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# "Crappy New Year": evaluation, stance and drinking stories

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“CRAPPY NEW YEAR”:  
EVALUATION, STANCE, AND DRINKING STORIES

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

in

The Department of Geography and Anthropology

by  
Martin Pfeiffer  
B.A., Louisiana State University, 2007  
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Last, but never least, I dedicate this thesis to the memory and life of my mother Molly Pfeiffer. I think you'd be proud.

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# Abstract

This thesis is an examination of drinking stories and how authors, through linguistic means, achieve narrative, social, and cultural goals. Language is a biological fact of *Homo sapiens* and narrative is a universal method by which humans make sense of their world. Humans' primeval relationship with alcohol is an expression of the innate desire to achieve altered states of consciousness. To study drinking stories is to study a manifestation of the essence of humanity.

This research employs the narrative theories of Labov (1997) and Labov and Waletzky (1967) combined with Du Bois's (2007) model of stance. I focus on the linguistic techniques of authors as they attempt three basic narrative goals of drinking stories: the construction of a believable and tellable narrative; production of satisfactory accounts for transgressive behaviors; and self-presentation of an identity as a competent drinker. Through Du Bois's (2007) model of stance I detail how narrators strategically deploy language as they invoke and assign cultural value; manage alignment with interlocutors and their stances; and position themselves in relation to evaluated entities and their utterances.

I find that the structure and content of the drinking stories examined is shaped by cultural expectations about the genre of drinking stories, dominant discourses about drinking, the specifics of narrated events, the narrators' experience of intoxication, and authorial decisions about methods to achieve narrative goals. Furthermore, both stories examined contained a variety of stance and discourse markers, grammatical constructions, valenced lexical tokens, reconstructed dialogue, and causal arguments. I conclude that an appreciation and understanding of context is critical at all levels of discourse analysis; drinking stories are maximally intelligible

only when considered with regards to the context of events described, the context of production, surrounding cultural discourses, and narrator goals. Finally, the virtual absence of literature on drinking stories *per se* demands further research.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis is about drinking stories with a focus on how one author draws on cultural and linguistic resources to achieve narrative goals with examples from a second story when relevant. In the literature review, I discuss anthropology's contributions to research on alcohol and examine research about drinking stories. My review demonstrates the unique and valuable nature of this thesis while providing background for the theories I engage for my analysis (Chapters 3 and 4). As a contribution to the literature, my thesis is the only analysis that is concerned with the construction and characteristics of drinking stories *per se* and I am the only author to probe drinking stories with Du Bois's concept of stance (Du Bois 2007). Furthermore, very few, if any, scholars have investigated drinking stories from an anthropological perspective. In contrast to other scholars I am not investigating what drinking stories can tell us about fraternity life (Workman 2001), identity formation in Alcoholics Anonymous (Arminen 2004; Cain 1991), or cross-cultural differences in reasoning about alcohol (Törrönen and Maunu 2007; Pyörälä 1995). My specific goal is to elucidate how drinking stories are strategically constructed to achieve three basic narrative goals.

First, narrators must make their story reportable (i.e., tellable) (Labov 1997, 2006; Labov and Waletzky 1967; Norrick 2005b; Sacks 1992). A narrative must be crafted to attract and maintain sufficient interest to justify narrators' consumption of increased social resources and ensure reassignment of the conversational floor throughout the story (Labov 1997; Labov and Waletzky 1967). Tellability often attracts and holds attention by stressing novel or dangerous aspects of an experience; reportability has an inverse relationship with credibility such that increasingly tellable (e.g., strange or novel) stories often become less believable (Labov 1997; Labov and

Waletzky 1967). Thus authors must construct credibility in response to the development of tellability (see Chapter 5).

Second, authors must account for and explain transgressive acts and boundary violations (Giles 1999; Schlenker and Weigold 1992; Scott and Lyman 1968; Sheehan and Ridge 2001; Weinstein 1980; Workman 2001). This is a particularly salient task for drinking stories given the relationship between alcohol and bad behavior (Room 2001). Prior research has firmly established the role of narratives in general, and drinking stories in particular, as devices for creating group- and self -identity (Bogren 2006; Giles 1999; Ochs and Capps 1996; Tutengesa and Rod 2009; Workman 2001). Obstreperous drinkers, like all miscreants, must justify or excuse their transgressions lest their misbehavior result in loss of status, a reputation, or criminal charges (Abrahamson 2004; Critchlow 1983, 1985, 1986; Giles 1999; MacAndrew 1969; Scott and Lyman 1968; Sheehan and Ridge 2001). Narratives create a “folk theory of causality” that links events into a meaningful sequence that “inevitably assign[s] praise and blame to the actors for the actions involve” (Labov 1997:407-408). Consequently I examine how one narrator creates a causal argument to account for his bad behavior (Abrahamson 2004; Scott and Lyman 1968; Room 2001) (see Chapter 6). When relevant I reference one additional text for further evidence and counterexamples.

Third, I investigate how drinking stories are used to construct and portray identity, particularly as a ‘competent’ and experienced drinker. Notions of skill and competence are key to the meaning and practice of drinking; cross-culturally the ability to drink in a manner appropriate to the occasion is positively evaluated and can increase social status (Bogren 2006; Room 2001; Tutengesa and Rod 2009; Workman 2001). Concepts and definitions of competence vary individually and cross-culturally. For teetotalers competence can refer to complete

abstention but drinkers may operationalize competence in terms of limiting intake or not vomiting (Bogren 2006; Pyörälä 1995; Törrönen and Maunu 2007). Of particular relevance to my thesis, drinking competence is often connected to a “controlled loss of control” (Measham 2002:359) where the narrator portrays himself as having come to the edge of disaster but demonstrates skill by managing to hold everything together (Cho et al. 2010; Lyng 1990; Workman 2001). Transgressive behavior ranges from lapses in bodily control (e.g., vomiting, crying, urination) to violating group and cultural norms (e.g., inappropriate sexual behavior, rudeness, aggression). Constructing a competent identity goes beyond the absence or presence of bad behavior; it works to position the narrator as someone in control, able to handle their liquor, and connected to surrounding social values (Bogren 2006; Pyörälä 1995; Törrönen and Maunu 2007; Workman 2001) (see Chapter 7).

The theoretical perspective underpinning my analysis is an adaptation of Du Bois’s (2007) model of stance. Spurred in part by Labov and Waletzky’s work on narratives and evaluation (Labov 1997; Labov and Waletzky 1967;) scholars began investigating how, through linguistic means, storytellers make moral judgments, present the point of the narrative, and interact with linguistic and sociocultural values. Du Bois’s concept of the stance triangle has the potential to synthesize over forty years of study and collapse terminological debates about modality, hedging, evaluation, and affective stance into a coherent model linking interactions between persons and culture (Conrad and Biber 1999; Cortazzi and Jin 1999; Biber and Finegan 1989; Du Bois 2007; Englebretson 2007; Hunston and Sinclair 2000; Kärkkäinen 2006; Simon-Vandenberg 2008; Thompson 2000a, 2000b; P. White 2003). Du Bois’s model connects interlocutors as they evaluate culturally embedded entities and propositions (2007). Interlocutors simultaneously position themselves in relation to each other and their object of evaluation.

Through the lens of stance I demonstrate how authors strategically construct their text to achieve the goals mentioned above: to create tellability, to account for bad behavior, and to construct an identity as a competent drinker.

## Conclusion

This chapter has given a brief overview of my research questions and introduced my theoretical grounding. Using the theories of Labov (1997), Labov and Waletzky (1967), and Du Bois (2007) I examine the linguistic means through which drinking stories achieve fundamental narrative goals: tellability and reportability, assigning blame, and constructing identity. In the next chapter I describe my data and its context. In addition to providing introductory details about the authors and their texts, I discuss the Erowid Center whose online database provided my data. After explaining my selection process and considering the potential impact of Erowid's editing on my texts I then offer a synopsis of "The Reasons I Couldn't Wait" (Nemo 2006) in the language of Labov's (1997) and Labov and Waletzky's (1967) theory of narrative.

## Chapter 2: Data

### 2.1 Text Selection

As data for analysis I initially selected three texts from the online archives of the Erowid Center; Erowid maintains an online clearinghouse of information about psychoactive substances ([www.erowid.org](http://www.erowid.org)). Erowid solicits and stores “Experience Reports” of drug use as part of their mission: “Documenting the Complex Relationship Between Humans and Psychoactives” (Erowid 2012a). A Review Crew evaluates submitted reports for topicality and coherence before archiving them in the “Experience Vaults” where they are categorized by the substance discussed and subcategorized by the type of experience such as “glowing experiences,” “medical use,” and “difficult experiences” (Erowid 2002). I read all of the reports in the alcohol section of the Erowid Experience Vaults and chose three that focus on alcohol, are of comparable length, and that meet Labov’s (1997) and Labov and Waletzky’s (1967) definition of narrative (i.e., were functionally structured and temporally ordered stories that contained evaluation). I did not disqualify a report because of polysubstance use provided alcohol was the author’s central concern. My depth of analysis of “Crappy New Year” (Nemo 2006) made further examination of the other texts largely redundant; I reference one additional story, “The Reasons I Couldn’t Wait” (Pleadthefifth 2006), as appropriate and both are included in Appendix A.

### 2.2 Text and Author Characteristics

Table 2.1 displays the characteristics of “Crappy New Year,” the report I focus on, and “The Reasons I Couldn’t Wait,” which I reference for further examples when relevant. Table 2.2 provides information about the authors and their alcohol consumption. Some of the information (e.g., sex and weight) in Table 2.2 is explicitly provided by the author or in the header of Experience Reports (see Appendix A) but other data I inferred based on careful (re)reading of

**Table 2.1** Data Characteristics

Author	Title	Category	Experience Type	Report Number	Experience Date	Report Added
Nemo	Crappy New Year	Alcohol	Difficult Experiences	39407	2004	2006
Pleadthefifth ('Plead')	The Reason's I Couldn't Wait	Alcohol	Train Wrecks and Trip Disasters	26062	2003	2006

**Table 2.2** Author Information

Name	Age <sup>a</sup>	Sex	Location	Weight	Blood Alcohol Content <sup>b</sup>	Dosage <sup>c</sup>
Nemo	18	Male	Unknown, USA	165lbs	.352	approximately
Pleadthefifth	16	Male	New York City, USA	135lbs	>.30	8+ oz of 151 proof rum

<sup>a</sup> This is my personal estimate based on the tone, style, and content of the stories. Plead is certainly under 21 and I am virtually certain that Nemo is as well.

<sup>b</sup> Nemo gives his BAC; I computed Plead's based off his body weight and number of drinks.

<sup>c</sup> 1 drink= 1.25 oz of 80 proof alcohol (Campus Alcohol Abuse Prevention Center [CAAPC] 2006).

the stories. For example, Nemo gives his BAC (107) but I calculated Pleadthefifth's (Plead) by comparing the dosage he gives in the experience report header to a chart correlating number of drinks, sex, weight, and BAC (CAAPC 2006; Nemo 2006; Plead 2006).

Although neither author gives an exact age they both appear to be under twenty-one years old which is the legal drinking age in all fifty states of the United States. Nemo and his friend S have their alcohol purchased for them by S's mother while Plead, presumably because of his age, must patronize his "local not-by-the-book liquor store" (Plead 2006:3). Plead also refers to himself and his friends as "drunk-off-their-ass teenagers" (62). In addition, Nemo and Plead seem to lack the accoutrements often associated with being over twenty-one or even eighteen: a personal residence and freedom from parental supervision. Both authors must search for a place to drink rather than imbibing at a private residence they rent or own and both imply that they live

with their parents (Nemo 6-7; Plead 10-11, 26-28). Plead refers to his father's domicile as "my house" (25) and Nemo plans to "go/home at about ten to my family" (5-7). Plead in particular is concerned about parental discovery so he buys mouthwash "for afterwards" and restricts his dose "to not look so bad in front of my dad" (10, 28). Nemo does not mention parental opprobrium or taking steps to conceal his drinking. However, parental supervision is implied by Nemo's obligation to "be with them at midnight of course" and by their presence at the hospital (5-7, 82-86, 99-101).

While Nemo declines to give a location, Plead makes several familiar references to New York City (51, 63). Given the fluent use of what appears to me (a native speaker) to be American vernacular along with references to Rite-Aid, Subway, Sparks, and a train that runs until almost midnight, I assume that Nemo lives in a relatively urban area of North America, probably in the United States (16, 26-28, 35-36, 69-71). "Crappy New Year" and "The Reasons I Couldn't Wait" lack obvious linguistic tokens or spellings that would suggest a British or even Canadian origin (Nemo 2006; Plead 2006).

## **2.3 Erowid**

### **2.3.1 Context of Erowid**

The source of my data is The Erowid Center, a non-profit organization, that runs Erowid.org, a website that describes itself as "Documenting the Complex Relationship Between Humans & Psychoactives" (Erowid ). Earth and Fire Erowid, the eponymous founders, began the project in 1995. By 2000 the center was large enough that both were employed full time and as of 2010 the staff includes "four primary staff members, two part-time staff" and "dozens" of volunteers (Erowid 2012a). Erowid describes its mission as follows:

Erowid is a member-supported organization providing access to reliable, non-judgmental information about psychoactive plants, chemicals, and related issues. We work with academic, medical, and experiential experts to develop and publish new resources, as well as to improve and increase access to already existing resources. We also strive to ensure that these resources are maintained and preserved as a historical record for the future (Erowid 2012a).

With over 45,000 documents Erowid covers an incredible range of topics including health, spirituality, legal considerations, and scholarly research findings (Boyer, Shannon, and Hibberd 2005; Erowid 2000, 2008; Wax 2006). Writing in the journal *Pediatrics* Paul Wax describes the amount of data on Erowid as “truly overwhelming” and so recent that it has at times been the only resource for physicians gathering data on new, unusual, or synthetic substances (Wax 2002). Wax goes on to situate Erowid as one of many websites begun in the 1990s in response to a perceived bias in the information from government institutions (Wax 2002). Consonant with this view Erowid describes its formation as an attempt to provide balanced information that would assist in fostering a “healthy relationship with psychoactives” (Erowid 2012b). The “Erowid Reviewing Crew” characterizes personal experiences as a vital source of information not only about substances but also about how humans relate to them (2002). Hence Erowid makes a concerted effort to gather and make accessible stories of individual experience.

Contexts of narration change who tells what stories (Hill 2005). The unique nature of Erowid as an anonymous and democratic space of revelation will simultaneously increase and restrict the range of participants and the types of stories they tell. Since anyone may submit an experience, Erowid provides a space of expression for authors whose voices might not otherwise be heard. The sense of anonymity engendered by distance between the author and reader, including the inability of visitors to Erowid to comment on site content, may operate to reduce fear of opprobrium and permit authors to share details they might otherwise censor. That freedom may be expanded by flexible cultural norms allowing the separation of drinking experiences from

personal biographies (Cavan 1966; Critchlow 1983; Room 2001; Sexton 2001). This is not to say that Erowid is a utopian space for total freedom of expression. Disproportionate access to, and familiarity with, the internet based on demographic factors like age and socioeconomic status will exclude some potential authors. In addition the function of narrative in the creation of self-identity and authorial considerations of audience undoubtedly influence participant demographics and the details they choose to include (Giles 1999; Ochs 2004; Ochs and Capps 1996; Workman 2001). As I note below the submission criteria and goals of Erowid shape the structure, content, and type of reports submitted.

### **2.3.2 Erowid Editorial and Review Policy**

Erowid does not post all submissions and reports that it edits many of the archived reports but this does not threaten the validity or integrity of my data (Erowid Reviewing Crew 2005).

Erowid's solicitation, review, and editing processes skew the vaults toward coherent and believable narratives of personal experience. Commentary on review and editing appear at the online submission page which states that a reviewer "takes into consideration writing quality, interest, and usefulness of data" and asks writers for "something more than a description of how fucked up you were or what cool patterns you saw" (Erowid 2012b; see Appendix B.1). Reports are then read and graded by two "Triagers", sorted by rating, and then edited or rejected by a "Reviewer" (Erowid Reviewing Crew 2005; Erowid and Erowid 2006).

As of October 2002 around sixty percent of reports are "trashed" (Erowid Review Crew 2002). Reports are rejected for lacking credibility, failing to identify the involved substance, being unbelievable, and for not offering "real interest, data, or color to the world" (Erowid Review Crew 2002). In terms of writing style, the "basic rule is that if a flexible, college level English reader can't make sense of it, it's not appropriate for the Vaults" (Erowid Review Crew

2002). Prior to publishing, a Reviewer edits submissions based on two principles. First, as part of a focus on individual experience, Reviewers delete or modify second person language that overly generalizes or projects the writer's experience onto others. Similarly, "overly didactic" text interpreted as "broad conclusions about how others should act" is removed or modified (Erowid Review Crew 2002). The Erowid Center, aware that editing submissions raises questions of voice and authenticity, states that "we work to make sure we don't remove the personal lessons or insights the author is trying to impart, but instead rephrase them as exactly that-the insights of the individual" (Erowid Review Crew 2002). Erowid's editing policies operate at a grosser level of the text than my analysis and minimally, if at all, distort my results. Furthermore Erowid's limited editing appears to have lightly, if at all, touched the texts I analyze. Both texts are coherent and continuous without obvious gaps and demonstrate the same authorial style from beginning to end; in both texts the authors make generalizations about their experiences and the experiences of others. The existence of grammatical errors and misspellings, along with the large number of submitted reports and the time pressures of a backlog of reports to be reviewed, strongly suggest a light editorial hand (Erowid Review Crew 2002; Erowid Reviewing Crew 2005).

## **2.4 Synopsis and Structural Descriptions**

### **2.4.1 Labov and Narrative Structure**

This section gives a synopsis of "Crappy New Year" through a brief description of William Labov and Joshua Waletzky's (1967) structural characteristics of narrative as expanded and modified by Labov (1972, 1997, 2001, 2004, 2006, 2010a, 2010b). This model posits that a narrative, in order to fulfill its referential function, is "one way of recounting past events, in which the order of narrative clauses matches the order of events as they occurred" (Labov

2010a:547). Narrative clauses consist of events separated by a temporal juncture, implied or explicit, such that changing the order of narrative clauses changes the order of events in the story (Labov and Waletzky 1967). A minimal narrative consists of two temporally ordered clauses but a complete narrative includes evaluation: “information on the consequences of the event for human needs and desires” (Labov 1997:401).

Previously Labov and Waletzky defined evaluation as “that part of the narrative which reveals the attitude of the narrator towards the narrative by emphasizing the relative importance of some narrative units as compared to others” (Labov and Waletzky 1967:38). Evaluation gives the point of a narrative and provides structural coherence as when a series of evaluative clauses build suspense by suspending the action of a story (Labov 1997, 2010a; Labov and Waletzky 1967). A complete and fully formed narrative consists of six parts: abstract, orientation, complicating action, resolution, coda, and evaluation. These features may overlap, are not present in every narrative, and Labovian narrative is not the only form for conveying experience (Bennett 1986; Brody 2000; Georgakopoulou 2006; Johnstone 2004; Robinson 1981; Spicer 1998).

Criticisms aside, Labov and Waletzky’s model, as modified, has been extremely influential and remains a powerful tool for narrative analysis (Bamberg 1997). “Crappy New Year” and “The Reasons I Couldn’t Wait” generally fit Labov’s (1997) model in that the stories can be separated into functional sections and they contain temporal junctures and evaluation (Nemo 2006; Plead 2006). The abstract occurs near the beginning of a story and gives the “most reportable event” around which the story is constructed (Labov 1997:405). When a discrete orientation section exists it generally occurs prior to the first narrative (i.e., temporal) clauses and “serves[s] to orient the listener in respect to “the who, what, where, when, and “behavioral context” of the story (Labov and Waletzky 1967:21). Next the “main body of narrative clauses

usually comprises a series of events which may be termed the complicating action section” in which the author answers the imaginary question “[a]nd what happened [then]?” (Labov 1997:402; Labov and Waletzky 1967:22). Evaluation occurs throughout the text although an evaluative section often suspends narrative action prior to the most reportable event and answers the question “so what?” (Polanyi 1979)

As a concept evaluation has been greatly expanded by Labov and others and I give a detailed discussion of evaluation in Chapter 3.2.2. In essence, evaluation identifies the point of the story, gives the author’s attitudes and beliefs, and is a resource for the author to invoke or assign cultural value (Du Bois 2007; Englebretson 2007; Labov 1997; Labov and Waletzky 1967; Thompson and Hunston 2000). Resolution of the narrative explains the results of the complicating action; narrative clauses occurring after the most reportable event comprise the resolution (Labov 1997). An optional coda may end the story by bringing the storyteller and audience out of the narrative timeline. The coda is “a functional device for returning the verbal perspective to the present moment” (Labov and Waletzky 1967:28-30).

## **2.4.2 “Crappy New Year”**

### **Abstract and Introduction**

Nemo’s first two paragraphs (1-14) act as an introduction and orientation. They are composed of free clauses (clauses that can be moved without changing the order of events in the text), lack temporally ordered narrative clauses, include large amounts of evaluation, and introduce the reader to the characters and context (situational and temporal) of the narrative (Labov and Waletzky 1967; Özyıldırım 2009). Nemo begins with an abstract giving the most reportable event as having “almost died several different ways” (2). He proceeds to give the time, and context, of events as New Year’s Eve of 2004 which he claims to be the night before

he wrote “Crappy New Year.” He adds to the behavioral context, and establishes expectations in the reader, by ending the first paragraph with the claim that “[t]his only happens when I hang/out with my friend ‘S’, quite possibly the worst drinking buddy ever; but what he did for/me last night is/just amazing” (12-4).

The second paragraph (5-14) completes the orientation and introduction. Nemo explains that he originally planned to “go hang out with S and his girlfriend, get a little/drunken, and go home at about ten to my family” but “[a]s it turned out I got home at/around 4 in the morning after being discharged from the hospital, and was probably in a/coma at midnight” (7-9). These lines form a second abstract: “an initial clause in a narrative that reports the entire sequence of events of the narrative” (Labov 1997:401). Nemo goes on to assert that “[m]any a thing happened last night, a great deal of which I don’t/ remember at all” (9-10) and urges the reader to “please take to heart/this terrible night and be careful when drinking” (10-11). He explicitly marks the end of the introduction, and the beginning of the complicating action, in line fourteen: “Now on to the story...” (14).

### Complicating Action

Labov defines complicating action as “a sequential clause that reports a next event in response to a potential question, “And what happened [then]?” (Labov 1997:401). Labov asserts that narrators begin their stories with an action that requires no explanation (usually embedded in the orientation) and then proceed through a sequence of linked events culminating in the most reportable event (Labov 2006). Given the cultural context of New Year’s Eve, and of the linkage between celebration and alcohol (e.g., wedding toasts, bachelor parties, and champagne on New Year’s Eve), I argue that Nemo’s desire to celebrate the holiday by drinking requires no explanation. According to Labov, Nemo’s task is then to move from a minimally reportable

occurrence through a series of causally related actions that peak in the most reportable event after which sequential events become the resolution (2006). Nemo begins the action by meeting up with “S and his girl at about 4-5 pm” and then visiting convenience stores looking for a mixer because S’s mom “bought him a half gallon of/vodka” (15-16). They visit a friend of S’s, “D, to get some/pot” (17-18). While there they “had a round of shots and smoked a few/bowls and a blunt” and chatted (18-19). After “about an hour” they “were in search of a place to go drink” and decided to visit S’s mother, ‘Mom’ “(as his mom is known/to all)” (21-25). There “[w]e mixed our first 2 liter...and wanted to go/spend some subway stamps and get some subs but the bastards closed early” and Nemo only ate “a small piece of pie and an English muffin at mom’s place” (27-29). After taking “healthy guzzles from our drink” they “all mobbed out” to “visit S’s aunt ‘P’” (32-34). In transit “mom bought S and I each one of those Sparks things” (35).

Upon arrival at P’s the group consisted of S, S’s girlfriend, P, and Nemo. Nemo remarks that “[t]he last thing I remember” is “S’s girl/filling up the next 2 liter” at “about 9:45[pm]” (40-42). Nemo comments that “I was prepared to/smoke another bowl, have a another [sic] drink for the road and head home, but instead came/to 5 or so hours later in the ER” (42-44). He then claims that “[f]rom this point forward my memory/ends, and this is only as has been retold to me” and concludes that “I must have hit a blackout very shortly after asking the time” (44-47). Nemo goes on to define a blackout as “just periods that I never remember and in which I say and do very/stupid things.” (46-47).

## Evaluation

In “Crappy New Year” evaluation is distributed throughout the text but lines 48-64 meet Labov’s and Labov and Waletzky’s definition of an evaluative section: they include few temporal clauses and suspend the complicating action which heightens tension and points to the

approaching climax (Labov 1997; Labov and Waletzky 1967). This exemplifies the structural function of an evaluative section and its role in indicating the point of the story. Nemo makes a series of statements about how much pot he smoked, how little he drank in comparison to S, and detailing his feelings about P (highly positive). Line fifty-seven is a key moment in the text because Nemo identifies the moment where he believes things began to spiral out of control (Schiffrin 2003). He smoked “bowl after bowl” of “trainwreck, which is/known to veterans to be very powerful ‘creeper’ weed” which “threw him over the edge” thus initiating the series of events that led him to the hospital (56-61). “Crappy New Year’ contains multiple groupings of evaluative clauses (multiple evaluative sections); I highlight these lines (48-64) because they indicate to the audience that the point of the story, the moment of greatest danger and chaos, is approaching.

#### Complicating Action Continued

Nemo resumes temporal progress in line 65: “we got up to go” but “I couldn’t stand or move much at all” (65). After vomiting on a blanket he, S, and S’s girl depart but Nemo has extreme difficulty walking. They head toward the train station “but we never made it” (69-71). Nemo has “very hazy/memories” of being dragged but “I just/kept falling” and “repeatedly kicked/him [S] in the knee” (71-76). Inexplicably, and marked as such through the adverb ‘just,’ “[a]t some point I just charged towards some random house,” ran into the door and “fell backwards, and hit/my head several times on the concrete” resulting in Nemo becoming “unconscious and completely unrousable [sic]” (77-80). Mom and S confer and decide to take Nemo to the hospital so Mom phones Nemo’s sister who, along with his parents, “piled in the car and raced out towards the other side of town” (81-86). Nemo is not clear but it appears that his parents picked up Nemo, Mom, and S with Nemo having to be stuffed into the car while “soaking wet

from falling/in puddles and pissing my pants which I did several times, plus probably reek[ing] of puke” (87-90). At the Emergency Room “[t]hey took me right in” since “I was falling into walls and such in the waiting/room” (91-92). Nemo notes that he was unconscious, or awake and blacked out, for several hours since he does not remember the catheter insertion or “a lot of the proceedings in the ER” (92-95).

### Resolution

Labov and Waletzky (1967) note that evaluation and the resolution frequently co-occur and this is the case in lines 99-124. Labov (1997) defines resolution as those complicating action clauses that occur after the most reportable event which is Nemo going to the hospital in a coma. Nemo begins the resolution after he has been in the emergency room for several hours. At “almost 4am” which is “[t]he only part about it I remember,” he “looked around,” saw his family and “became a little/more aware of the fact that I was in the hospital and such” (99-101). Nemo sobbed constantly and “thank[ed]/everyone for ‘saving my life’ (101-102). He then describes a confrontation with a female physician who “bitched me out several times about how drunk I was (my/blood-alcohol level was .352!)” (106-107). This is a highly evaluated encounter (see Chapter 7) and Nemo rebuffs the doctor’s judgment with a reference to the primacy of his personal experience: “which/doesn’t make much sense in my little world, seems to me that just indicates I’ve got a high/tolerance” (108-110). Nemo follows up with a screed about how S got a prescription for Vicodin: “this is a guy who drinks himself into oblivion every/night and is the most insane drunk I’ve ever known or would want to know, and yet I get/the lecture?” (111-114). The last paragraph of the resolution continues Nemo’s claims that S drank “SO much more” than he did as everyone “that was with me that night continued to say” (115-117). Nemo ends the

resolution in the hospital with his family meeting S and Nemo kissing S in a “non romantic [sic] way” (117-124).

#### Coda

Lines 125 through 151 are evaluative and make up the coda that brings the audience back to the present. These paragraphs are a list of consequences and what I term a “lessons learned” commentary. Nemo begins with a question: “What did I learn from this?” and provides the simple answer “A lot” (114). Although he enjoys being drunk he “really hate[s] getting/DRUNK” and is “getting tired of spending so/much money on it and having to drink every night etc” (115-116). Nemo recounts the “other shitty things” that happened including losing money and being “treat[ed] like shit” by a “surly” hospital staff (125-132). He acknowledges “act[ing] like an idiot in front of some people I really love/and respect” but does not include his parents in the enumerated list that follows (134-135). He describes the experience as “terribly humiliating” and expresses remorse for making others miss New Year’s Eve: “not cool” (136-138). This experience has led him to trust S and “think of him like a brother” and he evaluates S’s care through a counterfactual situation in which he was left to fend for himself (138-147).

Nemo ends “Crappy New Year” by identifying “[t]he biggest thing I learned out of all of this is that I just should never even start the drinking, at/ least the heavy drinking, until I get to a place you want to stay; avoid at all costs the notion of/trying to get home or wherever I want to be while completely shitfaced” (148-151). In this case the coda takes Nemo and the reader past the present and makes a “step into the future” whereby Nemo discusses the implication of his “Crappy New Year” for future behavior (Ochs 1994; see Chapter 5.1).

## 2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the nature, source, and characteristics of my data. From the online collection of The Erowid Center I selected complete narratives that involved drinking. I proposed that Erowid's editorial practices do not challenge the validity of my data. Furthermore, I argued that the depth of my examination justified my focus on one text, "Crappy New Year" by Nemo (2006). When relevant I give examples from another text, "The Reasons I Couldn't Wait" by Plead (2006). I finished Chapter 2 with a synopsis of "Crappy New Year" utilizing Labov's (1997) and Labov and Waletzky's (1967) structural description of narrative. In Chapter 3 I detail the theoretical and methodological foundations of my analysis. After an overview of the fields of discourse and narrative analysis, I give a detailed discussion of Labov's (1997) and Labov and Waletzky's (1967) theory of narrative. In addition I review concepts of evaluation with examples. After detailing Du Bois's (2007) theory of stance, I offer context for this thesis and describe my transcription and editorial conventions.

## Chapter 3: Method and Theory

### 3.1 Discourse Analysis

My analysis uses the theory and techniques of discourse analysis with especial focus on Labov's theory of narrative (Labov and Waletzky 1967; Labov 1997) and John Du Bois's (2007) theory of stance. Discourse analysis holds that language and the world are reflexively linked such that language both reflects and shapes reality (Johnstone 2008). Furthermore, despite sharing methods with a range of fields (e.g., linguistics), discourse analysis moves beyond language as an abstract system of rules and grammar and is instead concerned with the "aspects of the structure and function of language in use" (Johnstone 2008:4). Discourse refers to communication between two or more interlocutors, including narratives, and can be expanded to include "patterns of belief and habitual action as well as patterns of language" (Foucault 1970, 1972; Johnstone 2004, 2008:3). Thus the label *discourse* can apply to widespread cultural conceptions and talk as well as the specific linguistic techniques that construct, reinforce, and challenge culture. In this formulation analysts can speak of the dominant U.S. cultural discourse as being one that classifies drinking (especially binge drinking) as a public health or medical concern (Hunt and Barker 2001; Marshall, Ames, and Bennett 2001).

Joel Sherzer (1987:295) describes discourse as "the concrete expression of language-culture relationships." The existence of reflexive linkages between drinking stories and culture means that narrators, like the Kuna whom Sherzer studied, can do cultural work through language (Sherzer 1982). Thus speakers, drawing simultaneously on linguistic and cultural resources, can change the world, and themselves, through words (Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Johnstone 2008; Ochs and Capps 1996, 1997; Sherzer 1982).

A major concern of discourse analysis is the relations between units of utterance and how parts become integrated (or not) into a coherent whole. Discourse markers (DM) serve to organize speech (broadly defined) and indicate relations between parts of the whole (Fraser 1999; Norrick 2001; Schiffrin 1987). Thus “the meaning of a DM is procedural not conceptual” as the core meaning of discourse markers is the relationship they construct between units of interlocution (Fraser 1999:944). Additional meaning is contextually negotiated or implied. For example, the connective *and* is an “elaborative marker” whose core meaning “indicates a relationship in which the message of [the second sentence] parallels and possibly augments or refines the message [of the first sentence]” (Fraser 1999:948; Schiffrin 1987). In the following quotation Nemo, in a context of having to account for transgressive behavior, adds to the core meaning of *and* to construct a causal relationship:

56 The alcohol I had consumed was  
57 slowly starting to hit, but this is what threw me over the edge. P had trainwreck, which is  
58 known to veterans to be very powerful 'creeper' weed (don't feel anything at first then it  
59 hits HARD like 5 minutes later when I smoke it, very dangerous in large amounts  
60 especially with alcohol) **and** we smoked bowl after bowl after bowl etc.  
 (“Crappy New Year,” Nemo 2006)

Nemo makes an explicit claim (“this is what threw me over the edge”) and then reproduces that claim by linking his description of the qualities of “trainwreck” to the amount smoked through the connective *and* (57). In context there is a clear implication of causality not contained within the core meaning of *and*. This brief example demonstrates the analytical concern of discourse analysis with studying locutions in context and the operation of analysis at the levels of word, clause, and sentence. The remainder of this thesis demonstrates levels of analysis ranging from single words to large scale social discourses.

