

# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

### THE ALCOHOLISM FRAME AND THE EVERYDAY-LIFE FRAME

The studies of this book distinguish two frameworks used in interpreting and accounting for drinking, especially socially unacceptable drinking. I call these the *alcoholism frame* and the *everyday-life frame*.

The concept of frame was developed first by Erving Goffman (1974). My use of the concept is influenced by Anthony Giddens (1984, 87) who emphasizes its cognitive dimension. Frames can be understood as clusters of rules which help to define and constitute specific activities. In everyday life, when we enter a situation and get an answer to the question “what is going on here,” we have found a frame from our stock of social knowledge that fits with at least certain characteristics of the situation. Such a loose definition of “frame” makes it possible to apply several noncontradictory frames to any situation by paying attention to different aspects of what is going on. When I speak about the everyday-life frame for drinking, I refer to an aggregate of more specific frames that people use to interpret drinking.

*In the everyday-life frame, drinking is to a large extent taken for granted. The everyday-life frame focuses attention on the place and functions of drinking in social interaction.* For example a drink may be used to convey meaning—a glass of champagne drunk to celebrate an anniversary. Banquets

## 2 Desire and Craving

and other special occasions are naturally part of the everyday-life frame and an essential part of "ordinary" drinking situations. In Finland, in fact, it seems that alcoholic drinking makes almost any situation special. Drinking also may be an occasion for social interaction as, for instance, when two colleagues go "to have a drink" after a hard day's work. In this case, drinking symbolizes freedom and release from work (and perhaps home), and from the self-discipline needed in carrying out one's duties. The everyday-life frame focuses attention on social context and meaning.

*The alcoholism frame, on the other hand, shifts attention from the situation to individuals and their drinking habits or style.* Along with this focus on individual drinking patterns, three additional things stand out about the alcoholism frame. First, the alcoholism frame distinguishes between normal and abnormal (or pathological) drinking. This way of dividing drinking is characteristic of some modern Western societies.<sup>1</sup> The alcoholism frame does not interpret frequent, unacceptable drinking an extreme case of "normal" behavior, but as something altogether different. Second, alcoholism is seen as a weakness or disease of the will. According to the alcoholism frame, alcoholics are unable to prevent themselves from drinking, because they have an overwhelming craving for drink. If a person believed to be an "alcoholic" goes for a drink after work, the alcoholism frame interprets the behavior as proof of craving and of addiction. It does not use the notions of freedom and relaxation to interpret the drinking of an "alcoholic." Rather, it sees drinking as the result of craving and of the inability to refrain. Third, the alcoholism frame portrays heavy drinking as a long-standing problem which can be managed and handled, but not cured. As this book will show, in all three of these aspects, alcoholism is a Western culture-bound syndrome.

It should be noted that the alcoholism frame is similar to other frameworks that assess behavior and situations by focusing on individual style, manner, or behavior. It is a special case of the frames by which the modern individual and individuality is socially produced and reproduced. On a more general level we could talk about the *personality frame* as a cluster of frames that construct the modern individual as a personality. We could also talk about the craving for alcohol as part of the *addiction frame* which itself is a cluster of frames that construct the modern individual as a desiring subject.

I am not suggesting that frames are grids or lenses through which "reality" is more or less accurately perceived. And I am not saying that someone who perceives an alcohol problem has an unreal or false belief.

Rather, this book suggests that frames constitute and organize social thought and social situations. As with any frame, the alcoholism frame is, in part, a self-fulfilling prophecy. When it is applied to a person, it generally structures social relations and situations, and gives them new meanings.

The two interpretive frameworks, the everyday-life frame and the alcoholism frame, are not equal, alternative ways of viewing drinking. The everyday-life frame is the basis for taken-for-granted attitudes toward social situations. When something is perceived within the everyday-life frame, it is usually not done reflexively, self-consciously. People are not deliberately applying a particular frame; they simply understand what is going on as competent members of a culture. Within the everyday-life frame, "ordinary drinking" consists of everyday-life situations such as having a party, or going to the tavern. Ordinary drinking occasions are not understood as "normal" drinking. The alcoholism frame, on the other hand, is usually a more conscious, second-order interpretive framework applied to a situation or to behavior that can not easily be made intelligible within the everyday-life frame. It distinguishes between normal and abnormal drinking, and then develops further interpretations of abnormal drinking—of "alcoholism." The studies in this book analyze the history and logic of the alcoholism frame, its interpretations of alcoholism, and the ways that it structures our drinking habits and notions of drinking.

## DESIRE AND THE MODERN PERSON

This is also a book about the modern individual as a subject of desire. Drawing upon the research tradition dealing with the concepts of desire and self-control, this book consists of theoretically informed empirical analyses of the way we are constructed and reconstructed as desiring subjects.

In the social science literature, the theme was first taken up by Sigmund Freud, particularly in his essay *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1978, first published in 1930). In that work, Freud suggests that civilization develops by imposing constraints on the natural instincts of men and women. The influence of Freud and psychoanalysis probably cannot be overestimated since Freud has provided the Western world with the vocabulary with which to talk about the psyche.

