Countering consumption in a culture of intoxication

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Prioritising a vision of long term cultural change toward the creation of a 'safer, healthier drinking culture' represents a meteoric shift in Australian alcohol policy. Despite this articulation, sensible drinking policy initiatives are constrained within an informational framework promoting alcohol unit warnings on alcohol vessels and standard drink guidelines. The aim of this research is to develop an understanding of the consumer culture of 'sensible drinking' by analysing young adult's constructions of credible identities and resistant motivations for manoeuvring within, and beyond, a culture where excessive drinking is the accepted norm. Using narrative theory approach, young adults' self-generated stories surrounding responsible consumption of alcohol are explored. Informants engage a resistance narrative to the dominant culture of intoxication and legitimise identity through construction of alternate subject positions. Despite underpinnings of belief homogeneity, informants displayed heterogeneity when manoeuvring within intoxicated social spaces suggesting a continuum of resistance behaviour and existence of micro-subcultures within a culture of sensible drinking. Understanding discourses of young people who create a legitimate culture of 'sensible' drinking offers critical, yet often dismissed, insight into the relationship between identity and alcohol resistance for the creation of a safer, healthier drinking culture.

Keywords – *alcohol, anti-consumption, responsible drinking, non-drinkers, social marketing*

Biography:

Marie-Louise Fry is a senior lecturer in social marketing at Griffith Business School, Griffith University, Australia. The focus of her research is on symbolic consumption, advertising consumption and behavioural psychology in social marketing contexts. She is particularly interested in motivated reasoning for engaging in risky, as well as non-risky behaviour. She has published in the *Journal of Business Research*, *Marketing Theory*, *Australasian Marketing Journal*, *Australasian Journal of Market & Social Research*, *Journal of Public Affairs*, *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, and *Corporate Reputation Review*. She is on the editorial board of the *Journal of Social Marketing*.

Introduction

The hallmark of contemporary alcohol policy in Australia prioritises the ‘facilitation of safer and healthier drinking cultures’ (National Alcohol Strategy, 2006). Priority Area 4 of Australia’s National Alcohol Strategy aspires to reduce the incidence of excessive sessional drinking by way of developing an ethics of moderation towards culturally universal safer healthier consumption practices, especially among the at-risk young adult cohort. The edict of a ‘safe and healthier drinking culture’ seeks to de-normalise intoxication; challenge the current status quo of drunkenness-related antisocial behaviour; and promote the building of a national consensus regarding healthy alcohol consumption (National Preventative Health Taskforce, 2009). This new policy rhetoric has important consequences for repositioning ‘alcohol’ as culturally inclusive signified by a subtext of positive socialisation, as opposed to culturally exclusive signified by a subtext of individual harm and social violence; for acknowledging that not all individuals consume alcohol to excess with national statistics estimating almost three-quarters of Australians (72.6%) consume alcohol in moderation and an additional ten percent practicing abstinence (AIHW, 2007); and for directly confronting the status quo of intoxication as part of the identity repertoire of ‘what young people normally do’ (Measham et al., 2002).

With the exception of alcohol unit warnings on alcohol vessels and standard drink guidelines, policy initiatives pertaining to Priority Area 4 largely remain contained within a harm minimisation framework (for example, regulating the physical availability of alcohol, increasing legal purchase age, tax policy and price) (National Alcohol Strategy, 2006). As a consequence of a long history of focussing on at-risk cohorts alcohol research, discussion and policy formation is predominantly understood from epidemiological (social deviance, psychosocial influences, risk consequences) and economic (tax and pricing policy, product availability) perspectives (Roche et al., 2008). The value of this research is not in question,

yet a pre-occupation with epidemiological and economic data coupled with overlay of media induced moral panic surrounding youth binge drinking has resulted in a marginalisation and, as a consequence, a comparatively understudied examination of cultural and sub-cultural aspects of alcohol consumption within the Australian context (Dann & Fry, 2009, Lindsay et al., 2009).

What is even less well understood, and largely rendered invisible, is examination of factors influencing why individuals prefer to practice responsible consumption or to abstain completely (for exceptions see Nairn et al., 2006; Piacentini & Bannister, 2009; Valentine et al., 2010). Given this gap in alcohol knowledge, coupled with the new Australian alcohol policy rhetoric toward facilitating a healthier and safer drinking culture, this paper aims to develop an understanding of the consumer culture of ‘sensible drinking’ by analysing young adult’s constructions of credible identities and resistant motivations for manoeuvring within, and beyond, a culture where excessive drinking is the accepted norm. Prior to presenting the adopted methodology, the following section offers a brief overview of forming identity beyond intoxication and discusses theoretical issues underpinning social identity. The paper concludes by calling for a greater understanding of the relationship between identity and resistance consumption in the alcohol context to help shed light on how meaningful subject positions are created against dominant norms in the aim to assist initiatives for creating a safer, healthier drinking culture.

