

Mount Saint Vincent University

Booze and CHAT: The Value of using Cultural Historical Activity Theory to Contextualize  
Alcohol Drinking throughout the Lifespan.

By

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## **Abstract**

The activity of alcohol drinking is omnipresent in society. The tools of alcohol use surround us on a daily basis, impacting our lives and our culture. Few have not been touched by the power of alcohol. Yet, the way in which alcohol drinking develops as a learned behavior through the lifespan is still not properly understood and the current means of contextualizing alcohol drinking through the lifespan are lacking. This thesis argues that cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) is superior to individually biased philosophies (IBP) and socially biased philosophies (SBP) in examining the multitude of vectors that converge to create alcohol drinking activity throughout the lifespan. Through the analysis of three distinct alcohol drinking activity case studies, it is demonstrated that IBP and SBP lack the depth and breadth to bring a detailed understanding of what is happening. Then through the analysis of the same three distinct alcohol drinking activity case studies it is demonstrated that CHAT is the greater means of analysis.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Alcohol is omnipresent in Nova Scotian communities. Messages to use alcohol, to use it responsibly and not to use it at all abound. Alcohol is the psychoactive drug most commonly used by Nova Scotians. Giesbrecht (2009) asserts that as North Americans we live, work, play, and study in alcogenic environments. The 2007 Nova Scotia Culture of Alcohol Report states that 85% of Nova Scotians drink alcohol. The Nova Scotian Student Drug Use Survey (2007) observes that 5% of grade seven students report being drunk in the last 30 days and that by grade twelve 46% of students report having been drunk in the last 30 days. The study also tells us that nine of ten students have consumed alcohol by the time they graduate. Adult consumption of pure alcohol has risen significantly in the last ten years, while the age of our first ever drink has dropped to an all time low (CCSA2007). It is clear that something is going on.

Those working in the disciplines of health, epidemiology, education, and psychology have attempted to bring context and understanding to the nature and role of alcohol in our society. Some have attempted to describe how and why the activity of alcohol drinking is acquired and propagated, in efforts to mitigate the harms associated with alcohol use. This thesis investigates problems with how we have explained and currently explain the nature of alcohol in our societies. It argues that the approach to understanding cultural/social phenomena known as “cultural historical activity theory” is superior to other explanatory paradigms in that it offers a more complete examination of how alcohol use is acquired, how it functions through the lifespan, and what its current and future role might be in society. This thesis argues that current individually biased philosophies, as well as socially biased approaches, inadequately explain

alcohol drinking and that cultural historical activity theory is the most effective means of describing what is going on.

### **Inadequate Accounts of Drinking Through the Lifespan.**

During my last fifteen years of work in the addiction treatment and health promotion fields, there have been two dominant explanations for why alcohol drinking occurs through the lifespan and why it results in harm: individually biased philosophies and socially biased approaches. This thesis argues that these two dominant means of describing and contextualizing alcohol use, and particularly harmful alcohol use, through the lifespan are inadequate.

Individually biased philosophies hold that harmful alcohol drinking is an emotional, physical, and spiritual problem that can be arrested but never cured (Babur and Caulkins al. 2010). These philosophies view harmful alcohol use as a disease whose only cure is abstinence and that any use of alcohol will result in a return to harm. They also view harmful alcohol use as solely an individual's responsibility and indicate that alcohol can never be consumed safely by those afflicted with the disease.

Individually biased philosophies are inadequate because they do not take into account the role that broader society plays in the acquisition of alcohol drinking and the problems that result. The focus remains entirely on the individual, whose responsibility is to utterly abstain from alcohol or be deemed sick or ill. Individually biased philosophies are also inadequate because they ignore the tools and instruments of alcohol use and the power they wield. In the relative safety of the twelve step meeting room, the individual is free from community pressure to consume alcohol and the instruments (advertising, bottles, and mugs) of alcohol use are wholly absent. However, at the end of the hour, the person is required to rejoin an environment where

the tools of alcohol are abundant and the community's activity around alcohol is ever present. Individually biased philosophies fail to take into account the complex nature of the role alcohol plays in society, making them inadequate descriptors of alcohol drinking as an activity.

Socially biased approaches view alcohol use as a learned behavior that can therefore be unlearned through the acquisition of alternative behavioral and cognitive skills (Babur and Caulkins et al. 2010). These approaches promote changes in the immediate social environments as a means of controlling alcohol drinking. Socially biased approaches often examine statistical and public opinion data in an effort to understand the public's attitudes regarding alcohol drinking with the notion that laws and policies can change these beliefs, thereby changing the context in which drinking takes place. Babur et al (2010) report that alcohol policies are primarily the concern of local, regional, and national governments, which often view the provision of treatment as part of a comprehensive approach to alcohol-related problems. Alcohol policies have long been a part of socially biased consideration of how and why alcohol use is acquired and maintained through the lifespan, even if the alcohol use is resulting in harm.

Although they often promote treatment for individuals, socially biased approaches for the most part remain focused on the role the community, and in particular the government, plays in nurturing and promoting alcohol use as an activity. The Province of Nova Scotia Culture of Alcohol Report (2007) holds that to reduce the burden that alcohol has on our societies, we require a change in the public policies that govern alcohol procurement. Approaches like the Culture of Alcohol Report (2007) view harmful drinking as primarily a community's responsibility and that alcohol can be consumed safely if the drinking context is changed. The individual's responsibility is mitigated by the community's broader responsibility for alcohol consumption.

Socially biased approaches provide an inadequate view of the activity of alcohol drinking because they do not take into account the individual's motivations for consuming and they too fail to recognize the power that is wielded by the tools of alcohol use. They do not consider what outcome individuals are seeking when they enter into a drinking experience. They rely on a mix of quasi-statistical data, public opinion polls, and simplistic psychology to explain why a person uses alcohol at different points in the lifespan. The Nova Scotia Child and Youth Drinking Report (2009) would seem to have us believe that adolescents in rural Nova Scotia consume alcohol to overcome boredom and that if the community provided more recreational opportunities there would be less adolescent alcohol consumption. If overcoming boredom was Hants County teenagers' sole objective, why, one might ask, do they choose consuming alcohol over the countless other means of overcoming boredom that are available to them? Socially biased approaches often argue that if alcohol was more expensive, fewer people would engage in the activity. Yet, if a person's motivation for using alcohol was social status, would not expensive alcohol be desirable? Socially biased approaches fail to take into account the complex nature of an individual's motivation and objectives in using alcohol, making these approaches an inadequate means of understanding alcohol drinking as an activity.

### **Background: Alcohol as Activity**

We are not born alcohol users. Alcohol is not required to sustain life through our lifespan. Yet, an adult who has never consumed alcohol is exceedingly rare in North American culture. Given alcohol's potential to cause intoxication, the harm it can cause humans both physically and mentally, its capacity to cause death by overdose, and its potential to contribute to social decay, one has to wonder how it is that alcohol use is acquired and maintained through a lifespan by the vast majority of the population without an overtly apparent breakdown of society. Babor

(2010) states that alcohol is a source of pleasure for many consumers, but is also associated with a host of problems that afflict individuals and society at large.

In our communities the benefits of alcohol use and the social attributes of drinking are the dominant discourse. One only needs to stroll through downtown Halifax on a balmy summer evening to hear a hearty shout of “social-able” cueing the flock to have another drink. Interestingly, one needs only scratch the surface of available statistical data for the true nature of alcohol’s harms to come to light. Thus, while the breakdown of society may not be overt, in the cold light of the facts of the harms of alcohol consumption, one could make a strong case that social breakdown resulting from alcohol use is indeed happening. Given the wide acceptance of alcohol, however, this tremendous problems associated with this substance are unseen by the majority of “sociable” citizens. This thesis will use cultural historical activity theory to explain why, with the exception of alcoholism, the harms of alcohol use remain under the surface of public discourse and hidden from the light.

Mirta R. Periago (2010), the Director of the Pan American Health Organization, has written that:

The harmful use of alcohol is among the leading risk factors for the burden of disease in the Region of the Americas, contributing to violence, injuries, suicides, chronic non communicable disease, and mental health disorders besides alcohol dependence. It disproportionately affects individuals, families, and societies in low to middle income countries of the Region and contributes to worsening inequities in health. Alcohol consumption is increasingly particularly among young people and it also starting at earlier ages, despite the scientific evidence of risk of early alcohol use and later development of alcohol dependency. (Alcohol No Ordinary Commodity, 2010)

Yet, despite this it is abnormal not to consume alcohol. Our society almost demands that you drink to be included as a full and complete member. It is normal and acceptable to refuse the offer of a cigarette. Tobacco refusal comes with kudos in our current culture. It is also becoming normal and acceptable to refuse the offer of less than nutritious foods. Chocolate cake refusal comes with positive regard for your decision, "Oh, good for you!" However, alcohol refusal comes with suspicion, disregard, and judgments. Refusing the offer of a drink does not come with approval; instead, it comes with new more persuasive offers to drink and a questioning of your decision-making.

The type, nature, and quantity of what you drink also come with inherent expectations and cultural norms that require mentorship and teaching. As a white, middle class male with a burly body type, I am not permitted to choose a colourful, high sugar, fruit based drink. It is not normal or acceptable for me to order a "Squashed Strawberry Alley Cat" or a "Tahitian Tee-Hee." I am expected to choose a dark drink of hard liquor or a strong beer in order to gain acceptance from peers and family. It is acceptable for me to drink wine, but only in certain drinking contexts. If I choose wine while watching sports with my peers, that is not normal; however, I can choose wine if out with my wife for dinner. If I refuse a drink in certain environments, judgments will range from "He is not much fun" to "He must have a problem with alcohol." If my wife refuses a drink, judgments range from "She must be driving" to "She must be pregnant." The tools/instruments associated with alcohol drinking appear to be innately masculine or feminine. Whether it is a crystal wine glass, rugged glass bottle, or plastic mug, each comes with a context that is partially determined by drinker intention and the drinking environments.

The Province of Nova Scotia's 2008 Child and Youth Drinking Report details the results of a series of focus groups conducted around the province with individuals under the age of nineteen. Adolescent females describe drinking as a highly social event, with the brand and quantity of consumption not as important as the portability of the alcohol container and the percentage of alcohol content. They reported wanting a high alcohol content that was sweet to drink and easily hidden in a purse or bag. Becoming intoxicated was the goal of the drinking episode. Males described drinking as a more solitary activity where the brand and quantity of alcohol consumed was paramount. They reported wanting alcohol brands that were what they considered inherently male and that the quantity of alcohol consumed was a badge of honour. Becoming intoxicated was a result of the drinking context rather than the goal.

I know of an adolescent gay male attending a local high school. He is out and is comfortable advocating for gay rights; he organizes student pride events and shares his story with peers, teachers, and the community. He reports not feeling pressured to hide his sexuality and that his peer group shows an overwhelming acceptance of his sexuality. However, he reports that his peer group does not accept his abstinence from alcohol. They continually question his reasoning for not drinking and often exclude him from events due to his choice not to drink. He feels pressured to consume alcohol to fit in and be socially normative. It is fascinating that his peer group is open-minded enough to accept his sexuality, yet is unable to accept his refusal to consume alcohol. What explains this inability? This thesis argues that cultural historical activity theory offers the most complete analysis of this inherent contradiction.

Giesbrecht et al (2010) describe the phenomenon of second hand drinking. They argue that the statistical data and narrative stories that regard those harmed by the effects of others' drinking should be quantified under the terminology "the second hand effects of drinking". They

highlight that the consumption of alcohol can impact people who themselves are not consuming alcohol, demonstrating that, even for those who do not drink, our world and communities are shaped by the activity of alcohol consumption. Yet, the dominant alcohol discourse would view any problematic alcohol use as solely individual and suggest that problems arising from the use of alcohol are the responsibility of the individual consumer of the alcohol, the argument being that if the community has offered a treatment option for the problematic drinker, then it has done its due diligence and can continue the plethora of positive alcohol messaging and continue to offer easy access to affordable alcohol. This thesis makes the case that cultural historical activity theory offers the most reasoned and complete analysis of this community misperception.

The activity of alcohol drinking dominates our culture. Despite not being born innately alcohol users, we acquire the behavior early in life and make attempts to moderate the behavior to suit our environments, our intended outcomes, and our internal compasses throughout our lifespan. Even those who do not currently consume alcohol are encompassed by the activity, and even the rare few who have never consumed alcohol are not immune to the systems involved in the activity of drinking alcohol. Those alcohol drinking systems impact all of our lives. Drinking alcohol is an immensely popular activity that has some reported benefits. However, given the likelihood of harm when the activity of alcohol drinking increases, it is important that we have a comprehensive understanding of how the activity is acquired, maintained, and propagated through the lifespan. Cultural historical activity theory offers the most robust means of examining the activity of alcohol drinking and is superior to a statistical analysis, actor network theory, and current developmental psychology paradigms. A more complete examination of the alcohol drinking offered by cultural historical activity theory may lead to the development of

more effective harm prevention strategies and greater treatment philosophies, and may assist society with developing initiatives that delay early alcohol drinking.

### Advantage: CHAT

Cultural historical activity theory is grounded in the work of Y. Engestrom and his Developmental Work Research program at the University of Helsinki; however, its development can be traced back to Russian psychologist L.S. Vygotsky, who was inspired by German philosophers Hess and Marx. Myers (2007) states that cultural historical activity theory addresses human activities as they relate to artefacts, shared practices, and institutions; thus it goes beyond individual knowledge and decision-making to take a demonstrated view of minds in context. He goes on to explain that the activity system, composed of the actor (subject) and his mediating tools and environment (rules, community, division of labor), is defined by the object, or objective, of the activity. Engestrom et al (2002) describe CHAT as a means of detailing how group activity is conceived and is subsequently conditioned by the social material and intellectual resources to which the individuals within the system have access.

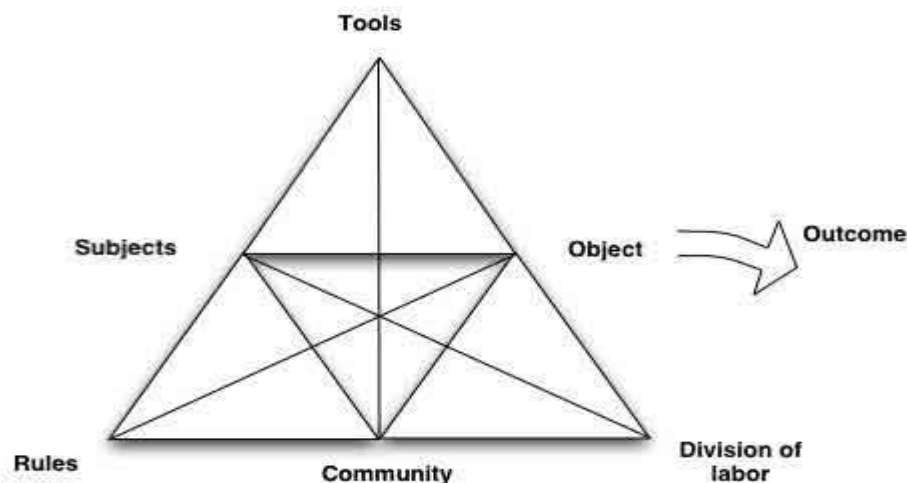
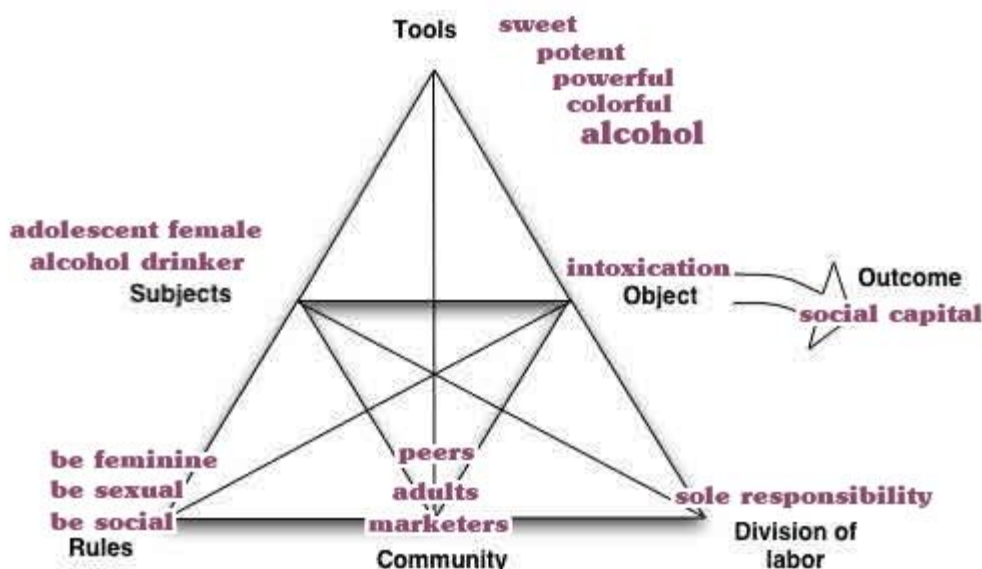


Figure #1. Conceptual model of an activity system. Engestrom, Y. (1987)

This thesis argues that Engestrom's framework of understanding learning and activity is superior to others in that it takes into account not only how culture shapes activity but more importantly how tools and activities shape culture. Educational researchers M. Roth and Y.J Lee (2007) purport that CHAT is the best kept secret of academia and that the theory is immensely interesting to them because it has shown to be fruitful for both analyzing data recorded in real classrooms and designing change when trouble and contradictions become evident in these cultural settings. They argue that CHAT can offer more complete descriptions of learning processes than epistemological or ontological aspects of human development, as does Bluden (2010) who reports that CHAT is superior to hypothetico-deductive methods and abstract empiricism in understanding the complex whole of an activity.

Building from the work of the philosopher Goethe's idea of "Urphanomen", Bluden (2010) also introduces the notion that a CHAT system can be perceived as a cell. I find this uniquely interesting and suggest that when we are conceiving a complex learning/activity system, we can divide it into many cells of activity, and that each of these cells adds to what Bluden calls the complex whole. Without question, the activity of alcohol consumption is a complex whole. This being the case, what are the cells that make up the complex whole of alcohol drinking? This thesis visually illustrates the CHAT cells that make up the activity of alcohol drinking, much like Russell and Yanez (2010) did in their CHAT study of writing in human activities. This demonstration of cells will provide evidence that CHAT is a better means

if understanding the complex nature of alcohol drinking through the lifespan.



**Figure #2. CHAT Adolescent Female Alcohol Activity Cell**

A recent article in *The Globe and Mail* (September 18, 2010), entitled “Seeking balance between rules and revelry”, reports on the death of a freshman student at Queen’s University. After a night of drinking it is reported that the young man in a state of intoxication fell from his dorm window and was killed. The article reports feedback from university administrators, students, parents, and community members. The crux of the argument was between two divergent points of view, from putting greater controls on alcohol consumption on campus (approaching prohibition) to the concern that greater control would mean fewer freshmen attending Queen’s, the argument that being social is an important part of the university experience. A CHAT analysis of the current situation at Queen’s University would give valuable insight into the nature and practice of alcohol drinking activity on campus because what is left out of the current economical debate are the tools of alcohol use, the objectives of alcohol use,

and the rules in which alcohol drinking is taking place, as well as the division of labor, which in my thesis I define as power structures.

It is important to consider Thorne's (1998) key components of a CHAT system:

CHAT theory is not a static or purely descriptive approach; rather the use of the theory implies transformation and innovation.

All CHAT systems are heterogeneous and multi voiced and may include conflict and resistance as readily as cooperation and collaboration

Activity is central. There is no student or teacher or technology-centered pedagogy from a CHAT perspective. Rather agents play various roles and share an orientation to the activity.

CHAT systems do not work alone. Multiple activity systems are always at work and will have varying influences on the local or focus CHAT system at hand. (Thorne, 1998)

These are the components that would offer a complete examination of what is going on at Queen's University. One can imagine the multitude of CHAT cells regarding alcohol drinking during freshmen year coming together to help describe intensely complex phenomena, complexities that are not adequately explained by empirical data, actor network theory, or human developmental theory.

The *Globe* article also lead me to thoughts of my first week at the University of New Brunswick in the Fall of 1986 when after a night of alcohol use a student in a neighbouring residence fell from his dorm window and was killed. As we struggled to understand what had happened in the weeks to come, the dominant discourse eventual settled on two distinct explanations: the dead student's lack of responsibility, or an act of fate, an accident. However, as

Hakkarainen (2004) and Lee (2003) argue, individuals develop a common understanding of practice through participation in shared activities, which is a common theme throughout CHAT philosophy. We have learned that drinking alcohol is a shared participatory activity, so it should be clear that the systems which developed the dead man's common understanding of how alcohol is consumed warrant greater scrutiny. This thesis argues that CHAT provides the contextual frame work by which this scrutiny can become meaningful.

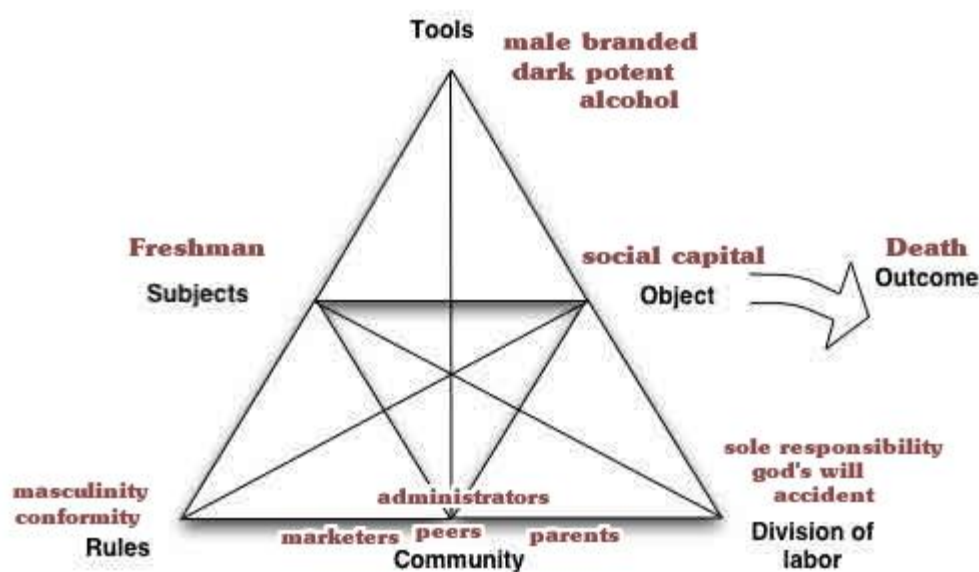


Figure #3. CHAT Freshman Alcohol Activity Cell – UNB September 1986, Queen's University  
September 2010

Engestrom (1999) observed:

First, activity theory is deeply contextual and oriented at understanding historically specific local practices, their objects, mediating artefacts, and social organizations. (Cole & Engestrom, 1993). Second, activity theory is based on dialectical theory of knowledge and thinking, focused on the creative potential in human cognition. (Davydov, 1988; and

Ilyenkov, 1977). Third, activity theory is a developmental theory that seeks to explain and influence qualitative changes in human practice over time. (Engestrom, 1999)

Foot (2001) contends that in these ways CHAT provides a framework for a system level analysis and a historically situated and artefacts mediated set of relations by which an organization is discursively enacted. Building upon that, I contend in this thesis that CHAT provides a framework for a system level analysis and a historically situated and artefact mediated set of relations by which alcohol drinking systems are acquired in adolescence and maintained through the lifespan.

### **My Argument**

The argument of my thesis is that cultural historical activity theory is superior to the current dominant means of conceptualizing and explaining the activity of alcohol drinking. I will argue that CHAT provides a more adequate examination of how the activity of alcohol use is acquired and maintained throughout the lifespan than individually biased philosophies and socially biased approaches. The argument will develop along the following points:

1. Alcohol consumption is a dominant activity in our culture.
2. Currently harms from alcohol consumption outweigh benefits.
3. To address both harms and benefits we need to understand alcohol drinking as an activity.
4. There is a lack of understanding about how alcohol consumption is acquired and maintained through the lifespan.

