to check things like "How did your evening go?", and "Did you get home?", and "What happened last night?", and to rejoice at the fun we had last night or something.*

These conversations can be seen as a way to manage one's regret but also to keep control of the previous day. Discussing others' memories of the incidents of the previous night and discussions can confirm one's recollection of the things that happened. The confirmation from others that one has not done or said anything alarming, stupid or embarrassing and that everybody was completely hammered too, can help people to get over the regret. After asking around and realizing that the evening had been successful in spite of the control loss of drinking one can actually enjoy the fun evening they had and relish the memories of an unforgettable drinking occasion. Telling and retelling stories to friends can be viewed as fuel for social life: they provide entertainment and bind the group together (Griffin et al., 2009), as discussed previously. It is also interesting that one's own regret may also lessen when others have been drunk too and done some stupid things. This again shows that drinking is a social activity from the start until the end. It does not matter so much if one has been really drunk and maybe even done some stupidities as long as others have done the same: the regret is also mutual and eases according to other members of the group.

People also have strategies to relish either the maintaining of control or the loss of control. Keeping control gives people satisfaction. Being able to spend the following day as usual and not having to be consumed and haunted by a hangover gives great pleasure. This can be seen to give people the sense of victory and success, whereas a hangover could lead to feelings of failure and letting oneself down. Autocracy and self-determination create the sense of power and it seems that people want to be in charge of themselves and their drinking. Tuuli's narrative portrays well how the joy of not having to wallow in hangover and self-pity emerges:

*Tuuli: Like, if I've been somewhere in the evening and I wake up the next morning like it was any other morning, I feel really good about it and then I can like... I may usually even do something like, really like... Like, go to my parents' for lunch, or something that I wouldn't even necessarily normally do. Go and do something really... Like, watch high culture or go to a museum or somewhere, something like that. And when I can, I can just take pleasure in it and wallow in the good feeling and the fact that I don't have any headache and be very pleased to go downtown to circle around or something.*

Another strategy to manage regret is to convince oneself that the dreadful hangover actually is worth it since the drinking on the previous night was fun and one would not have wanted to miss it. This can be seen as a way to ease the potential regret and celebrate that one has had a fun night out and also to justify the drinking. If one has had fun, the drinking has been worth it, and hence was justified and acceptable. It also makes life easier when one does not take everything so seriously. This celebration could also be associated with the mottoes “carpe diem” or the newly emerged “YOLO – you only live once”. These mottoes cherish taking risks, letting go of control and enjoying life since you only live once and our time here is limited, and hence people should have fun and live while they still can. Paula describes her strategy to cherish hangover:

*Paula: But now I've been trying to learn and have partly learned this good attitude introduced by my little sister: 'I was so drunk yesterday and I have so terrible a hangover today – Yay!' And the next day I try to rejoice the fact that I'm feeling sick, like "Yay, I achieved something yesterday!" So nowadays I may feel after drinking like "Oh my god - yay, I had fun though!"*

*Interviewer: Well, is it a sign of having had fun when you have a hangover?*

*Paula: Well, quite often yes. And maybe this is kind of self-suggestion too that I've been trying to learn. Like my sister does it quite much like... It's the same like if you do something embarrassing when being sober and most people are like "Oh my, I was totally embarrassing", but we like to think more like "I embarrassed myself yesterday – yay, how*

*cool!” It makes your life so much easier. So maybe it is the same for hangover and last night’s drinking. It feels better the next day when you view it like this.*

Griffin et al. (2009) suggest that sharing stories of exaggerated drinking occasions can also be seen as escape or a time out from the rational and civilized subjectivity and self-control. Paula’s stories reveal that sometimes embarrassing memories and shared stories may be regarded as fun. The lack of control actually becomes a funny and entertaining thing that can be shared with friends. The hangover can also be seen as a sign of a fun night. Thurnell-Read’s (2011) research on British stag tour participants also indicated that sometimes feeling ill actually is interpreted so that the previous night was a good one and the ones that are most wasted during the night or feel worst the next day are the ones that gave their everything to the experience, and hence are to be celebrated for that. He also concluded that a shared suffering of hangovers is an essential part of a stag tour bonding ritual. All these arguments are similar to the results of the present study.

### **4.3 Tension between social patterns and control**

It has been argued that there are certain social patterns that lubricate drinking, i.e. a structure, but also a person’s own will to make independent decisions and strategies to control their drinking, i.e. an agency. Usually these two collide when drinking. On some occasions control can be kept but on some others it is lost. The following section analyzes what determines and defines control or control loss. In the section the following themes are covered: the environment and company; decadence versus sobriety; determination and self-control; anticipation and expectation; and unexpected occasions.

### 4.3.1 The environment and company

The environment itself can affect the consumers' decisions to drink and how much they drink, as Paula's story describes:

*Paula: We were drinking at my house with an old crowd and then the strong punch started to affect each one of us very strongly and then we went to Onnela and... There was terrible music playing and all the people were like teens and it was kind of like a disappointment - the bar. Because I've previously been there only at student parties and the people were a bit different then. But when we recovered from the initial shock, then the people there suddenly started to amuse us terribly. And it was maybe that then we dared to get wasted safely and be intentionally embarrassing and it all was just such fun. And we had a great crowd, we danced and we had some inside joke related to the evening and uhmmm, we drank and drank.*

It can be argued that the environment of drinking can encourage people to party more freely, be consciously awkward and drink more. For example, in a lower-end bar favored by younger people control might loosen because of the environment and the other customers. If the other customers are behaving badly, it may give an unwritten permission to let loose, go wild or maybe even overboard. In addition, the possibility of losing one's face regardless of one's own misbehavior is lower when the people around are being looked down on. This assumption may also be turned around since, for example, in a fancy cocktail bar it is more likely that the people are able to keep control and act accordingly to avoid public humiliation. Hence, it can be argued that some environments actually encourage people to lose control and act more spontaneously (Rook & Fisher, 1995) and that culture defines drinking and drunkenness (Martinic & Measham, 2008, p. 4). Similar results were presented also by Goulding et al. (2009) in their study of clubbing and using illicit drugs. Their research indicates that the club can function as a social space where at that time and place people are collectively able to move beyond their everyday roles or categories defining them and let it loose.

