In gender-focused discussions of alcohol and other drug use and problems, the emphasis has usually been on the individual male or female or on the genders as aggregates of individuals. But most drinking and much drug use have strong social and interactional elements, where gender roles and often gendered interactions come into play. Drawing on the existing literature, opportunities for research on gender roles and interactions in drinking and drug use and problems are discussed under the following headings: courtship and affectional preference; sexuality; marriage and partnership; parenthood; friendship and peer relations; work roles; informal social control (spouse, relatives, friends); and domination, violence, and abuse.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INTERACTIONAL DIMENSION IN STUDYING GENDER IN DRINKING AND DRUG USE

The distinction between male and female is biologically based, but expressions and understandings of the difference are socioculturally constructed. Gender is used here to refer to these culturally specified definitions and connotations of being male and female.

Being male or being female entails a set of expectations about behavior, internalized in the individual concerned but also strongly held by others in contact with the individual. Much of being male or female is social, in that it entails behavior in front of an audience of others and in interactions with others. These expected ways of behaving in social interactions may be referred to as gender roles.

In gender-focused discussions of alcohol and other drug use and problems, the emphasis has usually been on the individual male or female or on the genders as aggregates of individuals. Thus, there are many discussions of whether heavy drinking among women has increased, whether male and female rates of heavy drinking have converged, whether women have a harder time than men giving up smoking, whether benzodiazepines are for women the functional equivalent as mood modifi-
ers of alcohol for men. In these analyses, differences in gender roles and interactional patterns between genders are often brought in as potential explanations of the patterns found, but explicit analysis of the interplay of drinking and drug use with gender roles and interactions is much rarer.

Yet most drinking is a social behavior, and there are strong social and interactional elements, too, in such behaviors as tobacco and marijuana smoking, cocaine snorting, and heroin injecting. In the social interactions which precede, accompany, and follow alcohol and drug use and problems, gender roles play a prominent part, a part which has been too little studied.

It must be kept in mind that both gender roles and drinking and drug use patterns are very different in different cultures. The challenge in a multicultural society is to map the patterns of variation, which for immigrant groups will not be a simple matter either of transportation of patterns in the old country or of acculturation to some mean in the receiving society (Room, 1985). Comparative cross-cultural studies, both within multicultural societies and internationally, offer particular opportunities to deepen our understanding of causal and interactional patterns among the factors under study.

Promising leads in the literature on gender roles and interactions in drinking and drug use and problems, and further research opportunities, are discussed here in terms of eight specific aspects of gender roles: courtship and affectional preference; sexuality; marriage and partnership; parenthood; friendship and peer relations; work roles; informal social control; and domination, violence, and crime.

**Courtship and Affectional Preference**

Initiation of alcohol and drug use typically happens in the years when dating and other courtship behaviors are also being initiated. Most teenage drinking and drug use is intertwined with friendship and peer relations in general (see following discussion), but it is also often specifically involved in courtship and dating. Drinking and drug use often serves as an “icebreaker” for cross-gender interactions. Thus, Kruse (1975) found that Finnish boys needed a few drinks to get up the courage to ask a girl to dance (and drank some more for solace if they were rejected). A stereotypical opening gambit in North American courtship is to offer to buy a drink as a bid to get acquainted.

Bars and other public drinking places are major locales of courtship, particularly for those who are already adults (Roebuck & Spray, 1967). A courtship starting in a North American bar is expected to progress rapidly to sexuality, and a single woman in a heterosexual bar was traditionally presumed to be open to approach (Cavan, 1966). But bars and other public drinking places are also frequently used by couples who have met elsewhere without any special implication of sexuality. On the one hand, the shared drinking serves as an icebreaker, while on the other hand the public nature of the place sets some boundaries around the behavior and the occasion. Observational and experimental studies have shown that those drinking together in bars influence each other’s amount of drinking, often not consciously.

For both the gay and the lesbian communities, bars have historically had an even more important role than for heterosexuals as places to meet and court. The
literature on gay and lesbian drinking has speculated that the presumptively higher rates of heavy drinking in these groups in part reflect the importance of bars as gathering places for these communities. Particularly in the lesbian community, there is some evidence that these traditional patterns have been changed by a wave of sobriety in recent years (Hall, 1993, Hastings, 1982).

