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Creating intoxicogenic environments: Marketing alcohol to young people in Aotearoaⁱ New Zealand

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Abstract

Alcohol consumption among young people in New Zealand is on the rise. Given the broad array of acute and chronic harms that arise from this trend, it is a major cause for alarm and it is imperative that we improve our knowledge of key drivers of youth drinking. Changes wrought by the neoliberal political climate of deregulation that characterised the last two decades in many countries including Aotearoa New Zealand have transformed the availability of alcohol to young people. Commercial development of youth alcohol markets has seen the emergence of new environments, cultures and practices around drinking and intoxication but the ways in which these changes are interpreted and taken up is not well understood.

This paper reports findings from a qualitative research project investigating the meaning-making practices of young people in New Zealand in response to alcohol marketing. Research data included group interviews with a range of Maori and Pakeha young people at three time periods. Thematic analyses of the youth data on usages of marketing materials indicate naturalisation of tropes of alcohol intoxication. We show how marketing is used and enjoyed in youth discourses creating and maintaining what we refer to as intoxicogenic social environments. The implications are considered in light of the growing exposure of young people to alcohol marketing in a discussion of strategies to manage and mitigate its impacts on behaviour and consumption.

INTRODUCTION

Intoxication from alcohol consumption is an ancient human phenomenon arising within complex dynamics of supply and demand, around which societies have developed multiple encouragements and restraints. Studies of alcohol use and intoxication have drawn upon diverse academic theories to describe a complex interplay of personal, cultural, historical, political and other contextual factors, to explain these behaviours, their consequences and significance (Room, 2001; Sulkunen, 2002).

Scholarship from within public health has rigorously established the links between availability, consumption and harm, and has argued for controls over many aspects of supply (Babor, Caetano, Casswell, Edwards, Giesbrecht, Graham et al., 2003; Edwards, Anderson, Babor, Casswell, Ferrence, Giesbrecht et al., 1994). However, latterly the entrenchment of neoliberal ideologies in many jurisdictions

has eroded public health alcohol policies and practices, in favour of industry-supported policies based on market forces and individual responsibility (Hall & Room, 2006; Hill & Casswell, 2004; Measham, 2006).

Sociological research into these new political economies in the UK has highlighted critical synergies between central and local government policy positions and corporate commercial activity (Hadfield, 2006; Hall & Winlow, 2005; Measham, 2006) producing what Hobbs et al. (2000) refer to as “municipal capitalism”. Drivers including profit, growth and competition among urban centers have produced youth oriented night-time economies: “a largely unregulated zone of quasi liminality awash on a sea of alcohol” (Hobbs et al., 2000:710)

Chatterton and Hollands (2002) describe the roles of corporate enterprise in producing the purpose-built “urban playscapes” of the night-time economy and Hollands and Chatterton (2003) emphasise the scale and power of corporate resources at work. These “criminogenic environments” (Hadfield, 2006) based primarily on youth leisure and consumption, have brought with them escalating concerns around violence, crime and harms (Hobbs, Hadfield, Lister, & Winlow, 2005; Homel, McIlwain, & Carvolth, 2004; Measham, 2006; Tomsen, 1997) and what in England has been referred to as “determined drunkenness within a developing culture of intoxication” (Measham & Brain, 2005:276).

In this climate a number of publications have argued that the active promotion of alcohol, especially to young people, by commercial interests is a crucial vector in

the problem of increasing consumption and harm (Academy of Medical Sciences, 2004; Babor et al., 2003; Hill & Casswell, 2004; Jernigan, 2006; Jernigan & O'Hara, 2004; Saffer, 2002). Particularly at a population level, alcohol contributes to an astonishing array of acute and chronic harms (Rehm, Room, Monteiro, Gmel, Graham, Rehn et al., 2003; Rehm, Taylor, & Room, 2006) and yet surveys show consumption to be on the rise among young people (Casswell & Bhatta, 2001; Hibell, Andersson, Bjarnason, Ahlström, Balakireva, Kokkevi et al., 2004). It is imperative that we improve our understanding of youth alcohol consumption and what can be done to reduce the harms.

Public health relies heavily on health promotion to address harms arising from alcohol use but critical approaches see it as weakened by its close alignment with neoliberal models, another product to be marketed and consumed in the identity projects of responsibilised citizens (Bunton and Crawshaw, 2002; Ettorre and Miles, 2002; Nettleton and Bunton, 1995). Such critiques lament the failure of health promoters to establish salutogenic environments and the roles of commerce and politics in establishing and maintaining health demoting environments.