5. Individually biased and socially biased theories do not provide adequate explanations of the activity of alcohol use.
6. CHAT provides a superior contextualization of alcohol drinking as an activity.
7. The superior contextualization offered by CHAT may be useful in enhancing the benefits of alcohol use and lessening the harms.

## **Thesis Summary**

### **Chapter 1. Introduction**

The thesis begins with how I came to my understanding of CHAT while outlining the origins of my interest in alcohol drinking as an activity system. The introduction uses narrative stories (*The Globe and Mail* article) and anecdotal reports to present the current problems and inadequacies in how we currently account for alcohol drinking throughout the lifespan. The introduction presents my arguments that CHAT is superior to the current dominant means of conceptualizing and explaining the activity of alcohol drinking.

### **Chapter 2. What is CHAT?**

This chapter describes how CHAT evolved as a theory. It offers a description of CHAT and then traces its lineage from Russian psychologist Vygotsky to his contemporary Leont'ev and then finally to Finnish researcher Y. Engestrom. This chapter discusses the contributions of Vygotsky, Leont'ev, and Engestrom to modern day CHAT and how each built upon the work of the other. This chapter also describes how CHAT is being used to contextualizes a diverse array of activity systems such as Brown and Cole's (2010) work in using CHAT to design and sustain

an after school educational activity system and Myers (2007) work in using CHAT to model school library programs and practices.

### **Chapter 3. Alcohol Drinking Across the Lifespan**

This chapter offers the “raw data” case studies that will be used throughout the remainder of the thesis for analysis and explanation. I describe three distinct alcohol drinking circumstances: an adolescent female’s first drink, a male University Freshman’s use of alcohol as a mean of gaining social capital, and the creation of a bar at a seniors’ complex. Each of these circumstances is inspired by true events and has come to me through my personal and professional life.

### **Chapter 4. Inadequate Accounts of Drinking Through the Lifespan**

This chapter examines current attempts to explain alcohol drinking in North American society. This chapter identifies and defines the two dominant means of contextualizing alcohol drinking throughout the lifespan - individually biased philosophies (IBP) and socially biased philosophies (SBP). This chapter critiques the efforts of IBP and SBP to examine and explain the acquisition of alcohol drinking, the meaning of alcohol drinking, and the role of alcohol drinking in society. This chapter offers examples of analysis from my own life as well as an examination of the cases in Chapter 3. It also describes why IBP and CBS are inadequate in their accounts of drinking though the lifespan and makes the case that another means is sorely required at this time.

## Chapter 5. Applying CHAT to Alcohol Drinking Across the Lifespan

This chapter details both through narrative and figuratively how CHAT can be applied to the activity of alcohol drinking, with particular focus on the case studies from Chapter 3. It will demonstrate by means of analysis the value of viewing alcohol drinking through a CHAT lens. The chapter includes a number of visually represented CHAT cells with accompanying explanation. Karkkainen (2009) contends (and I agree) that in CHAT the concept of contradiction is of crucial importance. The CHAT alcohol drinking cells illustrated and analyzed in this chapter will draw out those contradictions and offer a more adequate explanation of those contradictions than individually biased philosophies or socially biased philosophies. An example of one such obvious contradiction is considering both alcohol marketers and health officials as subject; while some instruments and a degree of community will be alike, objectives and outcomes will differ.

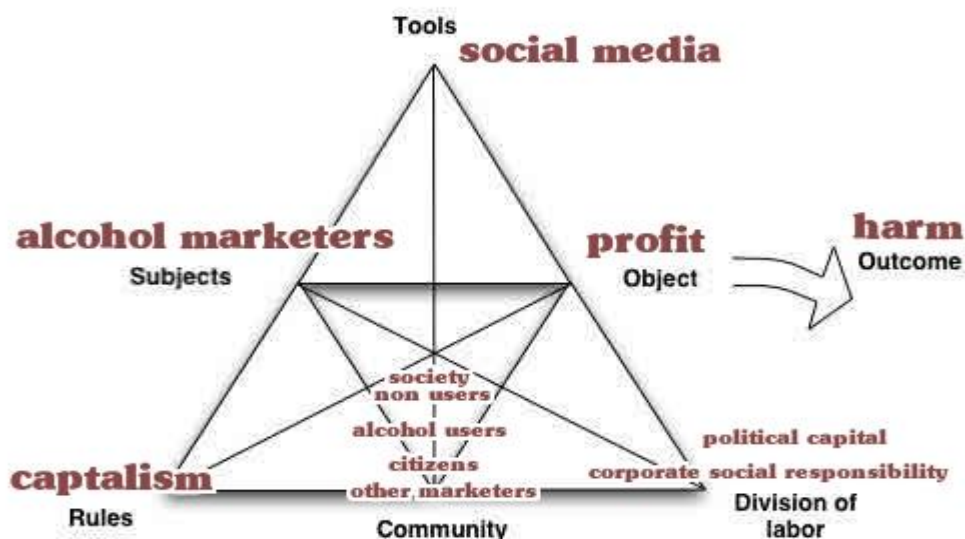


Figure #4. Marketer Alcohol Activity Cell

## Chapter 6. Conclusions and Implications

This chapter restates the problems with the current dominant discourse in contextualizing alcohol drinking throughout the lifespan. It details how CHAT solves the problems created when other theories are applied. It makes the definitive argument that CHAT is a superior means of describing alcohol drinking through the lifespan by addressing the inherent problems with the other theories and demonstrates how much more context is achieved with a CHAT view. It describes how CHAT's superiority lies in its ability to contextualize the inherent power of alcohol drinking tools and to explain the nature of the community in drinking activity, as well as describing the role a person's objectives play when entering a drinking episode.

Reflecting again on the cases from Chapter 3, it gives insight into how a CHAT analysis of alcohol drinking throughout the lifespan can enhance the benefits of alcohol drinking for society while lessening the harms. It restates the core of the argument that CHAT is superior to the current dominate means of conceptualizing and explaining the activity of alcohol drinking.

## Chapter 2: What is Cultural Historical Activity Theory?

Cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) has evolved through three generations of work (Engestrom, 2001). This chapter traces CHAT's evolution with particular focus on the contribution of the three major contributors to CHAT: Lev Vygotsky, Aleksei Leont'ev, and Yrjo Engestrom. Each had a profound influence on moving CHAT forward as an approach. Each man was revolutionary in how he brought CHAT to his generation. This chapter begins with a basic description of CHAT, then describes Lev Vygotsky's contribution to the genesis of CHAT, and following that, discusses Leont'ev's efforts to expand CHAT theory. Finally, it explores Yrjo Engestrom's work in developing and diversifying CHAT theory and offers examples of how CHAT is being applied to a variety of activities.

### CHAT in Brief

CHAT refers to an interdisciplinary approach to studying learning and development (McGaw 2000). The CHAT paradigm argues that learning is a process of constant interaction with the environment and others (Koszalka & Wu 1996). This interaction is the activity in cultural historical activity theory. The main focus of an activity is to produce an outcome (object), physical or mental (Koszalka & Wu 1996). For the outcome to be reached, the subject uses tools. It is these tools that are at the heart of CHAT. CHAT provides the notion that it is not only how the subject uses these tools to reach an outcome but how these tools mediate the actions of the subject, often changing/evolving the outcome. As Karkkainen (1999) explains, this means that the object of an activity is constantly evolving, and that it is possible to trace the history of a particular activity and the evolution of its object. Capper & Williams (2004) suggest

that, while we use tools to manipulate the environment, the nature of the tools we use also shapes our own thinking about what we do and how we do it. Kuutti (1996) defined activity as a form of doing directed towards an object.

Perhaps, this notion harkens one to Tomessello's (1999) concept of "ratcheting" in that, as a tool is passed down through the generations, its use and effectiveness is honed through an interaction between the powers and potentials of the tool users and the material affordances of the tool itself. Take, for example, the computer. Early computers were large mechanical beasts locked away in warehouses or basements. Their sole function was data analysis and rote functioning. Now, computers are hand held, easily transported, and common. They have become a friend to the user, and we have witnessed an explosion of social networking and computer human interaction. The computer has evolved from a stranger whirring and lurking behind a closed door to a useful means of connecting with friends to becoming our friend – our best friend. So, we consider, did the computer evolve and we follow, or did we evolve and the computer follow? It is important to remember that CHAT is not a means to answer that question; CHAT is a means of contextualizing and offering analysis to the circumstance so the researcher/writer can offer a more meaningful insight into what is happening.

In referring to the analysis of tools, Wertsch (1998) asserts that it is essential to recognize the role (tool) mediation plays in shaping human actions. He argues that only with such recognition are we likely to ask questions about why certain cultural tools and not others are employed and about who has decided which cultural tools are to be used. CHAT is a means of analyzing those likely questions.

## Vygotsky: In the Beginning There Were Tools

Culture is in fact the product of human social life and the social activity of human beings, and therefore the very act of putting the question about cultural development of behavior already leads us directly into the social plane of activity. (Vygotsky 1934/1987, vol.3, p.145-146)

Until the 1960's, many of the works of Russian Jewish scholar, Lev Vygotsky (1897-1934), were unavailable to North American researchers, primarily because of the Cold War, and also because they were subject to censorship by the Soviet government (Yamagata-Lynch 2010). Marx (1845), in his thesis on Feuerbach, characterized two challenges of social theory:

The chief defect of all materialism...is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectivity. [and on the other hand] Hence in opposition to materialism the active side was developed abstractly by idealism, which of course does not know real sensuous activity as such. (Center for Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research, University of Helsinki)

Blunden (2010) explains that Marx contended that cultural psychology and activity theory (which Marx called materialist method) comprised three main components.

1. real individuals – not mythical or hypothetical from the past, but real empirically given humans
2. their activity – purposive actions, particularly social action
3. material conditions – and the means all the artifacts they use on their activity

Cole et al. (1978) observe how, working in the tradition of Marx, Vygotsky argued that the mechanism of individual development change is rooted in society and culture. Vygotsky based his psychology on Marxian theory to describe the relationship between individuals and their social environments (Cole 1985). He challenged the popular view of his time that a person was separate from his or her environment in that an organism's development was a predominantly biological process. He wrote (1934/1986):

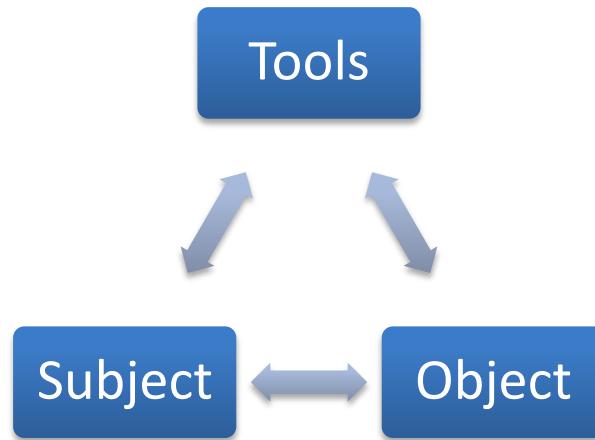
as subjects of study [was] a major weakness of traditional psychology, since it [made] the through process appear as an autonomous flow of thought thinking themselves, segregated from the fullness of life, from the personal need and interests, the inclinations and impulses of the thinker. (Vygotsky, 1934/1987, p.10)

He began developing a unified framework where the organism and the environment were parts of a complex system that co-created consciousness through human participation in activities (Vygotsky, 1978). Foot (2001) states that Vygotsky viewed human development as an active social process rather than an individual, cognitive, and largely passive one. This view evolved into what would become known as cultural historical activity theory.

Key to Vygotsky's framework and his major contribution to the notion of CHAT is the importance of tools, which are the means by which humans participate in activity. Vygotsky assumed that the relationship among artefacts, tools, and social others were not constant and changed over time (Vygotsky 1987). He viewed tools as both a unit of and reflection of culture. The insertion of cultural artefacts into human actions was revolutionary in that the basic unit of analysis now overcame the split between the Cartesian individual and the untouchable societal structure. The individual could no longer be understood as a person without the agency of individual who uses and produces artefacts (Engestrom 2001). Cole (2000) concurs that the

initial premise of the cultural historical school is that human psychological process emerged simultaneously with new forms of behavior in which humans modified material objects as a means of regulating their interactions with the world and others. It was common at the time to refer to such mediational devices as tools. Thus, Vygotsky introduced the idea that tools mediate both culture and activity and that culture and activity mediate tools. It is the concept of mediation that is Vygotsky's legacy.

Foot (2001) explains that the notion of artefact-mediated action was first formalized by Vygotsky. According to Vygotsky, action consists of subject (or actor), an object (either entity or a goal), and mediational tools. Since tools can be either material or conceptual, language, scientific methods and models, and other forms of cultural artefacts are just as much tools as are computers and telephones. Cole (1978) states that Vygotsky brilliantly extended the concept of mediations in human-environment interaction to the use of signs as well as tools. Thus, we can consider sign systems like numbers and language as tools as well. Figure #5 can also be considered Vygotsky's early notion of an activity unit. To take the various mediations of human development into account, Vygotsky introduced the notion of a "unit" for the analysis of human behavior (Langemeyer & Roth, 2006).



**Figure #5. Vygotsky Activity Unit. Yamagata – Lynch, L.C. (2010)**

This triangular representation of mediated action was Vygotsky's attempt to explain the development of human consciousness in a manner that did not rely on the dualistic stimulus-response associations (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Vygotsky began the genesis of CHAT with two vectors: the first was his assertion that social/environmental interaction was at the root of human development and secondly that social/environmental interaction could only happen in concert with current culture and society, which has evolved from a common history. The notion that human development was not solely a matter of an individual's thought process and reasoning was groundbreaking. In addition the idea emerged that as a subject acts upon an object, the mediation of tools and how tools mediate the subject become paramount in the activity. It is when humans are manipulating tools, and consequently when the tools manipulate humans, that history is formed and culture is re-created or made anew.

### **Leont'ev: A Theory Emerges. Activity Becomes Paramount**

CHAT scholars agree that the "object" is the reason why individuals and groups of individuals choose to participate in an activity (Kaptelinin and Miettinen, 2005). The object is

what holds together the elements in an activity (Hyysalo 2005). This unity of understanding is a result of work done by Aleksei Leont'ev, who was a colleague and peer of Vygotsky in Soviet Russia, and when Vygotsky died at an early age, it was Leont'ev who continued the study and expanded it into a workable psychological theory. Yamagata-Lynch (2010) concurs that it was Leont'ev and his colleagues who extended the work by focusing on the psychological aspects and treating activity as a holistic unit of analysis directed by an individual or groups of individuals goals and motives for participating in a an activity. Yamagata-Lynch goes on to explain that Vygotsky's mediated action is often explained as a process, but human activity from an activity theory perspective is a series of processes that are contained within an activity that acts in a bounded system. There is a high degree of variability within the activity system but the activity system itself is presented as uniform mechanism.

Leont'ev built upon the early and unfinished work of Vygotsky by suggesting that although subject acting upon tool was still an important factor in how the activity system functioned, an equally important consideration is that the activity system acts upon the subject as well. Leont'ev explained that within an activity system the events that occur, and the consequences the participants experience, can qualitatively change the participant, his/her goals and motives for participation, the environment, and the activity itself (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Although Leont'ev took Vygotsky's beginning theories in a new and exciting direction, he maintained the underlying principle that engagement with environments, social connections, and activity are at the heart of human development, and that humans are more than their thoughts and Pavlovian biological processes. It is the open-ended, ongoing exchange with the environment that constitutes the foundation of life for all living organisms. It is also this ongoing process of

exchange that calls out for and gives rise to regulatory mechanisms that allow it to be carried out (Leont'ev, 1959/1981).

In fact, Stetsenko and Areivitch (2004) argue that Leont'ev took the idea of socially constructed individual objectives a step further than Vygotsky. They suggest that what Leont'ev wanted to convey in his work was the notion that human activities are always driven by something objectively existing in the world rather than by some events and occurrences in the hidden realm of mental processes in the human mind. My colleagues at Addiction Services would be startled by what Stetsenko and Areivitch (2004) propose. One of Leont'ev's central claims is that each activity is driven by certain motives that distinguish one activity from another, and that those motives stem not from inside individuals (e.g. as direct outcomes of individual needs, pure will, or free choices), but are essentially motives brought on by the material world. My colleagues working in the field of addictions would be troubled by the suggestion that free will and personal choice would be outside the realm of the individual. However, that is one of the strengths that Leont'ev's studies bring to CHAT. He challenges the ideas that we are masters of our own domain and that the only forces at work are those controlled by the individual. He would find it absurd that we would take an approach suggesting that to address issues with alcohol, I need only change the way I think about alcohol. Leont'ev's key contribution to CHAT is suggesting that the reasons we engage in an activity (e.g. alcohol drinking) are as a result of an individual want to achieve a social external object/goal/outcome.

Human psychology is concerned with the activity of concrete individuals, which takes place either in a collective – that is jointly with other people – or in a situation in which the subject deals directly with the surrounding world of objects – for example the potter’s wheel or the writer’s desk. With all its varied forms, the human individual’s activity is a system of social relations. It does not exist without these relations. The specific form in which it exists is determined by the forms and means of material and mental social interactions. (Leont’ev, 1981 p.11, in Millar and Chen, 2005)

Leont’ev portrays human development as profoundly social and not reducible to any process ‘inside’ the individual. Furthermore, he also views social transaction as the primary focus of analysis (Stetsenko and Areivitch 2004). However, this notion is not simple to grasp because social transactions are situated in a sociocultural and historical world. In effect, human development is the merging outcome of interactions occurring simultaneously between the history of our species, history of culture, history of individuals, and the history of moment-to-moment interactions that make up living behavior (Miller and Chen 2005). Leont’ev reinforced in CHAT the concept that social interaction (activity) is central to human development and was one of the first to suggest it could be measured as a unit of analysis. His work led to the understanding that when we measure activity which he referred to as social interaction, it is important to take into account the history and culture of the activity because activity does not develop in isolation. Each activity is a recollection of something that came before, and each activity influences what will come next. Activity does not beget culture, and culture does not beget activity; rather, they are in unison, each profoundly affecting the other. Although this may seem somewhat ethereal, we must keep in mind that CHAT is primarily a means of describing activity, not answering questions about the activity. Foot (2001) states that activity is a unit of analysis for understanding a larger flow of human life. However, Engestrom (2000) points out

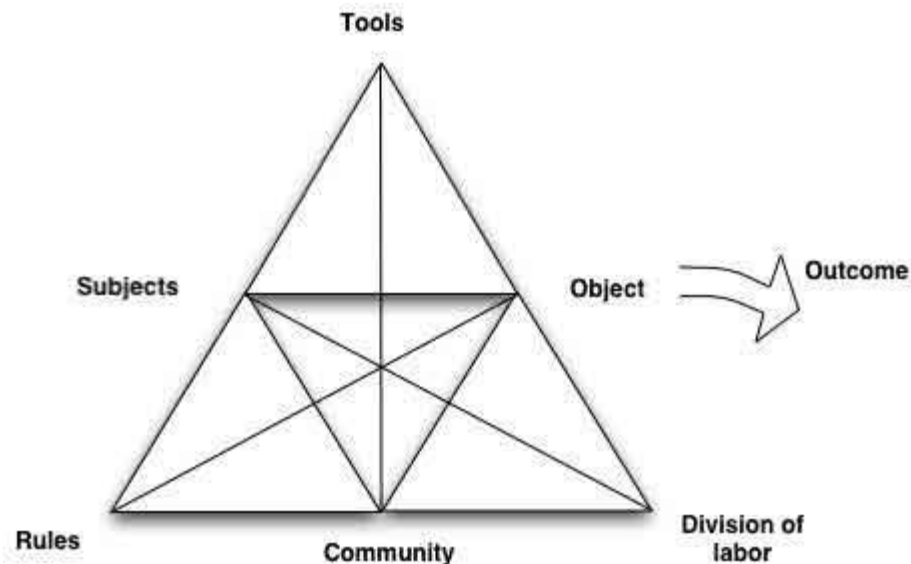
that activity systems are driven by communal motives that are often difficult to articulate for individual participants. Activity systems are in constant movement and internally contradictory. Fortunately, it is Engestrom who brings to the third generation of CHAT a model of analysis that brings a degree of clarity and greater understanding to the work, while still allowing for the utter complexities of human behavior.

### **Engestrom: Describing the Unit of Analysis**

L.C. Yamagata – Lynch (2010) reports how Finnish researcher Engestrom further developed analytical methods within activity theory by introducing activity system analysis. Activity systems analysis is used to map the co-evolutionary interactions between individuals or groups of individuals and the environment, and how they affect one another. Engestrom's contributions to CHAT have permitted researchers, teachers, and interested parties to bring a greater and more contextualized understanding to human behaviors through CHAT analysis. CHAT has been applied to a wide range of human activities including: The Network for Ethnological Monitoring and Early Warning (Foot 2001); courtroom expert testimony (Engestrom, 1992); technology integration (Koszalka and Wu, 1996); school and society (Russell 1997); school library programs (Myers 2007); learning after school programs (Brown and Cole, 2010); children's hospital (Engestrom 2000); and organizational development (Engestrom, 2001). As I searched for a paradigm to best examine and describe alcohol drinking through the lifespan, I was thrilled to discover Engestrom's work as it provides a robust and fruitful means of contextualizing a complex series of human behaviors. I agree with Koszalka and Wu (1996) that traditional cognitive research approaches to understanding activity at times provide valuable information, but generally lack the vigour to fully understand the dynamics of

the given activity. Conducting such examinations with CHAT helps to reveal an activity's content, structure, organization, and fundamental characteristics.

Keeping in mind that in Vygotsky's first generation of CHAT the unit of analysis remained for the most part individually focused, Leont'ev explicated the crucial difference between an individual action and a collective activity. However, Leont'ev did not expand Vygotsky's original mediation model into a model of a collective activity system (Engestrom 2001). It is Engestrom (1987) who brings a visual representation and definition to the complex nature of an individual acting in his or her community. Engestrom represents a person's environment with the terms: rules, community, and division of labor. These three points bring a context and a means of conceptualizing Leont'ev's vision of society, history, and culture.



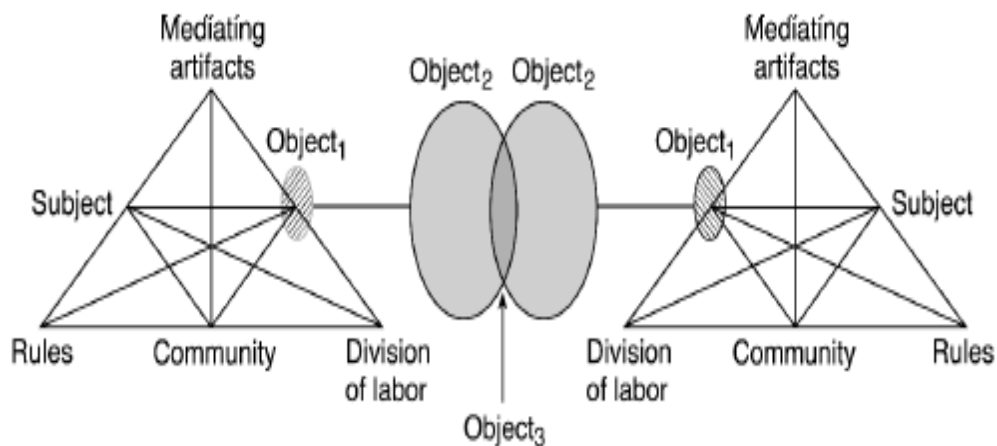
**Figure #6. Engestrom's Expanded CHAT Cell. Engestrom, Y. (1987)**

We see that CHAT requires an understanding of the history of the subject, the object that the subject is acting on, the characteristics of the surrounding community, the tools available to the subject, the rules which govern the community, and how labor is divided within the community (Koszalka and Wu 1996). Engestrom (1992) contends that his activity cell model reveals the decisive feature of CHAT, which is the multiple mediations in any activity. The subject and object are mediated by tools, which could include symbols or representations of various kinds. The tools are the tip of the iceberg depicted at the top of the model. The less visible social mediators depicted at the bottom of the model are: rules, community, and division of labor. The activity system incessantly reconstructs itself because there are continuous transformations between the components of the system. The structure of an activity system is static, but the activity inside is fluid.