There is rather little research specifically on the role of alcohol and drugs in courtship, and on the influence of courtship patterns on drinking and drug use. Possible methods of study include observational studies in public drinking places and qualitative interviews about life experiences and about dating and other courting rituals. A limited amount of information could also be gained from survey interviews.

It is also relevant to study advertising and media representations of alcohol and drugs in courtship (see Goffman, 1979), because media representations influence as well as reflect patterns of courtship. There are large cultural variations in courtship patterns, and these also need to be taken into account in study designs.

Because courtship often coincides with the life-period and contexts of maximum alcohol and drug use, developing knowledge of patterns of alcohol and drug use in courtship and how those patterns might be influenced is a promising direction for research. A first step might be some qualitative interviewing, such as the current study by Ferris (1995) of drinking in courtship relations. Apart from the immediate findings of such studies, results from them can guide the addition of material on this area to ongoing surveys of college and high school students and of youth.

Sexuality

Gender roles are perhaps at their most bifurcated in regard to sexuality: Stereotypically, women are supposed to guard themselves against sexual expression, whereas men are supposed always to be seeking it. The North American dating complex of the period 1910 to 1960 (roughly) posed an especially hard task for the female role (Bailey, 1988): Courtship was carried out in territories often controlled by the male (in particular, the automobile), so that withholding sexuality required vigilance and an ability to control the male date's behavior by moral more than physical force. Before the 1920s, drinking by a young woman signalled her degradation, however, in the 1920s drinking and smoking became symbols of emancipation for young women (Fass, 1977).

In the context of the dating complex, female drinking therefore took on a variety of symbolic meanings. Even more than for men, drinking for women was associated with being grown up and even cosmopolitan. On the other hand, the status of drinking as a symbol of sexual availability was reinforced, because it threatened the vigilance and moral authority required of the woman by the dating complex. In American films of the 1920s, a single drink in a woman's hand signalled sexual availability, a code which continued at least through the Doris Day films of the early 1960s (Room, 1991). Nowadays, it is more often the accumulation of several drinks which signals sexual availability in films (e.g., the film The Cutting Edge).

Stereotypically in the movies, drinking inclines women but not men to sexual behavior; in fact, men's heavy drinking is often presented as an alternative to being
with women. In the cultural stereotypes presented on the screen, drinking or drug use often makes men violent, but it even more commonly makes women sexual. In this context, it would be interesting to study differential expectations about the effects of drinking on men and women in the general population and in subgroups such as teenagers. As Leigh's review (1995) makes clear, drunkenness has been widely perceived in the population as worse in a woman than in a man, and one major reason for this is the perceived link between a woman’s drunkenness and her loss of sexual restraints.

The expectation of a woman that she will control both her own behavior and her date's even when both are drinking provides a paradigm in courtship for the expectations of women's control over their men's drinking in settled relationships which will be discussed later (see "Informal Social Control").

Middle-class gender roles in North America in regard to sexuality have been through two major revolutions in the 20th century: the shift to the ideology of the companionate relationship and the toleration of sexuality in an engaged couple in the 1910s–1920s, and the shift to an ideology of gender equality and a wider toleration of sexuality in the 1960s–1970s. Associated with both of these shifts was a shift in expectations about women's drinking, and about the relation of women's drinking to sexuality (Room, 1991). But these revolutions, occurring in multicultural societies, have not proceeded uniformly by social class and by ethnicity. Even among the middle class, the revolutions are often partial and only half-internalized:

Change ... comes slowly, meeting enormous resistance both inside us and in the system of social institutions that supports our society’s mandates about femininity and masculinuity—about how a good woman lives, how a good man behaves. . . . No matter how revolutionary a period of change may seem on the surface, the old myths continue to whisper to us. (Rubin, 1983, p. 3)

Impelled by the threat of AIDS, there has been considerable research in the last few years on the role of drinking and drugs in sexuality, particularly in the U.S., Scotland, and Norway (Leigh & Stall, 1993; Plant & Plant, 1992; Træen & Kvalem, 1995). This has included both quantitative and qualitative studies of populations at especially high risk of AIDS, as well as general-population epidemiological studies and some social psychological experimental work. It is well established that the populations engaging in risky sexuality and in risky drinking and drug use substantially overlap. But from the point of view of harm prevention, it is more important to understand what are the contexts and circumstances in which drinking and drug use interact with sexuality and risky sexuality—topics about which much less is known. Qualitative interviewing of teenagers and adults on perceptions and behaviors on these topics might be the most immediately promising path forward. Given the role culturally assigned to women in controlling sexuality, female samples would be a first priority.

