Symbolic Interaction

How to Be a Good Alcoholic

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Alcoholism is not one singular thing. It takes many forms, some more dignified and less destructive than others. This article explores how people drinking in the early hours of the day in bars present themselves and their relationship with alcohol and alcoholism. By means of ethnographic data, I analyze their strategies in dealing with the deviant use of alcohol. I find that the early morning drinkers use distinctions along three dimensions: managing drunkenness, taking breaks from drinking, and claiming certain motives for drinking. These distinctions are used in order to position oneself on a normative scale of different types of alcoholics.
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INTRODUCTION

> It's 9 o'clock in the morning and I'm in a bar. I'm with Espen and a new guy I haven't met before and we're all drinking beer. The new guy asks me what I'm doing in Oslo and for how long I've lived here. I'm telling him about my project, that I spend time at this and a few other bars that open early and that I'm going to write about it. "Really?" he says, laughing. I nod and smile back. He quickly adds: "I'm one of those who admit that I'm an alcoholic." "Do you?" Espen asks. "Yeah, but I'm what you can call a well-functioning alcoholic."

Drinking beer is loaded with symbolic meaning. It is an act surrounded by multiple norms, rules, and attitudes, and therefore it has a strong impact on interaction between people. In Mary Douglas' words: "Sampling a drink is sampling what is happening to a whole category of social life" (Douglas 1987:9). Drinking beer in the early hours of the day enhances the symbolic power of the act because alcoholic drinks are not normative substitutes for common morning beverages such as coffee. At least, this is the case in the Norwegian context where my ethnographic research among early morning drinkers in bars took place.

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Alcohol consumption has various meanings depending on the context and various types of boundaries help us separate one context from another (Zerubavel 1993). In Norway, drinking alcoholic beverages is a "time-out" activity (Douglas 1987; MacAndrew and Edgerton 1969). It is a leisure activity, separated from work and other obligations. There are, however, some exceptions to these rules. There is, for example, the tradition of champagne for breakfast when celebrating the Norwegian National Day. In addition, if you find yourself at the airport early in the morning you will most likely observe people having a drink to kick off their holiday, like some sort of a ritual to mark the start of a time-out period. Such occasions allow people — who otherwise would not think of drinking at that time of day — to make exceptions. However, the meanings alcohol takes during these exceptional occasions differ sharply from the meanings that are constructed in a worn-out bar at 9 o'clock in the morning on a regular weekday. The statements by the self-proclaimed alcoholic above would disturb interaction during the champagne breakfast, but flows naturally among the morning drinkers I observed. Because for them, this is not a time-out activity but it is a time-in activity that frames the context of their meaning making.

The ways people behave have no intrinsic meaning. Rather, meaning is created by an act of interpretation (Cohen 1989:17). Given the deviant character of drinking beer at a bar early in the morning, alcoholism is likely an interpretation of such behavior. However, alcoholism is not one singular thing. It is well established that what people label as alcoholism and other addictive behaviors varies, and that such behaviors cause different reactions both in the social surroundings and in the addict himself/herself in different cultural contexts (Sulkunen 2007:543). Alcoholism is inevitably bad, but there are nuances of bad and that is a matter of concern for the early morning drinkers. They do not necessarily regard each other as drinkers or alcoholics of the same kind. People *do* their alcoholism in numerous ways. This perspective relates to Denzin's (1987) lay theory of alcoholism, which holds that "an alcoholic is a person who defines himself or herself as an alcoholic" (1987:11). Denzin argues that most theories of alcoholism do not take into account the lived experience of the active alcoholic. The alcoholic is objectified and in most cases portrayed as a victim of his or her disease. Denzin adds other features to his definition, but I pick up the argument at this simple starting point. The main point is that people are drinkers and alcoholics in various ways. How these different ways are manifested has social consequences. People develop strategies to cope with the question of alcohol and alcoholism, strategies that affect social life.

This article deals with the meanings of alcohol and alcoholism within the context of social interaction. The empirical basis is an ethnographic study carried out in bars early in the morning in Oslo, Norway. I investigate how people use verbal and behavioral strategies to position themselves when it comes to the question of alcohol and alcoholism. I do not challenge the "realness" of alcoholism, in the sense of evaluating whether they are alcoholics or not. I look at how it is "real" for the people under study, in the sense that their opinions and beliefs about alcohol and alcoholism influence social interaction.