Forming identity beyond intoxication

The normative nature of drunkenness as integral to and symbolic of social bonding and other pleasure experiences enables ‘intoxication’ to act as an influential device in the articulation of identity and social relationships (Sande, 2002). Driven by the need for social belonging and the innate desire for a recognisable identity, the intoxicated body takes on a ‘compulsory

status for identities to be intelligible to others' (Nairn et al., 2006:288). For many young people intoxication acts as a conduit for the production of credible identity positions achieved through displays of behaviour that are valued and shared by relevant in-group members. The pursuit of determined drunkenness (Measham, 2004) enables opportunities for social interaction and the building of a sense of belonging. For young adults socialisation and drinking have become intertwined to such an extent that drinking is viewed as an end in itself suggesting that the pursuit of intoxication is a desired aspect of the Australian leisure experience (Roche et al., 2007). When considering the power of conforming to social norms it is not surprising that intoxication has become a powerful, and arguably dominant norm among young people's social activity repertoire.

Like binge drinking, non- or responsible drinking is also influenced by individual, personal characteristics and intentions, as well as the collectivity of positive experiences of congregating in an environment together *as a group* that has "*shared-intentions*" to consume leisure experiences (Nairn et al., 2006). Rather than belonging to the prevailing culture of intoxication there are those who have no desire to be recognised by the dominant norm, actively resist the dominant norm and/or opt out of belonging to the prevailing culture of drunkenness-oriented drinking¹ (Fry, 2008). Rejection of the dominant norm by being a young adult and not drinking to excess implies a contradiction in terms of sociability. Yet these individuals actively construct credible identities outside the forms of sociability associated with alcohol consumption, and in direct opposition to that norm (Nairn et al., 2006). Co-existing within the youth culture of intoxication is a parallel construction of social identities requiring individuals to create meaningful subject positions in a legitimate alternate 'non-drinking' culture (Piacentini & Bannister, 2009).

Constructing social identity

Identity is no longer construed as a unitary, static, binary construct. Rather, the construction of identity is contextualised as a dynamic representation of self which is continually reassembled, produced and reproduced (Shanker et al., 2009). In agreement with Plumridge et al. (2002) identity resonates as something we do; a performance in the fashioning of the self. In the enactment of 'fashioning the self' individuals interact with the vast array of symbolic and cultural resources within contemporary culture to construct representations of their possible selves and to negotiate collective identities in relation to social situations, roles and interactions (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Beyond stereotypical commodification of brands, individuals equally construct, maintain and communicate their identity through symbolic consumption of leisure activities (Elliott, 2004). Relevant accoutrements of use and competence in behaviours are displayed which lay the foundations and ascriptions of identity (Plumridge et al., 2002). Through repeated performances the practice of consumption becomes ritualistic and natural, and enables a conduit for individuals to actively transform symbolic meanings from consumer culture to further their identity position and lifestyle goals (McCracken, 1986). As Shanker et al. (2009) argue the symbolic potential of an individual's identity position is fashioned (produced and reproduced) into ongoing identity projects.

The production of a recognisable identity and its incorporation into ongoing identity projects extends the notion of the self within the broader context of socialisation and social belonging. If identities are to be intelligible to others, people must gain recognition and validation from others (Butler, 2004). Thus, if one conceives the production and reproduction of identity as situated in social consumption practices then the development of the individual self becomes inseparable from the parallel development of the collective social identity (Elliott, 2004). As consumption behaviour will generally reflect relevant important, rather than irrelevant unimportant identities individuals will seek out relationships that affirm their valued identity position (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Jenkins' (2004) asserts the reciprocal

relationship between identity and culture is integral for identity formation as interaction of social practice authenticates self identity, and that the self is implicitly embedded in social practice.

The fashioning of an individual's identity position into ongoing identity projects is not only dependent on the interplay between self and social practice, but also on an individual's capability to classify themselves in relation to others to elicit similarity or difference (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). The sense of belonging to a group together with the value and emotional significance attached to the perception of oneness with the group can have a powerful influence on behaviour (Bhattacharya et al., 1995). How we identify ourselves and how others identify us depends on the ongoing interplay between internally-directed self-categorisation and externally-directed social comparison of others (Stets & Burke, 2000). The internal process of self-categorisation relies on individuals to identify perceived similarities between the self and other in-group members. The social group to which an individual selects and feels they belong provides a definition of who they are as per defining characteristics of the group. Within specific communities of practice individuals hold common social identification tags, view themselves as members of the same social category, and recognise perceived similarities between the self and others included in the in-group based on attitudes, beliefs, values, affective reactions, behavioural norms, styles of speech and other properties believed to be correlated with the relevant in-group categorisation (Stets & Burke, 2000).

