

Power and intoxication: self-control and discipline for the famous

Robin Room

School of Population Health, University of Melbourne

AER Centre for Alcohol Policy Research,
Turning Point Alcohol & Drug Centre, Fitzroy, Victoria, Australia

Centre for Social Research on Alcohol & Drugs (SoRAD),
Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden

Lecture in the course, “Regulation of life-styles in welfare
society: Power”, Sociology Department, Helsinki
University, 16 October, 2007.

The symbolic power of substance use

- Positive symbolism of use
 - Champagne = celebration
- Positive symbolism of abstaining
 - Marker of faith for Muslims, Mormons ...
- Negative symbolism of use or heavy use
 - “drunkard”, “dope fiend”, “alcoholic”, “drug addict”, “dependent on drugs” all stigmatized
- Negative symbolism of abstaining
 - “wowsers”
- Variation by time and place in the symbolism

Properties behind the symbolic power: 1

- Valued physical goods
 - Amenable to commodification, industrialization, globalization
 - Access as a symbol of power and domination
- Use as a social behaviour
 - A performance in front of others
 - Demarcating the social group's boundaries of inclusion/exclusion
- Taken into body
 - Intimate behaviour
 - Fateful: can contaminate – poison, infection, sin, spirit possession
 - Subject to prescriptions and taboos

Properties behind the symbolic power: 2

- Psychoactive = power to affect thinking & behaviour
 - Intoxication, taking one out of oneself
 - Valued and feared: Double edge of terms:
 - *pharmakon*, drug, intoxication
 - Intoxicated behaviour as unpredictable, intractable, dangerous → powerful
 - The disinhibition axiom
- Causing addiction/dependence
 - Enslavement, loss of control of drug use and of life
 - But heavy use as a symbol of power, access to resources
- So multiple underlays of symbolic power

Drinking, intoxication and social power

(see the Pat Morgan reading)

- In the powerful, it can be
 - A prerogative of status
 - A means of intimidation
- In the powerless, it can be
 - A marker of unworthiness of the social group
 - A sign of personal unworthiness
 - A person-centred explanation of deviance
- Given the power assigned to it, alcohol may be denied to a subordinate group
- Alternatively, making alcohol freely available may disorganize resistance

Alcohol and intimate domination

(see the Room reading)

- Intoxication as an explanation of the otherwise unjustifiable
 - Legitimizing irrationality
 - An external agent (“it’s the alcohol talking”)
 - The mere threat of drinking can be coercive
- Reinforces domination particularly when it is in decline or flux?
- The ambiguous cultural status of the disinhibition axiom

On the other hand: modernity and the expectation of self-control

- Rationality as the norm, the irrational needs explaining
 - A preference for rationalizing explanations
- Intoxication as the archetype of impaired control
- A divorce between will and desire
 - That we can find ourselves doing things we desire even against our will
 - Is will something permanent with a continuing existence in us, or does it change from moment to moment?
 - Jon Elster, *Ulysses and the Sirens*
 - Economists and “rational addiction”: the temporal structure of “preferences”
- The individuation of social control: The cultural imperative of self-control (Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*)
 - Demonstrating self-control with respect to alcohol or drugs
 - Within culturally determined limits (MacAndrew & Edgerton, *Drunken Comportment*)

Self-control, intoxication and addiction

- “Epidemics of the will” – Eve Sedgwick, 1992
 - “the peculiarly resonant relations that seem to obtain between the problematics of addiction and those of the consumer phase of international capitalism”
- Self-control both moment-to-moment, and through time
 - Intoxication as failure of self-control in the moment
 - Addiction as failure of self-control through time
 - Some linkage: Failure in many moments adds up to addiction
- Addiction and intoxication as explanations of behaviour:
 - Secularized, material explanations of possession, the individual behaving “not like him/herself”
- Self-control as a transcendent social value, but also
 - something to be demonstrated in daily life

Among modern elites

- The primary relation to power: Intoxication and drug use as prerogatives and markers of privilege and affluence
- vs. self-control and sobriety, at least in public
- The solution: the guarded privacy of the powerful
 - Physical and social walls between the public and the private
 - The private vs. public spheres are there also for the less powerful, but with much less guarding

Breaching the boundary: threats to reputation and self-image

- Intoxication (and illicit drug use) as semi-private behaviour for all
 - Exceptions:
 - fiesta times (*carnaval*, Valborgsafton, midsommar, *russefeiring* ...);
 - youth??
- An important part of self control is **keeping** it private (Gusfield's "competent drinker")
- But trouble happens, breaching the boundary of semi-privacy
 - the car accident, the argument or fight, the betrayal
- The otherwise private is suddenly revealed
- The urgent need for a public figure: how to re-establish credibility as a person in control of oneself
 - 3 case studies ...