This paper reports findings from a three-year investigation of the impacts of alcohol marketing among young people in Aotearoa New Zealand, as part of an ongoing effort to explore more closely links between the promotional activities of the industry and youth meaning-making practices and behaviours around alcohol. An earlier report (McCreanor, Moewaka Barnes, Gregory, Kaiwai, & Borell, 2005b) argues that, in the alcohol area, young people actively engage with promotions, in diverse, apparently enjoyable ways that produce peer-to-peer

transmissions of marketers' messages. We analyse qualitative data to describe a complex of youth-salient discourses around the themes fun/cool, identity and culture, drawn from alcohol marketing materials by our participants.

We report on the incorporation of these pro-alcohol discourses within broader youth accounts of social life that resonate with contemporaneous marketing messages and emphasise the pleasures and compulsions (but not the harms) of alcohol intoxication. These findings provide support for Measham and Brain's (2005) notion of a "culture of intoxication", although our public health orientation leads us to a somewhat different formulation that focuses on marketing within a broad set of environmental influences.

Our data reveals direct endorsements of alcohol and marketing (often linked to branded products) that are significant in their own right, illustrating what Ritson and Elliot (1999) and others refer to as the social uses of marketing artifacts. We argue that the effects of youth meanings, attached to alcohol products, combined with over-exposure to alcohol marketing, in the context of the broad shift to social orders dominated by identity-linked consumerism (Kasser & Kanner, 2003; Schor, 2004), are of great concern. Alcohol marketing invests heavily (Huckle & Huakau, 2006; Jernigan & O'Hara, 2004; King, Taylor, & Carroll, 2005) in creating what we refer to as intoxicogenic social environments, in which young people trust and value industry-given knowledge and messages presented in important domains of youth culture. We use this term to refer to the discursive social practices that engage with and utilise pro-intoxication talk to create and maintain expectations, norms and behaviours around alcohol consumption.

REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

Descriptions of drinking culture in Aotearoa New Zealand emphasise its masculinised and binge oriented character (Stewart, 1997). Wyllie and Casswell (1991) attribute this in part to patterns around physical labour, mateship and sexism laid down by colonial culture that have persisted into the present. Hill (1999) notes these masculine characteristics are symbolised in sports and related forms of nationalism.

The recent history of alcohol control in this country is well documented, with the key issues being: deregulation of the commercial environment; liberalisation of marketing controls (Hill & Casswell, 2004), and the lowering of the age of legal purchase (Huckle, Pledger, & Casswell, 2006). The Sale of Liquor Act (1989) came into force in 1990, removing controls on outlet density and lifting restrictions on trading hours. This resulted in an increase in the number and range of alcohol outlets (Hill & Stewart, 1996), the introduction of alcohol sales in supermarkets and extended opening hours in on-license premises. The legal drinking age was reduced to 18 years in 1999. Deregulation freed up the marketing of alcohol products and revisions of the Broadcasting Act (1989) increased opportunities for promotion of alcohol via sponsorship, and by 1992 allowed the broadcast advertising of specific alcohol products (Casswell, Stewart, & Duignan, 1993).

MARKETING, EXPOSURE AND CONSUMPTION

The international literature is clear that promotion of alcohol, particularly to children, is pernicious in its likely impacts on subsequent drinking. Grube and Wallack (1994) found positive associations between advertising exposure and intention to drink. In a longitudinal study, Connolly et al. (1994) found a linear relationship between recall of beer ads and later consumption in 15 year old boys. Casswell and Zhang (1998) showed links between liking for alcohol advertisements and later drinking and violence. Hill (1999) studied brand advertising in New Zealand and found linkages to local understandings of masculinity.

Alcohol promotion is never static, even in established markets, as new cohorts of young people become available as targets for marketing activity on a continual basis as they mature (Saffer, 2002). Ellickson et al. (2005) devised measures of exposure of 12-13 year olds to alcohol marketing materials in television, magazines, event promotions and point of sale advertising. With a sample of over 3000 adolescents, they found that exposure to multiple modes of marketing influenced later youth drinking. Snyder et al. (2006) found that alcohol consumption has a linear relationship with exposure to advertising and advertising expenditure in youth markets, for youth both over and under the legal drinking age. Collins et al. (2007) found that among sixth grade pupils, exposure to alcohol marketing strongly predicted both intention to drink and drinking behaviour. As Babor et al. (2003) have pointed out:

Exposure to repeated high-level promotion inculcates pro-drinking attitudes and increases the likelihood of heavier drinking... Alcohol advertising predisposes minors to drinking well before legal age of purchase. (p.183)

Studies of exposure levels of young people to alcohol marketing give serious cause for concern. Jernigan and O'Hara (2004) found that over-exposure of underage people to liquor advertising is a regular occurrence in youth media markets including radio, television and magazines. They also pointed out that less than half of the annual \$4B spent on US alcohol marketing is deployed in such monitored media. Vast resources are invested in a range of other strategies including branding and sponsorship and innovative options such as text-messaging, internet, events and guerilla marketing.