It is within the social arena that group identification is likely to be reinforced through the external process of social comparison. This process centres on the selective application of evaluating in-group and out-group individuals on dimensions that lead the in-group to be judged positively and the out-group to be judged negatively. Implicit in the process of creating social-identification is the flexibility of categorisation to not only express similarity, but also its ability to express difference. Social groups and related behaviours become integral

for the signification of membership (or exclusion of membership) at both individual and social levels where identity labels become infused with importance and meaning. Importantly, the internal definitions of group membership and evaluative consequences strongly influence how members orient their behaviour to maintain in-/out-group comparisons that favour the in-group, the self and strengthen existing group identification, belief structures and group legitimacy (Hogg & Mitchell, 1996). From a structural perspective the production and reproduction of credible identity projects is reliant on the intersection between the individual and their interpretation of self-concept, the interaction of individuals within collective spaces, and institutional contexts which determine social reality (Jenkins, 2004).

For young adults the formation of identity is produced and reproduced as the individual transitions from teenager to adulthood interpreting one's sense of self and consolidating self-image (Jenkins, 2004). Through interactions with other like-minded individuals in collective social spaces self-image meets public image. Implicitly, interactions between individuals provide an arena for individuals to consolidate and evaluate their sense of self within a collective environment, thus engaging in the process of producing and reproducing their social identity. The development of social identity is guided by shared understanding of institutionalised contexts which pattern and organise the way of doing things. Shared laws, morals and political frameworks establish an understanding of authority and distribution of rewards or penalties. Any attempt to grapple with the creation of social identity must take into consideration the complexity and interrelationships between the individual, the collective space in which interaction occurs and the institutionalised patterning and symbolic way of doing things within broader society. For those operating beyond dominant norms the construction of social identity poses additional constraints influencing the construction of alternate identity projects. By exploring constructions of young adult non-/infrequent drinker identity this paper aims to elucidate the tensions, practices and factors that

shape management of the subject position within a broader social environment that encourages intoxication.

Method

Narrative theory provides a useful framework for understanding young adult responsible drinking behaviour. Narrative approaches have been used by researchers to develop several inductive theories of physical and psychological health and understanding interpersonal health communication (see for example: Weschesblatt et al., 2000, Eggly 2002). This theory posits individuals recall salient moments in their relational lives, organise these thoughts, and make sense of these experiences through an organised telling of experiences (Fisher, 1987).

Importantly, the narrative surrounding the experience has ontological status as the process of telling the story creates and constructs meaning rather than simply being an act of remembering or retelling (Shanker et al., 2009). As individuals construct their identities and self-narratives from building blocks available in common culture, above and beyond their individual experience, self-generated stories become an essential mechanism for situating social action into a specific construction of social identity (Lieblich et al., 1998).

Conceptualising ‘stories’ acts as a thread linking life events and serves an explanatory purpose to establish meaning of how identity as non-drinking social actors is constituted within a broader discourse of drinking for the self and wider social cohesion of peers.

Semi-structured interviews ranging from one and a half hours to two hours were conducted with 48 consumers aged 18 to 25 years. Recruited through friendship networks informants represented a mix of gender, socio-economic representation, employment status (working, unemployed, and university) and geographic locality (across Australian east coast regional and metropolitan centres). To put informants at ease when talking about socialising within a culture where intoxication is the dominant norm interviews were conducted by an

age-relevant researcher. The interviewer was given extensive instruction, was trained in interpretive research methods and was closely supervised by the senior researcher. Selection criteria required informants to self-categorise as either a non-drinker or an infrequent drinker. Infrequent drinkers (n=30) characterised themselves as placing limits on their consumption of alcohol, were cognisant of consumption levels when socialising taking precautions to maintain 'within blood alcohol limit' levels and did not consume alcohol on a daily or weekly basis. Non-drinkers (n=18) collectively disliked the aroma of alcohol, its taste, and/or the behavioural effect of excessive consumption. Within the sample there was no mention, despite prompting, of experiential avoidance trigger where a non- or infrequent drinking identity was the result of negative intoxication experiences.

