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Final Research Project

Qualitative Research Methods- Romero

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- **Abstract:**

This report presents the findings from a qualitative study exploring the social context of alcohol consumption among women through watching the television show, *The Vampire Diaries*. Drinking is an essential part of the social aspect, and the drinking environment can strongly influence attitudes and behaviors of young people. The themes represented and recorded found that women and men are differently portrayed in this television show. Women are seen to be more emotional driven when drinking, while men use alcohol more to repress feeling or as a casual social tool.

- **Introduction:**

Over someone's life, people tend to have the greatest level of alcohol consumption throughout their late teens and early twenties. Alcohol consumption is a prevalent institution in society. Since young adults are introduced more to alcohol in the high school and college years of their life, I chose to research a television show that represented the same age for their target audience. My research question is how are the drinking habits of women portrayed in the show, *The Vampire Diaries*? Television is a large part of how we collect ideas and notions about the world and everything in it. The CW network, which *The Vampire Diaries* show is aired on, targets the "female friendly" 18-34 year old demographic. So how women and their habits are to be interpreted is significant. It is necessary that the topic of female drinking requires more in-depth sociological analysis, and effects and findings are discussed and explored.

- **Theory, prior research, and background:**

Although these related topics are still relatively unexplored, there is a pattern to how female drinking habits are portrayed on The CW television network. Factors that ultimately tie into the focus of female drinking is to answer the question of how women are seen. The media provides their audience, which in this case is predominately women between the ages 18-34, with instructions for how to act in real life. Even though they not aware they are registering this information, “the warnings and encouragements are framed within basic gendered assumptions” (Bogren & Mansson, 2014: 28) The information that Bogren and Mansson have collected comes to reference that gendered drinking has two sides. On one side that people are responsible for their own actions in maintaining their possible risks. On the other hand, people will integrate contradictory information from several parts of their society.

In the incidence of drinking, the standard thought is that men drink more than women. According to the National Institutes of Health, the patterns of male and female drinking are becoming more similar. Situational factors in relationships with drinking may vary from place to place, but alcohol messages regularly appear in most current media. “These normative beliefs, which include perceptions of approval, benefits, and social norms are shaped by media exposure” (Borzekowsk 2015: 319). And the publicity to alcohol advertising and other media where alcohol is presented is associated with following alcohol use and exposure.

There is a pattern of binge drinking being in the same age group as the target audience of people who watch The CW network. Young adults are more are more inclined to be suseptible to binge drinking because of their impressionable age. The more a person is presented with interpretations telling and informing them to drink, the more likely that they will follow in that lead. Young adults are emerged in a drinking culture where that is how you are social and create

connections and commonalities. When the target audience has implicit and explicit knowledge about drinking and what is presented, their own thoughts will come into play as well as factors they think are common knowledge. During 2002 to 2013, the National Epi-demiological Survey of Alcohol and Related Conditions found that the frequency of binge drinking has increased, and the binge drinking frequency was higher for women compared to men (White & Castle, 2015).

Despite the perceptions, within the focus on drinking habits of women, “little attention has been given to how drinking is encouraged and communicated as a benefit” (Bogren & Mansson, 2014: 33). Drinking between men is seen as a symbol to represent social, or business like situations. For women, drinking stays in relation to their health risks, such as pregnancy. In an experiment performed at the Behavioral Science Institute (Koordeman 2011). The variables deduced a pattern of men consuming more compared to women throughout watching the movie. The focus of women drinking is more associated to health risks, associated with pregnancy. However, in this particular study, men are actually more affected while watching alcohol consumption and in turn their drinking increases. The subordination of women is a fluid contextual behavior because it is seen as a census. “Hegemonic Masculinity” inherently is seen to benefit men rather than women. “The different perceptions afforded to the consumption of alcohol by men versus women, where men’s use is less stigmatized than that of women” (Dumbili 2015: 7).

More females are seen to be current drinkers. The focus of drinking is suggested to impact the attitudes that men drink more in comparison. Future research would be important to explore reasons pertaining to the drinking gap between men and women. The social factors that come in to play are important for recognizing that there are implicit messages that are transcribed to our society. Each person has their own mental awareness for their actions and the

consequences. However, those implicit messages create norms and beliefs that people will create for them and their life.