More generally, it would be useful to study differential expectations by gender among adults and teenagers about the effects of drinking on behaviors such as aggression and sexual activity. Comparisons across social class and ethnic groups
should also be included. We still know very little about how the relations between gender roles, drinking and drug use, and sexuality work themselves out in people's daily lives.

Marriage and Partnership

Bachman, O'Malley, and Johnston (1984) have shown, in a follow-up study of American high school seniors, that those who marry relatively early drink and use illicit drugs much less than those who do not. Though there are few other studies relevant to the issue of the effects of marriage on drinking and drug use, these findings match the general pattern for both genders on the correlates of marital status: Married persons are less likely to drink heavily or use illicit drugs than those the same age who are single, cohabiting, or divorced or separated. To the extent that there is literature which goes beyond these descriptive findings for men, it tends to revolve around the issue of the role of a culturally prolonged bachelorhood in high rates of drinking problems (see Stivers, 1976).

The literature on women's drinking, on the other hand, focuses on cohabitation and divorce and separation as risk factors for heavy drinking (Wilsnack & Wilsnack, 1991). Wilsnack and Wilsnack (1991) found cohabiting women had the highest rates of heavy drinking and drinking problems of any marital status. While many cross-sectional studies also have shown higher rates of heavy and problem drinking among divorced and separated women, the Wilsnacks suggest that divorced or separated status seems to be declining as a risk factor. Their analysis of longitudinal data in fact found that becoming divorced or separated was associated with reduced problem drinking, particularly when the woman had left a frequent-drinking partner or a sexually dysfunctional relationship.

The interrelation of drinking or drug use and gender roles within a marriage or other partnership has received relatively little attention (see Wilsnack & Wilsnack, 1991). Knupfer (1964) found evidence of a norm that a wife should drink less than her husband, to go with other cultural expectations about being shorter, less interested in sex, and so forth; thus, only 12% of wives drank more than their husbands. On the other hand, there is some evidence that a couple's drinking patterns tend to converge over time, if only because they are frequently acting as a social unit at parties, on nights out, and in other drinking situations. A common finding in the literature on women's illicit drug use is that the initiation is by a male partner, who also frequently continues as the supply source (Rosenbaum, 1981).

The existence of differences in drinking and drug use and problems by marital status is not in dispute, but we need to know how to interpret the differences, and what are the implications for prevention and treatment. This suggests three paths forward: qualitative interviewing about the interplay of drinking and drug use with coupling, partnership, and uncoupling; interviews with both partners in probability samples of couples; and longitudinal studies of the correlates and changes involved in life transitions (such as getting married).

In general, there should be a stronger focus on the process of relationships in studying the interaction of drinking, drug use, and marital status—both on proc-
esses of coupling and uncoupling, and on processes of interaction and mutual influence within the relationship.

Parenthood

Anyone who has eaten family meals with small children knows that the children's presence does not combine well with the ideal gourmet magazine meal with a wine to match each course. Generally, in North American culture, the idea of drinking with children around is somewhat suspect: Only 3% of Ontarian adults in 1992 felt that it was okay to drink "enough to feel the effects" for "a parent, spending time with small children," and 53% felt that there should be no drinking at all (Ferris, Templeton, & Wong, 1994). There is rather little data on the differences children make in their parents' drinking patterns. Cahalan and Room (1974) found that, controlling for age, U.S. married men without children were more likely than married men with children to drink heavily but not more likely to experience tangible problems from drinking. On the other hand, Haavio-Mannila's (1991) analysis of a sample of Finnish women, controlling for being in a couple relationship, found that having children at home was strongly negatively associated with hazardous drinking. Particularly in the last decade, the injunction to avoid drinking during pregnancy, often taken very seriously, provides a break with previous drinking patterns for women, but not necessarily for men. Given both this and patterns of child caretaking by gender, we may expect the advent of children to have a more dramatic effect in changing women's than in changing men's drinking.