Karkkainen (1999) explains that community signifies all the participants of an activity system who share the same object. Division of labor refers to the distribution of tasks, authority, and benefits among the participants. Rules refer to the explicit or implicit regulations that constrain actions the written or unwritten rules. An activity system contains a variety of different viewpoints or “voices”, as well as layers of historical accumulated tools, rules, and patterns of division of labor.

It is Engestrom’s work that most intrigues me about CHAT, since it was Engestrom who brought CHAT as a unit of measurement to the forefront. Measurement is used here in the sense that we can now look at a behavior, a series of actions, or an activity and gain understanding into the full complexity of the interaction. Engestrom’s visioning of what lies beneath the tip of the iceberg of activity (subject, object, tools) gives us the context to examine the role the environment (rules, labor, community) has in shaping individuals’ behaviors. A common

practice is for researchers to (visually) represent their particular area of interest with a CHAT cell as a unit of measurement. This permits the researcher to overlay a variety of CHAT cells vertically or horizontally and bring a degree of explanation to human behavior that does not always translate effectively to the written word. I suggest that CHAT cells would be best viewed through 3-D glasses, as CHAT is not static and flat, but has depth and volume. To illustrate this I offer Engestrom's visualizations of how two activity systems, which share a common object but act on it in different ways, might be graphically represented (Figures #7 and #8). I also offer (Figure #9) to illustrate how Engestrom represents a possible unit of analysis for examining power relationships at work



**Figure #7. Two Interacting Activity Systems. Engestrom, Y. (2001)**

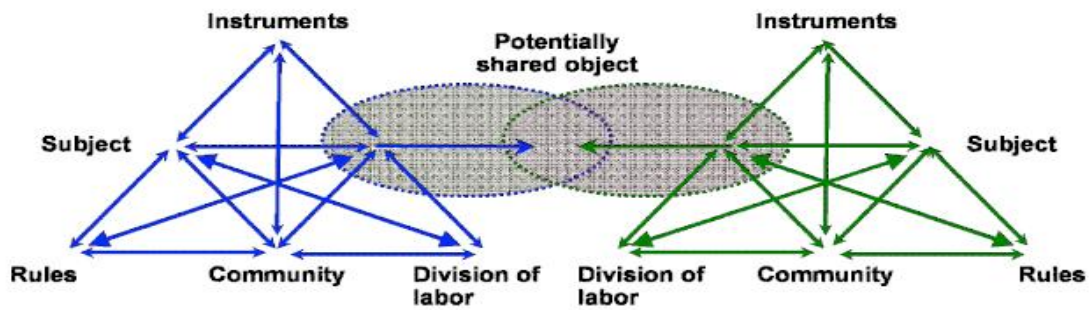


Figure #8. Two Activity Systems and a Potentially Shared Object. Engestrom, Y. (2008)

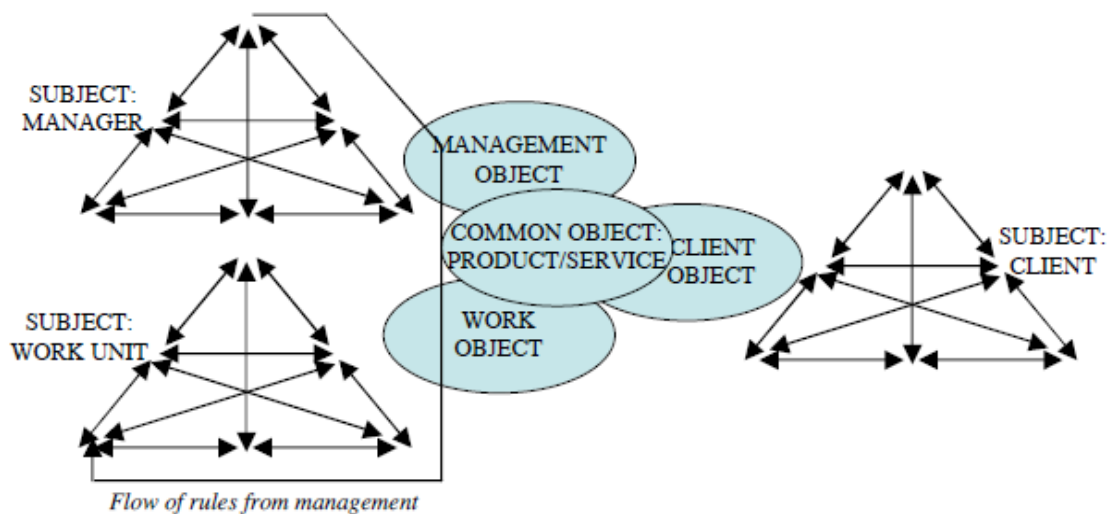
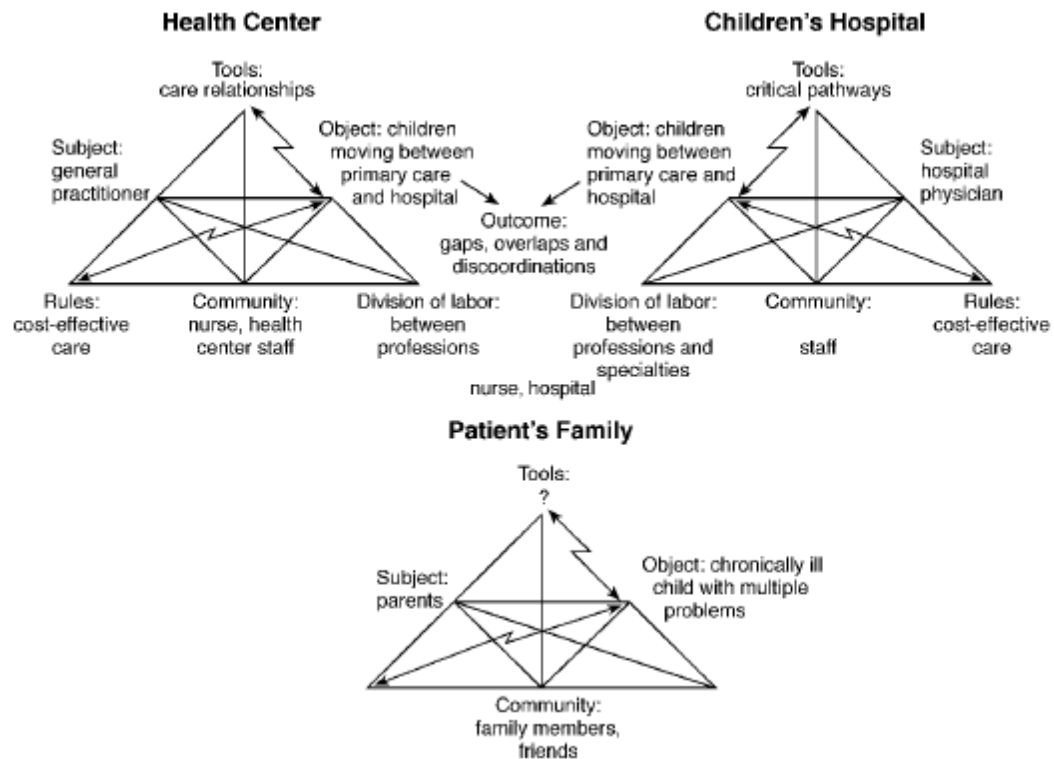


Figure #9. Possible Unit of Analysis for Examining Power. Engestrom, Y. (2008)

In Engestrom's (2001) paper examining the difficulties a hospital system is having properly diagnosing and treating an asthmatic child with food allergies he demonstrates the power and depth that a critical CHAT analysis can offer.



**Figure #10. Contradictions in Children's Healthcare in Helsinki Engstrom, Y. (2001)**

One can see this explanation of the gaps in this healthcare system almost lift right off the page. Each group of individuals in the healthcare system might have a similar object; yet the tools, rules, community, and division of labor are different for each, thus changing the outcome. We see the family disconnected, not a part of the larger activity system. If we did have our 3D glasses, I would visualize the family activity system hovering above the healthcare activity systems, at times passing through it, but never becoming attached. It is this uniqueness to illustrating complexity that is Engstrom's greatest contribution to CHAT.

## CHAT as a Means

The current generation of CHAT has been growing in popularity as a means to examine and analyze complex human behavior. This is primarily due to CHAT's ability to bring deeper meaning to activity than traditional research and study formats. Researchers, educators, and academics often note that the nodes of a CHAT activity cell, object, subject, tools, community, rules, division of labor, and outcomes, provide them with a unit of analysis that reaches more deeply than other means, such as statistical analysis or observational analysis. I have demonstrated how Engestrom uses a graphic representation of CHAT to provide greater context to the inner workings of a large children's hospital. Other researchers, such as Dixon-Crouse, (2003) suggest that CHAT would be a powerful compendium of analysis in concert with either action research or mediation theory.

Smit et al (2010) in their examination of South African teachers in search of an identity make use of CHAT as the analytical framework of their study and also use it to frame the larger project where data was collected. They report employing it as an analysis tool of identity representation in the activity system of schools where teachers work. The aim of the project was to offer an examination of how elementary school teachers in South Africa develop and maintain professional identity. They argue that discovering how teacher identity is developed is important because in a society where the social capital divide is increasing, teachers are one of the last hopes for the young, especially from rural and poor townships. Through a series of facilitated and documented conversations with teachers, the researchers drew out language that illustrated

and offered context to the nodes of an activity cell. Smit et al (2010) do not make use of a visual representation of a CHAT cell but choose to report their findings through the use of text.

.....there may also be contradictions or conflicts or tensions. For instance, rules and policy changes in education compel the teacher as subject to renegotiate their object/motive to create a good learning environment for effective learning. Also, tools such as textbooks and auxiliaries' mediate learning are absent in many schools thus impeding the learning outcome. (p.103)

We see Smit (2010) using the discourses with teachers to examine rules, objects, tools, and conflict, all of which are tenants of a CHAT cell. CHAT provides researchers with the opportunity to gather, organize, and illustrate the complex notion of teacher identity in poor South African townships. Most importantly they have the means to present it to colleagues across the world, as CHAT provides a common language of analysis that can be shared among many. Nardi (2006) agrees that an immediate benefit of CHAT is for the dissemination of a common vocabulary for describing activity that all researchers could share.

Murphy and Rodriguis-Manzanares (2009) use CHAT to make sense of e-teachers' activity in the context of high school distance learning. In their conclusions they report that their study was different from other studies of K-12 distance learning in that adopting a CHAT perspective allowed them to move beyond identifying needs or difficulties in order to focus on changes in teacher's practice. Again we see researchers recognizing that CHAT permits a deeper understanding of the complexities of human activity. Murphy and Rodriguis-Manzanares (2009) suggest that the element of CHAT that most excited them was Vikkunen and Kuutii's (2000) note that:

each individual taking part in a common activity has a slightly different view and interpretation of the object and purpose of the activity depending on the individuals position in the division of labor, his or history in the activity, training and experience etc. (p.301)

Due to the complex nature of e-learning as an activity, the researchers believed that CHAT offered a new and more dynamic means of analysis that took into account the “slightly different view and interpretation”. Murphy and Rodriguis-Manzanares detailed their findings by the nodes of a CHAT cell. Included in their conclusion was a section on object, subject, rules, and division

of labor, instruments, outcomes, and community. They also offered a diagram:

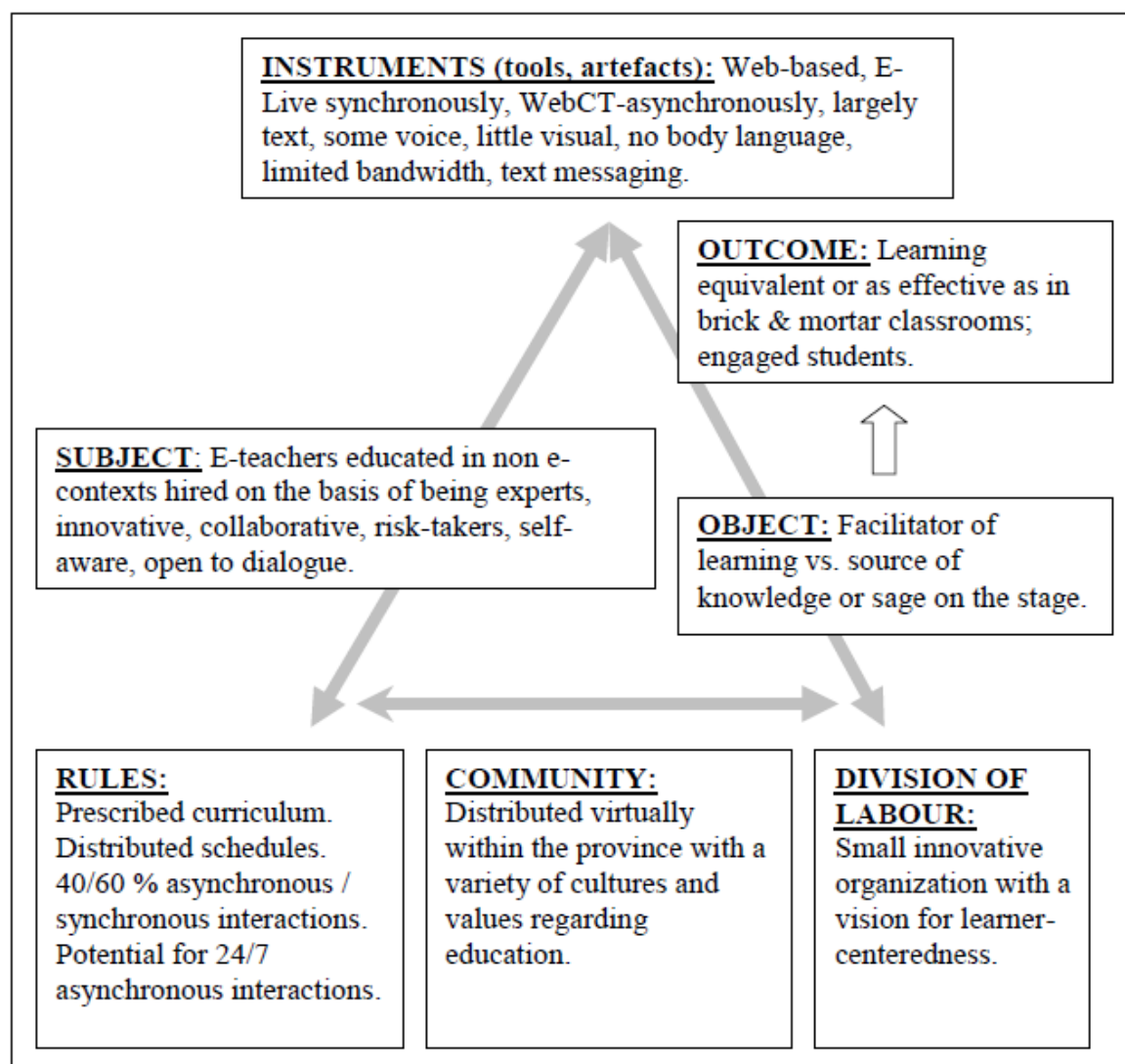
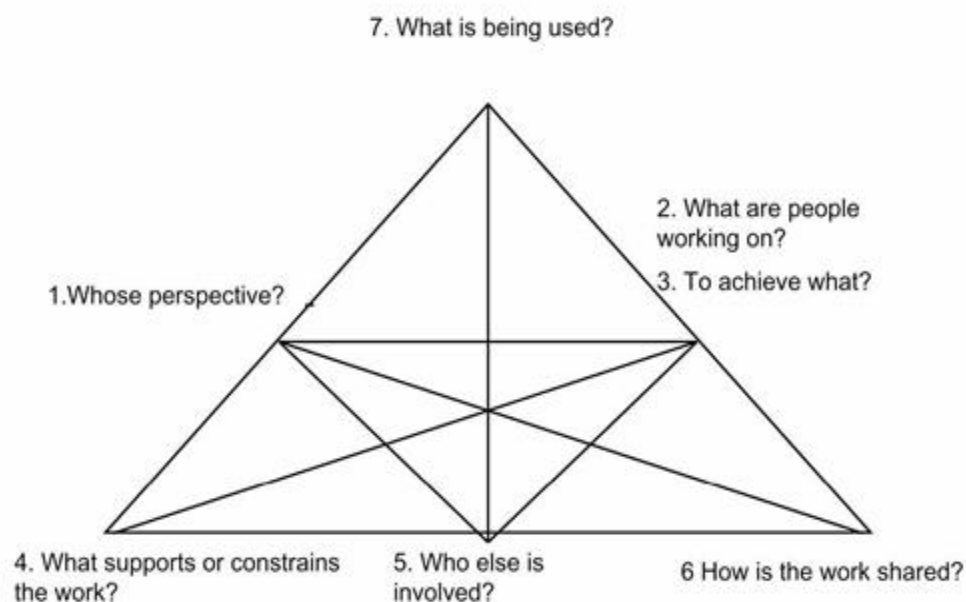


Figure #11. Murphy, E., Rodriguez- Manzanares, M.A. (2009)

During a large national research project in the UK examining professional learning within the multitude of agencies tasked with children's services, Leadbetter et al (2007) use CHAT as a means of structuring facilitated workshops where participants could discuss their developing work practices and plan changes. The researchers report:

activity theory provides a theoretical framework and approach that encompasses many of the complex ideas and domains; it also provides a methodological approach that guides interventions with the groups. As practice is changing rapidly, often due to externally driven agendas, it is important to understand the cultural and historical contexts within which the changes occur. (p.87)

Due to the ever changing nature of the demands on children's services in the UK, the researchers have had difficulty trying to contextualize both the means and nature by which agencies currently come together to service children. The immense challenges that occur when agencies try to work together effectively on behalf of the children is difficult to examine through traditional means. Interestingly, Leadbetter et al (2007) for the most part do not use CHAT activity cell as a means of describing the current situation; instead, they choose to use the CHAT as a way in which questions can be formulated to discover the deeper complexities of multi-agency collaboration.



**Figure #12.** Leadbetter et al. (2007)

Leadbetter et al. conclude with identifying “themes arising” from the questions that were generated by a CHAT analysis. It is in describing these themes that the nodes of the CHAT cell are referred to. As they describe the theme of *co-working and location*, they report that for some people co-location is seen as an artifact or tool, a way of mediating collaborative work. As Leadbetter et al. describe the theme of *division of labor and professional development*, they report that how professional identity is maintained while divisions of labor are negotiated and role boundaries are blurred or redefined is a complex and multifaceted problem. Here, we see the researchers not using CHAT as a means of how to resolve issues of multi-agency collaboration, but using it to better describe why it is so challenging. It is only by fully contextualizing “the how” that we can even begin to get to “the why”.

J. David Betts (2006) at the University of Arizona conducted a six-year study of a multimedia arts program (MAEP) delivered to children living in economically challenged circumstances. Formative data was collected from an early cohort of participants over an 18-month period, and then the participants were followed after graduation to note outcomes in terms of high school graduation, higher education, and employment. The study findings are reviewed and analyzed retrospectively using CHAT. Betts reports that CHAT makes it possible to investigate the meditational processes that innovative tools can bring to education. The data collected and subsequently analyzed using CHAT included parent interviews, student exit interviews, the art produced, the Perceived Self Efficacy and Attitude Questionnaire, journals, researcher observations, tests of literacy skills, and written questionnaires designed by the author. Betts collected a wide range of data through the use of expansive research tools ranging from observational data to peer reviewed psychological testing measure, and in the end he chose CHAT as a means of comprehending what he had collected.

Like Murphy and Rodriguis-Manzanares (2009), Betts shares his findings by means of discourse with headings attributed to the language of a CHAT cell: object, subject, outcome, division of labor, community, tools. Under the heading of subject, Betts finds that one can look at MAEP from three points of view: students, parents, and the researchers who observed the cohort year of curriculum development. Interestingly, Betts did not identify those delivering the curriculum as a subject to be examined. Betts does offer a graphic representation of his findings.

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Parents</b>	<b>TAs</b>
<b>Object</b>	Computers and arts. Please parents. Learn new art technology skills.	Digital equity issues. After school activities.	As researchers doing participatory observation
<b>Tools</b>	MAEP, labs SW, Design exp, language Arts	Automobiles	Email reports, new computer programs
<b>Rules</b>	MAEP rules set and negotiated over School/Work	Policies about attendance, completion.	Research reports and meetings. MAEP culture and rules
<b>Culture</b>	Created new space from several different schools	Tucson, Hispanic.	University students. Academic goals
<b>Roles/ division of labor</b>	Students, artists, workers	Parents, logistical and moral support	Students, researchers, teachers, learners
<b>Outcomes</b>	New literacies, higher education	High school success for their child. PC in home	Teaching and curriculum experience

Figure #13. Betts. (2006)

In this case we see CHAT being used to look back on a complex human experience and the researcher being able to draw out a description of the experience that future researchers potentially could use to discover why a program did or did not meet its goals.

### **Final Thoughts**

CHAT is a means of bringing depth and breadth to complex systems of activity. It was Vygotsky who began to challenge the idea that humans are at their core driven by their thoughts and internal processes. He put forth the notion that human behavior is at its essence a result of social interaction. Having been influenced by Marx, Vygotsky was of the mind that human social interaction takes place through use of tools, and as humans use tools to mediate their environments, the tools mediate the human interactions. Leont'ev expanded Vygotsky's ideas regarding social interaction and firmly argued that all human behaviors were a result of their interactions with their environments through social interactions. He identified that this social interaction was activity and that activity was not only mediated by the use of tools, it was also powerfully influenced by the object that the subject was acting on. In other words the subject's main purpose for entering into a certain activity system is to obtain an objective. Leont'ev's greatest contribution to CHAT was his assertion that activity is rooted in a historical and cultural milieu. He explained that we are influenced by what has come before us and we influence what is yet to come. Engestrom brought definitions and description to the historical and cultural aspects of CHAT, with his terminology regarding rules, division of labor, and community. This opened the door for researchers and scholars to begin using CHAT as a means of examining and quantifying human behavior and activity. This permits greater understanding of complex phenomena. Later in this thesis I will use the CHAT analyses formats offered by those

highlighted in this chapter as the inspiration and groundwork for my own CHAT analysis of alcohol drinking through the lifespan.

### Chapter 3: Alcohol Drinking Activity

As reported by Langemeyer & Roth (2006), Engestrom in his *Developmental Work Research* (2005) draws on narrative case studies detailed by others to describe and expand on the notions of CHAT. In one example he uses a work scenario described by Hart-Landberg and Reder (1997) to demonstrate the inseparable unity of activity and communication.

In this chapter, I will offer three different narratives of drinking through the lifespan. They are put forward here as concrete examples that will be used for analysis and to illustrate points through the remainder of this thesis. Although these narratives are not true stories, they are inspired by true events and represent what I know from twenty years of experience in the field of addictions, newspaper and other written accounts of incidents, and from my own personal experiences and experiences related to me by family, friends, and colleagues. As you read these stories you are invited to keep in mind the basic framework of CHAT, which is: subject, object, outcome, tools, community, rules, and division of labor. The utter complexity of alcohol drinking as an activity should become apparent.

#### The Freshman

It was the early fall in 1986 when the Freshman arrived on campus. The leaves had just begun to turn and that autumn smell of wood smoke hung in the air. He had been dropped off outside his dorm earlier that week by his parents, and although they were worried they would miss him, they were still excited to see him starting this new chapter in his life and trusted the university to take care of their son. Plus, the Freshman had always been a responsible boy; he had graduated top in his class from high school and was a star on the school's hockey team. He had always made good decisions, decisions that had always lead to positive outcomes. He was

considered mature by his high school guidance counselor, and his parents were confident that after a small period of adjustment he would excel in his new surroundings.