As pointed out earlier, sociality is an important part of drinking: drinking usually occurs with friends and drinking with certain individuals or groups also deepens relationships. The drinking company actually can also define, lubricate or restrict the drinking of an individual. My analysis has suggested that people want to stay at the same level of intoxication within a group. This means that people may want to assimilate the behavior of their drinking company and proportion their drinking accordingly, since they do not want to deviate from the group or the general drinking attitude. It can be argued that the company of heavy partiers is more likely to suck individuals into serious drinking than the company of calm and composed partiers. Similarly, MacNeela and Bredin (2010) discovered in their study that peer group i.e. the drinking company enables freedom to drink but at the same time includes a regulatory environment. In their study binge drinking was not an exact quantitative matter since it was seen as relative to the peers benchmarking the amounts consumed. My analysis indicates similar results: how drunkenness is perceived depends highly on the context of drinking occasion.

#### **4.3.2 Decadence versus sobriety**

*Paula: Sometimes I feel, usually perhaps after a period of time when I have not drunk so much... Like if I haven't been really drinking for many months, or very many weeks, then I might feel it. During the time that I was studying away from home in a school where the studying was very physical and mentally quite hard too, I felt that, what army rookies often say that, after a rough week there is a need to get hammered. So then I've sometimes had that kind of urges to go drinking. Since I've been stressed and physically and mentally tired, then I've like felt that I ache for booze and want to get smashed. So then I had these kinds of feelings.*

The analysis indicates that sometimes people engage in either decadence or sobriety periods in their lives. Previously it was suggested that summer is a time for decadence since then more drinking opportunities emerge and that student life is usually associated with much heavier drinking than what might be the general drinking culture. Decadent times may also follow after a

longer period of soberness when people feel that they need to get wasted and “clear” their head. This can also be seen as a reward for soberness and being “a good boy or girl” or a reward after a long and hard week.

Deliberate sobriety may occur when one feels that he or she has been drinking too much and it is time to close the bottle for a moment. A good example of this is the so called “janopause” that I have been observing to be quite common among my friends. After the Christmas parties and New Year people feel the need for a detox. January without alcohol can be seen in several ways. It can be seen as self-flagellation where people punish themselves for the drinking of the past year and bad behavior. In addition, it can be seen as a sacrifice that people make in order to justify the drinking of the year ahead. Sobriety might also be a way to prove to oneself and others that one is able to abstain from alcohol, and hence is in control of one’s own consumption and life in general.

Consumption behavior and activities can also be seen as a means to maintain and develop a stable and harmonious self-concept. Symbolic consumption supports role transition and identity crises that people face in their lives (Schouten, 1991). Bearing this in mind, it can be argued that abstaining from alcohol for a period of time can also refer to preserving and protecting of self-concept. After decadent periods in their lives people may feel that their self-concept and identity are threatened. Hence, symbolic consumption, i.e. the decision not to consume alcohol, assists them to maintain their understanding of who and what they are and be in control of their lives. People do not want to be perceived as unruly or stupid by themselves or by others either and thus abstaining from alcohol every now and then is a way to protect and adjust their self-concept and the image they project to others. Another example of symbolic consumption to protect the self-concept is exercising after a rough and boozy weekend. Exercising can both be seen as protecting the damaged self-concept and punishing oneself for drinking too much.

As Paula’s story above illustrates, sometimes after a longer period of sobriety people also need to clear the air by getting hammered. Drinking is seen as a magic elixir that may momentarily release oneself from the stress. Decadence may result from exhaustion as Paula describes but it may also include a social aspect:

*Pekka: Well, let's say for instance when I came back from student exchange, I had been enjoying Japan's oriental atmosphere for eight months. I came back some time before Vappu and I hadn't seen my friends for like eight months and I was in a mood that I feel like seeing people and... Well, I knew that there is this one school event, well not so much a school event but a student event, where there would be alcohol available and quite a lot of friends attending. So then I dressed in my overalls and I had an agreed spot in my friends' group, and I wanted to see my friends and drink with them, enjoy the evening and then I set off for Kymppisuora (a pub crawl) to booze. Then I felt like drinking with my friends and so I drank with friends.*

Pekka's description indicates that sobriety (or not being able to drink with friends) can arouse the feeling of neglect. As drinking is a highly social activity and a means to nurture relationships, not participating in drinking occasions for a while causes guilt and longing. One might feel himself or herself a bad buddy, and hence be drawn to drinking with friends. When these feelings accumulate or the opportunity to drink with friends occurs, it is likely that one's control loosens and drinking happens.