Gullestad's (1984) ethnographic study of young working-class mothers in Bergen, many of them divorced, suggests how tightly constrained a young mother's world can be, with any dating or sexual behavior censored by neighborhood gossip, and with any drinking limited to occasional evenings out dancing.

Koski-Jännès (1991) found that having children in the home was associated with a more positive outcome from alcohol treatment in a Finnish sample, apparently for both genders. Her remark in this context, that "the role of children has received . . . little attention from researchers," applies as well to the alcohol and drug field generally.

Reanalysis of existing epidemiological data sets offers a relatively low-cost option for establishing basic epidemiological information about the relation of drinking and drug use to parenthood status, with attention to variations in population subgroups. To develop understanding of causal patterns, longitudinal data will be required. Such longitudinal studies might focus on drinking and drug use in life-stages and thus cover marriage and partnership as well as parenthood.

Friendship and Peer Relations

A great deal of drinking and much drug use occurs in the company of friends or acquaintances. Yet studies specifically focused on drinking and drug use in friendship relations are scarce. Friendships and peer relations enter the alcohol and drug literature in three main ways. In the literature on correlates of youthful drug use,
there has long been an emphasis on respondents' reports of friends' use patterns, and a finding of a strong correlation with the respondent's use pattern (Kandel, 1980). Studies of the spread of illicit drug use have charted diffusion through friendship networks in sociometric diagrams (e.g., Plant, 1975). And observational studies in bars and other drinking places have often focused on the relation of the size and composition of the drinking group to the speed and amount of drinking and to instances of "trouble" (e.g., Graves, Graves, Semu, & Sam, 1982).

An explicit attention to gender roles is found mostly in the observational studies of bars and drinking places. Reflecting changes in the drinking culture in many industrial countries, the focus on male drinking groups in older studies has been joined by an attention to mixed-gender drinking groups. A few studies were explicitly oriented around gender roles—for instance, Spradley and Mann's study (1975) of the gendered interactions between cocktail waitresses and male drinking groups. More often, the studies have included many insights on gender roles, companionship, and drinking, but these insights have not been drawn together into a coherent picture.

Van de Goor's study (1990) of situational aspects of adolescent drinking behavior in the Netherlands, combining questionnaire and observational methods, is a good example of a study with explicit attention to the influence of gender. Van de Goor found that both the rate and the amount of drinking was higher in all-boy groups than in the smaller and rarer all-girl groups, and mixed-gender groups fell in between. Boys seemed to feel more pressure than girls to "drink up" to some group norm. For both genders, drinking rates were slower in dyads than in larger groups; this hints that there may have been less drinking among van de Goor's participants in a courtship situation than in friendship groups.

Studies of all-female drinking groups are quite rare. An interesting exception is Honkasalo's (1989) participant observation study of drinking parties among Finnish female factory workers. Each participant brought her own bottle of spirits (and the group brought an extra one for the husband "as thanks for him staying away"), and the party continued with rounds of toasts until after 1 a.m., when all the alcohol had been consumed. But the centerpiece of the evening was a ritual meal, provided and prepared with exquisite attention to detail by the hostess. The nature of the parties was thus specific both to the gender and to the culture.

Attention to drinking and drug use in friendship and peer relations has been relatively scanty, and there has been very little attention anywhere to this topic for women's friendship networks and relations. First steps forward would probably be observational studies and qualitative interviewing; attention to this dimension might be combined with attention to other aspects of gender roles and interactions.

Work Roles

The extreme differences in drinking norms and practices between different occupations are underlined by Honkasalo's study (1989), which also included observations of a group of hospital nurses' assistants with uniformly disapproving and restrictive attitudes to drinking. Although there are quite a few studies of drinking or drug use in specific occupations, few of them have paid attention to gender roles
in the occupation or workplace. Significantly, the few that do have are focused on women's work (e.g., Spradley & Mann, 1975).

