

## Social change and gendered drinking: learning from differential changes in times of crisis\*

It is, of course, especially appropriate to be honouring the work and contribution of Ludek Kubicka by considering the impact of social change on the drinking of women and men, and on the relation between women's and men's drinking. I am confident that Ludek will be more than pleased as he reads the work which this occasion brought forth.

Three of the papers consider changes in drinking in a period of transition or crisis, while one considers longer-term processes of social change. Munné (2005) uses a combination of retrospective survey questions and qualitative analysis of respondents' comments to examine the effects of the economic crisis in Argentina on drinking behaviour. From data collected during the crisis, she finds that perceptions of effects are widespread: a majority of her respondents, for instance, agree that people have stopped going to bars and restaurants and now drink at home or a friend's home, and that people have switched to cheaper alcoholic drinks. She finds even more consensus on a more normative statement, with five-sixths of her respondents agreeing that 'in the crisis situation, it is important to cut down on drinking and other expenses that are not necessary'. This result is backed up by the comments which her respondents volunteered. From these, it becomes clear that for many Argentinians alcohol and drinking is a heavily moralized field of discourse. The reaction, particularly of older respondents and women, to questions about drinking in the crisis was along the lines of 'It would be good if they didn't drink at all'. The degree of moralism expressed about drinking, in a society which has often been considered, for instance by Jellinek (1960, pp. 30, 204–205), as the closest there is to a southern European-type wine culture existing outside Europe, is quite remarkable.

Two of the papers, as do some of Ludek Kubicka's own papers (Kubicka *et al.* 1995, 1998), consider what has happened in Eastern Europe during the post-communist period. This has been a period of great and, for many,

wrenching changes. One may speak of it in non-dramatizing terms as a period of transition or as 'the transition', but as this meeting began Sztompka (2000) proposed to us a more dramatic characterization of it, as a period of 'cultural trauma'. There is no doubt that the lives of many women and men in Poland and in former East Germany were disrupted and changed forever by what followed the events of 1989.

To study this period, Bloomfield *et al.* (2005) turn to surveys conducted in Germany in 1991 and 1998. They find, both in terms of frequent (daily) drinking and of consumption quantity per day, the decline in drinking shows up in both East and West, and among both women and men. For daily drinking (Table 2), in both East and West most of the decline is among men which, as Bloomfield and colleagues note, suggests gender convergence. For the amount of drinking per day, the absolute change is fairly equal between eastern and western men and women, but in proportional terms it is greatest among women, and particularly among East German women. The male/female gender ratio was approximately 2 in 1991 (2.3 in the East, 1.9 in the West), but by 1998 it was 4.5 in the East and 2.7 in the West. This is suggestive of gender divergence, although Bloomfield and colleagues warn us that the 1991 and 1998 measures are somewhat different. In the limited frame of 1991–98, then, the evidence is mixed concerning whether there is gender convergence or divergence.

Analysing mortality trends between 1986 and 2002, Wojtyniak *et al.* (2005) find that mortality from liver disease and from alcohol poisoning also shows little sign of gender convergence: the ratios have risen for all comparisons for liver disease, although they appear to have fallen for alcohol poisoning. In general, the authors find that the transition in Poland was a time of substantial increase in alcohol consumption, reflecting the breakdown of the old alcohol control system (and, one might add, the substantial exploitation of the Polish alcohol market by EU-based corporations—Moskalewicz 1993). Cirrhosis mortality rose after the transition, but the rise was mainly among men. With alcohol poisoning, the immediate effect of the transition appears in both genders, but with a male rate approximately an order of magnitude higher than the female rate. The authors conclude that the gender alcohol–mortality gap 'tends to grow in the

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years when consumption increases, which suggests that consumption variability over time is shaped first of all by male consumers'.

Considering in more general terms ideas about gender differences and gender convergence in drinking, Holmila & Raitasalo (2005) examine the evidence on gender convergence in studies of recent decades, finding mixed results. Summarizing the literature on convergence, Holmila and Raitasalo offer five mechanisms which have been proposed to explain convergence, three focusing on changes in women's roles, in particular in work roles, one on changes in gender roles for men, and one on changes in the position of alcohol and drinking as a symbol of gender roles.

However, given the equivocal results from their review, as well as in the German and Polish analyses just discussed, perhaps we need a parallel series of hypotheses about gender divergence in drinking. One is offered by Wojtyniak *et al.* (2005): it can be argued, as they put it, 'that the economic and cultural shocks associated with the transition affected primarily men'. Loss of job and economic security left men particularly vulnerable, while women could always withdraw 'to the more traditional but respected role of a housewife'. However, against this, the authors point out that women with university education were the women most affected by the transition, but it does not seem to result in increased mortality for them.

A second hypothesis might start from the observation by Horverak (1983) and colleagues in one of the Norwegian alcohol strike studies. As household stocks of alcohol ran low, all that was left were the beverages preferred by women. In the emergency situation, the men also proceeded to drink these stocks up. This might be seen as simply an expression of power relations between the genders, but perhaps it is something slightly more subtle, related to the theme of alcohol as a symbol of gender roles which Holmila and Raitasalo discuss. Perhaps it is simply that women and men agree that alcohol matters more to men than to women. If so, in a family economic crisis precipitated by a time of crisis, whether in Argentina, Germany or Poland, alcohol would be viewed as more of a necessity for men than for women, and there would be gender divergence in drinking.

A third hypothesis arises from another theme in Holmila and Raitasalo's paper. If, indeed, men's drinking control is more externalized than women's, we would expect gender divergence if the external controls on drinking weakened. This was probably the case in the time of transition in East Germany and Poland, but it is difficult to see this as a likely explanation for divergence in the following period, during the 1990s.

A fourth hypothesis, of course, is simply that in some crisis situations women may lose status and power

relative to men, so that their claim to a share of the drinking is weakened. In the transition from communism, clearly this was true at such symbolic levels as female representation in parliament. It may be argued to have been also true at more everyday and down-to-earth levels (Einhorn 1993; UNICEF 1999).

In my view, such thinking about possible causes of gender divergence is needed to balance out a literature where the empirical material, as in the Polish and German cases in the 1990s, does not always come down on the side of convergence.

However traumatic the times of crisis may be for those caught up in them, the papers of this session help to underline and exemplify Ludek Kubicka's insight that much can be learned about the social mechanisms of drinking, and about gender and drinking, from studying what happens in periods of great social change. Ludek's own work on changes during the transition in the Czech Republic (Kubicka *et al.* 1995, 1998) found that drinking in a sample of men increased by 16% between 1988 and 1993, while Prague women's drinking increased by one-third—proportionally twice as much—between 1987 and 1992. The increase in women was confined to the economically active, particularly those who were working freelance or as newly self-employed. As both the session and Ludek's own work exemplify, studying who changes their drinking by how much in times of social change shines new light on our understanding of gender roles and drinking.

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