### 3.2 Narrative Analysis

Michael Bamberg gives an expansive (as compared to Labov and Waletzky 1967) definition of narrative as storytellers giving “narrative form to experience” by which “[t]hey position characters in space and time and, in a broad sense, give order to and make sense of what happened” (Bamberg 2012:77). Narrative is an “attempt to *explain* or *normalize* what has occurred; they [narrators] lay out why things are the way they are or have become the way they are” (Bamberg 2012:77). Thus, narrative is a subjective form that creates meaning by proposing structured relationships between occurrences separated in space and time (Ochs and Capps 1997).

Bamberg writes that “narrative analysis attempts to systematically relate the narrative means deployed for the function of laying out and making sense of particular kinds of, if not totally unique, experiences” (Bamberg 2012:78). Research on narrative looks at “the means” while research with narrative examines “the way these means are put to use to arrive at presentations and interpretations of meaningful experiences” (Bamberg 2012:78). My thesis, in contrast to prior work on drinking stories, is concerned with the means of narrative and examines how linguistic and cultural resources are deployed toward the narrative goals of tellability, explication of causality, and identity presentation. My analysis assumes, as established by the research of others, that narrative in general, and drinking stories in particular, are resources through which storytellers do cultural work related to their self- and social identities (Abrahamson 2004; Killingsworth 2006; Ochs and Capps 1996, 1997; Rødner 2006; Schiffrin 1996; Sheehan and Ridge 2001; Tutengesa and Rod 2009; Workman 2001). Storytellers, by taking stances, access, reproduce, and challenge cultural values and norms.

### 3.2.1 Labov

In 1967 William Labov and Joshua Waletzky proposed referential and evaluative functions as part of their structural theory of narrative. They offered the minimal definition of narrative as “one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which actually occurred” (1967:9). In essence, a narrative is a set of utterances whose order mirrors the temporal progression of the event described. Clauses are narrative clauses when they are separated by a temporal juncture (e.g., “afterwards”) and “locked in position in the sequence” (Labov and Waletzky 1967:10-14). . Thus if event ‘A’ (getting out of bed) happened before event ‘B’ (driving to school) then the clause describing getting out of bed must, absent other linguist or rhetorical manipulation, come before the clause that describes driving to school. Labov and Waletzky hold that the required match between reality and a story, the referential function of narrative, inspires the temporal ordering of narrative clauses (1967:9).

Labov and Waletzky go on to note that many narratives include “free clauses” whose order can be rearranged without altering the reported sequence of events and “restricted clauses” that can be rearranged but not moved across temporal junctures. They observe that narrators, rather than giving just a terse series of narrative clauses, combine evaluative and narrative clauses to construct a fully formed narrative whose structure can be described functionally: the abstract, orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution, and coda (1967:21; Labov 1997). Although evaluative functions can be distributed throughout the text, even as parts of narrative clauses, Labov and Waletzky hold that stories tend to be organized into functional units. Chapter 2.4.2 gives a synopsis of “Crappy New Year” in terms of Labov’s (1972, 1997) and Labov and Waletzky’s (1967) categories.

Labov and Waletzky, as modified by Labov (1997), highlight three goals of storytellers: creating tellability, “self-aggrandizement” (Labov and Waletzky 1967:35), and the “assignment of praise and blame” through the construction of a causally related chain of events (Labov 1997). Narrators regularly seek to present themselves in the best possible light and “bad behavior,” (Room 2001) including excessive intoxication, calls for an account (Buttny 1987; Labov and Waletzky 1967; Scott and Lyman 1968; Weinstein 1980). Labov also argues that narratives serve as a “folk theory of causality” attempting to explain how the most reportable event came to pass by linking events into a meaningful sequence (1997:407).

In the case of drinking stories, including “Crappy New Year,” I believe that the assignment of praise and blame is inherent to the explanation of causality. Memory is at the nexus of awareness, self-identity, and responsibility meaning that alcohol’s impact on recollection and decision making can create wiggle room for drinkers to evade responsibility (Critchlow 1983, 1985, 1986; Giles 1999; Room 2001). Cultures, individuals, and jurisdictions vary in the degree of “excuse value” they allow for blaming “bad behavior” on intoxication (Marlowe, Lambert, and Thompson 1999; Room 2001). Therefore, when an author makes claims about cause they are also making moral or ethical judgments. The distribution of praise and blame has implications for the narrator’s identity and evaluative devices are techniques for the creation and projection of the self. Given the relationship between narrative and the construction of self-identity it is unsurprising that storytellers engage in “self-aggrandizement” whereby they attempt to portray themselves in a positive light (Labov and Waletzky 1967).

The features identified by Labov and Waletzky serve the dual functions of referencing events that happened in the past and shaping interaction with the audience through the structural development of the narrative (Johnstone 2004). The orientation, typically consisting of a set of

free clauses at the beginning of a story, sets the stage and gives introductory information on participants and context (1967:21). Next the “main body of narrative clauses usually comprises a series of events which may be termed the complicating action section” in which the author answers the imaginary question “And what happened [then]?” (1967:22; Labov 1997:402). Evaluation, the third function and section of narratives, often separates the complicating action from the result and responds to the query “so what?” In Chapter 3.2.2 I give a detailed discussion of evaluation since the concept is critical to my analysis and has been significantly expanded and revised since 1967. The resolution of the narrative generally follows the evaluative section and includes a set of sequenced clauses explaining the results of the complicating action. Finally narratives may conclude with a coda which brings the storyteller and the audience to the present day and signals the end of the narrative (Labov and Waletzky 1967:28-30).

Critics have argued that Labov and Waletzky’s (1967) structure is an ideal type bound to a particular viewpoint of linearity, that their elicitation methodology skews results toward the structured narratives Labov analyzes, and that there are other means by which experience can be related (Bennett 1986; Georgakopoulou 2006; Spicer 1998; Watson 1973). These are important critiques but much of the value of Labov’s and Labov and Waletzky’s work is that it was one of the first attempts to understand how narrative discourse might be structured, broken apart, and analyzed (Johnstone 2004:92). Labov, on his own, and Labov and Waletzky (1967) have enormously influenced narrative analysis and the discourse analysis of narrative. Labov and Waletzky’s “Narrative analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience” (1967) is undeniably a seminal text. In 1997 a quadruple special edition of the *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, edited by Michael Bamberg, reprinted the original 1967 article alongside some 40 authors

simultaneously applauding and extending Labov's work (Bamberg 1997). I find the greatest value in Labov (and Waletzky) to be pointing to the importance of the author's viewpoints and beliefs in directing the structure and contents of a story toward regularly occurring narrative goals: creating tellability, constructing a chain of causality, and positive self-presentation.

Although I use the terms interchangeably (as does Labov 2010a), Labov's 1997 analysis introduces the concept of reportability while Labov and Waletzky's (1967) discussion aligns more with the idea of tellability as an event with inherent interest (Sacks 1992; Norrick 2005b). Both discussions (Labov 1997 and Labov and Waletzky 1967) posit that narratives must be contextually relevant to be told. However, the absence of objective "and absolute standard[s] of inherent interest" makes it difficult to judge "the interest of the narrative or the competing claims" regarding worthiness to extended conversational space (Labov 1997:403). Therefore Labov (1997) turns to the concept of reportability as a quality that "justifies the automatic reassignment of speaker role to the narrator" rather than Labov and Waletzky's (1967) earlier definition where tellability (a term they did not use) justifies the storytellers increased consumption of conversational resources. Unusual, dramatic, and strange events are still the most relatable but reportability builds off the concept of a "most reportable event" (Labov 1997:405). Labov notes that sometimes trivial or banal (i.e., low tellability) events can be recounted and meet with audience approval (1997). Reportability seems to emphasize the local conversational context and the audience as constraints on storytelling; audiences can end narratives by refusing to renew the author's entitlement to the speaker role (Labov 1997). However, the "relativization of reportability" does not preclude recognizing that some things are more relatable (tellable) than others: "death, sex, and moral indignation" (Labov 1997:404-405).

Labov proposes that the “reportability of an event is related to its frequency, as well as its effects upon the needs and desires of the actors” and that “it follows almost automatically that as reportability increases, credibility decreases” (Labov 1997:405). He refers to this situation as the “reportability paradox” and defines credibility as “the extent to which listeners believe that the events described actually occurred in the form described by the narrator” (Labov 1997:405). In sum, events can be tellable but irrelevant while reportability emphasizes context and audience credulity.

### **3.2.2 Evaluation**

In addition to the referential function of narrative, Labov and Waletzky (1967) proposed an evaluative function for narratives: “that part of the narrative which reveals the attitude of the narrator towards the narrative by emphasizing the relative importance of some narrative units as compared to others” (Labov and Waletzky 1967:34). In regards to evaluation, Labov and Waletzky’s 1967 analysis was most concerned with the structural role of evaluation as the narrator responds to the contextual demands (i.e., rhetorical exigency) that elicited storytelling (Labov 1997, 2010). Labov and Waletzky (1967) describe six characteristic types of evaluation (without claiming to be comprehensive) that vary in their degree of embeddedness in the text. Evaluation can be internal to the story as with cultural action (e.g., fingering rosary beads) or external such as “a direct statement of the narrator to the listener about his feelings at the time” (1967:40). Table 3.1 (following page) lists Labov and Waletzky’s (1967) evaluative types with examples from “Crappy New Year” (Nemo 2006),

Labov and Waletzky class repetition as a subtype of the suspension of action although it also highlights elements; the act of repetition makes elements more likely to be noticed and can indicate importance (i.e., being important enough to say more than once). Technically all non-

**Table 3.1** Evaluation in Labov and Waletzky (1967)

Type	Category	Example	Location
Direct statement	semantically defined	“this is what threw me over the edge”	57
Lexical Intensifiers	semantically defined	“in any way,” “damn good”	13, 36
Suspension of Action	formally defined	Nemo’s descriptions of ‘trainwreck’ and blackouts	57-64
Repetition	formally defined	“my memory ends...I must have hit a blackout...I never remember”	44-46
Symbolic Action	culturally defined	“counting down the minutes until new year in the car”	84-86
3 <sup>rd</sup> Person Statement	culturally defined	“the doctor bitched me out several times”	106-107

narrative clauses suspend the action which is one function of an evaluative section (Labov and Waletzky 1967). They also note that the author, as the main source of information, strategically selects the events to relate and can omit unsavory acts (Labov and Waletzky 1967). The absence of detail can be as important, if not more so, as how other events are portrayed. While revisiting evaluation in 1997 Labov recapitulates his and Waletzky’s 1967 argument that, in order to draw attention and to heighten tension, evaluation sections most often occur before the climax of a story as is the case in “Crappy New Year.” Labov goes on to classify narrative clauses in an irrealis mood as evaluative which leads him to conclude that “[a] narrator evaluates events by comparing them with events in an alternative reality that was not in fact realized” (Labov 1997:403). Comparing possibility to reality evaluates both as the narrator and audience contrast the two. Thus Nemo uses the (unrealized) specter of his death to build tellability and laud his friends for keeping him alive.

Numerous scholars have contributed to the creation of an enormous body of work attempting to define and explain how social actors assign cultural value, align or disalign with others, and position themselves with respect to their utterances (Du Bois 2007; Englebretson 2007; Thompson and Hunston 1999). Jargon and labels abound which makes Du Bois’s (2007)

synthesis all the more appealing. Geoff Thompson and Susan Hunston attempt to impose order on the plethora of concepts and argue for three “inherent characteristics of evaluation” (1999:21). Evaluation is subjective, “involves comparison of the object of evaluation against a yardstick of some kind,” and “is value-laden” (1999:21). From this description it follows that evaluation is indicated by the lexical, grammatical, and textual means of marking comparison, subjectivity, and value (Thompson and Hunston 1999:21). Therefore it is unsurprising that topics of research have included, but are not limited to, adverbs (Biber and Finegan 1988; Conrad and Biber 1999), adjectives (Biber and Finegan 1989), modal verbs (Capone 2001), grammatical construction (Hunston and Sinclair 1999), lexical selection (Athanasiadou 2007; Channell 1999), counterfactual constructions (Harding 2004, 2007; Ziegler 2000) and textual structure (Labov and Waletzky 1967; Thompson and Zhou 1999).

Thompson and Hunston suggest a generalized and synthetic definition of evaluation as “the broad cover term for the expression of the speaker or writer’s attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about” (Thompson and Hunston 1999:5). My use of the term evaluation generally follows their definition and, since evaluation implies and is inseparable from the other processes of the stance triangle, this is consonant with Du Bois (2007). When necessary I engage the term evaluation in Du Bois’s (2007) more technical and specific sense (i.e., of assigning and invoking cultural value) and I make this usage clear through context or explicit comment.

### **3.2.3 Selected Evaluative Techniques**

In this section I discuss several evaluative techniques and focus on those that further elucidate the nature of evaluation and that are important to my analysis. I discuss them here for greater

clarity and to avoid cluttering my analysis and conclusions with overly numerous digressions or lengthy explanations of concepts. This section also serves as a partial review of the literature in the fields of discourse and narrative analysis.

### Intensification and Extreme Case Formulations

Intensification refers to the modification of the degree, extent, or scale of a quality of an entity (Athanasidou 2007; Israel 2002). Intensifiers that downgrade the degree of a quality are downtoners while amplifiers “scale an entity upwards” (Athanasidou 2007:555). In the body of this text I use intensification in a limited sense to refer to the upgrading of the extent or degree of a quality thus presenting it as more extreme as when Nemo describes a blackout as periods when he does “very stupid things” (Nemo 2006:42-43). Intensification of degree expresses a subjective judgment in which the author assesses the quality of an entity and assigns it a position along a scale of intensity relative to “an assumed norm” (Athanasidou 2007:555).

Intensification often, but not always, expresses judgments about degree: how stupid, how drunk, how much liquor consumed. In speech or texts intensification serves at least four functions: to “index speakers’ perspective on an entity,” “to give specifications of degree,” to indicate focus, and “to show involvement on the part of the speaker” (Athanasidou 2007:555-556; Edwards 2000; Pomerantz 1986).

Extreme case formulations (ECFs) are intensifying constructions that use “extreme language” (“maximizers” in Athanasidou 2007) such as *brand new*, *every time*, *never*, *completely*, *totally*, *all*, and *none* (Edwards 2000:347; Pomerantz 1986:219). Maximizers characterize an entity or quality in terms of the far or most extreme end of a scale of degree (Athanasidou 2007). Anita Pomerantz (1986) defined extreme case formulations through example and described three uses:

1. To defend against or counter challenges to the legitimacy of complaints, accusations, justifications, and defenses.
2. To propose a phenomenon is “in the object” or objective rather than a product of the interaction or the circumstances.
3. To propose that some behavior is not wrong, or is right, by virtue of its status as frequently occurring or commonly done. (Pomerantz 1986:219-220)

Pomerantz showed that speakers, by linguistically maximizing their characterization of the nature of the wrong done to them, defend against unsympathetic hearings “in which a hearer reconstructs a circumstance that could be referenced by the description offered but that supports a position contrary to the original one” (1986:221). Through the ECF the speaker stresses the “full and clear” nature of the wrong and protects their claim against “down scaling” by listeners (Pomerantz 1986:221-222). Pomerantz also demonstrates how speakers’ claims of “everyone” and “all the time” portray the inherent nature of objects (whether bosses or fruitcakes) as causing a phenomenon (Pomerantz 1986). For example, the assertion that “everyone always reacts that way to snakes” constructs a “lay logic” (i.e., a “folk-theory of causality”) that, using as evidence a generalized reaction by all people without exception, makes an inherent quality of snakes responsible for the behavior of others (Labov 1997:492; Pomerantz 1986:224). Finally, Pomerantz shows that speakers can argue for the acceptability of behaviors (taking bribes, having a gun in the house, or calling a doctor for test results) by arguing that it is a widespread practice which everybody does (1986:225-227). In this linguistic construction the “frequency of occurrences” speaks for the “rightness/wrongness” of a practice and “[w]hat ‘everyone does’ is the ‘right’ way to behave and is not accountable” (1986:225).

Derek Edwards (2000) notes that ECFs are “factually brittle” and open to challenge since generalizing statements can be refuted through a single exception (352). Speakers can “soften” ECFs (e.g., “well, almost everyone”) but most ECFs are unsoftened (Edwards 2000:352, 359). It is important to notice that softeners do not negate the arguments of ECFs but rather serve as a

defense against potential challenges. Edwards offers two functions of ECF softeners that have special relevance for my analysis: “ECF softeners work by...indexing the speaker as reasonable, taking account of empirical realities, not making excessive claims...and retaining the generalizing work that ECFs perform while being immune from easy rebuttal by countercases” (Edwards 2000:359). Edwards argues that the performance of extreme case formulations can function epistemically to signify the speaker’s commitment to, or certainty of, a proposition. He writes, “[g]iven that ECFs are used for insisting on, highlighting, or emphasizing a point, they are simultaneously available to be treated as signaling a speaker’s investment in that point. Denying or insisting on something in an extreme way can highlight the action of denying or insisting, as a kind of stance or investment” (Edwards 2000:364). Through extreme claims or hyperbole the speaker signals their intense belief and strong feelings in a proposition or toward an evaluated entity. In addition, “the sheer extremity of ECFs makes them available for a range of ‘as if,’ ‘essentially so,’ nonliteral or metaphoric uses and uptakes” (Edwards 2000:365; Israel 2002). The factually brittle nature of ECFs encourages others to interpret them as a gloss on other claims and as propositions instructing them to act “as if” the ECF is true or as indicators of sarcasm, irony, and hyperbole. Table 3.2 (following page) summarizes this discussion of extreme case formulations with examples from “Crappy New Year” (Nemo 2006).

Characterizing events as extreme or highly intense bolsters tellability as shown in fraternity drinking stories where narrators frequently deploy hyperbole and exaggeration to make the story more thrilling and thus more reportable (Workman 2001). Intensification (in the sense of amplification) can be achieved through a variety of lexical, grammatical, and textual means including repetition, superlatives, valenced lexical items, adverbs, adjectives, and prosodic elements like increasing voice volume or capitalization (Athanasidou 2007). In Chapter Five I

**Table 3.2** Functions of Extreme Case Formulations (Edwards 2000; Pomerantz 1986)

Function	Exemplary Quotations from Nemo (2006)
“[A]ssert the strongest case in anticipation of non-sympathetic hearings (Pomerantz 1986:227)	this is a guy who drinks himself into oblivion every/night and is the most insane drunk I've ever known or would want to know, and yet I get/the lecture? (112-114)
Portraying a phenomenon as inherent to an entity (Pomerantz 1986)	Last night, new years eve 2004, was the second time in only a period of a few months/that I almost died several different ways in a drunken stupor. This only happens when I/hang out with my friend 'S' (1-3)
Characterizing a behavior as acceptable “by virtue of its status as frequently occurring or commonly done” (Pomerantz 1986:220)	We all took healthy guzzles from our drink (32)
Indexing the speaker’s investment or stance (Edwards 2000)	P was one of the best people I'd ever met, I love/that woman in every way but a romantic one” (38-39); After that I was unconscious and completely/unrousable, which has happened to me before, I think they're like mini comas or/something because I don't respond to ANYTHING (79-81)
“Doing nonliteral” and metaphorical construction (Edwards 2000:347, 365)	From this point forward my memory ends, and this is only/as has been retold to me. I must have hit a blackout very shortly after asking the time, for/me blackouts are just periods that I never remember and in which I say and do very/stupid things (44-47)

show how Nemo uses intensification, among other techniques, to construct tellability.

#### Epistemology: Positioning, Evidence, and Reconstructed Dialogue

Storytellers make arguments and deploy evidence in and through narratives (Bennett 1979; Bennett 1986; Giles 1999; Stahl 1977; Weinstein 1980) and “truth is a linguistic question” (Bolinger 1973). Epistemology deals with the construction of knowledge and how narrators position themselves in relation to their arguments. Storytellers, speakers, and authors make epistemic claims where epistemic is defined as concerning a speaker’s certainty in the truth of propositions along with the degree of responsibility they take for a specific stance (Bennett 1986; Chafe and Nichols 1986; Cornillie 2009; Du Bois 2007; Hyland 1996, 2005; Kirkham 2011; Simon-Vanderbergen 2008; P. White 2003). Epistemic stance “comment[s] on the certainty (or

doubt), reliability, or limitations of a proposition, including comments on the source of information” (Conrad and Biber 1999:57) and this conception is subsumed by positioning in Du Bois’s (2007) stance model. Authors can draw on a wide variety of techniques to provide evidence and express confidence or doubt in their assertions with obvious consequences for the narrative distribution of praise, blame, and responsibility for transgressive behavior (Giles 1999; Labov 1997; Labov and Waletzky 1967; Scott and Lyman 1968). Du Bois’s integrative stance model recognizes that epistemological statements cannot be separated from evaluation or alignment. Taking a stance is a social act with social consequences and evaluations are made by social actors (Du Bois 2007; Englebretson 2007). Therefore assigning responsibility for, and levels of commitment to, utterances is important for reasons beyond credibility. In the following paragraphs I briefly discuss hedging, boosting, and reported speech with regards to their role in constructing evidentially based claims.

Ken Hyland defines hedges as “any linguistic means used to indicate either (a) a lack of complete commitment to the truth of a proposition, or (b) a desire not to express that commitment categorically” (1996:251). In contrast boosters “emphasize certainty about a proposition or confidence in an assertion,” “express authorial commitment to a proposition,” and “close off alternative viewpoints by strengthening the asserted position” (Hu and Cao 2011:2796). These definitions explain that hedging and boosting can operate both on the illocutionary force of an utterance (i.e., the truth value or strength of the statement) and the author’s responsibility for discourse (Holmes 1984; Hyland 1996; Hu and Cao 2011).

Hedges and boosters are the two sides of the evidentiary coin and the linguistic means of their expression overlap with, and are sometimes the same as, those of intensification and include modal verbs, adverbs, epistemic adjectives, quantifiers, and intensifiers (Hyland 1996).

Commitment to claims can be weakened (hedged) through expressions such as “apparently,” “it is possible that,” “it seems,” and related phrases. Examples of boosters include phrases and modifiers such as “undoubtedly,” “clearly,” “of course,” and “obviously.” Repetition and prosodic elements can also function epistemically as when a declaration is repeated or shouted as opposed to briefly mentioned or tremulously whispered. Table 3.3 gives examples of boosting and hedges from “Crappy New Year” partially based on the categories in Hyland (1996) and Hu and Cao (2011).

**Table 3.3** Hedging and Boosting with Examples from “Crappy New Year” (Nemo 2006)

Category	Function	Exemplary Quotation
Epistemic adverb	hedging	By this point I was soaking wet from falling/in puddles and pissing my pants which I did several times, plus <b>probably</b> reeked of puke (89-90)
Epistemic adverb	boosting	I couldn't ever repay that but <b>certainly</b> would return the favor” (146)
Epistemic verb	hedging <sup>a</sup>	I <b>think</b> I met up with S and his girl at about 4-5 pm (14)
Epistemic verb	hedging <sup>a</sup>	I/ <b>guess</b> I got up and crashed into a bunch of furniture (didn't break anything thankfully) (65-66)
Epistemic verb	boosting	I <b>know</b> I'll never see again (130)
Evidential verb	hedging	she was <b>saying</b> the fact that I wasn't in a coma with that/ much booze in me meant that I was an alcoholic (107-108)
Modal verb	boosting	I <b>must</b> have been awake at/that point but still in a blackout” (92-93)
Modal verb	hedging	can't help/but to think that had I had a little more food in my stomach I <b>might not</b> have gotten as bad/as I did (27-29)
Textual prosody	boosting	I think they're like mini comas or/ something because I don't respond to <b>ANYTHING</b> (80-81)

<sup>a</sup>Although *I guess* and *I think* can function as epistemic markers, they can also act as evidentials, discourse markers, or to frame a stance (Cornillie 2009 Déhe and Wichmann 2010; Kärkkäinen 2006, 2007)

Narrators can use the reported speech of themselves and others in multiple ways: evaluatively, as evidence, to frame a stance, to manage alignment, and to take a stance (Caldas-Coulthard 1987; Clift 2006; Coulmas 1986; Holt 1996; Labov and Waletzky 1967). Direct reported speech refers to purported quotations while indirect reported speech provides the “illocutionary force” (i.e., the certainty and tone) and “propositional content” but not the exact

words and structure of a speech act (Caldas-Coulthard 1987:75; Holmes 1984). Reported speech often serves as evidence and can “len[d] an air of objectivity to...account[s]” (Holt 1996:242).

Although direct reported speech in the form of quotations has received extensive study (Clark and Gerrig 1990; Clift 2006; Coulmas 1986; Holt 1996; Niemalä 2005; Tannen 1986, 1995) there is a dearth of literature on indirect reported speech of the type Nemo uses. Indirect reported speech, especially without an attributed author (i.e., hearsay) is often characterized as less epistemically strong compared to quotation even though direct reported speech is rarely, if ever, a complete and accurate representation (Bednarek 2006; Caldas-Coulthard 1987; Clift 2006; Cornillie 2009; Holt 1996; Tannen 1986, 1995; Travis 2006). Deborah Tannen argues that the reproduction of speech can never be complete since, by definition, reported speech removes the utterance from its original context of production thus changing its meaning (1995). In addition, it is virtually impossible for interlocutors to reproduce from memory the exact wording and prosodic elements that make up utterances. Therefore Tannen proposes the term “constructed dialogue” (1986, 1995). Constructed dialogue is a powerful resource for producing and deploying stances while manipulating authorial responsibility. For example, authors, through dialogue attributed to someone else, can make evaluations but avoid responsibility for the utterance. As I show in Chapters 5 and 6 Nemo deploys constructed dialogue to construct credibility and to take stances regarding his actions on New Year’s Eve.

### *Just*

The word *just* is complex, multivocal, and polysemous with its meaning dependent on context, placement, and relationship to surrounding lexical items (Bakhtin 1982, 1986; Kishner and Gibbs Jr. 1996; Lee 1987, 1991; Molina and Romano 2012; Nerlich and Clarke 2001; Weltman 2003). *Just* is also important to Nemo and he uses it sixteen times to produce a range

of co-occurring and multiple meanings in “Crappy New Year” (2006). Previous research on *just* demonstrates a range of meanings and includes David Weltman’s (2003) analysis of political speech, David Lee’s (1987, 1991) discussion of *just* and categories of meaning, and Jeffery Kishner and Raymond Gibbs Jr.’s (1996) examination of *just* and collocated lexical items.

In addition to marking temporal order and quantity, *just* has also been observed being used to deprecate something or someone (e.g., “that’s just rhetoric”), to minimize the importance of a process or thing with regards to another, and to mitigate responsibility and proclaim the “blameworthiness of an action” (Kishner and Gibbs Jr. 1996; Molina and Romano 2012; Weltman 2003:356-357). Weltman examined political discourse and found that assertions preceded by *just* can act as “peremptory assumption[s]” that foreclose explanation and imply the truth of a proposition “which is unaccompanied by justification or explanation” (Weltman 2003:350). Through this usage the word *just* can preclude questioning the speaker’s conclusions by characterizing them as outside the boundaries of argument or by appealing to authority. Statements utilizing *just* can be “spectacle[s] of ‘pure’ assertion” sometimes prompted by “the speaker being at a loss for explanation” because the statement is unarguably true or because the event is inexplicable; thus *just* can be a tautology equivalent to stating “X, not Y” (Weltman 2003:362-365).

Kishner and Gibbs Jr. propose a synonym for each meaning of *just* such as “only” for the restrictive sense and “merely” for the depreciatory usage (1996:25). Table 3.4 (following page) gives a summary of the meanings of *just* that appear in “Crappy New Year” (Kishner and Gibbs Jr. 1996; Lee 1987, 1991; Molina and Romano 2012; Weltman 2003). Throughout my analysis (Chapters 5-8) I discuss Nemo’s use of *just* in detail including my observation that Nemo’s usage rarely fits neatly into the categories described in Table 3.4.

**Table 3.4** Functions of *just* and Examples in “Crappy New Year” (Nemo 2006)

Function	Example
Specify time or location	and I had <b>just</b> smoked a bowl (41)
Emphatic	but what he did/for me last night is <b>just</b> amazing (3-4)
Restrictive	My plan the whole day was to <b>just</b> go hang out with S and his girlfriend, get a little/drunk, and go home at about ten (5-6)
Depreciatory/Minimization	for/me blackouts are <b>just</b> periods that I never remember and in which I say and do very/stupid things (45-47)
Argumentative closure	she was saying the fact that I wasn't in a coma with that/much booze in me meant that I was an alcoholic and had a dangers dependency; which/doesn't make much sense in my little world, seems to me that <b>just</b> indicates I've got a high/tolerance (107-110)
Indexical/Indicating inexplicability/Marking production difficulties	it's hard to describe but she was <b>just</b> very/'cosmic' and intelligent in a more spiritual way (39-40)

### 3.3 Stance

Stance is critical to my analysis and in this section I explicate stance and show, through examples, how stance can be employed to analyze drinking stories. Stancetaking is one of the most important things we do with language and it is inherent in communication (Du Bois 2007:139). Stance is a “linguistically articulated form of social action” whereby speakers evaluate an entity or proposition and take a position in relation to their utterance and in relation to somebody; stance has social consequences and functions within a network of relations and meanings between interlocutors, culture, and objects (Du Bois 2007:139).

Prior research on stance has produced a plethora of models and terms including affective stance, attitudinal stance, epistemic stance, evaluation, modality, and style stance (Barton 1993; Biber and Finegan 1989; Conrad and Biber 1999; Du Bois 2007; Englebretson 2007; Harding 2007; Hunston and Thompson 1999; Kirkham 2011; Precht 2003; P. White 2003). Du Bois abjures functionalist typologies based on what stance is doing in a specific utterance; instead he proposes a model that describes the process of stance. Consequently, his stance triangle subsumes and synthesizes much of the prior literature while also providing a methodology for

analysis. The stance triangle graphically illustrates the dialogic relationships between stancetakers, larger systems of sociocultural value, and the act of stancetaking through evaluation and positioning.

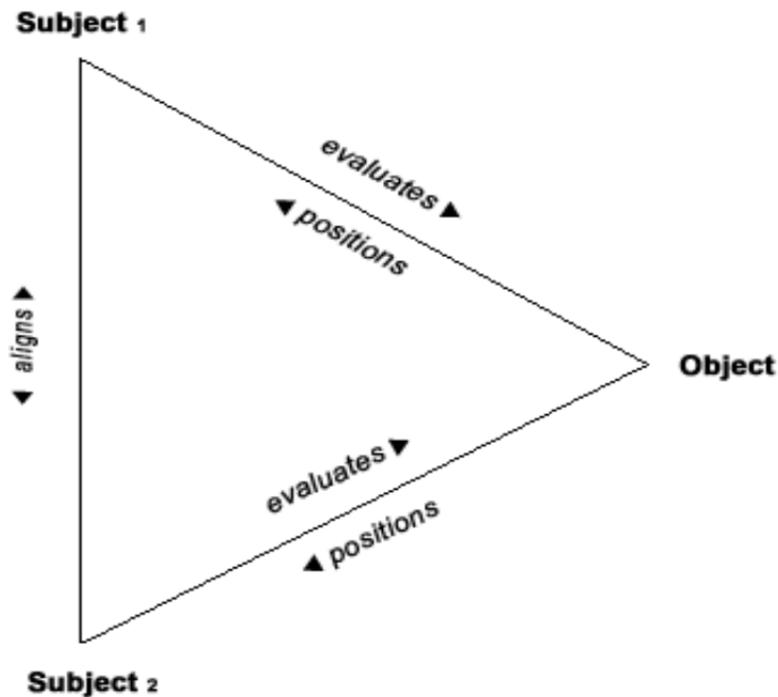
Du Bois (2007) begins his discussion of the stance triangle with three questions:

- 1) “Who is the stancetaker?”
- 2) “What is the object of stance?”
- 3) “What stance is the stancetaker responding to?” (Du Bois 2007:146-151)

Stancetakers engage in three constant and simultaneous processes that reflect the dialogic and reflexive nature of stance. Stances are taken in response to other stances; they are intersubjective and do not exist *sui generis*. Taking a stance is an intersubjective act permeated by “presupposed systems of sociocultural value (Du Bois 2007:139). Stance occurs through interaction, in context, and with regard to the stances of others. The stance triangle itself consists of three interconnected processes carried on between two (or more) interlocutors. By convention Du Bois (2007) identifies the stancetaker as  $S_1$  (subject one), the object of stance as  $S_o$  (stance object), and the interlocutor, who has made the stance being responded to, as  $S_2$  (subject two). Figure 3.1 (following page) gives Du Bois’s (2007) graphic representation of the stance triangle.