Informants completed a *pro forma* sheet recording categorical data concerning alcohol consumption and demographics. At the outset, informants were asked to describe a specific incident of experience within the intoxication environment. Interviews proceeded in a conversational manner with informants talking about their relationship with the night time economy and intoxication. Initial setting the scene questions sought to establish the respondents background with alcohol, then loosely tracked the symbolism and meaning of *not drinking* or *drinking sensibly* within a culture where intoxication is a dominant norm; the construction of social identities to enhance meaningful subject positions in a legitimate alternate culture and processes for managing socialising within the intoxication culture. Interviews were transcribed verbatim from audio-tapes, with identifying names or references to individuals erased to maintain anonymity. Data were analysed using a modified constant comparative method (Wooten, 2000). The interviewer and senior researcher read through the entire set of transcripts independently to agree the overall shape, meaning and context of reported experiences. Individual lines of transcript were sorted and constantly compared to

generate thematic categories that served to explain individual experiences of creating credible responsible drinking identities within a culture of intoxication.

Collective identity of ‘not the same’

Both the non-drinker and infrequent drinker discourses highlight a sense of not belonging and not being part of the more accepted cultural norm of intoxication. The presence of difference, not the same, or not like them is deeply embedded in all informants’ narratives. Particularly within discourses of non-drinkers there was a heightened sense of difference and interpretation of not being connected with ‘that other world’. The following excerpts from non-drinkers clearly exemplify this sense of alienation from the dominant norm.

“It’s just like they go out and just get drunk all the time and get silly. That’s not me. I just don’t get it at all, you know going out and getting drunk. It’s like people intentionally go out of their way to wreck their lives. What’s that about? I know I’m not like them. I know I don’t want to be like them. I go out of my way to make sure I don’t socialise where there are night clubs and pubs and places where there are drunken people just on the streets. I’m different and am really glad of it.” (Female, non-drinker)

“A culture has been created where young people who *do not* get drunk and party hard on a regular basis are considered abnormal. I regularly see my friends and others getting drunk and viewing it as some sort of rite of passage. I’m up against a social expectation that assumes I regularly partake in binge-drinking events.” (Male, non-drinker)

From a social perspective, informants were unified in the way they personified sensible drinking as a means to facilitate enjoyment, fun and pleasure as opposed to intoxication which was viewed as abject. Rejection of the dominant norm is illustrated by a desire to behave according to individually imposed moral values discriminating between right and wrong. Informants contextualised the self within a framework of justice, where abiding by the rules of society (moral, legal and social) guided production of their non-drinking identity positions.

“Life is a privilege. I’m not necessarily religious but I recognise that I don’t want to destroy myself ... lose the few working brain cells I have. I respect myself too much to cause harm to myself... or to inflict pain on my friends ...like cause them embarrassment or something... let alone me having to deal with myself the next day! You just don’t know what the actions you do today will impact on you or others tomorrow. I know that might sound somewhat over the top but I try to live a good life. That doesn’t mean that I wrap myself in cotton wool but I do consider my actions and what the impact might be on others and myself. I would never dream of getting a police record, or even think of getting in a car drunk ... especially behind the wheel”
(Male, infrequent drinker)

The notion of being a good citizen caused some tension in the way informants viewed those who drink to excess. Some participants mentioned that they found it difficult not to be ‘judgemental’ and ‘negative’ towards heavy drinkers. Discourses illustrated recognition of the need to respect the choice of others, yet there was conflict in accepting the current culture of intoxication as the dominant norm, especially in hindsight of possible consequences arising from intoxication.

“I try not to judge people but you know its hard when all you want to do is go out and not end up in the middle of a rowdy bunch of drunkards. You know it’s doing so much

harm. When I really think about it I have zero tolerance for people, even my friends, who think getting drunk is just 'it'! I really don't accept that this is the only way to have fun. It bothers me when my friends go out and like their aim is to get drunk and that's it. I probably sound prudish but that's how I feel." (Male, non-drinker)

For informants, the idea that individuals purposefully seek destruction of the body for the pursuit of enjoyment, pleasure and fun fuelled a sense of disconnect between the world of a drinker and that of their own identity as a non- or infrequent drinker. Excessive consumption of alcohol was not necessarily construed as loathsome, yet an individuals' loss of control when drinking to excess raised alarm bells. There was concern for, what informant's identify as a 'conscious lack of visual integrity' of individuals when drunk, which would normally not occur when sober (for example: dancing in the street, vomiting in public, violence or for females 'looking like a skag'). Informants clearly identified a disparity between the individual when drunk and the individual when sober, and recognition that in the post-consumption phase drinkers might not necessarily remember what they had done the night before.

"Being drunk just looks bad... it's such a disgrace... seeing people vomit in the gutter... it's just off! I don't think people realise what they do when they're drunk. It's embarrassing what people do and they just have no idea. I suppose their other side is revealed... sometimes this is good and other times it gets nasty... do you think they will remember who they were when they were drinking?" (Female, non-drinker)

The notion of disturbance and reconciling identity positions in relation to the visual display of drunkenness is similar to Nairn et al.'s (2006) concept of intoxication as abject. Drawing on Kristeva's (1982) theory of abjection, Nairn et al. explain the disturbance surrounding informant's identity position centres on disrespect of borders, positions and rules. For

informants excessive consumption represents loss of control, with the visual representation of the 'drunken body' associated with terminology of unappealing, unacceptable, inappropriate and to be avoided. The following excerpt illustrates how excessive alcohol consumption creates abject bodies and disturbs identities.