### **4.3.3 Determination and self-control**

*Tuuli: Or like if I have a certain feeling that I don't want to, then I don't drink. Like for instance if there's a major party going on and everybody is like "Okay, now everybody to the bar counter!", then I... I've never like been embarrassed to take, like, that I order a glass of water. Someone there beside me laughing like "What, are you taking a water?!", but it doesn't somehow bother me.*

Self-control can be defined as the efforts of the consumer aiming to avoid or resist behaving in a certain manner and a struggle between desire and willpower (Hoch & Loewenstein, 1991). My

data analysis indicates that when determined people manage to maintain self-control better and do not yield their soberness and start drinking so easily even when pressured, as visible in Tuuli's text above. When one has determined not to drink his or her mind is not so easily changed and control generally remains. For occasional sobriety there usually is a reason, such as work or being the designated driver, as discovered earlier. My findings are similar to Hoch and Loewenstein's (1991) research that concluded that self-control is affected by the desire- and willpower-based strategies of the individual.

*Tuuli: I don't really know, on the other hand I don't awfully feel like [drinking], but then again it's not like I don't want to drink either. I'm like a little undecided about it and yet I've drunk. Like for example that one cruise thing, it was like that everyone was drinking so much and I was like "I don't know..." Like, I wasn't so like "Gee, I want to drink so much", but at some point during the evening when I had drank quite much already... It was like I hadn't really an opinion about it and then I was like "Well okay, I'll have some more".*

Determination and self-control help keeping control, but sometimes people might be somewhat undecided whether to drink or not. Determination seems to be important when maintaining control of one's drinking and indecision easily leads to loosening of control, as Tuuli's story above indicates. When undecided, one can also be affected by the fact that other people are getting wasted too. Since being on the same level of intoxication with the rest of the group is argued to be important to people, in an unsure situation an individual is more likely to go with the flow and follow the others' example than to maintain control.

In the context of impulse buying Baumeister (2002) concludes that there are three main causes for self-control failures: conflicting goals and standards, failure to keep track and depletion. These three are all visible also in the alcohol consumption context. For example, an urge to have fun and the will to live healthy are contradicting goals affecting decisions to consume alcohol. Sometimes the desire to party defeats the health motives and control is lost. Sometimes the control loss is actually intentional and planned, as discussed previously in Section 4.2.3. When being drunk, the ability to keep count of drinks may become obscure and therefore the failure to

keep track leads to loss of self-control. Baumeister (2002) considers self-control an energy-like resource that may run out. As discussed earlier, previous efforts and a long sobriety period may wear an individual out, make them crave for a drink and so lead to failure of self-control.

#### 4.3.4 Anticipation and expectations

Drinking creates positive emotions and negative anxieties even before the occasion itself: the upcoming event is both anticipated and feared. Anticipation and anxiety usually occur when the event is expected to be fun or an unforgettable one, or deviating from the normal. Drinking creates also pressure to succeed and fear of tomorrow's hangover. Paula considers her feelings before drinking:

*Paula: Well, often I feel like "Damn, this has been planned for so long", and it creates pressure and I feel like "Now I need to feel like pouring down drinks", and "What if I have a hangover", and "What if it is a bad evening", and... I feel like I really need to bother and what if I just stayed home and slept. And at that point I just need to say to myself like "No, now open the first one", and usually after that, after that first one my mind is totally changed. Well, sometimes I think I've been the whole day like trembling and waiting for the moment that I can break out the first one. Then I may feel enthusiasm for the forthcoming event even the whole day.*

*Interviewer: Well, are they like random occasions when you feel this kind of enthusiasm or..?*

*Paula: Well, partly random or so but maybe they are more like the adventure events, like music festivals or some Hukkaputki-like (pub crawl) occasions or events like that. Like you know that it is not just an ordinary bar evening coming and the point of the evening is not just to get drunk, but more like that we go out there and see what happens. Like maybe then I might expect more of the whole evening, when I know that this evening may be an unforgettable one... And maybe then it is even the aim to remember something about it.*

The adventure drinking occasions, as Paula calls them, are expected and anticipated. Then one has decided to let it loose and see what happens. This indicates also that alcohol is sometimes consumed for thrill and excitement – a relation noted also by other researchers (Kropp et al., 1999). It has been noted that one of the students' drinking motivators is particularly the possible excitement and adventure it provides (Treise et al., 1999), and my interpretation supports this argument. The analysis also shows that especially all-nighter parties are usually planned before and people tend to be aware that today they are going to party hard and maybe drink a bit more than usual. Planning ahead and advance arrangements make control loss and drinking more justifiable, as already discussed in Section 4.2.3. High expectations and the anticipation for a fun drinking event can be viewed as a justification for control loss and drinking. However, high expectations may also lead people to disappointment:

*Pinja: Well, now it occurred to me... When I was doing my exchange studies in South Korea and there was this one of those costume parties, which I really like a lot, and the pre-party was really nice... There were four girls and one boy of us there, we were having a pre-party at a student dormitory and we were getting ready for this costume party. Everybody was getting ready and dressing up. We didn't have that many drinks because in that country they don't drink anything else than booze, like booze a bit under 20 degrees proof, or then beer. And I don't like beer and there at the campus area they didn't sell this stronger alcohol and so we didn't have anything else than beer and something else... Like we drank maybe one or two glasses, or not even that really, so we didn't drink that much but the getting-ready was fun, but then... Then we started our journey to the actual occasion that was supposed to be this like costume party for exchange students. And it was so hard to find the place since in Korea they just simply don't have any street names, they don't use them and still we had to find the place. And it took us forever to look for the place and it started to frustrate us extremely already at the point when we were searching and searching the goddam place... And at that point we didn't certainly have any drinks... We were all freezing and Korea is a place where people don't dress bizarrely at all. And everybody was staring at us like super badly because we were westerners and dressed up in weird costumes without any reason, since it wasn't Halloween or anything. And it started to irritate us and we tried to ask everyone for help, and they tried hard to help us find the*

