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# Alcohol and Dutch Masculinity: How Does Alcohol Influence the Dutch Male Image?

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**Alcohol and Dutch Masculinity:  
How does Alcohol Influence the Dutch Male image?**

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Abstract

The present study investigated the impact alcohol has in creating Dutch masculinity. Twenty Young men between the ages of thirteen and nineteen participated in interviews for this project, participants under the age of eighteen were required to have a parental consent form signed. The focus of the research was to find out how, and if, alcohol plays a role in creating masculinity. It was assumed that most participants would drink alcohol on a regular basis and believe that drinking it was essential to be a man.

In my results, my assumptions were proven incorrect. Most of the boys were not frequent drinkers and did not associate alcohol to manliness. They did, however, associate drinking beer with being male and drinking wine with being female. I think this is a topic that needs to be investigated further in the future.

## **Introduction**

Alcohol is a big part of American youth culture and it has become problematic. In a national study done in the late 1990s indicate that people between the ages of 18 and 25 had higher drinking quantity and frequency rates (Peralta 2007). A majority of this drinking is happening on college campuses. On college campuses, many students use alcohol as a tool to unwind and relax. This is typically an excuse for students to drink, and continue drinking either until they get sick or until they black out. Binge drinking has become quite common on college campuses, in the national study 42.7% of students had been binge drinking within two weeks of the study (Peralta 2007). Binge drinking is very popular among college students, especially male students. Alcohol is a means of expressing masculinity, and young men think they have to drink alcohol to prove they are a man. This type of mind frame encourages and enforces male stereotypes.

I am interested in knowing if this attitude towards alcohol is the same in the Netherlands. The drinking age is much lower in the Netherlands than in the United States, so there may be some difference between American drinking habits and Dutch drinking habits. In my research, I will be focusing primarily on the role alcohol has in creating Dutch masculinity. I want to understand why young men start drinking alcohol and how it impacts their social lives.

I believe this is important to learn because it tells a lot about how gender stereotypes are formed in the culture. I have had an interest in gender stereotypes for many years. It is interesting to see the expectations people have that are based on old traditions or societal norms. Stereotypes are heuristics used to label people based on their physical appearance, be it skin tone, body shape, gender, or something else. In this study I was interested in understanding the male stereotype in Holland and seeing the role that has in Dutch society.

There were many reasons why I chose to study the topic of alcohol use among teen males. I decided to focus on alcohol use because I am interested in learning about addiction. I would like to become an addiction counselor, so I decided to focus my project on alcohol to see if I did find it interesting. The reason I chose to study drinking among males is because it is assumed that men drink more and in the media it is part of the masculine identity.

From my research I wanted to find out what the Dutch male stereotypes are of men from the mouths of Dutch males. My study is significant for youth, both in the Netherlands and beyond. It sheds light on the drinking patterns within the Dutch community. It is important for youth to know that they do not have to follow the group, and it is okay to be different. This study may also show that everyone feels societal pressures that they may, or may not, give in to.

### **Literature Review**

The image of the strong man has long been associated with heavy alcohol consumption in many western cultures. In this stereotype, drinking a vast amount of alcohol is necessary to prove one's masculinity. It is especially important to prove this to their peer group, other men. This gender stereotype is learned at an early age, which suggests to young males that drinking alcohol is necessary part of being a man, and the more one drinks the more manly he is considered. There are societal and peer pressures to prove one's masculinity, and alcohol is an important part of that. There have been various studies that have attempted to understand how masculinity and alcohol are interconnected and it has been found that gender expectations lead men to drink alcohol in order to prove their masculinity.

An early study on gender expectations and alcohol use was done by Landrine et al. (1988). In their study, participants were asked to assign gender stereotypes as either male or female. They were asked to assign the adjectives presented to them through society's stereotype,

not their own personal views. They did this so that people would not resist stereotyping. The researchers hypothesized that participants would assign “drinking beer” and “getting drunk” as stereotypically masculine traits. Landrine et al (1998) did find this to be true in their results, participants did make traditionally gender stereotyped decisions. From these results the researchers suggested that the association of heavy drinking and the male gender role may be the reason why men typically drink more than women. They also stated that, “drinking often increases with the presence of stereotypically masculine tendencies because it is the ‘masculine’ way to behave” (Landrine et al 1988, 710).

In a study in the year following Landrine’s (1988) article, Lemle and Mishkind (1989) did their own study investigating the relationship between masculinity and alcohol. They specifically looked at the differences between social and alcoholic drinking in connection to masculinity. Throughout the article, the authors repeat the idea that the more a man drinks the more masculine he is. They stress this fact because it is central to the interrelationship between alcohol and masculinity. One aspect of masculinity is formed by the act of drinking alcohol, and the more a person can drink the manlier he is.

The article furthers this idea by diving into how the idea that entrance into manhood is dependent on alcohol consumption. The authors state that in Western cultures, “alcohol is a component of the male sex role” (Lemle & Mishkind 1989, 214). Males are encouraged to drink in order to fulfill the male sex role and also to be accepted by their peers. Drinking alcohol is even part of masculine activities, such as: sports games, in groups of other men, and in bars. Drinking, in these kinds of situations, encourages men to drink heavily, in order to impress their friends.

The authors did pose an idea about drinking that was interesting. They stated that drinking alcoholically is not a masculine trait. The reason for this is that being dependent on someone or something is not part of the male role. To be a man it is important for him to be able to control himself and be independent. Alcoholics are not able to control their addiction to alcohol, making them less masculine. This is an important fact that has not been explored any further. It would be interesting to do more research on this. This and the previous studies have been important for understanding masculinity and alcohol, but there have been more recent studies that have continued this research.

In 2007, Mullen et al. conducted a study about young men, masculinities, and alcohol in Scotland. The researchers' were interested in knowing the context in which men drink and when they get drunk, as well as finding out the contemporary drinking culture. The specific aims of the study were: "describe drinking context in a small sample of young men, learn what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior while drinking, and to describe the values and beliefs about being male associated with alcohol" (Mullen et al. 2007, 154). In order to investigate this they recruited a diverse group of young men ages 16-24. The participants were from different backgrounds, including socio-economic class, age, education level, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. They did this to ensure that different masculinities were represented. The researchers lead a series of focus groups, as well as individual interviews.