"I just hate it when people abuse their bodies especially when you hear stories where people can't be woken up after passing out. Why is losing control such a sought after thing?" (Female, infrequent drinker)

Informant's articulated an alternate perspective to 'disconnectedness' with those who frequently consume alcohol. The sense that 'alcohol' was not central to the leisure experience of infrequent drinkers was a surprise for excessive drinkers, as exemplified by the following:

"Many are surprised I drink not to get drunk, but because I actually enjoy the taste of certain drinks. I'm considered abnormal for not wanting to go out to excessively loud venues, spend hundreds of dollars in one evening, and not even remember the events that took place." (Male, infrequent drinker)

Informants' subject position as a non-/ infrequent drinker is in clear opposition to that of a drinker, particularly excessive drinkers. It was clear that construction of identity as a non-drinker interpreted excessive alcohol consumption as disrespectful and harmful to the self, as well as to others. The loss of control associated with excessive drinking and its presentation in the form of a drunken body validates the non-drinkers' oppositional identity. The performance of social identities that would otherwise be demonstrated in everyday life creates a sense of disturbance and tension to an individual's construction of non-drinker identity. The basis of non-/infrequent drinkers' identity is guided primarily by strong moral values where the consequences of behaviour are weighed against personal goals, social justice and respect.

In turn, this requires informants to find a balance between their personal views regarding intoxication and recognising the current culture of intoxication as a norm.

Credible identity positions beyond intoxication

Creating credible identity positions accentuates informants' authentication of the self; providing meaningful reasons for avoiding states of intoxication. For informants, the construction of a higher order alternate subject position legitimised the reproduction of a desired identity. Creating credible identity projects coexists within a broader model of laws, morals and structural frameworks enabling informants to apportion meaning to their lives. The notion of 'being a good citizen' re-emerged throughout informants narratives. Interpretations of responsibility to the self and others surfaced as essential in the cultivation of identity and practice of ongoing identity projects. As it is natural for individuals to hold multiple identities depending on roles enacted, informants also conceived their identity as possessing multiple possible selves transferring across relevant identity categories when necessary (Hogg & Mitchell, 1996). Specification of identity categories: healthy/sporty; academe/professional and religious faith mirrored those identified by Nairn et al. (2006) in her examination of non-drinking New Zealand teenagers. As recognised by Nairn et al. (2006), the actions of individuals to select other norms and subject position to legitimate rejection of the dominant norm of intoxication stem from well established and important discourses with society; validating Elliott (2004) and Jenkins (2004) assertions of a reciprocal relationship between identity and culture as integral for identity formation.

Sporty/healthy subject position

Sporty and/or healthy subject positions emerged as an important determinant of non-/infrequent drinker identity. Nairn et al. (2006) highlight the importance of sport as a

meaningful social position for non-drinking women, while this study extends the construction of non-drinking 'sports' identity for both men and women. Legitimising a non-drinking position was bound within discourses elaborating on the physical and mental impacts of health and well-being from engaging in sport; preparedness for sporting engagements and participating as part of a team. Participating in sports, especially as a member of a State or Regional team, was viewed a privilege whereby ensuring capability to perform was paramount. Informants expressed a driven desire to achieve the most out of their lives. For some, having a drink was viewed as part of celebratory activities, yet never to excess. Informants' recognised the belongingness associated with a sports team facilitated social and personal status, where the practice of refusing to consume alcohol guided a meaningful subject position of non-/infrequent drinker identity.

"I like to be able to get up in the morning and start with exercise. It gets me going for the day. I hate sleeping in and only do that when I'm sick; even then I hate it. It's a waste!" (Female, non-drinker)

"I play in the junior AFL comp... I have to have my wits about me. I worked hard to get into this team and nothing will get in the way. Ya never know I might end up in the professional league. Friends rib me about leaving early or not going out during the season... I'm not a big drinker anyway and kinda like having sport as an excuse to leave!" (Male, in-frequent drinker)

Academe/professional subject position

Similarly, academe and professional career ambitions enable enactment of alternate subject positions for non-/infrequent drinker identity. Potential impact on the future in terms of opportunities lost or gained was paramount. Issues such as loss of licence, police conviction, loss of independence and limiting professional opportunities, either current or future, were of

central concern. Informants were cognisant of a grander scheme to life where opportunities are built from directed, focussed attention and acquiring relevant skill sets to build the foundation for future success. Informants expressed a desire of goal achievement to achieve the most they could from life.