IDENTITY, ACCOUNTS, AND BOUNDARIES

The interactionist perspective serves as a theoretical foundation for this study. Put simply, I study what happens when people do things together (Maines 2003), and I search for the meaning-making processes in interaction. Meaning is created through interaction between people or between people and things, based on the participant's interpretations of the situation (Blumer 1986). In this case, I investigate how the meanings of alcohol and alcoholism come through in the context of bars.

The work of both Mead and Goffman is fundamental for the understanding of social identity from an interactional perspective. Mead (1934) looks the self as a result of social action and social conditions; Goffman (1959) defines the self as a result of situational coincidences and interaction rituals. Building on Mead and Goffman, Holstein and Gubrium (2000) claim that the self is not something we are, but is rather an object we actively construct and live by (2000:10). Identities are constructed through social practices and actors maneuver between different ways to construct themselves. Identities are not static, but rather dynamic objects that people are in constant negotiation with and that are played out in different ways in different contexts. According to Harré et al (2009), social positions are objects that exist a priori for the person filling them as part of a common knowledge about the social context. How people construct their position at the bar in the morning is not randomly chosen, but is related to the norms, beliefs, and knowledge that characterize the situation.

To gain more detailed and generalizable insights about positioning and identity construction, scholars have developed various conceptual frameworks. One that is of particular relevance here is Scott and Lyman's (1968) theory of accounts. In general terms, an account is "a statement made by a social actor to explain unanticipated or untoward behavior" (1968:46). An account is differentiated from the wider understanding of explanations in that it is necessarily concerned with something problematic. It is a tool, so to speak, born out of people's capacity to deal with troubled events, and its function is to restore and repair what is broken. Drinking at bars in the early hours of the day is deviant behavior, which makes the use of accounts relevant. The drinkers are aware that a common interpretation of their having a drink at 8 o'clock in the morning is that they are alcoholics, and that people passing by believe they are seeing alcoholism in action. Accounts can be divided into two main categories, justifications and excuses (Scott and Lyman 1968:47). In a justification, the narrator takes responsibility for the event but denies its offensive or wrongful character; in an excuse, the narrator admits the wrongfulness of an event but denies responsibility for it. Most importantly, accounts involve a presentation of the accounter's self (Järvinen 2001:267). Justifying an action is not only directed at the possible condemnation by others and by ourselves, it is also a way to recast ourselves as good moral actors. Accounts are part of an ongoing process of identity construction.

In many cases, justification overlaps with what is labeled "techniques of neutralization" (Sykes and Matza 1957). Such techniques have been defined as "universal modes of response to inconsistency" (Hazani 1991:146). Originally, a criminological

theory about juvenile delinquency and the excuses and justifications that young deviants use to rationalize their behavior, the concept of neutralization techniques has gained influence in a wide range of disciplines and across various themes (see Maruna and Copes 2005). It has the potential to be applied "to any situation where there are inconsistencies between one's actions and one's belief" (Maruna and Copes 2005:223). When it comes to risky behavior, scapegoating is a common way of neutralizing: "This (scapegoating) is the oldest way to deny a risk: to draw a border between the stereotyped 'them' (risky people) and 'us' (safe people)" (Peretti-Watel 2003:27). In the area of alcohol, an example of scapegoating would be to point to other people's risky consumption of hard liquor in contrast to one's own "healthy" consumption of wine.