Although popular in high school, the Freshman began at his University without the advantage of a network of friends. Many of his public school classmates had chosen to attend other schools or to enter the work force right after graduation. For the first time in a long time the Freshman felt very much alone. However, he was determined to stick it out and not let homesickness get the better of him; he had expectations to live up to and early in his first week on campus thought he was making progress on creating a new network of friends. His good looks and easy-going manner drew people close to him, his wry wit and ability to be one of the boys was suiting him well, and he began to gain the social capital that he believed would be needed to succeed in this environment. He had watched an acquaintance he had made on the first day of orientation bear the brunt of not being normal. The acquaintance had a new wave hairstyle, wore an over-sized dime store jacket and appeared to have applied mascara, and although he was nice enough, he was quickly made an outcast by the seniors. The Freshman learned quickly that to make the most of his situation and not be ostracized he had to use language that objectified women, speak of his athletic prowess, always appear prototypically male, and most importantly demonstrate his ability to drink alcohol. The Freshman was at his best in his Flyers hockey jersey, bottle of beer in hand, sharing stories of his sexual exploits the night before, whether they had truly happened or not.

The Freshman's dormitory was the largest on campus, housing up to one hundred and fifty males, the majority of whom were in their third or fourth year of study. The dorm held the reputation for being the wildest on campus and proudly displayed the promotional materials of a large Maritime brewery, who had been the "sponsor" of the dorm for as long as anyone could

remember. During orientation week the dorm environment was changed to show homage to a certain brand of beer sold by the brewery: the walls would be plastered in posters advertising the brand, an inflatable can of the brand would be on the front lawn outside, and there were any number of contests where branded merchandise ranging from mini-fridges to hot tubs could be won. The brewery was also a prominent sponsor of both the on campus bar and the nightly orientation week concerts and offered the University large donations. The University seemed proud of its affiliation with the brewery and would often tout in its own promotional recruit materials that it was a place where students could study, have fun, and make the most of student life.

The Freshman had his first drink of alcohol a few weeks before high school graduation. He and a couple of buddies split a twelve pack of beer and went to a football game, acted silly, chatted to some girls, and went for pizza. All in all it was a fun night. The Freshman had viewed alcohol as an adjunct to his life, not necessary to maintain the social capital in high school that had been achieved with his good looks, sense of humor, and accomplishments in athletics. Alcohol simply was there. Throughout high school, his parents had made it clear that if he were to drink, he was not to drive or get in with anyone who had been drinking. They were adamant about this and would bring it up each time he had gone out with friends. The Freshman was proud he had never driven drunk and had even been an organizer of his school's Mothers Against Drunk Driving school assembly.

The last Saturday night of orientation (classes would start on the following Monday morning), it was the Freshman's dorm's turn to host a social. This Saturday had traditionally been the biggest party day of the semester; it always began with a beer and eggs breakfast, continued with drinking games throughout the afternoon, and finished with a party co-hosted by

an all female dorm. The Freshman had consumed alcohol throughout the week, but in a manner that avoided intoxication while still gaining the capital needed to remain in and not out.

However, expectations were high as the day began, the upperclassman had begun to notice the Freshman's hesitancy to become drunk, and they took this as a sign of weakness. The day began with comments directed to the Freshman, such as "You're not going to puss out are you?" and "Hope you're not a fag tonight."

The Freshman felt his credibility waning, and he had heard the upperclassman refer to his orientation acquaintance as a queer. They had systemically excluded his acquaintance from everything that seemed important, like parties, pick up sports, and casual conversations. He was bound and determined that this would not happen to him. He had expectations to meet both academically and socially. Losing his capital would prevent him from achieving what he wanted, and he decided that night he would drink alcohol in a manner that protected himself and his goals.

As day turned to night the Freshman did his best to keep up with the consumption demands of the upperclassmen. The brewery had offered free beer at breakfast and discounted beer prices in the dorm all night long. At one point in the evening although feeling lightheaded and ill, the already intoxicated Freshman was cheered by his dorm mates and their invited female guests to join a beer drinking contest. Whoever drank three mugs of beer the fastest would win a beer branded gift bag with branded Frisbees, coasters, pens, magnets, and hats. At his friends' urging the Freshman entered the contest. As he picked up the third beer and put it to his lips, he felt a sudden rush of vomit; amid calls of "pussy" and "fag", he rushed from the dorm bar area to the bathroom, his face pale, his head spinning, and vomited violently into the toilet. He was drunk. He was confused. He was socially scarred. It was ten minutes to midnight.

At 5:45 am the next day, twenty-seven hours prior to his first University class, the Freshman was found by a groundskeeper on the pavement dead just outside his dorm. The coroner reported later that the Freshman has fallen from his third story dorm window at some point during the night. The coroner surmised that the Freshman had gotten hot and removed the screen of his dorm window so he could sit on the ledge and get some air. The University expressed remorse that the Freshman's actions had led to his death. They committed to investigating the idea of making the screens in dorm windows immovable. The brewery offered a gift towards a scholarship in the Freshman's name. The dorm had a party the next Saturday night in honor of the Freshman. Beer was free for females until 10:00 pm.

## Sophie

During the summer between her grade seven and grade eight year, Sophie's parents decided to take the family to a cottage resort area along the seacoast of a neighboring province. Sophie and her family would spend all of July and August in the cottage community, enjoying (as her parent's assured her) the surf and the sun. Sophie did not like the idea of leaving the few friends she had for the summer. She was already uncomfortable thinking about having to meet new people, and on top of that she had experienced a growth spurt over the previous year and was now the tallest girl in her class. She and her mom had recently bought her first bra, and she had begun shaving her legs and armpits. The only good thing that had happened lately was that the woman at the movie theatre had mistaken her for being eighteen, when her mother had asked for one adult and one student and the woman at the counter asked if she had not meant two adults. This made Sophie smile, but leaving the safe confines of her room and neighborhood certainly did not make her happy. However, because she was only a kid and not an adult, when

her parents packed the car and left for the summer, she was part of the caravan. The choice of whether to stay or go was not hers to make.

During the first couple of weeks at the cottage Sophie kept entirely to herself, reading her books or listening to her iPod. She saw some kids around but felt no inclination to approach them, and they did not seem interested in approaching her. Despite her Mother's almost constant encouragement and prodding for her to go meet some of the other kids, Sophie spent her time in a self-imposed isolation, in part to spite her parents for bringing her there, but also due to her innate shyness and worry that she would not be liked by the other kids or even shunned. That she could not cope with, and she thought it best not even to try, considering it better to be alone by her own choice than alone by their choice.

About the third week, which was the local communities' "Wine Tasting Festival", complete with grape stomping exhibits, foreign dignitaries displaying their wines of choice, and a large furry grape mascot making his way around town to the delight of onlookers, Sophie went for a bike ride by herself, and after a while she found herself riding along the small main street of the cottage community. She had ridden there before and enjoyed glancing into the shop windows along the way; her reflection somewhat impressed her, and she did look older than her 15 years. Now that she had let her blonde hair grow for the first three weeks of summer, she could certainly pass for 20, maybe even 21 or so, she thought. Sophie liked this; the appearance of being older was something that brought her a good deal of pride, and she worked at it. She loved it when a grade one student at her school recently mistook her for a student teacher and when her Mom's friends made comments on her maturity and good looks. Sophie had always had a fascination with being adult and the perceived freedom that came along with being adult. Adults

could do what they wanted when they wanted; they certainly didn't have to spend the summer in some lame cottage if they didn't want to.

When Sophie pedalled by the local corner store, a group of young people called to her. She had seen them before, two boys and three girls. They had been on the beach a few times when she was there collecting seashells, and she had seen them at the Canada Day fireworks. After a bit of chat about where she went to school, who she knew and what music she liked, the boy with the blonde hair, Josh, asked if Sophie would try and buy all of them some alcohol at the liquor store on the neighboring block. Sophie was flattered and swelled with joy that Josh believed she looked old enough to buy alcohol. The other kids in the group told her how great it would be if she did and that they would look forward to hanging out with her if she tried. Sophie knew it was a risk, but it was not the risk of her parents finding out; they had given her glasses of wine at special occasions since she was twelve, which always made her feel older and adult-like, and she did not think her parents would care very much if she tried to buy alcohol as long as she did not drink to excess. Sophie was much more concerned that if the store refused to sell her alcohol, she would lose something in the eyes of her fledgling friends. She carefully weighed her options, the beginnings of the friendship critical in her mind. Refuse to try and purchase – lose. Get caught trying to purchase – gain a little. Succeed in buying – gain a lot.

Sophie agreed to try and buy them the alcohol. This inspired much kudos from her new friends. They handed her some crumpled up money and waited patiently around the corner from the store. Sophie knew she had passed the point of no return once she heard the jingle of bells in the door of the liquor store; the clerk glanced her way and then went back to counting bottles. Within a few minutes she had made her purchase and was on her way outside with a supply of wine coolers and light beer. Listening to the clink of the bottles as she gripped the brown paper

bag tight in her arms, she had never felt so mature. Sophie's new friends expressed their pleasure and admiration when she handed them the bag. They quickly made a plan to meet later that evening at the cove on the other side of the dunes. They assured Sophie they would not start the party without her and that she was going to be the guest of honor. One of the girls in the group asked Sophie what she would be wearing to the beach later that night, and when Sophie shared it would be her pink GAP hoodie and surf shorts, the girl replied she would wear likewise. Sophie realized that she had made an impression; she had achieved a level of acceptance that her knowledge of books or choice of music could not have helped her attain.

Later that night Sophie's parents, having heard she was going to the beach with some kids, commended her on stepping out of her shell and making some new friends. As they left for the neighbor's campfire, both her Mom and Dad with a bottle of wine in hand told her to have fun and not to stay out too late. Sophie joined her friends at the beach, Josh started a fire, and the other sat around sipping from their wine coolers and light beer. When Sophie was handed a raspberry wine cooler, she twisted off the lid and took a sip, trying to mimic the same drinking mannerisms as her mother. Through the evening, Josh drank a few light beers and acted silly, putting seaweed on his head and pretending to be a rock and roll guitarist, while Sophie sipped on a total of two wine coolers and told the story about how she was mistaken for a teacher. The other kids sat by the fire drinking light beer and coolers, laughing at Josh's antics, and listening intently to Sophie's stories about home. On the walk home, Josh feeling particularly brave stopped and gave Sophie her first kiss. It was sweet and memorable.

After that night alcohol did not play an important role in maintaining the relationship between Sophie and her summer friends. She did (when asked) on a few more occasions make purchases for them, which always filled her with a sense of pride. She and her friends also

enjoyed swimming in the surf, hanging at the ice cream shop, and riding bikes downtown.

Sophie is entering her grade 12 year this September; she is editor of the school paper and plans a career in journalism. She has not drunk alcohol in some time and has never been intoxicated. She and Josh still email each other, but they are “just friends”.

### **Shady Pines**

Shady Pines is a privately owned seniors’ complex with over 300 units. It is a mix of single residence condo type dwellings with large high rises spread over five acres just outside a bustling metropolitan city. In the center of the property and attached to the two high rises is a main building where you will find the dining room, chapel, gym, games rooms, corporate offices, leisure rooms, and on site nursing and social work offices. The majority of Shady Pines residents are 65 or older, white, and retired. The residents’ health ranges from excellent, with the ability to drive, be active, and travel, to poor, where they are bed bound and require 24-hour nursing care. The majority of nursing care takes place on the ground floors of the high rises with the upper floors reserved for those with some mobility and fewer immediate health needs. The condos are reserved for those who require little nursing care and are very mobile. Shady Pines is a private for-profit business with an owner, a general manager, and a Board of Directors.

Two years ago a group of residents, with support from the onsite social work team, approached the owner and general manager with a request to create a bar area in the main building just off the dining hall. The residents reported it would be a place to be social, to hold events, to congregate, and to have fun. The team of social workers agreed and suggested it might be a means of engaging less social residents, thereby decreasing the isolation and loneliness that sometimes comes in the senior years. Both the residents and the social workers thought having a

bar was a right and that the seniors certainly paid enough in fees to warrant having an added place for fellowship. The nursing staff remained on the sidelines during the decision-making process and had for all intents and purposes no comment. Upon briefly considering the request, the owner directed the general manager to create a bar, in part due to agreeing with the case put forth by the social workers and residents, but also seeing it as a potential new revenue stream. The Board was not consulted. (Interestingly, the first Board meeting after the installation of the bar was adjourned early so members could attend a social in the bar.)

The general manager applied for and was granted a Provincial liquor license; she also consulted with their insurer, who determined there would be no increase in liability costs. The bar was installed, and the area was opened at the end of February last year. A resident's son, who worked for a large national distillery, was able to have them sponsor the bar, providing alcohol branded signage, clocks, glasses, mugs, tablecloths, napkins, and event posters. Having looked at other examples of seniors' home bars in the province, the general manager established policies that she believed would maximize profit while keeping residents happy. Alcohol prices reflected the fixed income many of the residents were on, so beer was \$3.00/bottle, while mixed drinks were \$4.00/shot, and non alcoholic drinks such as cola and lemonade were sold for \$4.50/glass. Residents could charge their bar tab to their Shady Pines account, eliminating the need for cash "on hand", allowing the bar debt to be taken from the residents' account. The bar was open from 6:30 pm (after dinner) until 11:00 pm, while on the weekends it remained open until midnight. The bar could be open through the day at the discretion of the general manager provided there was a special event or occasion. Often bridge tournaments were now held in the bar on Sunday afternoons rather than in the leisure rooms.

The bar proved to be a huge hit, and each night it was filled with residents enjoying a cold beer or a gin and tonic. When the bartender suggested an open mike night residents began sharing their musical gifts with each other, playing piano, guitar, and harmonica, and impromptu jam sessions would occur among retired musicians. Social work staff reported that some residents who would rarely come out of their room for anything were coming out to enjoy the bar atmosphere. A resident social committee was established and began running more and more events with the bar serving as host environment. Early advocates of the bar spoke proudly of their efforts to get the bar, and the social work staff surveyed bar patrons over a two month period and presented their findings on a poster at a local social work conference: "Decreasing Social Isolation in a Senior Setting: The Role of the Neighborhood Bar."

However, in August a concerned family member approached staff upon discovering a large bar tab among his grandfather's monthly fees. Apparently, the grandfather had been buying rounds for friends over the last month and had lost track of expenditures. Initially, staff argued that the grandfather was responsible for his own actions and expenditures; however, when the family member pointed out that his grandfather had a small degree of dementia, staff offered to rebate one half of the bill. A policy was established whereby the bartender was to monitor the expenditures of individuals and alert them when they were becoming extravagant.

Throughout the fall, residents continued to frequent the bar. It was a symbol for them of freedom and independence. They drank, they laughed, they danced, and they sang. Comment cards contained things like: "I feel like a kid again." "Best thing about this place." "Let's open another." "Beer should be cheaper." There were scattered nursing reports of drunken behaviors like slurring of words, wandering hands, and small injuries like bumped heads and twisted ankles, but these appeared infrequent and were poorly documented.

Then, on the night of December 18, a resident named Mary fell and broke her hip in her room, just after attending a Christmas social in the bar. Mary was 82 and had just recently moved into the upper floor of Tower #2 of Shady Pines. She had been a school teacher all her life and loved to dance and sang in the church choir. Mary's daughter reported that her mother was upset about having to move out of her home and away from her friends and family; her daughter reported encouraging Mary to make some new friends and explore all that Shady Pines had to offer. Mary had learned of the social though the nurse who came to her room to provide her the medication she needed for her blood pressure, glaucoma, and kidney stones, medications that included on the bottle a warning that they should not be combined with alcohol. Bar records indicated that Mary charged three rye and colas to her tab, and it was reported that she was observed drinking at least one of them. Mary was not a teetotaler, as she had frequently consumed alcohol throughout her life, and friends said of her she enjoyed a good drink and a good party

Mary spent a month in hospital before dying of an infection as a result of her broken hip. Her family was devastated. The bar is now closed pending a review. Nursing charts of the day she fell indicated that Mary was provided her medication at 8 am and again at 3 pm. The social began at 7:30 pm. Mary was found on the floor of her room by morning check in staff at 7:30 am. She had not changed from the clothes she wore to the social. The family is considering legal action but has been advised by a lawyer Mary was of competent mind, so proving any liability would be difficult. It was her choice to consume the alcohol that may have interfered with her medication causing her to become dizzy and fall.

Social work staff are asking on behalf of the former regular bar patrons for the bar to be reopened; they view Mary's case as an isolated incident, which could have happened just as

easily at home. Nursing staff is now tentatively expressing the idea that perhaps given the fragility of many of the residents it might not be appropriate to offer alcohol on site. The vast majority of residents' view what happened to Mary as an unfortunate accident - God's will. The general manager has reported that for the time being the bar will remain closed and that given what happened to Mary and the subsequent ongoing investigation it is best to wait until all the factors have been examined. It is interesting to note that the bar at Shady Pines was breaking even.

### **Data Scenarios Presented**

Having drawn on my experiences, both professional and personal, I have detailed three unique case studies that I will refer to throughout the remainder of the thesis. The complex narratives that comprise the stories of The Freshman, Sophie, and Shady Pines offer to us the raw data that can be used for a CHAT analysis. Each story has in common alcohol as a tool, and we see the tool of alcohol both being manipulated and doing the manipulating. It is important to consider at this time that alcohol *per se* is neither good nor bad, harmful or helpful; it just simply is what it is – a liquid distilled from fermented plant that contains ethyl alcohol, a chemical that when ingested has the potential to cause intoxication. These stories will offer rich fodder for the analysis and examinations that lie ahead.

## Chapter 4: Inadequate Accounts of Drinking Through the Lifespan

This chapter describes and then defines the two current dominant means of contextualizing alcohol drinking through the lifespan - individually biased philosophies (IBP) and socially biased philosophies (SBP). It offers a critique of both those means with the conclusion that they are both inadequate methods of accounting for alcohol drinking through the lifespan and that another more robust means of analysis is required.

Dr. D. Sellman (2009) states that alcohol has become a surprisingly cheap grocery commodity that is almost as accessible as bread and milk. Yet, throughout recorded history humans have been drinking fermented liquids which cause intoxication. Sellman (2009) does go on to report that alcohol is a drug that has been enjoyed by most human groups since the beginning of civilization, and since that time humans have struggled with the positive and negative consequences associated with alcohol drinking. In 594, Solomon prescribed the death penalty for drunken magistrates and required that all wine be diluted with water before being sold (Babur et al 2010). Not surprisingly, since they first drank alcohol, humans have been trying to explain, describe, and contextualize the drinking experience in efforts to enhance the pleasure and positives while mitigating the harms. Academics, researchers, and scientists in the fields of history, psychology, education, sociology, and biology have offered a perspective on how and why humans initiate alcohol drinking, maintain alcohol drinking, and cease alcohol drinking through their lifespan. Babur et al (2010) share that the anthropological literature has also long recognized that there are striking differences between cultures and drunken comportment, while Mizell and Peralta (2009) report that since the 1970's sociologists have been endeavouring to understand the role that gender plays in drinking through the lifespan. Dodd (2010) adds that

given the continued pervasiveness of high risk drinking among college students, recent efforts have focused on understanding the nature of problem drinking.

Demant (2009) found that sociological studies into alcohol use seem to find it difficult to deal with the substance itself. Although referring to substance (alcohol) abuse, McDonald and Towberman (1993) in Pagliaro and Pagliaro (1996) note that no one model has been fully developed that explains the phenomenon and that analyses are bound by their inherent dominant discourses, either psychological theories which tend to focus on individual behavior rather than on environmental or cultural contributors to individual behavior, or sociological theories that tend to focus on external factors, which have the effect of ignoring individual differences.

What is clear is that humans have consumed, do consume, and will continue to consume alcohol, creating both pleasure and pain for themselves, and that academics continue to struggle to understand and contextualize alcohol drinking. Given alcohol's potential for toxicity and that no other commodity sold for ingestion, not even tobacco, has such wide ranging adverse physical effects (Babur 2010), there is a need to critique the currently inadequate means of describing alcohol consumption so that a more promising means can begin to take precedence.

### **Individually Biased Philosophies**

Throughout my work in the addictions field the descriptions of alcohol drinking have fallen into a broad category that I will call individually biased philosophies. There is the school of thought that alcohol drinking is acquired and maintained through the lifespan due mostly to individual needs, wants, deficits, and desires. Whether alcohol drinking is pleasurable or causes harm to the individual is about whether that individual is or is not flawed in some way and the choices they make.

We have drunk to drown feelings of fear, frustration, and depression. We have drunk to escape the guilt of passions, and then we have drunk again to make more passion possible. We have drunk for vainglory-that we might the more enjoy foolish dreams of pomp and power. (AA, 1952)

It is primarily the responsibility of the individual to choose in early adolescence whether or not to drink, and to “control” one’s drinking to acceptable levels as s/he moves through adulthood. If individuals stray outside those acceptable levels, then they are understood to have failed society in some way – they are flawed. Demant (2009) refers to this means of contextualizing alcohol drinking to the individual as bio-physical, while Rosenquist et al (2010) refer to it as biological factors; for my purposes in this work I have chosen to use the individually biased philosophy (IBP). To clarify, I do not use this term in reference to 12 Step programs, which I offer no comment or critique on here; my purpose in using the term IBP is to co-opt the feeling that comes with the twelve step movement and strongly harken to the notion that it is individuals’ passions and pursuits as well as their biology which are dominant in alcohol drinking. Many of my addictions colleagues would argue that alcohol drinking is primarily an individual pursuit and that although drinking may take place in a social circumstance, psychology and individual motivations would be at the root of the consumption. Sellman (2009) argues that when it comes to designating blame for the societal harms due to alcohol consumption, it is typically directed toward the individual consumer rather than the marketer or producer of the alcohol.

Interestingly, Bond, L. Daube, M., & Chikritzhs, T. (2009) have found that the focus on the individual and his/her alcohol drinking may not be organic in nature; instead, it is part of alcohol marketers’ purposeful attempts to lessen the inquiry into their culpability for alcohol related harms. Marquis (2001) argues that government and marketers helped pave the way for the

liberalization of alcohol selling by shifting the blame for social problems from producers and purveyors' and onto the individual drinker.

A consistent theme employed by any number of IBP analysis attempts is “choice”; that is the idea that an individual ultimately has a choice as to whether to become involved with or continue alcohol drinking. Bahr and Hoffman (2009) contend that an adolescent's choice of friends may be an intervening variable in drinking and heavy drinking. The Alcohol Alert (2006) from the US Department of Health and Human Services reads:

Young adulthood is a stage of life marked by change and exploration. People move out of their parent's homes and into dormitories or houses with peers. They go to college, begin to work full time, and form their own identities and how they fit into the world. The roles of parents weaken and the influences of peers gain greater strength. Young adults are on their own and for the first time, free to make their own decisions, including the decision to drink alcohol. (US Dept of Health and Human Services, 2006)

What is propagated is the idea that one is in control of one's own destiny as it relates to alcohol consumption. Barry and Goodson (2009) report on the many responsible drinking campaigns that help people exercise responsibility in making decisions about drinking. These campaigns again are propagating the notion that whether a person initiates alcohol use or not is related to the choices s/he makes in regards to life, friends, work, and play. Then, if later in life the alcohol use becomes problematic, programs like Alcoholic Anonymous would outline the choice as drink and die or don't drink and live. This is a limited choice, granted, but still an individual choice.

## Step One

We admit we are powerless over alcohol – that our lives have become unmanageable.  
(AA, 1952)

Let me consider my own initiation to drinking alcohol through a IBP lens. My first time consuming alcohol was in the fall of 1985 I was starting my senior year of high school and on a cold October night was asked by friends to join them in attending a football game. I was asked if I wanted to drink before the game. I said yes and split a six- pack of Alpine bottled beer with a friend. I had had any number of other opportunities to consume alcohol up until that point but had not done so. I knew of alcohol and its effects, my parents both consumed alcohol on a social basis, and there was alcohol in my home. I had witnessed friends and family engage in positive drinking episodes, laughing, dancing, and smiling, and I had witnessed friends and family experience harm from alcohol fights, hangovers, and regrets.