*bar but no one just could. They advised us to go one direction, and then advised us to go in another, and they pointed into a third direction. And it was just like running around. When we finally found the place, reached the bar downstairs, the first thing we noticed was that the others weren't dressed up in costumes. So we looked like totally silly there. It started to irritate me like hell and I just left. The others stayed there but it just pissed me off so much, the situation, that I just felt so stupid in my costume. And I was irritated because everybody had been there like so long and had been pouring down drinks and they were way more drunk than us. But still there was bad ambiance somehow and a bit quiet in a way and not like anything we had expected. And it was a really stupid occasion. Like it involved waiting for the drinking, like maybe we were waiting for a good party in a way and it also involved drinking. Like, we hadn't planned like to booze wildly but the expectations were totally let down and I felt really shitty even though nothing really happened.*

Treise et al. (1999) argue that the main drinking motivator for students, in addition to adventure, is specifically the security it offers: the fact that students know that on a certain night they can drink at a certain place and expect a certain experience. The expectations for an evening may however rise too high and then, as Pinja's story shows, those expectations lead to a bitter disappointment and thus control. When nothing seems to be the way expected, one gets frustrated, the illusion of a great night disappears and control stays. It can be argued that high expectations of a fun night legitimate control loss and letting those expectations down gives more control to the individual, which, however, is not the desired effect in that case.

#### **4.3.5 Unexpected occasions**

There are some random and unexpected events or festivities that make control loss, public drinking and blundering legitimate. A good example of this are the infrequent occasions of Finland winning the Ice Hockey World Championships. In the year 2011 this rare event happened. Instantly after the victorious final game mayhem seized Finland and the city streets were occupied by loud and boisterous hockey fans, a large number of them young men,

celebrating the historical occasion. In downtown Helsinki, for example, partiers blocked the streets, swam in fountains, urinated publicly here and there, and climbed on bus stops or even lamp-posts (or basically on any possible object above ground) – all deeds that would normally be considered mischief and completely inappropriate.

In spite of the cold weather, many fans also took off their clothes – probably to show-off their body and bring forward and embody their masculinity and invincibility. Thurnell-Read (2011) found similar behavior in his study of British premarital stag tourism to Poland. His study argues that the stag party participants embody unruly and unstrained masculinity by, for example, loosened control, nudity and heavy alcohol drinking. At the championship parties usually so introvert, quiet and modest Finns became noisy, pretentious, and disorderly. Nobody wanted to miss the party of the century and the celebration and drinking on the streets lasted until 3 AM. In that situation the primitive behavior was, however, somewhat acceptable and justifiable since something completely exceptional had happened and people needed to release their joy. What is interesting about this occasion in particular is that unlike other broad national festivities, this event was quite unpredicted. People did not know a week or even a couple of days ahead that drinking would occur on that specific evening and therefore planning the event ahead was more difficult.

Unexpected events may also be smaller episodes during the evening, but still are unexpected and have an effect on the occasion:

*Paula: ...well we had had a pre-party and then we had left for a bar... And we had a bit dull time there and we went out and started to walk since my friend lives downtown there near Kamppi and we started to walk to her place. And we were like a few steps away from her door then there was this yellow New Beetle stopping along the side of the street and we were like looking that isn't that cute. And then there were these two guys a bit older than us and they opened the windows and asked where were going. And we were like "We were at a party and it was a bit boring, so we left already", and they just responded like "Hey, come with us, we are having an after-party!" One of them was sober and he drove and the other was a bit drunk already. And we went to their place for an after-party and we drank*

*there more and it was quite a fun evening. I ended up having the cute boy's number, even though I never saw him again but like... It was like, "Can these things happen?" Maybe it was the beauty of the evening that a yellow cute little car caught us there by the doorsteps. And like total strangers... And like for a moment we were thinking there in the backseats if it actually was really wise for two girls to go along.*

Paula's narrative illustrates that sometimes unexpected episodes occur during the drinking occasion. As control before drinking occasions and planning ahead is sometimes important for people, this kind of unpredictability may lead to different results. The unpredictability of an event or an episode may lead to unexpected joy caused by the surprise and adventure it offers. Adventure is said to be one of the motivators of drinking (Treise et al., 1999) and when unexpected things happen, excitement and joy take the upper hand. Unpredictable occasions may, however, expose people to danger too. When people suddenly decide to drink and lose control or do something unplanned, the chain of events may at some point take the wrong turn and lead to dangerous or hazardous episodes caused by the lack of planning.