#### Evaluation, Positioning, and Alignment

The stance triangle consists of three processes carried out by two or more interlocutors: evaluation, positioning, and alignment. All stance acts involve these elements and they are inextricably linked. Du Bois writes that “evaluation can be defined as the process whereby a stancetaker orients to an object of stance and characterizes it as having some specific quality or value” (Du Bois 2007:143). Speakers, through the evaluation of stance objects, invoke cultural values to make judgments while also positioning themselves in relation to their proposition and the entity evaluated. Positioning refers to “the act of situating a social actor with respect to



**Figure 3.1** The Stance Triangle (Du Bois 2007:163)

responsibility for stance and for invoking sociocultural value” (Du Bois 2007:143). Positioning creates a relationship between the stance taker and the object of evaluation including the degree to which the speaker claims a stance. The final element, alignment, is “the act of calibrating the relationship between two stances, and by implication between two stancetakers” (Du Bois 2007:144).

Evaluation subsumes prior conceptions of affective or evaluative stance (Biber and Finegan 1989), positioning absorbs epistemic stance and modality (Barton 1993; Clift 2006; Conrad and Biber 1999; Kirkham 2011), and alignment accounts for the intersubjective nature of discourse (Haddington 2004, 2006; Kärkkäinen 2006; P. White 2003). Stances are dialogic in that they are constructed, deployed, and maintained in communication with interlocutors, other stances, and prior discourse (Bakhtin 1982; Du Bois 2007; Du Bois and Kärkkäinen 2012; P. White 2003).

Stances that reproduce elements or the structure of other stance acts resonate across texts with the similarities reinforcing stances or indexing alignment. The concept of resonance builds off a musical (or physics) metaphor: plucking one string on an instrument can cause other strings to vibrate if the frequencies of the two are related. Similarly, structural similarity of sequential stance acts by interlocutors may reinforce positions and create or index alignment.

Du Bois's (2007) model describes an inextricable relationship between evaluation and positioning which subsumes prior theoretical entities (Englebretson 2007) such as epistemic stance (Biber and Finegan 1989), affective or evaluative stance (Conrad and Biber 1999), modality, and hedging (P. White 2003). In the stance triangle Du Bois's arrows illustrate that all evaluations also position the subject and all positioning implies an evaluation (2007). The following quotation from "The Reasons I Couldn't Wait" by "Pleadthefifth" (Plead 2006) demonstrates multiple aspects of stance:

006 Since we're fairly new at this drinking thing (read: pussy little bastards), or at least B and  
007 M are, we needed chasers. I feel that Gatorade is the best sort of chaser. The taste is also  
008 bearable, for me, when mixed with such a high proof alcohol. (Plead 2006:6-8)

Returning to Du Bois's three questions we identify the stancetaker ( $S_1$ ) as Plead and the stance objects ( $S_0$ ) as Plead, his friends, and their Gatorade concoction. The answer to Du Bois's third question about prior stance ( $S_2$ ) highlights the relationship between stancetaking and culture. Human interaction occurs against the backdrop of cultural norms, beliefs, and values; to fully illustrate this Du Bois's graphic model would benefit with the triangle being inside a circle similar to how LeBlanc (2010) stresses community values in her study of online groups.

In line 6 Plead equates lack of experience and an inability to conquer the body's reaction to foul tasting liquids with the negative, and gendered, qualities of being a "pussy little bastard." Drug use is a gendered activity and Plead engages with surrounding cultural discourses that link

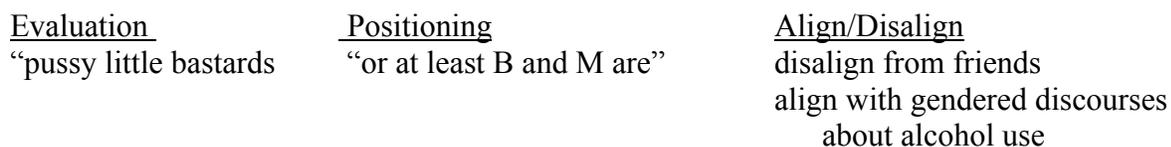
competent drinking to gendered (masculine) values of toughness, physical exploration, and the valorization of intoxication (Lindsay 2006; Measham 2002; Peralta 2007; West 2001; Workman 2004). He invokes a chain of associations linking physical control and competence to a masculine “hierarchy based on courage and skill” (Workman 2001:431). Culture and stancetaking are reflexive and Plead reinforces gendered notions of drinking through an unquestioning invocation similar to the norm of binge drinking among fraternity members and their use of drinking stories to reproduce that norm (Workman 2001).

Du Bois’s (2007:166) stance diagraph deconstructs a sentence in terms of the processes of the stance triangle. Diagraphs are the triangle in a different format and Figure 3.2 shows a stance diagraph applied to lines 6-8 in “The Reason’s I Couldn’t Wait” (Plead 2006):



**Figure 3.2** Stance Diagraph of Lines 6-8 of “The Reasons I Couldn’t Wait” (Plead 2006)

In these lines Plead evaluates himself and his friends with regards to broader gendered discourses of drinking. Plead, as the author, is claiming the stance even though he does not begin the sentence with *I think* or the equivalent. After determining who is evaluating what in relation to prior stances I can move on to examine how Plead evaluates himself and his friends in the phrase, “read: pussy little bastards” (6). As noted above, Plead’s evaluation “invoke[s] presupposed systems of sociocultural value” (Du Bois 2007:139) regarding masculinity and alcohol. Figure 3.3 graphically displays the stance processes applied to lines 6-8 of “The Reasons I Couldn’t Wait” (Plead 2006):



**Figure 3.3** Stance Processes of Lines 7-9 of “The Reasons I Couldn’t Wait” (Plead 2006)

Plead takes responsibility for his utterance and he positions himself in contrast to his evaluation and the stance objects of his friends with the phrase “or at least B and M are” (6). Plead makes the evaluation and rejects (i.e., positions himself) a relationship of similarity to the stance objects (his friends). Plead’s unquestioning use of “pussy little bastards” aligns him with surrounding social stances about alcohol, masculinity, and experience (6). His use of “read” projects a stance and instructs the audience how to interpret his friends’ need for mixers: as a sign of weakness related to femininity (6).

Lines 7-8 are another opportunity to examine positioning:

007 I feel that Gatorade is the best sort of chaser. The taste is also  
 008 bearable, for me, when mixed with such a high proof alcohol (Plead 2006).

This utterance can be diagrammed as follows (Figure 3.4) with the second stance subject (S<sub>2</sub>) being Plead’s friends as indicated in surrounding discourse (not reproduced here):

<u>Speaker</u>	<u>Stance Subject</u>	<u>Positioning</u>	<u>Stance Object</u>	<u>Evaluation</u>
Plead	I	feel that	Gatorade	the best sort of chaser
	me	for me	taste	bearable

**Figure 3.4** Stance Diagram of Lines 7-8 of “The Reasons I Couldn’t Wait” (Plead 2006)

Plead has positioned himself toward Gatorade in several ways. Firstly, through his use of “I” and “for/me,” Plead has identified the evaluation of Gatorade as his and as a subjective feeling (7-8). Secondly, by including “for me,” he allows that others may have divergent views (7-8). Thirdly, he limits the scope of his evaluation to when he consumes “high proof alcohol” (8). Through linguistic means Plead has positioned himself in a specific relationship between himself, his utterance, and Gatorade with implications for his identity and the identities of his friends.

## Making a Stance

A fine grained analysis of lines six through eight of “The Reasons I Couldn’t Wait” reveals linguistic techniques for creating a stance and demonstrates one method I use in my analysis:

006 Since we're fairly new at this drinking thing (read: pussy little bastards), or at least B and  
007 M are, we needed chasers. I feel that Gatorade is the best sort of chaser. The taste is also  
008 bearable, for me, when mixed with such a high proof alcohol. (Plead 2006:6-8)

Plead begins with the discourse marker *since* thus creating a causal connection between needing chasers and a lack of experience (Brown and Rubin 2005; Fraser 1999; Schiffrin 1987). Again his position is informed by cultural context as experience in alcohol use is often connected to evaluations of maturity, status, and identity (Bogren 2006; Demant 2006; Killingsworth 2006; Sheehan and Ridge 2001; Workman 2001). He highlights this connection by instructing the reader to interpret the need for chasers in a particular way: “read: pussy little bastards” (6). His choice of a gendered insult indexes the previously mentioned masculine ethos of drinking; his addition of “pussy” to “little bastards” clarifies his meaning and encourages an association of the two concepts. Thus, to be a “pussy” is to be diminished, weak, and unable to conquer bodily reactions to unpleasant tasting liquids.

Plead alternately aligns and disaligns with his friends and their embodied stances. Stance here exists at the physical level and requiring chasers (being unable to choke down bad tasting liquids) indexes inexperience and “pussiness.” In line 6 he initiates a separation from his friends with “or at least B and M are” as opposed to his use of “we” at the beginning of the sentence. Interestingly he returns to “we” at the end of line 7 realigning him with his friends based on the common need for chasers. Plead’s use of the hedge *fairly* (“fairly new”) in line 6 gives him a partial escape route as he can claim a level of familiarity with alcohol or at least one more

knowledgeable than his friends; instead of inexperience Plead suggests that his need for a mixer is related to the unpleasant taste of “such a high proof alcohol” (7-8).

Plead again disaligns from his friends in lines 7-8 when he stresses his specific ability, with the phrase “for/me,” to handle alcohol’s taste. Plead portrays his physical control as the result of experience, as explicitly stated in line 6, and implied by his rationale for selecting Gatorade as a mixer/chaser. He characterizes Gatorade as the best “sort of chaser” and expresses knowledge, presumably based on experience, that it makes high proof liquors “bearable” (7-8). These three lines of text are in a dialogic relationship with the full story and with social discourses: they are connected to other sections of the text and surrounding cultural values. The full meaning of a sentence or a paragraph exists in how units are connected and the relationships between them. Lines 6-8, and the stances they create, resonate (Du Bois 2007) with the rest of Plead’s story, with broader cultural discourses, and with elements in “Crappy New Year” (see Chapter 7) (Nemo 2006).

### **3.4 Text and Transcription Conventions**

Appendix A contains the original texts of Plead and Nemo’s stories as posted by The Erowid Center (2006). The only alterations are the addition of line numbers, adjusting the font to 12 point Times New Roman, and changes in spacing that resulted from pasting web-based text into Microsoft Word. I correct misspellings when I quote their stories but leave neologisms, portmanteaus, and grammatical irregularities intact. Line numbers are given in parentheses and are cited either next to the quotation or at the end of the sentence based on considerations of sentence flow and clarity. Line breaks are indicated, when relevant, with a slash: “This only happens when I/hang out with my friend 'S” (Nemo 2006:2-3). Appendix B includes the Erowid Center’s for Experience Report submission form and a copy of its newsletter, *Erowid Extracts*,

detailing the editorial and review process for submitted reports (Erowid 2012a, 2012b). Along with changes in spacing caused by pasting web-based text into Microsoft Word, I removed blank text boxes, altered the font to 12 point Times New Roman, and adjusted spacing to remove white space.

Although I am examining written texts I use the terms “speaker,” “interlocutor,” “narrator,” and “storyteller” interchangeably. In addition I use the term “speech” to refer to both written and oral discourse except where otherwise noted. Regardless of the medium (written or spoken) the purposes of narrative generally remain the same and my lack of distinction between written and oral discourse is not meaningful for my analysis.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

Chapter Three provides an overview of the methods and theoretical foundations of this thesis. I began by discussing the definition of discourse as speech (broadly defined) between two or more interlocutors. The term discourse can also refer to continued and distributed patterns of talk about a subject such that scholars can speak of dominant American discourses about drinking. Discourse analysis is concerned with language as it is used and holds that language and culture demonstrate a reflexive relationship; language simultaneously reproduces, challenges, and enacts culture. Narrative is a culturally universal form of discourse and is a critical way in which humans make sense of the world and themselves. Narratives are important in the projection and construction of identity and create meaningful relationships between sequences of events.

I then discussed Labov (1997) and Labov and Waletzky’s (1967) structural-functional theory of narrative. They argue that the referential and evaluative functions of stories structure narrative forms. Fully formed narratives include evaluative and temporal clauses; they can be

described in terms of six functional units: abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and coda. Labov and Labov and Waletzky defines evaluation as those parts of the narrative that indicate the speaker's orientation and indicate the importance of events for "the needs and desires of the actors" (Labov 1997:405; Labov and Waletzky 1967). They identify three fundamental tasks for narrators: constructing tellability and credibility, assigning praise and blame, and building a causal chain explaining how the most reportable event came to pass (Labov 1997; Labov and Waletzky 1967). Reportability justifies reassignment of the conversational turn to the narrator throughout the story and is inversely correlated with credibility (Labov 1997).

In Chapter 3.2.2 and 3.2.3 I discussed the specifics of evaluation. Evaluation plays a structuring role in stories and, although distributed throughout the text, usually suspends temporal movement prior to the most reportable event thus heightening tension and indicating the point of the story (Labov 1997; Labov and Waletzky 1967; Polanyi 1979). Labov observes that storytellers often talk about what didn't happen (counterfactuals) in order to evaluate events which did occur (Harding 2004, 2007; Labov 1997). Labov and Waletzky (1967) identified six types of evaluation with varying degrees of narrative embeddedness; the concept has been significantly expanded since their seminal article. In this thesis I generally use the term *evaluation* as Thompson and Hunston do: as "the broad cover term for the expression of the speaker or writer's attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about" (Thompson and Hunston 1999:5). I indicate, through context or explicit statement, when I mean evaluation in Du Bois's (2007) technical sense of invoking and assigning cultural value to an entity.

Chapter 3.2.3 identifies and discusses several evaluative techniques including intensification (Athanasidou 2007), hedging (Fraser 2010a; Hyland 1996; Lakoff 1973; P. White 2003), and boosting (Hu and Cao 2011). I use intensification in a limited sense to mean increasing the intensity or strength of a quality. Extreme case formulations (ECF) use maximizing language to present the strongest possible case against potential challenges, to argue for the cause of phenomena, and to argue for the moral rightness (or wrongness) of behavior (Athanasidou 2007; Pomerantz 1986). However, ECFs are “factually brittle” since a single counter-example proves them false (Edwards 2000:352). Therefore Derek Edwards argues that ECFs can be used non-literally to indicate commitment, certainty, and irony (Edwards 2000). Epistemology is a broad category that includes the marking of sources of information (evidentiality) and commitment to a proposition and its truth value (epistemic positioning) (Barton 1993; Biber and Finegan 1989; Chafe and Nichols 1986; Conrad and Biber 1999; Kirkham 2011; Du Bois 2007). Hedging negatively modulates (downtones) interlocutor investment in an utterance, their certainty of its truth value, or the degree to which they claim it (Caffi 1999; Fraser 2010a, 2010b; Hyland 1996).

I ended section 3.2.3 with discussions about reported speech and the lexeme *just*. Reported speech, especially purported quotation, can function evidentially and “len[d] an air of objectivity to...account[s]” (Holt 1996:242). Tannen argues that reported speech is never accurate because of fallible human memory and the removal of utterances from their context; she offers the term “reconstructed dialogue” (Tannen 1986, 1995). I characterized the lexeme *just* as multivocal and polysemous with a range of potential meanings including deprecatory, minimizing, and tautological (Bakhtin 1982, 1986; Kishner and Gibbs Jr. 1996; Lee 1987, 1991; Molina and Romano 2012; Nerlich and Clarke 2001; Weltman 2003). During my analysis of “Crappy New

Year” it becomes clear that context is critical in deciphering the meaning of a given usage of *just* (Nemo 2006).

In Chapter 3.3. I illustrated Du Bois’s theory of stance with examples from Plead’s story “The Reasons I Couldn’t Wait” (2006). Du Bois’s stance triangle subsumes previous theoretical entities into three processes: evaluation, positioning, and alignment. Stance is a social act with consequences and by taking a stance interlocutors invoke and assign cultural value; position themselves in relation to evaluated entities, to others, and to their own utterances; and manage alignment with interlocutors and their stances (Du Bois 2007). Through grammatical, lexical, and structural similarity stances can resonate across discourse thereby intensifying positions and aligning or disaligning with others.

I end Chapter Three with a discussion of my text and transcription conventions. I have made few changes to “Crappy New Year” and “The Reasons I couldn’t Wait” (Nemo 2006; Plead 2006). Changes in spacing occurred when I altered the font and transferred the texts (and material in the appendices) into Microsoft Word. Otherwise I only correct spelling errors.

In Chapter Four I conduct a review of the scholarly literature related to this thesis. I argue that anthropology has significantly contributed to the study of alcohol and other drugs but that the field is currently dominated by a public health model with research mostly conducted by scholars in the fields of medicine, public health, epidemiology, and sociology (Hunt and Barker 2001; Kelly et al. 2011; Marshall, Ames, and Bennett 2001). Anthropology’s main contributions have been to demonstrate the cultural embeddedness of drinking and intoxication along with methodological innovations. Furthermore, anthropology has provided a wealth of cross-cultural data. Anthropologists have conducted little, if any, research on drinking stories with the aforementioned disciplines publishing the most literature. Very little examination of drinking

stories themselves exists; narratives of alcohol experience are used as data with little consideration for the impact or importance of the narrative form. This points both to the need for additional research and to the value of my own work as an examination of how drinking stories are constructed rather than their social functions or as providing data for public health programs.

## Chapter 4: Literature Review

### 4.1 Anthropology and Substance Use

Anthropology has contributed significantly to research about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs (ATOD) and a full review of the literature in this thesis would be impossible (for more detailed reviews see Dietler 2006; Heath 1987, 1995; Hunt and Barker 2001; Kelley et al. 2011; Marshall, Ames, and Bennett 2001). Here I describe some of the early seminal texts, summarize several findings relevant to this thesis, and highlight three critical contributions. First, anthropological investigation demonstrates the cultural nature of alcohol (as an artifact and in use) and, by implicit extension or explicit research, other drugs. Anthropology challenges conceptions of alcohol as an essentialized substance divorced from culture with effects determined solely by pharmacology. Second, archaeology reveals the diverse and primeval nature of human involvement with mind-altering substances and altered states of mind. Third, anthropology provides methodological techniques and theoretical perspectives not found in medicine, psychology, public health, or sociology-the fields most involved in policymaking about, and the study of, alcohol and other drugs. Dwight B. Heath, writing in 1987, commented that “[m]uch of what is anthropological in the history of alcohol studies cannot be attributed directly to the efforts of people in the discipline” (Heath 1987:101). Unfortunately alcohol studies remains dominated by the aforementioned fields but these non-anthropologists conduct much of their work “using concepts, methods, and data...commonly associated with anthropology” (Hunt and Barker 2001; Room 1987:101). In the following sections I give an overview of anthropology’s involvement with alcohol studies and end with a discussion of the literature on drinking stories.

#### 4.1.1 Anthropology and Alcohol Studies

In 1965 David Mandelbaum, drawing on data produced by the cross-cultural and ethnographic resources unique to anthropology, argued that “[e]ven a brief account of the range of drinking practices shows that cultural expectations define the ways in which drinking, both normal and abnormal, is done in a society” (288). Drinking behavior, Mandelbaum asserts, is a “manifestat[ion] of pervasive cultural themes” including the basic structure of social relations (1965:288). Despite historical change and cross-cultural variation Mandelbaum identified several qualified similarities in drinking behavior: generally men drink more, drinking is usually social, and drinking companions tend to clump by age and social status (i.e., people drink with people like themselves). Mandelbaum went on to note that “medical and behavioral studies” regularly “glossed over” linkages of culture and societal drinking patterns (1965:288).

In 1969 Craig MacAndrew and Robert Edgerton published their seminal book *Drunken Comportment*; like Mandelbaum they drew on anthropology’s store of cross-cultural knowledge to demonstrate intersections of alcohol and culture. MacAndrew and Edgerton “demonstrate[d] conclusively that drunken comportment, however much it may be affected by biochemical and neuropharmacological factors, is also a product of expectations and culturally shared values” (Heath 1987:103). They showed that alcohol’s effects depended on more than biology and molecular structure contrary to prevalent and continuing discourses that regard alcohol as an essentialized (i.e., deterministic and unchanging) substance (Hunt and Barker 2001).

MacAndrew and Edgerton noted that societies often regard drunken comportment as a “time out” state in which behavior is subject to less opprobrium and segregated from the person’s larger biography. However societies differ in the circumstances and degree to which intoxication is an acceptable excuse for transgressive behavior. Intoxication never provides an unlimited

excuse; justification based on intoxication is always “within limits” that are culturally determined (Hill 1978; MacAndrew and Edgerton 1969; Room 2001; Tryggvesson 2004).

*Drunken Comportment*, and scholarly work since, has highlighted the importance of the mental state of drinkers, their expectations, the social setting, and the identities of other participants in determining the effects of alcohol and other drugs (Becker 1967; Critchlow 1983, 1985; Heath 1998; MacAndrew and Edgerton 1969; Room 1984, 2001). *Drunken Comportment* resonates with Mandelbaum’s observation that “the behavioral consequences of drinking alcohol depend as much on a people’s idea of what alcohol does to a person” as they do on pharmacology (Mandelbaum 1965:282).

Mandelbaum synthesized widely distributed research and presented examples that outlined areas of study for the next forty years: to determine the drinking behaviors of a culture (intake and social); to explain cultural variation in drinking behaviors by reference to the larger culture; to solve social problems caused by alcohol, and to determine the role of alcohol in society (1965). At the time of “Alcohol and Culture” and *Drunken Comportment* most anthropological data on drinking was a byproduct of other research. Mandelbaum (1965) and MacAndrew and Edgerton (1969) mark the end of an era in which anthropologists viewed alcohol as an ancillary concern and the beginning of drinking as a topic of study in its own right (Room 1987).

Ethnography, and its attempt to understand cultures on their own terms, is a hallmark of anthropology. Sheri Cavan, a sociologist, was clearly influenced by anthropology when she wrote *Liquor License: An Ethnography of Bar Behavior* (1966) an examination of public drinking in America. This was one of the first (if not the first) in-depth studies of American drinking based on participant observation. *Liquor License*, unlike most research then or since, examined normal (i.e., non-alcoholic) drinking in a social setting and attempted to describe the

types of drinking spots and their unwritten codes of conduct. Cavan describes bars as spaces where everyday rules are partially suspended. Behavior in bars, in keeping with the idea of a “time-out” during drinking, does not necessarily impact the everyday identities of drinkers. Bars have complex and structured rules of behavior: social hierarchies are often suspended (e.g., bosses and workers are on a first name basis in a bar) and atavistic rules from the past apply (Cavan 1966; Schivelbusch 1992). The situational stressing of reciprocity and sociability in drinking establishments is illustrative. Unless specifically exempted an individual, once a drink is bought for them, is obligated to reciprocate despite financial difficulties or time constraints. Accidentally spilling another’s drink obligates the spiller to replace it with the same or a comparable beverage. Conversations with strangers are common in bars but not in daily life; presence in a bar is a tacit signal of openness to social contact unless otherwise indicated through means such as body language or verbal statements. Furthermore individual bars become communities through the presence of regulars, explicit policy, dress codes, décor, beverage offerings, and pricing. Regulars often become friends and patrons may continue to frequent drinking establishments even when they no longer drink in order to participate in the establishment’s particular social life. In sum, Cavan demonstrates that bars are cultural spaces with rules divergent from daily life.

James Spradley, an anthropologist, focused on “urban nomads” (i.e., hobos) in his path-breaking ethnography *You Owe Yourself a Drunk* (1970). Spradley not only described the lives of men, including their drinking, but also related his participants’ life experiences to larger social processes. For instance he documented how societal discourse about homelessness and joblessness resulted in actions and policies encouraging or causing the very behaviors they were designed to end. Spradley was at the beginning of a movement toward applied anthropology and

argued that political and social discourse constructed hobos as a “folk devil” (Cohen 1972) as a way for policy makers and society to avoid responsibility for social problems and to obscure politically unpleasant truths. Spradley teamed up with Brenda Mann (a student who worked as a waitress) to apply ethnographic techniques to the lives of cocktail waitresses in *The Cocktail Waitress: Women’s Work in a Man’s World* (1975). Gender and labor are the authors’ key concerns but the job they study is defined in relation to serving alcohol (“cocktail waitress”) and their site was the pseudonymous “Brady’s Bar.” *The Cocktail Waitress*, although it has relatively little focus on drinking itself, does remind readers of the importance of cultural, social, and economic context to understanding alcohol as a cultural object. For instance, men ordered drinks in ways that reaffirmed their masculinity and hierarchical status in relation to the waitress (Davis 1976; Spradley and Mann 1975).

The political process that Spradley outlines in *You Owe Yourself a Drunk* (blaming social problems on those who experience them), continues with current targets including drinkers and drug users (Hunt and Barker 2001). Philippe Bourgois, an anthropologist, studied crack dealers in Harlem for his ethnography *In Search of Respect* (1992). He combined in-depth ethnographic observation with political and economic theory to argue that crack dealing was a response to, rather than a cause of, poverty, family disintegration, educational failure, and racism. He detailed how crack dealing and crack use is integrated into users’ conceptions of social status and economic success when more traditional avenues of achievement appear to be, or are, foreclosed.

Currently most research on substances comes from a public health perspective and is problem-oriented. Larger social discourses about alcohol and other drugs influence the availability of research grants and jobs. Whereas earlier research focused more on studying non-problematic drug use in the context of an individual’s life, the current paradigm produces

narratives about health as a managed risk and alcohol and other drugs as threats to public health (Hunt and Barker 2001). Alcohol and drug research have both moved toward problem orientations and examining non-normative, problematic substance use (Hunt and Barker 2001). In other words, the money and the jobs are government funded and the funding goes toward research that promulgates the characterization of alcohol and drugs as inherently risky and dangerous activities (Hunt and Barker 2001; Marshall, Ames, and Bennett 2001). Although the substance abuse paradigm recognizes the importance of sociocultural factors it has a limited understanding of those concepts (Hunt and Barker 2001). The intersections of paradigm, political discourse, and funding have greatly constrained anthropology's recent contributions to alcohol and drug studies contributing to the "the death of ethnography" in these areas and encouraging the production of research that often uncritically accepts status quo arrangements of power codified in the dominant conceptions of substance use (Hunt and Barker 2001).

#### **4.1.2 Archaeology**

The presence of a separate subheading for archaeology is for organizational clarity and should not be taken to mean that I regard archaeology as separate from anthropology. Archaeology has provided evidence about past cultures and contributed to theoretical conceptions of alcohol. Michael Dietler (2006) has written an excellent review of archaeological contributions to the study of alcohol so I briefly and broadly discuss the antiquity of human's relationship with alcohol and theoretical contributions of archaeology.

Fermentation is a natural process that will, given common circumstances, occur without human intervention. Thus humanity's first contact with alcohol probably occurred long before efforts to produce intoxicating beverages become evident in the archaeological record "as early as the seventh millennium B.C.E." (Dietler 2006; Social Institute Research Center [SIRC] 1998).

From that point brewing was discovered independently or spread through trade, warfare, and migration to become a worldwide phenomenon. Every culture has made use of psychoactive substances and alcohol is the most common (Dietler 2006; SIRC 1998). Archaeology and cultural observation have demonstrated tremendous human ingenuity and effort in the materials and procedures developed to produce alcoholic beverages (Jennings et al. 2005). Access to prestige foods, including materials for fermentation, was probably a key motivation in the development of agriculture (Braidwood et al. 1953; Homan 2004; SIRC 1998). Due to the time consuming nature of production, and the rapid spoilage of most early alcoholic beverages (wine being the exception), production of alcohol for feasts, like agriculture, required the large-scale organization of labor across time and space (Dietler 2006; Jennings et al. 2005; Smith 2006). The brewing facilities and paraphernalia associated with these “commensal politics” and vessels for trade are the most prolific artifacts of the alcoholic archaeological record (Dietler 2006). The production of, and trade in, alcoholic beverages were key parts of prehistoric political economies (Dietler 2001; SIRC 1998; Steel 2004; Valdez 2006).

Michael Dietler (2001, 2006) has proposed that alcohol be regarded as a form of “embodied material culture” in that it is produced to be consumed and integrated into the body. The bodily incorporation of alcohol and its psychoactive properties partly explain alcohol’s recurring relationship to religion and ritual whether as a sacrament or in antithetical opposition (Dietler 2001, 2006; Mintz and Du Bois 2002; SIRC 1998). Dietler has further proposed that alcoholic beverages be regarded as a special category of food given that this is how most cultures through history have regarded them and the historical importance and functioning of alcohol as a source of calories (Dietler 2001; Schivelbusch 1992). Many modern and Western cultures continue, at

least in some situations, to regard alcohol as a food item rather than a separate class of consumable (SIRC 1998; Schivelbusch 1992).

## **4.2 Drinking Stories**

I begin this section with an overview and give a synopsis of research findings which will supplement the historically oriented review of Chapter 4.1.1. I define a drinking story as a narrative about a past or hypothetical drinking event. I make a distinction between talk and discussion about drinking and drinking stories themselves. For example, talk about drinking includes “wine talk” and the oinoglossic registers used to index status (Silverstein 2006). The distinction is blurred when scholars conduct focus groups or analyze conversations since respondents often intersperse storytelling with more cognitive or abstract talk about alcohol. Narrative is a fundamental human mechanism for constructing meaning and even when the author of the research I review does not explicitly mention storytelling there are often examples of drinking stories in the quotations they give (e.g., Bogren 2006; Mancini-Peña and Tyson 2007). Therefore this literature review includes work that does not focus on, or even engage, narrative theory, discourse analysis, or the paucity of literature about drinking stories.

The majority of research involving drinking stories comes from outside the field of anthropology and engages notions of health and risk. This perspective is obvious given the journals that have published most of the literature based on or analyzing drinking stories: *Addiction Research and Theory*, *Contemporary Drug Problems*, *Drugs: Education, Prevention, and Policy*, *Health Communication*, *Journal of Youth Studies*, *Nordic Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, and *Substance Use and Misuse*. Most authors draw on drinking stories (usually intermixed with talk about drinking) as sources of data without discussing the unique characteristics of narratives in social life or the possible implications for their data of narrative

form, structure, and purpose (Bogren 2006; Cho et al. 2010; Coleman and Carter 2005; Demant 2007; Demant and Järvinen 2006, 2011; Grønkjær et al. 2011; Haydock 2010; Howard et al. 2007; Hunt and Evans 2008; Hunt, Evans, and Kares 2007; Järvinen 2003; Lindsay 2009; Mancini-Peña and Tyson. 2007; Mayock 2005; Mullen, Swift, and Black 2007; Omel'Chenko 2006; Østergaard 2009; Peralta 2007; Rødner 2006; Rúdólfssdóttir and Morgan 2009; West 2001). Only a handful of articles, none of them written by anthropologists, explicitly focus on narratives of drinking as topics for analysis or as sources of data (Abrahamson 2004; Arminen 2004; Cain 1991; Giles 1999; Griffin et al. 2009; Killingsworth 2006; Sheehan and Ridge 2001; Workman 2001). There is a clear need for anthropological engagement and theoretical analysis of drinking stories. Topics of investigation should include the contexts and characteristics of naturally occurring performances, the particular subjects and structure of drinking stories, and the roles of drinking narratives as resources for managing social relations. These are also questions that would profit from examination by folklorists along with examination of the artistic elements of performance.

Thomas Workman's (2001) article "Finding the Meanings of College Drinking: An Analysis of Fraternity Drinking Stories" is the farthest reaching, and most theoretically grounded, analysis of drinking stories I have located. His discussion presages many of the findings of other scholars and I use his work as an introduction to my discussion of gender and alcohol. Workman recorded drinking stories told in (relatively) naturalistic settings by groups of fraternity members in order to further "understanding [of] the meanings and functions of high-risk drinking and the ways in which those meanings are reproduced within the culture" (2001:427). He applies Bourdieu's (1990) habitus theory to argue that heavy drinking by fraternity members is a socially constructed practice that is, in part, encouraged by narrative performances that accept and

reproduce existing norms of alcohol consumption. Workman makes the following comment about the role of narrative in producing habitus:

the use of narratives provides recursive reality for individuals; a set of implied, unquestioned rules for social actors that are followed uncritically and passed along as inherent within the social structure. Behaviors are signified as routine and are reified without thought or reflection. Never overtly stated, the rules of the habitus are illustrated through the stories told and accepted. (Workman 2001:430)

Workman offers a typology of five “metanarratives”: “Adventure Stories” focusing on risk taking, “Stupid Stories” told for entertainment, “Naked or Puking” stories involving the exploration of physical limits and capabilities, and “Regretted Sex Stories” that present a “sexual encounter as a trap” (2001:427-441). The final theme frames the others and presents heavy drinking as “a once-in-a-lifetime-experience...like college itself, a privileged activity that must be enacted or lost for all eternity” (Workman 2001:441). Thus, fraternity drinking is discursively relegated to the young and segregated from the future with its attendant responsibilities imposed by careers and family. A sixth metanarrative, “tragic stories” concerning death and academic failure, existed but these were rarely told since “as the men expressed, they would ‘bring everybody down’” (Workman 2001:442). Situation and context influence the range of acceptable topics and content of drinking stories since they are social acts.