“I’d hate to think that I couldn’t do something in my life cause I’d done something stupid... like get caught for drink driving!. I’m studying to be a lawyer and having a conviction would destroy that... it’s just not worth it! I couldn’t imagine having to deal with something like a police conviction let alone having to tell my family. My friends and I are pretty motivated to learning. Education helps gives the backbone to what we want to do in life... making a difference is important, working hard and being focussed is a key part of that.” (Male, infrequent drinker)

Religious faith identity position

The final alternate construction of non-/infrequent drinker identity focused on religious practices and respect for religious constraints. In these instances, excessive consumption of alcohol is frowned upon or alternatively viewed as unacceptable. Religion not only guided a meaningful line of action for behaviour, but also facilitates legitimacy for inclusion within a specific community bound by rules, beliefs and moral structure. Individuals expressed indifference regarding the inclusion of alcohol within their life. Importantly, conforming to norms of an alternate ‘religious-based’ subject position was viewed as a more powerful construction of identity than that of the alcohol consumption norm. In this way, informants constructed an alternate subject position related to cultural beliefs embedded within broader society and/or specific communities.

“Drinking is a choice. It’s a choice that I don’t think about and don’t really care about. Alcohol is not the centre of my life. My religious beliefs are a central part of my

identity and I choose not to drink stupidly. I have a beer every now and then.” (Male, infrequent drinker)

“To integrate or not to integrate” within the intoxicated culture

Participant’s decision to be a non-/infrequent drinker in a culture where excessive drinking is the dominant norm illustrated varying levels of integration within the intoxication environment. Discourses surrounding acts to integrate, or not integrate, or to assume an artificial identity illustrates the importance of the ‘self’ within an individual’s own construction of their identity. The following narratives highlight the construction of non- or infrequent drink identity is not necessarily a static construction, but rather suggests individuals improvise their own experiences, goals, interests and social circumstances to determine the degree to which assimilation within the intoxication environment is upheld. The following discussion examines how informants construct their identity position in their choice to manoeuvre within or beyond the intoxication environment.

Resistance through self exclusion (non-drinkers)

Socialising beyond, rather than within, alcohol-infused environments enabled participants to purposefully construct their identity position as a *non-drinker* through self-exclusion. Repeated avoidance strategy performances created an identity construction of ‘them’ versus ‘us’. Not socialising within the intoxication environment interpreted and ‘I am different’ identity. Non-drinker informants acknowledge they are viewed by drinkers as ‘not cool’, as ‘outsiders’ or as ‘not belonging’ while simultaneously identifying that they ‘wouldn’t want to behave that way’, ‘who wants to be intoxicated all the time’ or ‘getting drunk is just meaningless’. Informants were strongly convicted to their subject position as a non-drinker while considering their identity position within the broader social landscape. Cognisant of not

belonging to the world of intoxication solace was sought through classification as an out-group, with this difference practiced through avoidance of alcohol fuelled environments.

“I avoid all interaction with night time entertainment... it just gets boring when people drink, get drunk and do stupid things. I like to engage in experiences with people. I went to a dry wedding the other week...people were going crazy that they couldn't drink at the wedding... but it was OK ... It was good to see people really enjoying themselves and connecting without any of the falseness that alcohol brings out in people.” (Male, non-drinker)

Resistance through integration (non-drinkers)

Overtly embracing a non-drinking subject position within alcohol fuelled spaces challenged stereotypical, well established and often unspoken conventions of ‘how one should act’ within the alcohol-fuelled environments; requiring drinkers to redefine the construct of fun, enjoyment and socialisation. Informants, via the nature of their non-drinking status, expressed a sense of ‘being different’ and felt they were viewed ‘as different’ when integrating within the night time leisure space. Yet simultaneously, non-drinkers were accepted among their drinking peers that they also could be cool and partake in the fun. Some non-drinkers who integrated in the alcohol-infused space mentioned their implicit acceptance within the drinking group centred on the invisibility of their non-drinking identity, despite not taking measures to subvert their identity. In some cases the invisibility of non-drinking status was overshadowed by the individual's personality. For others, non-drinking status was challenged yet ultimately accepted, over time, by peers. This acceptance illustrates successful management of individual expectations, both drinkers and non-drinkers, within group situations.