In Australia, King et al. (2005) found annual expenditure on advertising has exceeded A\$100m and evidence of over-exposure of underage media markets. Their study also highlighted reactions to advertisements, with high proportions of the study population linking specific ads to valued social characteristics (success, sexuality) and a wish to consume the product.

In New Zealand, annual expenditure on alcohol advertising for beer, wine and spirits rose from approximately \$18m in 1992 to reach \$36m by 2005 (Huckle & Huakau, 2006). Exposure of the population aged from 5-17 years, was such that 90% saw at least one televised alcohol advertisement per week. In addition a panel survey showed that, in the same age group, young people saw in excess of 500 such advertisements per year (Huckle & Huakau, 2006).

Comparing consumption data between 1995 (Habgood, Casswell, Pledger, & Bhatta, 2001) and 2004 (Ministry of Health, 2007) showed significant and marked increases in the volume of absolute alcohol consumed per survey participant. This observation held for 14-17 year olds and 18-24 year olds in both genders. Underage drinking was widespread, with young people more likely than adults to consume large amounts per session, and prevalence of consumption undifferentiated by gender or ethnicity. Young males and Maori youth were significantly more likely to consume large amounts at least once per week (Ministry of Health, 2007).

Huckle et al. (2006) report sharp rises in a range of acute, alcohol related harms among young people in New Zealand from 1999 onwards. These include fatal and non-fatal car smashes involving alcohol, drink-driving offences, alcohol-related emergency room visits and arrests for disorder offences involving alcohol.

MEANING, MARKETING AND YOUTH

Early efforts to understand the impacts of alcohol marketing focused primarily on advertising and assays of viewer reactions, finding evidence of engagement with and enjoyment of the materials (Casswell & Zhang, 1998; Wyllie, Holibar, Casswell, Fuamatu, Aiolutepa, Moewaka Barnes et al., 1997; Wyllie, Zhang, & Casswell, 1998a, 1998b). The current study sought a broad but detailed qualitative knowledge about what a wider range of promotional devices and approaches might mean to young people and what the experience of living in an environment saturated with pro-alcohol discourses is like.

Elsewhere we have written about ways in which alcohol marketing impacts on youth identity formation by contributing humour, attractive ideas, images, phrases and other resources that can be incorporated into young people's identity processes (McCreanor, Greenaway, Moewaka Barnes, Borell, & Gregory, 2005a). Theorists and researchers (Giddens, 1991; Kasser & Kanner, 2003; Schor, 2004; Winlow and Hall, 2006) have argued that consumption is now a crucial dimension of the atomized identities of the citizens of neoliberal societies and that this is particularly so for emerging generations.

METHOD

We recruited 24 groups (12 Maori, 12 Pakehaⁱⁱ) of between three and six friends with the intention of interviewing them at approximately eight-month intervals over the course of the research. We chose participant groups in three starting age bands; 14-15 years, 15-16 years and 16-17 years. For both Maori and Pakeha we opted for 4 groups each of females and 4 groups of males (8 groups) and had a further 4 groups that were mixed by gender. From these 24 groups of participants we recorded 70 interviews of a potential 72, the loss being two groups in the oldest age band who had dispersed to work and study in other cities by the time of the final interview.

In addition we recorded 29 data sessions of a 'one-off' nature with other groups of friends in whatever combinations of age, gender and ethnicity occurred within an opportunistic sample. The aim was to understand how participants experienced socialising and drinking in a range of actual youth events such as Big Day Out

(music festival), New Year celebrations, school balls/afterballs, birthday parties, weekend drinking and the like.

Two Maori (SB and HK) researchers and one Pakeha (AG) researcher used their networks and connections to establish contact with groups in a number of private and public secondary schools in Auckland. Three of the sets of longitudinal interviews were conducted with students from a secondary school in a small country town some distance north of Auckland. The one-off interviews were gathered from groups assembled from diverse start-points that arose in the course of discussions about the project within the social networks of the research team members.