Scapegoating bears some resemblance to the more general concept of boundary drawing, as it concerns distinctions that actors navigate in interaction. As an analytic tool, the concept of boundaries has been employed in a wide range of research on themes such as social and collective identity (Gamson 1997), taste and class (Bourdieu 1984), race and ethnicity (Barth 1969), gender inequalities (Gerson and Peiss 1985), and professions and knowledge (Abbott 1988; see i.e, Lamont and Molnár 2002). This article deals with the social construction of a "good alcoholic," hence the focus is on the role of boundaries in building identities. In order to have a notion of self, one needs to separate it from other things. As noted by Zerubavel, "things assume a distinctive identity only through being differentiated from other things" (1993:3). Constructing identities requires notions of difference and symbolic boundaries point to the ways in which people make these distinctions between objects, people, and practices (Lamont and Fournier 1992). The aim of constructing and maintaining distinctions is often to achieve superiority over others, whether an individual or a group. This process is often termed boundary work, and is thought to capture a fundamental social process, namely relationality (Emirbayer 1997; Lamont and Fournier 1992; Somers 1994). In the area of alcohol, an example of boundary work would be to draw distinctions between different types of beverages, for example to rank exclusive wines over alcopops or vice versa, in order to mark affiliation with a certain group.

Within this theoretical framework, I analyze how the early morning drinkers navigate around the question of alcohol and alcoholism, investigating how various types of accounts and boundary work related to such issues facilitate the drawing of different types of alcoholic identities.

METHODOLOGY

Participant observation was undertaken in six bars in Oslo opening between 8 and 9 in the morning, with approximately hundred field observations conducted between the period Spring 2011 and Spring 2013. All six bars are centrally located, with four of them in the eastern part of the city, one in the western part, and one in the city center. They are quite similar in style; all except one are located at street level, they

all have a fairly dark interior, and all have a rather worn out appearance, some more so than others. All bars have their share of regulars, and although patrons do not form a homogeneous group, one could still say that the most typical drinker is male, between 50 and 70 years old, and living on either a pension or some form of welfare benefits. Some have worked all their lives and are well integrated; others have a life history more on the margins of mainstream society. Norway is a welfare state and the pension programs are fairly generous, especially if one has been employed for many years, indicating that the pensioners do not struggle too much economically. Those on various social welfare programs are typically worse off, but everybody appears to be enrolled in some program that provides a minimum of steady income. In addition, some of the regulars participate in low threshold work a few hours a day with salaries in cash, which provide some money for beer. Pensions and most welfare benefits are paid on the same date every month, and in the following days, the bars are at their busiest. A few older women are also frequent guests, and you may find younger people there from time to time. Less frequent, but still noteworthy, are the night-shift workers who have a couple of beers on their way home to sleep. Most guests drink beer (Pilsner) and a few drink white or red wine. Hard liquor (above 22% alcohol) is not served until 1 PM according to the law, a rule that appears to be respected both by the guests and by the bartenders. The level of consumption varies among the guests, but in general, it is high. Some drink to intoxication on a daily basis and have been doing so for years. The most typical description given by the guests themselves is that the morning drinker is quite lonely and enjoys drinking a little too much.

The starting point of the study was to explore the phenomenon of drinking at bars in the early hours of the day. As in most ethnographic studies, the research questions were fairly open at the start of the study, and I had no specific hypotheses (Atkinson and Hammersley 1994). However, I was interested in the question of alcoholism, how this specific group of early morning drinkers relate to it, how they define it, and whether they define themselves as alcoholics. My strategy as a field observer can be described as that of the participant-as-observer (Gold 1958). I was open about my role as an observer when I talked to people, but I did not want to interfere too much with the other guests' interactions and therefore tried to act as any other guest at the bar. I drank beer or coffee, read the newspaper, engaged in conversation or just sat there, which are typical behaviors at these places. I did not know any bar guests beforehand, and during the first phase of my field work I sat mostly by myself. Gradually, I got to know people and could eventually anticipate meeting people I knew and join them in conversation. I quickly learned that alcohol is a common topic of conversation and that talk about alcohol is often closely related to talk about alcoholism.

On a typical day of field observation, I spent several hours (from half an hour to five hours) in the bar, going straight to my office to write up field notes afterward. As reminders, I also made notes on my phone or in a small notebook during observation. Field notes were coded and the coding strategy was inspired by a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967). In practical terms, this means that the coding was as free as possible from theoretical categories and concepts in advance, in order

to be able to build an analysis from the bottom up. Clearly, one cannot free oneself completely from one's theoretical repertoire, and it is both misleading and undesirable to claim that one can (Herbert 2000:552). Nevertheless, an inductive strategy can help to avoid a theoretical "closing" of the field at the early stage of the analysis. I used the transcripts of every code that in some way included alcohol, which in the end separated into three categories that had to do with *ways* of drinking, *patterns* of drinking, and *motives* for drinking.