The results of the study found that the drinking culture changes as people grow older. The younger men viewed being drunk as more important than the older men. They did not care about the consequences of their drunken behavior; in fact, their peer groups often valued this. It was also found that getting drunk was the purpose of drinking for many of the participants. The main finding was that as one gets older and gains more responsibility, drinking behaviors tend to

change. This study was able to use personal stories through interviews and focus groups to better understand alcohol and masculinity.

There was a study by Poelen et al. (2005) that examined alcohol use among Dutch teens and young adults. This study did not specifically investigate masculinity, but the findings on gender were similar to the previous studies on masculinity. The authors were interested in giving an overview of past research on alcohol use among Dutch adolescents, as well as their own.

The article begins with the authors presenting the legal drinking age in the Netherlands. Teens may purchase soft alcohol (beer and wine) at the age of 16, and at 18 they can buy hard alcohol (liquor). This age limit is not strongly enforced in many establishments; there was in fact a study that showed that in restaurants teens aged 13-15 were able to purchase an alcoholic drink. This fact set the tone for the rest of the article, which describes alcohol use during adolescents and the transition into adulthood (Poelen et al. 2005).

The authors used secondary data for their own study. They used the Netherlands twin register as their subject pool. This seems to be a poor decision because it would lead to many different biases. To limit this bias, they were specifically interested in the prevalence and trends of adolescent alcohol use.

The results showed that alcohol use did in fact increase with age, but the quantity of drinks lessened after the age of 25. The previous study by Mullen et al. (2007) also found this to be true, and the reason is because around this age people begin to gain more responsibilities. This study also looked at the changing trend of alcohol use from 1993 until 2000. In 2000, males ages 12-15 were drinking more frequently than girls than in 1995 and 1997. Also, the data showed that there were far more teens drinking alcohol in 2000 than in 1993. There has been a growing trend of alcohol use by teens in the Netherlands, but the researchers do not try to explain this.

There could be many possible reasons, but there is no way to know them without further research.

In my study, I wanted to continue this work to find out at what age Dutch teens start drinking and why they started to drink in the first place. I tried to combine the methodologies of the Mullen et al. (2007) and Poelen et al. (2000) studies in my research. I originally wanted to conduct focus groups, but was unable to do this. I was able to conduct interviews that centered more on the prevalence of alcohol use and the importance it does, or does not have, in the lives of these boys.

### **History of alcohol consumption in Dutch culture**

In the Netherlands, alcohol consumption has long been associated with Dutch masculinity. An article written by Benjamin Roberts (2004) entitled *Drinking like a Man: the Paradox of Excessive Drinking for Seventeenth-Century Dutch Youths* investigates the heavy drinking patterns of Dutch youth in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. He describes the drunken behavior of young men in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, which are similar to the young men of today.

Roberts (2004) begins his article by describing the social atmosphere in the Netherlands in the late sixteen hundreds and early seventeen hundreds. Alcohol was an important part of Dutch culture during this time. During this time alcohol was safer to drink than water. Alcohol, especially beer, was safer to drink and was more affordable than tea or coffee (Roberts 2004). The Seventeenth century also marked a time of prosperity among the Dutch, which made alcohol, other than beer, more affordable. “With the increased prosperity in the Dutch republic, people of all classes and ages were consuming alcohol” (Roberts 2004, 237). Everyone was consuming more alcohol during this time.

Alcohol was safer to drink as well as an important element of Dutch social life. Important dates and events in Dutch society were celebrated with alcohol. There were specific beers that were used during specific occasions. If a couple announced they were expecting a child, guests would be presented with a goblet called *Hansje in de kelder*. The guests had to drink out of the goblet to bring good health to the baby. Special beers were also brewed for fairs, funerals, homecomings, and engagements. These special drinks were a part of these traditions as were specific drinking rituals (Roberts 2004). There were many drinking games used during special occasions. The point of the games was to quickly become inebriated. Special cups would be used for the games, such as the *pasglas* or the *molenbeker*.

The *pasglas* was a long and round cup that was marked, it looked like a measuring glass. During a game, it would be passed around and the next player had to drink the next level marked on the cup. Each person had to drink more than the last. "If the player failed to drink exactly to the mark, he had to gulp down to the next, which quickly made him drunk" (Roberts 2004, 240). The *molenbeker*, or the windmill cup, was a silver goblet with a base that looked like an arm of a windmill. The cup could not be set down unless it was empty, so players had to drink the contents before they could set it down. There was a pipe on the cup that would be blown into, and the number of times the sail, or arm of the windmill, turned would equal the number of time the player had to empty the cup.

Games like these were often played in taverns and in homes. Drinking alcohol was a part of Dutch society. Although it was part of society, excess drinking was problematic. There were many problems with fighting in taverns, sometimes there were even killings. Excessive drinking also affected the growing economy; production deadlines were not being met because of

intoxicated workers. Despite all of these issues, the only people who wanted any kind of reform were the Dutch Reformed Church.

Roberts (2004) focuses a large portion of the article on the churches role in reform. Ministers would try to tell people about the evils of excess drinking. They even published books and pamphlets to inform people about the dangers of alcohol. Moralists were even printing books for parents about moral upbringing. They believed it was important to start this education at an early age. When moralists talked to young people about excess drinking they always presented a clear image. They would tell the young people that “excess drinking would deteriorate their health, make them age prematurely, and turn them into social degenerates” (Roberts 2004, 243). They stressed to young people how excess drinking would cause one to lose their good looks. They believed that young people were so vain that they would stop drinking to preserve their beauty.

Moralists especially preached to the young men that drinking alcohol, and specifically getting drunk, was not appropriate behavior (Roberts, 2004). The warnings about the evils of alcohol were nothing new. Young men did not care about the messages they were receiving about the dangers of alcohol. Drinking was a part of the culture and also the male identity.