Interviewers encouraged participants to talk about socialising with reference to alcohol and marketing, and were able to tape-record conversations among group members, with prompts from the interviewer. In the final interviews with the longitudinal groups and later one-off interviews, we supplemented our existing approach by showing groups a number of advertisements via laptop in order to focus discussion.

The data were transcribed verbatim and transferred for coding and analysis into the QSR N4 software package. The coded materials were examined closely through critical reading by team members, to generate descriptions of the commonalities and variations in meaning (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Taylor, 2001) afforded by constituent sections of transcript. Thematic analyses (Bryman, 1988; Patton, 1990) were undertaken using an inductive process that moved from

the body of data coded to a particular theme, toward a generalised description of the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We present textual excerpts from the coded data for three linked themes – fun/‘cool’, identity and culture – and follow on with more interpretative analyses of the ways in which the thematic complex constitutes a feature of youth social space.

FINDINGS

The findings are presented via the analysis of selected examples of mono and multi-voice excerpts, with suitable pseudonyms added, drawn from the entire corpus of transcripts. There is no attempt to consider any possible longitudinal characteristics in this paper.

Fun/cool

As might be predicted we found much evidence for acceptance, valuing and use of alcohol marketing materials among our participants and recorded many instances of such behaviours and practices. There is a strong sense that the promotional materials are themselves regarded as interesting, attractive and serviceable in a range of ways and that these characteristics, seamlessly linked to products, brands or alcohol types, constitute intoxicogenic environments. We explore a number of ways in which the climate surrounding alcohol is established as cool, exciting, or fun, within this theme.

This group discusses popular youth music festivals that they have attended. Export Gold Big Day Out (and latterly Lion Red BDO) is an international event that

makes an annual appearance on the New Zealand summer youth music circuit and has been sponsored by beer companies for a number of years.

Jo: I went to Big Day Out last year and I went to 2002. The 2002 was the best one cos Fu Fighters came. And then last year it was cool because Metallica came. But there's nothing really that exciting this year...

Jo: My boyfriend was saying something about apparently Jack Daniels was choosing the first opening act. So they might be selling Jack Daniels there this year...

Liz: Wouldn't that be cool. I went to (another event). They don't care. They're all drunk but ... get in. They just stand there drinking and like oh dude... (17yo Pakeha females)

BDO and similar gatherings are a valued part of the social calendar for these young women as they reminisce over past events and anticipate those still to come. The key draw is clearly the bands and their music but these are strongly linked, via branding of the event title and other marketing activities, to roles that alcohol marketing and consumption have to play, which are also valued and celebrated. Liz's comment confirms the co-construction of appreciation of the possibility that these underage drinkers at BDO might manage to find a way to obtain alcohol at the event and approvingly represents the organisers of another event as being relaxed about admitting intoxicated patrons.

However alcohol advertisements and other marketing materials are clearly regarded as of intrinsic value. This excerpt records a joint rendition of a television commercial. The advertisement turns around a team of "DB Export Gold thirst fighters" who laddishly take emergency calls around the neighbourhood from their base (modeled on a fire service, complete with alarms, logistics, communications, sirens, engines, equipment and other renditions of rescue culture) to save people –

touch rugby players, hot vindaloo consumers, a party that has run out of beer –
from their thirst.

Hine: Thirst quencher or ...something like that, what's it called?

Holden: Quench your thirst

Jackson: Fire thirst?

Hine: Yea that's it

All: Yea – that's the one

Hine: Instead of fighting fires they fight thirst, they help people who are
thirsty... with Export Gold.

All: Yea

Hine: And what's the one – that same ad. And they got 5 people

Jackson: You have to make a chain?

Holden: It will be a pretty short chain.

Hine: Yea (laughing)

Aaron: Five man chain

Hine: Is it five or is it three

Holden: And

Jackson: Yea its five. And then they go...oh and when they're on the rugby
field. There's these shoes and ash

Hine: Oh yea on the field

Jackson: Oh You can't save them all

Holden: Can't save them all

All: laughing

Holden: And I like it when they say my father's father's father's father

SB: So you guys are pretty on to that ad, in terms... it took you a short time
to for you guys to pick it up, what's that like?... Do you see an ad and just
run with it? You like it?