Workman observed that the stories were often highly physical and valorized risky or unpleasant activities such as vomiting or being pulled over by the police while drunk. These stories (particularly adventure stories) “define a hierarchy based on courage and skill” (Workman 2001:431). He therefore proposes that heavy drinking by males involves what Stephen Lyng (1990) calls edgework. Lyng defines edgework as a voluntary activity with “a clearly observable threat to one’s physical or mental well-being or one’s sense of an ordered existence” (Lyng 1990:857). This “controlled loss of control” (Measham 2002:349, 359) tests mental, physical,

and mechanical limits and brings a situation to the edge of chaos (Lyng 1990). Through competence and skill the edgeworker survives and restores order (Lyng 1990). Interestingly, Lyng borrows the term from Hunter S. Thompson and his characterization of heavy drug taking as a test of skill and ability (Lyng 1990:858). The ability to survive and thrive in chaotic or dangerous situations, including heavy intoxication, can impart elite status. Edgework, like heavy drinking, tends to be a gendered activity that can easily connect with heteronormative ideals of masculinity (Cho et al. 2010; Laurendeau 2008; Lois 2001; Morrissey 2008; West 2001). Stories, like scars, become trophies and evidence of skill, risk-taking, and masculinity (Peralta 2007).

Two works by Australian authors further explore linkages of gender, alcohol, and narratives. Margaret Sheehan and Damien Ridge (2001) examine the connections between narrative, binge drinking, and gender in the lives of young Australian women. Social opprobrium of female drinking has lessened recently in Australia (and elsewhere) but remains significant (Allamani 2008; Griffin et al. 2009; Killingsworth 2006; RÚdólfsdóttir and Morgan 2009; Sheehan and Ridge 2001). Sheehan and Ridge argue that “it is through the use of narrative that these young women make sense of their drinking” and that “any harm encountered along the way tends to be filtered and recontextualized through the powerful narrative event of the ‘good story’” which reframes negative outcomes in terms of “adventure, bonding, sex, gender transgressions, and relationships” (2001:347-348). Their respondents engage drunkenness and storytelling as resources to challenge hegemonic notions of femininity and, through narrative construction, minimize perceived harm. Binge drinking is part of their social interaction as is the discourse that it inspires, and it is through discourse that these women make the experiences meaningful. Sheehan and Ridge note that these women are active agents in their drinking and take steps to

limit possible harm. They suggest that health campaigns should reinforce harm reduction strategies rather than reproducing marginalizing discourses that will be either ignored, challenged, or reworked (Sheehan and Ridge 2001). Similarly, Ben Killingsworth observes that drinking stories played a role in the gender performance of Australian mothers brought together by their children's playgroup (2006). These women "through their careful references to alcohol...were able to deploy an identity that encompassed both adherence to, and rejection of, dominant, highly gendered sociocultural expectations relating to them as mothers" (Killingsworth 2006:377). Thus by referencing activities now largely proscribed to them they portrayed themselves as good mothers but also as "independent, capable women whose self-worth is not solely derived from their service to their children and their husbands (Killingsworth 2006:378). Their drinking stories also projected identities to the other mothers of the playgroup with one participant irritating the others through what they perceived as exaggerated and belabored accounts of drinking experience.

As the articles on gender suggest, narrative allows drinkers to make sense of their own drinking and this often involves contrasts with an "Other" (Abrahamson 2004; Bogren 2006; Demant and Järvinen 2006, 2011; Grønkjær et al. 2011; Haydock 2010; Omel'Chenko 2006; Rødner 2006). The "Other" can be differentiated along lines of class (Haydock 2010), maturity (Demant and Järvinen 2006), addiction (Omel'Chenko 2006), authenticity (Bogren 2006), and conformance with social norms (Demant and Järvinen 2011). Sharon Rødner (2006) and Elena Omel'Chenko (2006) both document how language use and storytelling are resources for self-presentation in contrast to "the drug abuser identity... [that] is important as it provides a negative identity that reinforces the informants' desired self-presentation" (Rødner 2006:333). Definitions of deviance and addiction are critical since "[b]y pointing out what is deviant, the

informants also make evident what is normal” (Rødner 2006:343). Omel’Chenko notes that “young people observe a clear division between those who experiment with drugs and those who are dependent on them” and that the “negative language of official discourse about drugs is used only in relation to others” (2006:62).

In the case of Alcoholics Anonymous the value system becomes somewhat inverted and storytellers access the identity of alcoholics or addicts (Arminen 2004; Cain 1991). Through shaping stories into an appropriate mold members demonstrate that they have “acquired the appropriate understandings” and self-identity of an alcoholic, albeit one in recovery (Cain 1991:216). Ilkka Arminen (2004) studies Alcoholics Anonymous narratives and examines “second stories” which are told in response to, and patterned after, an initial narrative. Through second stories an interlocutor demonstrates “the speaker’s analysis and understanding of the first story” and displays their conformance with AA principles (Arminen 2004:319). In terms of stance, second stories can be described as methods for evaluating the narratives of others and managing relations of alignment through structural and topical resonance (Du Bois 2007).

#### **4.3 Conclusion**

In my review of the literature I have highlighted anthropology’s role in proving the culturally embedded nature of drinking and inebriation (Mandelbaum 1965; MacAndrew and Edgerton 1969). However, following Hunt and Barker (2001), I note that current research on alcohol is conducted from a public health perspective that views alcohol use as an inherently risky behavior and gives little attention to the connections of drinking and culture. Anthropology has contributed to theoretical and methodological concerns and provided cross-cultural evidence. Archaeology has demonstrated the primeval relationship of humans with intoxicating beverages and illuminated the role of alcohol in prehistoric political and economic life (Dietler 2001, 2006).

Dietler argues that alcohol should be treated as a special type of food with special status because of its place as a form of “embodied material culture” designed to be ingested and integrated into the self (Dietler 2001, 2006).

Very little research has been done on drinking stories themselves; instead, drinking narratives have been used to access cultural beliefs about alcohol, to examine the reproduction of norms, and to examine the construction of social identity in relation to competence, gender, and class (Abrahamson 2004; Bogren 2006; Demant and Järvinen 2006, 2011; Killingsworth 2006; Lindsay 2006, 2009). This research has firmly established the role of drinking stories as a vehicle for the production of identity particularly through “Othering” and accessing the value systems of edgework and hegemonic masculinity (Bogren 2006; Measham 2002; Workman 2001). This review reveals the extreme dearth of research on drinking stories themselves and highlights the value of my own research as an original contribution to the discipline.

In the next section, Chapter 5, I examine how Nemo, through linguistic means, builds tellability while maintaining credibility. I find that he presents “Crappy New Year” as relevant, recent, and intense. Furthermore, he creates “counterfactual spaces” in order to evaluate what did happen and heighten reader interest (Harding 2004, 2007). His claims of amnesia and memory loss build tellability but decrease credibility in an example of Labov’s “reportability paradox” (Labov 1997:405). Therefore Nemo turns to reconstructed dialogue and the recollections of his friends to maintain believability.

## **Chapter 5: Tellability and Credibility**

Tellability is not an inherent characteristic of events or stories: it is created. Rather than an immutable quality of events it is a judgment made by narrators and audiences based on personal and cultural criteria in context (Labov 1997; Norrick 2005b; Polanyi 1979). Authors construct tellability through the cultural and linguistic resources available to them at particular times and in specific contexts (Norrick 2005b; Polanyi 1979). Thus when I or other scholars write that some events are inherently more tellable (e.g., near-death experiences) we mean that those events are interesting and relevant within the cultural framework and context under discussion. There are at least two reasons narrators try to make their tales tellable. First, to give their story a point and answer the audience's implicit question: "so what?" (Labov 1997; Labov and Waletzky 1967; Norrick 2005b; Polanyi 1979). Second, tellability justifies the narrator's extended holding of the conversational floor and interlocutors' attention (Labov 1997; Sacks 1992). Although the concepts of tellability and reportability are discussed with reference to oral narrative (Labov 1997; Labov and Waletzky 1967; Norrick 2005a) they apply to written stories with slight modification. For instance, in written texts tellability serves to hold readers' attention so they will finish reading the text or perhaps pass it on as opposed to capturing reassignment of the speaker role.

### **5.1 Tellability**

#### **5.1.1 Tellability in the Initial Paragraphs**

Nemo's opening paragraphs (1-14) act as an introduction and orientation: they are composed of free clauses and lack temporally ordered narrative clauses, they include large amounts of evaluation, and they introduce the reader to the characters and situational context of the narrative (Labov and Waletzky 1967; Özyildirim 2009). Introductions, abstracts, and orientations, as the

expected initial contact between interlocutors and a narrative, are critical locations for the development of tellability and the engagement of interlocutor interest. Nemo's beginning paragraph (1-4) give the "most reportable event" establishing the "point" and focus of the narrative (Labov 1997:339, 2006). Labov writes that "[a] narrative of personal experience is essentially a narrative of the most reportable event in it" (Labov 1997:405). Therefore I provide a detailed analysis of Nemo's orientation and the evaluative techniques he deploys in the first paragraphs as an introduction to how he constructs and maintains tellability throughout the text.

Nemo's initial paragraphs (1-4, 5-14) orient the reader (Labov and Waletzky 1967) and are typical of his style and use of evaluative techniques: they stress physical peril and extreme circumstances, posit counterfactuals, and make use of repetition, intensifiers, vague modifiers, and the adverb *just*. These evaluative techniques are repeated throughout "Crappy New Year" and are stylistically characteristic of Nemo especially in comparison to Plead's narrative (see Chapter 8).

001 Last night, new years eve 2004, was the second time in only a period of a few months  
002 that I almost died several different ways in a drunken stupor. This only happens when I  
003 hang out with my friend 'S', quite possibly the worst drinking buddy ever; but what  
    he did  
004 for me last night is just amazing. (Nemo 2006)

#### First Sentence

In line one Nemo portrays his experience as recent, repeated, extreme, and dangerous therefore enhancing tellability (Labov 1997; Labov and Waletzky 1967; Norrick 2005b; Polanyi 1979). Nemo begins line one by establishing the temporal proximity of events which enhances their relevance by casting them as current events or "local news" rather than dimly recalled personal lore (Norrick 2005b:1825). Nemo minimizes the potential timespan offered by the plural of "months" with the adverb "only" and reinforces temporal proximity by the vague

adjective “few” (1) Nemo claims that “[I]ast night” (the events of the story) was New Year’s Eve which, in addition to providing a pun for the story’s title, also indexes a range of cultural knowledge that provides a setting and a script to make his actions intelligible (1). The specific date anchors events and, as a holiday strongly associated with drinking, invokes readers’ beliefs about alcohol and celebration.

Nemo stresses the recurrent and varied nature of the dangers he faced: there were multiple threats (“several different ways”) over a brief period of time. Further intensification happens through Nemo’s lexical selections in self-description: “drunken stupor” has a strongly negative valence compared to logical alternatives like ‘drunk’ or the medico-legal term ‘inebriated.’ The “almost” at the end the first sentence acts as a “counterfactual marker” indicating a potential, but unrealized, occurrence (Ziegler 1999). The “almost” intensifies the implication that Nemo came close to death and, as a counterfactual marker, invokes a possible state of events (Nemo dying) and marks them as unrealized (Ziegler 1999). This “counterfactual space” (Harding 2007) is now available for evaluation by Nemo and by readers. Counterfactuals further contribute to tellability by engaging listeners as they imagine what could have been and evaluate an unrealized possibility against reality (Harding 2004, 2007). Death looms over “Crappy New Year” as the most serious alternate ending to Nemo’s night.

#### Second Sentence

Paragraph one also has the first examples of two evaluative devices stylistically characteristic of Nemo: the use of *just* and the use of superlatives to construct extreme case formulations (“worst” and “ever”) (3). With regards to tellability the *just* in line four can be regarded as a boosting adverb and its use points to a production difficulty caused by the impossibility of explaining the immensity of S’s “amazing” behavior (Kishner 1996; Molina 2012; Weltman

2003). Nemo implies situational exigencies dire enough to require vague but “amazing” action from S who is, paradoxically, “quite possibly the worst drinking buddy ever” (3-4). Nemo hedges S’s superlatively negative (a softened ECF) status with the phrase *quite possibly* and the contrastive discourse marker *but* connecting the descriptions of S and his actions for Nemo (Edwards 2000; Fraser 1999; Nemo 2006:3-4; Holmes 1984; Schiffrin 1987). Here Nemo creates tellability through suspense as the reader expects S to foment crisis. In other words, superlatives are tellable because exemplars, whether the best or the worst, are extremes and thus unusual and interesting.

### Second Paragraph

In the second paragraph (quoted below) Nemo moves from a brief abstract of the most reportable event to an orientation giving a fuller account of the persons, places, times, and behavioral contexts of his experience (Labov 1997; Labov and Waletzky 1967).

005 My plan the whole day was to just go hang out with S and his girlfriend, get a little  
006 drunk, and go home at about ten to my family because my mom had planned a dinner  
007 thing and I wanted to be with them at midnight of course. As it turned out I got home at  
008 around 4 in the morning after being discharged from the hospital, and was probably in a  
009 coma at midnight. Many a thing happened last night, a great deal of which I don't  
010 remember at all and has been told to me for the purpose of this report, please  
    take to heart  
011 this terrible night and be careful when drinking; I'm damn lucky I made it through all of  
012 this as well as I did. I am pretty much convinced I have a drinking angel or something  
013 that watches out for me when I get myself drunk, and I am NOT in any way a religious  
014 person. Now on to the story... (Nemo 2006:5-14)

Nemo reiterates the behavioral and cultural setting of New Year’s Eve through statements of desire to be with particular persons (his family) at the culturally marked moment of midnight (6-7) in contrast to his actual location (hospital) and condition (“probably in a coma”) (8-9). Line five gives Nemo’s expectations for the night (“[m]y plan...”) while lines seven through nine (“[a]s it turned out...”) reveal that his plans went badly awry. This accentuates tellability and

whets the reader's curiosity by giving outcomes without providing explanatory events (Hoeken and Van Vliet 2000). Nemo's lexical choice of "coma" (9) resonates (Du Bois 2007) with his earlier use of "drunken stupor" (2) to reinforce and intensify the seriousness of his physical state and his proximity to death or serious injury. Similarly his statement that "[m]any a thing happened" (9) resonates with "several different ways" (2) to stress the variety of dangers encountered and overcome. His vagueness may be a result of memory loss, purposeful, or both but it can engage readers as they fill in gaps while creating a sense of ominous uncertainty.

Through his avowal of memory loss (9-10) Nemo indexes cultural knowledge about the linkage of alcohol and anterograde amnesia (Giles 1999; Griffin 2009) and supports his claim of being in "a drunken stupor" (2). He evaluates New Year's Eve as "terrible" (11) enough that his survival implies divine intervention ("a drinking angel or something") (12) even to the militantly nonreligious like himself; Nemo stresses this self-characterization orthographically by capitalizing "NOT" (13).

### Stepping Into the Future

Nemo buttresses tellability and reader engagement with a plea for the reader to "please take to heart/this terrible night and be careful when drinking" (10-11). This is an important development because to this point Nemo has only been concerned with evaluating the past and its relevance to himself; he has focused on the unusual and extreme nature of events he experienced. Here Nemo makes a "step into the future" (Ochs 1994) and suggests that his experience is relevant not only to his future but that of any readers as well. Elinor Ochs (1994:107) writes that "[a] defining feature of all stories is that they have a point" and that "the point may be the relevance of the story's past events for future events" (Ochs 1994:107). In Nemo's case it would be better to say that the past's impact on the future is one point of the

story. Nemo makes other ‘steps into the future’ near the end of “Crappy New Year” (especially 125-130 and 148-151) which I discuss in Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight.

### **5.1.2 Tellability Throughout the Text**

Heretofore I have been concerned with the first two paragraphs of “Crappy New Year” which correspond to Labov’s concepts of the orientation and abstract (Labov 1997; Labov and Waletzky 1967). Nemo’s construction of tellability in the body of “Crappy New Year” is largely an extension and repetition of techniques introduced in his first two paragraphs. Analysis of tellability throughout Nemo’s text further details the strategies and techniques he begins in paragraphs one and two. Examining the entire text also reveals moments of resonance and strategies of evaluation that contribute to the point and coherence of “Crappy New Year.” In other words, further analysis is not be merely a recapitulation of my examination to this point but gives a fuller picture of how Nemo answers the ultimate narrative question of “so what?” Nemo ends his introduction on line fourteen and the closing clause marks his preceding text as antecedent to the main narrative action of the story. I let his words mark the end of my initial investigation and the beginning of my foray into the complexities and richness of the full text: “Now on to the story...” (Nemo 2006:14).

#### **“Drunken Stupor”: Extreme Inebriation and Tellable Effects**

Extreme situations are tellable and Nemo stresses his level of inebriation and the amount of alcohol (and marijuana) he consumed, despite repeated protestations of moderate consumption, particularly “in comparison” (117) to his friends. His first explicit reference to quantity mentions that S’s mom bought them “a half gallon of vodka” (64 shots), a significant amount for three people for one night (15). His lexical selections imply heavy consumption: he writes not of taking sips of his drinks but of taking “a round of shots” (18), “healthy guzzles” (32), and

“chugs” (38). In addition he lists consuming a Sparks energy drink (16 oz. of 6%-8% abv.) by himself (35). Nemo also lists instances of pot use that he characterizes as heavy. Early in the evening he splits “a few bowls and a blunt” (18-19) with three other people and later he smoked “bowl after bowl” (60) of “trainwreck” which is “very dangerous in large amounts/especially with alcohol” (59-60). Table 5.1 demonstrates the importance of dosage to Nemo as measured by the number and nature of references he makes:

**Table 5.1** References to Dosage in “Crappy New Year” (Nemo 2006)

Location	Quotation
15-17	his mom bought him a half gallon of/vodka, and we were making the rounds to rite-aid and such looking for a 2 liter or/something to mix it in.
18-19	We chilled at D's for a bit, had a round of shots and smoked a few/bowls and a blunt;
32-33	We all took healthy guzzles from our drink; vodka and that new berry 7-Up are a great/combo, barely even notice the booze,
35-36	on the way mom bought S and I each one of those Sparks things (the malt beverage/energy drink), which are damn good.
37-38	By the time we got to P's, S and his girl had been drinking hard, but I had only had a few/chugs and was hardly feeling anything.
40-42	The last thing I remember is S's girl/filling up the next 2 liter, and S and I had just smoked a bowl that I was preparing to/match him on.
48-50	I must stress how little I drank in comparison to S and his girl, and I was only starting to/slur my words a slight bit and had a bit of difficulty maneuvering around tight spaces and/such; basically the starting point of intoxication as I last remember.
50-52	After the bowl that I/matched S, P took out her stash and I matched her several bowls (I almost smoked my/whole \$60 bag with her!)
57-60	P had trainwreck, which is/known to veterans to be very powerful 'creeper' weed (don't feel anything at first then it/hits HARD like 5 minutes later when I smoke it, very dangerous in large amounts/especially with alcohol) and we smoked bowl after bowl after bowl etc.
106-107	The doctor bitched me out several times about how drunk I was (my/blood-alcohol level was .352!),
115-117	If my BAC was .352, he must have been like .6; he drank SO much more than I did, and/him, his mom, his girl, and anyone else that was with me that night continued to say how/little I had actually drank (especially in comparison to S).
119-120	my mom went and thanked them and said that S was hugging her and shit, he was wasted but held it much better than me in more ways than one.

Absolute dosage of alcohol is not the sole determinant of effects, and the timing of Nemo’s drinking suggests maximal effects from the amount he consumes. He is drinking a significant

amount in a relatively short period of time (4-7 hours) on an almost empty stomach (26-31). This speeds alcohol from the stomach into the bloodstream and restricts the amount of alcohol which can be metabolized by the body (one ounce of 80 proof liquor per hour) leading to sharp increases and higher overall BAC (Blood Alcohol Content). Nemo reports a BAC of .352 which he recognizes as high and marks as such with an exclamation point: “my blood-alcohol level was .352!” (107). For someone of Nemo’s weight (165lbs) this requires ingesting at least sixteen ounces of 80-proof liquor (CAAPC 2006) With a BAC of .352 then his worries about dying and use of the term “coma” (9) are apt since death is possible with a BAC of .40 and a BAC “in the range of” .45 is lethal to 50% of people (CAAPC 2006; Meyer and Quenzer 2005:226-228). I find it interesting that Nemo never describes the early stages of inebriation (e.g., anxiolysis and relaxation) and that he identifies fairly advanced intoxication such as slurring his words as “basically the starting point of intoxication” (48-50).

In addition to detailing quantity, Nemo spends considerable time on his body’s functions and its responses to alcohol. Drinking stories, like alcohol intoxication, are often intensely physical (Bogren 2006; Peralta 2007; Pyörälä 1995; Workman 2001) and Erowid’s submission guidelines (Erowid 2012b; Erowid Review Crew 2002) ask contributors to discuss the physical effects of their substance use. Nemo further enhances tellability by focusing on those bodily responses that index extreme inebriation and by depicting his physical reactions as intense and debilitating. Table 5.2 (following page) demonstrates the importance to Nemo, as measured by the variety and number of references, of conveying his response to alcohol.

Nemo’s performance of intoxication includes speech difficulties and failing motor coordination by approximately 9:45pm (42): “I was only starting to slur my words a/slight bit and had a bit of difficulty maneuvering around tight spaces and such” (49-50). After another

**Table 5.2** References to Actual and Potential Results of Nemo’s Inebriation

Effects	Exemplary Quotations	Location
Altered Behavior (uncharacteristic, inexplicable, or disinhibited)	I just charged towards some random house (77); I acted like an idiot (134)	46-47, 51-52, 52-53, 55-56, 61-63, 68, 77-79, 97-98, 101, 102, 102-103, 103-106, 122-124, 134-135,
Death	I almost died several different ways (2).	2, 102, 141-142, 143
Memory Loss or Blackout	for/me blackouts are just periods that I never remember and in which I say and do very stupid things (45-46)	9-10, 40, 44, 45, 46, 50, 61, 71-72, 92-93, 99,
Physical Incoordination or Speech Difficulties (slurring)	“my legs wouldn’t move or coordinate at all” (73)	23-24, 49, 54-55, 65, 66, 72-73, 74-75, 88, 89, 91, 103, 128, 136-137,
Stupor, Coma, or Unconsciousness	I was unconscious and completely/unrousable (79-80)	2, 9, 43-44, 79-80, 80-81, 83, 87, 92, 93-94, 107, 112
Vomiting or Urination	pissing my pants which I did several times (90); I puked all over the blanket and/ on myself	68, 90, 131, 142

hour his “legs wouldn’t move or coordinate at all” (73). Nemo’s lack of bodily control extended to “pissing [his] pants...several times” (90) and vomiting on himself until he “reeked of puke” (90). “[R]eeked,” “puke,” and “pissing” are evocative and negatively valenced terms similar to Nemo’s use of “drunken stupor” (2, 90). He emphasizes the amount and significance of his vomitus with an extreme case formulation (Edwards 2000; Pomerantz 1986) realized through the lexical token *all*: “I puked all over the blanket and on myself” (68).

Nemo presents a pattern of behaviors associated with intense intoxication considered dangerous enough to prompt special attention from medical personnel: “[t]hey took me right in to the ER once I was falling into walls and such in the waiting/room” (91-92). A doctor then “bitched [him] out several times about how drunk I was” (106). The upshot is that Nemo’s prompt and special treatment by the hospital staff, including the doctor’s harangue, was

prompted by his extreme drunkenness and its attendant physical risks. In other words, if the hospital staff was worried and interested then the reader should be too. Table 5.3 (following page) gives a summary of Nemo's techniques for constructing tellability.

## **5.2 Credibility**

Labov writes that a “fundamental paradox of narrative rests on the inverse relations of credibility and reportability” (Labov 2001:66). The inverse relationship between reportability and credibility can be restated as a positive relationship: as tellability increases so does the author's responsibility to provide corroborating evidence (Labov 1997). In oral contexts an unbelievable narrative causes the narrator to lose his or her entitlement to the conversational floor which may terminate their story before its conclusion (Labov 2001). In written and oral contexts an incredible (i.e. un-credible) narrative will, presumably, be discounted, ignored, or not finished with consequent loss of status by the narrator. A narrative that is tellable but not credible has failed just as a believable but pointless story fails (Labov 1997). Therefore the resources devoted to the construction of credibility should match the effort expended on the construction of tellability. This does not mean that the author must devote the same amount of time or narrative space to supporting evidence as to tellability since sources and evidence vary in credibility and sufficiency. Thus a highly unusual event could be made credible by a reference to video records or it could remain unbelievable despite multiple, but untrustworthy, eyewitnesses. Authors do not ask for the audience's belief in a vacuum but as part of the process of making evaluations and moving toward or away from the stances of others. Labov's (1997) description of an inverse process provides a particular instantiation of the more fundamental linkage between evaluation and positioning. His “reportability paradox” (Labov 1997:405) can be restated as a comment on the type of positioning required for certain evaluative

**Table 5.3** Selected Evaluative Strategies of Nemo to Construct Tellability

Evaluative Method	Possible Effect	Potential Textual Markers	Examples
Counterfactuals (Harding 2004, 2007; Ziegler 2000)	engages reader and evaluates possible (but unrealized) occurrences	modal terms, statements of possibility, alternate histories	If I hadn't choked on vomit.../and was still alive (130); I almost died (2)
Extreme Case Formulations (Edwards 2000; Pomerantz 1986)	intensification, signaling relevance and authorial commitment to proposition	superlatives, high-valence adjectives and adverbs	worst (3); at all (10)
Indexical (Ochs 1992; Silverstein 1976)	narrator points to information and readers makes associations based on shared knowledge	descriptions of behavior related to extreme intoxication	I must have hit a blackout" (45); starting to/ slur.../basically the starting point of intoxication (48-50)
Stepping Into the Future (Ochs 1994)	presents narrated events as relevant to the present or future	direct statements, advice, discussing lessons learned	take to heart/...and be careful when drinking (10-11)
Intensification (Labov and Waletzky 1967)	stresses unusual or extreme nature of a situation or entity	highly-valenced lexical items, scaled or valenced modifiers, capitalization	drunken stupor (2); very shitty event (143); BIG MISTAKE! (31)
Repetition (Labov and Waletzky 1967)	emphasis, delay forward movement of the story to build suspense	grammatical, semantic, lexical, propositional, and structural similarity	I must have hit a blackout very shortly after asking the time, for/me blackouts are just periods that I never remember and in which I say and do very/stupid things. (45-46)
Vagueness (Jucker, Smith, and Lüdge 2003)	engage readers, allow worst case assumptions	imprecise quantifiers, deletion of details	almost died several different ways (2)

assertions. In the language of stance, Labov is arguing that claims presented as highly tellable must be accompanied by a particular pattern of relations between positioning and evaluation.

### 5.2.1 Memory Loss and Source Attribution

Credibility, like tellability, is constructed and in this section I examine how Nemo creates believability through linguistic and narrative resources. Nemo, as I show in Chapter 5.1,

expends considerable effort and narrative space creating tellability which theoretically requires him to make similarly extensive attempts to build credibility (Labov 1997). His repeated avowals of memory loss, consonant with Labov's "reportability paradox," index extreme drunkenness (tellable) but cast doubt on the veracity of his story (Labov 1997:405). The tension between Nemo's declarations of large-scale memory loss and the inverse relations of credibility and tellability raise an important question: why would an author stress memory difficulties when they want to be believed?

I suggest there are three considerations for answering this question. First, as I show in Chapter 6.2, Nemo's protestations of memory loss are a key strategy in how he accounts for his socially inappropriate and transgressive behavior. Second, Nemo constructs credibility largely through means other than his own recall: the inclusion of detail, reporting the speech of others, and following narrative conventions and conforming to audience expectations. Finally, Nemo's burden of proof is relatively low since the events of "Crappy New Year" (2006) generally follow the master narratives developed in mainstream U.S. discourses about risk, alcohol, and binge drinking (Bamberg 2004; Talbot et al. 1997). Master narratives are social discourses (often implicit) that create and reinforce "taken-for-granted notions of what is good and what is wrong" while promulgating expectations and scripts for behavior (Talbot et al. 1997:225). Master narratives construct stock characters, situations, and event sequences. For example, U.S. and Western European societal discourses present drinking as an inherently risky behavior and identify college students and youth as populations particularly at risk (Clapp, Shillington, and Segars 2000; Coleman and Cater 2005; Hunt and Barker 2001; Marshall, Ames, and Bennett 2001; Mayock 2005; Workman 2001). These discourses circulate through mass media, political speech, public health campaigns, and medical opinion. Within this dominant discourse alcohol is

presented as causing, or at least contributing to a laundry list of social and moral problems: violence, rape, academic failure, poverty, vehicular accidents, death, injury, unplanned pregnancy, lost productivity, and fetal alcohol syndrome. Given this milieu it does not require a great leap of faith to believe that somebody (e.g., Nemo) got too drunk and ended up in the hospital.

Alcohol interferes with the ability to form memories resulting in anterograde amnesia (A. White 2003; White et al. 2004). Table 5.4 shows that Nemo makes repeated mention, both explicit and indexical, to his memory or lack thereof:

**Table 5.4** References to Memory in “Crappy New Year” (Nemo 2006)

Location	Quotation
9-10	Many a thing happened last night, a great deal of which I don't/remember at all and has been told to me for the/purpose of this report
40-41	The last thing I remember is S's girl/filling up the next 2 liter
44-45	From this point forward my memory ends, and this is only/as has been retold to me
45-47	I must have hit a blackout very shortly after asking the time, for/me blackouts are just periods that I never remember and in which I say and do very/stupid things
48-50	I was only starting to/slur my words a slight bit and had a bit of difficulty maneuvering around tight spaces and/such; basically the starting point of intoxication as I last remember
71-72	I have very hazy/memories of looking up and seeing that I was being dragged
79-80	After that I was unconscious and completely/unrousable [sic]
92-93	I must have been awake at that point but still in a blackout; I think I passed out/ again later because I was unconscious for a lot of the proceedings in the ER
95-96	It took me a really long time to figure out I was in a hospital and that my family/was there, though I was awake for a good few hours of it
99-101	The only part about it I remember however was being told once that it was almost 4 am,/and that's when I looked around and saw my mom, dad and sister and became a little/more aware of the fact that I was in the hospital and such.

Paradoxically, admitting to memory lapses may enhance believability. Many drinkers have experienced blackouts (i.e., anterograde amnesia) and those who have not are almost certainly aware of them from media references, health campaigns, or the experiences of friends (Coleman and Cater 2005; Griffin et al. 2009; A. White 2003; White et al. 2004). Given widespread

knowledge about blackouts, and Nemo's stress on being "DRUNK" (128), readers would be incredulous if he claimed perfect recall. Human memory is fallible in the best of circumstances and audiences generally expect some details to be fuzzy and others forgotten. Therefore, by admitting to memory loss, Nemo augments believability through conformance with audience expectations about drinking and drinking stories. Neal Norrick refers to this phenomenon as "the paradox of forgetfulness in personal narratives" (Norrick 2003:68) whereby "listeners interpret signs of forgetfulness as proof of authenticity in personal stories" and "displays of both uncertainty and remembering serve to authenticate and personalize stories" (Norrick 2005b:1836). Nemo identifies alcohol as the cause of his amnesia and Norrick notes that "[w]hen storytellers supply special reasons for their faulty memory, it seems to confirm the validity of the surrounding details all the more, since they claim to know exactly why it is they cannot remember just one particular recalcitrant 'fact'" (Norrick 2005b:1837). By identifying the proximate cause of his amnesia Nemo's memory loss acts more as an index of inebriation (see Chapter 5.1) and less as a sign of unreliability.