Wilsnack and Wilsnack (1991) reviewed the small spate of recent American literature concerning whether paid employment is associated with more heavy drinking among women. As might be expected from the heterogeneity of both women in paid employment and other women, no general conclusion can be drawn on this question. A more fruitful line of inquiry has been the studies of women's drinking in occupations in which they are a minority, also reviewed by Wilsnack and Wilsnack. In four different societies, it appears that women are more likely to drink heavily or frequently when they are in occupations dominated by men than when they are in occupations dominated by women. Haavio-Mannila (1991) found that men's drinking patterns influenced women's drinking in occupations where men were in the majority, but that the reverse was not the case when women were in the majority. As Wilsnack and Wilsnack noted (1991, pp. 141-142), these findings suggest areas for further research:

One question is whether nontraditional employment increases women's risks of problem drinking . . . or simply makes it more likely that they will drink or drink heavily. Studies that evaluate possible explanations for the influence of nontraditional work on women's drinking would also be valuable (e.g., the possibility that women engage in collegial, companionate drinking with male colleagues . . . ). Also worth exploring . . . is the hypothesis that women in nontraditional occupations drink more, in part, as a symbolic expression of power and gender equality.

Informal Social Control: The Spouse, the Family Member, and the Friend

Family members and friends exert a primary influence on our behavior, often without any conscious intention. These influences can operate to increase our drinking and drug use, or to decrease it. For some kinds of relationships, the predominant influence may be to increase use. In all kinds of relationships, however, influence may be exerted to limit or control drinking and drug use. These informal social controls are far more diverse and widespread than any official efforts to limit harm from drinking or drug use through treatment or punishment. Heavy drinking is far more common among men than among women, as is the use of illicit drugs. Often the drinking is at the expense of the rest of the family—whether in terms of the money it takes, the time spent drinking, or how the drinker behaves to family members after drinking. In this sense, it can be said that women's greatest problem with drinking is their men's drinking. Studies of young couples in Finland, Estonia, and Russia (Holmila, 1987, 1988) have shown that wives are far more likely than husbands to try to control their spouse's drinking, although the attempt is often not successful. The attempts at control often take on a ritualized character, so that the husband may conclude that his wife no longer loves him if she has given up nagging him about his drinking.

Studies in the U.S. (Room, 1989; Room, Greenfield, & Weisner, 1991) have shown that the predominant direction of efforts to control drinking within the family flows from women to men, and from older generations to younger. Al-
though the wife was previously the predominant source of pressures to reduce drinking, in a 1990 survey, mothers had overtaken wives as a source of pressure. An Ontario survey also found the predominant flow of pressure from women to men, but no clear direction in the flow by generation (Room, Bondy, & Ferris, 1996). The predominance of wives over husbands as a source of spousal pressure, however, mostly reflects the higher rates of heavy drinking among males: In the U.S. data, a heavy-drinking wife was about as likely as a heavy-drinking husband to have been pressured by her spouse. In Finland, too, heavy-drinking women report that the spouse or partner is the most important agent of control (Holmila, 1991).

The role of the “good woman” as the controller of her man’s drinking is stereotypical and traditional. In Scandinavia, at least, formal state control systems often put the wife in the position of acting as a control agent on her husband’s drinking (Frånberg, 1987; Järvinen, 1991). Finnish male heavy drinkers often define their life history as an oscillation between settling down with a good woman and “breaking out” to freedom in a drunken binge (Alasuutari, 1986). In the traditional pattern, women have a double burden of control concerning drinking: They are supposed to control not only their own drinking, but also their man’s. One object of research might be to examine the possibilities for transcending the stereotypical gender roles concerning the control of heavy drinking behavior.

In the U.S., men are more likely than women to report having pressured a friend to cut down drinking, and among both men and women, heavy drinkers are more likely to report this than lighter drinkers or abstainers (Room, 1989). Ontario findings specify the gender relations a little more: Men and women are equally likely to have pressed a female friend about their drinking, whereas men are more likely than women to have pressed a male friend (Room et al., 1996).

This line of investigation offers the possibility of pilot projects to strengthen social control efforts in the family and in friendship networks as a strategy for preventing alcohol- and drug-related problems. Further development of this line of work requires more qualitative approaches. From the point of view of its preventive potential, work in this area might well have a relatively high priority.