Aaron: Depends if I like it

Jackson: Yea ...if I like it

Holden: If it makes you laugh, then you'd probably go oh that was funny

All: Yea

Jackson: Yea and then you I remember it and tell your friends, have you seen that ad? Crack-up aye? (17yo Maori mixed)

While there is a striking similarity between the data and the actual advertisement, the fact that this work is done within the group shows that while the participants have requisitioned elements of content and style, they are performed and appreciated within their own context for their own purposes. They mimic the tone and cadence of the actors very well and pay attention to detail, but add in their own touches to correct and support each other in their co-performance as they go. The interjections, affirmations and laughter show an enthusiasm that comes across even in the transcript, with the additional commentary (eg "I like it when they say...") used to highlight key effects and build consensus around the attractiveness of the ironic slapstick of the advertisement. Jackson's comment about telling friends makes explicit the practices within his circles that achieve peer-to-peer transmission of the marketing materials that can produce multiplier effects for the marketer at no additional cost.

Identity

Participants made wide use of messages and content about gender, ethnicity and age-related identity from alcohol marketing materials. They spoke among themselves and to our interviewers in ways that expressed their appreciation of the

content of marketing materials as salient to who they were and their life experiences. This excerpt illustrates common themes around ethnicity and gender.

James: Have you seen those billboards...And it's got ones like oh, "Give the Māoris their foreshore; Yeah right!" (laughter) Oh yeah, and I was watching C4 last night and... there's these two guys... and one's like "Dude can I borrow your hair dryer" and then it's like orange and the orange background's like "Yeah Right!" And those DB Draught ones, these dudes, like these working men that go out and yeah, "That man deserves a DB". There's heaps of them... but even if it wasn't alcohol, it is good as. (17yo Pakeha mixed)

James acknowledges the salience and common cultural understanding of the political commentary in the first example he relates. The (Tui beer) billboard he refers to uses an ironical trope – "Yeah, right!" – that the marketer has appropriated from local usage and successfully branded (McCreanor et al., 2005a). The specific situation referred to is the highly controversial legislated confiscation of the foreshore and seabed of Aotearoa from the collective legal estate of indigenous Maori tribes in 2005. The Tui format is used to mock the grievance felt by indigenous New Zealanders and this in-joke provides an ethnic marker for the brand, effecting inclusion for Pakeha through the ridicule of Maori concerns.

To buttress his claim that there are multiple examples of such valued marketing James makes use of elements from another advertisement to perform his own version for consumption by the affinity group. The 'hairdryer' advertisement appeared on a youth music television programme, utilising the ironic format entrenched by the marketer of Tui beer, to deliver a micro-homily of how young men should and should not act. The scene is perhaps the bathroom of a student flat; two young men in towels are completing their ablutions amid steam and

mirrors. The verbal interaction that James works up is represented as right on the edge of behaviour appropriate between young men; the use of haircare equipment, in the sharing, 'feminine' bathroom setting portrayed, breaches commonplace masculine orders. Skillful use of ambiguity maintains just enough space to entertain the notion that such behaviour may be acceptable in the context of the young 'metrosexual', thus avoiding the alienation of an important market segment. Interestingly the product branding is codified and when the pivotal question "Dude can I borrow your hair dryer" is asked, 'speaks' the irony by changing the colour of the hairdryer and background of the set to Tui's livery orange. The reference to DB Draught promotions works similarly to link masculine identity to the product, as a worthy reward for the valorised ("dudes") workmen. James makes a dual point noting both the appropriateness of beer as a reward for the workers and the value derived from the masculinised marketing he has cited when he colloquially endorses it as "good as".

Other products also have identity valence, although these features are not necessarily branded in every instance and even generic forms of drink are put to work. In this extract females and males co-construct gender balance around drink styles.

Sam: RTD's like I'm thinking popular culture, thinking of popular culture there's girls', RTD's are more of a girls' drink, it's lolly water. The guys have the beer you know because it tastes good, well it depends, they can get quite sickening.

David: what's that ad with that guy?

Sam: It's woosy, apparently RTD's are woosy, they're lolly water.

Gill: Why's that?

Fran: Because they're sweet and you know they're not real man stuff because they don't taste like, the alcohol.

Sam: yeah man we drink everything straight. (17yo Pakeha mixed)

The gender demarcation represented by RTDs and beer is subjected to elaboration within this group as they debate the merits of the two styles. Both beer and RTDs are criticised, but the epithets “woosy” (evoking perhaps the more widely used term ‘wowsers’) and “lolly water” (as distinct from fire-water) are devastating for the latter. Fran evokes a widely used sub-theme in our data to the effect that RTDs are largely the domain of learner or female drinkers and the bravado of the final turn from Sam seems to reinforce the distinction. The markers of sweetness and alcohol-masking are what signifies such products as being for young females; these participants, most of whom are under, but close to legal age, inflect a disparagement of such drinks, reflecting awareness and positioning of younger drinkers. Using a masculinising trope – “not real man stuff” – to describe this fruit juice/spirit style of drink, the meaning they create and deploy is that, in distancing themselves from RTDs, speakers can avoid being categorised as immature or overly feminine.