Drinking alcohol symbolized manliness, as did things like gambling and womanizing. There was a moralist that asked in his writings, what is worse, a drunkard, a gambler, or a womanizer. The answer was the drunkard because he was also a gambler and a womanizer (Roberts 2004). Gambling, getting drunk, and womanizing were all symbols of manliness for young men. Drinking in excess was very important for young men because it allowed them to prove their masculinity.

## Masculinity

The word masculinity conjures up many stereotypical images of men. There are various characteristics that represent manliness. In American films, masculinity is displayed through characters like the tough action star, the ladies man, or the protector. These characteristics appear in many films, and sometimes one character can possess all of these traits. Acting tough, being a womanizer, and protecting your loved ones can represent what it means to be a man, but this is not true for all men. There are multiple masculinities that are influenced by culture, history, and environment.

R.W. Connell (1996) explores the concept of multiple masculinities in his paper, *Teaching the Boys: New Research on Masculinity, and Gender Strategies for Schools*. Through his own research he found that anthropologists and historians have not been able to find one specific masculine identity, that masculinity is defined differently across cultures and at different periods in time. Multiple masculinities can even be found within a single group; “Within any workplace, neighborhood, or peer group, they are likely to be different understandings of masculinity and different ways of ‘doing’ masculinity” (Connell 1996, 208). The different constructions of masculinity are all dependent on other people. Connell believes that masculinities are not fixed and are being constantly changed to fit different settings. In his paper of multiple masculinities Connell also introduces the idea of hierarchy and hegemony among masculinities.

Different masculinities are not on the same plane, there are some that are held in a higher regard than others. In many western cultures the masculinities of homosexuals or ethnic minorities are dishonored and are often marginalized. Connell (1996) does not explain the reason for marginalization of these masculinities in his paper. The reason for their lower status could be

because their presence challenges the dominant heterosexual male identity that holds so much power in the United States and in other western cultures. The dominant male image is quickly discussed in the Connell (1996) article, where he introduces the term hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is the highly visible image of the ideal man, which does not typically represent the majority. Connell defines it as: “a position of cultural authority and leadership, not total dominance; other forms of masculinity exist alongside” (Connell 1996, 209). The hegemonic form is typically higher in the hierarchy of masculinities. It is the “ideal” male role.

### **Gender and alcohol**

Literature on alcohol consumption often notes the gender difference between drinking behaviors. The differences that are often mentioned are the types of alcohol men and women like and how much they consume. Robert L. Peralta (2007) found that the difference in alcohol use among men and women are more affected by cultural differences than biological ones. Gender differences are rooted in societal beliefs. In western societies women have long been expected to act chaste and timidly while men were expected to be tough and protective. These beliefs are still a part of society. The gender difference that has been found in alcohol consumption stems from these deeply seeded beliefs.

In research on college drinking the focus is always on men and their excessive drinking. Drinking alcohol has long been connected with masculinity. “Drinking is a ‘male domain’” (Capraro 2000, 307). Capraro (2000) believes that drinking is a male dominated activity that is also identified with being male. Lemele and Mischkind (1989) have also posed this conclusion in their article, *Alcohol and Masculinity*. They believe that drinking is a “key component of the male sex role” (Lemele & Mischkind 1989, 214). The researchers also stated that alcohol is a key part of a male’s transition into a man. Once a man gone through this transition he must

continuously prove his masculinity by drinking more and more. The more a man drinks the more masculine he is, so men are pressured to keep consuming alcohol until they have surpassed the amount they had consumed the last time.

There is pressure for men to use alcohol in order to prove their masculinity, but women do not have the same pressures in this area. Men are expected to be heavy drinkers and the drunker they are the more masculine they are considered to be. Women are expected to drink less than men, and if they do “drink like a man” their femininity is challenged. “Women tend to drink wine, tend to drink slowly, drink with family members or at parties, drink on social occasions...this style of drinking suggests that drinking is a social ritual for women” (Landrine et al. 1988, 764). Women drink to celebrate special occasions or to spend time with other people. They also are less likely to get very drunk because they drink wine, and they drink it slowly. Men on the other hand, “tend to drink with same-sex friends or acquaintances in bars (i.e., in the company of strangers), drink irresponsive of special occasions, drink beer, and drink fast...men tend to drink to get high or drunk” (Landrine et al. 1988, 764). Landrine et al. (1988) suggests that these gender differences can be seen in drinking behaviors and not just biologically.

In past research, a gender difference has been found in alcohol drinking. Cultural norms as well as biology have been used to explain these differences. Studies have shown that men drink a lot more than women, and it is necessary to do more research to find out why.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

Young Dutch teen males were recruited to participate in this study. Ages of participants ranged from 13 years of age to 19 years. This specific age group was chosen because it included

boys under the legal drinking age of the Netherlands, 16 for soft alcohol and 18 for hard alcohol, those who were of age, and those who had been over the age for a few years.

The participants were recruited through friends and family of my host family and SIT staff. An email was sent out to all hosts asking for participants. This was the easiest and quickest way to recruit participants in the short time frame I had.

### **Materials**

For this study I created an interview guide (see appendix A) for myself and a parent consent form (see appendix B). The interview guide was important because it listed basic questions I asked participants. Some of the questions include: **What is a man, where do you learn to be a man, do you feel pressure to act like a man, how long have you been drinking, and what is the point of drinking?** I tried to make the questions open ended and clear so that participants would not feel that I was searching for a specific answer.

For this study I also created an informed consent form for parents. This was necessary for participants younger than 18 years of age. It is a United States law that people under 18 need parental permission to participate in any research. The form gave a brief overview of what the research entailed and a description of what the participant would have to do. It also stated that the participants' identity would remain anonymous and anything said during the interview would remain confidential. Also, names would not be used in my final paper. Participants were also told that they could stop the interview at any time and were not obligated to answer every question. The form also offered a chance for the parents and participants to see my results if they wished to see them.

For one of my interview sessions I had to create a survey (see appendix C). The purpose of the survey was to get more personal information from students in a classroom. The survey

included similar questions that were in my interview guide as well as background questions about age, ethnicity, and religion.

### **Procedure**

I had originally planned on facilitating two focus groups but instead I conducted individual interviews. I was not able to have focus groups because there was not enough time to arrange them and also, some participants were not comfortable with speaking in a group. I decided to do individual interviews as well as small group interviews. This was easier for participants and made them more comfortable to talk with me.