In the absence of memory Nemo, like others reconstructing a blackout, relies on the recollections of others, fragmentary recollections, logical inference, and physical traces (Giles 1999; Nash and Takarangi 2011). In the second paragraph Nemo writes that "[m]any a thing happened last night, a great deal of which I don't/remember at all and has been told to me for the purpose of this report" (9-10). This is his first explicit reference to memory and also a blanket statement of source attribution. Nemo declares that he sought information from other participants "for the purposes of this report" (10) suggesting that his story has been researched and giving the recollections of others an air of purpose and veridicality. He is informing the reader that any information lacking citation (explicit or implied) can be assumed to be based on

conversations with others who were there: S, S's girl, Mom, P, etc. Despite regular protestations that S and "S's girl" (40) "drank SO much more than I did" (115) Nemo does not mention any alcohol (or pot) related impairment of their memory. Therefore unattributed details, even when based on Nemo's "vary hazy memories" (71) or the memories of other drinkers, are implicitly presented as facts based on purposive interviews with others. Nemo reinforces credibility, and his assertions of memory loss, by explicit source attributions and reconstructed dialogue (Tannen 1986, 1995). Table 5.5 (following page) shows instances of reported speech where Nemo alludes to or quotes his own talk or the speech of others. In "Crappy New Year" most explicit attributions of source are reported speech events with the exceptions being Nemo's references to his memory and inferences. All but one of these reported speech events are indirectly reported in the form of paraphrase without an attempt to recreate the exact utterance. It seems that the only purported quotation occurs in lines 101-102 when Nemo recalls "thanking/everyone for 'saving my life.'" "

As I discussed in Chapter 3.2.3, indirect reported speech (e.g., paraphrase and especially unattributed hearsay) is generally characterized as epistemically weaker compared to attributed quotations (Caldas-Coulthard 1987; Clift 2006; Holt 1996; Tannen 1986, 1995; Travis 2006). Repeated source attributions remind the reader that Nemo sought out information and purposively interviewed other participants (9-10). Nemo repeatedly highlights the oral transfer of information between characters during and after New Year's Eve. His repetitive stressing of reported speech resonates across the text and bolsters the credibility of his account.

### **5.2.2 Inconsistent Forgetting and Detailed Recollection**

Forgetting, or claiming to forget, can be a strategic rhetorical resource (Giles 1999; Muntigl and Choi 2010; Norrick 2003) and Nemo does provide some in depth descriptions, without

**Table 5.5** References to Reconstructed Dialogue in “Crappy New Year” (Nemo 2006)

Location	Quotation
9-10	a great deal of which I don't/remember at all and has been told to me for the purpose of this report
18-20	We chilled at D's for a bit, had a round of shots and smoked a few/bowls and a blunt; he's a big poker enthusiast, and we all talked quite a bit about the/strategy and luck components of games like that for a while,
42	I asked him the time and he said it was about 9:45
44-45	[f]rom this point forward my memory ends, and this is only/as has been retold to me
48-49	I was only starting/to slur
52-54	meanwhile she kept telling me to put mine [pot] away; I guess I just/kept telling her that I loved and respected her so much I would do anything for her, or/something along those lines
55-56	then when S got down to pick it up and was putting it back in/the bag in front of my face I was accusing him of ripping me off
60-61	S said later P was/so blazed she just kept loading
67	S told me I was staying there for the night
73-74	S likened it to one of those dolls/where one pulls the string and it does jumping jack motions.
82-83	S called my/sister from my cell and told her I was passed out in a stair well
84-85	I guess/something about what S said to my sister was enough to scare her
87	I hear they pulled up and I couldn't move and was still unconscious
88-89	S, his girl and his mom all told me later they were damn/sore
96-98	[they] gave me a cat scan and I/was talking a lot to the guy doing it, I babbled to everyone and ceaselessly asked what/time it was
99	[t]he only part about it I remember however was being told once that it was almost 4 am,
101-103	I was crying a lot and thanking/everyone for 'saving my life', I also asked the nurses and doctors some very peculiar/questions
103	people said that I wasn't slurring/too bad actually
103-105	I asked the/doctor if methamphetamine lowers you tolerance to alcohol, and then adamantly swore I/had only tried meth once (which is true)
106-108	[t]he doctor bitched me out.../she was saying the fact that I wasn't in a coma with that/much booze in me meant that I was an alcoholic and had a dangerous dependency
115-117	he drank SO much more than I did, and/him, his mom, his girl and anyone else that was with me that night continued to say how/little I had actually drank
119	my mom went and thanked them and said that S was hugging her and shit
120-122	S's girl hit on my/sister (she's bi and thinks my sister is hot, I've known this for a while) and told her she/wanted to have a 3-way with her and S;
122-144	then S came to see how I was doing, I kissed him/and said that it wasn't romantic, I kept telling people I loved them and wanted to kiss/them in a non romantic way,
144-145	I think of him like a brother at this/point, which he told me last night is a mutual feeling

citation, apparently at odds with his blanket avowals of amnesia after 9:45pm: his behavior at P's (51-54, 65-70), events after leaving P's (70-90), and much of his experience at the hospital (91-114, 131-132), all occurred after he blacked out. For instance, Nemo identifies "about 9:45" (42) as the time his amnesia begins, "[f]rom this point forward my memory ends, and this is only/as has been retold to me" (44-45). However Nemo proceeds to recount details about being at P's and comments that, not long after "about 11:30" when he and his friends leave P's, he has "very hazy/memories of looking up and seeing that I was being dragged along by the arms" (71-72). These apparent contradictions raise questions about the accuracy of Nemo's recall and his protestations of amnesia. Alcohol exacerbates the inherent fuzziness of human memory and drinking stories regularly include details inconsistent with what narrators claim to have forgotten (Giles 1999). This may be due, in part, to details becoming available through the act of telling (i.e., writing) and confabulation in which individuals fill in gaps with logically consistent details based on scripts patterned by culture and experience (Giles 1999; Mayock 2005). Elise Kärkkäinen demonstrates that the construction *I guess* can frame an upcoming stance to indicate conclusions arrived at through inference or deduction based on locally available information and immediately prior discourse (2007:190, 208-211); Nemo's uses of *I guess* collocates with some of the otherwise unattributed details including his conversation with P and leaving her domicile (53, 66, 74) (for a more complete discussion see Chapter 6.4). These inconsistencies may also result from his particular ideas of memory (Giles 1999; Nemo 2006:10, 40, 46, 50, 99). Nemo's conception of "remember" may idiosyncratically refer to visual, auditory, mental, or sensory recall and he thus identifies the end of his memory as the absence of a specific modality in his recollections (Giles 1999). His declaration of amnesia (44-45) uses *only* as part of an extreme case formulation ("this is only as has been retold to me") which can function as non-literal

hyperbole or be a presentation of the strongest possible case defend against unsympathetic hearings (Edwards 2000; Pomerantz 1986). As a final consideration, social identity is a “flexible resource” in discourse and Nemo’s inconsistencies may reflect changes in his self-concept or decisions to differentially highlight aspects of his experience to serve immediate narrative goals (Antaki, Condor, and Levine 1996:473). The upshot is that inconsistencies exist between what Nemo describes and what he claims to remember but he protects credibility through a blanket statement of attribution: “[m]any a thing happened last night, a great deal of which I don't/remember at all and has been told to me for the purpose of this report” (9-10).

Nemo strengthens credibility through detail and precision (Norrick 2003; Ochs and Capps 1997), as when he twice gives his BAC to the third decimal: “my [BAC] was .352!” (107, 115). He gives relatively precise, albeit hedged, time markers (e.g., “about 9:45” and “about 11:30” in lines 42 and 65) throughout “Crappy New Year.” Table 5.6 shows that most of Nemo’s mentions of time are within fifteen to thirty minutes and only twice (15, 21) does he give an hour as a range of uncertainty.

**Table 5.6** Selected Time Markers in “Crappy New Year” (Nemo 2006)

Line #	Quote
7-8	I got home at/around 4 in the morning
15	I think I met up with S and his girl at about 4-5 pm
21	We left D's after about an hour and were in search of a place to go drink
42-44	I asked him the time and he said it was about 9:45; I was prepared to/smoke another bowl, ...but instead came/to 5 or so hours later in the ER
61-62	This is how I know I was in a blackout though, it was like/11:00 and I was sitting around smoking,
65	At about 11:30, we got up to go,
99	The only part about it I remember however was being told once that it was almost 4 am,

In addition to precision about time, Nemo gives minutiae about events at the hospital and recounts having a cat scan, crying, babbling, and asking questions. His reconstructed dialogue is often quite specific, even to the point of banality, as when he recounts his mother going to thank S, his mention of S's girl hitting on his (Nemo's) sister, and his questioning the doctors about the effects of methamphetamine on alcohol tolerance (119, 120-125; see Table 5.5). Nemo's tendency to identify brand names neither adds to the story, nor is it required by Erowid's submission guidelines, but the names do add verisimilitude and texture to "Crappy New Year" ("subway," "berry 7-up," and "Sparks," 28, 32, 35). I am not arguing that Nemo decided to include details or give specific times and brand names to boost credibility. Rather, I am pointing out how elements of his story, planned or unplanned, function to achieve narrative goals and the provision of specific names concretizes "Crappy New Year" providing a hook for the reader.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

In this Chapter I have examined how Nemo constructs reportability and, in response to the "reportability paradox," his development of credibility (Nemo 2006; Labov 1997:405). I have shown that Nemo builds tellability through intensification, portraying himself as extremely intoxicated, and referencing potential, but unrealized, outcomes (especially death) of "Crappy New Year" (2006). Nemo's assertions of memory loss, and his description of a range of behaviors related to inebriation, serve to index intense drunkenness. Nemo's amnesia presents a severe threat to his believability and in response he makes a blanket statement of attribution wherein he claims to have interviewed other participants. Nemo reassures the reader that events were witnessed by (supposedly) reliable people who told him what actually happened. Furthermore he regularly offers precise and detailed descriptions of times and places which

provide texture, anchor the story, and suggest accuracy (Ochs and Capps 1997). In the next section, Chapter 6, I examine how Nemo accounts for his transgressions and constructs exculpatory causal chains of events. Nemo uses linguistic techniques to minimize the nature of his transgressions and to argue that events were outside of his control. In addition he blames others for his excessive intoxication and develops a theory of automatism that positions him as blameless when blacked out.

## Chapter 6: Praise, Blame, and Accounting

Stories occur in a cultural context and the dominant method of interpretation, the common sense of a culture, is the master narrative (Bamberg 2007). Master narratives frame activities and provide the usual way of reasoning about a topic or events. In the United States, and much of Europe, drinking occurs against the backdrop of a master narrative constructed through medical authority that situates substance use within contexts of risk and addiction (Borsari and Carey 1999, 2001; Hunt and Barker 2001; Järvinen 2003; Omel'Chenko 2006; Wax 2002; Workman 2001). Furthermore, dominant discourses about alcohol invest drinking and drunkenness with moral implications (Critchlow 1983, 1985; Hunt and Barker 2001; Lender and Martin 1987; Schivelbusch 1991). In the case of drinking stories this means that the construction of causality and the assignment of blame involve judgments about identity and character. Many cultures accept the state of inebriation as reducing responsibility for a person's actions (MacAndrew and Edgerton 1969; Room 2001). However the excuse value of alcohol occurs within limits and drunkenness is rarely an acceptable or complete excuse for exceptionally transgressive behavior (Critchlow 1983, 1985; Room 2001; Tryggvesson 2004). The plot of "Crappy New Year," and perhaps most drinking stories, revolves around behaviors generally considered risky, inappropriate, or wrong. Therefore one task of the author is to make a causal argument that minimizes his responsibility for violating social norms. Given the importance of the narrative distribution of praise and blame for social life I dedicate significant space and detail to this analysis although a complete and full examination of Nemo's techniques is beyond the scope of this thesis and its associated space limitations. Therefore I focus on a few key themes and examine their linguistic instantiation through representative examples.

## 6.1 Mitigation, Minimization, and Situational Constraints

Nemo's transgressive behavior calls for an account in order to avoid the loss of face and potential disruption of self and social identities (Buttny 1987; Schlenker and Weigold 1992; Scott and Lyman 1968; Weinstein 1980). Marvin Scott and Stanford Lyman define accounts as "a linguistic device employed whenever an action is subjected to evaluative inquiry," or more specifically, "a statement made by a social actor to explain unanticipated or untoward behavior" (1968:46). In Scott and Lyman's definition accounts justify or excuse transgressive or unusual behavior that is subject to moral and social judgment. Lines 21-26 (quoted below) illustrate both Nemo's tendency to portray himself as a passive agent responding to situational pressures and his efforts to minimize, through linguistic means, the severity of his offenses.

021 We left D's after about an hour and were in search of a place to go drink, S's mom  
022 technically doesn't like people drinking in her place (it's a guarded apartment building  
023 with some 'unsavory characters' living in it and it's an issue when people stumble out the  
024 door all shitfaced) but there was no other place, so we went. 'Mom' (as his  
mom is known  
025 to all) wasn't too pleased as she'd planned a quiet and early evening to herself and didn't  
026 like the idea of us being there too long. (Nemo 2006:21-26)

This paragraph offers an excuse for Nemo's decision (along with S and his girlfriend) to impose on Mom. In an excuse "one admits that the act in question is bad, wrong, or inappropriate but denies full responsibility" as opposed to justifications where "one accepts responsibility for the act in question, but denies the pejorative quality associated with it" (Scott and Lyman 1968:47). Nemo concedes that going to Mom's was inappropriate but "denies full responsibility" by offering a causal argument; he further mitigates his transgression by redefining the offense and minimizing its severity (Schlenker and Weigold 1992; Scott and Lyman 1968:46-47). Nemo deploys the semantic meaning of "technically" (22) to suggest that going to Mom's is wrong only by a "strict" understanding of the rules (Fraser 2010a, 2010b; Lakoff 1973;

“Technical,” Webster’s 1984). He further attenuates his violation by describing it as a matter of weakly-held personal preference by Mom (“doesn’t like”) determined by her living situation (“guarded apartment building”) and blandly labeling it an “issue” when people drunkenly stumble about (Caffi 1999; Holmes 1984; Nemo 2006:22-24). In this case the discourse marker *but* cancels the meaning of the previous clause (which established that drinking at Mom’s was a problem) and introduces Nemo’s argument, presented through an extreme case formulation, that “there was no other place” (Nemo 2006:24; Norrick 2001:857-859; Schiffrin 1987). Nemo uses the discourse marker *so* (24) as a “causal conjunction” to indicate a warrant and project a causal relationship between his claim (nowhere to go) and his action (“so we went”) (Bolden 2009; Fraser 1999:931; Nemo 2006:24; Schiffrin 1987). Nemo combines a negative construction with “too” (25) to mitigate the illocutionary force of his presentation of Mom’s displeasure and then recasts her objection to their very presence (22, 25-26) as a concern with them remaining overly long (Fraser 2010b; Holmes 1984). Table 6.1 (following page) shows the other instances in “Crappy New Year” where *so* constructs causality, indicates an inferential relationship between clauses, or provides a warrant (justification) for his conclusions. As shown in Table 6.1 (following page) Nemo’s use of *so* marks multiple instances of explanation and reasoning in “Crappy New Year,” although not all of them involve “unanticipated or untoward behavior” open to moral judgment (Scott and Lyman 1968:46). I discuss some of the events referenced by Table 6.1 in greater detail but I introduce the table here to bolster my claim for Nemo’s use of *so* in line 24 by showing other instances where it has a similar function.

## **6.2 Automatism: Accessing the Excuse Value of Intoxication**

Nemo accesses the excuse value of alcohol by indexing folk beliefs about alcohol’s disinhibiting effects and constructing relationships between memory, volition, and intoxication

**Table 6.1** The Discourse Marker *so* as a Causal Marker, Indicator of Warrant, and Sign of Inferential Reasoning in “Crappy New Year” (Nemo 2006)

Location	Quotation
21-24	S's mom/technically doesn't like people drinking in her place (it's a guarded apartment building/with some 'unsavory characters' living in it and it's an issue when people stumble out the/door all shitfaced) but there was no other place, <b>so</b> we went.
29-31	as it was I had a small piece of pie and an english muffin at mom's place and that/was it (of course I had been planning on going home and feasting later, <b>so</b> I wasn't/looking to be full and thought I'd just get an extra buzz, BIG MISTAKE!)
32-34	We all took healthy guzzles from our drink; vodka and that new berry 7-Up are a great/combo, barely even notice the booze, and decided to go visit S's aunt 'P'. Mom hadn't/seen P for a good bit, and wanted to come along <b>so</b> we all mobbed out towards her place;
79-82	After that I was unconscious and completely/unrousable, which has happened to me before, I think they're like mini comas or/something because I don't respond to ANYTHING. Mom was worried I had a/concussion, and S's knee was killing him, <b>so</b> they wanted to go to a hospital.
87-88	I hear they pulled up and I couldn't move and was still unconscious, <b>so</b> all of them had to/drag me and stuff me in the car. S, his girl and his mom all told me later they were damn/sore after dragging my ass around like that.
122-124	I kissed him and said that it wasn't romantic, I kept telling people I loved them and wanted to kiss/them in a non romantic way, <b>so</b> I guess I finally did.

(Critchlow 1983, 1985, 1986; Room 2001; Tryggvesson 2004). Deploying the alcohol excuse can be problematic and Nemo’s indirect approach partially shields him from challenges to its validity (Room 2001; Tryggvesson 2004; Wild, Graham, and Rehm 1998). Nemo defines blackouts as “for me blackouts are just periods that I never remember and in which I say and do very stupid things” (45-47). The use of *just* and *never* resonate thus intensifying an extreme case formulation that links bad behavior to memory loss and presents both as simultaneous and inherent consequences of extreme inebriation. The *just* in Nemo’s characterization of blackouts also minimizes the seriousness of the blacked out state and the “very stupid things” that Nemo does (Kishner and Gibbs Jr. 1996; Molina and Romano 2012; Nemo 2006:46-47). He attempts acts of argumentative closure and peremptory assumption by asserting the primacy of his experience and stressing the personal applicability of his definition through the coupling of his

preface (the stance marker “for me”) with the use of *just* (Weltman 2003). Thus Nemo proposes that blackouts typically cause him to do stupid things regardless of medical, social, or legal understandings of inebriation.

Nemo’s conception of blackouts smacks of automatism: behavior conducted “without voluntary control” during “a discontinuation of the history of psychic life...caused by a cessation in the flow of a sense of consciousness” (Arboleda-Flórez 2002:569-570). Memory is critical to folk, medical, and legal understandings of volition and automatism: “there is no automatism without amnesia” but “not every case of amnesia amounts to automatism” (Arboleda-Flórez 2002:572). For instance, criminal defendants sometimes offer amnesia as a sign and cause of an inability to form intent or understand the consequences of their actions (Hermann 1986; Keiter 1997; Marlowe, Lambert, and Thompson 1999). If culpability depends on volition and intent then Nemo’s repeated avowals of being blacked out resonate with his assertions of amnesia to become claims about guilt and blame that absolve him of both.

Nemo distinguishes between different states of consciousness, with varying implications for responsibility and blame, based on the presence or absence of memory, awareness, and wakefulness. Blackouts are different from unconsciousness since Nemo, while blacked out, “say[s] and do[es] very stupid things” as opposed to the “mini comas” of unconsciousness where “I don’t respond to ANYTHING! (79-81). Therefore references to blacking out index memory loss, intoxication, and decreased culpability but not necessarily insentience. Table 6.2 (following page) presents the mental models of consciousness that emerge in “Crappy New Year” (Quinn 2005).

Nemo links awareness to memory but distinguishes both from wakefulness (45-47; 92-93; 94-96; 99-101). While at the hospital Nemo comments that he was “awake...but still in a blackout” before he “passed out again” and remained “unconscious for a lot of the proceedings

**Table 6.2** States of Being in “Crappy New Year” (Nemo 2006)

State	Active	Awake	Aware	Memory	Culpable	Characteristics and Quotes
Sober	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	normal functioning
Drunk	yes	yes	yes	yes	somewhat	slurring and clumsiness (49)
Blackout	yes	yes	no	no	no	just periods that I never remember and in which I say and do very stupid things (46-47)
Unconscious or “drunken stupor” (2)	no	no	no	no	no	completely unrousable (79-80); like mini comas(80-81); I don’t respond to ANYTHING” (81)

in the ER” (92-93). Despite being awake at the Emergency Room Nemo remembers little (92-93, 95-96) and the beginning of his memory for events overlaps his return to awareness: “[t]he only part about it I remember however was being told once that it was almost 4 am and that’s when I...looked around...and became a little more aware of the fact that I was in the hospital” (99-101). The upshot is that Nemo claims to remember very little after about 9:45pm and that he distinguishes between being aware, being awake, remembering, and being conscious. Some of these states of being can co-occur but unconsciousness for Nemo means no memory, no awareness, and no wakefulness.

Nemo’s most reportable event and the apotheosis of his automatist argument co-occur in lines 77 through 79:

077 At some point I just charged towards some random house; the door was at the  
bottom of a  
078 stair well, and I just ran down and smacked straight into the door, fell backwards, and hit  
079 my head several times on the concrete. (Nemo 2006)

Nemo stresses the importance, and intensifies the illocutionary force, of these lines through structural and semantic repetition: “charged” and “ran down” are nearly synonymous, both verbs are single syllable, and both clauses begin with the noun-adverb phrase “I just” (77-78). Further intensification occurs through the use of active verbs of motion (“charged,” “ran,” and “smacked”), and by lexical intensification (“straight into” and “several times”). These boosting techniques preclude interpreting *just* (77, 78) as minimization. Rather, these usages of *just* function as a “spectacle of ‘pure’ assertion” whereby Nemo offers the form of explanation without substance (Weltman 2003:363). *Just* occupies the slot where explicatory contextual information would occur but gives no account. As in his definition of blackouts *just* offers a “non-informative tautology” that avers but does not explain (Weltman 2003:368). Thus Nemo’s logic of automatism peaks at the most reportable event for which Nemo can give no explanation.

### **6.3 S: Best of Friends, Worst of Friends**

Nemo spends a significant amount of text writing about S: evaluating him, aligning and disaligning with him, and positioning himself with respect to him. S is Nemo’s foil, scapegoat, friend, and information source, and Nemo alternately praises and excoriates him in various ways throughout the text. S is important enough to consume half the space in the opening paragraph of “Crappy New Year” (quoted on the following page).

Nemo builds an extreme case formulation (ECF) through the lexical token *only* (2) thus establishing a one-to-one correlation between extreme drunkenness, near death, and the presence of his friend S (Pomerantz 1986). This construction accomplishes two of the functions of ECFs described by Anita Pomerantz: to state the strongest possible case as a defense against challenges

001 Last night, new years eve 2004, was the second time in only a period of a few months  
002 that I almost died several different ways in a drunken stupor. This only happens when I  
003 hang out with my friend 'S', quite possibly the worst drinking buddy ever; but  
    what he did  
004 for me last night is just amazing. (Nemo 2006:1-4)

and to “suggest the cause of a phenomenon” as “in the object...rather than a product of the interaction or the circumstances” (Pomerantz 1986:219-220, 277). Nemo suggests causation through correlation and causation implies that S bears some responsibility for Nemo’s “Crappy New Year.” Nemo strengthens the connection with a hedged ECF, this time using the superlative *worst*, to evaluate (in the sense of assigning cultural value, Du Bois 2007) S as “quite possibly the worst drinking buddy ever” (3). However, Nemo immediately goes on to evaluate S’s behavior “for me last night” as “just amazing” (3-4). The hedge *quite possibly* attenuates the illocutionary force of Nemo’s extreme evaluation and, combined with the contrastive discourse marker *but*, partially ameliorates cognitive dissonance caused by the obvious inconsistency of blaming and praising S in the same sentence (Du Bois 2007; Holmes 1984; Schiffrin 1987). The *just* in line four can be read in several senses: emphatic, restrictive, and indicative. It restricts and emphasizes interpretations of S’s behavior as amazing and indexes a production difficulty caused by Nemo’s inability to adequately describe what S did for him.

S also serves as a point of comparison for Nemo to minimize his own drinking (Table 6.3, following page). Through comparisons to S, bolstered by the reported speech of others, Nemo characterizes his own drinking as, if not moderate, then at least not heavy enough to cause the degree of intoxication he experiences (see Chapter 7.1). In the orientation Nemo uses extreme case formulations (“whole,” “of course”) to establish intense commitment to an itinerary (5, 7): “My plan the whole day was to just go hang out with S and his girlfriend, get a little drunk, and go home at about ten to my family because my mom had planned a dinner thing and I wanted to

be with them at midnight of course” (5-7). Nemo partly blames his unplanned “DRUNK” (128) on Subway employees and castigates them for closing early on New Year’s Eve (26-31, quoted below).

**Table 6.3** Comparisons to S’s Drinking in “Crappy New Year” (Nemo 2006)

Location	Quotation
37-38	By the time we got to P's, S and his girl had been drinking hard, but I had only had a few/chugs and was hardly feeling anything.
48-50	I must stress how little I drank in comparison to S and his girl, and I was only starting to/slur my words a slight bit and had a bit of difficulty maneuvering around tight spaces and/such; basically the starting point of intoxication as I last remember.
111-114	Meanwhile, and speaking of vicodin, my friend S got a/prescription and 6 pills for the road; this is a guy who drinks himself into oblivion every/night and is the most insane drunk I've ever known or would want to know, and yet I get/the lecture?
115-117	If my BAC was .352, he must have been like .6; he drank SO much more than I did, and/him, his mom, his girl, and anyone else that was with me that night continued to say how/little I had actually drank (especially in comparison to S).
119-120	my mom went and thanked them and said that S was hugging her and shit, he was wasted but held it much better than me in more ways than one.

026 We mixed our first 2 liter there, and wanted to go  
 027 spend some subway stamps and get some subs but the bastards closed early, can't help  
 028 but to think that had I had a little more food in my stomach I might not have  
 gotten as bad  
 029 as I did; as it was I had a small piece of pie and an english muffin at mom's place  
 and that  
 030 was it (of course I had been planning on going home and feasting later, so I wasn't  
 031 looking to be full and thought I'd just get an extra buzz, BIG MISTAKE!). (Nemo 2006)

Nemo uses a negative construction (“can’t help but to think”) to create an indirect comment that, combined with the modal *might*, attenuates illocutionary force. Simultaneously he boosts the illocutionary point by presenting the propositional content (“I might not have gotten as bad”) as so compellingly obvious that he “can’t help but to think” about it (27-29). Thus he attempts to minimize the loss of face involved in complaining about, and assigning blame to, the Subway employees (Caffi 1999; Partington 2007, 2011:1786, 1790; Vasquez 2009). Next Nemo justifies his light snack by referencing plans to “g[o] home and feas[t] later” and hoped to get an “extra

buzz” since eating slows alcohol’s movement from the stomach and small intestine into the bloodstream (29-30). The “of course” in line 30 resonates with the “of course” in line 7 which stresses his desire to be at home with his family at the culturally meaningful moment of midnight and depicts Nemo as connected to the cultural values of hearth, home, and kin. As with his excuse about visiting Mom, Nemo constructs a causal chain of events in which situational exigencies defeat his plans.

## **6.4 Reported Speech and Linguistic Constructions**

### **6.4.1 Reported Speech**

As I discussed in Chapter 5.2.1, Nemo argues that he was blacked out for most of his “Crappy New Year” and relied on the verbal reports of others to reconstruct events. An examination of Table 5.5, which displays references to reconstructed dialogue in “Crappy New Year,” shows that Nemo relies on fourteen verbs to indicate speech. Of those verb only six are used more than once and just three verbs account for over half (21 of 35) of his constructions involving reconstructed dialogue. Table 6.4 (following page) shows the locations and frequencies, along with examples, of repeated verbs along with several verbs that occur only once.

Research on epistemic modality, epistemic commitment, and evidentiality has often portrayed direct experience as a preferred way of knowing and as indicating higher levels of certainty and commitment for interlocutors (Cornillie 2009; Caldas-Coulthard 1987; Clift 2006; Holt 1996; Tannen 1986, 1995; Travis 2006). In contrast to this view, Bert Cornillie (2009) argues that evidentiality (the source of knowledge) and epistemic modality (the likelihood that it is true) are conceptually separate and that specific ways of knowing, such as inference and hearsay, do not necessarily imply weakened commitment to the truthfulness of a proposition. In other words,

the epistemic certainty and commitment of the author is indicated separately from their attributions of source. Given Nemo’s reliance on indirect reported speech, particularly in the periods where he claims to be blacked out and committed much of his bad behavior, this debate is relevant to my analysis.

**Table 6.4** Selected Verbs Used for Reconstructed Dialogue in “Crappy New Year” (Nemo 2006)

Verb	# of times used	Conjugations	Location
to tell	11	told, retold, telling	10, 45, 52, 53, 67, 83, 88, 99, 12, 123, 145
to say	6	said, saying	60, 85, 103, 107, 116, 123
to ask	4	asked	42, 98, 102, 103
to slur	2	to slur, slurring	49, 103
to talk	2	talked, talking	19, 97
to thank	2	thanking, thanked	101, 119
to babble	1	babbling	97
to bitch	1	bitched	106
to hear	1	hear	87
to swear	1	swore	104
14 different verbs	35 total verb uses	20 conjugation types	see Table 5.5

Nemo presents his inferences, reported speech, memory, and sensory experiences as equally valid. Initially I assumed that Nemo would link unattributed speech (hearsay) to descriptions of bad behavior as part of a strategy to attenuate his portrayal of inebriated transgressions and mitigate readers’ negative evaluations. However Tables 5.5 and 6.4 show that Nemo uses reconstructed dialogue throughout the text and relies on only a small number of speech related verbs. Furthermore, reported speech is central to his construction of credibility as I demonstrated in Chapter 5.2.1. An example will provide further clarification. Line 87 lacks authorial attribution and could, without knowledge of context, be labeled epistemically weak hearsay used to hedge commitment or to mitigate illocutionary force: “I hear they pulled up and I couldn’t move and was still unconscious.” Despite an excellent opportunity for hedging, if it is accepted that unattributed reported speech inherently implies a lack of commitment, the following lines

(88-89) cite sources, offer evidence of Nemo being unconscious, and boost the force of his depictions: “S, his girl and his mom all told me later they were damn/sore” (88-89). “Damn” intensifies the event and portrays Nemo as exceptionally unconscious thereby requiring strenuous effort to “stuff [him] into the car” (88). In sum, Nemo does not hedge through his use or presentation of reported speech; nor does he hedge through inference as I show in my discussion of *I guess*.

#### **6.4.2 *I guess***

There is debate in the literature about the nature and functions in discourse of the construction *I guess*, and a variety of conceptions have developed (Cornillie 2009; Déhe and Wichmann 2010; Fraser 2010a; Kärkkäinen 2006, 2007; Nuyts 2001; Simon-Vandenberg 2000; Thompson 2002). These disagreements about *I guess* may reflect historical changes in their usage (e.g., increases in grammaticalization), the complexity of their use in actual discourse, misunderstandings about the relationship between evidentiality and epistemic modality, or a failure to properly examine local contexts and linguistic cues such as prosody (Cornillie 2009; Déhe and Wichmann 2010; Kärkkäinen 2006, 2007). In “Crappy New Year” this linguistic form serves evidential and stance marking functions but does not act as an epistemic hedge. I discuss *I guess* to illuminate the nature of this construction and to show how it contributes to the narrative goal of assigning praise and blame (Labov and Waletzky 1967).

Elise Kärkkäinen demonstrates several functions of *I guess* including discourse organization, evidential marking, and stance marking; she argues that *I guess* has undergone semantic bleaching and serves to indicate the type of upcoming stance rather than a perspective about the information to be presented (2007:212-213). In conversation, *I guess* often indicates conclusions arrived at, and claimed, by an interlocutor through inference using locally available information

and immediately prior discourse (2007:190, 208-211). Similarly, from a “subjective, single-speaker vantage point,” *I guess* is “a subjective evidential marker” that “indexes a reasoning or inferential process of the speaker” (2007:212). Table 6.5 shows that *I guess* occurs five times in “Crappy New Year,” that four of those constructions collocate with details apparently contradicting Nemo’s asseverations of amnesia, and that *I guess* collocates with inferential processes (see Chapter 5.2.2).

**Table 6.5** *I guess* in “Crappy New Year” (Nemo 2006)

Line #	Quote
52-54	P took out her stash and I matched her several bowls (I almost smoked my/whole \$60 bag with her!) meanwhile she kept telling me to put mine away; <b>I guess</b> I just/ kept telling her that I loved and respected her so much I would do anything for her, or/something along those lines.
65-67	At about 11:30, we got up to go, the problem was I couldn't stand, or move much at all./ <b>I guess</b> I got up and crashed into a bunch of furniture (didn't break anything thankfully)/and S told me I was staying there for the night.
72-76	I have very hazy/memories of looking up and seeing that I was being dragged along by the arms and I just/kept falling, my legs wouldn't move or coordinate at all. S likened it to one of those dolls where one pulls the string and it does jumping jack motions. <b>I guess</b> I repeatedly kicked/him in the knee on accident, which isn't cool because he has bad arthritis problems in that knee.
82-85	S called my/sister from my cell and told her I was passed out in a stair well, when she told my mom/and dad that they all piled in the car and raced out towards the other side of town ( <b>I guess</b> /something about what S said to my sister was enough to scare her)
122-124	S came to see how I was doing, I kissed him/and said that it wasn't romantic, I kept telling people I loved/them and wanted to kiss them in a non romantic way, so <b>I guess</b> I finally did.