## 4.4 Summary

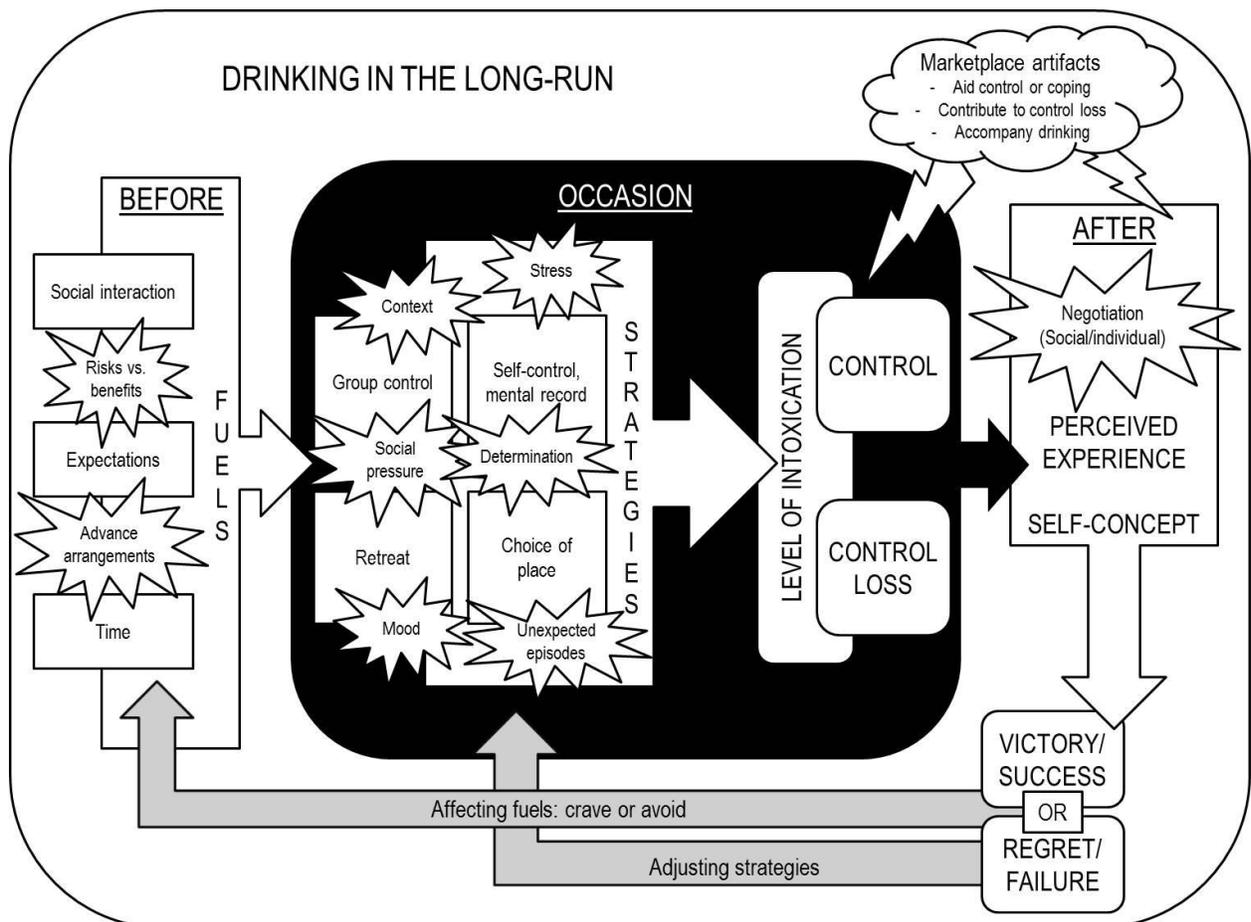
The findings of this study are summarized in Figure 1 below. Social interaction, expectations and time can be seen as fuels that contribute to drinking. Alcohol consumption is regarded as a means to nurture existing friendships and also to create new ones. Its social effects are utilized in order to aid and groom relationships. The expectations of a fun or adventurous drinking occasion create anxieties that influence alcohol consumption. Some occasions are anticipated or even feared long before the actual event and anticipation may lead to pure joy or bitter disappointment. Time also contributes to drinking since drinking has a timely aspect: some periods of life, for example student life, are boozier than others. Advance arrangements and risk versus benefit assessment are connected to these fuels and they affect the occasion before the actual drinking occasion.

During the occasion there are several strategies that the consumer pursue to influence the level of intoxication and thus control. Self-control and mental record are strategies to control an individual's own drinking but people also want to maintain the group control and an equal level of intoxication. The choice of place may be either a control strategy, or a purposeful control loss strategy. Retreat strategy is used when the situation is getting uncomfortable and control loss needs to be avoided. There are, however, also factors affecting the strategies of control. The context, stress, social pressure, determination, the mood, and unexpected episodes may turn the course of the evening off-track and away from the intended end result. Sometimes the results are perceived as good and sometimes as bad. Before and during a drinking occasion there are also marketplace artifacts present that aid control, contribute to control loss or accompany drinking. Food and non-alcoholic beverages are examples of artifacts aiding control and accompanying drinking, whereas music or sauna may contribute to control loss.

After the occasion people pursue in negotiation, both social and individual. People try to remember the previous night and blackouts are restored with friends. Negotiation leads to feelings of victory/success or regret/failure through the perceived experience and self-concept. Marketplace artifacts are also present after the occasion itself since they may aid coping with the hangover or regret: food and non-alcoholic drinks relieve hangovers and exercising after a rough

weekend, for example, may be used as a penalty for indulgence or a means of adjusting one's damaged self-concept. The feelings after the occasion then further affect the next occasions and the phrase "I'll never be drinking again" has been heard countless times. If regret is very bad, one can be assumed to avoid drinking for a while, in order to protect one's self-concept and the others' perception of oneself. Abstaining then again may start to cumulate as feelings of longing and craving for a drink. The feelings also contribute to strategies since people adjust their control strategies according to their perception of the previous drinking event. The previous description portrays how one drinking occasion is perceived and managed and how it impacts on the next occasion. Further, this cyclic process can be comprehended as a long-term perception and management of drinking and balancing between more sober and decadent times of life.