Studies of social life depend on what we observe. The linguistic/language turn in the social sciences put language at the center of social inquiry. It has been acknowledged for some time that talk is not merely a reflection of something "real," but also constitutes realities. When we talk, we act, hence the term "speech-act" (Austin 1962). This view is no longer controversial. My study is about talk and action. Through participant observation, I spoke with the informants, I listened to talk between the informants, and I observed how they acted. Some of my observations did not involve words; for example, quite a few of the regulars in some of these bars would arrive at the bar, drink a couple of beers, and leave without talking to anybody, except for a couple of words and a gesture when they order at the bar. If the aim here is to use language as a means to understanding such an interaction, there is not much to work with. When it comes to the theme of this article — the characteristics of "the good alcoholic" — it is not expressed through words alone, but through actions, styles, and behaviors. In Bourdieu's (1984) terms, linguistic capital is not the only resource for positioning in this social field. Distinctions are made with regard to embodied skills and abilities — while some choose certain conduct of actions based on aesthetic or social preferences, for example, going to a specific bar, others choose the necessary (Bourdieu 1984:372), for example, going wherever as long as they serve alcohol. Moreover, in my data, some of the actors do not just talk about taking a break from drinking alcohol; they are actually taking a break, having a coffee instead. It is an important benefit of ethnography that "it examines what people *do* as well as what they *say*" (Herbert 2000:552).

In the following, I outline three strategies that the early morning drinkers apply in the construction of a "good alcoholic." These strategies concern the ability to manage drunkenness, to take breaks from drinking, and to use certain vocabularies of motives that downplay the deviant nature of their drinking.

WAYS OF DRINKING: MANAGING DRUNKENNESS

Some of the guests at these bars get pretty drunk, but if you get too drunk early in the day, you exaggerate the deviant character of the drinking. One way of normalizing the situation and presenting a more acceptable image is not to get drunk. On one fairly busy morning, I sat at a table with a group of men, and one of them told me a story about the previous night:

> Olav, a man aged about 60, was invited to another guy's home the night before. Today when they met again at the pub, the other guy could not remember that.

> Olav says he rarely gets drunk himself. "It's not about drinking as fast as possible and getting drunk. I'm done with that."

This was the first time I had met him. One of the first things he said was, "I'm an alcoholic." Apparently, it cost him nothing to admit that. Alcoholism is often associated with loss of control, in the sense that alcohol more or less takes charge of a drinker's will (Sulkunen 2007). In contrast, the statement above expresses control. He used to get drunk before but states that he has now gained control. He drinks every day, but *he* is in charge, not the alcohol. He is in control while his friend is not. During a conversation with another man of the same age, a regular guest at another bar, the following occurs:

> He's telling a story about a guy who bought three bottles of wine on the same day the social insurance came. He says that he doesn't drink wine often himself because that gets him drunk too easily. He drinks coffee with the beer and that makes him stay sober. "They cancel each other out," he says.

Whether or not drinking coffee with beer actually influences the level of drunkenness is not so important in this context. He does it nevertheless. His stated purpose is not to get drunk, which is why he drinks coffee with the beer and stays off wine. This is also a man who by no means hides the fact that he is a regular drinker. Given the possible stigma he experiences as a deviant drinker, his strategy with coffee drinking symbolizes a form of stigma management (Goffman 1963).

On another morning, I was listening to a group of men talking at the table next to me. It was a nice, quiet morning with laughter and smiles. One of the guests had a dog:

> After some silence, the dog owner says: "Yeah, it's lovely here in the morning. Absolutely quiet, no noise and just nice people." A little later, when a new guest arrived at his table, he talks about his routine: "I go for a walk with the dog for two hours, then two beers here, then it's home."

