Summary

- Young adult novice drivers represent a key at-risk cohort for alcohol-related road fatalities. Little research has investigated the value perceptions of responsible drivers as compared to their risk-taking counterparts. Addressing the value-perception gap this qualitative research integrates identity theory and value expectancy theory to analyse the hedonic aspects and reward benefits of young adult drink-driving behavior.
- The study identified three categories of young adult drink-drivers: under-the-limit, borderline and extreme. Motivation drink-drive was influenced by perceptions of driving as a right versus a privilege; fear versus fatalistic attitude of drink-driving consequences, and drink-driving as a connection for escape versus utilitarian activity. Future prevention strategies for at-risk drink-drivers must be relevant, convincing and consider the dynamic and changing landscape young adults inhabit.

Introduction

Stemming risky driving behavior is an important social issue and a matter of great public interest. In Australia the economic cost of vehicle crashes is estimated at $6 billion per annum (Hawke, 1998), with alcohol as the leading single cause of all road crashes (Peder et al, 2004). Despite a reduction in alcohol-related fatalities on Australian roads from 44% in 1988 to 26% in 1998 and public health efforts promoting low-risk drinking and drink-driving alternatives, young adult drivers continue to
represent one-third of alcohol-related vehicle fatalities (Australian Transport Safety Bureau, 2004). Young adult novice drivers represent a unique cohort. First, they are relatively inexperienced as both drivers and drinkers. Second, they continually enter the market year on year. It is the combination of inexperience and the regeneration of this cohort that represents a specific challenge for road safety policy makers targeting drink-driving.

With over two decades of drink-driving prevention and continuing young adult fatalities, MacFadyn and Hastings (2002) propose prevention efforts progress towards a second generation shift. A second generation perspective places greater emphasis on the cultural meaning and symbolism of consumption. Understanding the value young adults derive from drink-driving becomes imperative as road traffic policy makers are searching for alternate prevention strategies. Surprisingly little empirical research has investigated the value-perception gap of young adult drink-driving behaviour, especially across risk propensity. The paper addresses this issue by exploring the symbolic meaning young Australians’ attribute to driving whilst intoxicated. Self identity and value expectancy theories are offered as bridging concepts to explore consumption relevance.

**Self-identity and drink-driving behavior**

Self-identify has been shown to reflect social influence and motivate behavior (Hogg and Terry, 2000). The voluntary nature of social influence is captured by the meanings and expectations individuals associate with a specific behavior, which is then
transformed into the self (Charg et al, 1988). As such, a person’s identity acts as a benchmark for their behavior.

Self–identity is comprised of two interrelating dynamics: 1) external social relationships and social-group structures which impact on the extent to which an individual considers they fulfil their societal role, and 2) internal personal processes within the self that affect behavior and self-expectations against which the expectations of others are compared (Burke, 1996; Connor and Armitage, 1998). Importantly, self-identity does not diminish over repeated performances. If self-identity with a particular behavior is central to that individual’s psyche, then repeated performances bolster, affirm and further strengthen self-identity (Sparks and Guthrie, 1998). Therefore, highly committed individuals possess high levels of psychological investment in their identities.

Previous studies have found the affect of self-identity on individual behavior (Granberg and Holmberg, 1990) and attitudes (Charg et al, 1988) to be significant. Nonetheless, the level of commitment invested on a specific behavior is dependent on the individual’s internally driven role expectation (Thoits and Virshup, 1997). In this way internally driven role expectations are represented as behaviors considered as either socially acceptable, or socially unacceptable. The complexity of the prevention task for road safety policy makers resides in altering value perceptions of the high at-risk group considered positive at the individual level, yet negative at societal level.

*Value expectancy*
While self-identity acts as a benchmark for behavior, unearthing value benefits attached to behavior assists to identify its symbolic motivational meaning. A relational perspective to value creation suggests positive economic exchanges are nested in the context of social relationships (Kimery and Rinehart, 1998). Applying a relational perspective to drink-driving prevention necessitates identifying ‘value’ benefits young adults derive from a usage perspective, as well as identifying ‘value’ benefits individuals are likely to exchange for one that is more worthwhile. Thus, value exists in its potential for use, as well as its potential for exchange. Value is further delineated by its strength or potency (Alderson, 1965). Potency is identified as the motivating force behind behavior unique to the individual and is characterised as extrinsic and/or intrinsic.