So why that night not before and not later, but that night in October of 1985? IBP would have it that my decision to drink alcohol that night was a confluence of personalized circumstances, that my initiation to drinking that night was about my internal desire to be accepted, to be normative, to experiment, and that my drinking that night was a result of the friends I had chosen or how I had chosen to react to my mother and father's style of parenting. IBP would try to explain my alcohol drinking that night through personal inquiry or as Machell (1998) suggests, through a lens of Freud, Jung or Sullivan. IBP would contextualize my drinking that night by looking at me the person and what led me to decide to drink.

No harm (as I remember) came that night; it was only three beers, for heaven's sake! But had harm occurred to me, IBP would have held me solely to blame and insisted that the decisions I made resulted in the manifestation of harm. Had my drinking escalated to the point of

dependence or a source of constant and persistent harm, then IBP would have me flawed in some way, and the only way to remove the harm would be to both correct the flaw and not consume alcohol. Benson (1998) reports that alcoholism is held to be a progressive illness that is a manifestation of an allergy and that the phenomenon of craving is limited to the alcoholic and never occurs in average temperate drinkers.

### **IBP: The Freshman, Sophie and Shady Pines**

In the Freshman's case IBP would most likely have us believe that his drinking on the night of his death was as a result of some flaw in his self esteem, personality, or coping mechanisms, and perhaps that had he felt better about himself or had been better able to cope with loneliness, he could have resisted the urging from his upperclassman to over consume that night. A IBP lens would have was us looking back on the situation and inquiring as to what the Freshman might have been thinking that night and what about him and his personality made his susceptible in that situation. The incident would ultimately boil down to individual blame with it being determined that the Freshman caused his own demise because of his poor decisions and not being able to handle his liquor.

The overwhelming sentiment would be that of an unfortunate accident brought on by one person's flawed decision making. However, there might be a small effort to prevent future similar circumstances by perhaps offering self esteem building courses to the freshman class, complete with a self help workbook on how to make good decisions, or perhaps a program teaching refusal skills with scripted role-plays on how to refuse a drink without losing credibility. Certainly, the brewery would sponsor such program and materials with their "drink responsibly" campaigns. Through the IBP lens, arguments would be made that we need to teach

children how to drink and that by introducing alcohol earlier in life we could prevent the bingeing that occurred that fateful night, the idea being that if we can teach individuals to handle their liquor we can avoid harmful results. There would also most likely be a campaign to point out the harms of excessive drinking and not drinking an attempt to change a person's behavior by making them fearful of a consequence.

In Sophie's case those applying a IBP would view her as a mature young woman who was developmentally ready to take on the responsibility of drinking, and they might point to her parents' appropriately modelling alcohol drinking behavior, thereby shaping her individual response to alcohol drinking episodes. They would certainly take into consideration that she was a reader who excelled at school, illustrating that her intelligence was most likely a protective factor in her decisions regarding alcohol. IBP would view Sophie's mature use of alcohol at such a young age as further evidence to the importance of teaching children how best to use alcohol. It would be argued that parents should permit glasses of wine at family gatherings and give children sips of liquor at supervised time so they develop as individuals a responsible approach to alcohol consumption, the idea being that this responsible attitude would transfer easily to any number of environments.

IBP would have it that Sophie's choices regarding alcohol were a natural extension of her teen age development and that she is moving away from her parents' control to her own locus of control. It would be argued that the alcohol drinking did not cause her obvious harm because she was not flawed and that because she was developmentally and socially healthy, alcohol drinking was simply a rite of passage, a natural part of the teenage years when risk taking and distancing from family become normative. Had Sophie's development, personality, or upbringing been flawed in some manner, her alcohol drinking would have been more likely to have resulted in

harm, the argument being that those who are not flawed and developmentally mature are better able to make healthy decisions about drinking; thus teens who are flawed by societal standards should avoid drinking or be repaired first before engaging in or returning to alcohol use.

At Shady Pines IBP would of course agree that access to alcohol is a right and that it is up to the individual to use good judgement and avoid any harms from alcohol. Given that we are dealing with seniors with much life experience, they are expected to know not only how to handle their liquor, but also to be fully cognisant of the societal expectations of alcohol drinking and the “Drink responsibly” message. The message here is that these people have been good citizens, paid taxes, and given back their whole lives; therefore, they should have the ability to access all that life has to offer. It would be discriminatory to and disrespectful to refuse a bar area to a group of people who have paid their dues. Due to their advanced maturity and elder status, it would be a IBP view that the individual residents of Shady Pines are to be treated with the respect their place in our society warrants. Any hint that they are being treated “as children” would not be tolerated. Certainly, alcohol is an adult drink designed for adults, and the ability to drink alcohol is viewed as supremely adult, so providing access to alcohol is an excellent demonstration that we have respect for our elders.

However, if someone does not have capacity to drink alcohol due to a biological reason (medication) or a mental reason (dementia), then that person is understood as flawed. It is the responsibility of the person, his/her family, and/or staff to manage these decisions. The environment should be permissive, and it should be the individual or his/her caregivers who act to protect the individual from the environment. If someone is flawed, s/he should be corrected before entering the alcohol drinking activity, and if the person cannot be corrected, it is the responsibility of the individual or his/her caregivers to make the individual decisions that keep

him/her from harm. Interestingly, we see this paradigm play out not only with seniors but with children as well. If harm occurs as a result of alcohol drinking, then the IBP lens will focus on the person; if the person is deemed to be not in capacity of his/her decision-making, then the lens immediately switches to their immediate caregiver. Fascinatingly, this is a fluctuating variable: suppose the headline is that a 17-year old boy gets drunk, falls, and breaks his ankle, and the blame almost entirely falls to him' however, if you start dropping the chronological age, at what point do you bring the parent into the mix – 16? 15? 14? 13? 12? 11? 10? Now suppose a healthy, vibrant, and drunk 75-year old senior falls and breaks his ankle; IBP would view this as an accident brought on by the individual decision to get drunk. But now let's add some descriptors - at what point do you include the caregiver in the lens if the senior lived in an assisted living complex, the senior had recently been diagnosed with early Alzheimer, or the senior was blind?

### **The Definition**

Individually biased philosophies (IBP) is a means of contextualizing the alcohol drinking experience through the lifespan which relies heavily on the explanations of the individual's motivations and desires for drinking or on his/her deficits which caused the decision to drink. IBP tends to under-consider the role community and society plays in the explanation of the drinking episode.

### **Socially Biased Philosophies**

In my work in the health promotion field, the dominant paradigm for explaining the initiation into, continuation of, and pleasure and harms from alcohol drinking are encompassed by a second broad category which I will refer to as socially biased philosophies (SBP). SBP

would see alcohol drinking as beyond the scope of individual's choice, in which a person is acted upon by a flood of societal, community, and normative factors that create alcohol drinking. In that description choice is secondary to the culture that demands that a person consume alcohol, and if harm results, then the society must make changes to increase the likelihood that individuals will either not consume alcohol, or consume it in a manner that does not create harm.

It is a cultural norm to drink at most social occasions and during recreational/leisure activities as it is often associated with fun, celebration, socialization and relaxation.

It is suggested that the culture of alcohol in Atlantic Canada stems from a work hard play hard mentality whereby Atlantic Canadians have traditionally made a living in challenging industries and use alcohol as a reward for a hard day's work. (Alcohol and Injury in Atlantic Canada, 2010)

It is the responsibility of society to set the limits on alcohol use through cultural norms, and if harm is resulting, then those norms need to be changed. It is a person's surroundings, environment, and upbringing that are dominant in creating alcohol drinking. Sulkunen (2002) refers to this as the social collective construction of the drinking practice. Rosenquist et al (2010) refer to social and cultural factors that impact a person's drinking behavior and suggest they play a critical role in the experimentation with alcohol and the development of drinking patterns over time. Vander Vorst et al (2008) suggest that the contextual setting in which alcohol use takes place is an important factor in the amount of alcohol being consumed. Marquis (2001) has found that beginning in the early 1990's sociological inquiry into drinking patterns has become the dominant discourse, rather than examining the deviancy of individuals and the question of an alcoholic or dependent personality. I have termed this method of social, cultural, and environmental analysis of alcohol drinking socially biased philosophy (SBP). I use the term socially biased philosophy to reflect the notion that one's thoughts and actions regarding alcohol

drinking are overwhelmingly shaped by one's circumstances and the things going on around one. My health promotion colleagues would argue that alcohol drinking is primarily a social pursuit and would agree with Vander Vorst et al (2008) that the amount of alcohol being consumed in society can be shaped by the social context in which the drinking is taking place, that these social contexts can be manipulated by public health policies, and that the individual is something that can be acted upon. Vinci et al (2010) report on coalitions of people in a given community coming together to support a coordinated approach towards implementing environmental management strategies that support consistent alcohol policies and enforcement of community infrastructures that eliminate irresponsible alcohol use. The notion here is that we need not engage the individual or delve into the psychology of the individual; we need only to shape the context of the drinking environment and that will shape the individual's thoughts, motivations, and goals regarding the drinking episode. Health Canada, in collaboration with the Canadian Center on Substance Abuse, (2006) report that a priority area for stakeholders interested in lessening the harms associated with alcohol use should include developing a culture of moderation rather than a culture on intoxication for both youth and adults in Canada.

Let me consider my own heavy drinking experiences through a SBP approach. During my freshman and sophomore years at university (1986 to 1989), I am confident I would have met the criteria of a harmful pattern of drinking. Although my first drink came later in my adolescence than the Canadian norm, in retrospect my patterns of drinking in early adulthood were excessive both in quantity and frequency. On more than one occasion during my early 20's I would drink to excess, act in a manner that would create a degree of regret, and would often be sick. I now consider one night in particular, probably November of 1988, when my university residence was having a party. During the course of the evening I consumed a large amount of

dark rum, a drink I had not consumed in the past. That night I experienced a blackout and am to this day unaware of my actions for a large portion of the night. It is only through the memories of friends that I was able to piece together the night's activities. However, I do remember at one point of the night going outside into the cold and laying my head against the brick wall of a nearby building, and I recall the feeling of the cold brick on my head as helping me stay conscious, a risky situation that I am fortunate to have escaped. Why did this occur? How is this event is best contextualized?

SBP would look at my university setting and determine how normalized was alcohol drinking to the upperclassman and my peers. SBP would consider how much alcohol advertising I had been exposed to and the amount of health education I had received regarding the dangers of binge drinking. SBP would hold that I could have been taught not to over drink and that if my alcohol was more expensive, it may have mitigated how much I drank or whether I drank at all. SBP would consider my maleness and how I was raised. Dodd et al (2010) indicate that in their study design where questions designed to indentify the deterrents that mitigate alcohol consumption, explore the psycho social differences between male and female drinking and determine how and where students acquire alcohol related information. The 2007 Nova Scotia Alcohol Strategy purports that by making alcohol more expensive, making it harder to get, and reducing the amount of alcohol advertising we're exposed to, we will consume alcohol differently; specifically we will drink less alcohol and create less harm. So, on that night in 1989 had my alcohol been more expensive, had the alcohol been harder to get, had we taken down all of the beer posters, would I have not almost died? It is difficult to say. However, now in my early 40's I rarely consume alcohol, and when I do it is exceedingly rare it is more than two drinks. Why? What explains this phenomenon? Alcohol is still abundantly available. Alcohol is still

relatively inexpensive. I continue to be male. I continue to be exposed to a university setting. I continue to view alcohol related advertisements. I continue to view my parents drinking behaviors. But something has changed. The US Department of Health and Human Services (2006) reports that about 21 percent of young adults meet the diagnostic criteria for alcohol dependence or abuse. Yet, as they enter their mid twenties studies show that many of those same young adults will stop or moderate their drinking. Filmore, in Babur (1991), concurs that alcohol's meaning changes as individuals go through different stages of life and as society's norms about what is appropriate or acceptable, drinking changes accordingly. CBS approaches endeavour to describe these changes by analyzing societal, cultural, and environmental effects on alcohol drinking.

### **SBP: The Freshman, Sophie and Shady Pines**

SBP would assert that whether the Freshman drank alcohol that night or not was beyond his control, that circumstances, policies, and the environment conspired to set him along a path to which there was no altering, and that simply being in an environment where alcohol was promoted, easily accessed, and free resulted in the harms that were incurred. SBP would propose that free will is compromised in situations where societal norms create a destiny of behavior and that those societal norms are not organic but truly constructed by powerful forces. The Freshman consumed alcohol that night because an environment was created where consumption was not a choice and that the power in the culture superseded the power of the individual. The Freshman would be viewed as a pawn in the larger game between the alcohol industry and the University where the profit driven motives of each created a vortex that the Freshman was simply caught up in with no chance of escape. Thus his death was not a result of an accident or his individual choices; it was in fact the result of a confluence of artificially constructed societal vectors

merging to create harm. The SBP lens would have us looking back at that night to examine the amount of alcohol advertising that the Freshman had been exposed to, the price of the alcohol, and the role “achieving masculinity” played, for SBP would be providing an understanding of the events that night that were summed up through a varied mix of corporate power, gender roles, and collective thought.

To prevent future incidents of harm resulting from alcohol drinking and to create safe drinking circumstances, SBP would encourage the University to exert its power and change the shape of the drinking episode. Those applying a SBP lens would discount the role of programs focused on changing an individual’s choices regarding alcohol and be much more in favour of wide scale actions that would purport to alter drinking norms on campus, such as increasing the price of alcohol, decreasing accessibility, and banning advertising. The SBP paradigm would support the attempt to alter the vision of masculinity and femininity on campus, perhaps by trying to address the hypersexualized nature of other on campus advertising or by increasing the funding to women’s organizations and clubs on campus. For SBP would suggest that by changing public policies regarding alcohol and by affecting how masculinity and femininity are defined, this would result in less risky drinking behaviors.

In Sophie’s circumstance SBP would point to her peer groups’ safe use of alcohol as protective, in that her first drinking episode took place within a group who did not make drunkenness normative. In any analysis the SBP lens would most certainly focus on Sophie’s strong social determinants of health. It would assert that her whiteness, her traditional family, her high income, and her good mental health would have had a major role in shaping her safe alcohol drinking practices. Those applying a SBP lens would also often argue that in the event that Sophie’s social determinants of health were to change or had she not been born into such

privilege her safe drinking practices would have been compromised. SBP would produce statistics and epidemiological studies indicating that those with challenging social determinants of health are at greater likelihood of experiencing harm from drinking, so subsequently raising someone out of lesser social determinants of health should result in safer drinking activities.

At Shady Pines SBP would consider the establishment of a bar site as the most important vector to the fall that broke the woman's hip. SBP would suggest that when the bar was created, this resulted in a change to the nature and tone of leisure at the seniors' complex. Where before the bar, leisure activities were held in common areas and the scheduled activity was dominant, once the bar was established the drinking became the leisure and whatever scheduled activity was going on became secondary. The cultural message became that to pursue leisure one must pursue drinking. Therefore, to take a lady who was already feeling lonely and isolated and put her in an environment where alcohol drinking and bar culture was the established and accepted leisure pursuit, the result was inevitable.

To prevent future alcohol related injuries those working through a SBP lens would suggest that alcohol drinking is made less appealing to the seniors, perhaps by removing most leisure pursuits from the bar, reducing the hours the bar is open, and not permitting residents to charge bar tabs to their Shady Pines accounts. The SBP hypothesis would be that if alcohol is harder to get and less of a social pursuit, people will not consume as much. SBP would most likely discount any poster or brochure campaigns to warn people of mixing their medications with alcohol, and would more likely advocate for a change in policy, whereby people on certain medications were only sold a certain amount of alcohol or soft drinks at the Shady Pines bar. When confronted with the argument that this is discriminatory or an infringement of personal freedom, SBP would counter that the good of the many outweighs the good of the one.

## The Definition

Socially biased philosophies (SBP): a means of contextualizing alcohol drinking through the lifespan which relies heavily on the descriptions and analysis of the environment, culture, and societal factors which encompass the individual. CBS tend not to consider an individual's psychological, biological, or hereditary traits unless viewed through the lens of how these traits are shaped by one's setting or community norms.

## Inadequacies

IBP and SBP are both wholly inadequate as means of contextualizing alcohol drinking through the lifespan. One of the glaring challenges is that the two approaches for analysis are rarely considered together. Researchers, writers, and educators tend to "go down the path" of one of the approaches or the other; thus the work in analysis becomes at the best two-dimensional and at the worst one-dimensional. I am not alone in suggesting this discrepancy; Demant (2009) points out that there has been a tendency for IBP and SBP to be mutually exclusive in the literature. He attempted to resolve this challenge by applying an actor network theory analysis to alcohol drinking in teenage girls, and although his attempt offered slightly more context than either IBP or SBP, it still lacked the three dimensional visioning afforded by CHAT.

IBP and SBP also appear to be dominantly used to describe how drinking might be initiated or when attempting to contextualize why and how drinking becomes harmful. There is much on this in the literature. In comparison there is less insight into drinking simply as an activity; this is because IBP and SBP are the dominant modes of discourse and for the most part are used as a means of answering questions, and we lack a sophisticated and thoughtful means of asking questions. IBP and SBP continue to attempt to resolve the same questions over and over:

Why does drinking grow into a harmful behavior for some and not others? How can we keep people from harming themselves and society with drinking? Ward et al (2010) report a dearth of research regarding the impact of the broader cultural and cultural context where alcohol initiation may occur and go on to mention that there is no current research on the influence and context of race and religious traditions on the consumption of alcohol by people. There is an overwhelming need for other questions, other thoughts, and another means analysis that will generate those complex questions and thoughts. In the next chapter I describe why CHAT is the other means that can lead to a more thoughtful examination of the full and wide ranging complexities of alcohol drinking. CHAT can generate those new questions.

### **SBP: Inadequacies**

Dodd (2010) finds that current research on college age drinking is dominated by large scale survey based (quantitative) studies and that although these studies have helped in giving some context, the unremitting rates of excessive drinking among college age students suggest that other forms might be more useful. Rosenquist et al (2010), in their study exploring quantitatively whether alcohol consumption behavior spreads from person to person in range socially networks report that their study included no measure of attitudes towards alcohol consumption and that their claims about underlying mechanisms for alcohol drinking networks effects remain speculative. Barry and Goodson (2010) claim that researchers are consistently inconsistent when identifying specific health measures that promote and/or contradict responsible alcohol consumption. Pasch et al (2010) report that owing to financial and time constraints in many intervention and etiological surveys, it may not be feasible to measure both child and parent perceptions regarding alcohol use and parenting style.

It is SBP's reliance on quantitative measurements that is at the root of its inadequacy. SBP attempts to contextualize and make meaning of alcohol drinking through statistics, surveys, focus groups, data analysis, and questionnaires. It is grounded in the belief that people will be able to verbalize the reasons why they engage in alcohol drinking behavior, and that by analyzing what they tell us we will be better able to understand how the culture and society has influenced alcohol drinking as a learned behavior. This reasoning is flawed; humans are usually not able to verbalize what is happening, because it is too complex, and there are too many agencies at work. Marquis (2001) reports that according to opinion surveys, it was only after World War II that a majority of Canadian women even admitted to consuming alcohol. Had we attempted to contextualize by means of a SBP survey female drinking prior to 1945, we would have determined that the culture prevented women from drinking. This would have been wrong, since women were consuming and were just not admitting it.

Dodd et al (2010) conducted a SBP type analysis of why underage students engage in high risk drinking and attempted to examine the motivational cues that may serve as behavioral deterrents. She and her colleagues relied heavily on focus group information as a means of gathering data for analysis. They report that she had recruited almost entirely risky drinkers for her study, with the students reporting drinking heavily weekly. During the focus groups she administered the Alcohol Use Disorder Identification test (AUDIT). A question on the AUDIT inquires as to whether the person has ever been injured as a result of drinking, and all 59 candidates (35 males, 24 females) reported, Never. Another question on the AUDIT inquires whether relative, friend, or health worker has ever expressed concern about your drinking, and again all respondents answered, Never. This is not plausible. The notion that a group of college age heavy drinkers had never injured themselves as a result of their drinking strains credibility.

Not a cut, not a scrap, not a headache or a twisted ankle? Obviously, the students were interpreting the notion of injury through a very personalized lens. The idea that friends would not ever have expressed concern about their drinking might be believable, but not a relative or healthcare worker? The answers of “Never” most likely come from the distinct possibility that relatives and healthcare workers have no idea what is going on in the students’ drinking lives. Ward et al (2010) report that a retrospective study they considered on reported alcohol use may have been influenced by recall bias. Pasch et al (2010) found when studying parental communication regarding alcohol drinking discrepant findings for parent- child communication may have been in part due to the perceptions of different reporting by parents or children. This demonstrates one of the flaws in using focus group/survey type techniques as the primary means of a SBP analysis into alcohol drinking, since participants have difficulty giving a full picture of what is going on.

Another interesting discrepancy in the Dodd et al study (2010) occurs when they were examining the role competition plays in heavy drinking among college age students. Males reported that keeping up with their peers’ drinking plays an important role in the amount they consume. Females were adamant that keeping up with their peers plays no role in the amount they drink, so researchers were probably close to concluding that competition is not part of the contextualization of female college age drinking, but then an interesting caveat was discovered, which led Dodd et al (2010) to conclude: “ upon reflection and further discussion the question for females should have been expanded with a probe relating to the competition among females to see who receives the most free drinks during the course of the evening” (p.97). This was an opportunity lost to more fully examine alcohol drinking among young adult females due a faulty

question and perhaps the biases of the interviewer, illustrating again the inadequacy of a SBP approach.

SBP approaches struggle to adequately explain alcohol drinking through lifespan because they are seeded in the idea that alcohol drinking is the result of something outside the person, that alcohol drinking occurs because the person is being acted upon by something else, an external phenomenon, and that this phenomenon is so powerful in shaping our drinking contexts that we may be unable to resist its influence. They fail to fully consider and contextualize what role a person's internal motivations and goals play in their choice to enter an alcohol drinking episode; instead, they rely almost solely on a futile analysis of the person's verbalized reasons for drinking in an effort to decipher the mystery external phenomenon. Since people are not able to fully verbalize why they engage in any activity, CBS approaches are hampered by the need to examine the influences the obvious culture and visible environment have on people's drinking and fail at considering what lies underneath, what are the deep seated objectives one has for entering or not entering the drinking episode throughout one's lifespan. There is a need to consider and contextualize not what they are telling us but what they are doing. SBP approaches view community and environment as the dominant discourse in explaining alcohol drinking to the point of ignoring the individual.

In the Freshman's case SBP would focus almost entirely on the environment within which the Freshman existed, with the idea that if we created a different environment or made changes to the environment, the alcohol drinking activity would be altered in a way that would change the outcome. However, this would fail to consider the truer underlining individual objectives and goals the Freshman had for entering into the drinking activity. SBP would rely on survey and statistical information that traditionally reports that freshmen enter the binge drinking

cycle for reasons associated with peer acceptance, competition, or boredom. These findings are drawn from people's conscious thoughts after they have completed the drinking activity, as we ask people to draw on their memories of a past event, which is often flawed, since people are not able to fully articulate (after an event) the complete reasoning for why they entered the event. How often have we heard it reported that drinking is a result of peer pressure? In my twenty year career this particular SBP has been dominant, yet how often has the nature and genesis of this peer pressure been analyzed? Rarely. The inability to offer a sophisticated analysis of the objectives the Freshman had for entering the drinking activity cycle makes SBP inadequate.

SBP also fail to provide the necessary weight to the tools used by the Freshman, instead relying too heavily on analysis of the tools used by the alcohol industry. The Freshman's use of alcohol and alcohol drinking tools to reach his desired outcome are almost always suggested by SBP as proof he has fallen for a trick propagated by the powerful industry. SBP would view the Freshman as powerless in the face of the brewery's tools of sponsorship and a plethora of advertising. However, what if the Freshman knew entirely what was being propagated and made a conscious choice to use the tools as they were intended – to gain power and prestige? We see in Sophie's case the industry using tools to propagate the notion that alcohol is an adult behavior specifically for adults, and Sophie agreed with this notion and used the tool as it was intended, to gain credibility by being perceived as adult like. SBP would contend that Sophie was manipulated into believing that the tools of alcohol drinking were adult and that these beliefs lead to her first drink. The bias that SBP demonstrate by over analyzing industry/corporate tools and underestimating the individuals' use of the tools makes it an inadequate means of examining alcohol drinking through the lifespan.