“I'm a hyper person anyway so people don't realise that I'm not drinking.” (Female)

‘When people realise I’m not drinking they look like stunned mullets...can’t believe it. We always get into a bit of an argument but finally they realise I really don’t want to drink... more importantly they accept that I don’t drink. That’s not to say they don’t try to get me to drink.’ (Female, non-drinker)

Integrating... sort of: ‘the veil of secrecy’ (infrequent drinkers)

An alternate strategy was to ‘integrate with alcohol’ rendering the subject position of an infrequent drinker as invisible, replicating Nairn et al’s (2006) non-drinker research. This protective strategy implies infrequent drinkers find it easier to integrate within the drinking culture, rather than opposing the dominant norm. Being seen to be involved has implications for conforming to group norms where acceptance is implicit. Informants conjured elaborate processes to ensure their identity position as an infrequent drinker was imperceptible. Part of the rouse involved ‘holding a drink’ at times for the entire social evening. Infrequent drinkers counted their drinks and would ‘fill up’ with water or soda which drinkers would not notice was not alcohol. Others would replace their alcoholic drink with their partners’ consumed beverage. Men highlighted a particular problem which tested their capabilities for passing as a drinker. A traditional Australian drinking ritual for men involves the process of ‘shouting’; requiring each member of the group to buy beers in turn. In this situation, participants would buy the first round and sit on their drink for awhile. Over time they may collect a number of drinks which the infrequent drinker would quietly distribute to others in the group. Despite strategies enacted to maintain invisibility, the key signifying element of ‘involvement in the drinking culture’ was the alcohol vessel. The container – the drink, the can, the bottle – illustrates the accoutrement of use which forms the foundation of the behaviour (i.e.: drinking) and becomes central for signification of membership.

“Yeah it’s hard sometimes. I keep an eye on the shouts. There’s no point making a fuss cause then there is just more angst about not being a big drinker. I subtly move beers along and take an empty. After a while no-one realises what I’m doing so it’s ok but at the beginning I do have to keep my wits about me. So long as you’re holding something that looks like it should hold alcohol. It’s funny ... when you do this sort of thing you see others doing it!” (Male, in-frequent drinker)

Responsibility role resistance (non-drinkers and infrequent drinkers)

The final strategy engaged to manoeuvre within the drinking culture was to assume a particular role. The roles assumed were primarily functional in nature such as designated driver or group carer. Women, in particular, were cognisant of their vulnerability. Concerns centred on protective functions by allocating a minder, being vigilant about drink spiking, taking care of inebriated friends and ensuring a strategy to arrive home safely. Moral values and respect for friends was paramount. Assumption of roles augmented a non-/infrequent drinkers’ subject position strengthening their affiliation with friends, as well as fulfilling their personal values. At times the assumption of a specific role caused some disturbance when drinkers ‘got out of control’. In this situation, the challenge of opposing the dominant norm required a balance between enjoyment of the social event and managing raucous behaviour of drinkers.

“I think you have to be more aware of things that might happen to you when you go out drinking. Although I’m not really taking on the role of a carer I end up doing it]cause I’m not drinking. I just wouldn’t want anything to happen ... like rape or whatever... it’s just something you have to think about as a female” (Female, non-drinker)

Analysis and Discussion:

It is clear from the results reported that non-/infrequent drinkers possess a strong, collective oppositional resistance identity towards excessive consumption of alcohol. Rather than creating a new behaviour, it is evident non-/infrequent drinkers maintain an oppositional resistance identity that is produced by, and produces an overarching cultural discourse *against* the dominant norm of excessive drunkenness (Cherrier, 2008; Shanker et al., 2009). As discursive constructions, each identity expresses resistance through acknowledgement, acceptance and subsequent cultivation of an identity into ongoing identity projects. The choice to operate within an alternate subculture of non- or infrequent drinking is openly declared through investment of values expressing credible, viable constructions of identity (Stets & Burke, 2000; Butler, 2004). Drawing on relevant discursive fields bounded by other social realities (eg.: sport, academe, and religion) enables the channelling of broader life ambitions and future possible selves to ‘fashion the self’ (Plumridge, 2002). This illustrates individuals actively interact with a vast array of social realities within contemporary culture to construct representations of the self and negotiate their collective identities in relation to social situations, roles and interactions (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

In contrast to this collective sense of belonging, non-/infrequent drinkers display heterogeneity when manoeuvring within intoxicated social spaces suggesting a continuum of resistance behaviour and existence of micro-subcultures within a culture of sensible drinking. Complex performances of responsible drinking within the intoxication space are displayed through a myriad coping tactics to maintain ongoing identity project as interpreted by the self. Categorising individuals’ sensible drinking performances along particular typologies of ‘performance practices’ reflects Fournier’s (1998) contextualisation of an anti-consumption resistant identity continuum; ranging from avoidance behaviours to minimisation behaviours to active rebellion. This study evidences the existence of a ‘sensible drinking performance’

continuum across active avoidance to inclusionary practices involving integration without alcohol, integrating with alcohol and role responsibility. By external processes of comparison avoidance practices enable validation of 'non-drinker in-group' with the legitimacy of their subject position continually reinforced and verified against a well defined dominant norm of drunkenness oriented drinking. It is also evident that non-drinkers and in-frequent drinkers, depending on the individual's perceived willingness to overtly display their self-identity within a public space, interact within the intoxicated culture while simultaneously rejecting consumption of alcohol or intoxication. In this instance the intoxication culture is accepted as an environment within which socialisation occurs and, as such, is not an exclusionary space. Informants are able to produce and reproduce their identity position within the collective drinking space suggesting a parallel integration of opposing subject positions (ie: non-/infrequent drinkers and intoxicated drinkers) where shared understanding of identity positions occurs within institutionalised contexts.