Before the interview process started I had to contact the participants as well as their parents. I spent much of my time explaining what my project was about and why I wanted their son(s) to participate. After this step I had to call the boys asking if they would like to participate and when they were available. Most of the boys were happy to participate and we scheduled the interviews.

The interview process was different with each interview. In each one I tried to make the participants comfortable and get to know them a little. I tried to ask them about their friends, what they like to do, where they spend their time. After breaking the ice, I began asking them questions about their concepts of masculinity. The answers that followed these questions shaped the rest of the interview. The different stories and ideas the boy would share with me would often go beyond the question asked and inspired even more questions.

### **Assumptions**

From my research I assumed that the young men in my study would see a direct link between masculinity and alcohol. I believed that when asked, "What is a man?" most answers

would include something about alcohol. I also thought that most of the young men had experience with alcohol and drank it on a regular basis.

### **Analysis**

#### **Interview one**

The first interview I did was very brief, and I did not get very much information from the participant. This person is 14 years old, lives in a home with his mother and father, both of whom were college educated. When I asked him questions his answers were very brief. When I asked him what masculinity meant to him, his answer was: not being a girl and playing sports. I think this answer is very representative of what a 14 year old would answer. He is still young, and has not had to think about proving his masculinity, or what that even means.

The questions on masculinity were very short, but he opened up much more when I asked about alcohol. This boy does not drink alcohol himself, but many of the people in his class do drink. When I asked him why he thought they drank he said, "Because it's a cool thing and they like it. It is a grown up thing to do. Some people also drink coffee. It is a taste you need to be grown up for". This was interesting insight into his world. Teens in his school think drinking alcohol, and coffee, make them appear more adult. They want to prove their maturity, and they think alcohol is the way to do it.

Later in the interview I asked the boy about students getting drunk. He did not think that people were getting drunk very often, but he did tell me that some of the sports players did get drunk on a regular basis. He told me that, "Hockey players get drunk a lot". This is surprising because sports teams are male spaces, and in such a space players have to prove their masculinity. Getting drunk is often how they prove it.

The boy also told me that it is fairly easy to get alcohol before the age of 16. If at a party it is extremely easy to get a drink. It is also easy to ask an older sibling or friend to buy alcohol. This came up in all my other interviews, which makes me think that this is a common practice. If people want to drink, it is fairly easy to get alcohol.

### **Short Self Analyses: Interview one**

This interview was very short, but I was able to learn a lot about the drinking culture among kids in this boy's class. I think the interview may have gone better if I had more direct questions. I did refine my questions a few more times after this interview, and it was easy to see the difference as my interviews progressed. I was getting more information when I lessened the number of questions. In this interview I had too many questions, some of which were very vague. I was also very nervous because it was my first interview.

### **Interview two**

The second interview went a bit better, but the participant's answers did not seem authentic. Throughout the interview it felt as if he were trying to give me the answers he thought I wanted. When I asked him where people learn to be a man he said: "learn it as you grow up from family and friends, and a little bit from school. Knowledge is what makes a man". He may have actually meant this, but to me it seemed as though he were trying to give me a good answer, rather than an honest one. Although this did not feel honest, I did feel that some of his answers were sincere, and unexpected. When I asked him about pressures to act like a man he told me that he feels pressure from girls to keep up a certain image. I did not expect this answer. This made me think about my own gender biases. I often think that women are the ones who are pressured to fit a certain image to impress men, but this does go both ways.

The interview with this young man was very different from the first. When I asked him about his friends and what he likes to do he told me he likes to go out to clubs. The first boy told me liked to chill and hang out with his friends. The difference in answers is because of the age difference them. This person was 19 years old, so of course his answers for what he likes to do with his friends would be different from a fourteen year old. The nineteen year old enjoys going to clubs and drinking with his friends. He told me that drinking was a big part of going out and that all his friends drink alcohol. Later in the interview, I asked him if he thought drinking was an essential part of being a man and he told me that it wasn't. He went on to say that people who choose not to drink have strong personalities. This made me think that he did not believe that he had a strong personality. I cannot be sure of what he was thinking, but this is how I interpreted it. I thought that maybe he didn't have a strong enough personality to reject drinking with his friends, especially because most of his friends are older. I thought that maybe drinking for him was a way of impressing his older friends. There is no real way to know if any of this is true or if I am reading too much into his statement. From this interview I found that his answers seemed to contradict each other and he was often trying to give me good answers, not honest ones.

### **Short Self Analysis: Interview two**

During this interview I still felt nervous about the whole interviewing process. This was my second interview and was a one-on-one conversation. I was still getting used to this type of interaction. I feel that the interview may have gone differently if I had been more confident in my questions. The interviews following this one were much better, and I learned a style that worked for me.

### **Interview three**

My third interview was with two brothers, ages 15 and 16. These boys live in a nice home with their parents and sister in a nice part of Amsterdam. When I entered their home, their mother greeted me and immediately made me feel comfortable. This made me more confident when I began the interview. The boys also seemed very comfortable with having me there and were happy to answer any questions.

The eldest, age 16, I felt was much more reserved than the other brother. He was quieter at the beginning of the interview, but gradually warmed up and shared some very interesting things. He spends most of his time at home and only sees his friends during school hours because they live outside of the city. He does not drink and does not think that his classmates drink either. He was able to tell me some stories about people in his class getting drunk, but still he thinks people don't drink. One of the stories he shared with me was about a girl he had seen in school the day I had interviewed him. "Today I heard a girl that she said that I had to learn for a test but I was wasted yesterday, so I couldn't learn. That shocked me". When I asked him if he thought this kind of thing happens a lot he said: "Well in my school, I actually don't think it, it probably is like that, but I don't see a lot of people did it or something". Here, this boy realizes that he does not actually know what people are doing in their spare time. He does not drink or party in his free time so he assumes that other people are the same.