The variety of rule makers at Shady Pines all taking a piece of the proverbial “bar environment puzzle” creates an intricate alcohol drinking activity cycle. How each individual or group of individuals fit into the overall picture of alcohol drinking is complex. Each would come with a set of predetermined roles or jobs to do: nurses responsible for healthcare, social workers looking out for people’s right, the General Manager maximizing profits, the owner making profit, and the residents going about their daily lives. SBP fall short in offering a true picture of how these roles come together to create the activity of alcohol drinking at Shady Pines. SBP would offer a silo view of the situation, perhaps polling nurses on their thoughts, analyzing residents’ perceptions, or reviewing published studies regarding seniors’ falls and how to prevent them. SBP struggle though when it comes to bringing these things together in a full view of the circumstances. SBP appear to rely heavily on traditional disciplines of study such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, or epidemiology, but fail to provide the means of bringing together in a discernible way the data collected during and on behalf these approaches. Due to their inability to consider the division of labor and their reliance on data collected in isolation, SBP approaches would be an inadequate means of analyzing the alcohol drinking activity at Shady Pines.

### **IBP Inadequacies**

Individually biased philosophies for describing drinking through the lifespan are inadequate due to the reliance on the framework that drinking alcohol is at the foremost a choice. IBP contend that even though there could be outside influences, ultimately alcohol drinking is choice, albeit at times an unconscious choice, but a choice all the same. IBP attempt to contextualize alcohol drinking by describing or analyzing why the person made the choice to engage in the activity. They suggest that if a person’s development had have been different, s/he would have chosen differently, that if a person’s genetics had been different, s/he would have

chosen differently, and, in the case of harmful drinking, if a person was not flawed in some way, s/he would have chosen differently. Those flaws could range from a psychological impairment, a lack of education, or a social circumstance. Immonene et al (2010) report that previous studies have documented various risk factors for the development of harmful drinking in old age, including more time and opportunity to drink and physical illness causing pain. IBP would have it that these would be risk factors to a person choosing to drink, not causal to the drinking, more causal to the choice.

IBP are also flawed because they fail to contextualize the complexity of the tools used in the manufacturing and procurement of alcohol. Bottles, mugs, advertisements, sponsorships, pubs, bars and cans are powerful entities in society, which cannot be ignored. IBP often leave the impression that the individual is in a vacuum as s/he makes daily decisions regarding the consumption of alcohol. This is far from the case; the majority of societies are inundated with a vast array alcohol drinking related tools. To not give these tools their full due in an analysis of alcohol drinking through the lifespan is to leave out a critical contextualization. Yes, the person may be 29, have low self esteem, his dad might have drunk, and he might have pain in his knee, but to ignore the depth and breadth of alcohol advertising around him and the sense of control he has when he holds a large solid glass mug of beer, is, I would argue, at best a two-dimensional analysis, and at worst one-dimensional.

IBP approaches are inadequate for explaining alcohol drinking activity because they use only the lenses of psychological analysis, human development, and personality traits. At times it is as if IBP are seeking the flaw in the person which initiates the drinking activity, and a variety of studies seek to understand why some are able to resist the temptations to drink while others are not. IBP often do not contextualize the external forces at play like religion, friendship,

corporations, profit, power, masculinity and femininity. When IBP do attempt an analysis of these external paradigms, it is to discover how they shaped the person's drinking, not how the activity of alcohol drinking shaped them. IBP for describing drinking activity through the lifespan is flawed because they are innately individually focused and fail to fully contextualize the person as well as the world around them.

A IBP analysis of what happened to the Freshman would fail to fully contextualize the episode. We need to consider the relevance of the tools of alcohol use that assisted the Freshman in his attempt to appear masculine and gain lasting social capital, but IBP ignore this vitally important vector. The tools of masculinity were not chosen by the Freshman; the culture chose the tools and the Freshman was required to use the tools that were at his disposal in his attempt to reach his desired outcome – social capital. However, in his efforts to use the tools, the tools used him, changing the outcome from social capital to death. I explore this more in Chapter 5. The Freshman case study clearly demonstrates the need for an analysis that considers the tools and artefacts that shape the culture, not one that relies solely on discovering how the individual might be flawed or determining why certain decisions were made. IBP would provide an inadequate analysis of the Freshman drinking episode because it lacks the ability to contextualize the use of tools.

In Sophie's case IBP would not offer any insight into how the community shaped the outcome of her drinking activity. IBP would conclude that because she was not flawed she had a relatively positive outcome to her first drinking episode; however, this fails to consider the important part her community played in her shaping her objective for entering the drinking cycle and the outcome that resulted. People do not work, study, play, and drink in a vacuum; societal norms and expectations are relevant and need to be analyzed. Due to the almost sole focus on

individual and choice, IBP would be an inadequate means of describing Sophie's first drinking experience.

Upon reading the case of Shady Pines, it is obvious that the rules that governed and shaped the seniors community were paramount to the drinking cycle. The power to create and change those rules wielded by the social workers, the bartender, the residents, the families, the owner, the General Manager, and the nursing staff requires examination. IBP would not provide any means to contextualize the rules at play in the community. To gain a fuller and more comprehensive understanding of what occurred at Shady Pines, it is imperative that we look at the control at work in the community. IBP ignores an examination of power, relying almost solely on an analysis of the person's individual motives and the deficiencies within him/her that may shape those motives. The Shady Pines circumstance requires an analysis that delves into the power imbalances in the system and what determines the rules of the system. I explore these imbalances in Chapter 5.

## Conclusion

Individually biased philosophies and socially biased philosophies are the dominant means of analyzing alcohol drinking through the lifespan; yet they are not considered in unison. To decrease the harms of alcohol drinking, health promoters using a CBS lens would contend that we need to change the culture surrounding the person, while addictions counselors using a IBP would contend we need to change the person to cope with the culture surrounding him/her. To resist the initiation to alcohol drinking, health promoters using a CBS lens would contend that we need to raise the price of alcohol, decrease alcohol advertising, and make alcohol harder to get. To resist the initiation to alcohol drinking addictions counselors using a IBP would contend that

we need to make the person strong enough to say no, improve his/her self esteem, and educate him/her regarding the harms and benefits of alcohol drinking so s/he can make the right choices. This is innately flawed because each paradigm does not consider the other. A truer analysis of drinking through the lifespan would not be limited to one set of beliefs and assumptions; instead, it would take both CBS and IBP into consideration along with a multitude of other and perhaps more complex considerations.

Neither approach permits a robust description of the complexities of alcohol drinking through the lifespan. IBP are inadequate because they rely on the notion that alcohol drinking is at its root a choice, because they fail to take account for the power of alcohol drinking tools, and because of their focus on discovering the flaw in the individual, which would account for the alcohol drinking. The attempts of SBP to describe alcohol drinking by the use of data and materials drawn from people's perceptions is flawed due to the challenges for people to be truthful and sophisticated in their responses, Humans are not able to verbally contextualize alcohol drinking, and the activity of alcohol drinking is too innate, too multifaceted, too three-dimensional to be fully examined through human responses to questions. SBP are inadequate due to their overwhelming focus on things external to the individual, where the individual is viewed primary as a vessel that is being acted upon by outside forces beyond its control, and to change the person's activity (alcohol drinking) we need merely to change those outside forces. This method discounts a person's goals, desires, and objectives for entering alcohol drinking activity.

There have been attempts to analyze alcohol drinking outside of IBP and SBP. Demant (2010) uses actor network theory to describe an adolescent's girl's first foray into alcohol drinking. However, these attempts are few and far between. There is an overwhelming need for a new approach to contextualize alcohol drinking activity, an approach that would permit a more

full examination of alcohol drinking through the lifespan and that takes wholly into account tools, objectives, community, culture, rules and power. It must also be an approach that raises new and more complicated questions regarding how alcohol drinking is acquired, how it is maintained, and how it shapes life, society and culture, not how life society and culture shape it, and it must describe and generate questions regarding “the how” we drink rather than keeping on trying to answer “the why” we drink. I contend that CHAT is what is needed now.

## Chapter 5: Applying CHAT to Alcohol Drinking Across the Lifespan

“To Alcohol! The cause of, and solution to, all of life’s problems.”

Homer Simpson

Mr. Simpson’s pronouncement illustrates nicely the quandary we find ourselves in when we begin to consider the nature, role, and place of alcohol drinking or, for that matter, substance use in our society. It is an exceedingly complex activity that hundreds of millions of humans have engaged in. Due to the overwhelming prevalence of alcohol drinking activity, its potential to both harm and/or benefit the human condition and its ability to shape family, community, schooling, work life, commerce, and a host of other human conditions, it demands a greater understanding; however, we have not yet found the means to appropriately describe the alcohol drinking as an experience. Alcohol drinking crosses the disciplines of psychology, sociology, biology, history, and anthropology, none of which have offered a detailed and meaningful account of alcohol drinking as an activity.

I contend that these disciplines have attempted to describe and analyze how alcohol drinking occurs rather than looking at the question of why alcohol drinking occurs. Nardi (2006) contends that CHAT is a powerful and clarifying descriptive tool and that, unlike anthropology, which is preoccupied with everyday activity, CHAT is concerned with the development and function of individual consciousness. Baowoy et al (2008) concur, stating that CHAT provides the semiotic resources to identify essential elements of human activity and to characterize its process of development. Betts (2006) suggests that CHAT is a useful framework for analyzing a complex human endeavour. Martin (2008) reports that CHAT can appreciate the development of the

trajectory of the activity system and can respond to disturbances and contradictions produced within the activity. Finally, Fielder et al (2009) concur that CHAT is a sociocultural framework appropriate for complex and collaborative human activity. This chapter offers an initial application of CHAT to drinking across the lifespan and starts to demonstrate the power of using CHAT to examine alcohol drinking activity. This chapter offers a first person CHAT analysis of three distinct drinking episodes: the Freshman, Sophie, and Shady Pines.

### **Booze and CHAT**

People face not only the challenge of acquiring established culture; they also face situations in which they must formulate desirable culture. In order to understand such transformations going on in human activity systems, we need a methodology for studying expansive cycles. Such methodology does not easily fit into the boundaries of psychology or sociology or any other particular discipline. (Engestrom, 1999, p.35)

I will now offer a first person CHAT analysis of three distinct alcohol drinking episodes. I use the term “first person” because the analysis arises from my lived experience, my reading, and my learned knowledge. As Virkkunen and Kuutti (2000) in Murphy and Rodriguis-Manzanares (2009) note, each individual taking part in a common activity has a slightly different view and interpretation of the object and the purpose of the activity depending on the individual’s position in the division of labor and his or her history in activity, training, and experience – I encompass this notion with the term “first person”. These three analyses should be considered a starting point in using CHAT in contextualizing alcohol drinking through the lifespan; they are neither complete nor sophisticated. Martin (2008) suggests it is more accurate to think of a large complex organization like a secondary school not just as one activity system, but as a network of activity systems. I concur and suggest that alcohol drinking through the lifespan is not one

activity system, but an expansive network of activity systems; however, for my purposes in this thesis I offer more elementary analyses of alcohol drinking. The intent of these analyses is to serve as literal examples demonstrating the potential of CHAT as a method and means to bring to light considerations to alcohol drinking that have yet to be discovered. Seaman (2008) argues that we need to seek new data sources and analytic strategies that facilitate a more context rich analysis.

Using the popular template employed by researchers and writers in the field of CHAT analysis (see Chapter 2), each episode description includes a narrative as well as graphic perception of subject, subject, community, rules, division of labor, and tools.

### **The Freshman Analysis**

Giesbrecht et al (2011) state that alcohol is a substantial contributing cause of acute and chronic disease, trauma, and social problems in Canada. This appeared to be the case in September of 1986 when a freshman student fell from a residence window after a night of heavy drinking and was killed.

#### **Subject**

Schulenberg and Maggs (2002) report that the transition to college in the first year involves both gains and losses, such as new friendships, but separation from family and old friends; more academic choices, but new academic demands; and increased independence. It is during these transitions that alcohol use and especially heavy use tend to escalate. The subject was an 18-year old male Freshman experiencing nervousness, exhilaration, trepidation, and the freedom of being away from home for the first time.

The previous year, his grade 12 year of high school, the Freshman was a standout hockey player on his school team. Hockey and athletic prowess had served him well, gaining him much social capital and for years had been a transitional force in his life. He had played for each of his school teams from elementary to middle school to high school. Hockey brought with it a network of friends and inherent expectations as the Freshman moved through school. He would not be playing hockey at his University due to his skill level. Though a top flight player at seventeen for his high school, the university team was comprised of mostly twenty-two year olds returning from playing major junior hockey, so for all intents and purposes the Freshman's competitive hockey career was over.

The Freshman was considered popular in his home community and at his old school. He had many friends and was often the centre of their actions, and often events and plans to meet were organized around his schedule as it was deemed important by his peer group that he be in attendance. However, he would be attending university without his social group, as he had chosen his school with the guidance of his parents, and because there was an expectation that he enter a well paid profession, a priority was placed on school choice – particularly a school that was “away” held a certain mystique and social capital with his parents and their network. The majority of his friends would be attending a local community college or entering directly into the workforce.

The Freshman had drunk alcohol prior to arriving to campus; however, it was only on a couple of occasions during his high school years and he had not yet experienced intoxication. He had observed his parents' drinking alcohol and had recollections reaching back into his childhood of his father being drunk and acting funny, but he had not viewed his parents drunk in recent memory. In his world intoxication held no capital. The primary consequence of over

drinking in his view was impaired driving, which could result in death for the driver or death for an innocent. Drinking and driving was considered by him to be a prime example of risky and harmful drinking.

### Object

The Freshman's object for entering into the drinking episode that night centered on exerting and demonstrating his masculinity through the type and amount of alcohol he consumed, because by doing so he would gain the long term acceptance and admiration of his new found peer group. He had already maximized the stories and trappings of his past athletic performances and was now in need of another story to assure extended approval from those he believed to be powerful in the community. In order to create a story with legacy, one that would live in his history much like his hockey exploits, he had to act upon the objective in a manner that would be historical; thus he had to drink like he had never drunk before. By consuming alcohol in a way that was unique to him and admired by his peers, he would create a useful history, a story that he could recall throughout his university days whenever there was a need to gain social capital or exert his maleness. Having a great "drinking" story would be helpful in transition to new peer groups, as well as assisting whenever the occasion may have arisen that he might be considered less than masculine.

It is important to note that the objective changed during the week because, although just drinking had been useful earlier in the week, just entering into the drinking activity no longer sufficed. There were demands to now be met regarding the level and nature of alcohol consumption; he had to create a different history. He had to act upon the alcohol differently for had he in this moment refrained from consumption, curtailed his consumption, or "just drank",

he would have not only been ostracized from the dominant group, he would have also had to withstand a plethora of ridicule.

### **The Community**

The community in this case was an all male dormitory “sponsored” by a well known brewery. The dormitory was historical in nature, having originated in the 1960’s. There were many campus stories about what had transpired at this dormitory over the years. It had a reputation of being a party place, with many historical accounts revolved around the type and nature of the parties that had been held there. Freshmen were expected to live up to this history and be aware of doing anything that might besmirch the party reputation.

This dormitory is on the campus of a large university. The university prides itself in giving students a full undergraduate experience. In its recruitment brochures and promotional materials the university proudly exalts their commitment to academics, athletics, and providing students the opportunity to enjoy “student life.” Since enrolment has been declining and the university is concerned with appearing stodgy, it is always trying to balance traditional ways and views with the demands of recruiting students in the 20th century. The university is located in a Maritime city whose economy is built primarily on the civil service and the military, and to a lesser degree manufacturing and the trades. The city is home to the largest brewery in eastern Canada.

In each of the three aspects of the community, alcohol drinking activity is common place and well accepted. Alcohol is readily available, heavily promoted, and inexpensive. Alcohol is a social capital, and you would be considered unusual and looked at with, at the worst, suspicion or, at the least, curiosity if you were to abstain from drinking alcohol.

## Rules

The rules of the dormitory would have included drinking as much dark high content alcohol as you could, using foul and misogynistic language that would be perceived at that point as prototypical male, and following the instructions of the upperclassmen who appeared to be at the high end of the social order. Becoming ill, refusing a drink, refusing a direction from an upperclassman, or appearing feminine in any way (hair style, clothing, and speech) is not permitted and is met with the threat of being shunned by the community. Not being a full participant in continuing the festive reputation of the dormitory would not be permitted, and doing anything that took away from said reputation would be considered almost sacrilege.

The rules of the dormitory would not be overt, in that they would not be explained to incoming freshmen; instead, the rules would be passed on to the next generation through the manner in which the upperclassmen carried themselves and acted in certain situations. There would be a natural selection process where a freshman who struggles to understand the rules or who disagreed with the rules and tried to exert different values or different views would be systematically and subtly ridiculed by the senior students in the dormitory. This would serve as a “weeding out” process, and freshmen who found it difficult to cope with the culture would choose another place to live for their remaining university years or drop out of university entirely.

Financial rules are dominant for the university; paying tuition and fees on time is paramount. Individual dormitories are for the most part responsible for enforcing the social rules on campus, and individual faculties are for the most part responsible for enforcing the academic rules and regulations. The city where the university is located is built upon the rules that people who work hard are permitted to play hard provided they take responsibility for their actions.

## Division of Labor

As a freshman, he would have experienced a tremendous power imbalance. The threat of being an outcast to the popular culture would have been ever present. Although he may have come from a small high school where he was respected, well liked, and popular, that would have all been lost. The stories from his past would not hold their capital in this new environment, and he would be starting over. His first few weeks on campus had the potential to produce valuable results and a worthy reputation that would stay with him throughout his academic career. The Freshman's "job" in this case was to create enough acceptable stories to permit him to remain in the dominant group as dictated by the culture he was within. He was creating a history, for in actuality it was not the real time events that brought with them the majority of the social capital, but the stories that would result from the real time events. It would not be the night of drinking that would create legacy; the legacy would come from repeating the stories that came from the night of drinking. The Freshman's limited power would lie in his ability to create new stories

The upperclassmen saw their "job" as providing the opportunity for the Freshman to prove his worth and either sink or swim, in essence to build a revised history. The upperclassmen though held all of the power because the story that the Freshman was trying to create had to take place on their terms, in their environment, and by their rules. These terms, rules, and the environment had been replicated and honed over the years with the intent of building and protecting a party reputation; thus the job given to the Freshman by the upperclassman was very specific - create a story for yourself by consuming as much alcohol as you can in a manner prescribed by us.

## Tools

The predominant tool employed by the Freshman to achieve his desired objective was alcohol in the form of beer in bottles and distilled spirits in a plastic glass. These tools had been chosen by the community as appropriate; using any other tools to create your story was not acceptable. The community would have acquired the tools from a corporate entity that uses the tools of alcohol to make profit. The corporate entity would have the power to make certain alcohol tools more attractive than others, and in the community being viewed as a master of the corporate alcohol tools was highly desirable.

Where in the beginning of the week the Freshman had used the tools of hockey and athletics to create the narrative that gained him some social capital, as the week progressed those tools were no longer at his disposal, in that they no longer carried weight with the community. The Freshman had not used alcohol extensively until that orientation week and thus was very much an apprentice when it came to wielding alcohol as a tool.

## Outcome

In CHAT the outcome results from the influences of the activity cycle as the subject acts upon or towards the desired object, while the tools, the community, the rules, and the division of labor manipulate and are manipulated by the subject. In this case we see the outcome for the Freshman was death. This was certainly not his intent for entering the alcohol drinking activity; yet the variety of factors interplaying with each other caused this result. It is important to keep in mind that the object for entering the activity is not the outcome, where the object might be the root motivation of an individual and though that may presuppose an outcome, the object itself is not

the outcome. In a group of individuals (subjects), the outcome will be the result of the activity cycle, not their agreed upon goal for entering the activity. The outcome cannot be presumed, as it is always a result of the activity. The Freshman entered the drinking activity with the object of using the masculine tools provided to him by the culture to achieve social capital. He did not enter with the intent to die. The upperclassmen as a group entered the drinking cycle with the object of continuing and building upon a legacy and tradition of the “party dorm”. Although this was the object they were acting on, the outcome of them acting was the death a Freshman. We see here the power of CHAT in explaining that subjects enter into the activity cycle with what they believe is an outcome in mind, but truly what they have in mind is an object, and the outcome will be the result of the powers at play within the activity cell. As the subject acts upon the object and in turn is acted upon by the activity cell, an outcome will result, most likely a result that the subject did not intend and, in this case, a result that had greater implication and ramifications than initially thought possible by either the Freshman or the upperclassmen.

A death is a startling outcome; however, it is important to consider that this activity drinking cycle created outcomes for those far removed from the central activity of drinking in the dorm that night. The Freshman’s parents were in another city when this happened; yet the outcome for them is the loss of a son and a lifetime of grief. This could affect their productivity as workers and their relationships with other family members; they may question their religious beliefs or it may reinforce religious beliefs. Chances are they will not be the same. The outcome of the alcohol drinking activity that night is not insular, and its ripples are far reaching. The alcohol drinking that night created outcomes for the Freshman, his parents, the upperclassmen, the University, the town, the Freshman’s old school, and his friends. Interestingly, the power of CHAT permits us not only to examine the outcomes created for each of these subjects, but also

the role each of these subjects played in the activity drinking cycle. IBP would have us examine how the Freshman was flawed and what we could have done to correct his flaw, and that the outcome that night was an accident as a result of poor decision-making. SBP would have us examining solely the role of the university and the policies at play that led to the outcome; it would ignore the tools and rules in the community. Both IBP and SBP would offer an elementary and flawed look at what happened that night; only CHAT would offer a complete contextualization.

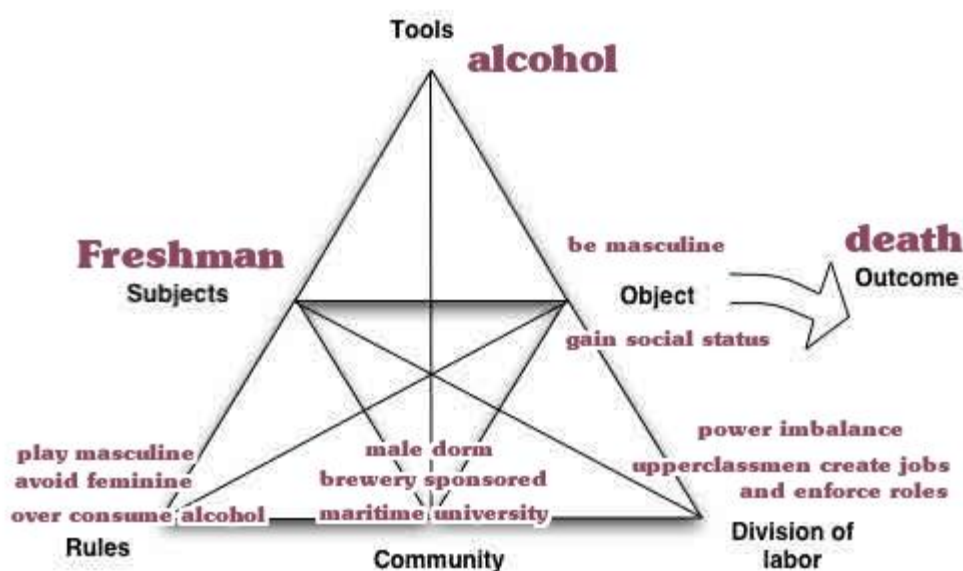


Figure #14. Freshman Alcohol Drinking Cell

## Discussion

This analysis clearly demonstrates that in this community with the rules that were at play, the only tool available to achieve the object was alcohol. Thus, the Freshman being away from his home community where different rules would have applied and where his hockey tools would

have still held value chose the only activity that was available to him; he consumed alcohol in a certain manner and that was the activity that ultimately caused him grave harm. The community rules were implicit and dictated that alcohol had to be acted upon in a certain manner. However, the elders in the community only passed on the rules and did not mentor appropriately how to manipulate the tools. His efforts to act upon the alcohol in a manner that would have gained him prestige and legacy could not surmount the alcohol acting upon him and putting him in a position of vulnerability.