Norbert Elias's two-volume study entitled *The Civilizing Process*

(Elias 1978; 1982, first published in 1939) was an important work in the Freudian tradition. Elias showed that the psychic structure, so eloquently described by Freud, is a historical construction. According to Elias, modernization has meant an ever greater need for self-restraint. The civilizing process is best understood as a gradual internalization of outer constraints into self-restraint. This development is due to the growing importance and strength of the central power of a nation—that is, the state—as a power monopoly. Along with state formation, and the growing importance of an exchange economy, networks of mutual dependence have become denser, and that has been the reason for individuals' need for greater discretion.

Michel Foucault has also studied the formation of the modern person in a number of his studies (for instance Foucault 1973; 1979; 1980; 1986). Foucault insists that it is insufficient to treat the modern psyche as a historical construction, to trace the history by which humans have developed an ever stricter self-discipline over their instincts. We must also realize, said Foucault, that “desire” and “self-control” are *notions* Western culture uses, notions that produce us in their own image as desiring subject.<sup>2</sup>

The concepts of self-control, addiction, and dependence have also been discussed in sociological alcohol research (Room 1985b). Of particular interest are Harry Levine's studies dealing with the social history of temperance and alcoholism (Levine 1978a; 1978b; 1980; 1984; 1990). According to Levine, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the rise of an “obsession with self-control” (Levine 1978a), especially among the American middle class, an obsession that contributed to producing the modern concept and experience of addiction (Levine 1978b).

The case studies of this book analyze the ways in which we are constructed or constituted as modern, desiring subjects by the notions of desire and self-control. As modern individuals, we have available to us at least two different sets of understandings. We can talk about “desire” in the everyday-life sense, or we can treat wants and wishes as alien “cravings” in the alcoholism and addiction sense. In many situations and for many individuals, we take the everyday-life frame for granted and barely recognize the way “desire” shapes our understandings and interpretations. In other situations and with other individuals, a compelling desire—a “craving”—seems to break beyond the interpretations provided by the everyday-life frame and the notion of abnormality or pathology seems most appropriate.

## ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

This book is a collection of theoretically informed studies dealing with one theme, the social and cultural character of alcohol problems. The studies are experiments in empirically grounded theory-building and do not try to exclude other interpretations of the phenomena. The studies concentrate on specific cases in one country, Finland; but the theoretical material draws upon a broad range of sociological, anthropological, social psychological, philosophical, and historical literatures, and addresses broad questions about the character of life in modern society.

From the vantage point outlined in the previous sections, I have tried to provide answers to certain questions. In chapter two I analyze the role of the Finnish temperance movement and ideology in the rise of the distinction between normal and pathological drinking. The chapter shows that the stages through which heavy drinking began to be considered an illness coincided with changes in alcohol legislation. Along with a gradual shift, first from a collective control to state-control, and later to individual control of drinking, the responsibility for drinking habits has shifted from the collective or the state to the individual. At the same time, it became common to think that abnormal drinking must be due to a personal pathology.

In chapter three I report on two case studies of Finnish local taverns, analyze the way in which the desire to go to the tavern and to drink is rooted in Finnish working-class culture, and discuss the role of the alcoholism frame in these cases. Although the alcoholism frame is seldom explicitly used by the men studied, they are well aware that they may be deemed "drunks" or "alcoholics" by outsiders, and they themselves also have their moments of doubt about the "real" motive for their pub-going. In that sense, the alcoholism frame structures their behavior to some degree.

Chapter four further develops these themes. It analyzes the "cultural grammar" of Finnish male working-class drinking by using the life stories of alcoholic and nonalcoholic men. It shows that the men's drinking habits are guided by a distinct cultural notion of *freedom*. They believe that total personal freedom is achieved, paradoxically, only when every kind of self-control and self-discipline is delegated to other people or externalized to outer constraints. However, when they interpret their drinking as expressing the desire to be personally free, it contradicts their will to preserve good relations with their significant others.

To solve this contradiction, the men redefine their drinking within the alcoholism frame as proof of their uncontrolled craving for alcohol.

Chapter five is a study of a Finnish alcoholism treatment institution called the A-clinic. It examines the way that different explanatory models of alcoholism are used as a means of making sense of the lived experience of both clients and therapists, and how these explanations are rooted in the specific social conditions. A case analysis of a family treatment group, applying the ideas of family systems theory, shows how insistently a medical model of alcoholism suggests itself, even if not offered by the therapists.

Chapter six is a case study of a Finnish self-help group called the A-guild. It looks at the way these men try to unthink the alcoholism frame and resolve their drinking problems by relating them to the meaning of drinking in Finnish working-class culture.