The other boy was younger, but he was not shy. He was the one who greeted me at the door and welcomed me into their home. After talking to him, I could see that he was immature, which is normal for a fifteen year old boy. When answering my questions his tone was more witty and sarcastic at times. He does not drink alcohol regularly either, but he does like to enjoy

a beer at birthday parties. I asked him why and he told me: “its not very tasty...it’s okay sometimes”.

This person was very different from his brother. He was more aware of his friends’ activities outside of school. When I asked him how often his friends drank his answer was each week. His brother then told him he had very bad friends. I think that the brother is more opposed to alcohol than this boy. He does not approve of his brother’s friends drinking. This may be because he wants to be protective over his younger sibling. He doesn’t want his brother to follow the friends’ behavior. I am not sure if he has cause to worry, but as an older sibling myself I understand the need to protect your family.

Neither of these boys drink alcohol, but they did tell me that they consider alcohol consumption a part of masculinity. When I first asked them about masculinity they both told me that it meant being tough, or in Dutch it is stoar. The younger brother’s answer was alcohol but did not give an explanation. When I asked them about it they told me that men drink very much alcohol. The older brother then went on to say: “men drink alcohol and women drink wine”. This was a common answer in most of the interviews and has been in a lot of literature. There is this idea that men commonly drink beer and women drink wine. Studies have shown that men do drink more beer and women are more likely to drink wine, but it doesn’t mean that this is the case with every man and woman. Nonetheless, this is a common mindset about specific gender roles.

Later in the interview I asked the boys if it was important for men to drink. They answered no, and said drinking was just a lifestyle. I then asked them if there is a connection between being a man and drinking and the oldest one told me: “you can’t be a man without drinking. I mentioned how you are sitting in a bar”. Earlier he gave me a scenario about

drinking: “if you go to the bar often, you like going to the bar, you order a beer or something, and you just drink beer. But if you don’t like being in the bar you don’t order beer”. He then went on to say that you can’t just order water when everyone else has beer. This all has to do with keeping up an image in specific spaces. I think that he does believe alcohol is a part of the construction of masculinity, but that it all depends on the circumstances and the environment. In a bar you are more pressured to drink to assert masculinity because it is a male space.

From this interview it seems that these boys are a bit sheltered. They spend most of their time at home and do not go out. This is not a bad thing, but their experience with alcohol and masculinity is much different from someone who does go out every weekend and drinks.

### **Short Self Analysis: Interview three**

I found that this interview was much easier than the first two. I was more comfortable after having some practice and talking with two people was much easier than talking to one person. This made the boys feel more comfortable as well. I think this allowed them to be more honest and open when answering my questions.

### **Interview four**

The next interview I conducted included three thirteen year old boys. These boys have been friends since childhood; they have grown up together. They were very young but they knew a lot about drinking behavior in the Netherlands.

I first asked them about masculinity and what it means to be a man. The youngest one in the group answered: “tough”. I asked him to clarify what that meant and his answer was: “someone is cool and muscular”. He also added that they should be a little bit of a ladies man. I thought this was very interesting because these are very stereotypical images of men. I was even more surprised when he told me that when he thinks of a man he thinks of a husband who takes

care of the family. I never associated the image of the tough man with that of the caretaker. I have often thought of them being on two different ends of a spectrum.

I followed the last question by asking about the men they admire. There were some interesting answers to this. One boy said that he admired voetballers, athletes, and tough guys. He talked about one specific player who has the most beautiful girlfriend in Holland. The player had said he wanted to date this girl in an interview and after that they started dating. I thought this was an interesting point, because only the nineteen year old had talked about girls in his interview. I think at thirteen, this boy is starting to notice girls and is admiring men who know how to attract the attention of beautiful women.

The other two boys talked about their families, their dads, cousins, brothers. One boy admired his father because of his profession as a graphic designer. The other boy said he admired his father because he brings in the money. This is the same boy that believed a man should be the provider for the family. I think that his father has a very strong influence in his life, which is shaping this boy's masculinity.

I asked the boys if they ever felt pressure to act like a man. They answered by saying, "sometimes" and "no". The boy who said no was the youngest of the group. He goes to a different school than the other boys, and at that school he is in the highest grade. He is one of the oldest people at his school, so he feels he is one of the coolest and has no need to prove himself or act differently. The other two boys attend another school and are in the lowest grade. One boy told me he felt more pressure at this new school than he had at his previous school, "More than the other school. Now there are much older [people], fifteen and sixteen year olds". The other boy, who also attends the same school, agreed, "yea there are these two guys that are like super cool, I don't really think that, but if you are with them then you can be yourself but you don't act

so much, you do act a little bit”. Here this boy is saying that hanging out with these two cool guys you have to act a bit different to fit in. After talking about social pressure to act like a man, I feel that these boys feel more pressured to act cool than to act like a man. They want to belong and fit in at school and notice to do so you have to act cool. Acting cool and acting like a man can sometimes be the same thing, but that’s a topic for another paper.

When I asked the boys about their first experiences with alcohol it did not surprise me that they had shared the experience. Their fathers allowed them to have some beer. One boy told me that he never drinks without his father’s permission, and when he has permission he only takes a sip of whatever his father is drinking. The boys do not regularly drink alcohol, but they have tried it on more than one occasion. One boy told me about a trip he took where he drank with a friend, “I was on a trip to the winter holidays and there was like a little fridge and I was with a friend of mine and we were there and we wanted to try it and it was real alcohol. But then I throw up. It wasn’t that good”. His curiosity led him to try the alcohol, something that many young boys experience.

There were some surprising answers when I asked further questions about alcohol. When I asked how easy it was to get alcohol while under the age of 16 they told me that it was easy to buy alcohol from a young cashier than a cashier who was older, “only like old people or so check behind cash register. Only they ask if you are 16. If they are 20 or so they don’t”. I had never thought about this before, but it makes sense. Younger cashiers understand that their peers like to drink and do not see a problem with that. Older cashiers are more likely to follow the rules and not condone young people to drinking before the legal age.