He says he is not drinking steadily throughout the day. He enjoys two beers and that does not get him drunk. At the same time, he mentions that he likes the quiet atmosphere in the pub in the morning: "No noise and just nice people." He would not appreciate people being drunk and boisterous. The ability not to get drunk is not just about yourself; it also affects the general atmosphere in the pub when intoxication is at a low level. This guest controls his drinking, and he prefers that others do so as well. As such, he shapes an identity as a man in control of his situation. Along the same line, many guests praise the bartender for not serving drunk people. During a conversation about differences between bars, a regular at one of the smaller and quieter ones said: "*Here it doesn't get to that* [noisy and boisterous]. *Ragnhild* [the bartender] *demands good discipline. It cost her nothing to show drunk people the door*."

People do get drunk at these bars, and as the day goes on, it happens more often. In other words, these bars are not typical locations for controlled drinking. Moreover,

those who state that they do not like either themselves or others getting drunk do not always live up to this ideal. Nevertheless, the idea of controlling intoxication is still present and influences the social atmosphere. People would rather emphasize that they do not get drunk, at least not visibly drunk, rather than brag about how drunk they were the night before.

PATTERNS OF DRINKING: TAKING BREAKS

There is much talk about staying sober for a while. Dry spells as a theme of conversation signals that people are heavy drinkers. If you talked about taking a break from drinking at the annual Christmas party with your colleagues, they would assume you had a drinking problem. Guests at the pub in the morning often have no trouble giving the impression of being heavy drinkers, but at the same time, they often talk about the breaks they have taken or plan to take. Below is a conversation with a man in his fifties on a fairly busy morning in a bar. He had coffee and explained why:

> "I decided to wait a bit today. Postpone the drinking a little bit." He claims that he feels the tingling now, but when he starts drinking, it doesn't stop. "It's either zero or it easily becomes 18–20 [beers]." He talks about a break that lasted from February until May, and says he still came to this bar from time to time, but only for coffee and water. He believes that his taking a break was met with respect from the other guests.

At least three points can be extracted from this example: first, the guest tries to delay having a drink until later in the day; second, he takes a longer break; and third, having a break and not drinking is met with respect. I met this guest in the pub several times during his dry spells. Indeed, the fact that he actually continued to go to the same bar when not drinking sends a strong signal. It is something he does, not just something he says. The *doing* can be assumed to make an impression on his fellow drinkers. He is not telling stories, he is *acting* them, which may also be the reason why his taking a break is met with respect.

The following example further illustrates the notion of dry spells being regarded positively. In one of the bars, a group of three older men (the youngest in his sixties and the oldest just above eighty) meet up every single day, year around. The youngest (Lars) drinks coffee, while the two others usually drink beer. They have their regular seats in the corner of the room and one morning when I was joining their table and Lars was out for a cigarette, I talked to Harald about him:

Harald: He (Lars) has been good for a while now. Hasn't been drinking for a year or so.

Me: Wow, that's not bad. Like, only in the morning or in general?

Harald: No, he hasn't been drinking at all. And then he's lost 100 pounds. He had to have an operation for gastric ulcer and then he stopped drinking and lost 100 pounds.

Me: Well done. And good for him I guess.

Harald: Yeah, damn good for him.

The notion of reflected appraisal holds that people's feelings about themselves are influenced by their judgments of what other people think of them (Milkie 1999). Lars' abstinence was clearly met with respect and positive appraisal, making the bar a good place to be even if only for coffee. The challenge of course, is the temptation to drink when in a bar, but if you can handle that, as Lars does, the bar constitutes a good arena for building self-esteem as a "good" alcoholic when you are on the wagon. Furthermore, one can look at Harald's identity work in this situation. By praising Lars' abstinence, Harald adopts the "normals'" attitude for himself, gaining a "phantom normalcy" (Goffman 1963) as result. Despite his own deviation from the abstinence norm, Harald becomes a different kind of good alcoholic by praising a friend who manages to live by it.

