

Schulenberg, J., O'Malley, P. M., Bachman, J. G., Wadsworth, K. N., & Johnston, L. D. (1996). Getting drunk and growing up: Trajectories of frequent binge drinking during the transition to young adulthood. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 57, 289-304.

# Abstract

*Objective:* The purpose of this study was: (1) to identify different trajectories of frequent binge drinking during the transition to young adulthood; (2) to validate the trajectories by relating them to behaviors and attitudes concerning alcohol and other drug use; and (3) to distinguish among the trajectories according to demographic characteristics and lifestyle experiences typical of the transition to young adulthood.

*Method:* Four waves of national panel data were obtained from the Monitoring the Future project; 9,945 weighted cases from the 1976-85 high school senior year cohorts were surveyed at biennial intervals between ages 18 and 24. Frequent binge drinking was defined as having five or more drinks in a row at least twice in the past two weeks.

*Results:* Six distinct frequent binge drinking trajectory groups were specified *a priori* and confirmed with cluster analysis: Never, Rare, Chronic, Decreased, Increased, and "Fling." Repeated measures ANOVAS revealed that the trajectories corresponded to patterns of change and stability in problems with alcohol, attitudes about heavy drinking, peer heavy drinking, and illicit drug use. Results from logistic regression analyses predicting diverging and converging trajectories provided some support for the general hypothesis that trajectories of Chronic and Increased frequent binge drinking over time are associated with difficulties in negotiating the transition to young adulthood.

*Conclusions:* The findings provide strong evidence for wide developmental variation in drinking patterns in the population, variation that is obscured by more aggregate-level considerations. The developmental variation in frequent binge drinking during the transition to young adulthood reflects systematic variation in success and difficulties with negotiating the transition.