As we reported in an earlier paper (McCreanor et al., 2005b) another way of expressing the identity impacts of alcohol marketing on young people is seen in the ‘naming games’ they enact with minimal prompting. Participants chose and attributed brand identities to themselves and others with obvious enjoyment. This excerpt illustrates the ways that branded product can be a marker of a valued ‘counter-identity’

Terry: You know what I found, I found that if you are a chick and you drink beer, guys will really respect you...I went into the city once ... and all the girls were drinking lolly water or like wine. And I pulled out a Tui from my boyfriend's box and all the guys were like "yeah", they were like "you've got the perfect girlfriend". I've had guys like telling me how impressed they are that I'm drinking beer and stuff, like really surprised that I drink beer.

AG: So what kind of woman drinks beer?

Terry: Like the girl next door, the down to earth girl... I reckon if guys see you with a beer they feel like they can relate to you more. Like more mature. (17yo Pakeha females)

Terry begins by positioning herself in a particular way, as a "chick" (commonly a male usage) so that we might expect her narrative to challenge gender stereotypes. Predictably she disparages 'feminine' alternatives in favour of a beer brand that provides her with a pleasing if unusual sense of herself. The affirmations of her status from peer group males (via her boyfriend) combine with the iconoclastic identity values of the brand and are distilled into Terry's own identity work that constructs her as approachable and mature.

Culture

Marketing materials draw to a considerable extent on the tropes and icons of local culture to ensure that they are marked by association with valued aspects of life in this country. The promotion of drinks to women, particularly premixed spirits, has contributed to changes to the gender balance in drinking practices as reflected in this data from a longitudinal interview with 17 year old Pakeha females.

Angela: back in the days it was only, the guys would go after work for a beer and not the women, and women weren't expected to go out drinking, and they were supposed to stay home and cook...

Carla: Yes, it's a lot more freedom. I think we have way more freedom in that sense of being able to go out, sort of like whatever time, or whatever (17yo Pakeha females)

Although alcohol marketing per se is not credited with achieving this change in the social order, access to and consumption of alcohol is produced as a marker of “freedom” and there is a resonance with liberatory feminist discourse - but also echoes of the neoliberal self-determining subject position in which identity and consumption are interwoven. The change to alcohol culture is coupled with changes in women’s culture and roles that seem to value the former by association.

This passage makes it plain that discourses on the products are valued currency in youth social circles.

Peter: Alcohol is one of the most trendy personal things for teenagers possible. You start a conversation about alcohol and everybody gets in on the conversation... on their own personal type and experiences. Everybody’s got their own personal opinion about what’s good and what’s bad. (17yo Pakeha mixed)

Peter is arguing that alcohol is a resource in the sense that talking about it in peer groups is important to his cohort, providing the currency for social exchanges that enact or reproduce culture. Although he does not refer to brands, in many instances in our data, the kinds of conversations Peter is referring to were exchanges either using or about marketing materials provided around particular brands. These 16 and 17 year old Maori and Pakeha males in a one-off interview provide an interesting example.

Jeff: one ad that’s been around for ages is that Speight’s one

Otto: Yeah, that’s mean

Jeff: Those have been around for years

Otto: And Heineken are always vividly in my head

Jeff: Yeah Heineken, you know where that guy grabs that Heineken out of the bin

Otto: Heineken Open

Jeff: Lion Red is like [the] league one I reckon

Otto: Nah Lion Red, reminds me of

Jeff: Woodstock reminds me of league, yeah 'cause heaps of league players drink Woodstock man (16/17yo Maori/Pakeha males)

This interchange shows how marketing materials are utilised in the process of performing male microculture, where remembering, joking and associating all link the salience of brands to favoured features (in this instance rugby league and tennis) of local youth interests. Particularly noteworthy is Otto's comment that one brand is "vividly in my head" which emphasises the availability and power of the marketing message. The upshot is demonstrated in the exchange with Jeff that becomes a collaborative account of what happens in a particular advertisement and includes delivery of the punchline which is also the name of a major sporting event sponsored by the brand, thereby achieving a double hit of positive linkage between brand and culture.