Breaching the boundary: case 1

- **Rebekah Wade**
- Dubbed the "Red Top's red top" for her pre-Raphaelite tresses, Wade is the Sun's first female editor.
- Despite a formidable work schedule, Wade finds time to mix with the same celebrities and politicians often pilloried in her pages. Out with her husband, former-EastEnder and New Labour fan Ross Kemp, she was even pictured hugging Cherie Blair....
- She has been a long-time [Rupert] Murdoch employee, working her way up from the News of the World's colour magazine to become, by 2000, the youngest editor in Fleet Street.



- Her tenure at [News of the World] was punctuated by her "naming and shaming" of known paedophiles, after the murder of schoolgirl Sarah Payne. Only after attacks on innocent men, riots in Portsmouth and the vilification of even some "paediatricians", did Wade reluctantly pull the plug on the campaign.
- --- BBC4 Documentary, 15 May 2003

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcfour/documentaries/profile/rebekah-wade.shtml>

Breaching the boundary: case 1

- “in good form”, and then a row:
 - “The editor of Britain's best-selling daily newspaper became embroiled in controversy yesterday after being arrested on suspicion of assaulting her soap star husband. Rebekah Wade, 37, who recently launched a campaign in her newspaper, the Sun, to stamp out domestic violence, found herself in a police cell in Battersea....”
 - She had started out with a consolatory drink with a friend who had just resigned in disgrace as a cabinet minister, and went on to a birthday party for her boss's son-in-law.
 - At the party, “Insiders said [that at the party Wade and her husband Ross Kemp], who met 10 years ago, were "in good form". But between the end of the birthday party and their arrival home, a row started. According to sources close to the couple it developed quickly and Kemp rang 999 in a fit of anger - a call which brought police to their Battersea home. When officers arrived they found Kemp with a thick lip and arrested his wife. She had her fingerprints taken and submitted a DNA sample before being locked in a cell to sleep.”
 - *Guardian* (London), Nov. 4, 2005

Breaching the boundary, case 1 (cont'd)

- Shamed Sun editor Rebekah Wade today downplayed reports of an alleged assault on her husband, EastEnders star Ross Kemp, but admitted a row had 'got out of hand'.
- Last night Kemp said the row was a "fuss about nothing" and Wade described it as a "silly row which got out of hand".
- The newspaper also relegated the story as it focused today's front page on the other twist to the EastEnders tale, an assault on Ross Kemp's onscreen brother, Steve McFadden, by his ex-girlfriend. Only at the bottom of page one did it refer to the incident involving its editor stating "And his bruv's had a bit of bother too". [*Daily Mail* Nov. 5, 2005]
- "As she awoke that morning in a police cell with a hangover,... she must have hoped it was all a bad dream. But some observers think the real nightmare is still to come, and the rumour mill has been spinning out of control about the potential for further revelations about the Wade-Kemp bustup." -- *Guardian*, Nov. 7, 2005
- On 31 January 2007 the London-based magazine *Private Eye* reported that the couple had separated, that Wade had moved to Chelsea, and that no major newspaper was covering the story. Wade is reportedly currently seeing former racehorse trainer, Charlie Brooks. [Wikipedia]

Breaching the boundary: case 2

- **Per Bill**, member of the Swedish Parliament
 - In a debate in Parliament in 2003, Per Bill, as the spokesman on alcohol policy of the right-wing Moderate Party, called traditional Swedish policy a "big brother policy", and called instead for an alcohol policy based on "individual responsibility,... a powerful prosecution of alcohol-related crime and at the same time helping actions for those who have a problem with alcohol".
 - On Sept. 9, 2004 at 5 pm Per Bill was jogging with a small child in a stroller on a quay in a busy part of Stockholm. He had been at a winetasting, where he says that he had tried about 25 wines. People there apparently tried to get him to take a taxi home, but he insisted on walking -- it was a beautiful late-summer day. He had often taken his children with him to wine-tastings, he said, because he wanted them to have "a natural relationship with wine and not see it as something that is taboo". Wine-tastings are a big hobby of his, and he says he is used to trying between 4000 and 6000 wines each year, and writing about wine-tastings in the magazine "Dina viner" (your wines).