The next illustration is about the use of Antabuse (disulfiram used to treat alcohol abuse and dependence) as a means of staying off alcohol. Taking a break from drinking can be a real challenge, and the use of Antabuse is fairly common:

> Gunnar, who talked about Antabuse yesterday, joins our table. Paul makes a comment about Gunnar drinking coffee and water. Gunnar says the same thing as yesterday, namely that he cannot drink alcohol if he wants to do something later in the day. He says he has been on Antabuse for two weeks, and that it is not so difficult. "The first week is hard, but then it gets better. After two or three months, it becomes hard again. That's when I start to get restless." Paul can not tolerate Antabuse, he says. A little later, Anders is talking to Gunnar about Antabuse. Anders says he takes it on Monday and Tuesday because then he can drink when Friday comes.

Anders does not always follow this pattern of taking Antabuse on Monday and Tuesday, at least not over time. First and foremost, it must be understood as an ideal, but it also reflects the tension between talk and action. Being on coffee and water, Gunnar is clearly taking a break, while Anders is just telling a story. If you wish people to think of you as someone who can manage to stay off alcohol, the chances are better if you act as such, as Gunnar does. That said, the conversation between these people works as an example of positive talk concerning dry spells, and using Antabuse to be able to manage them is not seen as failure. It is more a question of pride rather than shame. The situation also illustrates that there are different ways to take a break, for example, to stay completely off for a period of time or to avoid drinking some days during the week.

Alcohol is toxic and may break down one's body if the intake runs out of control. Many of these drinkers have first-hand experience of that and know that it is necessary, sometimes vital, to let the body and soul rest. Managing to do so is not only good for the physical health, it may also provide a certain feeling of pride and thus fuel the construction of a better self. It is clear that people are proud of their breaks. Their stories about abstinence are readily told, and they are well accepted by others, as listeners often react with "good for you" or similar sentiments.

MOTIVES FOR DRINKING: BUT WHY?

The people who drink at the bar on a regular Tuesday morning are certainly aware that this behavior violates common drinking norms. The kinds of motives they offer for doing it anyway, despite the possible stigma, are part of their positioning strategies. A man of around sixty, whom I had never seen before when we started talking, said the following:

> You know, you have different levels of alcoholism. First you have, and that's the lowest, those who can't get out, those who just sit at home and drink. They end up drinking themselves to death. Then you have those who go to these bars every morning. They're in a sense at the level above those who sit at home. And then you have those who, and I guess I'm in that category, occasionally or for short periods of time, go out and drink beer in the morning … Like, I'm not really an alcoholic, only occasionally.

For this man, those who drink at home and do not get out are at the lowest level. In their world, it is just them and the bottle. If you go to bars on a daily basis, you are at the level above. However, there is a strong addictive flavor to such a routine — it is as if you *have* to do it. This contrasts with the occasional morning drinking, which supposedly is more a matter of choice, or at least less characterized by compulsion. The statements above can be interpreted as an example of boundary drawing, where he distances himself from the risky behavior of the "others," the "lower-level" alcoholics. More specifically, such talk echoes the concept of "defensive othering" (see Schwalbe et al. 2000), a kind of boundary work that may be done "… to deflect the stigma they experience as members of a subordinate group" (Schwalbe et al 2000:425). The drinker does not put himself in a completely different position — he uses the term *occasional alcoholic* to describe himself — but among alcoholics, he is on top of the hierarchy.

In addition, as the next illustration shows, it is not only a question of whether you go out or not, or how often you go out. The question of *where* is also a matter of concern. Some of the morning drinkers switch between various bars, going from one to another on the same day, or at times paying regular visits to one bar and at other times to other locations. Others have clear preferences and avoid specific places. One morning a group of people who are regulars at "Moe's," were in the beer garden at "Old Tavern," which was pointed out by one of the patrons seated around the bar counter. He said when another guy arrived: *"He belongs to 'Moe's,' doesn't he?" The bartender goes: "I guess all the monkeys out there belong to 'Moe's'."* On another occasion the same bartender said when I asked about the difference between the two bars: "*They're more hardcore over there* [at "Moe's"]. *This place is more for working people*."

The distinction between the significant terms, "hardcore" and "working people," as well as the distinction between "lower-level" and "occasional" in the previous example, are types of boundary work that can be understood from a perspective of motives. Following Weber, motive is understood here as "a complex of subjective

meaning which appears to the actor himself or to the observer as an adequate ground for the conduct in question" (1947:98–99). It is implicit that the "hardcore" and "lower-level" drink because they need to, or because they do not want anything else, while the working people have a beer when they are off work, or when they feel they deserve it. Their motives are different. Workers refuse to be placed in the same category as the hardcore; therefore, it is not well received when some of the hardcore use "their" bar.

