



Women and Alcohol

Introduction

To explore the topic of women and alcohol, we will be using a CBC documentary called "[Girls Night Out](#)." This documentary tackles the issue of "binge" drinking among (young) women. Several women share their experiences with alcohol use and heavy drinking, discussing the impact it has had on their lives.

The documentary is helpful in introducing some important discussions. But it may also be misleading. According to [Statistics Canada](#), actually less young women are drinking heavily (as of 2014) than were during the previous year. In addition, these statistics also indicate that more men drink heavily than women in every age range. This directly contradicts the suggestion of the "Girls Night Out" documentary that more and more young women are binge-drinking, especially on college campuses. It is important to deconstruct the social forces that contribute to this lack of balance while, at the same time, still exploring the real issues related to heavy drinking. Otherwise, the documentary might reinforce problematic social attitudes and the very behaviour it seeks to expose.

Instructional strategies

1. Show the entire documentary "[Girls Night Out](#)" (or show the first half – from beginning to 22:25) and facilitate a general discussion using questions like:
 - a. What do you think about this documentary? What did you find surprising/interesting/annoying/etc.?
 - b. How are women represented in this video? (in terms of their appearance, attitudes, gestures, language, bodily expressions, etc.) Is this representation accurate? Why or why not?
 - c. How do you see it when a man is drinking heavily or when a woman is drinking heavily? Do you see it differently? Why or why not?
2. The beginning of the documentary (up to 6:20) talks about the drinking culture within a college/university context. You might pause there to facilitate a discussion, or draw attention to this theme later and use some of the following questions.
 - a. Several of the women interviewed talk about drinking as "the normal thing to do" and something that is highly "accepted." Do you think this is true? Do you think it is true in high school? Why or why not?
 - b. Why do you think "Girls Night Out" only focuses on female binge drinking?
 - c. Do you think this perpetuates society's expectations of how women should act or behave? Does society have a different expectation for men?
 - d. Have you ever felt pressure to drink because "it was the thing to do"? Have you ever felt pressure not to drink when others were because it was socially unacceptable? How are these pressures helpful or harmful?
3. People choose to drink for a variety of different reasons. Some of the reasons mentioned by the women interviewed in the documentary include: it made them feel sexier/funnier, it gave them confidence, it helped them forget about their worries/anxieties, peer pressure, it made them feel good/have fun, it was the 'normal' thing to do/it was accepted, etc.).
 - a. Do you think those reasons are specific to women, or can they (in your view) generally be applied to men as well? Why or why not?

- b. Think of other (than those mentioned above) reasons why anyone may choose to drink. Can those reasons be applied to both men and women? Are some of the reasons you came up with “gendered” (specific to men or to women)? If so, why do you think that is?
 - c. Do you think that the reason one chooses to drink has an impact on potential risks or harms? Are the risks or harms similar or different for men or women? Explain.
4. According to Statistics Canada less young women are drinking heavily than previously. Also more men than women in every age range drink heavily.
 - a. If binge drinking among young women is actually declining, why do you think the documentary appears to suggest it is a growing problem and frames excessive drinking as a women’s issue?
 - b. What are some ways in which the media frames excessive drinking (or drinking in general)? Does it ever (in your opinion) appear biased? Why or why not?
5. The documentary discusses some of the risks associated with binge drinking for women and girls. These risks are highlighted at 17:38, you may wish to pause the video so that students can take a look at those risks and explore the questions below.
 - a. Do any of the risks mentioned surprise you? How so?
 - b. Rape is highlighted as a risk of binge drinking. Do you think that rape is related to alcohol consumption? How so?
 - c. Why do you think that alcohol is sometimes blamed when sexual assault occurs? What message, in your opinion, does that send? Is it harmful? If so, to whom?
 - d. Do you think that everyone who engages in excessive drinking faces risks? Does everyone experience harm? Explain.
 - e. Do you think those risks are different for women and men? Why or why not?
 - f. What are some ways to prevent these risks or harms?
6. The issue of alcohol marketing is discussed in the documentary. You might explore this topic by reviewing the Alcohol Marketing Prezi with students. The Prezi includes images of ads aimed at women and at men. All the ads include images of women, and many have an explicit sexual connotation.

Drug Literacy

Big ideas

- Drugs can be tremendously helpful and also very harmful
- As humans, both individually and as communities, we need to learn how to manage the drugs in our lives
- We can learn how to control our drug use by reflecting on the different ways people have thought about drugs, exploring stories from various cultures and listening to each other

Competencies

- Assess the complex ways in which drugs impact the health and well-being of individuals, communities and societies
- Recognize binary constructs (e.g., good vs bad) and assess their limitation in addressing complex social issues like drug use
- Develop social and communication skills in addressing discourse and behaviour related to drugs

For a complete look at the drug literacy competencies, as defined by the Centre for Addictions Research of BC, see: <http://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/cisur/assets/docs/iminds/hs-pp-drug-curriculum.pdf>