Extrinsic characteristics refer to value derived from the marketplace, and as such have broad market appeal. Extrinsic characteristics comprise primarily of moral and social variables that impact a-priori drink-driving decision-making. Road behavior trends suggest the moral climate of society is moving towards consideration that drink-driving is a shameful and unacceptable activity (Australian Transport Safety Bureau, 2004). Longitudinal studies indicate growing public understanding of speed and drink-driving risks, increases in the probability of drink-driving detection, greater support for strict approaches to speeding, as well as learner driver and drink-driving management (Peder et al, 2004, Pennay, 2004). In addition to short-term immediate outcomes road traffic authorities advocate that prevention campaigns have been instrumental in facilitating reinforcing shifts in cultural and social norms within the wider community (Mauck and Zagummy, 2000).
Intrinsic characteristics refer to the underlying individual motives used to justify drink-driving behavior which have credence within peer groups. Responsible drivers are likely to be driven by socially acceptable values, possess high levels of motivation to behave appropriately, and compare the appropriateness of their own behavior with others in society (Petty et al, 1983). Nonetheless, risk-taking behavior is endemic among young adults (Turrisi et al, 2000; Zuckerman, 1994). Evidence suggests risk-takers believe their driving skills are enhanced after drinking (MacDonald & Dooley, 1993), perceive the risks of drink-driving as over-rated, consider it OK to drink and drive (Baum, 2000), are less likely to agree to stricter laws against drink-driving, and are less likely to consider prevention alternatives (Turrisi et al, 2000). Furthermore, frequency of drink-driving increases with higher levels of blood alcohol content (Holubowycz and McLean, 1995). For excessive risk-takers, the attitude locus of mastery and confidence supersedes consideration of drink-driving or other risky driving behavior as dangerous.

The above review provides insight into attitudes, values and motivations of risky and non-risky drink-driving behavior, yet specific examination of intrinsic and extrinsic value benefits young adults derive from drink-driving behavior remains unexplored. Addressing the value-perception gap, this qualitative study explores the ‘value’ young adults place on drink-driving, or alternatively not drink-driving, in order to understand consumption relevance.

Methodology
Phenomenology principles guided the methodology for analysing young adult drink-driving behavior (Fournier, 1998). This interpretative approach encourages exploration of the participant’s ‘lived’ experiences (Thompson & Haytko, 1997) by asking what is happening, seeking new insights and assessing the phenomena in a new light. The use of everyday language becomes imperative for gaining common sense and practical understanding of real life stories and narratives. Phenomenology is an ideal framework to gain meaningful understanding of drink-driving behavior given the dynamic culture in which young adults inhabit (Berg, 1998).

Purposive sampling was conducted in a regional area of New South Wales reporting higher than average positive breathalyser tests compared to other regions in the State (Proudman, 2005). Respondents were selected as representative of young adults who possess a driving license (either provisional or full licence), regularly drive a vehicle, as well as self-report alcohol use. To ensure a cross section of the local community sampling included a mix of university and non-university students. All non-university students were employed. In total, interviewees included fifty-three young adults aged 17 to 25 years.

Interviews were held in a relaxed environment, with a topic list addressing broad non-contentious issues before exploring more difficult areas. The topic list guided the interview process. Issues that diverged from the discussion yet had a relevant connection were further explored. Interviews consisted of two phases. In phase one, participants discussed the symbolism and meaning of drink-driving from a societal perspective. They self-reported alcohol use and drink-driving frequency, which was
verified at the conclusion of the interview session to ensure consistency. This information was used to segment the cohort into three drink-drive categories: *under-the-limit drivers* (n = 15), *borderline drink-drivers* (n = 20), and *extreme drink-drivers* (n = 18). Phase two involved elaboration on the meaning and symbolism of drink-driving, or alternatively not drink-driving, from an individual perspective. Interview sessions were carried out till no new information was obtained. Interview transcripts and notes were imported into NVIVO for analysis. Table 1 synthesises qualitative outcomes across drink-driver category.