It should be added to the interpretation of this distinction that the drinkers who attend the bar for the working crowd are not necessarily employed *at the time* as many of them are retired. However, they affiliate to a category of people who *have been* integrated in working life, while the typical guest at the other bar represents a person with a marginalized life history on the outskirts of mainstream society. Moreover, old age is a positive symbolic attribute in the first case as it symbolizes a well-deserved retirement, while old age in the latter case is a symbol of wasted opportunities and a miserable life. Such differences are not necessarily matters of fact on the individual level, but they form the logic of the boundary work the drinkers engage in for the purpose of drawing distinctions between different motivations.

There are not many women in the bars in the morning, but most days there are some regulars or the occasional drop-in present. A woman of around forty, who works full-time night shifts, and contrary to the patrons above did not appear to be concerned about which bar she attended, said the following to me on a quiet morning at "Moe's," the "hardcore" bar:

> Freedom is being able to drink beer at your own convenience, when you want to, and for me it's often best in the morning. Because of my job, I usually can't drink in the evenings. Also, I like it better in the morning. At night, the bar is full of people; they're drunk and it's cramped for space, you're being pushed around and there's lots of noise. Now, it's peaceful and nice. I can sit here reading the paper on my phone, just watch people, relax, maybe talk to somebody I meet. It's much better.

She talks about having a beer in the morning as a freedom project. She works all night, so for her it is an after-work beer, which is a fairly common drinking ritual. She also likes the morning better than the evening because it is quieter, and she can relax. As such, she positions herself in a less deviant category, as someone who drinks according to her own preferences, and when it is appropriate in relation to her working hours. Along a similar line, some people may express clearly that their morning drinking is an exceptional case, that is, when a man sat down at the bar and said loudly — "*I just sent my tax return, I did my civic duty. I think I deserve a beer*," and when another man, who said he was off work for a few days, laughed when he took his first sip of the beer and said: "*It's crazy to drink beer for breakfast, but it's good!*"

Although drinking in the morning breaks with common drinking norms, it appears that drinking in a bar provides a better feeling than staying at home

drinking. Moreover, it is better to have a drink because you like it, or because it fits with other obligations such as work, than to go out because you just have to have alcohol. This illustrates how motives can be used in symbolic boundary work and social positioning. Most people would rather associate themselves with those who do not *have* to drink than with those who cannot or will not chose otherwise.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

According to Goffman (1966), people "give off" information simply by being present in a situation. The information you give off by being in a bar in the morning on a regular weekday drinking beer is that you probably drink too much. It is a type of situation where "alcoholic" is a likely label. This is a matter of concern for the people involved, not necessarily because it is wrong — many would not object to the label — but because there are different ways of being an alcoholic. How the early morning drinkers deal with this has been explored in this article. I have shown that they use distinctions along three dimensions to position themselves on a normative scale of different types of alcoholics. In short, a "good" alcoholic has the ability not to get drunk, at least not too quickly too early in the day. He or she is able to stay off alcohol from time to time, with or without the help of Antabuse, and he or she does not drink only because he or she *has* to drink; the drinking is not driven by compulsion or a strong urge alone, it is also a matter of choice. These dimensions have, respectively, to do with certain *ways* of drinking, certain *patterns* of drinking, and certain *motives* for drinking.

Human beings use a variety of tools to present themselves in ways that make sense to both themselves and their social surroundings. The content and form of such self-presentation are culturally bound. One does not *have* a specific form of self-presentation, one *makes* a story by considering the context (Presser 2004). As Holstein and Gubrium (2000) put it: "narratives are occasioned, put together in the context of particular times and places; these circumstances influence how the self might be storied by presenting local relevancies" (2000:106). Among the "local relevancies" in the context of the bar during the early morning hours are one's relationship with alcohol and alcoholism. As the drinkers are engaged in a socially deviant activity, the stories being told often take the form of some sort of account, whether an excuse, a justification, or a neutralization technique. I have interpreted these accounts as identity work, following the understanding of identity as something that takes shape when we verbally account for our behavior (see Presser 2004:82).