We could suppose that if alcohol as a tool had not been available, he may have chosen another means of achieving a masculine skewed social status; however, even if he had chosen another tool, the outcome might have not changed. Given that the division of labor predicated that he follow the guidelines imposed by the upperclassmen, one cannot safely assume the upperclassmen in a male dominated dorm sponsored by a brewery would have given direction any less hazardous.

It is important to keep in mind that CHAT is not intended to be a predictive tool; rather it is meant to be an explanatory tool. Nardi (2006) reminds us that CHAT is a powerful and clarifying descriptive tool rather than a strongly predictive one. However, it may be useful (and interesting) to offer some first person hypotheses, and having applied a CHAT cell to an activity episode, this notion is perhaps worthy of future investigation.

### **Sophie's 1<sup>st</sup> Drink Analysis**

Ward, Snow and Aroni (2010) contend that while a number of studies have examined predictors of pre-adolescent alcohol use, there has been a dearth of discussion regarding the definition and context for alcohol initiation and the difference in risk factors for initiation to

alcohol and the misuse later in life. I continue here to contend that CHAT could offer the framework for those discussions to take place, offering a depth of analysis that cannot be reached by purely individually biased philosophies or socially biased philosophies. CHAT can also provide a common language for the discussions to take place around, and this language could span any number of academic disciplines.

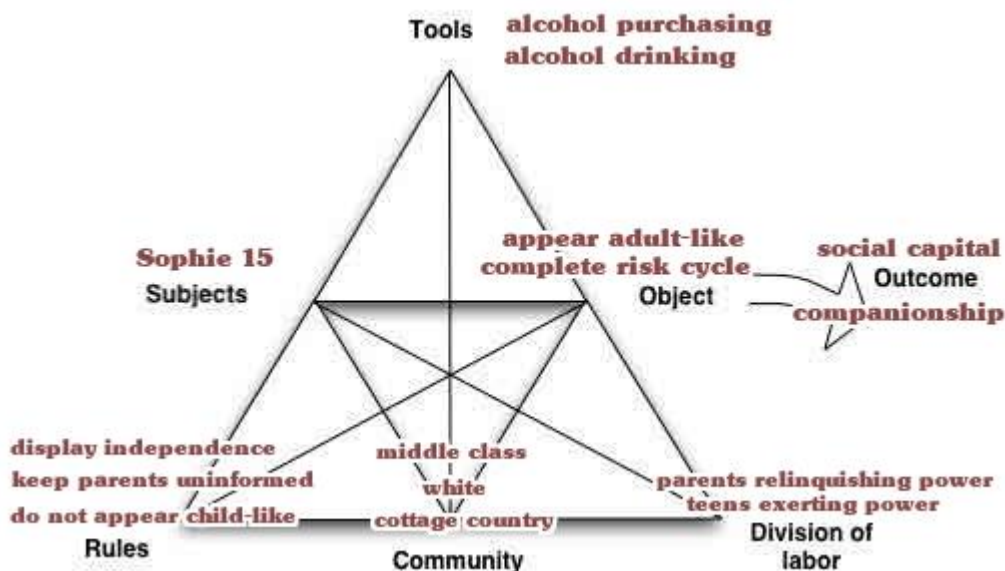


Figure #15. Alcohol Initiation Cell

## Subject

Sophie is an academically gifted albeit shy and awkward 14-year old female who is spending the summer time between grade 8 and 9 at a cottage in a beach community in her home province. She is tall for her age (5'9") and has been the subject of some ridicule from her peers due to her height. However, lately she has been mistaken as older by certain adults in her community. Sophie has never consumed alcohol. She is aware of what alcohol is and has viewed

her parents drinking on a number of occasions. To her recollection she has never experienced her parents intoxicated.

Sophie does not know the other teens at the beach. She and her family are there for the first time. She has had difficulty fitting in and has spent the first couple of weeks alone at her cottage. Her parents have encouraged her to mingle with the others kids, but to his point she has chosen not to.

Due to her height and her “older looks”, the teens approach Sophie at the canteen one afternoon and ask her if she will try and buy them beer and coolers at the local liquor store. Anxious to make friends Sophie agrees, is successful buying the alcohol, and that night at a campfire on the beach consumes two raspberry coolers, her first drinks of alcohol. Having limited her intake of alcohol, Sophie was able to be friendly and funny without drunkenness – something that was considered adult by her peer group. She is now considered cool by her peers and is a highly sought after companion for the rest of the summer.

### **Object**

Sophie’s object to entering the drinking episode that night on the beach was to complete the cycle of adolescent risk taking she had begun earlier in the day when she agreed to try and purchase the alcohol. The object she was working towards was being perceived as “adult like”. By communicating with her peers, she put in motion a series of activities – agreeing to the purchase, making the purchase, consuming the alcohol -- and by completing this cycle she achieved her object and had a desired outcome. Had at any time the cycle not been completed, Sophie would have had another outcome, not necessarily a harmful outcome, just different.

## Rules

The dominant rules at play here are those governing the purchase of alcohol by a minor. These community rules would include having to be nineteen years of age and being able to produce government issued identification prior to purchase. There are no stiff penalties for breaking the rules and trying to purchase alcohol under the age of nineteen; however, the shame and humiliation of being turned down and having to face your peer group having failed in your mission can certainly be considered a type of penalty. These rules would be communicated to young people through government campaigns and police messages; however, storytelling from parents and elders in the community would be the most common means for passing on the rules to the younger generation.

Being able to break the community rules for purchasing alcohol under age would come with much social capital. We see here that not following the rules and manipulating the rules comes with greater pay off than following the rules. Where in the Freshman's case following the drinking rules of the community led to greater and greater social capital, in Sophie's case not following the rules of the community brought her the social capital she desired as an object. Although she could most likely not just express to her peer group that she disagreed with rules and tell a story about how she broke the rule in the past, this would not have sufficed. She did have to prove that she had the ability to circumvent the rules by assuming an adult role and making an alcohol purchase.

Other rules would include keeping parents minimally informed as to one's whereabouts and activities, making sure one's appearance and activities were that of an adult not a child, and displaying independence and a distancing from parents. We see two distinct communities, an

adult community and an adolescent community, both with at times two distinct set of rules; yet we also see the lines between the rules being blurred. Where we see the adolescents enforcing the rules in their community that they perceive as adult like and dressing and acting in a manner they believe to be adult, we see the adults at times enforcing rules that regard their offspring as children (“Tell me where you’re going”), but also at times permitting them the latitude of adults (“You can miss curfew and sip wine with us at dinner”). It is the adults who are changing the rules in this summer cottage community as a means of nurturing the maturation process.

In this community we see rules that govern adolescent behavior and rules that govern adult behavior. In an effort to perhaps teach and mentor adolescents in the adult way, we see the adults of the community choosing times to bend the adolescent adult rule divide so that the younger generation can be included in certain customs and rituals. By providing Sophie the opportunity to drink wine with them at dinner, her parents are allowing her to experiment with adults roles, and it is then perhaps predictable that Sophie would manifest this experiment outside of her parents’ control. Making an purchase of alcohol (albeit underage) would seem to be a natural extension of her trying on an adult role, and the kudos from peers that would come along with a successful completion of the alcohol purchasing activity creates an outcome that would motivate her to enter into that activity cycle time and time again.

### **Community**

The community is a summer cottage area used by non-resident white middle class families. The community is transient in that some new families arrive each summer while others choose not to return. The communities’ activities would have centered on the perception of leisure pursuits, relaxation, and making a different environment from the home “day to day”

circumstances they were trying to escape. Joining the community would have been a decision exercised by the adults of the community. Sophie was asked by her parents if she wanted to go, and even though she expressed that she did not want to, she was not in a position to refuse. She was taken there. The adolescents in the community may have been consulted as to whether or not they wanted to join the community; however, because the material resources needed to join the community (fees, travel, rentals etc.) are solely the domain for the adults, it would have been ultimately their decision to join the community for the summer or not.

CHAT permits us a unique examination of the community, and so we are better able to understand that the adolescents of the community were for all intents and purposes not in control of whether they joined or un-joined the community. This lack of power created a desire to create a community within a community, and we see the adolescent community within the summer cottage community surrounded by the adult community. The status of the adult community is highly sought after by the adolescent community, because it is viewed as a powerful community. Although not wanting to be part of the actual adult community, the adolescents try and replicate the adult community to the best of their ability by attempting to act adult like within their adolescent community. We see Sophie being sure to hold the wine like her mother and sip her drink as her mother does. CHAT offers a more complete examination of the community within community phenomenon.

### **Division of Labor**

In CHAT, division of labor refers to the roles that each of the community members assumes and the jobs that each of the roles is responsible for. How labor or duty is divided among the community is at its core truly how power is distributed. It is important to consider that

we do not refer to job in the corporate sense, as paid worker or someone having a duty to perform; here I refer to job as role expectation. In my CHAT analysis I primarily see examining role expectation as the analysis of power within the community and thereby the activity.

In the cottage community, adults (parents) are perceived as the most powerful, as they determine the roles and distribute the power to the other members of the community (the adolescents). Parents attempt to release a degree of power to their children by doing things such as relaxing curfews and offering less supervision. By changing the rules that govern the adolescents, they are changing the roles of both adult and adolescents, because adolescents who assume a more adult role and follow the new laxer guidelines are met with kudos and greater latitude for rule breaking. This, combined with the context and role of school not restraining them, a teens feel more independent and are more likely to experiment with adult behaviors. These adult behaviors are crucial to social status. The adults arrive with the job of governing the adolescents, but over the course of the summer attempt to give the job of governance to the adolescents themselves. It is the adolescents who recognize this power shift and take advantage of it that to gain the most social capital from both the adults of the community and their peers.

Sophie's object of being perceived as an adult probably resulted from the change she felt in the division of labor in the community. Where at home her "job" role of student and friend gained her sufficient social capital, we see in this case with a new community comes a new role. She was being approached to fulfill one of the most demanding yet important roles. She was being asked to acquire the tool that the adolescents believed would gain them more power within the community. In her new job as the purchaser of alcohol, Sophie had reached the pinnacle of the adolescent community. Her more mature looks anointed her the Queen and her subjects wanted booze. If she was to refuse or fail, then she would be deposed in favour of the person

who could be successful and provide the subjects what they required. Yet, she was successful and became a beloved ruler.

However, in the battle to get the alcohol, the Queen in waiting faced one opponent, the clerk at the store. As the anointed gate keeper, the clerk failed in the important job role of keeping adolescents from purchasing alcohol. Consider though that if much harm had come to the children upon drinking alcohol, such as if one of them had got drunk and drowned, what would be the reaction of the community to the gatekeeper, the clerk who was defeated in the battle? If history is any indication, there would be no reaction. The harms of alcohol are well known and well documented, and we never see responsibility for those harms falling to the retail clerk who sold the alcohol. Interestingly, if Sophie had bought drinks underage at a bar and much harm had come to her, there might very well be a reaction to the bartender who sold the drinks, as s/he should have tried harder to keep alcohol out of the hands of the children. We see the sellers of alcohol assuming different roles in the community, some being held accountable for the power they wield and some being ignored.

### **Tools**

Tools regarding the acquisition and use of alcohol are dominant in this case. Alcohol is considered an adult tool by the community, and children and youth in the community can gain social credit by challenging the rule that alcohol is for adults. They do this by involving themselves in manipulating the tools of alcohol acquisition and use. Through this manipulation they demonstrate to their peer group adult-like behaviors. By acting on alcohol as an adult would, I am therefore adult in the eyes of my friends.

In Sophie's case her adept use of the tools of alcohol purchasing and alcohol use gained her the respect and admiration of her new group of peers, moving them from acquaintances to friends. She became a sought after companion, not only due to her being able to use the tool, but also because she was able to prevent the tool from manipulating her into undesired outcomes.

The beach is an important tool in the adolescent community. It permits the young people a place outside of the dominant adult culture where they are able to practice and expand their adult role. In CHAT, tools can be acted upon by the subject and in turn act upon the subject. This tool manipulation is an important part of creating the outcome. The beach gives Sophie a place where she can try on her adult role away from actual adults. The beach has no walls or barriers, and the group has to be quiet and unassuming at the beach in order to not draw the attention of adults who may come to investigate any abnormalities. The beach provides a much different tool to the drinking activity than a loud party or a secluded forest location in which the adolescents may act in a much less mature way. CHAT allows us to contextualize the tools in a manner that provides deep meaning. The beach acts upon Sophie's drinking activity in a protective manner, because it is a tool that when acted upon demands a certain level of decorum.

### **Outcome**

Completing the risk taking cycle by having agreed to purchase the alcohol, through purchasing the alcohol and consuming it in a manner that was considered adult, Sophie gained in her mind what was a desirable outcome: social capital and companionship. Sophie avoided any profound negative consequence to her first drinking activity because, unlike the Freshman, her communities did not dictate that she consume the alcohol in a certain manner to achieve social status; that she purchased alcohol and consumed some was sufficient in having her be perceived

as adult like. The division of labor (power) was more balanced in Sophie's peer group; although being new to the group was initially a detriment, she was able to use her physical appearance of being older as a means of levelling the playing field. Unlike the Freshman's history (hockey) whose usefulness fatigued, Sophie's mature looks were deemed useful through the drinking activity and resonated throughout.

### **Discussion**

Science-based individually focused analysis can be effective for achieving certain investigations. But alcohol related behavior does not occur in isolation. Rather, it is shaped by our physical and social setting (The Marin Institute 2005). This analysis of Sophie's first drink demonstrates that the activity around alcohol served as a social setting lubricant that enabled her to appear adult in the view of her peers; this gained her the critical communal capital she needed for a positive outcome. The way in which she manipulated alcohol allowed her to mediate the division of labor in the peer group, thereby providing her power in her community.

Here again we see the CHAT's ability to contextualize alcohol as a tool being of utmost important. Sophie's first drink did not occur in isolation and not as a result of some childhood trauma or peer pressure. We also see that her early drinking activity did not result in tremendous harm over her early lifespan. In contextualizing her early drinking, we require a framework that encompasses the many variants at work on her activity, because Sophie is a human, inside of a community, and that community is inside many more communities, like putting a mirror to a mirror. There are tools in each of those communities, tools that naturally exist, as well as tools that are powerfully and artificially produced. The activity in each of those communities and how the tools manipulate and are manipulated in those circumstances would be a result of power,

labor, rules, and objectives, all of which result in an outcome. We need not fixate on the outcome; we need thoughtful analysis of the activity.

Sophie entered into the drinking activity working on and towards the object of being perceived as adult like. The strength of CHAT is that we are able to contextualize her entering the drinking cycle outside of the age old peer pressure argument. It was the demands of the individual adolescents that began the cycle of activity, as well as the demands of both the adolescent community and the adult community, all of whom existed within the summer cottage community. The adult community was encouraging the adolescents to assume more and more adult roles, and although they looked forward to trying on these new roles, they wanted to do it on their terms. Alcohol drinking with parents would no longer suffice, but alcohol drinking as adults would, and in the adolescent community it became the object. Here we see CHAT offering a much more detailed analysis than IBP or SBP ever could; if we to try and offer Sophie a questionnaire (classic SBP) about why she went and bought the booze, she would most likely answer because she was bored or though it would be fun. She would not be sophisticated enough to dig deep and offer thoughts regarding the balance she was trying to strike between the adult community and the adolescent community. This is not a fault of Sophie and is not a comment on Sophie's intelligence, since none of us would necessarily be sophisticated enough in our conscious thought to draw those conclusions.

IBP would content that Sophie's first drinking activity cycle ended "successfully"; that is, it was without harm because she was not flawed and her maturity, her upbringing, and intelligence afforded her good decision-making skills. It is through a thoughtful CHAT analysis that we understand that Sophie's first drinking activity resulted in an outcome that did not bring harm, because the tools she chose to act upon (the alcohol) in her effort to be perceived as adult-

like were mitigated by more powerful tools (particularly the beach) demanding that she display a level control and responsibility that was protective. In the Freshman's case we see that the tools he chose to act upon (alcohol) to achieve masculinity were not mitigated by the more powerful tools employed by the upperclassmen. CHAT allows us to actually see that the tools and rules put forth by the upperclassmen overwhelmed the Freshman's tools and the object he was acting on, creating a lethal outcome. It is through CHAT that we are able come to terms with why Sophie's case turned out in the manner it did, and the Freshman's case turned out in the manner it did. We are not forced to rely on statistical data, human developmental hypotheses, or ideas of God's will. We are able to thoughtfully apply a standardized view to each activity and draw out meaningful conclusions for debate.

## **Shady Pines Analysis**

### **Subject**

According to CHAT, the subject refers to the individual or group of individuals who are acting upon a common object. In this analysis I refer to the seniors who reside at Shady Pines as subject, and they are acting upon a common object – a bar. Shady Pines is a seniors' housing complex. It has over 300 units with people 65 and over comprising 85% of its occupancy. Recently, a bar has opened in the complex.

The subject in this case is made up of a number of individuals who have some commonalities: they would be seniors (65+), they would be on fixed incomes, and they would have moved from their homes to now reside at Shady Pines. The individuals would represent all the levels of care provided by Shady Pines, from those living independently in the condo-like dwellings, to those housed in the assisted living apartments, and some who reside in the medical

wing of the structure. Many of the individuals who make up the subject would have families in the vicinity, but the degree to which those families involve themselves with the individual senior or Shady Pines would vary widely. The seniors at Shady Pines pay to be there; some pay from their own resources, some pay a portion of the fees while family picks up the rest, some pay a portion with the state making up the rest, and some are entirely state funded. The majority of seniors consider Shady Pines their home.

The power of CHAT is that the choice of subject by the researcher or writer is never wrong and always of value. In this case I could have chosen as a subject the nursing staff whose duty it was to deliver medical care to the seniors, or the social work staff who saw their duty as protector of the seniors' rights, or the owner and general manager whose duty it was to keep residency rates high and make profit, or the bar staff, the cleaning staff, or the administrative staff, or any combination of these, which would make for a valued and useful CHAT analysis. This is why CHAT is expansive and not static; it a dynamic means of interpretation with few fetters. IBP may look at each of these groups as well, but would do so through the lens of finding the mistakes that were made that lead to the outcome. In CHAT there is no lens *per se*; it just simply is as it is, pure analysis with little bias.

### **Object**

The bar area came about after a group of social workers who work on behalf of some of the seniors and a group of seniors themselves lobbied the owners and managers of the facility. The argument for the bar in large part was based around a belief that some seniors were feeling socially isolated and that the seniors had a right to access affordable and alcohol on site served in a social atmosphere. There was little to no opposition to the bar. The nursing staff offered no

comment and appeared ambivalent to the bar's arrival on site. The owners of Shady Pines liked the idea because they believed it may be a revenue stream, as well as helping in recruiting new seniors to the complex to fill vacancies. They wanted to appear as sensitive to the seniors' needs, and partly because the seniors were able with the help of the social workers to present a bar as a need, they acquiesced and built a bar.

The objectives of having a bar are reported to be to provide residents a place to gather, have leisure, and relax. The bar is located on the main floor of the complex next to the dining room and is open from 6pm to 11pm each night. It has tables and chairs, a dance floor, a shuffle board game, and television sets. Drinks can be purchased for \$3.50, beer is \$4.00. Seniors are able to bill the bar to their Shady Pines accounts.

When the bar first opened friends, family, and outsiders thought it novel or "cute", in that the seniors were trying to capture their youth. They saw little wrong with the venture and would often stop and watch the seniors making use of the bar. On a 1940s and 50s theme dance night, there were almost as many nursing staff and family outside the bar watching as there were seniors in the bar enjoying the party.

### **Community**

The community in focus is a seniors' complex of approximately 300 residents. The community is made of seniors (who pay to be there), bartender, nursing and social work staff (who are paid to be there), a General Manager (also paid to be there), and an Owner (who makes profit when people are there). This community is a primarily a place where senior members of our society can live if they are unwilling or unable to live in their homes. There are people from many social classes; residents have their bills paid by their savings, or their families, or the state.

The community is visited by family, service delivery people, religious leaders, and outside medical staff. On holidays and special occasions, non-government organizations, clubs, and guilds visit Shady Pines to deliver concerts, pageants, and special presentations. The local Girl Guide troop comes every second Saturday night for a sing along and the Lion's Club runs a charity bingo in the main hall of the complex the fourth Thursday night of every month, where members of the general public are welcome to come and play.

Shady Pines is in the suburbs of a large Maritime city. The city has fallen on hard times lately, with budget deficits soaring and services being cut. The city resides in a province that is getting much older and is trying to attract young people and convince university graduates to stay, without much success. Although the population is living chronologically older, they are not living well; the population is relying on medical technology and medication for its advanced years. The Provincial government reports that hundreds of nursing home style beds will be needed in the very near future and that it has no resources to build them, so they are looking more and more to private entrepreneurs to build and run the homes.

### **Rules**

The transactional rules that govern the bar were established by the Management of Shady Pines. Last call is at 10:30 pm. No drinks are served after last call. All drinks must be consumed in the bar area. Family and visitors are welcome in the bar provided they are of legal age. There is no smoking. The bar has a policy of serving only singles or doubles. The Provincial law says you cannot serve anyone who is already intoxicated. Civil law has found the bars in the province that serve someone until s/he is intoxicated have a legal responsibility for that person until s/he is

sober. People are responsible for their own behavior. A sign in the bar reads – Drink Responsibly.

The more subtle societal rules that are at play include the idea that seniors have earned the right to live as they please, and unless they are doing themselves grievous harm they should be left to live. Although in practice this is a complicated mix, seniors living at Shady Pines are less independent and have more people concerned about them and their personal business than perhaps just their family. They have to give up a certain degree of privacy and autonomy in order to live there, so although they have earned the so-called right to live how they choose, Shady Pines offers a multitude of policies and guidelines they must abide by to live there.

Provincially few resources and services are offered to seniors to stay in their private homes, and there are even fewer supports for the family taking a senior into their family home. The rules of the province would appear to stream people toward private care. Cultural rules, such as respect for your elders and dignity for all, are dominant discourses in this society; yet the rules at play that push seniors to be publicly housed on the outskirts of mainstream society appear to be hypocritical to those discourses.

Through CHAT we are able to consider that the seniors at Shady Pines may have been feeling disenfranchised by the insincere rules of society and could possibly have been grasping towards some degree of independence and self determination in advocating for the bar. CBT are unable to reach that deep and would simply offer an analysis of the transactional rules (policies) at work in the bar environment or perhaps settle on the conclusion that boredom and isolation were key factors in the popularity of the bar, which lead to the woman coming out, drinking, and then hurting herself. This is likely because when asked the seniors would be unable to

contextualize their frustration with the greater society and quite likely would use comments like, “It made things fun” and “It got some people out of their rooms.”

### **Division of Labor**

The owners and managers of Shady Pines are ultimately accountable for opening the bar, setting the bar hours, and determining the internal service policies. The bartender is a paid staff member of Shady Pines, and patrons of the bar are perceived to be responsible for their own behavior when in the bar. Social work staff see their role as assuring the rights of the residents and offering a voice to them. This is sometimes at odds with the nursing staff who see their role as “taking care of the residents” and have an understanding that there are times when the residents cannot take care of themselves and need the system to act on their behalf.

As I have mentioned previously, I use an analysis of the division of labor in the CHAT civility cell to examine power. In the transition to living at Shady Pines, I contend that it is safe to surmise that the majority of seniors would be grieving their loss of power. The seniors at Shady Pines are in conflict with their historical power paradigm, where they once they may have been accountants, firefighters, nurses, teachers, wives, husbands, or parents, they are now simply residents. One loses the control over one’s destiny. The bar is an attempt at exerting power. Being able to manipulate the tools and accoutrements of alcohol drinking and holding power over the environment where drinking takes place is propagated in most alcohol industry advertising as all powerful. A seventy-five year old man has probably viewed thousands of hours of alcohol advertising and been exposed to hundreds of thousands of print and outdoor ads. He might also consider himself a master of alcohol drinking with much life experience in its

practice. When most else of what defined him as himself has been taken from him, a bar environment would be a powerful place to try and express his mastery.