After this, I asked them which gender drank more and they said men drink more, but at their age more girls were drinking. It was surprising to hear that girls were drinking more, and

even more surprising when one boy said that the girls that were drinking were sluts, “I know very much sluts and they drink more.” I processed to ask him what a slut was and his answer was: “She goes with very much guys. Only, Friss it’s a party for younger people, people go there to kiss. We don’t really kiss there much, we are not there that much. She like kisses with 8 people and has 8 boyfriends and then she chooses which one.” So this boy thinks that girls who kiss many people are sluts and these girls drink alcohol. I didn’t talk to any girls for this study so I cannot make any assumptions from what this boy has told me. Girls who are drinking may be more likely to kiss more boys because they have less control over their behavior. The girls might also be drinking to feel more relaxed around boys. There is no way of knowing, this also would be another interesting topic to study.

After discussing what is a slut and why girls drink more I asked the boys why they think men drink more. One boy said that men party more. Another boy spoke about men and women going to bars, “guys are like ‘can I have a beer’ and girls are like ‘can I have a beer or can I have water’. Guys don’t go to a bar and ask for water.” Another boy added: “I think girls want to be pretty and all guys have beer bellies”. This gender difference was also mentioned in the last interview. In a bar, men cannot order water because it goes against the male role. They are expected to drink beer, not order a water.. Women can have beer in a bar, but they can also order water because they have to keep their figure to look attractive to men. Men do not have to worry about their physique because it is more important for them to prove their masculinity.

These 13 year old boys had a vast amount of knowledge of alcohol use in the Netherlands. I was surprised by many of their answers because they did not match my own preconceptions of drinking in Holland.

### **Short Self Analysis: Interview four**

I think this was my best interview. I felt very comfortable talking to these boys. It was nice having three people to interview. I was able to hear multiple perspectives on masculinity and alcohol. There were times where the boys disagreed about certain things that made me more intrigued. My own preconceived notions about drinking in the Netherlands were challenged in this interview.

### **Interview five**

In this interview I spoke with two brothers who live outside of Amsterdam in a small town about an hour away. These boys were very nice and invited me over for dinner with their family. I was able to get to know them, as well as their family, before the interview. The eldest boy was 17 and the other was 14.

The older brother was quieter at first, but opened up as the interview progressed. He was very careful with answering questions and never wanted to make generalizations. When I asked him the question “what is a man?” he had a difficult time thinking of an answer: “Hard questions. I can’t think of a stereotype. I haven’t thought of a definition.” I was surprised he could not think of a stereotype. In all the interviews before this people always had an answer, but this was the first time someone could not think of one. The rest of his answers were also different from other participants but shared some similarities. When I asked about where he learned to be a man his answer was: “get in closer contact with older people as you get older... learn more manly behavior” and he also added, “You don’t want to stay behind”. I think he has noticed other people around him are maturing and acting differently making him think he has to keep up with them, When I asked him about men he admired he also found this difficult. He said that he admired many musicians, but not because they were men. I do not believe that this young man

thinks in terms of gender categories. He does acknowledge that they exist and that there is a difference between men and women but I don't think it is something he thinks about on a regular basis. He focuses more on the person, rather than just their gender.

The younger brother was more open when we started the interview. His views were slightly different from his brother on some questions. I think this is because of their age difference. When I asked the question ,what is a man?, his answer was literal, "testicles, the biological definition of a man". A few people had said this before in interviews, but using different terms. I did not expect him to think of it in a biological way, but he did. After this we talked about male stereotypes. He believed the ideal stereotypical man should be brave and prefer doing things the right way before the easy way. He explained to me that this meant a man should do things thoroughly and correctly, not doing whatever is easiest. He added that men should be caring and giving to everyone. He and his brother were playing off one another as they both answered this question. They spoke about the man as a protector and how it was an old-fashioned view. It does not surprise me that they spoke about this, they acted like gentlemen from the moment I met them. They were both very cordial and helpful.

I continued the interview with questions on alcohol. They both had experience with it. The older brother drank it on a regular basis because he was of age, and even then he would go to a café and drink a beer once every two weeks or so. The younger brother would have Shandy (drink with little alcohol in it) for holidays, and said he would most likely drink a few beers when he is his brother's age. At the end of the interview I asked them what they thought the point of alcohol was. The eldest brother said: "to loosen the group, loosen the atmosphere". The younger brother said that drinking was tradition and that it is rooted in their society. I did not

expect to hear this in an interview. These boys understand that alcohol is a part of their history and Dutch tradition.

I think their experience with alcohol is different because they live in a small town. When I asked them if men or women drank more, they answered that men and women drink differently, women drink more chic drinks (wine and cocktails) and men drink mainly beer. They then went on to say: “maybe in Amsterdam it is different”. They assumed that there was a difference between where they lived and Amsterdam.

These boys provided me with a lot of information about masculinity and alcohol use in the Netherlands. They were able to give a different perspective because they live outside of Amsterdam.

#### **Short Self Analysis: Interview five**

I felt very comfortable speaking with these boys. It was difficult to transition into the interview because I was able to get to know them prior. It may have been better if we had done the interview first and then had dinner. I did enjoy our conversations before and after the interview and feel I really got to know these boys and their family. They were all very welcoming and made me feel at home.

#### **Interview six**

For this interview I spoke with a classroom of 11 boys. I was permitted to come and speak to an English class at one of the gymnasium schools in Amsterdam. In the group, there were four 16 year olds, six 17 year olds, and one 18 year old. The interview was set up as an English lesson, and allowed the students to practice the English language as I asked them questions about masculinity and alcohol. I was in contact with the teacher and she was very happy to have me come. She helped me form a lesson plan to structure the interview. We

decided on having the class divide into small groups and answer some warm up questions (see appendix D). We then had them fill out a survey (appendix C) so students would feel more comfortable telling me about their history with alcohol in a more private setting.. After this, I talked to them about alcohol use in the United States and about the prohibition act. We ended the class with each group chose a statement from a list the teacher had created. They then had to debate whether they were for or against the statement. This format was successful and I was able to talk to all the students.