- **Methods and procedures:**

This study was set up to explore the social context of the alcohol consumption of women on the television show, *The Vampire Diaries*. The research focused on the target audience age of the television show, being young people between 18-34 years old. The qualitative methodology approach is acceptable to explore the social context involving drinking habits of women associated with the portrayal on *The Vampire Diaries*. One aspect of this study was to explore how are women drinking habits portrayed in the show, however, the qualitative aspect of this research means that it can't be held as a model to prove why these patterns exist.

The research consisted of six 45-minute episodes of *The Vampire Diaries* television show, with production airing dates from 2009 to 2015. I used convenience sampling and chose the first episode of each of the six seasons provided on Netflix. The television show portrayed characters that fell into the same age as the target audience, which is ages 18-34 years old. Season One had the main characters in highschool, and as the show progressed into later seasons, the characters moved onto college. For recording notes, I chose to only focus on 12 (6 female, and 6 male) characters that were main and re-occurring in the show. Both male and female character behavior was noted, in order to provide the comparison to gender differences and how they are each seen.

The audiovisual analysis is an unobtrusive method for observing and gathering notes. There were three main themes of this research: 1. Women are seen to drink in excess; 2. Women are seen to drink more in group settings; and 3. Women are seen to be more emotional drinkers. In keeping with the theory, there is an importance of social groups and the impact of the environment

where women are seen to be drinking. Content analysis is an appropriate method for the research to view the television show as representations of events that are created to be interpreted and provide insight. The content analysis of *The Vampire Diaries* and its representation of young adults gives significant value in generating assumptions to the factor of alcohol and women.

To code through the 6 episodes of *The Vampire Diaries* looking for patterns and themes, I organized through situational occurrences, the role of peers, and the emotions of when alcohol consumption taking place.

1. The situational occurrence of drinking was to highlight where the characters were actually drinking, if they were actually shown to be drinking on the show, and patterns of quantity of alcohol use. The environmental factor was to explore if the drinking was in public, private, or in secret.
2. The focus on the role of peers was to organize the different situations where drinking was present and find the patterns of how the characters would drink in group settings. I recorded the social influence of peers, the experience of alcohol use by peers, and the use of alcohol by peers.
3. The emotions the characters had was important to note. Male and female reactions were recorded to highlight the gender differences. I created sub-groups of emotions for angry, sad, and happy. Jealousy would fall under either angry or sad at different moments. I want to see how the characters are drinking and for what particular reason if any.

Focus of these patterns throughout the episodes was used to triangulate findings and consider how the data follows into the themes. The themes of how women are seen were considered in

regard to how they may report the interpretation. The inductive approach will help provide meaning attached to the behaviors of the characters. I will observe the relationships between the various components of the changing social experience.

- **Findings and results**

The party scene is a prevalent occurrence throughout the show. The appeal of the show is that the characters, even though the show first starts with all of them in high school, are seen to be independent and mature. *The Vampire Diaries* pilot episode portrays high school students, most of them under 18 years old, drinking alcohol at parties, and hanging out at the local bar. The society in which the show takes place is where intoxication is preferred and is used to enhance situations. Alcohol is consumed in all settings and is seen as a cure for all hard hitting emotions.

My research question for this study is to explore and understand how are the drinking habits of women portrayed in *The Vampire Diaries*? Through researching the episodes' patterns and important influences, there are dominant themes that are reoccurring are prevalent in the show.

The 12 selected characters I chose, ranging in the range of ages 18-34, provided both insight for interpretation of women and the gender differences versus men. From the very beginning of the show, the main female character was put in a stereotypical, victimized, and helpless damsel-in-distress role. The female characters are mostly seen to be weak and helpless. While the male characters are projected to in turn be strong, indestructible, and powerful.

While focusing on patterns, drinking occurs within every age group and is present in almost all settings. Making it easier to study the common themes and groups that are linked to the shows interpretation of reality. The analytical coding interpreted the research drawn from the show.

Theme1: Women are seen to drink in excess...