As highlighted in the preceding section, the marketing is gender linked and particular products tend to be targeted accordingly; for example, in recent years, New Zealand has seen a succession of campaigns for competing beer brands built around masculine icons (hard work, outdoor life, pioneering spirit, inventive ingenuity, ironic humour) and concepts from 'mainstream' New Zealand culture, that were noticed and analysed by our participants. The appropriation of these cultural commons for use in the marketing materials, whatever the perceived quality of the actual product, harnesses nationalist, masculine identity imagery to produce a positive valence around the products. Elsewhere we have noted ways in which this positions the brand to speak like an elder or mentor, articulating and

reproducing valued cultural messages about work, morality and aspiration, so that brand and medium are 'good' and transcend mere commercial purpose (McCreanor et al., 2005b).

Intoxigenic environments

We argue that these thematic elements of fun/cool, identity and culture along with other outcomes of marketing practices, cohere in a pervasive climate of youth meanings around alcohol that we refer to as intoxicigenic. The discursive resources available and normative in this social climate support arguments and understandings that alcohol is not for low or moderate consumption but is seen as intended for producing intoxication.

Tony: yeah well I've got to get drunk don't I? Because that's the trend ...It's just you know if everybody else is drinking you don't want to not drink. I mean I could if I wanted to, I say that of course but then... (17yo Pakeha males)

Tony is reflecting on the 'carrot and stick' character of the intoxicigenic environment in which peer pressure is applied to the abstainer and peer esteem awaits the accomplished drinker. Later in the same interview he notes that there are implications for personal "status" involved in being able to drink at least as much if not more than others in the peer group so that alcohol consumption is linked to social hierarchy. Within such environments, the risk and harms of alcohol are socially discounted. Referring to drinking to intoxication in her peer group this young woman role-plays the rationale behind such behaviour.

Emily: This is not helping me in the future but... there's nothing else to do and I'm just... I really want to have a good time for now, I don't really care about the consequences until they come... (15yo Pakeha females)

Awareness of the consequences of heavy consumption simply does not weigh against the imperatives of drinking to intoxication in a present that has been constituted as offering no alternatives and with no regard for the future.

There are direct associations between branded products and the will to intoxication.

Ed: I was just like “yes Smirnoff Blue, Smirnoff Blue, I'm going to get so wasted tonight”. I was in the taxi and I was like passing it back to see if anyone wanted it, and everyone was “no screw that shit”, and I had it straight. I was just like going, “oh you guys are just pussies”... (17yo Pakeha mixed)

In this setting where the ambience is not directly supportive of risky drinking, the role of the brand becomes more powerful. Ed reports an internal dialogue that chants the brand name and seemingly allows him to overcome the negative reactions of his friends when he invites them to join him in drinking the neat spirit. This inner talk seems to provide the resources to construct them as weak (“pussies”) and therefore, by contrast, himself as strong and therefore able to continue to drink to intoxication (which he subsequently describes).

These data show multiple instances in which young participants make meanings from alcohol marketing that create and maintain social environments where drinking to intoxication is the norm and the expectation. Participants enjoy, value, identify with and make social use of the alcohol marketing messages that are used

to create positive valence for specific products. We argue that, in their own cultural spaces, young people combine these elements into lived ideologies of alcohol intoxication.

In our study, consideration of campaigns from a production-side perspective shows the emergence of sophisticated, multimodal promotions that tap into youth discourses to produce and naturalise drinking to intoxication. One such campaign that ran in New Zealand in September 2004, the Export Gold “Rock Ride Party” took the form of a brand-based ‘competition’ for the prize of an all-expenses paid weekend at Queenstown. The winner would fly with three friends to enjoy extreme sports – as ski freestyling, snowboarding, bungee jumping – with instructors and operators. They would be hosted by a DJ who was an acknowledged youth advocate and be guests-of-honour at a gig by a popular band, with access to unlimited supplies of beer. The promotion ran for several weeks through youth radio stations, music television, and websites encouraging people to enter by text, cellphone or email. The strap-line on the bottom of an email version of the promotion read: “The best weekend you’ll never remember!”. The effects of such promotions on the winners pale to insignificance in comparison to the likely associations between product and youth-valued activities resonating through the youth spaces and cultures. Our data show that the synergistic, cumulative effects of environmental exposure of young people to alcohol marketing, creates and maintains expectations and norms for practices of drinking to intoxication.