Time is of essence in the boundary work the drinkers are engaged in. The drawing of temporal boundaries *does* more than just divide time, as it may represent mental partitions that connect the temporal to other aspects of the social order (Zerubavel 1993:10). As drinkers at a bar in the morning, these individuals already crossed a conventional temporal line for when it is appropriate to drink alcohol.

To address this, we saw that some people emphasized that their drinking was in accordance with other important temporal boundaries, that is, the boundary of the workday, and that they went to the bar when they were off duty. Furthermore, when people talk about their breaks from drinking and receive good feedback on such efforts, a temporal boundary is constructed that can be used to position oneself as a person in control. Last, the ability to abstain from drunkenness is not only about abstaining from that specific condition, it is about the ability to stay in control at that specific time of the day when drunkenness is especially deviant and inappropriate. In sum, one may say that these temporal boundaries are means to facilitate the drawing of identity boundaries and to make distinctions between different types of drinkers.

The dimensions identified as resources for constructing an identity as a "good" alcoholic may be viewed as control strategies. Loss of control is probably the most common characteristic that has been used to describe the essence of addictions. That is what also makes addiction a philosophical inquiry, because it touches upon the question of autonomy and free will (Foddy 2011; Morse 2006). The findings in this study not only underpin the importance of control, but they also show that the early morning drinkers deal with control in a nuanced way. It is not simply a matter of loss of control *or* free will; it is a matter of keeping the hands on the wheel *despite* a strong desire for alcohol. The "good" alcoholic maintains a level of control over his addiction, not by quitting, but by handling alcoholism in certain ways.

In the first two dimensions discussed above, which have to do with *ways* and *patterns* of drinking, the notion of control is a crucial feature in a very concrete sense. It concerns the ability to restrict the pace and amount of drinking, and the ability to endure periods of abstinence. As part of constructing an identity, it is something that cannot be achieved only by talk, by discourse alone. You cannot look drunk and talk about how you manage drunkenness, and you cannot go into a bar day after day, week after week, and still be trustworthy when you talk about a controlled pattern of drinking. To build an identity as a drinker in control, these strategies demand action, not merely talk. When some patrons go to the bar and drink coffee instead of the usual beer, they show to the world and to themselves some level of control. They are not complete slaves to alcohol.

The motives that the drinkers express can be interpreted as strategies to normalize to some extent the deviant nature of morning drinking. The notion of control is in this respect crucial. The bottom line is whether you use alcohol or if alcohol "uses you." Motives are verbally expressed, but the trustworthiness depends on action, that is, if you do not have the ability to control the ways and patterns of drinking, the available motives are more limited than if you do. Mills (1940) stated: "The motives actually used in justifying or criticizing an act definitely link it to situations, integrate one man's actions with another's, and line up conduct with norms" (1940:908). One strategy is to relate the drinking to acceptable and anticipated norms of conduct, such as freedom and autonomy. The night-shift worker was an example of that, as she indicated how drinking in the morning fit well with her working hours, and

that she preferred the quiet mornings to the noisy evenings. Another strategy is to distance oneself from others who are thought to have untoward motives, such as being driven by compulsion. By frequenting the bar for the "working people" instead of the "hardcore" bar, the patrons position themselves in a more morally decent category. Similar distinctions are found in other studies, that is, in Anderson's (1978, 2003) ethnography of Jelly's, where the "regulars" distanced themselves from the "hoodlums" and "wineheads" along dimensions that had to do with the notions of decency and affiliation to work and family.

Alcoholism can take many forms, some more dignifying and less destructive than others. Managing to stay in some kind of control obviously helps the morning drinkers to tip and turn everyday life in a more satisfying direction. They use specific strategies to do so, some of which we have looked at here. The strategies are mostly verbally communicated — before, after, and in the midst of drinking. Accordingly, they work as guidance, justification, and explanation for action. The strive to be a "good" alcoholic depends on the ability to act in accordance with the strategies that are verbally accounted for.

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