**Figure 1 Framework of drinking management in the short and long run**



## 5 Discussion

This section of the research further discusses the key findings of the study, how these findings change our views of alcohol consumption and answers the three research questions presented in the beginning of the study. The main research question addressed the managing and balancing of alcohol consumption in the short and long run. The analysis highlighted some strategies that consumers employ to keep control. The second research question asked how drinking is structured and made inevitable by Finnish students' consumption narratives. The study compiled social and individual structures and marketplace artifacts that affect drinking and are present in many alcohol consumption occasions. The final research question addressed the subject of students' identity and how drinking contributes to it. Next, I will elaborate on these subjects, followed by the implications and limitations of the research and recommendations for future research.

In this research alcohol and drinking have been identified, for example, as a party device, social glue or lubricant, and time out from stress. Alcohol has many roles throughout the consumers' lives. This study portrays how drinking is managed and balanced in the short and long run in the Finnish students' context. The study suggests a framework on how one drinking occasion – all the episodes before, during and after it – contributes to the future occasions and perception of drinking in the long run. In previous literature drinking has mostly been viewed and analyzed through certain occasions (for example Thurnell-Read, 2011) and not as a long-term process. Drinking cultures and behaviors have also been researched and categorized (Room and Mäkelä, 2000) but drinking has mainly been assigned a static state or behavior model. This research extends these views and offers new insights on how drinking should be considered and perceived.

The framework presented in this study illustrates how drinking is managed, balanced and structured in the short and long run and in the context of the research. As the framework demonstrates, drinking in the long run is seen as a cyclical process where the experiences and choices of the consumer during a drinking event affect the next experiences. The process of the consumer's individual and social perception of drinking lasts a lifetime, and hence people should

not be straightforwardly divided into certain categories, as previous literature has sometimes done (Shim & Maggs, 2005). On that account, this research provides novel insights into drinking culture and drinking definitions and categorization that have been framed.

Following the foundations of existential-phenomenology (Pollio et al., 1997), I suggest that drinking culture or an individual's alcohol consumption behavior should be viewed as a constantly changing state. Therefore, people should not be labeled as certain static types of drinkers or divided into certain pre-determined groups. This notion is based on and continues the work of Martinic and Measham (2008), who note that (extreme) drinking is not an absolute state or definition but defined by the context, culture and culture's views on drinking. How people drink, perceive their drinking and manage it, is a lifelong project that has no "right ways" or end states. People engage in many types of drinking behaviors and cultures during their lifetime, and hence there are no static states. This study has also underlined that drinking is socially very context-bound and, for example, the place and drinking company have an effect on what is perceived as an appropriate level of intoxication or behavior (Rabow & Duncan-Schill, 1995). The situational nature of drinking has also been discovered by, for example, Orford et al. (2004), who noted that heavier drinking usually occurs in heavy drinking company.

This study underlines the importance of the social aspect of a drinking experience – a matter that has been noted also comprehensively in previous research (for example Livingstone et al., 2011; Maunu & Simonen, 2010). Drinking is an important part of people's social lives providing them with social confidence, security and comfort; and social matters are also an important motive to drink. This study discovers that thanks to the influences of alcohol, during a drinking occasion individuals, for example, become more open and relaxed, engage in self-disclosure and gain confidence to approach people they are not so familiar with. Old relationships are deepened and new ones formed during alcohol consumption occasions, and hence drinking is considered a social glue that binds individuals and groups together.

Previous literature has mostly concentrated on the very influences and impacts that alcohol has during one certain occasion. However, this study extends our views on the effects of drinking on social matters. My research indicates that drinking occasions also have a long-term influence on

social relations and friendships beyond a certain event, since reminiscing the unforgettable and fun events reinforce the social influence of alcohol even further. In addition to reminiscing, also self-disclosure that people engage in during alcohol consumption has a timely aspect. Self-disclosure and opening up proceeds to more intimate level over time. In short, drinking is not a solitary activity but a complex, versatile and lifelong phenomenon where people (re)create and nurture relationships, shared meanings and memories.

Griffin et al. (2009) suggested that drinking stories play an important role in students' social life, since they are a shared source of entertainment, a route to social life and a source of new material to bind people together. As stated, my analysis also supports this argument: sharing stories and filling in each other's memories are seen as entertainment and reminiscing the good old times and thus they can be seen to contribute to relationships also in the long run. However, my analysis also indicates that sharing drinking stories is also a way to cope. When consumers feel regrets of the previous night, getting reassurance from friends that everything went well, can actually ease the regret and provide a feeling of safety. Shared regret can also be considered better than solitary worrying: when other members of the group have also difficulties to remember or have done something stupid, the individual's own regret might be reduced. Consequently, this study has extended our view of drinking stories' role in alcohol consumption.

In this research context drinking has been identified as an important part of student life, and hence the study supports the work of Banister and Piacentini (2008) who see student life as an extended phase of liminality justifying drinking. In student life drinking is seen as a norm and a common activity to engage in, alcohol is part of a student's everyday life. Alcohol consumption has a strong role in students' lives and alcohol is involved in many events and occasions that students participate in, such as student parties, get-togethers, seasonal parties, everyday situations, and so on. People understand that studying is a passing phase of life that includes some rituals, norms and behaviors. Accordingly the student life phase can be comprehended to justify heavy drinking and sometimes even strong drunkenness since it is seen as a transitory stage that individuals live through, as Piacentini and Banister (2006) also suggest. Drinking also contributes to students' identity and self-concept.