Drinking is seen to be the problem solver for easing into awkward sober situations. In Season 1 Episode 1, while other females are drinking, the main female drinker is Caroline. When a party in the woods happens, the first line out is "Can I get you a drink?" by Caroline. The mission for Caroline (female #3) is to get the other character to catch up with her own drinking level. It is insisted that everyone drinks, if only to be accepted, and constantly keep a cup in their hand throughout the duration of their first party of the episode. When Caroline starts flirting with a male character, he blames it on her being drunk. She is seen as just a drunk girl who couldn't control herself. In every episode the characters are shown to be actually drinking from their cups. While I counted the times each female or male actually took a drink, males had a higher number of times that they actually took a drink. However, the cases in which females were drinking, was "chugging" either straight from the bottle, or downing a drink. Compared to the males, who drink casually during the day. The rates of binge drinking nearly compared to their male peers. The emotional theme is also connected the females drinking in excess. The women tend to rely heavily on alcohol to deal with their feelings, blaming it on "I'm just drunk and dumb tonight" (Caroline).

Theme2: Women are seen to drink more in group settings...

The party scene in *The Vampire Diaries* is significant, whether it be for the whole town to join or party for the teenagers. The fact that everyone in a party is involved in drinking provides for it to be more acceptable that people will drink. The male characters casually drink throughout the day, or make themselves a drink when they first come home. It is understood through these interpretations that drinking is a casual social tool for men. While women seem to

hold on to feeling more comfortable in fitting in. Peer groups will influence the drinking behavior of women's nontraditional roles. Alcohol is used as a social tool to increase the social bonding in groups and social settings. Women are most commonly drinking to deal with emotions. For them, drinking alcohol at parties sets an environment that they are surrounded by friends and feel safe enough to relieve their negative emotions. The men, although the majority of the characters are underage in the earlier seasons, use alcohol casually. Women are seen to drink together and use alcohol as a social act. The theme seen of the women is that they shouldn't drink alone, to drink alone is anti-social. Drinking alone is thought to be a prediction of alcoholism, which would be seen as shameful. The single evidence I recorded throughout the 6 episodes of a woman drinking alone was of an older woman, the parent of one of the main characters.

Theme3: Women are seen to be more emotional drinkers compared with men...

The gender differences of alcohol consumption in this show seemed to be the most common theme. Although the women in this show are seen to drink, at times just as much as the men, it isn't so much a casual activity. The men are portrayed as mature and independent and accepted when pouring a drink when they get home. Women are seen to drink to deal with feelings. They deal with emotions such as jealousy, betrayal, and loss and treat it with alcohol. Men use alcohol as a social tool and for male bonding. Women are emotional drinkers. When Carolone flirts with a male character he blames it on her being drunk. Men are projected to be stronger. Men and women both use alcohol, but women use it to deal with feelings or in spite of them, and men use alcohol to repress actual vulnerable emotions. Tyler, one of the main characters, attends his father's memorial service. He drinks out of the flask but is presented to be strong and

masculine. He shares the flask with another male character and the scene is the form of male bonding. When men are faced with difficult emotions, they are serious and important situations of strength. While women dealing with emotions are seen to be more trivial, such as jealous of another girl or upset about a boy. Men frequently exceeded women in typical drinking habits and roles which deemed it acceptable that men “be drunk before noon” (Tyler, male #6).

- **Discussion and Conclusions**

My study was to explore the patterns and data to see how drinking habits of women were portrayed in *The Vampire Diaries*. I found that the common themes throughout my data was that women were seen to drink in excess, drink more in group settings, and were more emotional drinkers than men. The validity of this research is sound. The interpretations were my own from actions that had been clearly presented without being molded to fit my theories. The basic coding I used was for determining:

- In what environments that drinking took place
- If it was actually consumed, not just used as a prop
- What emotions were presented when drinking; which were clearly categorized out of happy, sad, and angry
- In what type of social setting take place during alcohol consumption

In suit, the reliability of this research is also valid. The way in which I categorized these patterns and occurrences was straightforward and could be recorded the same. The patterns I collected allowed me to interpret and explore the relationship between woman and alcohol. I

found that women are presented differently on the show than men. Women are also seen to drink more when they are dealing with emotions. Unlike men, women are portrayed to feel more comfortable drinking with peers and/or with group situations. In the show, drinking is used as a social tool and to enhance the feeling of maturity of the characters.

This qualitative research study produced results of the audiovisual analysis. The analytical induction allowed me to formulate ideas about the data and patterns I found while watching the experiences of social interaction. These interactions of drinking alcohol and how they do it has an effect on the characters experiences and the way they interact and communicate with themselves and others.

- **References**

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