There are four important similarities among the passages in Table 6.5. First, they offer accounts or explanations for behavior: Nemo’s reason for continuing to smoke pot despite P’s offer to provide for both of them (52-54), S’s unsuccessful decision to leave Nemo at P’s (65-67), the basis of S’s comparing Nemo to a doll (72-76), Nemo’s family rushing to the hospital (82-85), and Nemo’s justification for kissing S (122-124). Second, they exhibit the same basic structure of inferential reasoning: Nemo gives contextual information through a description of

recent events then deploys the construction with *I guess* to bridge the gap between locally available information and explanations for behavior in the story. The discourse marker *so* in line 124 further indicates causal reasoning (see my discussion of Table 6.1).

Third, Nemo takes a stance in each passage. Fourth, the *I guess* construction serves an evidential function indicating that Nemo is making an inference as opposed to hedging or mitigating a claim. For instance, Nemo hedges very little of the contextual information or conclusions that collocate with *I guess*. Although he expresses uncertainty about the exact wording of what he told P the phrase “something along those lines” (54) displays certainty in the essential illocutionary point of his utterance. In fact, Nemo boosts and intensifies his descriptions through mechanisms like repetition (“I couldn't stand, or move much at all”), intensifying adjectives (“a bunch of furniture,”), evocative verbs (“crashed into” and “piled in”), and source attribution (“S likened it to”) (65-66, 73, 84).

For further explication I briefly discuss lines 82 through 85 and then give a detailed analysis of lines 72 through 76 to elucidate the processes at work in Nemo's use of *I guess*. Lines 82 through 85, wherein Nemo surmises that “**I guess** something about what S said to my sister was enough to scare her”, are structurally divergent; this section is the only instance where a common noun follows *I guess* rather than the proper noun “I.” In addition the circumstances involved are so blatantly obvious that little reasoning is needed to explain his family's behavior. This passage (82-85) is best understood as ironic understatement (i.e., litotes) that introduces and frames a stance while maintaining the structural form of inferential reasoning. Nemo uses his sister's reaction to build tellability and comment on the dangerous severity of his condition. Just as the medical staff's concern (expressed by taking Nemo “right in to the ER”) pointed to his extreme intoxication and the precariousness of his health, so too does his family's decision to “pil[e] in

the car and rac[e] out towards the other side of town” (82-85, 91-92). Nemo stresses his family’s sense of urgency, (“piled into” and “raced”) and the distance they were willing to travel, to intensify the sense of physical peril provoked by his physical stance of being “passed out in a stairwell” (82, 84).

Lines 71 through 76 exemplify the role of *I guess* as a stance marker and Nemo’s deployment of stance to account for transgressive acts. Lines 71-76 are quoted below for ease of reference:

71 I have very hazy  
 72 memories of looking up and seeing that I was being dragged along by the arms and I just  
 73 kept falling, my legs wouldn't move or coordinate at all. S likened it to one of those dolls  
 74 where one pulls the string and it does jumping jack motions. **I guess** I repeatedly kicked  
 75 him in the knee on accident, which isn't cool because he has bad arthritis problems in that  
 76 knee. (Nemo 2006)

Nemo begins line 71 with an overt exception to his blanket statement of amnesia: “I have very hazy memories...” and then quoting S to provide an evaluative metaphor of Nemo’s loss of bodily control that positions Nemo as blameless and that resonates with Nemo’s automatist portrayal of intoxication (see Ch. 6.2): “S likened it to one of those dolls where one pulls the string and it does jumping jack motions” (73-74). In the next clause *I guess* is in the initial position signifying both the deployment of a stance that becomes available for evaluation by readers and indicating a conclusion arrived at through inference: “I guess I repeatedly kicked him in the knee” (74-75). Nemo continues his stance formation through an evaluation of the kicking as “[not] cool” and reinforces the positioning introduced by S’s metaphor by labeling the “repeate[d]” kicking an “accident” (74-75). Figures 6.1 and 6.2 show lines 74 and 75 in the form of modified stance diagraphs (Du Bois 2007):

S <sub>1</sub>	S <sub>2</sub>	S <sub>0</sub>
Nemo	S	Nemo “repeatedly” kicking S in the knee

**Figure 6.1** Stance Diagraph of Lines 71-76 of “Crappy New Year” (Nemo 2006)

<u>Speaker</u>	<u>Stance Subject</u>	<u>Positioning</u>	<u>Stance Object</u>	<u>Evaluation</u>
Nemo	I	accident because	repeatedly kicked	isn't cool bad arthritis problems

**Figure 6.2** Modified Stance Diagram of Lines 74-76 of “Crappy New Year”  
(Du Bois 2007; Nemo 2006:74-76)

Repeatedly kicking S is a physical stance that, without the explanation provided by “on accident” (75) would index Nemo disaligning from S. Instead, Nemo aligns with S by expressing concern for his welfare, negatively evaluating the kicks, and positioning himself as faultless through a metaphor portraying his body as obstreperously unresponsive. Nemo deploys reported speech (S’s metaphor) to contextualize the stance he begins with *I guess* and in doing so offers his preferred interpretation of events. He then takes a stance and, through his evaluation and positioning, proposes essentially the same exculpatory interpretation for the reader to align with. The stance behavior in lines 71 through 76 thus demonstrates the inherently intersubjective nature of stancetaking even in the supposedly fixed and unidirectional format of a written text (Du Bois 2007; Englebretson 2007; Haddington 2004, 2006; Hyland 2005; Kärkkäinen 2006).

## 6.5 Conclusion

In this Chapter I have shown that Nemo engages a variety of techniques in accounting for, minimizing, and excusing his bad behavior. One of his key techniques is presenting causal chains of events that position him as the victim of circumstances as when he imposes on Mom. Nemo also rejects responsibility for getting “shitfaced” and alternately blames others (e.g., the Subway staff) or presents the intensity of his intoxication as inexplicable. In addition he uses lexical hedges along with indirect and negative constructions to minimize his transgressions. He is unable, at least without significant challenge, to access the excuse value of alcohol since his behaviors go far beyond the bounds of the within limits clause (MacAndrew and Edgerton 1969; Room 2001). Therefore he presents an exculpatory theory of mind based on connections

between memory, awareness, consciousness, blackouts, and responsibility. In Nemo's formulation the lack of memory (blackout) reduces or removes responsibility and culpability. Through comparisons with S and mechanical bodily metaphors Nemo further excuses himself. In the next section, Chapter 7, I detail how Nemo, despite his poor showing in "Crappy New Year," presents himself as a competent and non-alcoholic drinker.

Nemo accesses a competent identity through displays of knowledge and experience and by constructing an "Other" in the form of S (Bogren 2006; Measham 2002). He presents himself as a fan of drunkenness therefore aligning with the value systems of hegemonic masculinity, edgework, and adventure drinking (Bogren 2006; Peralta 2007; Workman 2001). Nemo deflects responsibility for becoming excessively intoxicated and through the deployment of a lessons learned sections he displays contrition as part his accounting (Abrahamson 2004; Schlenker and Weigold 1992; Weinstein 1980). Furthermore, he challenges his emergency room doctor who acts as an embodied agent of dominant discourses about drinking, risk, and disease. In his highly evaluated final paragraph, Nemo forcefully rejects a dependent identity by preemptively defining the moral of "Crappy New Year" (Nemo 2006).

## Chapter 7: Sloppy Drunks and Competent Drinkers

Definitions of competent drinking and competent drinkers vary across individuals and societies; underlying beliefs and assumptions about alcohol, risk, and identity play key structuring roles in specific formulations of competence (Bogren 2006; Cho et al. 2001; Macfarlane and Tuffin 2010; Sheehan and Ridge 2001). I argue, based on the research I reviewed in Chapter Four, that in the United States, Australia, and much of Europe dominant medical, political, and social discourses can be broadly characterized as associating competence with the practice of abstention or moderate drinking. Moderate drinking is defined by limits on the amount ingested within specific periods of time (e.g., not binge drinking) and the absence of negative effects in various areas of life functioning: employment, physical health, personal relationships, mental health, and legal or social obligations (Coleman and Cater 2005; Hunt and Barker 2001; Keane 2009; Macfarlane and Tuffin 2010; Mancini-Peña and Tyson 2007; Marshall, Ames, and Bennett 2001; Schivelbusch 1992).

Control, disease, and maturity developed through experience are recurrent themes in conversation and narratives about drinking; definitions of competence are almost inevitably made through comparisons to problematic or alcoholic drinking (Bogren 2006; Demant and Järvinen 2006; Järvinen 2003; Macfarlane and Tuffin 2010; Omel'Chenko 2006; Østergaard 2009; Rødner 2006). In this chapter I discuss notions of drinking competence and then analyze how Nemo evaluates and positions himself as a competent drinker despite his poor showing on New Year's Eve. I argue that Nemo, despite having lost control in "Crappy New Year," portrays himself as a competent drinker by assigning blame, by segregating New Year's Eve from his larger biography, and by presentations of himself as an adventurous and heavy drinker thus

invoking value systems related to edgework and hegemonic masculinity (Cho et al. 2010; Morrissey 2008; Peralta 2007; Workman 2001)

The indices of drinking competence most frequently mentioned in research are the avoidance of negative consequences, controlled drinking, and self-control while drinking (Bogren 2006; Cho et al. 2010; Demant and Järvinen 2006, 2011; Lindsay 2009; Macfarlane and Tuffin 2010; Measham 2002; Pyörälä 1995; Rúdólfsdóttir and Morgan 2009; Workman 2001). The prescribed behavioral norms of control depend on beliefs about the impact, nature, and place of alcohol in personal and social life. In other words, individuals define the behavioral expression of competence (both drinking and drunken comportment), based on their beliefs about the effects of alcohol and how much, when, and for what purposes it is acceptable to imbibe (Bogren 2006; Demant and Järvinen 2006, 2011; Room 2000, 2001). Bogren (2006) describes lines of reasoning about alcohol among Swedish youth based on conversations in an online chat room. For those ascribing to the teetotaler argument drinking is fundamentally risky and obscures expression of the authentic self. The moderate drinking argument emphasizes avoiding intoxication and proposes taste and sociability as acceptable reasons for drinking. In contrast the “getting drunk argument” holds that intoxication is acceptable and fun but censures overly transgressive drunken comportment (Bogren 2006:526).

Bogren suggests that adherents of the getting drunk argument seek a “controlled loss of control” (Measham 2002:349) whereby they can experience the pleasures of intoxication within certain boundaries and avoid undue risk or harm (Bogren 2006; Mayock 2005; Østergaard 2009; Workman 2001). These fans of intoxication portray personal authenticity as being true to oneself and being honest about motivations for drinking (including adventure, escape, and sociability). This line of reasoning values knowing one’s limits: vomiting, sobbing, and passing

out are signs of a lack of control and incompetence (Bogren 2006; Pyörälä 1995). An additional element of competence concerns control across spans of time and multiple drinking episodes with a focus on avoiding dependency and alcoholism (Bogren 2006; Pyörälä 1995). Bogren demonstrates that proponents of each line of reasoning engage in a process of “Othering” whereby they build their own identities through negative constructions of an Other glossed as immature, inauthentic, and out of control (Bogren 2006:524-529; Cho et al. 2010:214; Rødner 2006; Rúdólfssdóttir and Morgan 2009).

## **7.1 The Paradox of Incompetence in “Crappy New Year”**

### **7.1.1 Nemo as an Incompetent Drinker**

Nemo clearly subscribes to elements of the “getting drunk is fun” argument (Bogren 2006) since drunkenness is a stated goal of his New Year’s plan: “[m]y plan the whole day was to just go hang out with S and his girlfriend, get a little drunk” (5-6). In the Coda (quoted below) Nemo comments about his appreciation for intoxication using the language of, and positioning himself with respect to, dominant medico-social discourses of drinking and disease:

125 What did I learn from this? A lot. I'm not drinking anymore because I do like the buzz A  
126 LOT (I'm what you'd call a lush, a borderline/low level alcoholic) and am getting tired of  
127 spending so much money on it and having to drink every night etc. I really hate getting  
128 DRUNK, to the point where you can't even stand and such, a little drunk is great to me  
129 but I absolutely detest when it goes over the line. (Nemo 2006:125-129)

Nemo seems to highlight the physical sensation of intoxication (“the buzz”) although he may be using a physically descriptive term (“the buzz”) to index the entire subjective experience of intoxication. For instance, cross-cultural evidence demonstrates that alcohol and sociability are closely linked, and Nemo indicates his valuation of sociability by his association of a “great start” to the evening with “chill[ing]” at D’s (18), his positively evaluated encounter with P (38-64), adherence to the practice of “match[ing]” (41-42, 51) bowls while smoking pot, and his

comment (144) that as a result of this experience he now “think[s] of [S] like a brother” (Cavan 1966; Dietler 2006; Donner 1994; Gibson and Weinberg 1980; Sheehan and Ridge 2001; SIRC 1998). Repeated lexical and orthographic intensification stresses his deep appreciation for the intoxicated experience including orthographic prosody (capitalization of “A LOT”), the label “lush,” and the descriptive adjective “great to me” (125-126, 128). Nemo also defines the limits of his enjoyment through explicit statements and intensification. The textual prosody of capitalization in “A LOT” and “DRUNK” resonates, thus acting to define and heighten the antithetical relationship between his appreciation of one state and loathing of another (125-128). His evaluation of being “DRUNK” is highly marked through adverbial modification (“really”) of the negatively valenced lexeme “hate” and then restated as “when it goes over the line” (127-129).

Line 129 further intensifies Nemo’s loathing for going “over the line” by restating his distaste using the extreme case formulation “absolutely” to modify another negatively valenced lexeme, “detest” (128-129). The sequential contrast (using the contrastive connector *but*) between the phrase “over the line” and “a little drunk” establishes that Nemo views intoxication as a continuum of intensity with associated positive and negative evaluations (Fraser 1999; Nemo 2006:127-128; Schiffrin 1987). Nemo defines “over the line” with a behavioral example, “being unable to stand,” which indexes (“and such”) a range of disliked behaviors and sensations (128-129). Finally, Nemo uses the language of social (“lush”) and medical (“alcoholic”) discourses to position himself as a nondependent (i.e., in control) drinker: “I’m what you’d call a lush, a borderline/low level alcoholic” (126). As in lines 128-129, he invokes a continuum and hedges the ideologically loaded term *alcoholic* with scalar qualifiers (“borderline/low level”) (126). Furthermore he disavows responsibility for these characterizations through an indirect

construction using a past tense modal verb (*would* in “I’m what you’d call”) thus assigning authorship to the reader and reducing illocutionary force (126). In other words, line 126 says that a reader subscribing to dominant medical and social discourses could, if they were so inclined to comment, class the events of “Crappy New Year” as problematic, and Nemo acknowledges this, but he rejects an identity as dependent, alcoholic, or diseased (125-126).

Nemo’s level of intoxication and drunken behavior during “Crappy New Year” goes “over the line” by his own (e.g., “can’t even stand”), and virtually everyone else’s, definition of competence or control (Bogren 2006; Nemo 2006:128-129; Pyörälä 1995; Workman 2001). That is to say, “Crappy New Year” appears to present Nemo as an incompetent drinker. His initial, and perhaps most basic, failure is egregiously overshooting his desired level of intoxication thus violating an ethos, common among drinkers and other drug users, that values bodily self-knowledge (especially regarding responses to substances) along with control over dosage and levels of inebriation (Abrahamson 2004; Cho et al. 2010; Hunt et al. 2009; Hunt, Evans, and Kares 2007; Lindsay 2009; Omel’Chenko 2006; Workman 2001). Furthermore, Nemo violates the norms of sociability associated with alcohol by passing out, by requiring care from others, and by interrupting their celebration: “I missed new years completely and made many other people miss it too, not cool” (Bogren 2006; Cavan 1966; Dietler 2006; Donner 1994; Gibson and Weinberg 1980; Nemo 2006:17-21, 137-138; Schivelbusch 1992; Sheehan and Ridge 2001; SIRC 1998). Other breaches of sociability include exhibiting aggression (“I was accusing him of ripping me off”) and injuring S by repeatedly kicking him in the knee “on accident” (55-56, 75).

Perhaps most importantly Nemo loses control of himself and his body with implications for his social status. The same markers of extreme intoxication that create tellability (see Chapter 5

and Table 5.2) also reveal the extent of Nemo's failure to maintain control. Vomiting, "pissing" (90) oneself, egregious displays of emotion such as "crying a lot" (101), aggression, and hospitalization are specific behaviors stigmatized by drinkers and often interpreted as signs of incompetence, immaturity, or a lack of control mentioned by researchers as behaviors stigmatized by drinkers and interpreted as a lack of control (Bogren 2006; Cho et al. 2010; Demant and Järvinen 2006, 2011; Lindsay 2009; Macfarlane and Tuffin 2010; Measham 2002; Pyörälä 1995; Rúdólfsdóttir and Morgan 2009; Workman 2001).

### **7.1.2 Nemo as Competent Drinker**

There are three key and overlapping techniques whereby Nemo constructs an identity as a competent drinker: claims of experience with intense intoxication, displays of knowledge, and aligning with value systems that valorize heavy drinking and which are associated with edgework and masculinity (Lyng 1990; Peralta 2007). Representations of drinking experience are regularly deployed in discourse to index desired social identities (Bogren 2006; Giles 1999; Killingsworth 2006; Sheehan and Ridge 2001; Workman 2001). For some, especially advocates of drunkenness as entertainment, youth, and fraternity members, drinking experience and extreme intoxication can act to show and construct maturity, masculinity, toughness, and skill (Bogren 2006; Demant 2007; Demant and Järvinen 2006; Peralta 2007; West 2001; Workman 2001). From this perspective stories of excess take on "the tone of battle stories told by war veterans" (Peralta 2007:745-746) and going "over the line" (Nemo 2006:129) becomes a trial by fire with survival the final marker of ability (Lyng 1990; Workman 2001)

Nemo demonstrates his familiarity with, and approval of, intoxication through implicit, direct, and indexical references. I demonstrated in Chapter 5 that Nemo portrays "Crappy New Year" as an extreme experience of intense intoxication. His statement that "[l]ast night...was the

second time in only...a few months that I almost died several different ways in a drunken stupor” (1-2), combined with his claim that “[t]his only happens when I hang out with my friend ‘S’” (2-3), implies multiple (more than two) occurrences of extreme drunkenness with S. The existence of a personalized definition of blackouts, indicated by “for me” (see Chapter 6.2 and Table 5.4), shows familiarity with drunkenness as does the use of plural nouns and verbs (“blackouts,” “are,” “periods,” “things”): “for me blackouts are just periods that I never remember and in which I say and do very stupid things” (45-47). This representation is trivialized through a construction with *just* (“just periods”) and is impressively bland compared to health oriented discourses presenting blackouts as dangerous and linked to risky behavior (University of New Hampshire Health Services 2012; Nemo 2006:46; White et al. 2004). Similarly, Nemo remarks that his “mini com[a],” after he ran into the door and during which he “was unconscious and completely unrousable,” have “happened to me before” (79-81). His blasé description sharply contrasts with Mom’s “worr[y] [that] I had a concussion” and the extreme case formulations (“completely” and “I don’t respond to ANYTHING”) describing the depth of his insensibility (79-82). These glib representations of insentience index a stance of unconcern brought about by familiarity and are reinforced by Nemo’s comparative and litotic surmise (see Chapter 6.4.2) that “I guess something about what S said to my sister was enough to scare her” (84-15).

Nemo also signals his hard-drinking status by grossly mischaracterizing an advanced state of drunkenness as “basically the starting point of intoxication” since he was “only starting to slur my words a slight bit and ha[ving] a bit of difficulty maneuvering around tight spaces and such” (48-50). He then describes additional difficulties with coordination and large scale motor movements (spilling pot), emotional effusiveness (telling P he loved her), and emotional lability (accusing S of stealing pot) (48-64). Furthermore he claims that 9:45pm, concurrent with his

description of only beginning to be intoxicated, marks the beginning of his amnesia (42). Slurring and gross motor difficulties begin with a BAC in the approximate range of .11 to .2 and blackouts around .21 to .29; for someone of Nemo's weight (160 lbs.) a BAC of .21 requires more than nine standard drinks (1.25 oz. of 80 proof liquid) over the five hour period he describes (CAAPC 2006). In other words, Nemo is identifying a significant degree of intoxication as "the starting point" and relies on previously presented claims of personal experience to support his classification.

Through the use of medical terminology and the display of knowledge Nemo presents an informed and experienced identity. For instance, Nemo indicates at least a basic understanding of pharmacodynamics by keeping his stomach empty "to get an extra buzz" (31). He uses, personalizes, and trivializes the medical terms "blackout" (45-45, 61, 92), "coma" (9, 80, 107), and "unconscious" (79, 87, 93-94). While at P's he exhibits a "veteran" identity through knowledge of marijuana varieties: "P had trainwreck, which is known to veterans to be very powerful 'creeper' weed" (57-58). He offers a personal understanding of alcoholism as a graded behavioral condition that he rejects. He obliquely, and briefly, refers to worries about dependence: "What did I learn from this? A lot. I'm not drinking anymore because I do like the buzz A LOT" (125-126). Nemo's self-presentation as an experienced, knowledgeable, and heavy drinker climaxes in his Emergency Room encounter with a physician who acts as an embodied and metonymic stand-in for dominant discourses about risk and drinking. Their encounter, quoted below, exemplifies the issues of power and authority inherent in evidential claims (Fox 2008).

106 The doctor bitched me out several times about how drunk I was (my  
107 blood-alcohol level was .352!), she was saying the fact that I wasn't in a coma with that  
108 much booze in me meant that I was an alcoholic and had a dangerous dependency; which  
109 doesn't make much sense in my little world, seems to me that just indicates I've  
got a high  
110 tolerance (which I do, very high and with many substances, 1000 miligrams of vicodin to  
111 me is a barely noticeable buzz). (Nemo 2006:106-111)

Nemo trivializes the female doctor's statements by labeling them with the gendered diminutive "bitched" (106) implying baseless concerns or nagging; he repeats this diminution, sans overt sexism, with the label "lecture" (114). Furthermore, he assigns her a straw-man argument by reconstructing her speech in terms of a reductionist link between tolerance and the socio-medical identity of an alcoholic thus making it "factually brittle" and open to challenge through a single counter-example (Edwards 2000). He demonstrates knowledge by referencing his "blood alcohol level" to the third digit (107) and marks it as extreme with an exclamation point and by placing it as a parenthetical comment immediately after the phrase "how drunk I was" (106): ".352!" (108). Nemo elides the fact that he was indeed "unconscious for a lot of the proceedings in the ER" (93) and previous labeling of his unresponsive stupor as a "coma" (9, 8).

Nemo introduces a counter-argument that privileges experientially gained self-knowledge over medical training, at least for the purposes of interpreting the implications of Nemo's consciousness despite a BAC of ".352!" (108). Thus the doctor's allegations of dependence don't "make much sense in my little world" (109) because of his unique constitution: "seems to me that just indicates I've got a high tolerance (which I do, very high and with many substances, 1000 milligrams of vicodin to me is a barely noticeable buzz)" (109-111). The *just* in line 109 performs multiple functions including the production of argumentative closure, restricting the range of potential interpretations through synonymy to *only*, and intensifying illocutionary force by indexing Nemo's investment in, and epistemic commitment to, his interpretation (Kishner and

Gibbs Jr. 1996; Lee 1987, 1991; Molina and Romano 2012; Weltman 2003). Nemo's claim of tolerance, like his portrayal of drunkenness as the beginning of intoxication, aligns him with the ethos of heavy drinking. Nemo often seems to be boasting and, from the perspective of edgework, the more intense the experience the greater his achievement in having survived. Thus the intensifying markers and indexical constructions that I identified as building tellability and credibility also have a role in the narrative depiction of a serious challenge to Nemo's survival.

### 7.1.3 Creating an Other

Drinkers partly define competence through implied or direct "Othering" often through comparisons to problem, immature, and incompetent drinkers (Bogren 2006:524-529; Cho et al. 2010:214; Rødner 2006; Rüdólfsdóttir and Morgan 2009). The process of constructing hierarchies is reflexive: as humans order things so are they ordered by them (Manning 2012). Paul Manning, in *The Semiotics of Drinking*, writes that "[d]rinks, as a phenomenon of material culture, are both ordered by people into cultural systems ('ordering things') and reciprocally act indexically to order people into those systems ('ordered by things')" (2012:4). Thus the use of different drinks, and drinking styles, associates the drinker with social values.

The main objects of comparison for Nemo are S and "his girl" (15) (see Table 6.3). In response to the Emergency Room doctor's assertion that he has a "dangerous dependency" (108) Nemo indignantly compares himself to S:

111 Meanwhile, and speaking of vicodin, my friend S got a  
112 prescription and 6 pills for the road; this is a guy who drinks himself into oblivion every  
113 night and is the most insane drunk I've ever known or would want to know, and yet I get  
114 the lecture? (2006:111-114)

Having just described himself as having exceptional tolerance to "many substances," Vicodin included, Nemo uses the discourse marker *meanwhile* to introduce a contrastive connection between him getting "bitched" at and S's receiving a prescription for the narcotic Vicodin (Nemo

2006:106-114; Pitler et al. 2008). Nemo gives an unflattering representation of S which, by comparison, minimizes his own drinking, and characterized by evaluative intensification through extreme case formulations (ECFs) and valenced lexical tokens. The superlatives *every*, *most*, and *ever* combine with the negatively valenced terms *oblivion* (as a state of inebriation), *insane*, and *drunk* (as an identity label) to construct an extreme depiction of S against which the reader is to (favorably) compare Nemo (112-113). Nemo positions himself as uniquely capable for making this judgment since he “know[s]” and has observed S: “he [is] the most insane drunk I've ever known or would want to know” (113). He strengthens the contrastive sense of this paragraph through the indignant rhetorical question ending his description of S: “and yet I get the lecture?” thus linking the doctor’s “bitch[ing]” to S’s receiving Vicodin while negatively evaluating both (111-114). S’s receipt of a prescription for Vicodin, despite his identity as an “insane drunk,” acts as evidence to demonstrate the failure of medical knowledge. In these passages (106-114) Nemo disaligns from the doctor and S using evaluative constructions that position him as a competent drinker whose experiential knowledge outweighs supposedly objective medical judgment.

In the immediately following lines (115-120) Nemo continues comparing himself to S:

115 If my BAC was .352, he must have been like .6; he drank SO much more than I did, and  
116 him, his mom, his girl, and anyone else that was with me that night continued to say how  
117 little I had actually drank (especially in comparison to S). My family (sister aside) had  
118 never met S, I wish I could have introduced them, but instead they met under these  
119 circumstances; my mom went and thanked them and said that S was hugging her  
and shit,  
120 he was wasted but held it much better than me in more ways than one. (Nemo 2006)

This paragraph begins with a (presumably) non-literal extreme case formulation (ECF) since a BAC of .6 is far above “the range of .45” which is the BAC “lethal in 50% of the population” (Edwards 2000; Meyer and Quenzer 2005:226). The *must* in line 115 functions epistemically

and evidentially to indicate a “confident or assured inference” based off Nemo’s observation that S “drank SO much more than I did” as confirmed by his friends and “anyone else that was with me that night” (Collins 2005:254; Nemo 2006:115-116). However, the grammatically proper use of *like* (“like .6”), as opposed to the “intrusive *like*” which focuses attention, hedges Nemo’s estimate (Nemo 2006:115; Underhill 1988:234). In other words, Nemo is confidently asserting that S’s BAC was higher than his own, based on knowledge about the relationship between BAC and the amount of alcohol consumed, but probably not claiming that it was literally .6, a lethal level. Alternately, Nemo could be ignorant of the implications of a .6 BAC. Either way, he presents S’s drinking as significantly greater than his own and the extremeness of Nemo’s portrayal indicates his commitment to the basic proposition that he, Nemo, drank relatively little “especially in comparison to S” (117). Nemo goes on to comment, seemingly inconsistent with his protestation that S “drank SO much more,” that S “was wasted but held it much better than me in more ways than one” (115, 119-120). This shift in presentation demonstrates the use of social identity as a “flexible resource” in narrative (Antaki, Condor, and Levine 1996:473). Rather than a single or fixed identity interlocutors and narrators can project (sequentially or simultaneously) multiple, and sometimes contradictory, identities across discourse in order to achieve immediately relevant goals (Antaki, Condor, and Levine 1996).

The coda of “Crappy New Year” (125-151) consists of what I call a “lessons learned” section in which Nemo symbolically atones for his behavior and credits S with preventing a kerfuffle from becoming a catastrophe. Therefore Nemo’s presentation of S in lines 119-120 may be a sign of inconsistency or it may mark the beginning of a shift in the identities that he chooses to stress in order to fulfill narrative tasks.

## 7.2 Lessons Learned: Rescuing a Competent Identity

Nemo attempts to neutralize the implications of “Crappy New Year” for his identity in two key ways. First, as I show in Chapter 6, he blames others for his extreme intoxication and the resulting bad behavior. Second, he symbolically atones for his actions by acknowledging them and, through a “step into the future,” implying that he has learned enough to prevent future indiscretions (Ochs 1994). In the coda, which in this case I call the lessons learned section, Nemo pulls attention away from potential issues of dependence by giving a lengthy enumeration of “[o]ther shitty things [that] happened” including irritation with the “surly” hospital staff, an “arm so full of trackmarks I look like a smack junkie,” losing \$30, and having “almost smoked all my weed” (129-134). He indicates the importance of social relations by ending this list with five lines (134-138) that focus on feeling humiliated and interpersonal consequences: “I acted like an idiot in front of some people I really love and respect; S, his girl, his mom, P and lots of others” (134-135). Nemo’s disproportionate concentration on interpersonal and subjective consequences directs attention away from considerations of alcoholism or disease and recapitulates the relationship between alcohol and sociability. Nemo’s lessons learned commentary portrays him as a penitent and rational individual who, having learned his lesson, will not make the same mistake twice (Schlenker and Weigold 1992). In other words, Nemo shows himself as a competent and skilled drinker who learns from his mistakes.

The final lines of “Crappy New Year” are key since they end the story and are, literally, Nemo’s last words on the subject. Nemo recants his previous decision to cease drinking (125-126) since he identifies, with an extreme case formulation (ECF) based on the superlative *biggest*, the main lesson of “Crappy New Year” as a need to better plan his drinking excursions: “the biggest thing I learned out of all of this is that I just should never even start the/drinking, at

least the heavy drinking, until I get to a place you want to stay” (148-149). Nemo engages in a non sequitur since he has not previously mentioned changing locations as a problem but in these lines suggests that he could have avoided unpleasantness by getting “shitfaced” at his final destination (151). This paragraph lacks hedges, which is unusual for Nemo, and he clusters several ECFs for intensification: “biggest,” “all of this,” “just,” “never even,” “at all costs,” and “completely shitfaced” (148-151). In this paragraph Nemo preemptively defines the meaning and relevance of “Crappy New Year” and indicates commitment and certainty with exceptionally intense language. The terminal location and his multiple extreme case formulations construct a powerful negation of both his earlier pledge to cease drinking and his heavily hedged flirtation with a problem-drinker identity (125-126, 148-151). Thus Nemo gives a final excuse for going “over the line” and forcefully rejects notions of abstinence and alcoholism (129).

### **7.3 Conclusion**

Nemo describes himself engaging in stigmatized behaviors that index incompetent and unskilled drinking: overshooting his desired level of intoxication, vomiting, aggression, violating sociability, requiring care from others, and going to the hospital (Abrahamson 2004; Bogren 2006; Lindsay 2009; Macfarlane and Tuffin 2010; Törrönen and Maunu 2007; Workman 2001). He neutralizes these transgressions by dodging responsibility for his exceptional inebriation and deploying a theory of automatism that absolves him of responsibility for acts committed while blacked out (Abrahamson 2004; Arboleda-Flórez 2002; Critchlow 1983). Additionally he expresses contrition and claims to have learned a lesson thus attempting to symbolically reintegrate himself into social life by demonstrating commitment to community values (Abrahamson 2004; Scott and Lyman 1968; Schlenker and Weigold 1992).

Nemo builds a competent identity by claiming experience, displaying knowledge, and accessing the values of adventure drinking, edgework, and hegemonic masculinity (Bogren 2006; Cho et al. 2010; Peralta 2007; Workman 2001). He analogically confronts dominant American discourses about drinking the form of an emergency room doctor who “bitched” him out for “how drunk I was” (106). He redefines the meaning of his extreme intoxication and rejects a dependent or diseased identity. In his last word on the subject (the final paragraph), he preemptively defines the lesson of “Crappy New Year” as a need to better plan his heavy drinking (148-151). This intensely evaluated paragraph forcefully rejects notions of dependence and restates his commitment to the values of adventure drinking (Bogren 2006; Workman 2001).