When the students were discussing the warm up questions I went around to each one and listened to their answers. All the groups had similar answers to the questions. The first question was asking about the drinking behaviors of teens in the Netherlands, and they all agreed that teens drink a lot. One student spoke about the difference between drinking in the United States and the Netherlands. This student said that drinking is a taboo in the U.S., which makes teens start drinking early because it is forbidden. I think this student's observation is correct. In the United States alcohol is something we do not talk about. The only time students and teachers have a conversation about alcohol is when teachers are telling students to abstain from alcohol and just say no. I was surprised to see how comfortable the students were to talk about drinking with their teacher. She also went around to every group and spoke to them about alcohol. The students felt comfortable talking to her, and she also felt comfortable to share her own experiences. There was no taboo about alcohol here.

As I walked around to the different groups I found that teens start drinking around the age of 14 or 15. I went through the surveys and found that most of the students started drinking around the same age. They all had different reasons for trying, but they all started drinking around the same time. Some students said they just wanted to try or experience it. One boy said:

“it’s rather normal and socially accepted to drink in the Netherlands; and so it isn’t really a reason, it just happened”. Another person wrote: “because it always felt like it was something special”. One boy’s response was: “I wanted to try what it tastes like and I was curious about it. I didn’t see why I shouldn’t and –as bad as it sounds- everyone was doing it, so I didn’t see any harm in doing it too”. These are all very different reasons for trying alcohol. The last comment was very different from all the other answers. Like the others, he was curious, but he was the only one to say he was influenced by his peers. He saw that everyone else was drinking and decided that he should try it too. This person was also one of the few who said they sometimes feel pressured to drink. Most people answered no to this question, but there were a few who said: “sometimes”. Alcohol is a part of Dutch culture, so I do not think most of these boys feel pressure to drink because alcohol is so rooted in the culture.

I focused more on alcohol than on masculinity in this class. In the survey, I did ask, “What is a man?” I received some interesting answers to this question. Two people answered that men should be interested in sports and be muscular. Some people answered that being a man was physical, having a penis. One person said men should be career building, and another said that a man should be physically strong and protective over his family. These answers are the same answers I had already heard in my other interviews. I think that all the answers in this interview represent various definitions of masculinity, which is exactly what Connell (1996) wrote about in his article about masculinity. He believed that there are multiple masculinities, and from this interview it can be seen that this is true.

It was nice being able to enter this classroom. All of the students were happy to share their own experiences with me. I think they liked enjoying doing something different in their class as well.

**Short Self Analysis: Interview six**

This interview was much different from the others. I did not just ask questions, but had multiple conversations with groups of boys. It was easy to talk to them because I spent a few minutes with each group. I feel that I was not able to get to know them because there were so many people. If I would have had more time I could have talked to them more about their own experiences. This format was less personal but did work.

**Interview seven**

This last interview is much different from the rest. I spoke with a man who is studying to be an addictions counselor and used to be an addict himself. I talked to him about his teen years and when he started using alcohol and drugs. There are some similarities between his teen years and the boys I interviewed but this man was much more into heavy drinking. This man battled with addiction for a very long time and was kind of enough to share his story with me.

He started drinking at age 14, which is around the same age the boys from the last interview started drinking. He grew up during the 1960s, which he said was during the Hippie era. He told me that he had been very insecure with himself because he had moved from a small town to Amsterdam. He had wanted to be part of the crowd, and being part of the crowd meant drinking alcohol. He began just drinking on the weekends with friends and this later changed to him drinking whenever he had a chance. He told me that he grew up with the idea alcohol was normal. His parents would drink and it was very normal to him. I think the concept of alcohol being normal has also come up in other interviews. Alcohol seems to be a part of Dutch society; people do not try to hide it. Parents drink it in front of their children and it is no big deal. It is just a part of life.

At age 16 he moved onto a new drug, marijuana. He said when he started using cannabis he was “fucked because I couldn’t stop”. When he started using cannabis he moved on to cocaine, which he said made him feel like he was on top of the world. He eventually went into “dealing and mainlining heroin and coke”. There was a period of time where he would stop using drugs but it would not last very long. When he did stop using, he stopped using the hard drugs because that is what he considered to be drugs. He thought he could stop using heroin and cocaine but continue drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana.

Throughout the time he was using drugs he was able to keep a steady job and build a career. He enjoyed his life; he was able to balance work and partying. But there finally came a point when he could no longer keep this balance and wanted to stop using. He got clean on January 1, 2004 after trying a twelve step program in Scotland. He had gone to various clinics in the past, but none of the programs had worked. He has since been able to stay clean, and now wants to help people who are in similar situations. He is currently studying addictions counseling in Ireland and has been doing work in a clinic in Holland.

This interview allowed me to learn about alcohol addiction in the Netherlands. There were some similarities between what this man experienced as a teenager and what boys today are experiencing. Alcohol was a way for this man to bond with his peers, and it was something that had always been a part of his life. He saw his parents drinking alcohol, and this was the norm for him. I think many of the boys I interviewed also feel that alcohol is a part of the culture, and it is normal to drink alcohol.

This interview was a way for me to understand how alcohol consumption goes from a normal behavior to addiction. With his story, I was able to understand how his addiction begins.

I do not know if any of the boys I interviewed will become addicts, but after hearing this man's story I better understand how addiction works.

### **Short Self-Analysis: Interview seven**

I was less prepared for this interview. I did not know if I was going to include this in my paper, but after speaking with this man I felt it was important to share his story. I was able to see how heavy drinking in the teen years can lead to addiction. I do wish I had asked this man about the connection between alcohol and masculinity. I assume there was some connection between him drinking and masculinity because he was trying to impress his friends, who were mostly male. I did not ask him directly about masculinity and wish I had.

## **Discussion**

### **Alcohol and Masculinity**

In my research I was unable to find a strong link between alcohol and masculinity. When I asked the participants to describe what a man is only one of them said drinking alcohol. I think that masculinity is something that has not been explored by these young men. It was difficult for them to think of answers to this question, and the answers were all very different. From my research I can see that there are multiple masculinities within the twenty-one people I spoke with. Alcohol was not really part of being a man for these boys; it is just part of the culture.

I did notice a common theme in all my interviews; gender differences and alcohol. In each interview I was told that men drink beer and women drink wine. Of course men do not just drink beer and women drink more than just wine, but I think it is important to investigate this because it came up in every interview. This is a gender stereotype, but I wonder if things are this way because people feel societal pressure to drink something because of their gender, or if it's just coincidence. I think there needs to be further research on this in the future. Gender roles and

alcohol may be a more interesting topic to understand than masculinity and alcohol in the Netherlands.