A clear advantage of CHAT is that there is a particular forum for discussions of job role and power under the division of labor heading. As CHAT gains in popularity as a meaningful form of analysis, we will all have a common CHAT language to use. Whether you want to use it in a context of human development, anthropology, or sociology, CHAT provides us the forum to consider power in a uniform manner that can be shared among the disciplines.

### Tools

Tools regarding the procurement and consumption of alcohol are dominant in this case. The bar itself in a built environment inside of a seniors residential complex and is made of glass, wood, and plastic. The bar is viewed by many as a tool that can be manipulated in a manner that provides leisure and fellowship to and for the residents, thereby enhancing their social health and well-being.

The tools that were acted upon to gain the bar include human rights, professional designations, and profit driven motives. Interestingly, these tools themselves do not directly touch alcohol (the liquid), yet were critical in the tool of alcohol entering the environment. The seniors themselves could not decide to have alcohol as a tool in the environment; they did not have that ultimate power. They had to elicit the help of the social work department who had the power to create change in the environment and introduce alcohol as an activity.

An interesting consideration is how the tools of medication and alcohol are at work here. As we learned earlier in this thesis, alcohol is the most common psychoactive drug used by humans in Province of Nova Scotia, yet who among us considers alcohol as a drug? Do you?

Alcohol profoundly changes how we think, feel, and behave, yet for the most part it is considered innocuous in our society. Certainly, when asked by a peer or loved one what medication you are taking, no one would ever list alcohol, but you can be assured the drug alcohol is in the mix, at some point and to some degree. Medications are propagated as tools to help make us well, help us live life fully, and in some cases cure what ails us. Is the truth not the same for alcohol? In a society that is inundated with messages to use the tool of alcohol in a medicinal manner, would it not make perfect sense that a senior would use alcohol in combination with her other “medications”? “Bartender as Pharmacist” might be a paper worthy of contemplation.

### Outcome

The bar is considered to be a tremendous success. Certain seniors who had rarely socialized are coming to the bar area to chat, play shuffle board, and watch TV. Often the bar hours are extended to 12 midnight at the discretion of staff because people were enjoying themselves, and comments included, “I feel like a kid again,” and “Why didn’t we have this years ago?”

Recently though, a 79-year old woman fell in her room after an evening at the bar and broke her hip. She is hospitalized. It was discovered that she had been served 3 single drinks over the course of two hours and was on a medication that was not to be combined with alcohol.

The bar is now closed pending a review.

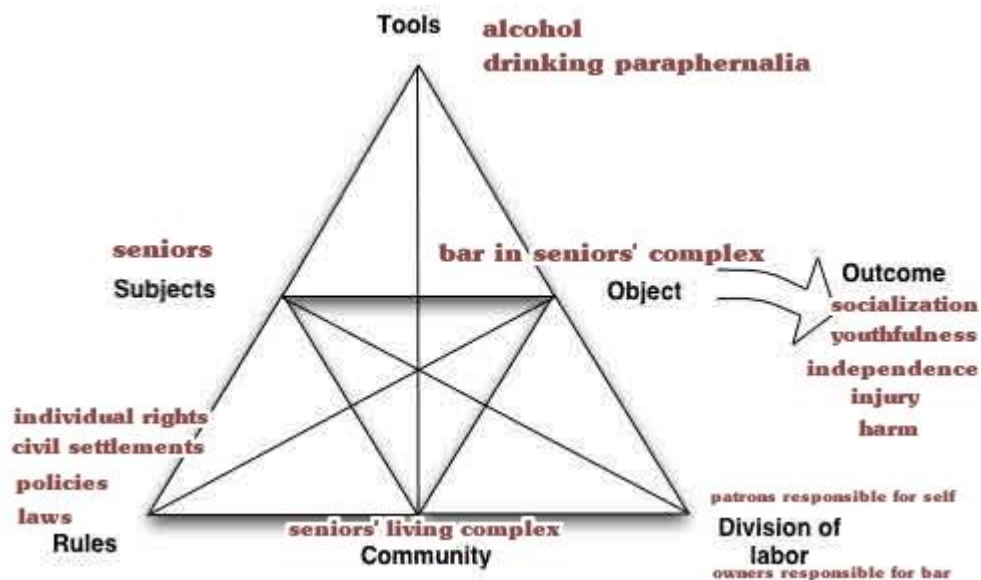


Figure #16. Shady Pines Bar Cell

### Discussion

The analysis reveals that the complexity of the rules at play has led to the bar ending as an active environment for the activity of alcohol drinking. Who or what is responsible for the outcome of the activity cell? One predominant rule would have it that the individual is solely responsible for his or her actions within the bar, yet a plethora of legislation and civil law decisions would indicate that others bear some responsibility for what happens in the activity cell (the bar). Interestingly, this individually focused responsibility does not extend to the dining room where meals are planned by a nutritionist and changes to the menu are not accommodated; you cannot eat whatever you would like. So in one situation you are master of your own domain, yet not more than 100 feet away you are dictated to by an expert. You cannot eat what you would like, but you can drink what you would like. However, it was only by employing the power of the social workers that the group of residents were successful in adding alcohol to the

environment. The group was able to achieve the outcome of creating a bar, yet once inside the bar individual responsibility rules and the group believe it is no longer responsible for outcomes. This is fascinating.

We observe the majority of subjects mediating the tools to reach a desired outcome of sociability and enhanced quality of life; however, one individual within the subject group in her attempt to mediate the tools to reach the desired outcome was manipulated by the tools in a manner that created a harmful outcome. As modeled by her community, she put forth an earnest effort to use the tools at her disposal to achieve camaraderie, but she did not, however, have the same result as her peers. CHAT permits us to see the expansive nature of the activity cell, from the individual attempting to mediate his/her tools to the larger subject group who were trying to exert power and to the communities within community (Shady Pines - within city - within Province) then to the larger social and cultural paradigms that governed all of the communities. It helps me when I am considering CHAT to think about those Russian nesting dolls where the largest contains the others. You open one and get the smaller, you open the smaller and get smaller, and this continues until, you have the tiniest of figurines, each unto its own, but able to fit inside each other to create one distinct unit.

In Shady Pines we see the overwhelming potential of CHAT as a descriptor for this complex activity, a multitude of figurines as it were, each fitting inside the other. We can easily visualize layers of CHAT cells illustrating effectively the number of divergent viewpoints. I would suggest that the review of the bar's activities and the decision to open it or keep it closed could benefit extensively from a thorough CHAT analysis. Engaging the variety of subjects in describing the community, rules, outcomes, tools, and division of labor from their perceptions

would provide the framework for a treasure-trove of data and description, far more than a statistical analysis or a broad opinion survey of former bar patrons, staff, and families.

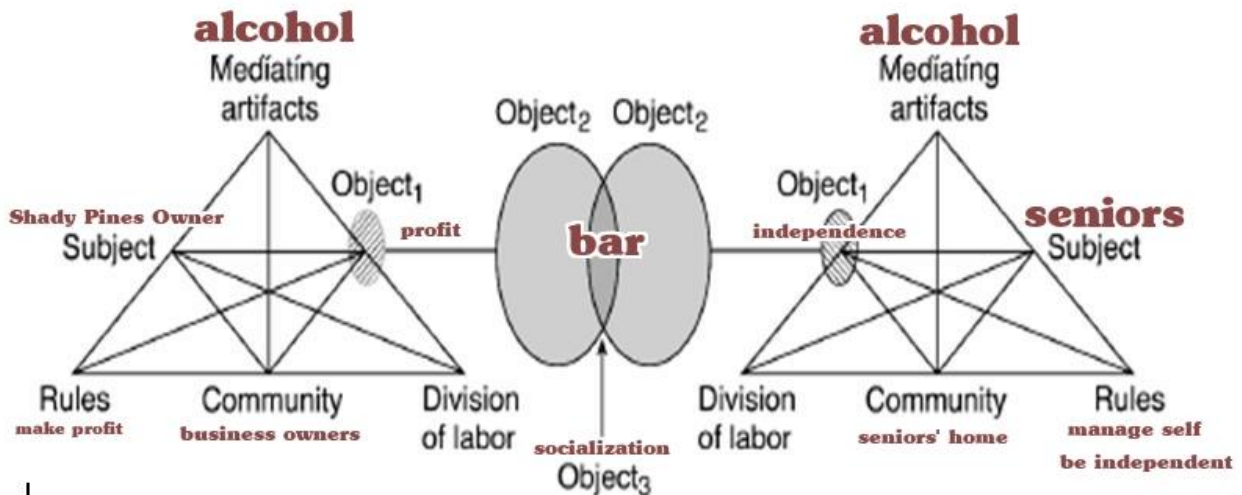


Figure #17. Shared Shady Pines Alcohol Cell

### Final Thoughts

In this chapter I have offered a CHAT analysis of the three cases presented in Chapter 3. These cases come from personal experience, work life, and reading, and are all rooted in reality. In each alcohol drinking activity we can see the power of CHAT as a superior means of uncovering, contextualizing, and analyzing the intricacies of each cell, just as when we open each carved figurine to reveal another, CHAT can be thought of as the most useful means of examining the intricate detail of the wood grain, paint, carving, flaws, features, and feel.

## CHAPTER 6: Me and My Conclusions

### Me

Alcohol drinking is not going anywhere. Prohibition is a distant memory and not likely to ever return, so alcohol drinking will remain a dominant activity for all of us in western society. It continues to have the potential to be useful as a social lubricant and the equal potential to do great harm. While the vast majority of CBT research and IBP thought into alcohol drinking is through a focus on the harm that is created, what is needed now is an approach that offers a truer look at alcohol drinking as purely activity, an approach that is without agenda. CHAT is what is needed now. Even when I consider my own journey, it is my introduction to CHAT that has helped me grow significantly as a researcher, academic, and writer.

As a young university student in the late 1980's, alcohol drinking was an activity I engaged in without academic consciousness, and it did not occur to me to study the fascinating phenomena that was going on around me; alcohol drinking was something to be done, not studied. After my addiction counselling career path took me to a place where I had a IBP bias to the harms of alcohol drinking to the individual, I counselled people to overcome their flaws and fight back against the power of alcohol in their lives. I gave no consideration to the idea that as I was encouraging the person to show restraint, I never once asked the community to show restraint. Later my work in health promotion swung the pendulum to the other end, and CBT became almost my sole focus, where I thought that government policies were the key to lessening the harms associated with alcohol drinking. My academic and career focus became lessening the harms associated with alcohol drinking, and I failed consistently to consider that increasing the benefits of alcohol drinking could accomplish the same objectives. It is only now after two years of study into CHAT and many wonderful conversations with my thesis supervisor

that I am able to pause for a sober second thought when it comes to alcohol drinking as activity. It is CHAT that has provided me with the framework, guidance, and ability to take that sober second thought and make meaning of what is in front of me.

The change CHAT has made in me and proof of its usefulness is illustrated nicely by a recent project I was asked to be involved with. The Medical Officer of Health here in Halifax asked for my opinion and comment on draught beer self pour tables. These are devices where a group of people can sit around and pour their own beer, in their own time in licensed establishments. The amount of alcohol that any one table can pour is preloaded by the wait staff of the particular bar, and the novelty is that customers can tap pour their own beer. A local tavern had made a proposal that government change the regulations and allow such devices.

The tavern owner was making purely economic arguments in favor, the public health community was making entirely CBT arguments against, and the addictions community was making strong IBP arguments against. Where in the past I would have been scrambling to find research that demonstrated the harms of such devices, considering that internationally published literature reports that increased access to alcohol increases harm, CHAT permitted me to consider the entirety of the situation. Through what I will call my micro CHAT analysis, I came to the understanding that in these tough fiscal times the novelty of the self pour table made good business sense, perhaps encouraging some people to venture out for a drink. However, these would have been people who would probably have come out anyway in better fiscal times. The harm CHAT led me to consider was not the potential for risky drinking by bar patrons, but the potential that the self pour table would initiate teen drinking. The bar would certainly advertise this new exciting way to drinking, and that ad would most likely end up on a billboard or in a local magazine, which in turn would most likely be viewed by youth who were already curious

about drinking and being perceived as adult like. When they viewed that adults had a new way of drinking, there is potential that they would become even more eager to enter an alcohol drinking activity.

I passed on my thoughts to the Medical Officer of Health in an email. Here is a synopsis of what I wrote.

Dear Dr. \_\_\_\_\_

In analyzing the request for self pour draught tables one can see it makes good business sense for the tavern in questions. However, an important consideration is the impact the advertisement that these new and novel table now exist will have on the young.

Perhaps, we could recommend that the tables can go ahead but with no new advertising permitted.

Dan

I was thanked for my feedback and my unique look at the issue. I was also asked to elaborate at an upcoming meeting where I will use CHAT as the basis for my comments and introduce my colleagues and peers to the notion of community, division of labor, rules, subject, object, tool, and outcome. At this time there is no decision on the self pour draught tables; however, if you see one in a local pub, let me know!

Jennifer Masters (2009) in her work examining the value of an online social networking project for school age children in Australia reports that the use of the CHAT frame enables a detailed description of connections within the project as participants work together to achieve individual and common goals. The analysis of the complex nature of the interactions between thousands of children, their teachers, their parents, and their school administrators combined

with the intricacies of computer-based technology requires CHAT. No other means would have brought the depth and breadth of discovery that CHAT was able to. I contend that the activity of alcohol drinking in society is so supremely complex and layered that it likewise demands CHAT. In order to unpack all that is encompassed in alcohol drinking, we need a framework that is new enough to be flexible, but established enough to be respected. CHAT is that framework.

## **My Conclusions**

### **IBP & SBP**

By reflecting on the case I made in Chapter 4, I strongly contend that individually biased and socially biased philosophies are both wholly inadequate because they are considered in isolation to each other. They are such dominant paradigms in themselves that academia is challenged in bringing them together for any kind of meaningful in-depth analysis. CHAT resolves this inherent difficulty by allowing the researcher or writer to take elements of both; as we saw in the discussion of the subject in the Shady Pines analysis, I chose the seniors as a group of individuals, where I could have offered an analysis of just one senior, or just one nurse or just the bartender had the situation warranted. With its broad definition of subject and its contention that the subject can be an individual, a group of individuals, a community, or an entire society CHAT is able to encompass a greater degree of analysis because nothing need be excluded. If I was to take an IBP analysis to the self pour draft tables, I would be almost solely focused on the flawed individual drinker as the subject. The effect on the bar owner, other patrons, and the young in the community would be ignored.

SBP create problems in analysis because they fail to adequately contextualize the motivation the individual or community has for entering the alcohol drinking activity. In the

Freshman example, SBP would more than likely focus analysis on the availability of cheap alcohol and how it was allowed to be promoted by corporate interests widely in the dorm, settling on the idea that the Freshman was led to the outcome due in part to unhealthy policies regarding alcohol on campus, and that to prevent future death, policies would need to change. However, it would fail to consider that the Freshman's motivation for entering the drinking activity had to do with a pursuit of a masculine legacy that would provide long lasting social capital, and that this was of such significant importance that no matter the price of alcohol the Freshman was going to enter the drinking activity, and the corporate propaganda to drink seemed less important than the historical legacy of the dorm as a party place, so one could conclude that, regardless of the posters on the wall, alcohol drinking was being promoted by everything everyone in the dorm said and did. It is only through detailed analysis of the outcome vector in the CHAT cell that we discover all of this; SBP would have not have taken us far enough in our analysis, and we would have settled on false assumptions.

IBP fail to consider the power that the tools of alcohol drinking have in manipulating the person or the community. IBP contend that if a person is not able to wield the tools of alcohol drinking appropriately, s/he must be flawed in some way. This is one sided; the notion that we all are innately born with the abilities to use the tools of alcohol drinking strains credibility. To remain solely focused on the notion that personal choice is most powerful when using the tools of alcohol drinking, and whether the tools create harm or pleasure is strictly in the person's locus of control, is problematic because it ignored the power alcohol drinking tools hold over society and the individual. They act upon us as we act upon them. CHAT resolves this problem because it helps one remain cognizant of the potential power the tool of alcohol has to change the activity

cycle and create a different outcome than the subject might have expected upon entering the drinking cycle.

### **CHAT is Superior**

CHAT is alive and well. Engestrom (2009) reports a dramatic growth between 2000 and 2005 in the frequency and journal citations to key activity theory terms and texts. My own study into the field demonstrates that this growth continues even today. We in the substance use field need to be bold and join the analytical momentum CHAT has created. Those studying alcohol drinking and substance use in society for too long have relied on conformist approaches to research, data collection, and investigation. They have taken us as far as they can. We require a new look at the issues from a lens that provides contextualization from divergent view points. In her paper on integrating language and speech in secondary schools, Deidre Martin (2008) reports that her paper does not follow conventional formats of empirical reports, since its main purpose is to present a new paradigm for researching. That new paradigm she is referring to is CHAT. My goal is likewise. I am presenting CHAT as a means to achieve greater insights into the role, power, and influence of alcohol in society.

We can see by the analysis offered in Chapter 5 that CHAT is superior to both TSB and SBP in contextualizing drinking across the lifespan. Unlike SBP, CHAT does not rely on the conscious thought of humans to reflect and give meaning to a past drinking episode; instead, it offers a meaning making framework to the actual events as they transpired from any number of divergent vectors, while still offering an all encompassing approach to bring those vectors together. Unlike IBP, CHAT is not rooted in the choices the subject made that resulted in the outcome; instead, it offers a way of making meaning about how those individual choices were

manipulated by other forces within the activity, which created an outcome. It does not judge the outcome; the outcome is what it is.

CHAT also provides a common language and approach to analysis that can be shared across the many disciplines of the humanities and sciences. We have seen in this thesis how CHAT has been used to contextualize everything from a children's hospital, to drinking on a beach, to distance learning. Each of the researchers in these diverse studies could come together and share finding that were meaningful to each other and the field, regardless of subject matter. We would understand what each other was talking and writing about. I could pick up a text on almost any topic area, and if it was written from a CHAT perspective, I could make meaning of it. The subject may be children, or astronauts, or aboriginal peoples, or professors, or low income workers, and we could have likewise and meaningful conversation and study if we all had a CHAT approach to subject. The tools could be alcohol, beakers, money, power, femininity, or neo liberalism, and we could still have meaningful conversation and study if we all considered those things tools. There is power in that.

Previous IBP and SBP data sources would be ideal for CHAT analysis and offer up a multitude of new findings and ask many more complex questions. Certainly, the Nova Scotia Child and Youth Drinking Report (2009) would benefit greatly if its focus group findings were subject to a CHAT analysis. We could perhaps move past things such as recollection biases, focus group anomalies, and sampling errors by taking the children and youths' verbatim responses and applying CHAT.

A.J.M, Forsyth (2008), in a study looking how banning glassware from nightclubs in Glasgow Scotland reduced bar violence and led to patrons feeling safer, offered only a simplified

analysis as to why plastic cups and mugs led to a more peaceful drinking experience. He relied on hospital visits and medically based statistical data to prove the decrease in injury and interviews with patrons to determine why things appeared safer. I suggest that this would be a prime circumstance where CHAT could offer deep insight into how a change in the tools of alcohol drinking acted in and upon the community changing the subjects' outcome, even though the rules and division of labor appeared similar to previous more harmful circumstances. Perhaps an email to Dr. Forsyth is in my future.

A colleague of mine who works in the field of youth engagement and health for a large government department told me that he was travelling to Digby County soon to interview a group of young people regarding a tragedy that unfolded in their small community. Apparently, a popular high school male had been killed while driving impaired after a party. Adding to the grief, another young male had been killed while driving impaired after leaving an impromptu memorial for the other young man. Now, on the weekends youth from the community gather at the gravesite of both young men to console each other and drink alcohol. My colleague reported that he had been invited by a teacher from the local high school to sit with the kids and talk in an effort to see just what is going on in that community and perhaps prevent another death. My colleague reported to me that he had no particular questions in mind for the community. This is where CHAT could play a vital role. It would give an excellent means of collecting data and perceptions. It would provide a much richer context to the alcohol drinking activities going on than surveys, interview questions, or empirical study. I suggest that a research project that comprises a CHAT analysis of even a portion of the alcohol drinking activities currently being undertaken in Digby County would be invaluable and add much to the literature. (given appropriate ethical approval and community support) Again, Leadbetter et al. (2007) suggest

that CHAT would be an ideal theoretical framework and approach to such a complex series of activities.

In the Digby County CHAT analysis the subjects could include youth, community leaders, teachers, alcohol industry, parents, and police. The division of labor could delve into power imbalances in the community, poverty, or how disenfranchised the youth might be. The potential for discovery is vast, and the findings, although sure to raise more questions, could possibly be used to prevent another tragedy. That is the value and future of CHAT.

### **CHAT and Me**

I offer the potential of CHAT as a brave new means of study in the field of alcohol drinking and, for that matter, substance use. The value of CHAT lies in its ability to better contextualize what is happening from any number of divergent views, as well as giving researchers a common language to use in reporting and sharing findings. Engestrom (2009) contends that to keep activity theory alive and productive, we need to read each other's concrete studies, dig in each other's data, and visit each other's fields sites of research and intervention. Certainly experienced CHAT researchers and CHAT philosophers would find the analysis that I have offered elementary. However, there is potential here as well, because if I can suggest a starting point, a basic theory that can be critiqued and expanded to the end degree, then a door opens that my more experienced and skilled CHAT contemporaries can walk through. This has also given me clear direction on the work that is before me, since substance use is a prevailing paradigm in our world and the tools to use substances are exceedingly powerful. How one learns to master these tools is understudied. How these tools are shaped by the user and how the user is shaped by these tools is understudied and not contextualized any meaningful way. The meaning

of substance use and the power it wields in shaping our culture is vague and undiscovered.

Potentially, I have opened a door, and I hope to join my contemporaries in walking through it.

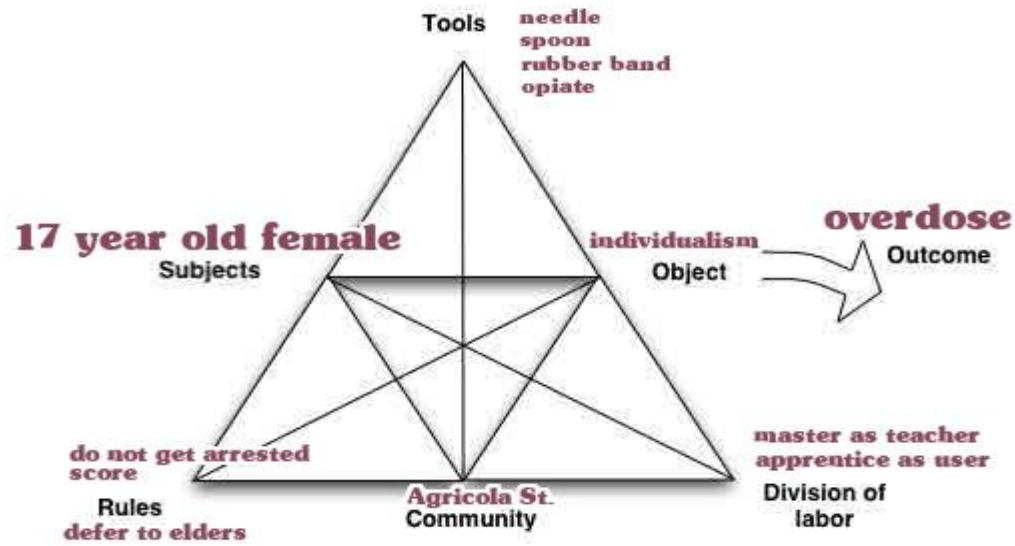


Figure #18. Heroin Initiation Cell

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