## **Chapter 8: Conclusion (The Big So What)**

My aim in this thesis has been to elucidate how storytellers construct their tales to achieve three narrative goals: tellability and credibility, accounting for bad behavior, and displaying a competent drinker identity (Labov 1997; Labov and Waletzky 1967). I began by providing information about the authors and stories comprising my data: “Crappy New Year” by Nemo (2006) and “The Reasons I Couldn’t Wait” by Plead (2006) (Chapter 2.1-2.2). The source of my data is the online Experience Vaults of the Erowid Center; I gave a brief discussion of the Erowid Center and its review policies to provide context (Chapter 2.3). I argued, based on textual consistency and coherence, that both narratives were only lightly touched by editing and that they retained their validity as data for analysis. I then provided a synopsis of “Crappy New Year” (Nemo 2006) in terms of Labov’s (1997) and Labov and Waletzky’s (1967) functional-structural theory of narrative wherein I demonstrated that “Crappy New Year” fits their six-part model of abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and coda (Chapter 2.4). Chapter Three detailed my theoretical and methodological foundation. I characterized language as cultural action and aligned myself with the overarching goal of discourse analysis: to study the use of language in creating, modifying, and performing interpersonal relationships and culture. Furthermore I positioned narrative as a unique form of discourse with deep connections to social and self-identity.

After describing Labov’s (1997) and Labov and Waletzky’s (1967) theory of narrative (Chapter 3.2.1) I discussed, with examples (Chapter 3.2.2), a conceptualization of evaluation (Chapter 3.2.2) based on the work of Geoff Thompson and Susan Thompson (1999). In their formulation evaluation is subjective, comparative, and value laden; the term evaluation is “the

broad cover term for the expression of the speaker or writer's attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about" (Thompson and Hunston 1999:5). Next I discussed Du Bois's (2007) theory of stance as an integrative model that describes how interlocutors assign cultural value, position themselves in relation to evaluated entities and their utterances, and manage alignment with other subjects and their stances.

In Chapter Four I gave an overview of previous scholarship about alcohol and drinking stories. I suggested that anthropology has made important contributions to the study of alcohol and other drugs including methodological advances, illuminating the primeval association of humans with intoxicating substances, and demonstrating the importance of culture in shaping and giving meaning to the experience of inebriation. However, following the arguments of other scholars (e.g., Hunt and Barker 2001), I noted that research on alcohol and other drugs, and drinking stories in particular, has usually been incidental and conducted within the fields of medicine, public health, sociology, and communication studies.

The remainder of this conclusion does two things. First, I review my findings in light of examples from Plead's story "The Reasons I Couldn't Wait" (2006). By doing so I wish to highlight several key points: the importance of contextual knowledge for interpreting discourse, the concurrent diversity and similarity of techniques whereby both authors achieve narrative goals, and the constraints and obligations imposed by cultural judgments of acceptable behavior and the "within limits" clause of the alcohol excuse. Furthermore, I argue that the linguistic strategies I discuss are interrelated and perform multiple functions simultaneously despite my topical organization. Second, I conclude by discussing the unique contribution of my research and suggesting areas for further investigation.

## **8.1 Review of Findings with Reference to “The Reasons I Couldn’t Wait”**

### **8.1.1 Tellability and Credibility**

In Chapter 5 I established that Nemo builds reportability through several techniques including intensification, repetition, and evaluative counterfactuals. “Crappy New Year” exemplifies Labov’s “reportability paradox” since Nemo’s mechanisms of tellability, such as indexing intoxication through claims of memory loss, directly decrease credibility (Labov 1997:405). Nemo’s avowal of amnesia for much of his “Crappy New Year” precludes the use of his memory for evidence. Therefore he relies on reconstructed dialogue, hedged personal recollections, inference, and unmarked assertions to build credibility.

Plead (2006) also depicts his experience as intense, albeit less so than Nemo in “Crappy New Year” (2006). Plead does engage reconstructed dialogue but, since he does not claim significant memory loss, he is able to make unchallenged use of personal recollection. Plead depends more on personal recollection and presents many statements as fact without using explicit evidential marking. Plead relies less on threats to his survival and more on humorous presentation and the cachet of subaltern behavior to develop tellability. Hugh Gusterson (1998), in his ethnography of nuclear weapons scientists, observes that classified information, although often banal, is attractive because it is secret. Correspondingly, forbidden and transgressive acts are reportable and interesting by virtue of being socially proscribed.

Plead’s evaluative techniques build a sense of daring mischief built on minor illegalities and “light transgression” (Törrönen and Maunu 2007). He describes going to “our favorite local not-by-the-book liquor store” and leaving with “a large bottle of Bacardi in our bag and anticipation in our hearts” (3-5). In addition he takes steps, such as using Gatorade bottles for their “inconspicuous nature,” to avoid parental and legal opprobrium (8-11, 27-30, 69-71). Plead’s

picaresque adventure with his friends is driven by the need to “find something to do” since “[s]itting around while drunk is nowhere near as fun as walking around while drunk” (24-25). He characterizes their drinking locations as being of questionable legitimacy; they begin drinking at “this park that is quite infamous for drinking, smoking and that sort of thing” (12) before moving into the “ghetto” (66) and eventually try to reach “[t]his little baseball field...big enough for us to lie around in without being suspicious (70-71).

Plead bolsters his humorous presentation by pronouncing third parties entertained by his group’s antics: passersby “laugh and continue walking” (56) when he and his friend trip into a “pile of dog crap” (55) and he declares the police “quite jovial” and “getting a kick out of the drunken teenager” lying in the street (85). Although worried about his friend M being overly intoxicated, he relaxes after “we were sure M was going to get taken care of, and finds M’s behavior toward the cops “quite hilarious” (85-87). Only when “M’s mom drops from the sky and appears” to castigate him does he “get quite scared” and begin “bawling” (88-93).

Like Nemo, Plead suspends temporal advancement to explicitly identify the moment when control over events erodes and chaos impinges (64-65): “Looking back, this probably the point where we become royally screwed” (Schiffirin 2003). The immediately following paragraphs, as in “Crappy New Year” after Nemo comments “this is what threw me over the edge” (57), give the most reportable event (Plead’s friend lying down in the street) and include intensified depictions of intoxication. Plead’s friend M “starts puking” and the nature and amount of vomitus is highlighted through structural and lexical repetition: “on my pants, on his pants, in the church’s plants” (74-75). Plead “piss[es] behind someone’s car” which he directly marks as an index of intoxication using the stance/evidential marker *I guess* and the inferential discourse

marker *so*: “I have to be pretty fucked up to piss in public, so I guess I was” (Déhe and Wichmann 2010; Fraser 1999; Hussein 2005; Kärkkäinen 2006, 2007; Plead 2006:76-77).

Although Plead differs in the specifics, he relies on techniques similar to Nemo to build tellability and credibility including portraying his experience as intense, introducing counterfactual situations, and deploying constructed speech, inferential logic, and memory. Plead’s ability to reference his memory unchallenged, in comparison to Nemo, demonstrates the interconnectedness of textual strategies. Nemo’s decision to highlight his amnesia to build tellability, and to account for his behavior, constrains his options for constructing credibility. In contrast, Plead, who does not claim amnesia, is able to provide recollections and consequently can rely less on reconstructed dialogue for maintaining believability.

### **8.1.2 Praise, Blame, and Accounting**

As I noted in Chapter 6, Nemo’s behavior far exceeds the within limits clause of the excuse value of alcohol for intoxicated behavior (MacAndrew and Edgerton 1969; Room 2001). The egregiously transgressive nature of his actions makes direct appeals to the intoxication excuse problematic and open to challenge. Therefore Nemo implicitly invokes alcohol’s excuse value by developing a logic of automatism thus partly precluding challenges to his account. His use of ECFs and *just* attempt acts of argumentative closure to prevent challenge and force acceptance of his presentation (Edwards 2000; Pomerantz 1986; Weltman 2003) Nemo makes distinctions between states of consciousness and presents blackouts as conditions of diminished, or absent, capacity. He then absolves himself by claiming to be blacked out during most of his bad behavior. In addition he demonstrates commitment to surrounding values by exhibiting contrition and minimizes the severity of his offenses (Schlenker and Weigold 1992; Scott and Lyman 1968; Weinstein 1980). Finally, he displays incredulity at his level of drunkenness and

blames events outside his control, namely others, for his drunkenness “go[ing] over the line” (129) (Abrahamson 2004).

Plead is, compared to Nemo, fairly well behaved and therefore more able to directly and without challenge access the excuse value of alcohol to account for public transgressions such as public urination: “I have to be pretty fucked up to piss in public, so I guess I was” (76-77). The initial clause provides a premise in the form of causal logic (“I have to be...to”) and the discourse marker *so* connects the clauses and signals the upcoming conclusion (Fraser 1999; Hussein 2005; Schiffrin 1987). Furthermore, the construction *I guess* functions evidentially to mark inferential reasoning, and, in combination with the DM *so*, indicates that an account is being provided (Déhe and Wichmann 2010; Kärkkäinen 2006, 2007).

In lines 96-100 Plead challenges his friends’, and their parents’, assignment of blame by disaligning from his friends and their stances and then offering a counter-stance. In doing so he positions himself as the aggrieved party.

096 So M’s mom is angry at  
097 me, thinking I forced him to drink and B said I gave them the liquor. People do  
098 maddening things when they want to cover their ass, so I don’t hold any grudges, but it’s  
099 still annoying to know that he totally sold me out when we all made the consensual  
100 decision to drink. (Plead 2006:96-100)

He contests their accounts by evaluating (in the sense of invoking cultural value) them as attempts to “cover their ass,” designates his friends behavior as “maddening,” and accuses them of “totally s[elling] me out” (Du Bois 2007; Plead 2006:99). In lines 97-99 Plead claims to be understanding (“so I don’t hold any grudges”) and then uses the contrastive discourse marker *but* to indicate abandonment of his forgiving position and introduce a negative evaluation of M’s actions (Fraser 1999; Norrick 2001:857-859; Schiffrin 1987). Through an extreme case

formulation (ECF) Plead exposes the depths of M's betrayal: "he totally sold me out" (Plead 2006:99; Pomerantz 1986).

Plead positions M's drinking as the product of a "consensual decision" and stresses the degree of mutual agreement through the inclusive pronoun *we* and an ECF using the maximizer *all*: "we all made the consensual decision to drink" (Athanasiadou 2007; Plead 2006:99; Pomerantz 1986). The lexical token *consensual* invokes notions of rational and informed consent as in the discourses of medicine, sexual health, and law (e.g., contracts and rape). In the terminal paragraph of "The Reasons I Couldn't Wait" Plead further deflects blame for M's drunkenness by proffering a physiological explanation that assigns responsibility to M: "M had never had such an intense reaction to alcohol and has drunk way more than the 8/or so ounces he drank that day, but he also hadn't slept or eaten for two days" (103-104). The ECF in line 103 ("never") heightens tellability by marking a deviation from expectations and reinforces Plead's innocence. Since the outcome of M going to the hospital was, in light of prior experience, unpredictable then Plead can't be blamed even if he provided the alcohol. Furthermore the proximate causes of M's drunkenness, sleeplessness and an empty stomach, were presumably M's choice making him responsible for the consequences of his physical state.

As with tellability and credibility, Plead's techniques for placing blame and praise are analogous to Nemo's but diverge in construction and deployment in response to variant contextual demands and personal style. M, not Plead, becomes egregiously intoxicated but Plead, like Nemo, engages causal reasoning, extreme case formulations, intensification, and valenced lexical items to present extreme intoxication as unexpected and to blame others. This pattern of resemblance-with-differences is repeated in Plead's construction of an identity as a competent drinker.

### 8.1.3 Competence

In Chapter Seven I proposed that Nemo's poor showing in "Crappy New Year" presents a paradox since he seems to portray himself as an incompetent drinker. He engages in a range of behaviors stigmatized by drinkers and indexing incompetence including vomiting, becoming incontinent, emotional effusiveness, aggression, and overshooting his desired level of drunkenness (Bogren 2006; Cho et al. 2010; Demant and Järvinen 2006, 2011; Lindsay 2009; Macfarlane and Tuffin 2010; Measham 2002; Pyörälä 1995; Rúdólfssdóttir and Morgan 2009; Workman 2001). Nemo presents a competent drinking identity by blaming others for his extreme intoxication, referring to previous drinking experiences, displaying knowledge, "Othering" S, and aligning himself with value systems associated with edgework and hegemonic masculinity (Bogren 2006; Demant 2007; Demant and Järvinen 2006; Peralta 2007; West 2001; Workman 2001). At the conclusion of "Crappy New Year" Nemo proffers a lessons learned commentary (114-137) that positions him as a contrite individual who has learned from his mistakes (Schlenker and Weigold 1992; Weinstein 1980). Furthermore, he defines the moral of the story as a need for better planning of his heavy drinking (135-137) thereby rejecting his previous flirtation (115-116) with notions of problem drinking.

Plead (2006) also presents himself as a veteran fan of intoxication and aligns with discourses and conceptions of drunkenness as adventure and physical exploration (Bogren 2006; Peralta 2007; Workman 2001). The opening line of "The Reasons I Couldn't Wait" expresses a conscious intent to "get drunk" and references "many other" drunken experiences: "[t]he day started out like many other summer days – a couple of friends and I decided to/get drunk" (1-2). Plead is, at least in this story, engaged in outcome-oriented drinking with drunkenness his goal (Antin, Paschall, and Nygaard 2010). He disdainfully evaluates being "only slightly buzzed" as

a “waste” of the money spent on booze (32-33). Plead’s definition of “only slightly buzzed” is, like Nemo’s definition of “the starting point of intoxication,” a significant underestimate of his level of inebriation (Nemo 2006:50; Plead 2006:29-32).

As I demonstrated in my explication of stance (Chapter 3.3), Plead defines a hierarchy of status based on experience and engages in a process of “Othering” toward his friends (Bogren 2006; Cho et al. 2010). By comparison to them Plead has “a bit more experience” permitting him to be “quite indifferent” to the taste of Gatorade “mixed with such a high proof alcohol” (6-9, 23). Interestingly, Plead also positions himself in relation to sober people, particularly those who are sober while everyone else is getting drunk. He negatively evaluates, and disaligns from, J, “the sober friend,” whom he describes as “perpetually annoyed” in addition to being “just plain embarrassed” and “maybe a little pissed, being sober” by Plead and his friends’ drunken comportment (20-21, 27, 34-35). His depiction of J produces a contrastive resonance to the passersby and police who evince amusement at Plead’s, and his friends, shenanigans (56; 84-85). In Plead’s interpretation J is missing out on the opportunity to enjoy, and be a part of, their drunken antics. He implies that J’s “consensual decision” not to drink reflects an underlying inability to have fun as revealed by her being “perpetually annoyed” (21).

Like Nemo, Plead indexes competence by referencing prior drinking experiences and through the display of knowledge; unlike Nemo, Plead highlights the need and mechanisms for concealing his drinking. Plead mentions prior drinking occasions and performs a knowledgeable identity through his planning practices and commentary about Gatorade bottles. The “inconspicuous nature” of “drinking from a Gatorade bottle” has “worked every time” to conceal his public drinking (8-10). Along with water they “also each brought...some mouthwash/for afterwards. Parents, parents, parents” (7-8, 10-11). Plead also evinces awareness of basic

alcohol pharmacology in a remark correlating degrees of intoxication with body weight: “M is a lot drunker than B” since “[h]e’s also a skinny bastard, while B is not” (28-29). As I noted above, in the final paragraph Plead blames an empty stomach and lack of sleep for the unexpected intensity of M’s inebriation (103-105). In the same paragraph Plead assumes the authority to interpret the meaning of M’s BAC of “.216 or so” as “indeed very high, but not especially lethal” (CAAPC 2006; Meyer and Quenzer 2005; Plead 2006:101-102). His hedge “not especially,” along with a previous admission that he made “a few choices that could have turned out not so good,” shows some consideration of the risks involved in adventures heavy drinking (60-61, 102).

M’s mother, in a role analogous to Nemo’s emergency room doctor, acts as an embodiment of dominant discourses about drinking (see Chapters 5.2.1 and 7.1.2). Plead relaxes after he and B “were sure M was going to get taken care of” but he encounters M’s mom who challenges Plead’s conception of adventure drinking. Lines 87 through 93 are quoted below for ease of reference:

087 Since we were sure M was going to get taken care of, B  
088 and I started to leave. Then, somehow, M’s mom drops from the sky and appears,  
089 running towards M, who is now in an ambulance. She stops me, asks me what is  
090 happening, and all that fun stuff. Being quite drunk, but not nearly as drunk as M, I get  
091 quite scared and think that M has alcohol poisoning and is going to die or get permanent  
092 brain damage, or something equally as terrible. I start bawling, and asking her if he’s  
093 okay. She says no, so I cry even harder. (Plead 2006:87-93)

M’s mom, presumably patently worried, disrupts Plead’s understanding of M’s intoxication. First, her anxious questioning forces him to reevaluate the situation from her perspective and forcibly reintroduces notions of risk and injury to Plead’s thinking: “I get/quite scared and think that M has alcohol poisoning and is going to die...or something equally as terrible.” Second, she fails to reassure Plead when he “ask[s] her if [M is] okay” which further unsettles the

personalized master narrative he has developed over “many other summer days” in which drunkenness lacks long-term consequences: “[s]he says no, so I cry even harder” (1, 92-93). Plead neutralizes the potential impact of “bawling” as an index of incompetence by implicitly blaming it on M’s mom questioning him and intoxication: “[b]eing quite drunk, but not nearly as drunk as M I get quite scared” (90-91). Simultaneously he positions himself in relation to M, using the contrastive connector *but*, in such a way as to minimize his own drinking: “but not nearly as drunk as M” (90) (Fraser 1999; Schiffrin 1987). Line 90 displays the same implicit argumentative structure that Plead uses to invoke the excuse value of alcohol in lines 60 through 61: “not being in the best state, I make a few choices that could have turned out not so good.” This resonance illustrates one way that Plead, more openly than Nemo but still implicitly from a linguistic perspective, accesses the socially exculpatory functions of intoxication.

The final paragraphs of “The Reasons I Couldn’t Wait” parallel those of “Crappy New Year” in that Plead, like Nemo, offers a moral that reinscribes his personal understanding of drunkenness as an adventure and positions him as a skilled, competent, and knowledgeable drinker. I have already shown how Plead responds to the assignment of blame by M, M’s mom, and B in lines 96 through 100 (see Chapter 8.1.2). Furthermore, he minimizes the danger to M by classifying his BAC of “.216 or so” as “very high, but not especially lethal” thereby stressing the intensity of the experience but denying the potential for serious harm (101-102). In his final sentence Plead assigns responsibility for M’s excessive intoxication to M thereby denying that his own drinking patterns are fundamentally problematic: “[f]or that [not eating or sleeping for two days], he/spent a night in the hospital and has a pretty funny story to tell” (104-105).

The final line (105) illustrates a pattern observed by Sheehan and Ridge in their study of binge drinking by young women in Australia: “[a]ny harm encountered along the way tends to be

filtered through the ‘good story’” (2001:347). In other words, unpleasant occurrences are minimized, redefined, and reframed by narratively integrating them with “tales of fun, adventure, bonding, sex, gender transgressions, and relationships” (Sheehan and Ridge 2001:347). Thus negative consequences become part of the adventure, stories become trophies of experience, and narrative presentations take on “the tone of battle stories told by war veterans” (Bogren 2006; Sheehan and Ridge 2001; Peralta 2007:746; Workman 2001). Having discursively deflected blame and dealt with potential risks (“not especially lethal”), Plead is free to reconceptualize events in opposition to M’s mom and cultural discourses about alcohol. In doing so he firmly aligns himself with the ethos of the “getting drunk is fun” argument and the ethos of adventure drinking (Bogren 2006; Workman 2001).

## **8.2 Context, Connections, and Contrasts**

### **8.2.1 Same Thing, Different Way**

In this conclusion I have shown that “Crappy New Year” (Nemo 2006) and “The Reasons I Couldn’t Wait” (2006) display significant similarities and parallelisms. This is largely the result of four factors. First, I examine Nemo’s (2006) and Plead’s (2006) stories in terms of fundamental narrative goals identified by Labov (1997) and Labov and Waletzky (1967). There are a finite number of linguistically and culturally appropriate ways to take stances that meet those goals, especially considering the limits placed on the excuse value of alcohol. For instance, intense stories about brushes with death tend to be more tellable than tales of minor traffic irritations. In addition these narrative goals are linked; tellability and credibility are inversely correlated so linguistic decisions about tellability will influence the development of credibility (Labov 1997; Labov and Waletzky 1967). Similarly, an author may have difficulty presenting a skilled and competent identity if he or she has, like Nemo, built tellability through

an intense depiction of intoxication. The boundedness of the excuse value of alcohol means that narrators must either indirectly “blam[e] the booze” (Critchlow 1983:1052) or look to other social and linguistic techniques to avoid moral opprobrium (MacAndrew and Edgerton 1969; Room 2001)

Second, situational and cultural contexts of production pattern and constrain language use; Nemo and Plead, as I show in Chapter 2.2., are of similar age, male, and almost certainly both from urban areas in the United States. Demographic similarity encourages, but does not require, linguistic similarity (Krauss and Chiu 1998). Guidelines posted by the Erowid Center and the written medium may also have had a homogenizing effect (Chafe and Tannen 1987; Erowid 2012b).

Third, drinking stories are a popular and common genre so Nemo and Plead were almost certainly influenced by prior exposure to the form in mass media or interpersonal relationships (Abrahamson 2004; Griffin et al. 2009; Peralta 2007; Tutengesa and Rod 2009; Workman 2001). In addition Nemo and Plead both write about behaviors stigmatized by dominant social discourses and defined as deviant, risky, and potentially diseased (Coleman and Cater 2005; Hunt and Barker 2001; Keane 2009; Marshall, Ames, and Bennett 2001). Thus there is social pressure to account for their behavior so as to avoid negative moral, medical, and social judgment (Scott and Lyman 1986).

Fourth, the culturally molded experience of drunkenness influences the form and content of drinking stories. Alcohol intoxication includes cognitive alterations but it is also intensely physical: motor incoordination, vomiting, unconsciousness, and memory loss are cross-culturally reliable effects (Meyer and Quenzer 2005). Anthropologists have never argued that alcohol intoxication is solely the product of cultural or individual expectations. Rather, anthropology has

shown that culture shapes drinking patterns and drunken behavior while giving social meaning to the state of inebriation (see Chapter 4). That social meaning is then accessed, reproduced, and challenged by drinkers in their performance of drunkenness and the experiences they highlight in narrative (Bogren 2006; Lindsay 2006, 2009; Heath 1987; MacAndrew and Edgergton 1969; Mandelbaum 1965; Peralta 2007; Workman 2001).

### 8.2.2 Differences and the Importance of Context

Although generally similar in many ways, “Crappy New Year” and “The Reasons I Couldn’t Wait” differ in detail. Table 8.1 compares Nemo’s and Plead’s usage of several discourse and stance markers. Significant variation exists in every category; the smallest deviance in the numbers of occurrence is with commas (approximately 10%). For instance, Nemo uses the inferential stance marker *I guess* and the inferential discourse marker *so* more than twice as much as Plead. This does not, by itself at least, indicate that Plead makes fewer stances,

**Table 8.1** Comparison of the Usage of Selected Discourse, Stance, and Textual Marker by Nemo and Plead (2006)

Textual Marker	Function/Indicates	Nemo # of occurrences (weighted) <sup>a</sup>	Plead # of occurrences	Difference <sup>b</sup>
and	connection; elaboration	119 (108)	60	.55
but	contrast; connection	19 (17)	10	.57
comma (,)	discourse relationships	115 (105)	122	1.16
I guess	evidential; inferential reasoning; stance marker	5 (5)	2	.4
must	inferential reasoning	5 (5)	0	n/a
since	elaboration; inferential and causal reasoning	0 (0)	8	n/a
so <sup>c</sup>	inferential reasoning	6 (5)	16	3.2

<sup>a</sup> “Crappy New Year” is 151 lines and “The Reasons I Couldn’t Wait” is 105 lines. To aid comparison I correct for the length difference by multiplying the number of Nemo’s uses by .913: (105/151=.913). I round the result to the nearest whole number.

<sup>b</sup> Difference expressed as the number of Plead’s uses divided by the (weighted) number of Nemo’s uses.

<sup>c</sup> This count only includes uses of *so* indicating reasoning or warrant rather than as an intensifier, to approximate, as a hedge, or to introduce new topics.

implicit arguments, or inferential judgments. For example, Table 8.1, combined with careful (re)readings of “The Reasons I Couldn’t Wait,” reveals that Plead employs the discourse markers *so* and *since* to conduct some of the causal reasoning and stance deployment Plead does with *must* and *I guess*. Table 8.2 lists Plead’s use of the discourse marker *since* which, like Nemo’s use of *so* (see Table 6.1), functions to construct causal or inferential reasoning and to indicate the application of a warrant (Bolden 2009; Brown and Rubin 2005; Fraser 1999; Hussein 2005; Nemo 2006; Plead 2006; Schiffrin 1987). However, *so* and *since* are not the same; most of Plead’s uses of *since* are equivalent to, and could be replaced with, the token *because* which is not the case with *so* in “Crappy New Year” (Nemo 2006; Plead 2006).

**Table 8.2** The Discourse Marker *since* as a Causal Marker, Indicator of Warrant, and Sign of Inferential Reasoning in “The Reasons I Couldn’t Wait” (Plead 2006)

Location	Quotation
6-7	<b>Since</b> we're fairly new at this drinking thing (read: pussy little bastards), or at least B and/M are, we needed chasers.
18-19	<b>Since</b> we needed some motivation, we played Shot-Blackjack, in which the losers have to/drink a shot of their Gatorade-Bacardi mixture.
18-19	As we got happier, Blackjack became boring and we/became obnoxious, I suppose, <b>since</b> our sober friend was getting annoyed.
29-30	I was slightly buzzed at/that point, <b>since</b> I had to slow down drinking to not look so bad in front of my dad.
32-33	I was just trying to catch up, <b>since</b> being only slightly buzzed but having/to hang around drunk bastards is a waste of \$7 bucks.
36-39	J wanted/to go downtown to get Japanese food, so that’s what we agreed to do. (Although, it/probably wasn’t/the best idea, <b>since</b> I need a pretty strong stomach in general to eat/Japanese food
86-88	He also starts/flipping off the cops, which I found quite hilarious. <b>Since</b> we were sure M was going to get taken/care of, B and I started to leave.
86	The walk home was terrible, <b>since</b> I was bawling and people were asking if I was okay.

Understanding the differences between Nemo’s and Plead’s use of discourse and stance markers points to the importance of considering context at all levels in the analysis and interpretation of discourse. “Crappy New Year” and “The Reasons I Couldn’t Wait” are fully

intelligible only when considered in relation to their cultural background and their context of production. At a lower level of analysis, local discourse becomes relevant. The lexeme *just* can express an impressive range of meanings (see Chapter 3.2.3). Actual instantiations of *just* in “Crappy New Year,” such as when Nemo runs into a door, become comprehensible only by examining the surrounding discourse and considering the immediately relevant narrative goals (see Chapter 6.2).

### **8.3 My Contribution**

My research, in the form of this thesis, is valuable for two reasons. First, this is an original contribution to the discipline of anthropology. Despite extensive search I have been unable to locate scholarly research in anthropology, or any other discipline, that examines the linguistic construction of drinking stories; my application of Du Bois’s (2007) stance model expands a relatively new and limited body of literature (Englebretson 2007; Du Bois and Kärkkäinen 2012; Haddington 2006; Harding 2007; Kärkkäinen 2006, 2007; Keisanen 2006) As shown in my literature review (see Chapters 4.1 through 4.2), the majority of research on alcohol and drinking is conducted in academic fields other than anthropology: medicine, public health, communication studies, and sociology (Hunt and Barker 2001; Marshall, Ames, and Bennett 2001). Furthermore, scholars have done research with, but not on, drinking stories. This thesis is an exploration of how to study drinking stories themselves.

Second, I explore the interconnection of two phenomena that touch on the core of what it means to be human. This thesis is at the nexus of two cultural universals: the alteration of consciousness and the production of narrative. Humans appear to have an innate desire to alter their state of consciousness and have devoted prodigious time and effort to doing so through a dizzying array of means including ritual, religion, music, physical practices (e.g., exercise and

meditation), and drugs (Blum et al. 2011; Pollan 2001). Alcohol has a special place among the intoxicants by virtue of its historical importance, widespread use, and ease of production; as the Social Institute Research Center (SIRC) notes, “[a]ll societies, without exception, make use of intoxicating substances, alcohol being by far the most common” (Dietler 2006; SIRC 1998:8). At the moment of Western contact the vast majority of societies produced alcohol indigenously; after European contact those societies that did not make alcohol either adopted European style drinks or began producing their own (Dietler 2006; SIRC 1998).

Narrative is a technique for making sense of the world by linking occurrences into a meaningful sequence. Storytelling is an expression of the “essence of humanness” in that it is a linguistic means of sense-making (Johnstone 2004:635; Ochs and Capps 1996). Language is a biological fact of *Homo sapiens* and narrative forms emerge early in childhood (Ochs and Capps 1996). To study narrative is to study a fundamental manifestation of humanity. This thesis conducts an original examination of the conjunction of two activities intrinsic to the human experience and therefore, as anthropology should, deals with basic issues of what it is to be human.

#### **8.4 Further Research**

Narratives are important sources of data for examining mental constructs, lines of reasoning, and cultural understandings; research with drinking stories should continue. However, there is an obvious need for anthropological engagement. Anthropology’s historical focus on non-problematic drinking, ethnographic techniques, and desire for emic understanding would be of great value to research with drinking stories. In addition, study populations should be expanded beyond groups considered “at risk” because of age (youth), group membership (fraternities), or drinking patterns (binge).

The Experience Vaults of the Erowid Center are a discourse corpus begging for study. Their multi-substance collection offers the opportunity to investigate the effect of substance on the resulting genre, if a genre exists. For instance, do narratives involving hallucinogens exhibit the physical focus of alcohol narratives? Do hallucinogen narratives involve the same goals as drinking stories? How does the choice of substance affect linguistic patterns of evidential and epistemic positioning?

Corpus studies have great value but they often lack context and strip away paraverbal, non-verbal, and kinesthetic communication. Prosody and gaze are resources for the indication of meaning and the construction of stance; few corpora can reproduce the range of phenomena occurring in face-to-face communication (Déhe and Wichmann 2010; Haddington 2006; Kärkkäinen 2003, 2007). Research with drinking stories generally elicits narratives through directed questioning (Abrahamson 2004; Sheehan and Ridge 2001; Workman 2001). It is important to know the situations and events that naturally elicit drinking narratives especially since the form, topic, and content of stories may differ by location. Drinking stories told in bars likely differ from the narratives found in frat houses.

Finally, further detailed linguistic analysis is necessary. Questions worth investigating include: the influence of memory loss on evidential and epistemic positioning, differences in discourse and stance markers by substance discussed, the effects of expectations and beliefs on narratives, and the ways in which the excuse value of intoxication is invoked. Alcohol's destabilizing effect on personality, combined with (real or performed) memory loss makes drinking stories an excellent location for studying identity formation, the production of accounts, and folk theories of the self.

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## Appendix A: Story Texts

### A.1 “Crappy New Year”

Crappy New Year Alcohol – Hard  
by Nemo

DOSE :	repeated	smoked	<a href="#">Cannabis</a>	(plant material)
	repeated	oral	<a href="#">Alcohol - Hard</a>	(liquid)
BODY WEIGHT :	165 lb			

1 Last night, new years eve 2004, was the second time in only a period of a few months  
2 that I almost died several different ways in a drunken stupor. This only happens when I  
3 hang out with my friend 'S', quite possibly the worst drinking buddy ever; but what he did  
4 for me last night is just amazing.  
5 My plan the whole day was to just go hang out with S and his girlfriend, get a little  
6 drunk, and go home at about ten to my family because my mom had planned a dinner  
7 thing and I wanted to be with them at midnight of course. As it turned out I got home at  
8 around 4 in the morning after being discharged from the hospital, and was probably in a  
9 coma at midnight. Many a thing happened last night, a great deal of which I don't  
10 remember at all and has been told to me for the purpose of this report, please take to heart  
11 this terrible night and be careful when drinking; I'm damn lucky I made it through all of  
12 this as well as I did. I am pretty much convinced I have a drinking angel or something  
13 that watches out for me when I get myself drunk, and I am NOT in any way a religious  
14 person. Now on to the story...  
15 I think I met up with S and his girl at about 4-5 pm; his mom bought him a half gallon of  
16 vodka, and we were making the rounds to rite-aid and such looking for a 2 liter or

17 something to mix it in. We stopped at the house of a friend of S's, I'll call D, to get some  
18 pot, real good shit. We chilled at D's for a bit, had a round of shots and smoked a few  
19 bowls and a blunt; he's a big poker enthusiast, and we all talked quite a bit about the  
20 strategy and luck components of games like that for a while, the eve was off to a great  
21 start. We left D's after about an hour and were in search of a place to go drink, S's mom  
22 technically doesn't like people drinking in her place (it's a guarded apartment building  
23 with some 'unsavory characters' living in it and it's an issue when people stumble out the  
24 door all shitfaced) but there was no other place, so we went. 'Mom' (as his mom is known  
25 to all) wasn't too pleased as she'd planned a quiet evening to herself and didn't  
26 like the idea of us being there too long. We mixed our first 2 liter there, and wanted to go  
27 spend some subway stamps and get some subs but the bastards closed early, can't help  
28 but to think that had I had a little more food in my stomach I might not have gotten as bad  
29 as I did; as it was I had a small piece of pie and an english muffin at mom's place and that  
30 was it (of course I had been planning on going home and feasting later, so I wasn't  
31 looking to be full and thought I'd just get an extra buzz, BIG MISTAKE!)