**Analysis of Findings**

**Phase one findings**

For *under-the-limit drivers* social influence was a key motivation for engaging in preventive behavior. This group chose not to drink and drive, or chose to drink within legal limits by limiting their alcohol intake when driving. Characteristics of social influence included strongly held moral values discriminating between right and wrong, consideration of long-term life issues, and peer recognition. The desire to behave according to social values was integral to the conduct of daily life. Attitudes towards driving philosophy influenced propensity to drive. Under-the-limit drivers strongly considered driving as a privilege with implicit legal and moral responsibilities.

Alternatively, *drink-drivers* were less concerned with social morals. Despite high cognitive awareness of the consequences for drink-driving, short-term personal experiences of revelry were more important on an everyday basis. Drink-drivers considered driving as an expected right of adulthood. The greater the intensity an
individual considered driving as a ‘right’, the more individualistic they were about their
driving behavior and less conscious of social and risk ramifications.

‘Driving is something that you do as soon as you are able do to … you don’t
wait … it gives you access to where ever you want to go, whoever you want to
be… it’s your freedom’ (Female, Borderline)

Two distinct groups emerged within the drink-driver market. First, *extreme drink-
drivers* self-reported driving-while-intoxicated regularly, disregarded potential for harm
consequences, were cognizant of having consumed excessive amounts of alcohol, and
engaged regularly in other risky driving behavior (e.g.: drag racing, speeding). Although
women are not typically representative of drink-drive fatalities (Senserrick et al, 2003),
they figured prominently in this group (males n = 11, females n = 7). Second,
*borderline drink-drivers* self-reported variable drink-driving behavior, considered drink-
driving as accidental, and were cognizant of the likelihood of being ‘just’ over the legal
driving limit. Borderline drink-drivers were represented equally by males (n = 9) and
females (n = 11).

Insert Table 1 about here

**Phase two findings**

Phase two focused on individual motivations for drink-driving. Interviews were
evaluated under the assumption that the three categories of drink-driving behavior
represent self-identity. It is further assumed that the motivation for engaging in risky or
non-risky drink-driving behavior represents consumption choices which are an indicator
of role behavior determining self-identity. Participants were evaluated in terms of the
intrinsic and extrinsic rewards they derived from drink-driving or alternatively not drink-driving.

Moral obligation
Moral obligation was a key intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for under-the-limit drivers. Intrinsic motivations for not drink-driving included personal responsibility to friends and self, and the obligation to prevent harm. At an extrinsic level, social unacceptability of drink-driving and stigma of loss, particularly future loss, were paramount. Future loss related to cancellation of licence, loss of current employment, limited future employment choices and loss of public and peer esteem. To avoid sanctioning under-the-limit drivers engaged in responsible drink-drive strategies including limiting alcohol consumption, appointing a designated driver, organising overnight stays, or catching a taxi.

‘Absolutely, I have zero tolerance level for drink-driving. My initial response is that the “law says it’s bad”’ (Male, UTL)

Penalty and financial issues
Additional intrinsic motivations for under-the-limit drivers included penalty and financial issues. Fear was a key driver of penalty issues. Fear of random breath testing, police conviction, attending traffic offence programs, and/or court appearances. For this group over indulgence on alcohol and fine payment was considered a waste of hard earned money.

‘The simple fear of being caught over the limit is enough.’ (Female, UTL)

‘It’s cheaper to stay sober.’ (Male, UTL)
Defiance and driving efficacy

For extreme and borderline drink-drivers defiance and driving efficacy were two key intrinsic drink-driving motivations. They possessed fatalistic attitudes towards vehicle accidents and police convictions believing ‘accidents occurred anyway’ and ‘if we get caught, we get caught’. At one level extreme drink-drivers understood the potential for harm, yet harm would happen to others who did not possess superior driving skills. Driving after drinking was considered a calculated risk. Yet, the risk was overridden by acquisition of extra confidence and a greater sense of security in their driving ability. For the extreme group, attaining self actualisation through driving efficacy was important.