**Domination, Violence, and Abuse**

In his landmark study of violent incidents and drinking’s role in them in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Pernanen (1991) found that men and women were equally likely to report having been subjected to violence in the last year, but women were more likely to have been subjected to violent threats that were not acted upon (p. 52). Although in each gender, violence and threats of violence were both more commonly reported by younger than by older respondents, it was particularly middle-aged women who were “much less likely to be subjected to physical violence when threatened with such” (p. 56). Pernanen interpreted this as a reflection of the nature of domestic incidents in long-established marriages or partnerships, where conflict is resolved in ways that preserve the stability of the relationship—or, one might add, where the memory of past violence may mean that a threat or other signal is enough to exact compliance (Room, 1980).
As these findings exemplify, gender roles and interactions are pervasive in Permanen's (1991) exploration of violence in a community sample. To start with, violence happened to men mostly outside the home, but to women more often at home. Among those who had experienced a violent incident since age 15, 17% of the men, but 60% of the women, reported that the most recent incident had happened in their own home (p. 81). For women but not for men, the violence often comes from a spouse or lover. For 41% of the women, the assailant in the most recent incident was their husband, whereas for 7% of the men it was their wife (p. 84). For 21% of never-married women reporting incidents, the assailant was their boyfriend, whereas for 9% of never-married men it was their girlfriend (p. 85).

Permanen's (1991) interpretation of violence emphasizes that it has a large intentional element, whether drinking is involved or not, and that it is rooted in social interactions; as he quotes an earlier review, "human violence has both a self-reflective and an interactive quality" (pp. 194–195). Gender roles are reflected in the nature of the violence reported: For 46% of female but 19% of male victims, it was limited to slapping, grabbing, pushing, or shoving; for 5% of female but 26% of male victims, it was limited to punching (p. 142). Gendered relationships and interactions are also involved: Male and female victims were equally likely to be punched (31%, 30%) when the assailant was a spouse, whereas males were much more likely than females to be punched when the assailant was a stranger (67%, 26%, respectively; p. 143).

In Permanen's (1991) data, drinking was present in over half of the incidents of violence reported. But the drinking modulates rather than overrides the patterns set by gender roles and interactions. For instance, whether drinking was present had a relatively minor effect on the variations in type of violence just noted (p. 154).

In the different frames of reference provided by other studies, however, alcohol can be seen to play a more distinctive role in gender interactions and violence. Aramburu and Leigh (1991), for instance, found that aggression toward a victim was more acceptable and the victim more blameworthy when the victim was drunk than when sober. These attributions were not much affected by whether the victim was male or female. In a large U.S. general-population sample, Kantor and Straus (1987) found that drinking by the husband alone or by both husband and wife preceded one quarter of the reported instances of wife abuse; in a multivariate analysis, the husband's general drinking pattern did predict wife abuse, although less strongly than normative approval of violence (whether the husband felt there were situations in which he could imagine approving a husband slapping his wife).

These studies reemphasize the importance of considering gender roles and gender interactions in studying violence and domination and the role of alcohol in it (see also Morgan, 1983). In such studies, it is important that the frame of reference be set broadly. Within the family, the issues include not only spousal violence but also violence in other family relationships—and not only violence in the family but also sexual abuse of children and others (see Wilsnack & Wilsnack, 1991). As Permanen's (1991) study reminds us, the issue of gender roles and violence also extends to interactions outside the family.

Further research development in this area should focus more on understanding the conditions and patterning of family violence and abuse than on establishing
prevalence rates. This is probably best pursued through qualitative interview studies, starting with relatively youthful populations (college age and in their 20s). A watch should be kept for opportunities to add questions on violence and abuse to studies on other aspects of gender roles and interactions.

CONCLUSION

This article has reviewed some existing studies of drinking and drug use patterns and problems from the perspective of gender roles and interactions and has suggested some opportunities for further work. A variety of study designs and research methods can be drawn on for such studies, including observational studies, qualitative interviewing, probability surveys (both cross-sectional and longitudinal), and content analysis of written materials. Because gender roles and interactions are so often steeped in drinking and drug use, such studies can teach us something more general about the interaction of social forces and norms with mundane and private behavior. But the studies also offer the promise of finding ways forward in the practical task of reducing harm associated with alcohol and drug use.

REFERENCES