Dietler (2006) remarks that alcohol has a relation to the person and the construction of an identity and self. My study illustrates this notion and describes how alcohol consumption contributes to a student's identity which is (re-)formed and adjusted according to life events and decisions made. Decadent phases of life or occasions when control has been lost can challenge the individual's self-concept and the image how he or she wants to be perceived by others. Individuals want to protect their self-concept and the social perception that others have. People want to avoid being negatively in the spotlight or being perceived as disorderly or unmannerly with regard to alcohol consumption. In phenomenology self is indeed viewed as a lifelong project where people adjust their consumption and sometimes make even rational choices in order to move towards an ideal self or better self-concept. Accordingly, this study provides a phenomenological view on students' identity that is affected by alcohol consumption practices and choices made over time related to drinking.

Martin et al. (1992) concluded in their study of alcohol consumption of workers that drinking is heavily associated with escapist reasons and that coping or escapist reasons are associated with higher levels of drinking. My research, however, questions this previous argument. Instead, my interpretation follows Rabow and Duncan-Schill's (1995) suggestion that drinking can sometimes be seen as a time out from stress, but it does not occur when stress levels are high. Most interviewees in my research did not even admit drinking in order to cope or escape everyday life and the ones who did, told that when being stressed out, they may drink only one or two drinks.

In addition to stress situations, literature has also associated drinking with celebration and situations deviating from normal life (Mäkelä, 1999, p. 99) and that Finns' drinking usually takes place during holiday seasons and national holidays (Mustonen et al., 2010, pp. 56-57). My analysis challenges also this argument, since the data indicates that drinking also occurs in entirely everyday situations and that alcohol and dressing-up has the ability to shift from mundane days to celebration. Celebration and a reason, even a made-up one, can be seen to justify drinking. In conclusion, my analysis considers drinking more as a party device or an instrument to shift from everyday to celebration and also as an occasion to be celebrated as such, instead of a means of coping or escapism.

Wallendorf and Arnould (1991) concluded in their study of American Thanksgiving Day celebrations that past, present and future meanings of, for example, family and regionalism are created through Thanksgiving consumption rituals. In this way people make their values visible and deliver a cultural message about the meaning of abundance and construct a model of social life. This study widens the scope of meaning creation to the alcohol consumption context. Drinking occasions can also be seen as creating meanings through alcohol consumption rituals. In this context meanings are created and cultural messages are conveyed of social meanings. Drinking is an occasion and activity where meanings are made of oneself, friends, and relationships. During alcohol consumption occasions people create and improve their relationships with one another but that, however, is not the end of all things. Relationships and their meanings are also recollected and recreated when people see each other for the first time in a long time or when past memories – or “the good old times” – are reminisced. When people share stories of past drinking occasions they relive those funny and memorable moments and at that same time recreate new social meanings and improve their relationships. Likewise, it can be argued that the social meanings of the future are also made when people plan and discuss the upcoming drinking occasions.

In conclusion, Szmigin et al. (2008) introduced a concept of calculated hedonism related to drinking that can be described as balancing between the funs that drinking offers and the risks it delivers at the same time. They conclude that the term of binge drinking is not the best way to describe the drinking of young people and therefore they present the concept of calculated hedonism. This term illustrates the choices and management of drinking (that can be regarded as excessive consumption) better than the emotive term of binge drinking. Drinking should not be viewed only as a medium of blundering or disorder, for sometimes it is an intentional choice of pleasure that has its own risks. Sometimes even control loss may be calculated and justified. Calculated hedonism can actually be seen as one of the things the whole study at hand is all about: balancing between the social structures, i.e. fun, and discipline, i.e. the risks. My analysis has provided novel insights on what are the funs and risks related to drinking and how they influence specific occasions and long-term alcohol consumptions. Some factors are discovered to fuel drinking, whereas other factors obstruct drinking by providing control to consumers.

Consumers also seem to consciously calculate the benefits and risks related to certain occasions. Hence, this study extends the concept of calculated hedonism and expands its views towards an even more long-term vision. Choosing between the funs and the risks is a lifelong process where previous choices affect future choices and experiences.

## **5.1 Theoretical implications**

This study provides interesting new insights to the consumer's alcohol consumption experience and provides new contexts to consumer culture and existential-phenomenology. I contribute to previous literature by suggesting a novel idea that there is a relationship between an individual drinking occasion and the long-term drinking. The nature of drinking and the perception of it are cyclical and therefore drinking cultures or individual's drinking behaviors must not be considered as static states or choices, as some previous literature has done. The study also emphasizes and extends our views of the long-term relation of alcohol consumption and social affairs: relationships are not only affected during a certain occasion but also in the long run when people look back on the memories of fun and unforgettable events. In addition, this study extends the existential-phenomenological research by illustrating how a student's identity is being influenced by alcohol consumption in the lifelong process of constructing the consumer's self and self-concept.