Conclusions

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the increase in alcohol consumption by young people and growth of alcohol-related harms, coincide with steadily rising expenditure,

sophistication and diversity in alcohol marketing. We are not yet beneficiary to the widespread development of the commercialized, purpose-built “playscapes” of the night-time economy reported from elsewhere, but deregulation and changes to drinking age have radically increased alcohol availability to young people.

We argue that these material and social features cohere in intoxicogenic environments where drinking to intoxication is a naturalised outcome. Our research focuses on important themes in the discursive realms of youth cultures to highlight the salience and utility of commercially-sourced talk about the roles, value and pleasures of alcohol. While our participants at various levels show themselves to be critically reflexive readers of their social environments, including the marketing they are exposed to, in other ways they were so immersed that the marketing messages around alcohol consumption went ‘under the radar’ to become default settings that strongly influence behaviour. The data show clear evidence that marketing materials were valued by our participants, and firmly integrated into their social and cultural practices. The high-exposure, wrap-around complex of alcohol-mediated fun/cool, identity, and culture constructed by contemporary alcohol marketing creates and maintains the intoxicogenic environments that young people widely experience.

Our study also shows that through such social environments, positive messages about alcohol are transmitted in a peer-to-peer fashion among members of social networks, increasing the range and scope of the marketing and making the choice of alcohol intoxication the easy choice. For young people in particular peer-peer communications of this kind are highly normative with the effect that the

marketing messages ‘become’ (as well as come from) youth cultures and environments. As we have noted elsewhere this is an ideal scenario for marketers (McCreanor et al., 2005a) because it introduces an authenticity and immediacy which is almost impossible to emulate, in a multiplier effect that increases the effectiveness of campaigns at no extra cost.

Intoxigenic environments are not accidental by-products of brand marketing designed to compete for market share. Rather they are a component of concerted, strongly resourced commercial social engineering that blends seamlessly with hegemonic discourses of pleasure, identity and culture to encourage and support the naturalised increases in consumption that are necessary to grow the profits of enterprise capitalism. Such intoxicigenic environments are created by overlapping, integrated campaigns that include traditional media outlets and event sponsorship. There is increasing investment in new electronic media such as the internet, social networking sites, mobile phones, as well as a range of other activities often referred to as guerilla marketing (McCreanor et al., 2005a).

We feel this term complements the phenomenon of a new “culture of intoxication” observed by Brain and Measham (2005) and others, by encapsulating the purposive actions of the commercial interests in the excessive consumption of alcohol. While we agree that our data speak in various ways to the notion of “determined drunkenness”, there is a risk that this can be cast as a property of young people themselves and would prefer a critical reading of the concept to raise the question ‘determined by whom?’, to foreground the roles played by alcohol marketing in achieving these outcomes. Marketing belongs among the

‘causes of causes’, a key social determinant powerfully shaping the discursive and material conditions that produce health promoting or health demoting behaviours at a population level.

Reliance on conventional health promotion approaches to address these trenchant issues mean that weak measures that target behaviour change and under-emphasise systemic influences (Bunton and Burrows, 1995; Ettorre and Miles, 2002) will prevail in relation to alcohol. Measham (2006) notes that in the UK such policies are undercut by a neglect of the social, political and commercial contexts, especially the night-time economy within which changes in youth alcohol consumption are occurring. In Aotearoa similar observations apply and it is clear that if we wish to reduce the population-level harms arising from alcohol use and intoxication then sterner measures must be applied.

As with international studies (Jernigan & O'Hara, 2004; King et al., 2005), local data on exposure of young people under the age of legal purchase, to alcohol promotion is high and trending upwards (Huckle & Huakau, 2006). The cumulative effects of such exposures will mean that children maturing in the current environment will have experienced many thousands of advertisements and other forms of marketing by the time they reach the ages of consumption and of legal purchase. We argue that amongst other approaches to regulating the availability and consumption of alcohol, controls in the form of penalties on marketers, producers and broadcasters for overexposure of young people to alcohol promotions need to be investigated and enacted with urgency.

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ⁱ Aotearoa is a Maori name for New Zealand.

ⁱⁱ Pakeha is a Maori term for New Zealanders of European (especially British) descent.

Response to reviewer and editorial comments

We have examined the additional literature suggested by the latest review and added material on the sociology of drinking environments and particularly on the critical approaches to health promotion in the introduction and conclusion. We hope that these changes have strengthened the theoretical frame and unified the paper.

We have also attended to the other points raised (clarification of the terms 'horizontal transmission' and 'developmental') and done further light editing and a proof-read.