Chapter seven discusses three ways in which the alcoholism frame is linked with the modern notion of person. First, alcoholism is seen as a personal problem, and this presupposes an individualist worldview. Second, in the alcoholism frame, alcoholism is seen as a disease of the will, and this presupposes the modern notion of a person as a desiring subject. Third, the alcoholism frame presents an individual's heavy drinking pattern as a long-standing personal problem. This is rooted in the way in which the modern individual is constructed as a personality with the help of "autobiographical reasoning."

Chapter eight outlines a cultural theory of alcoholism. It suggests that theories about drinking problems are efforts to deal with them, and that is why such theories restructure the problems themselves. Theories of alcohol related problems, therefore, have to be seen as part of the problems themselves.

The theoretical appendix discusses theories of the modern individual as a desiring subject. It develops an account of modernization and character modification, the role of the notions of "desire" and "self-control" in it, and discusses its methodological implications. By taking examples of the studies of this book, it also discusses the different functions and meanings of explicitly stated regulative rules may have.

The studies in this book deal with Finland. It seems that in Finland the alcoholism frame does not organize everyday life so much as, say, in the United States. Therefore it may appear easier for me to relate unacceptable drinking to the social and cultural meanings that structure everyday life, to the meaning structures in terms of which ordinary drinking situations are perceived. However, I think that the ease with

which the excessive drinking habits of the men studied here are shown to be intelligible in terms of the meaning of ordinary drinking is largely an illusion, created by painstaking cultural analysis. The cultural structures of everyday-life are constitutive of men and women's interaction and mutual understanding, but they are rarely if ever discussed and reflected on. In this regard, Pierre Bourdieu (1977) talks about *doxa*, the universe of undiscussed and undisputed knowledge, on the basis of which people's discourse, arguments, and attitudes arise. The everyday-life frame resides below a horizon of taken for grantedness; its rules are obvious only after they have been expressly articulated. Further, from without, these men's "alcoholic" drinking and other behavior seems quite as irrational as that of, say, American alcoholics. So, I would like to say to a reader who thinks that these cases are "ethnic" exceptions: *De te fabula narratur*; it's you that the tale tells about.

## METHODOLOGY

The construction of this work is due to the subject and to my conception of the role of theories, methods, and empirical material in cultural studies. To me, sociology is a genre of literature rather than a form of social engineering. This book does not seek to provide the state, or other groups, with useful, reliable background information for planning and policy-making. That does not imply that all references to concrete reality are in vain. Neither do I think that "methodic sincerity" (Malinowski 1961, 3) is unimportant. I have been careful in making observations.

Nonetheless, the point of cultural studies, in my view, is to find new ways of seeing, to create possibly confusing and hopefully fresh, but nevertheless grounded points of view for understanding and explaining social phenomena. By revealing the social and historical form and logic of limits and constraints that are often taken for granted and conceived as universal and natural, sociology can help the reader find new ways of thinking and acting. This kind of effort requires a lot of thinking, but it also takes devices and conceptual tools that help one to succeed.

I perceive a theoretical framework as a way of thematizing and understanding phenomena in a way that differs from that of lay thinking. A research method is a way of applying that framework to a particular subject and material. A developed and explicitly defined method

is a way of protecting oneself from being carried away by one's own prejudices, by the constraints of lay thinking. A method is like a telescope or a microscope that presents the material in a way that differs from the one we are used to. It may raise into the fore things that cannot be seen with the "bare eye," details that may give us a hint of a totally new theoretical framework. And the same can be said of the so-called empirical data, since any material organized by the rules of research methodology may represent the "empirical material" of a study. Empirical data, therefore, have a double role. They provide us with direct or mediated information about a phenomenon. In addition, empirical material, whether it be based on interviews or observation, a sample of cultural artifacts, or a collection of essays written by other social scientists, is food for thought. By arranging and interpreting the material the researcher can clear his or her thoughts and sharpen the conceptual and methodological tools.

In my search for new ways of thinking, I have been influenced by several trends in cultural studies. My debt to Michel Foucault is great and will become clear in later chapters. I also want to pay tribute to the Birmingham school, especially the ethnographic studies of Paul Willis. The Birmingham school must be especially appreciated for its ability to cross, or at least narrow, the gap between structure and agency, between subjects and their external limits and conditions. On the one hand, human subjects search in an active and creative way for a view of the social world that makes sense. On the other hand, the tools available for our cultural construction of social reality and identity are themselves part of that world. The way social life appears to us is pre-structured by cultural distinctions, classifications, and discourses. I have sought to hold on to both ends of the chain at once; to treat way of life—or, to use Pierre Bourdieu's concept, *habitus*—as a structured and structuring structure.

Even though this book can be classified as alcohol sociology, I would like to place my work in a broader context, and treat it as a work in the cultural studies of complex society. To paraphrase Michel Foucault (1986, 9), the case studies that follow are studies of alcoholism by reason of the domain they deal with, and the references they appeal to. But my interest in drinking is of a philosophical nature. The primary object has been to learn to what extent the efforts to think about drinking can "free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently."