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**Blood Brothers**

**&**

**Southern Men**

***Engaging with Alcohol  
Advertising in Aotearoa***

**A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in Psychology at Massey University**

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**The outlines of a [text] are never clearly and stringently defined: no [text] can exist by its own powers; it always exists due to its conditioning and conditional relations to other [texts]; it is a point in a network; it carries a system of references – explicitly or not – to other [texts]...it is true that the [text] presents itself as a tangible object; it clings to the tiny parallelepiped surrounding it: but its unity is variable and relative, does not let itself be constructed or stated and therefore cannot be described outside of a discursive field.**

**Michel Foucault**

## **Abstract**

The aim of this project is to develop a robust methodological translation of the insights of 'culturalist' theoretical positions in communications studies as an alternative through which to approach contemporary media research. The focus is on engagements with alcohol advertising. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, as internationally, there is a significant body of publicly-funded research examining how alcohol advertising affects audiences. However, this thesis contends that important questions need to be asked about the adequacy of these (dominantly positivist) investigations. A review of local research identifies that in theoretical and methodological terms the majority of these studies are riddled with tensions and contradictions. In addition, when located within the context of wider developments in contemporary communication studies, an important epistemological gap is highlighted as requiring attention and debate. Comparison of this local review with international studies highlights similar concerns, particularly around 'effects' driven research, the adequacy of dominant positivist models, and the need to examine epistemological alternatives that can encompass meta, meso, and micro forms of enquiry.

A discursive-theoretical approach is then argued as an epistemological alternative that is highly congruent with contemporary communication studies, which, if more robustly translated through methodology and method, could provide a very solid 'culturalist' alternative framework for media research. Taking a contrastive, multi-voiced, context-based approach, the present research focuses on connections, divergences, or disjunctions between different participants' interpretations of, and responses to, themes, ideas and positions they perceive as existing in the ad-texts, and themes and ideas on offer about alcohol in the wider social context.

Using a methodology I describe as 'Discursive Sonar', this research highlights the socially located, interpretative complexity of advertising engagements. By unpacking that complexity, this project identifies how, and why, media engagements vary for different participants (including that of the reflexively

engaged participant researcher). By locating the interactions between participants and ad-texts within the context of wider struggles over meanings around alcohol in Aotearoa/New Zealand the research shows ways in which both ad-texts and participants reflect, employ, and debate those wider struggles.

I contrasted and compared individual participant interactions with the content and themes they identify in response to the ad-texts, with what producers intended those texts to communicate, and also with the views of the other participants. Through these analyses key textual 'mechanisms' become apparent as determining why and how engagements can be closely shared or variable between people and groups. Focusing on diversity and variance in engagements highlights cultural shifts around how alcohol is understood in Aotearoa/New Zealand, as well as significant alterations in views between the generations involved in the project. Focusing on commonalities across engagements identifies how 'interpretative communities' can be produced through textual responses, which are in turn engendered in response to commonly held constructs such as gender and age.

This project succeeds in two ways. As well succeeding in significantly developing existing 'operationalisation' of discursive theory, it also constructs a viable discursive framework through which to approach media research. It is suggested that further development of this alternative might move us beyond the barriers of abstraction and effects in media research to examine the ways in which media and other dominant discursive forms interact, and are interacted with, to shape choices in our social worlds.

## Acknowledgements

Having skimmed over many pages and notes of acknowledgment in my time, I now have some measure of what lies behind them. It is the extraordinary investment of patience and faith from all concerned. To my kids, my surprised, but always supportive, wider network of family and friends, and many of my colleagues, past and present who have all been invaluable sources of encouragement in this venture, thank you. To all those that gave their time, information, help, books, articles, emails, energy, and enthusiasm, thank you.

To Kerry Chamberlain and Joe Grixti, my supervisors turned friends, for your different versions of critique, patience, and sometimes much needed light relief – thank you. I found a quote that summed it up:

**Creativity represents a miraculous coming together of the uninhibited energy of the child with its apparent opposite and enemy, the sense of order imposed on the disciplined adult intelligence. Norman Podhoretz.**

To the research participants, without whom there would be no project, and all of whom were so open and interested, thank you. Most of all to Jeremy, my partner – what can I say? Thank you doesn't quite cover it.

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## Contents

Acknowledgements.....	v
<b>Chapter 1 An Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 2 My Locations .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Position/s .....	8
Being Taiwi (not Māori).....	11
Epistemological commitments .....	12
<b>Chapter 3 Mapping Media Studies.....</b>	<b>16</b>
Communicative paradigms .....	16
Media approaches .....	19
So where are we now? .....	32
<b>Chapter 4 Reviewing the Local Research.....</b>	<b>34</b>
1. The dominant public health approach .....	35
2. Culturalist approaches .....	48
Introducing some interdisciplinary research attentions .....	55
Key issues and themes from both sets of research .....	56
<b>Chapter 5 Re-locating the Local .....</b>	<b>68</b>
A comparative examination of international alcohol advertising research.....	68
The review process.....	68
Epistemological differences .....	69
Shifts in research approaches .....	71
(Re)locating advertising texts, and engagements with advertising texts, within social contexts.....	73
Attention to the 'youth effect'.....	75
Concern with critical absences: Pleasures and reflexivity.....	77

Commentaries on conditions of debate: Public opinions and winning in increments.....	78
Summary .....	80
<b>Chapter 6 A Discursive Approach .....</b>	<b>83</b>
Finding frameworks.....	83
What is a discursive approach? .....	84
The discursive theoretical framework of this project .....	88
The discursive subject .....	98
Diversity not relativism .....	105
In summary .....	106
<b>Chapter 7 Methodology and Method .....</b>	<b>107</b>
Operationalising a discursive approach .....	107
<b>Chapter 8 Locational Context .....</b>	<b>130</b>
Alcohol as cultural artefact/s in Aotearoa/New Zealand.....	130
The cultural diversity of alcohol's histories.....	131
Differences of culture: Māori and Pakeha .....	131
Differences of gender: Drinking in a man's country?.....	134
Moral differences: Contesting frameworks in discursive struggle.....	137
Political differences: Gender in debates.....	139
Forces of war: Mixed impacts of the services .....	140
Impacts of change: Shaping new environments .....	141
Consumption re-worked: Enacting new changes .....	143
Contemporary debates, conditions and positions: Paradoxes and political complexities.....	144

Contemporary research foci: The importance of meanings and the subject of youth .....	147
Politics and warring factions: Present states and ongoing politics .....	151
Why these contexts of struggle matter .....	157
The texts .....	158
<b>Chapter 9 Initial Engagements.....</b>	<b>159</b>
Lion Red: Interpretations and responses .....	160
Speight's: Interpretations and responses .....	184
<b>Chapter 10 Links: Points of Engagement .....</b>	<b>200</b>
Summarised issues arising .....	244
<b>Chapter 11 Relocating Positions .....</b>	<b>247</b>
<b>Chapter 12 Taking Stock .....</b>	<b>268</b>
Summarising the gains of a culturalist shift.....	270
Achieving fresh insights? Benefits of looking differently.....	294
The benefits of a discursive approach .....	301
<b>Chapter 13 Reflexive Responses.....</b>	<b>306</b>
References .....	322
<b>Appendices 336</b>	
Appendix 1: Scripts .....	336
Appendix 2: Information Sheets .....	340
Appendix 3: Consent Form .....	346

## Chapter 1 An Introduction

**After you've heard two eyewitness accounts of an auto accident, you begin to worry about history. Author Unknown**

Advertising is an extraordinarily pervasive presence in contemporary Western lives. Try going a day without being addressed by an advertising text, an hour even. Such texts have very complex possibilities for engagement, not only because of the interpretative variance inherent to any text but also because of the unique experiences individuals bring that shape their textual experiences (Buckingham & Bragg, 2004; McQuail, 1994; Van Zoonen, 1994). Academic study of the ways in which advertising texts are experienced, interpreted, made sense of, and impact, sits somewhere within and between cultural studies, media studies, sociology, psychology, and marketing. These are diverse fields indeed all working to identify some coherent framework within which such textual engagements can be understood.

My own experience of this academic diversity has highlighted for me that study is itself an interpretative act, driven by paradigms, contexts, and perspectives. What you see depends on where you stand, when you look, and what you choose to look at. Despite the wide range of epistemological, theoretical, and methodological histories and preferences in the field, it is possible to talk about media and advertising studies in a wide sense, locating one set of research in relation to another in a broader arena. Organising epistemologies tend to see studies fall broadly into positivist-empirical or culturalist-interpretative paradigms (Kellner, 1997; McQuail, 1994). This loose division reflects developments within, and indeed beyond, media studies that have seen a shift towards more post-structuralist or social-constructionist world-views. Within contemporary media enquiries, what can be termed 'culturalist' approaches are now more dominant (Kellner, 1997). However, in some areas of applied research positivist

approaches still hold sway, reflecting the academic origins of researchers (psychology and epidemiology). This has led to two distinctly different bodies of research that represent two quite different ways of understanding our worlds (Moore, 2002).

Some advertising categories stimulate more research than others, and attention becomes particularly focused when texts work to communicate ideas, or products, that are considered to be a potential source of harm. Individual products – like cigarettes and alcohol – that may be harmful to the health or social wellbeing of the public, and therefore potentially constitute a significant cost to the public purse, have stimulated not only large bodies of research but also regular streams of tax-paid funding to underwrite these activities.

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, cigarettes may no longer be advertised but alcohol can. Since the controversial arrival of alcohol advertising to mainstream media in the late 1980s (corporate ads), and early 90s (brand ads), research concerned with how such texts might engage people, and the possible effects such engagements might have, has been growing. When I examined the main body of Aotearoa/New Zealand alcohol advertising research, there was a surprising lack of consonance between this applied work and contemporary media theories. The research did not reflect the ‘fit’ I had been expecting. On closer inspection, I realised that not only was there a significant gap between this research and contemporary theories, but that even on its own terms the work contained a considerable number of theoretical and methodological problems.

What became clear was that the Aotearoa/New Zealand research critiques of alcohol advertising were very focused on the negative impacts of alcohol use. The primary research objective appeared to be to search for ways to specifically and measurably link negative impacts of alcohol use with exposure to alcohol advertisements. This research position produced very singular ‘readings’ of the advertising texts being studied, leaving significant gaps in analyses. Alternative, or variant, readings and responses to the advertising texts were notably absent. For example, when research participants suggested any texts contained

pleasurable contents, this was represented primarily as a conditioned response or as the false understanding of a duped consumer – not as legitimate views or experiences of individuals. For me, this position raised questions about whether these research enquiries were giving adequate voice to participants and their interpretations. Yet the research was presented as if it represented the voices and experiences of individuals within audiences. However, the research interpretations of what those voices were saying seemed to have been filtered too strongly through the mesh of public health concerns. This suggested a struggle was being enacted to make the research ‘mean’ in particular ways and that this struggle was problematically shaping research writings in ways that were unidentified.

In addition to the unexamined effects of the researchers’ positions, there was an absence of any concern for locating alcohol-advertising texts within any broader socio-cultural or historical analyses. From a contemporary theoretical perspective, consideration of such contexts and locations, rather than examination of texts in isolation, would be critical elements for making sense of the particular relationships Aotearoa/New Zealand communities have to those texts. Contemporary theories would argue that the way in which relationships to alcohol are set out in advertising (how it is used and by whom) will resonate, or not, because of broader social, cultural, and historical conditions. Yet there seemed to be an almost complete absence of attention to alcohol, the advertising texts, or people engaging with those, as socio-culturally and historically situated. For me this represented a problematic abstraction.

My initial analysis aroused an additional interest with how explanations were often given about what was *intended* in production. Intent is a critical issue if what is at stake is consumer harm. The research had engaged minimally with producers of texts and none had asked producers directly about their work. This absence of attention to production processes did not allow for projects that have specifically identified the importance of this aspect of analysis (e.g. Hall, 1973; O’Barr, 1994). Productions, as well as interpretations of advertising texts, require

some socio-cultural location. Production processes and producers also come from within cultural spaces and are shaped through the various social forces and communities of interests from which they emerge. However, the research was positioning producers as if they were external to, and acting on, as opposed to existing *within* communities. The research also positioned producers as fully aware of the complex and multiple processes of signification in which they were engaged. This would sit uncomfortably within more recent media frameworks, which propose that producers, like audiences, are participants who are operating at varying levels of 'awareness'. In addition, my own experience of working in the advertising industry would argue such sophisticated theoretical awareness is very unusual.

The problems and gaps I perceived in the existing research – around consideration of contemporary media developments, weaknesses with existing theoretical and methodological bases, lack of socio-cultural-historic location, homogenisation of highly variable media engagements, and a lack of reflexivity – stimulated the decision to undertake this thesis. To address what I had identified as 'the local research problem', I decided to construct my thesis to work across three main areas. Namely to: 1) provide a 'map' of the theoretical landscape of contemporary media studies; 2) critically review the main body of Aotearoa/New Zealand research, both on its own terms and for 'fit' against developments in contemporary media theories; and 3) demonstrate the advantages of a more contemporary (culturalist alternative) research approach through the example of a specific research project.

It would be fair to ask why I took issue with the orientation and accuracy of existing alcohol-advertising research in the health sector when the dominant concern of the researchers is clearly to limit the potentially damaging impacts of a product that has been connected to many negative outcomes. In part my response is because I believe that the orientation presently dominating local alcohol advertising research (the search for measurable effects) is what leads researchers to fail at their own projects. A secondary motive was one of concern

for accountability in research practices. Accountability in health research is critical, not only in order to produce research that can stand scrutiny and challenge (especially from commercial alcohol interests seeking weaknesses), but also because such research is instrumental in shaping political policies, interventions, services, material conditions, and human experiences. Public health researchers call for textual accountability, and responsibility, by advertisers (e.g. Hill, 1999), and I would like to extend that challenge back to those research communities.

This thesis, like any work concerned with the politics of representations, or representative acts, constitutes more than a concern with alcohol advertisements – or with research texts. This work is part of a larger debate about all communicative processes in our social worlds, the impacts those processes might have on individuals and communities, and about who has relationships and responsibilities to particular communicative activities. Alcohol advertising has been charged with perpetuating inequitable social systems (Hill, 1999), yet any rhetoric of social responsibility for representations must ultimately raise questions about our own accountabilities for what we represent, and the ways in which we represent, in everyday life. Accountability is perhaps most important when representations are framed by the warranting effects of powerful social institutions and positions; for example, offered to children by parents or to the wider community by scholars.

This project does not purport to offer a solution for obtaining *the* comprehensive analysis of an advertising text's impacts; it contends that the very idea is impossible. The intention is to expand the ways in which we attempt to make sense of media texts, mediatory processes, and their impacts by demonstrating significant problems with dominant approaches, and the possibilities offered by an alternative. The argument is that such expansion is necessary if media critiques are to be credible or useful.

This thesis is presented in two main sections. Section One maps and reviews the existing research situation in Aotearoa/New Zealand. This section is also where I

will establish my own commitments, positions, and interests, and where I attempt to locate myself in relation to the project, and the thesis in relation to other scholars. A brief overview then describes the main areas of media studies, reviewing key developments in the field internationally, and summarising current epistemological and theoretical positions. This overview is followed by a review of the Aotearoa/New Zealand research, in which this local work is examined both on its own theoretical terms, and also through comparison and comments about the 'fit', and variance, between these projects and contemporary media positions. This local research review is followed by an exercise in which the reviewed research is academically located in an international context. International location is undertaken by outlining a summary of issues, which are identified in worldwide alcohol advertising research and then commenting on the Aotearoa/New Zealand versus the international research positions.

Section Two sets out a contemporary media research alternative. This section is a 'test' project, designed to show how a current (epistemologically post-structuralist) media framework can be operationalised to make sense of the processes of engagement of alcohol advertising texts in order to examine the advantages an alternative approach can offer. I set out the foundation for the present research project and the epistemology, theory, methodology and method that flow from this. I then examine the interactions and analyses this approach produces. The research outcomes are then considered in terms of what they suggest such an alternative approach might contribute to solving the problems identified within the field; particularly around 'effects' and abstraction. The final chapter reviews the thesis as a process that has generated shifts, learning, and questions, through a reflexive critique.

# **Section One**

## **Mapping terrains and positions**

*There can be no single truth.*

*Judith Binney*

## Chapter 2      My Locations

**Writers aren't exactly people.... they're a whole bunch of people trying to be one person. F. Scott Fitzgerald**

*This chapter addresses some of my own positions, commitments and values in relation to this work. It also introduces one of the 'other' voices I will be bringing to this text – a voice of my own interruption. I want to allow myself to interrupt for two reasons. Firstly I enjoy the interruption of footnotes. For me they act as meaningful asides to the text, comments from the author in a slightly less than authorial voice. My primary discipline insists footnotes are not appropriate forms of communication. As a form of textual resistance I am employing a device that makes text notes instead. Secondly, I want to use this device of 'other' voices to disrupt my dominant authorial position as always coherent or complete. [This authorial voice [I/student] is likely to dominate constructions of the imaginary subject any reader might hold, but may say little about the Jane you might meet in any other circumstances. At times I will have been less sure than I may seem, and if I am sure my arrival was invariably a lengthy process. I need to add that I am more a muted green sort of a person. Sadly it does not print as well as violet.] This text is a piece in a far wider process, one filled with debate, shifts, and changes. The dominant authorial voice that speaks elides multiple shades of 'others' that constitute who might have spoken or what might have been said. So from time to time 'I' will speak through square brackets, as my text notes from an 'other'; a reminder of the multiplicity of others [e.g. mother, drinker, lover, foreigner] that I debate with as I write.*

### **Position/s**

This project is about making visible complexities and differences in a particular set of debates and yet, ironically, setting out a piece of work like this immediately

necessitates elisions of complexities and differences (Burman, 1997). Communications are shaped through positions, choices, and particular foci, so elisions are always a necessary problematic. All producers of 'knowledge' approach their subjects from particular positions that must inflect the shape, direction and findings of their work and cause different issues to become highlighted or elided (Nikelly, 1994; Pauly, 1994). It is therefore important that the inflected nature of work is made visible – as much as is possible.

I do not come to this research as an objective observer, nor would I identify such a thing as possible. My position is that of interested participant. My partner, who is supportive of my research, is a writer *directly* involved in the business of producing, amongst other things, alcohol advertising. He is responsible for many of the alcohol advertisements that are referred to in Aotearoa/New Zealand research. He is also responsible for the advertisements and advertisers' time provided for this study. We have very different perspectives on the roles and processes of advertising.

I was active in paid employment in advertising for a number of years but my view of it has latterly been shaped through engagements with a variety of critical theories – social and psychological. Through my academic engagements I have come to understand languages, texts, acts, practices, and conditions as important structuring forces that shape how we make sense of ourselves of others, and our worlds. I now make sense of my partner's work – and my own – as inherently political and as functioning in multiple and complex ways, some of which concern me greatly. My ad-writing partner makes sense of advertising in relation to his principles of creative excellence, and performance on client objectives, not being concerned day to day with the political implications of the work or of unintended levels of operation that I worry about. If he was, I suspect he could not do what he does. [I am not sure if his agreement to participate in this project reflects complete trust in me, a lack of awareness of the implications of what might emerge from any project concerned with textual responsibilities within media communications, faith in the power of the status quo to maintain

itself, or resignation to change. He said that “someone is going to do this work and it might as well be me”.]

Promotion of alcohol for consumption is a debate with which I have had complex engagements. After working actively to promote sales of alcohol through a variety of marketing and advertising roles, I shifted to paid employment in mental health. Through mental health I became involved in work addressing the tangibly negative impacts that consumption of alcohol can have for individuals, families, and communities. I have friends whose lives have been deeply damaged, and sometimes ultimately transformed, through alcohol addictions. I have two grown children who both engage in recreational alcohol consumption and some of their attitudes towards drinking and the ways in which they consume it [in larger quantities than I would like] worry me. These negatives are complicated by the fact that many of my friends and I drink alcohol for pleasure and enjoy it. I understand alcohol is a drug, one that requires approaching with awareness and respect for the possible negative consequences of its ‘misuse’ – but I cannot make sense of it in purely negative terms.

I have other complex positions, identifications, and values layered through and inflecting my work including, but not limited to, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, multiple social roles, identifications, and politics, which will also affect my approaches and ways of looking, seeing, hearing, and making sense of things. I am English, female, and what one might broadly call, politically left. This – and more – all shapes what I offer and creates a structuring framework for the work I do. Concerns and allegiances of mine – and of yours – will inflect any reading/s of this text. This is not an apology, neither is it a challenge. It is an expression of awareness of the resources, constraints, and shaping/s such positions necessarily engender. My personal challenge is to attempt to engage critically with my own positions and identifications, and to try to consider the implications of the ways in which they shape my work. In this spirit the final chapter of this thesis will be a more deliberately reflexive exercise; designed to address the

pedagogic aspects of the processes and some of the challenges this work opened up for me.

## **Being Tauwi (not Māori)**

After many years in Aotearoa/New Zealand I have come to a position of much greater self-awareness of what 'being' English in this country might mean, of some of the colonised and colonising forces that I represent and re-produce. I have struggled, and still do, with how not to falsely homogenise variance in my work; and with how to offer something useful to others, but which does not attempt to speak for others. That struggle is hardest when I try to work out how to even begin to address my felt obligations to tanagta whenua (which translates as people of the land) and honour the spirit of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (what I understand as a documented commitment to Māori sovereignty).

As a Māori programme producer said to me just recently, it is hard to imagine any Aotearoa/New Zealand research that does not in some way connect to important issues for Māori. As Tauwi I do not think one can do local research and set any connections the work has for Māori aside, but initially my greatest problem was that I felt I had no right to speak to issues that concern Māori. Taking a position of having no 'voice' can be an alibi for not dealing with very difficult issues of engagement (Gayatri, 1990). After listening to generous advice I sought out and paid attention to different 'voices' speaking to such complex research issues; voices of Māori, and of other non-Western researchers in Western dominated research environments.

The result of this process has been that I have shifted position somewhat. Māori must be able to do research for Māori but Tauwi researchers must find some way to respectfully and genuinely connect to issues in their research that involve Māori communities. Ideally this would involve a genuine partnership project, but within the context of conducting a PhD this preferable route is not really an option. Following research protocols and ethics guidelines can make work look the part of being culturally appropriate, and yet still not meaningfully address any

core issues around cultural differences in research. I can only see the world through my particular lenses but I think there are core issues around cultural differences in my research that deserve some attention. I cannot apprehend what all the issues may be, and I certainly cannot see any issues from a Māori perspective. In the end I decided that perhaps what I can do is contribute to conversations between Māori and Tauwiwi researchers within my area of work. It was in this spirit that I decided to tentatively progress.

## **Epistemological commitments**

### **A slippery scholarly position**

I work across broadly post-structuralist, social-constructionist, or critical culturalist perspectives which, as Burr (1995) suggests, are more orientations than definitions. I hold a worldview that understands dominant forms of knowledge/s as subjective human constructions about how things are. This is not to argue against there being anything 'real' but to state that what we have to say about things in our worlds (through words, acts, or artifacts) must be recognised as socio-culturally produced and located – as indeed we are ourselves. I hold (re)productions of knowledge/s to be social activities with myriad cultural-material impacts that require critical attention. As for naming where I am, at this stage I have found it very difficult to identify any label for my positions that 'fits'.

Academically, this thesis is tricky to locate; it does not sit in a bounded disciplinary space. Naming it as a doctorate in psychology, albeit one focused on media, is misleading. This identifies my departmental home but does not accurately account for the work. To understand where this thesis 'belongs', how it can be positioned, and on what criteria it might be judged, it is better described as aligned with the intent of cultural studies: seeking to draw from and move across disciplinary boundaries (e.g. Sardar & Van Loon, 1998). For me disciplines are rather like an Escher drawing. A shift in focus can reveal that what seemed contained, intricate and bounded is in fact endlessly connected to all sorts of loops in a larger maze. Theories and practices of individual fields of academic endeavour are pieces in a much larger whole; albeit uniquely inflected,

shaped as they are, through the refractory processes individual disciplines construct. Thus a work can be examined as within a field but also as part of what lies 'outside' a discipline to commonalities held across a range of academic fields.