For marketers and policy makers this study provides insights of how consumers perceive drinking, not only during one specific occasion but also in the long run. Understanding consumers' perceptions can help to define factors or marketplace artifacts that can be used to either fuel or obstruct drinking. This study suggests that the market can either fuel or obstruct drinking by offering means to control or control-loss to consumers. The analysis suggests that there are certain social structures that fuel and direct drinking and at the same time agencies, i.e. personal or shared strategies, that may limit the consumption of alcohol. Marketers should never forget the social nature of drinking since social relations and alcohol seem to be highly related both in the short and long time span. The practical implications also suggest that consumers

should not be divided into strict or fixed consumer groups on the basis of their drinking behavior. Alcohol consumption has been identified as a lifelong process and not as a static state. Dividing consumers strictly into groups could lead to misinterpreting their behavior and reasoning, which then leads to ineffective message delivery or even ignorance.

## **5.2 Limitations and further research**

The study was made using the qualitative research approach, the existential-phenomenological approach, to be precise. The knowledge generated from the phenomenological approach can be seen to be idiographic, time bound and context dependent (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). In consequence, this knowledge should not necessarily be applied to larger or wider subsets of people, for it is only a portrayal of the interviewees' experiences. The interpretive approach also means that the analysis of the texts is based on the author's own pre-understanding, interpretation and explanations of behavior (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006), and hence the results are a reflection of her own view of the world and the phenomenon seen through the interviewees' eyes and experiences. Some other researcher would probably have made different interpretations and ended up in different kinds of results, which certainly would not make them any more or less valuable or interesting. This, however, can be seen to limit the research and at the same time give it its own and unique nature.

The decision to interview friends was intentional and it also can be considered to limit the research. The fact that the interviewees were familiar with the interviewer could affect their answers as they might have left out some relevant or interesting stories because they know that the interviewer already is aware of that story. They also might have skipped some stories – for example stories of bad or grim drinking occasions – that have involved the interviewer as they do not want to offend the interviewer. This factor limits the study, but at the same time the decision to interview friends was made intentionally. I argue that drinking is a sensitive subject and people may be more willing to tell about their feelings and experiences, even the embarrassing ones, when the interviewer is a friend, rather than a half-acquaintance or a complete stranger.

The context of the master's thesis narrows and limits the research as it does not offer possibilities for a very wide-ranging exploration. This study is based on discussions with six interviewees, who were 21–25-year-old students or recently graduated. Thus, the sample group was very homogenous in that regard – a choice made intentionally. This limits the results to illustrate how students portray and experience drinking, and hence no broader generalizations can be made based on this study. However, as discussed earlier, studying is a phase in life when people usually consume more alcohol. In consequence, it can be argued that particularly students represent drinking more vividly and diversely than other groups of people would.

As it limits the study at hand, the homogenous sample group also provides possibilities for further research. In order to broaden the scope, similar studies could be conducted on different sample groups, for example working people in their thirties or forties, or people already approaching their retirement age. These kinds of studies would offer new insights in the topic and broaden our understanding of how the alcohol consumption experiences of people and their perceptions of the experiences change (or do not change) during an even longer period of time and according to their phase in life. Such a research would also provide interesting understanding on how consumers' identities are shaped when students proceed from student lives and identities and enter the “adult” life, which is usually perceived as less boozy. Also studying people from different areas or educational backgrounds could offer us interesting views on the topic and help us comprehend how these demographics affect alcohol consumption and the meanings people make of it.

## 6 Conclusion

The empirical part of the research exposed a research gap in current alcohol consumption literature. Previous literature has not considered drinking as a long-term process where individual occasions influence the long-term perception of drinking. In previous research the social nature of drinking has been identified but, again, the long-term social influences have been omitted.

This research illustrated that in order to manage drinking and keep control people employ certain strategies before, during and after a drinking occasion. Self-control, group control, the choice of place and retreating have been discovered to be strategies that individuals engage in. There are, however, other forces that affect a certain event. Social interaction, expectations and time are fuels that urge drinking before the event. The context, stress, social pressure, unexpected episodes, the mood, and determination are factors that contribute to control during an event. Marketplace artifacts, as food or music, are perceived to contribute to control or control loss too.

In addition to the discoveries related to managing a specific drinking event, this study has indeed discovered that drinking is a long-term cyclical process. Certain occasions and the decisions made impact on future drinking and behavior. Regret and failures may trigger avoidance and sobriety for some time, whereas the feeling of success and a longer period of abstinence may create urges to drink and lead to more decadent phases. Failures also challenge individual's self and self-concept. Because of these challenges, drinking has an effect on consumers' identity and self-concept. Some phases of life, for example student life, are considered boozier ones. That consideration may also justify and excuse heavy drinking and behavior that would otherwise be considered inappropriate. Both balancing drinking and identity or one's self-concept perception can be seen as a lifelong process that has no end states or static definitions.

In this research alcohol consumption has also been discovered to have a long-term effect on social relationships. Drinking lubricates social relations in situations aimed at nurturing friendships or the ease to get to know new people. However, drinking also affects relationships even years after a certain event: reminiscing the good old times and the fun occasions experienced together creates a sense of solidarity and glues friends and groups together tighter.

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STT Info:

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# Appendix

## Appendix 1: Questions and topics covered in the semi-structured long interviews

### *Background information*

- Tell about yourself
- What do you do?
- How do you spend your free time?

### *Drinking in general*

- Can you tell about your drinking?
- What is drinking like to you?
- What does drinking include?
- What occurs to you in regards to drinking?
- Describe yourself as a drinker
- When do you drink?

### *Drinking occasions*

- Can you think back of a drinking occasion when...
  - a) you felt good or nice
  - b) you felt bad
  - c) you did not feel like drinking
  - d) you felt like drinking

### *Feelings on drinking*

- Can you tell how you feel when you drink?
- How do you feel before drinking?
- How do you feel after drinking?