Breaching the boundary – case 2 (cont'd)

- As Per Bill passed a restaurant-boat next to the quay, the stroller was weaving around and seemed close to overturning, according to witnesses at the scene. With heavy traffic nearby, there also seems to have been the danger of an accident. The guard at the boat, a woman who is the mother of three children, was concerned about the child, and stopped Bill and persuaded him to come with her to the watch-office on the boat. She says there was a half-finished bottle of wine in the stroller.
- Then he tried to make an escape, and she wrestled with him after a couple of steps. He hit her repeatedly on the arm and face



with his mobile phone, causing her to bleed. The stroller overturned during the fracas. With the help of another guard and a passing motorist, he was subdued and handcuffed. During this, he had tried to pull rank as a member of parliament, in fact presenting himself as another member of his party who is a former foreign minister. His explanation is that he was afraid the guard was trying to hurt him and the child, and just wanted to get away.

Breaching the boundary — case 2 (cont'd)

- The regular police finally responded to the guard's call about an hour later, and took Bill away to the drying-out station, where they held him for six hours and released him. They held him under the law which allows the police to hold a drunk person who is a danger to themselves or to others. They also wrote him up on suspicion of injury to a civil servant (presumably the private guard). The child was left with the guard, who reports that she changed and fed "the poor little one" before the mother arrived to pick the child up after about a further hour.
- The leadership of the Moderates was dismayed by the events, noting that they had seen no evidence that Bill had a problem with alcohol. They demanded that he hold a single-person press-conference the next day at the party headquarters, where he would announce that he was the person involved, that he is taking time out from politics and that he will seek professional advice on whether he has an alcohol problem. Otherwise they would announce that they had decided on the time-out for him.

Breaching the boundary – case 2 (cont'd)

The press conference was duly held, with Bill having had little or no sleep for 24 hours. His account of what happened sounded confused. But he acknowledged that "it is easy to understand how eyebrows might have been raised a little when a person dressed as I am now (blue jacket, beige pants, checked shirt without tie, comfortable shoes) and with red teeth and blue tongue and rucksack in front comes jogging with a stroller and smells very much of red wine".



"No, Bill doesn't think he has a problem with alcohol", reported the centre-left newspaper. "He indeed drinks more than the normal Swede, he said, but only wine with meals four or five times a

week, spirits only 5 times a year and and never beer". Bill said, "But now I will get a professional judgment about that. Maybe this is a very good alarm bell for me".

Breaching the boundary – case 2 (cont'd)

Seven months later, on 5 April 2005, a court cleared Bill of the charges on the grounds that the fracas had occurred outside the limit of the restaurant guard's jurisdiction. Bill said, "it feels as if I woke up from a 7-months-long nightmare". The court said it understood the guard's judgement that there was a risk that Bill and his son would come to harm but "the fact remained that the intervention had been without a legal basis". Per is still in the Swedish parliament, but no longer the Moderates' spokesperson on alcohol policy.

– Translations by RR from *Dagens nyheter*, *Svenska dagbladet* and *Expressen*

Breaching the boundary – case 3

Anna Sjödin, the 29-year-old national chair of the SSU, the youth organization of the Swedish social democrats, had been out partying on 29 January, 2006 with her SSU comrades, reportedly for 9 hours. They were drinking at the Crazy Horse, a relatively inexpensive bar in Stockholm's most fashionable nightlife district, Stureplan. At 2 am the party was seen as too drunk by the bar staff, and refused further drinks. They protested noisily about this. The bar staff called the door-guards to make them leave. Sjödin, who 12 years before had played rugby for Sweden, led the resistance to the eviction. A guard, Babek Jamal, claimed that Sjödin had fought him tooth and claw and shrieked, among other things, "jävla svartskalle", a racist taunt, and "Such as you are the type of immigrants we don't want to have in this country". Sjödin claimed that he had called her a "whore" and other sexist taunts, and that two guards had held her down while a third hit her with a baton.



Breaching the boundary – case 3 (cont'd)



- The police were called, and took Sjödin away to a drying-out cell. Both she and the guard charged each other with crimes.
- Sjödin held a hastily arranged press conference the next day, and denied being drunk or making the racist taunt.