‘At the point of being drunk … it’s like it (alcohol) gives people extra confidence and they’re like “I won’t crash, I won’t get caught” and so it’s like when you’re drunk you have a sense of security to drive.’ (Male, Extreme)

Borderliners considered drink-diving as a functional necessity to drive home. They self-reported probability of being ‘just’ over the legal limit for driving. Driving efficacy was encapsulated by perceived capability to drive which, in turn, was motivated by a belief that the person who ceased consuming alcohol at least an hour prior to leaving the entertainment venue was the most capable to drive home. Inherent in driving capability was maintenance of perceived safe driving practices to ensure driver concentration. For example, passengers were appointed specific roles: watcher for road side random breathalyser sites; watcher for police vehicles; front seat passenger ensured that the driver maintained safe driving and braking distance from other vehicles.
‘Everyone always in the car stays really silent and everyone does watch outs and stuff…the person driving is really careful…’ (Female, Borderline)

**Mobility and convenience**

Additional intrinsic motivations for extreme and borderline drink-drivers were mobility and convenience. For *extreme drink-drivers* alternative transport was not a considered option. Ability to leave venues without time restrictions and travel between venues was paramount. For *borderline drivers*, alternate transport options were given consideration but were not viable for a number of reasons. For example, taxis are expensive, public transport is poorly scheduled, lacked frequency and convenience, or lacked proximity to home (i.e.: distance to train or bus stop). Parents as a transport option were viewed as detrimental to self-image. For women, convenience co-related to safety either alone (walking late at night between the bus stop and home), or in group situation (waiting for a bus in town).

**Vehicle safety and possession**

For extreme and borderline drink-drivers vehicle safety was the primary extrinsic variable impacting drink-driving behavior. *Borderline drink-drivers* in particular were concerned for vehicle vandalism or theft. A strategy of leaving the vehicle in town and utilising alternative transport was considered high-risk. Consequently, extrinsic value concerns for the vehicle overrode any intentions not to drink-drive, or passenger safety.

‘I won’t leave the car in town. Too much vandalism of cars left in the street. Smashed windows or slashed tyres. I’ll make sure the car gets home.’ (Female – Borderline)
While *extreme drink-drivers* also mentioned vehicle safety, vehicle possession was an important extrinsic attribute. Males, in particular, identified driving as part of their masculinity evidenced by the type of car they owned, speed ability and engine size. As one extreme male commented ‘the larger the engine, the faster the speed’.

**Discussion**

The findings in phase one explored the symbolism and meaning of drink-driving from a societal perspective. The degree to which individuals perceive social morals and values as central to their self-identity influences their choice of drink-driving behaviour. Key factors shaping drink-driving behaviour are represented by: driving as a right versus a privilege; fear versus fatalistic attitude of drink-driving consequences; and drink-driving as a connection for escape, excitement and adventure versus a utilitarian activity. For under-the-limit drivers, responsibility of self, others and social implications (legal and moral) was imperative. They considered driving as a privilege and viewed drink-driving as morally and socially unacceptable, vigorously opposing such behaviour. In contrast, extreme drink-driver self-identity is construed through individualistic attachment to driving prowess and immediate gratification. Driving as a ‘right’ is highly valued with little consideration of social or risk ramifications. In comparison with socially responsible under-the-limit drivers, the self-identity of extreme drivers expressed egoistic motivation with the goal of increasing the individual’s own welfare. Borderline drink-drivers represent an interesting cohort straddling the divide between under-the-limit drinkers and extreme drink-drivers. Despite consciousness of road safety social and moral values, this group derive utilitarian function from drink-driving.
Justification for driving while intoxicated reveals a mixture of defiance, commonsense and rationalisation. Expectancy values of extreme drink-drivers support previous research of attachment to thrill seeking behaviour, driver efficacy and disregard for conviction (Jonah, 1997). Extreme and borderline drink-drivers exhibited similar value expectancies. For both groups, intrinsic characteristics of defiance and driving efficacy, mobility and convenience, as well as extrinsic characteristic of vehicle safety/possession explain drink-driving behaviour. Nonetheless, the strength of value and in some instances value meaning associated with behaviour serve to differentiate these two groups suggesting value expectancies differ substantially between extreme and borderline drink-drivers.

Extreme drink-drivers believe the experience of drink-driving is sublime. Drink-driving is a premeditated, accepted behaviour. It is a form of behaviour they enjoy fulfilling self on a number of levels: transformation though superior driving capability, enhanced control over surroundings, an outward expression of inner self, and defiance of authority. The vehicle represents an extension of the self symbolising individualism and machismo, is an expression of the consumption of risky behaviour where speed and vehicle modification are vital, and acts as a visible status cue.