### **Age Differences**

I think the diverse ideas about alcohol and masculinity in my research was due to the age differences of my participants. The answers given by the thirteen year olds were completely different from those of the nineteen year old. The older participants had more experience with alcohol and had dealt more with the issue of masculinity. The younger participants had little experience with alcohol and had never thought about masculinity or what it means. I think as they develop and get older they have to discover what a man is and what kind of men they want to be. It was interesting to see the difference age has on people's opinions on masculinity and alcohol use.

### **Assumptions**

Before my research I believed that all the young men I would interview would associate alcohol consumption with a masculine identity. I was surprised to find this to be untrue. Hardly any of the participants mentioned alcohol use when they described the ideal or stereotypical man. In fact, most mentioned acting tough, being strong, and being protective as traits associated with men. I think it would have been better to explore this more in my interviews. Masculinity is such a broad subject that it is hard to pick one portion of it to study. I think alcohol and masculinity would have a different outcome in the United States, which is where most studies have been done. College students are usually studied, and alcohol is a large part of the college experience on many campuses. I think that if this study had been done in the United States my assumptions would have been proven to be true.

## **Limitations**

In my research, I was faced with some limitations that may have affected my data. The first limitation was a time constraint. I had four weeks to complete the research and one of those weeks included many Dutch holidays so I could not do any interviews in this week. It was difficult trying to find participants and set up interviews in three weeks. I was able to do it, but if there had been more time I would have liked to have a more diverse sample.

Another limitation is the actual sample I was able to recruit. Most of my participants were from two parent homes, and all were ethnically Dutch. I had wanted to interview people from different racial and social backgrounds but I did not have enough time to reach out to those groups. I had to interview the people I had access to.

## **Interview Techniques**

I conducted a series of individual and group interviews for my study. I had to adjust my approach in each interview because I was interviewing people of different ages and in many of the interviews I was speaking with more than one person. With each interview I became more comfortable with asking questions and creating a good rapport with participants because I learned what worked and didn't work. The more comfortable I was, the more comfortable the participants were. This led them to feel free to tell me more about their experiences as young men and with drinking alcohol.

## **Conclusion**

Alcohol consumption does not have a direct connection to masculinity in the Netherlands. Alcohol does not define masculinity but it is a part of life as a male. Just as Connell (1996) had discussed in his article, I found that there were multiple masculinities among the people I spoke with. Each person defined it differently based on their own beliefs and

experiences. There were some common themes such as: Men are considered to be heavier drinkers than women, and their drink of choice is beer. My research shows that drinking is a part of Dutch culture. There are no taboos about alcohol and people feel free to talk about their use of alcohol, no matter the age. It may have been interesting to further investigate the difference between male and female drinking behavior.

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## **Appendix A**

### Questions for interviews

#### **Masculinity**

- 1) What is your group of friends like and what do you like to do with them?
- 2) What is a man?
  - a) What kinds of traits should a man have?
- 3) Where do you learn to be a man?
- 4) What type of men do you admire/ what features do you admire in a man?
- 5) Do you feel pressure to act like a man?

#### **Alcohol**

- 1) How long have you been drinking and what was the first moment you had alcohol like?
  - a) Is it easy to get alcohol before you are 16? Why?
- 2) Who do you think drinks more alcohol: boys or girls?
  - a) Why?
- 3) How often do you drink?
- 4) What is the point of drinking alcohol?
  - a) Are you influenced by others to drink?

## Appendix B

### Parental Consent form

*Before agreeing to let your child participate in this study it is important that you read the description of the study.*

The purpose of my study is to examine Dutch masculinity. I have chosen to interview teen boys because it is a time of transition into manhood, and I would like to know how perceptions of masculinity influence their behaviors as they become men. Participants will be meeting in a focus group with other boys of similar ages. They will be asked to just have a conversation about what masculinity means to them, what they like to do with their friends, and stereotypical images of men in Holland. I am not sure how long this will take, it could take anywhere from a 30 minutes to a full hour. It will depend on the number of people in the focus group and how much they are willing to talk about. I will most likely be conducting the focus group on a weekend as to not interfere with their studies. If your child decides he is uncomfortable at any point in the study, he can feel free to stop and wither leave or just take a break. This includes any discomfort about answering any specific questions.

All the information provided in the study will be kept confidential. I will be the only one that sees the actual information. I will not be using any names in my study, so your child's identity will be kept anonymous. When I have finished my research, all the information will be destroyed, and will be unavailable for further use.

After the study is complete, you or your child can email me if you wish to see the results. Please sign here if you have completely read this form. If there are any questions please email me at,\_(email)\_.

**I have read the above and understand its contents and I agree to let my child participate in the study.**

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Parent Signature

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Date

Adriana Lara  
Email:

SIT Amsterdam Student

## Appendix C

### Gender Role and Alcohol Survey

**Please fill in your answers. All answer will be anonymous and will only be read by me. If you feel uncomfortable answering a question please leave it blank. Thank you!**

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Religion: \_\_\_\_\_

National identity: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Dutch, Moroccan, Turkish, Spanish....)

**Please read the questions carefully and answer the questions.**

- 1) What is your group of friends like? (mostly male, mostly female, mixed)
- 2) What does it mean to be a man? What do you think of when you see the word man?
- 3) What men do you admire? What do you admire about them?

**Please read the following questions and answer them truthfully. These will not be read by anyone except me.**

- 1) Do you drink alcohol?
- 2) How old were you when you started drinking?
- 3) Why did you decide to try alcohol?
- 4) How often do you drink?
- 5) Do you ever feel pressured to drink?

## **Appendix D**

### **Warm up questions:**

What are the drinking habits of teenagers in the Netherlands?

At what age do people start drinking alcohol? (not the legal age)

Where do people get alcohol from?

What kinds of alcohol do people typically drink?

Is there a gender difference?

Do you think people drink too much? Why?



**Consent to Use of Independent Study Project (ISP)**

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