Breaching the boundary – case 3 (cont'd)

- On the basis of a 189-page investigative report, Sjödin was charged on 7 April with three counts, including making a racist insult. The guard was not charged.
- On 13 October 2006 Sjödin was found guilty on all charges, and fined SEK 360,000, and ordered to pay damages of SEK 5,500 to the guard. She then took “time-out” from her SSU duties and appealed. The higher courts denied her appeals, and on 16 December she resigned her position as chair of the SSU.

– Sources: Svenska dagbladet, Dagens nyheter, Wikipedia

The double frame of intoxication: private partying vs. public decorum

- Sources of media fascination:
 - Everyone looks like a hypocrite:
 - Rebekah Wade & her campaign against domestic violence
 - Per Bill and his critique of Swedish "big brother policy" on alcohol
 - Anna Sjödin and the SSU's restrictive stand on alcohol policies, anti-racism stance
 - The deer frozen in the headlight:
 - The moment when the private turns public
 - Pressure from associates to put the best face on it the next morning
 - Partly forced by Swedish press policy of not naming the accused; "a member of parliament from the Moderates" makes all suspect

Ways of interpreting the double frame

- The action of the drug itself
 - “A marked ambivalence [of] attitude and opinion concerning the proper place of alcohol in social life ... in part ... stems from an awareness that satisfactions brought by imbibing alcohol not infrequently have a spurious quality. What seems to be love to the intoxicated maiden turns out to in sober retrospect to have been sex exploitation.... Modifications in human behavior brought about by intoxication are socially and personally destructive as well as socially integrative.” -- E. Lemert, *Alcohol, values and social control*, pp. 553-575 in DJ Pittman & CR Snyder, eds., *Society, Culture & Drinking Patterns*. NY: Wiley, 1962.
- Drunken comportment as “time out”, operating under a different set of norms from sober comportment (the “within limits” clause) – C. MacAndrew & R. Edgerton, *Drunken Comportment*, Chicago: Aldine, 1969.
 - But the hypothesis of a specific set of norms for drunkenness has not been tested
 - How does "time out" relate to the subcultural norms on self-control the qualitative studies find for drinkers and drug users?

One remedy for failure of self-control: pleading addiction

- But this entails an enormous loss of face and often self-respect
 - The “general theme underlying” American statements on alcoholism “has to do with lack of self-control on the part of the drinker. This societal symbolism of the deviation as a sign of character weakness is one of the most vivid and isolating distinctions which can be made in a culture which attributes morality, success, and respectability to the power of a disciplined will.” – E. Lemert, *Social Pathology*, 1951:356.
- So often resisted:
 - Bill: “I am 99% sure that I do not have an alcohol problem’. He has been in contact with an alcohol counselor who certified that Bill did not have any signs of having a problem with his drinking.” -- *Expressen*, 27 Oct. 2004
 - No mention by Sjödén, who maintained her innocence throughout, and felt let down by the courts.
 - In contrast, Mel Gibson, accused of making anti-Semitic remarks to an arresting officer when arrested for drinking driving, apologized profusely and went into alcoholism treatment. The judge ordered him to attend self-help meetings five times a week for 4½ months and three times a week for the remainder of the first year of his probation.
 - US Drug Courts rely on the threat of a jail sentence of at least a year to coerce acknowledging a drug problem and cooperating with treatment.

Intoxication and drug use as a semi-private world

- Operationally, controlled use is use that
 - does not result in trouble
 - stays out of the public eye
- "Time out" from the business/civic/parental worlds of strict rationality
 - "time out" attached to different behaviours in different cultures/social worlds (MacAndrew & Edgerton)
 - the "fiesta" exception: public disinhibition and time out
- Intoxication as inherently dangerous, but the danger is normatively limited (Goffman, "Where the action is")
- "Within limits" indeed
 - but the limits are specific to the particular social world, and there may not be a single set of limits
 - normative limits in different social worlds need study

Problems in the management of social order: the rupturing of the frame of privacy

- Drug use and intoxication are often ostensive performances
 - In front of an audience
 - The performance may be about self-control
 - The audience can rupture the boundary of privacy (particularly for the powerful & famous)
- Disinhibition, clumsiness or mischance
 - The semi-private suddenly becomes public
 - Scandal, shame, derogation, defrocking
 - Pleading addiction: a thorny resolution