The acceptance of an individuals' non-/infrequent drinking status within the broader collective space dominated by an alternate way of behaving highlights how the behaviour of others who oppose the dominant norm are able to successfully infiltrate intoxicated spaces on their own terms. Non-drinker integration not only contravenes established, unspoken conventions associated with the process of becoming intoxicated, but actively legitimises the existence of an alternate non-drinking subject position within the social drinking space. Alternatively, in-frequent drinkers adopt strategies to subsume their identity within the intoxicated space as a mechanism for acceptance within the intoxicated environment (ie: adopting accoutrements of use). Interestingly, subsuming the practice of 'drinking' to maintain a veil of invisibility illustrates the long established symbolic way of socialising to manage belonging and identification without challenging the dominant norm (McCreanor et al., 2005).

Implications for policy and research

From a policy perspective, this study provides evidence for re-thinking alcohol prevention beyond a sole focus on intoxication and at-risk groups. Creating a culture of sensible drinking requires policy makers, academics, prevention specialists and other relevant stakeholders to think ‘beyond’ traditional boundaries of intoxication that have attracted most attention to date. By advocating the creation of healthier and safer drinking cultures, policy makers acknowledge the role of responsible, sensible, moderate drinking in alcohol prevention policy. Yet, the shape, form and development of cultures embracing responsible drinking behaviour remains uncertain, especially within a context where epidemiological and economic based harm minimisation prevention frameworks continue to be implemented. Emerging research evidences the relevance of contextualising intoxication within contemporary culture through a cultural lens to make sense of how young people view their social worlds. For example: Griffin et al. (2009), McCreanor et al. (2005), Measham (2004) and Brain (2000) have investigated the consumer culture surrounding extreme drinking and intoxicated consumer identities; Valentine et al. (2007) and Holloway et al. (2008) have examined geographies on drinking and drunkenness; and Batchelor (2009) has recently explored the feminisation of intoxication. This study points to a new direction in alcohol knowledge calling for greater understanding of the relationship between identity, resistance consumption and consumer culture to shed light on how meaningful subject positions of ‘*sensible drinking identities*’ are created against dominant norms in the aim to assist initiatives for creating a safer, healthier drinking culture.

This study evidences young people create their own oppositional leisure spaces without alcohol. It is also evident that drinking spaces are engineered to facilitate ‘drinkatainment’ leisure environments based around drinking and where intoxication is the perceived norm (Brain, 2000; Measham, 2004). Alongside Valentine et al’s (2010)

recommendations, consideration of a wider range of urban and night time spaces, less predicated on the consumption of alcohol, is vital for engendering a culture where intoxication is *not* the norm. Creating oppositional leisure spaces facilitates access for young people in the community to meet, build, shape and express their own identity within a safe place beyond alcohol and intoxication infused environments. At the same time, engaging youth in alcohol knowledge projects, facilitating a dialogue surrounding alcohol enables an understanding of youth issues, a connection with others, the sharing of stories and cultural values equipping youth with alcohol knowledge and responsible practice of consumption. Participants showed themselves to be critically discerning of their identity position in relation to alcohol, capability to integrate without or beyond alcohol infused environments, and equipped with skills to falsify their position as a drinker. These ambassadors of ‘responsible’ drinking have a capability to transmit their skill set in a peer-to-peer fashion among members of social networks, leveraging authenticity and immediacy of responsible drinking messages through youth relevant peer-to-peer communication (McCreanor, 2005).

Government has set an enormous task in confronting the status quo of intoxication as a cultural norm. It is evident there is a vital need for further research to harness an understanding of sensible drinking from youths perspective, but also a greater influence with government, industry and major stakeholders that shape the capability for the successful creation of healthier and safer drinking culture is critical. Attention must be directed toward understanding the performance practice of sensible drinkers and the intersection of abstainers and integrators within the intoxication space to give legitimacy to development of policy initiatives for creating a healthier and safer drinking culture.

1. The notion of the dominant prevailing norm contradicts reality. With regards to alcohol the reality of visual displays of drunkenness and street violence dominate

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