32 We all took healthy guzzles from our drink; vodka and that new berry 7-Up are a great  
33 combo, barely even notice the booze, and decided to go visit S's aunt 'P'. Mom hadn't  
34 seen P for a good bit, and wanted to come along so we all mobbed out towards her place;  
35 on the way mom bought S and I each one of those Sparks things (the malt beverage  
36 energy drink), which are damn good.

37 By the time we got to P's, S and his girl had been drinking hard, but I had only had a few  
38 chugs and was hardly feeling anything. P was one of the best people I'd ever met, I love  
39 that woman in every way but a romantic one, it's hard to describe but she was just very

40 'cosmic' and intelligent in a more spiritual way. The last thing I remember is S's girl  
41 filling up the next 2 liter, and S and I had just smoked a bowl that I was preparing to  
42 match him on. I asked him the time and he said it was about 9:45; I was prepared to  
43 smoke another bowl, have a another drink for the road and head home, but instead came  
44 to 5 or so hours later in the ER. From this point foward my memory ends, and this is only  
45 as has been retold to me. I must have hit a blackout very shortly after asking the time, for  
46 me blackouts are just periods that I never remember and in which I say and do very  
47 stupid things.

48 I must stress how little I drank in comparison to S and his girl, and I was only starting to  
49 slur my words a slight bit and had a bit of difficulty manuevering around tight spaces and  
50 such; basically the starting point of intoxication as I last remember. After the bowl that I  
51 matched S, P took out her stash and I matched her several bowls (I almost smoked my  
52 whole \$60 bag with her!) meanwhile she kept telling me to put mine away; I guess I just  
53 kept telling her that I loved and respected her so much I would do anything for her, or  
54 something along those lines. At one point I tried to put it away, but instead spilled it all  
55 over my shirt, then when S got down to pick it up and was putting it back in the bag in  
56 front of my face I was accusing him of ripping me off. The alcohol I had consumed was  
57 slowly starting to hit, but this is what threw me over the edge. P had trainwreck, which is  
58 known to veterans to be very powerful 'creeper' weed (don't feel anything at first then it  
59 hits HARD like 5 minutes later when I smoke it, very dangerous in large amounts  
60 especially with alcohol) and we smoked bowl after bowl after bowl etc. S said later P was  
61 so blazed she just kept loading. This is how I know I was in a blackout though, it was like  
62 11:00 and I was sitting around smoking, when I had planned to leave an hour before; I

63 also don't like to smoke more than 2-3 bowls at a time because I never feel much higher  
64 and instead I just get a headache from all the smoke.

65 At about 11:30, we got up to go, the problem was I couldn't stand, or move much at all. I  
66 guess I got up and crashed into a bunch of furniture (didn't break anything thankfully)  
67 and S told me I was staying there for the night. He tried to put a blanket on me but I  
68 wouldn't let him and was trying to fight him, eventually I puked all over the blanket and  
69 on myself. I don't know why, but after that the 4 of us left; I think S was going to put me  
70 on the train and ride with me until my stop (which is very far from where the three of  
71 them live, they really were looking out for me) but we never made it. I have very hazy  
72 memories of looking up and seeing that I was being dragged along by the arms and I just  
73 kept falling, my legs wouldn't move or coordinate at all. S likened it to one of those dolls  
74 where one pulls the string and it does jumping jack motions. I guess I repeatedly kicked  
75 him in the knee on accident, which isn't cool because he has bad arthritis problems in that  
76 knee.

77 At some point I just charged towards some random house; the door was at the bottom of a  
78 stair well, and I just ran down and smacked straight into the door, fell backwards, and hit  
79 my head several times on the concrete. After that I was unconscious and completely  
80 unrousable, which has happened to me before, I think they're like mini comas or  
81 something because I don't respond to ANYTHING. Mom was worried I had a  
82 concussion, and S's knee was killing him, so they wanted to go to a hospital. S called my  
83 sister from my cell and told her I was passed out in a stair well, when she told my mom  
84 and dad that they all piled in the car and raced out towards the other side of town (I guess  
85 something about what S said to my sister was enough to scare her) counting down the

86 minutes until new year in the car.

87 I hear they pulled up and I couldn't move and was still unconscious, so all of them had to  
88 drag me and stuff me in the car. S, his girl and his mom all told me later they were damn  
89 sore after dragging my ass around like that. By this point I was soaking wet from falling  
90 in puddles and pissing my pants which I did several times, plus probably reeked of puke.  
91 They took me right in to the ER once I was falling into walls and such in the waiting  
92 room. I must have been awake at that point but still in a blackout; I think I passed out  
93 again later because I was unconscious for a lot of the proceedings in the ER, like the  
94 catheter insertion for example, and I don't think unconsciousness could ever be more  
95 merciful. It took me a really long time to figure out I was in a hospital and that my family  
96 was there, though I was awake for a good few hours of it. They gave me a cat scan and I  
97 was talking a lot to the guy doing it, I babbled to everyone and ceaselessly asked what  
98 time it was.

99 The only part about it I remember however was being told once that it was almost 4 am,  
100 and that's when I looked around and saw my mom, dad and sister and became a little  
101 more aware of the fact that I was in the hospital and such. I was crying a lot and thanking  
102 everyone for 'saving my life', I also asked the nurses and doctors some very peculiar  
103 questions, people said that I wasn't slurring too bad actually. For example, I asked the  
104 doctor if methamphetamine lowers you tolerance to alcohol, and then adamantly swore I  
105 had only tried meth once (which is true), they must of thought I was the most dipshit  
106 tweaker-drunk. The doctor bitched me out several times about how drunk I was (my  
107 blood-alcohol level was .352!), she was saying the fact that I wasn't in a coma with that  
108 much booze in me meant that I was an alcoholic and had a dangers dependency; which

109 doesn't make much sense in my little world, seems to me that just indicates I've got a high  
110 tolerance (which I do, very high and with many substances, 1000 miligrams of vicodin to  
111 me is a barely noticeable buzz). Meanwhile, and speaking of vicodin, my friend S got a  
112 prescription and 6 pills for the road; this is a guy who drinks himself into oblivion every  
113 night and is the most insane drunk I've ever known or would want to know, and yet I get  
114 the lecture?

115 If my BAC was .352, he must have been like .6; he drank SO much more than I did, and  
116 him, his mom, his girl, and anyone else that was with me that night continued to say how  
117 little I had actually drank (especially in comparison to S). My family (sister aside) had  
118 never met S, I wish I could have introduced them, but instead they met under these  
119 circumstances; my mom went and thanked them and said that S was hugging her and shit,  
120 he was wasted but held it much better than me in more ways than one. S's girl hit on my  
121 sister (she's bi and thinks my sister is hot, I've known this for a while) and told her she  
122 wanted to have a 3-way with her and S; then S came to see how I was doing, I kissed him  
123 and said that it wasn't romantic, I kept telling people I loved them and wanted to kiss  
124 them in a non romantic way, so I guess I finally did.

125 What did I learn from this? A lot. I'm not drinking anymore because I do like the buzz A  
126 LOT (I'm what you'd call a lush, a borderline/low level alcoholic) and am getting tired of  
127 spending so much money on it and having to drink every night etc. I really hate getting  
128 DRUNK, to the point where you can't even stand and such, a little drunk is great to me  
129 but I absolutely detest when it goes over the line. Other shitty things happened too: I lost  
130 \$30 out of my wallet somehow which I know I'll never see again, I almost smoked all my  
131 weed, my dick hurts like hell and pissing is just agony, the hospital always sucks and

132 when the staff treats you like shit (they were pretty surly) it makes it much worse plus  
133 whatever asshole put my IV in did a hell of a job because my arm is so full of trackmarks  
134 I look like a smack junkie, and I acted like an idiot in front of some people I really love  
135 and respect; S, his girl, his mom, P and lots of others.  
136 It's just a terribly humiliating thing to be that way and have to get dragged to a hospital  
137 because you can't even stand; I missed new years completely and made many other  
138 people miss it too, not cool. I also really found out something about S, I always trusted  
139 the guy and liked him as a friend, but he stayed with me and dealt with me like that, and  
140 in an area of town where I would have surely been beaten and robbed if he'd left me or  
141 tried to let me take care of myself; then come the morning the drunk bus would've found  
142 me and taken me to detox, which is worse than the hospital, if I hadn't choked on vomit  
143 or something and was still alive that is. If it weren't for S, this already very shitty event  
144 would have been much worse (for me at least) and I think of him like a brother at this  
145 point, which he told me last night is a mutual feeling. I'm indebted to all three of them for  
146 taking care of me like that, I couldn't ever repay that but certainly would return the favor  
147 if it came up.  
148 The biggest thing I learned out of all of this is that I just should never even start the  
149 drinking, at least the heavy drinking, until I get to a place you want to stay; avoid at all  
150 costs the notion of trying to get home or wherever I want to be while completely  
151 shitfaced.

Exp Year:           ID: 39407  
2004

Gender: Male

## A.2 “The Reasons I Couldn’t Wait”

The Reasons I Couldn't Wait Alcohol - Hard  
by Pleadthefifth

DOSE :	8 oz	oral	<u>Alcohol - Hard</u>	(liquid)
BODY WEIGHT :	135 lb			

1 The day started out like many other summer days -- a couple of friends and I decided to  
2 get drunk. (M, B, & myself. We also had a sober friend, J) The best way to do that, in our  
3 opinion, was to split a 750ml bottle of 151 proof rum. So, we took a trip to our favorite  
4 local not-by-the-book liquor store and bought our goods. About \$21 dollars later, we had  
5 a large bottle of Bacardi in our bag and anticipation in our hearts.  
6 Since we're fairly new at this drinking thing (read: pussy little bastards), or at least B and  
7 M are, we needed chasers. I feel that Gatorade is the best sort of chaser. The taste is also  
8 bearable, for me, when mixed with such a high proof alcohol. Yet another benefit of  
9 drinking from a Gatorade bottle is that of its inconspicuous nature. For me, it has worked  
10 every time, knock on wood. We also each brought a liter of water and some mouthwash  
11 for afterwards. Parents, parents, parents.  
12 So, we get to this park that is quite infamous for drinking, smoking and that sort of thing.  
13 We drink off about one-third of the Gatorade bottle and refill it with the rum. (There were  
14 approximately 7 or 8 ounces of rum in the Gatorade ‘cocktail’.) The 750ml bottle of  
15 Bacardi 151 comes with a little pourer cap, so not a lot of it comes out at one time. This is  
16 probably good in bars, when all people need to pour is about a shot at a time. Maybe we  
17 should have taken this as a hint, I don’t know.  
18 Since we needed some motivation, we played Shot-Blackjack, in which the losers have to

19 drink a shot of their Gatorade-Bacardi mixture. As we got happier, Blackjack became  
20 boring and we became obnoxious, I suppose, since our sober friend was getting annoyed.  
21 (On second thought, she is perpetually annoyed, so I can't be too sure how obnoxious we  
22 were.) M mentions that drinking his concoction is like drinking water, while B can hardly  
23 choke it down. I'm quite indifferent as I have a bit more experience. (Not necessarily a  
24 good thing.) Sitting around while drunk is nowhere near as fun as walking around while  
25 drunk, so we had to find something to do.

26 I had to pick up some food for my dad, so that's what we did first. Admittedly, it's not  
27 the most fun thing, but it was something. J (the sober friend) and I bring the food to my  
28 house, while M and B wait outside and continue to drink. When J and I come back out, M  
29 is a lot drunker than B. He's also a skinny bastard, while B is not. I was slightly buzzed at  
30 that point, since I had to slow down drinking to not look so bad in front of my dad. M  
31 was really wasted at this point, as I remember laughing really loudly at him and slapping  
32 my knees, and I was just trying to catch up, since being only slightly buzzed but having  
33 to hang around drunk bastards is a waste of \$7 bucks. B was stumbling around and  
34 babbling something about Clay Aiken. J was just plain embarrassed (and maybe a little  
35 pissed, being sober.)

36 We stood around near my building for a while, trying to decide what to do next. J wanted  
37 to go downtown to get Japanese food, so that's what we agreed to do. (Although, it  
38 probably wasn't the best idea, since I need a pretty strong stomach in general to eat  
39 Japanese food, and the liquor was not helping any in that department. But I like Japanese  
40 food, so I guess it wouldn't have been that big of a problem.)

41 To get downtown, we have to take the subway. I've been on the subway while drunk, and

42 it's a bumpy ride that isn't too good on the stomach. (Malt liquor + hot dogs + long,  
43 bumpy subway ride = sure way to get myself to puke in public.) The walk from my house  
44 to the subway is about 7 blocks, but we first had to go to J's house for her to get money  
45 from her Grandmother. M, B and I wait outside. By this point, all three of us have  
46 finished our Gatorade cocktails, so M and I go to the store to get another chaser. I'm not  
47 sure if they were out of Gatorade or if I just couldn't find it, so I ended up getting some  
48 sort of Cranberry juice bottle. M gets nothing because he's hella wasted and is lying  
49 down on the floor and wants to take a nap in the store. I had to get him up to go to the  
50 counter and pay for the juice, which I did. I remember the guy at the counter telling me  
51 the juice was \$1.25, as opposed to the dollar I am used to paying, so I angrily mumble  
52 something about him ripping me off. Lord only knows what he thought.

53 So M, J, B and I make our way to the subway. B is up ahead with J talking about god  
54 knows what, while I'm acting like a crutch for M because he can hardly walk. He trips, I  
55 trip, and we fall in a dried up pile of dog crap. (Gotta love the New York City streets.)  
56 Some people were passing, they almost trip over us, laugh and continue walking. I figure  
57 that M is going to need some rest, so I get him up and get him to lie uncomfortably on  
58 someone else's car, while hoping the owner isn't around to call the cops. B and J  
59 disappear somewhere for nearly 10 minutes, and M and I are just hanging there.

60 Now, not being in the best state, I make a few choices that could have turned out not so  
61 good. I have my new Oceanspray cranberry juice chaser, pour half of it out, and replace it  
62 with more rum. I start drinking, while slapping M intermittently to make sure he's still  
63 alive. I also give him some water to drink so he has something more to puke up. B shows  
64 up out of nowhere without our sober buddy. Looking back, this is probably the point

65 where we become royally screwed. Passersby are staring and inquiring about our mental  
66 state, a cop car slows down and stares at us but thankfully, this being the ghetto,  
67 continues going, as a few drunk-off-their-ass teenagers are the least of their worries.

68 (Another reason to love New York City.

69 B and I, being the least fucked up, decide to try and get M somewhere where he can just  
70 wait out the alcohol. This little baseball field was our choice, as it was big enough for us  
71 to lie around in without being suspicious. We make it across the street and maybe 10 feet  
72 up, but then sort of collapse in front of this Jehovah Witnesses church building parking  
73 lot. M and I sat there for about 20 minutes, although it could have been 20 seconds and I  
74 wouldn't have known the difference. At this point, M starts puking. On my pants, on his  
75 pants, in the church's plants. B says something about pissing and disappears for a few  
76 minutes. He comes back, and I go piss behind someone's car. I have to be pretty fucked  
77 up to piss in public, so I guess I was. B starts to take some pictures, and lord only knows  
78 what he got.

79 People who are passing by are staring, M gets up to go piss or something, doesn't make  
80 it, and lies down in the middle of the street. This is where I started to get panicked.

81 People are always going to go and do something when there's a semi-conscious body in  
82 the middle of a NYC street. So, I'm assuming, someone calls the cops. A crowd forms. B  
83 convinces me to go to the corner and pretend we don't know him, to avoid getting in  
84 trouble. One cop car shows up, and somehow multiplies into 6 and an ambulance. The  
85 cops were quite jovial, getting a kick out of the drunken teenager. M says his name is  
86 Ernie Ichijogi, which is quite far from his real name. He also starts flipping off the cops,  
87 which I found quite hilarious. Since we were sure M was going to get taken care of, B

88 and I started to leave. Then, somehow, M's mom drops from the sky and appears,  
89 running towards M, who is now in an ambulance. She stops me, asks me what is  
90 happening, and all that fun stuff. Being quite drunk, but not nearly as drunk as M, I get  
91 quite scared and think that M has alcohol poisoning and is going to die or get permanent  
92 brain damage, or something equally as terrible. I start bawling, and asking her if he's  
93 okay. She says no, so I cry even harder.

94 The walk home was terrible, since I was bawling and people were asking if I was okay. I  
95 dumped the rest of the Bacardi, and called J on her cell phone, still bawling. She actually  
96 made it downtown and got Japanese food, I found out soon after. So M's mom is angry at  
97 me, thinking I forced him to drink and B said I gave them the liquor. People do  
98 maddening things when they want to cover their ass, so I don't hold any grudges, but it's  
99 still annoying to know that he totally sold me out when we all made the consensual  
100 decision to drink.

101 Later, I found out that M was taken to the hospital and they found he had a Blood  
102 Alcohol Concentration of .216 or so, which is indeed very high, but not especially lethal.  
103 M had never had such an intense reaction to alcohol and has drunk way more than the 8  
104 or so ounces he drank that day, but he also hadn't slept or eaten for two days. For that, he  
105 spent a night in the hospital and has a pretty funny story to tell.

Exp Year: 2003

ID: 26062

Gender: Male

Views: 4888

## Appendix B: Erowid Documents

### B.1 Experience Report Submission Form

<[http://www.erowid.org/experiences/exp\\_submit.cgi](http://www.erowid.org/experiences/exp_submit.cgi)>

Accessed October 24, 2012

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We are looking for submissions of well-written experience reports about the use of psychoactive plants and chemicals as well as other forms of mind-altering activities such as yoga, meditation, and the use of mind machines.

NOTE: Not all reports that are submitted are selected for publication. Each report goes through a thorough review process that takes into consideration writing quality, interest, and usefulness of data. Although we are slowly catching up, we still have a significant backlog of reports. Some reports are read and published within days, but in many cases, it can take a year or more for a submission to be reviewed. Please be patient.

Submissions should describe more than just a list of activities engaged in. We are looking for descriptions of mindset, physical and mental effects, intentions, insights, problems, aftereffects, etc. A report is more likely to be published if it includes the following type of information:

- o Description of mindset & setting
- o Details of any preparations made for the experience
- o Dosage & timing information
- o Notes on prescription or over-the-counter medications, herbs or supplements that were being taken at the time of the experience.
- o Something more than a description of how fucked up you were or what cool patterns you saw.

For more about how reports are reviewed for publication, what makes a good report, and how experience reports can be useful, see:

- o [Experience Report Reviewing: The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly](#) (2002)
- o [A Brief Overview of the Experience Report Reviewing Process](#) (2005)
- o [The Value of Experience](#) (2006)
- o [Communicating Experience](#) (2006)
- o [Surfing the Matrix](#) (2006)

Suggested Title :

 \*

Anti-Spam :

 \* (Enter "notspam" into this field)

Author Name / Pseudonym :

 \*

Substance Name(s) :

 \*

Dose :

Body Weight :

Age at time of experience :

Report :

(We recommend writing your report in an external editor and pasting here when you are finished to avoid the chance of losing your text as you write.)

Email :

Copyrights: By submitting this report to Erowid you grant perpetual, international, transferrable, non-exclusive copyright to Erowid. You grant permission for the report to be used on Erowid.org, in promotional literature, and in both electronic & print publications of Erowid's choosing. Changes may be made to clarify the text, remove identifying details, correct errors, or implement other editorial decisions. Whenever reports are used, credit will be given to the author.

Please consider carefully before submitting this Report. If selected for publication, all information will be displayed publicly.

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Experience Reports are the writings and opinions of the individual authors who submit them. Some of the activities described are dangerous and/or illegal and none are recommended by Erowid.

## B.2 Erowid Report Reviewing

Erowid Review Crew (2002)

<[http://www.erowid.org/experiences/exp\\_info1.shtml](http://www.erowid.org/experiences/exp_info1.shtml)>

Accessed February 24, 2008.

Experience Report Reviewing

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

by the Erowid Reviewing Crew

October 2002

[Erowid Extracts #3](#)

Citation: Erowid. "Experience Report Reviewing: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly". Erowid Extracts. Oct 2002;3:18-20.

The Experience Vaults are one of the most popular parts of Erowid, cumulatively getting well over 30,000 page views per day. They provide the closest thing we have to public forums where visitors can submit their ideas and opinions for public display.

Because experience reports by definition are subjective, they are put through less fact-checking than many other types of articles on Erowid. But they do go through a lengthy process of approval. The two most common questions we receive about the Experience Vaults are whether the reports are checked or reviewed at all, and why a particular submitted report has not yet been displayed on the site. This article is an introduction to the Erowid Experience Vaults, how reports are chosen for publication, and what type of reports do not make it onto the site.

Initial Impressions, by Scotto

As Earth explained to me how to benchmark the average report, I was surprised to realize that the average report was of considerably poorer quality than I'd expected. It's easy to be arrogant and judgemental, especially because I consider myself a writer, but that was what I had to get over. I had to make a distinction between my perception of the quality of the writing versus the potential value of the actual content of the writing. It took a while to get used to.

I think the most dispiriting aspect of reviewing is how much destructive use gets reported as if it were wonderful recreational use. On the one hand that's also me being arrogant and judgemental; clearly there's a line between what some consider acceptable and what others consider destructive. But by the same token, in some cases I can clearly see harm in the patterns of use described, if only by my own standards, and it's challenging to remain relatively unbiased about evaluating the worth of the report in those cases.

The flip side is that I still see people having remarkable experiences, often in reports from those who are at the earliest stages of their

## The Mission

From the start it's been obvious that experience reports are an integral part of the data about psychoactive substances. If nothing else is known about a plant or chemical, a lot can be learned from a few well-written reports of their use. The design goal of the Experience Vaults is to act as a categorized repository for the long-term collection of people's experiences with both psychoactive substances and

techniques, and to make those experiences easily available to people searching for information about reported use, effects, problems, and benefits. Our editorial goals are to weed out completely fraudulent entries and to keep the texts focused on the firstperson experiences of the authors. The vision that keeps the project moving is one of 100,000 reports on a thousand different substances or techniques, all categorized, rated, and searchable as part of the public knowledge-base.

## The Past

From 1996 through mid-1998 the "system" we used for publishing experiences was simply to request permission to use reports that we found on email lists or web boards and to ask specific individuals to write up their unusual experiences. In 1998, we created a simple web form for the submission of reports, which forwarded the stories to us by email. While this had the advantage of allowing anonymous submissions, it quickly became burdensome, as it was our policy for both Fire and Earth to read each report before we would publish it on the site (in handcoded HTML). Eventually, we started to accumulate a large backlog of reports with no way to allow other crew members to review them while still maintaining oversight of the collection.

## The Present

The third generation of the Experience Vaults -- launched in June 2000 and still in use today -- introduced a much more formalized and improved review system that has allowed us to publish more than 3,500 reports in the last two years. The Erowid experience admin system allows Erowid crew members to review incoming submissions, categorize them by substance and type of experience, then edit, rate and approve them. The primary principle of the design is that at

psychedelic career. When I read reports by 19-year-olds and witness the sense of wonder they're experiencing, or the confusion, it gives me the opportunity to see my own experiences with a fresh eye. It helps remind me to take a step back from how jaded I usually am, to not be so "been there, done that." There are still a lot of people out there who are stumbling into this enormous world of psychedelics for the first time. When I was 19 years old and first started taking psychedelics, I instinctively looked for answers to difficult questions that the experiences raised. Our college library had a couple of Tim Leary books, which are definitely not beginner-level texts. Alt.drugs was a wasteland back then. It's still a wasteland, but there's so much more than Usenet now. It's exciting to think that in a relatively short time span, resources such as Erowid have developed to offer something more concrete to new users than I was able to find during my relatively isolated novice period.

Another thing reviewing experience reports constantly reminds me is that it's not easy to do the work of writing up experiences. It's really easy to have a weekend trip that seems remarkable and then by Monday be too busy and tired to write about it. There seems little incentive. I often ask myself, "What is there novel to say about my experience?" It really does get challenging to force yourself to try to write it down.

least two knowledgeable and trained reviewers read each submitted report before it is considered a permanent part of the archive.

When a first-stage reviewer approves a report it becomes publicly viewable, but it also enters a list of reports awaiting secondary approval. If a second-tier reviewer also approves the report, it is considered to have received "final" approval and becomes a permanent part of the collection (although it can always be taken down by a site admin). If, on the other hand, a first level reviewer "trashes" a submission, it does not get displayed but instead enters a list of reports awaiting secondary "trashing". When a report is trashed by a second tier reviewer, it is permanently deleted.

### The Problem

It's not obvious at first glance how challenging and time consuming it can be to review incoming reports. It takes time to read a full text, determine whether to approve or reject it, then set all relevant categories and ratings. Generally the better a report is, the easier it is to review. While some reports are well written and a joy to read, it is much more difficult to decide what to do with the other 80%.

With each report that comes in, we feel a strong sense of obligation to honor the energy and time that the author took to write up their experience and submit it to us. Even--or perhaps especially--when reports are badly written, or describe types of use that seem less than ideal, it can be draining to decide that someone else's story isn't worth publishing. And yet, as publishers, it's our job to examine incoming reports and make educated decisions about how to apply a set of reasonable criteria for inclusion or exclusion. There are Experience Report Reviewing guidelines which spell out the general parameters by which reviewers judge submitted reports.

---

"While I am rather forgiving with regard to spelling and style, if I have to work to make sense of a report, I am likely to delete it."  
-- Scruff

---

**Accept or Reject:** We reject reports we believe to be falsified, reports which are impossible to read because of bad grammar or spelling, reports which have no content related to any topic we cover, and reports which consist only of a litany of activities engaged in while high but don't address the effects of the substance. Nearly half of all submitted reports fall into one of these categories.

**Report Rating:** Reports are assigned an overall rating ("Amazing" to "Marginal"), which determines where they show up in the lists of publicly displayed reports, and whether they are listed as "Erowid recommended". Less than 1% of displayed reports receive a rating of "Amazing" and another percent are rated "Very Good", while most reports are rated in the "Average" range.

### Most Common Reasons Reports Are Deleted

**Weak in Content** Reports that contain very little beyond a mention of the drug a person took and then a description of what they did: "We drove around in Bud's car, then we went to the

mall, then we walked to the quickie-mart, played video games, and everything was really bright and we laughed a lot."

**Not Credible** Occasionally we get a report that just sounds utterly implausible. It's impossible to tell with what frequency spurious reports are submitted, but a reviewer can often get a sense of whether a report is completely fabricated.

**Difficult to Read** Many of the reports we receive are incredibly difficult to read. Some are submitted in all capital letters (or with no capital letters) with no punctuation or paragraph breaks, others are such spelling and grammar disasters that they are completely unreadable. These sorts of reports are generally rejected immediately. Reviewers have a lot of leeway if they feel a writer's unusual style is artistic, but the basic rule is that if a flexible, collegelevel English reader can't make sense of it, it's not appropriate for the Vaults.

**Very Uninteresting** Reports that are extremely redundant and offer no real interest, data, or color to the world. There are a lot of below-marginally written reports, about common substances, that we decline to publish.

**What Was That?** It's not always clear from a report what substance a person actually took. While we do have a category for reports about substances that turned out not to be what the author expected, not being able to identify what substance was ingested makes a report virtually useless, and therefore these are usually deleted.

There is also a rating called "Cellar". If a report is considered unfit for display, but contains some tiny bit of relevant data that we don't want to lose, it is relegated to the cellar, undisplayed but still available for internal research. Examples would be a report that mentions hospitalization but provides no verifiable details or contact information; a very poor quality report which describes a reaction or effect we haven't heard of; or a report of a rare combination of substances that we don't find credible.

Rating is necessarily a subjective and highly personal process and it can be touchy to grade other people's writing. At this point we choose not to clearly display report ratings because we are aware how seriously some people take this type of judgement.

---

"I've been called a masochist for reading reports as avidly as I do. I've been fascinated with reading and hearing others' experiences since I was a teen."  
-- Scruff

---

**Text Editing:** Some editing is done on the text of most reports, although we don't generally fix minor spelling and grammar errors. Our policy is to fix only a few errors per report in order to retain a strong sense of the author's writing skill and style.

We feel that artificially polishing each report would sanitize the incoming data, making it hard to identify the original voice of the author. Often the diction, style, spelling, and grammar of a report are all one has to get a sense who the author is, what their level of education is, who they are. These stylistic issues, which can often be distracting to read through, are also very much part of the data of a given report. Preserving the voice of the author both helps to capture the range authors

who write the reports and provides additional cues for choosing how much weight to give the content of the report.

\* \* \* \* \*

Unfortunately, the level of care our review crew strives for makes it difficult for us to keep up with the number of incoming reports--currently a steady 25 per day--so we are constantly falling behind. Early in 2002, Sophie lead a charge to clear out pending reports more than a year old, and succeeded. But even weeks of nothing but experience reviewing only caught us up to last year's submissions. There are thousands of reports which have never been read. When people inquire why their report hasn't been posted to the site, we sheepishly have to respond that we are doing the best we can to work through the submitted reports, but that the project is critically understaffed and underfunded.

Experience Vault Statistics

Total Reports Submitted 17,396  
Submitted Each Day 25

Total Reports Reviewed 10,719  
Published 4,527  
Declined (1st pass) 1,782  
Declined (permanent) 4,290  
On Hold 120

Total Awaiting Review 6,797

Oct 2002

The solution to the problem may seem to be simple: finding more people to do the reviewing work. But people who volunteer to review reports often imagine the process to be much more fun than it is. Unfortunately this leads to most volunteers quitting before they begin. Even with a rigorous application process to weed out those who aren't serious, along with a request that people commit to reviewing at least 40 reports before giving up, less than half who agree actually complete 40 reports. Since it takes more than an hour to train someone in on the interface and then another few hours of oversight by a second-tier reviewer, finding committed reviewers can be a burden on the busiest of the crew.

The Future

The primary problem with our current reviewing system seems to be the period of time it takes to train new reviewers, combined with a difficult and somewhat tiresome process that loses the attention of casual volunteers. A fourth generation system, being designed to help resolve some of these problems, includes a triage system for incoming reports that will incorporate a significantly simpler interface for use by casual volunteers. This will be used as a first stage to pre-sort and provide basic categorization for incoming reports, which will then move on to full review by the crew.

\* \* \* \* \*

Through the work of a few dedicated reviewers, the Experience Vaults have grown into a valuable public archive. Scruff has been an amazing reviewer and has processed more than 2800 reports. Sophie has reviewed over 1700 reports in the last year and MorningGlorySeed has reviewed 450. Other long-term review crew include, in order of number of reports reviewed, Tacovan, Erica, Shell, Catfish, Desox, and Scotto. It is only through the sustained efforts of these committed individuals that the project is able to thrive.

We cannot express enough our appreciation to those visitors who have taken the time to write and submit quality reports and to those reviewers who have tromped through the seemingly endless quagmire of human folly, searching to unearth gems of insight, clarity or error, to be added to the public record.

## Meme Cultivation

### Describe *Your* Experience, Not Mine

Although the general rule for editing experience reports is to change as little as possible of the author's language, one of the primary changes reviewers are encouraged to make is to modify second person and "didactic" language. Although this does change the voice of the author, we feel strongly that there is value both in encouraging people to think and write in terms of their own experience, and in not telling others what to think, feel or do. The Experience Vaults are intended for descriptions of experiences, not for broad treatises on the use of psychoactives.

The first part of the policy is to adjust instances of 2nd-person language where the pronoun "you" is used. An example would be changing "Mescaline gives you body tingles" to "Mescaline gives me body tingles".

While there are certainly phrases and uses of "you" that are acceptable--and a reviewer will leave such sentences intact if they're not directly about personal experience or are crafted with skill and intention--projecting one's personal experiences onto everyone else in the world is a common error that Erowid is keen to discourage.

The second part of this policy is the removal of overly didactic (lecturing) text. Some authors fill their reports with broad conclusions about how others should act based on their own experiences, experiences which may not even be described in the report. When an author uses didactic language like, "first time users should always..." or "remember to always...", it's time to edit the text to reflect that person's unique experience rather than their assumptions about what others should experience.

We work to make sure we don't remove the personal lessons or insights that an author is trying to impart, but instead rephrase them as exactly that--the insights of an individual.

## **Vita**

Martin Pfeiffer was born in Baton Rouge, LA and received his B.A. in Political Science from LSU in 2007. In the Fall of 2012 he will receive his Masters degree in Anthropology. People fascinate Martin although he does enjoy living with his three cats. Martin plans to move in the near future, and hopes to do something meaningful with his life.