Borderliner drink-driving behaviour is contradictory on a number of levels. Altruistically they perceive their drink-driving behaviour as accidental, yet with a functional outcome – to get home. They believe alternative prevention strategies as unacceptable, while acknowledging the likelihood of being ‘just’ over the legal limit for driving. Despite perceiving police conviction as an inevitable outcome, they engage in
precautionary driving strategies with passengers, who may also be highly intoxicated. In summary, the social-identity of borderliners represents a complex mix of defiance and utilitarian purpose with moral and social responsibility.

Under-the-limit driver locus of self is attached to societal values and morals, as well as fear of potential loss. They resent those who drink and drive and consider drink-driving as irresponsible. They have a greater sense of self within society and are active in ensuring others do not drink-drive. They derive a sense of duty, pleasure and value which is reflected in their self-identity.

**Conclusion and recommendations**

This study provides some input into understanding the deeply held values and motivations young adults hold towards drink-driving. Insight into the relationship between self-identity and value expectancy of drink-driving illustrates the dynamic interactions young people have with drink-driving. Self-identity is expressed through role behaviour, which in turn is characterised by value-expressive attitudes. The finding that the drink-driving cohort can be further segmented into groups with differing perceptions of self-identity and values as to why they drink and drive suggests clearly that drink-drivers are not all the same. Drink-driving occurs over a variety of situations and involves a myriad of justifications. As such, drink-drivers cannot be considered a homogeneous market. This outcome has important implications for road safety policy makers in developing prevention strategies.
Prevention messages for under-the-limit drivers who chose not to drink and drive, or drank within legal driving limits are likely to reinforce self-identify and pro-social drink-driving attitudes, which in turn influence their strong stance against drink-driving. The borderline and extreme drink-drivers require prevention strategies that are convincing and move individuals towards owning the problem rather than considering the problem relates to others. The fatalistic attitude of extreme drink-drivers suggests information only and/or fear-based messages may not be relevant. For this group a step-wise approach to addressing drink-driving behaviour may be necessary. The prevention objective may be better positioned in the first instance by targeting self-identity values extreme drink-drivers hold close. Borderline drink-drivers understand the consequences of drink-driving and are more likely to think about being caught than about the probability of being involved in an accident. This group is distinctive for their incongruence between the utility of drink-driving and cognition of consequences. In addition, the practical difficulty relating to convenience of alternate transport is a continuing challenge. Providing inexpensive youth relevant transport options between home and drinking venues has the potential to reduce the number of drink-drivers on the road. The key is to identify types of transport alternatives that have relevance to young adults, and importantly that young adults are likely to actively embrace. Identifying ‘cool’ transport options may also have potential to reduce the number of extreme drink-drivers on the road.

The call by MacFadyn and Hastings (2002) for prevention efforts to place greater emphasis on cultural meaning and symbolism of consumption has relevance. Targeting drink-driver self-identity and their value expectancies provides a starting point for
ensuring that the symbolism and meaning of prevention strategies has relevance to young adults. Implementing differential prevention strategies based on direct drinking-driving experiences allows for a targeted approach reflecting deliberate choices and purposes of drink-driving. Further investigation needs to examine young adult drink-driving value benefits across metropolitan, regional and country areas.
References


### TABLE 1: Symbolism and meaning of drink-driving among young adults

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Under-the-limit Drivers</th>
<th>Drink-Drivers (Borderliners, Extreme)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 1: Social Influence factors</strong></td>
<td><strong>Phase 2: Intrinsic Value Benefits</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong moral values</td>
<td>Moral values not important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term view to life issues</td>
<td>Short-term personal gratification</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer esteem</td>
<td>Driving considered a right</td>
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<td>Driving considered a privilege</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 2: Intrinsic Value Benefits</strong></td>
<td><strong>Defiance</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Moral obligation</td>
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<td> personal responsibility to friends/self</td>
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<td> obligation to prevent harm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Penalty</td>
<td> Borderliners: perceived driving capability enhanced by limiting intake of alcohol</td>
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<td> fear of police conviction</td>
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<td>Financial</td>
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<tr>
<td> less expensive to stay sober</td>
<td>Mobility &amp; convenience</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 2: Extrinsic Value Benefits</strong></td>
<td><strong>Vehicle safety and possession</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Moral obligation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td> drink-driving socially unacceptable</td>
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<tr>
<td> stigma of loss (licence, peer esteem, career implications)</td>
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