This work is both 'outside' and 'inside' psychology and media studies. It is a work of discursive theory that happens to be focused on media. As discursive theory it holds connections to certain brands of psychology but also connects well beyond them. Associations are to the 'alternative' brands of psychologies; for example, to post-structuralist, social-constructionist, post-feminist, post-colonial, neo-Marxist, post-modern and critical psychologies. These labels bring a host of scholars to mind, people whose works have helped shape what these identifiers mean: Kenneth Gergen, Ian Parker, John Shotter, Erica Burman, Wendy Hollway and Valerie Walkerdine are just a few examples. As a work focussed on media this thesis is also connectable to similarly post-positivist and critical works of media scholars. Therefore in media terms I would position my work (humbly) alongside the likes of Ian Eng, Daniel Chandler, David Gauntlett, Celia Lury, Mica Niva, and David Buckingham. However, I am working through a framework that is new for media studies, so my work is also rather different to theirs. What I do is to take the naturalised usage these writers all offer but do not really explain about things 'discursive' and articulate a theoretical and methodological framework about discursivity.

Hence, this is a work about discursive theory. As such, I would argue it is most usefully positioned in relation to a wider discursive theoretical terrain. For example, works by Clifford Geertz, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Paulo Friere, Paul Ricoeur, Jerome Bruner, and Fredrik Nietzsche (a very small sample) whose works all resonate strongly as engaged with discursivity to me. Of course an interest in discursivity does not mean these scholars are removed from positioning by the sort of identifiers I have described above. Discursive projects to which my work might be aligned also hold clear affinities to the sort of trans-disciplinary signifiers ('posts', 'isms', or critical approaches) that I have been

talking about. So does mine. However, there is no one label I have referred to that I would comfortably take up.

To locate this work I wanted to articulate a position that both connected me to and separated me from what is ultimately a very wide ranging set of projects and scholars. This project is a work in conversation and debate with those positions and there is a politics in refusal of direct location. To resolve problems of labelling I have, for now, come to use the term culturalist. I use it to signal affinity with what is implied through declaring my academic place within cultural studies; that is, paradoxically as not having a fixable place. For me 'culturalist' signals my shared engagement with what are widely shared concerns: refusals of essentialism, a concern with making sense of social and human processes, an engagement with the potential in reflexivity, and a critique of notions of truth and objectivity. However, in using the term culturalist I also resist and seek to work around or even against some of what the labels set out above would argue or imply. To oversimplify: I remain deeply shaped through post-feminisms, but while I carry the inflection it is not the core of my work; I do not hold with the (often post-structuralist) over privileging of language; or find helpful the strength of post-modernist associations to particular times and politics, or the insistent post-modern refusals of any meta-theoretical position; neither do I share neo-Marxian insistences on certain values that for me fall too close to truth claims.

Culturalist is also useful as a term familiar within media studies. Kellner (1997) highlights this term as identifying a particular emphasis to broadly post-structuralist projects within communications studies that are strongly influenced by cultural studies. Therefore, in media terms one can understand 'culturalist' positions as approaching any study of media in social, political, and critical terms. Culturalist frameworks would include attention to public and private spaces, interacting forces, conditions and relationships, to theorising the broader social as well as getting involved in the 'ordinary' of the day to day, and they would be interested in the dialectical interconnectedness of these things.

As a 'culturalist' I signal an interest in processes and complexities, not bounding, enforced coherence or absolutes. Because I understand humanity, communities, and subjectivities as always in process and not fixed, I recognise the artificiality of stabilised moments and ideas, rather than seeing – or seeking – such things as innate or truly bounded. The theoretical framework I have found most compatible to this orientation, and appropriate to this thesis, is discursive. The detail of what this means will be set out in Chapter 5.

Scholars who align to cultural studies are also concerned about power and its operations (e.g. Sardar & Van Loon, 1998). Any participation in generating forms of knowledge about how media operate or about media contents, or about the people who experience media technologies and texts has implications for power and its distribution. Media knowledge/s inform policies, which in turn are part of the expression of balance between social controls and individual liberties (Törrönen, 2001). Media research is very political work. This point raises the complexity of the multiple and competing interests at stake in setting out information about what media and media texts do in our environments. A primary motivation for this project is to make such positions – including my own – far more of an issue.

## Chapter 3 Mapping Media Studies

**The hardest thing to learn in life is which bridge to cross and which bridge to burn. David Russell**

*Although my thesis is focused on advertising, this chapter will overview media studies approaches more generally because it is from within media studies that theories about advertising originate. I will review key areas of focus as a way of highlighting the main categories of very varied approaches to media studies and, within this review, identify where I see contemporary theories positioned. Of necessity, such an overview cannot be comprehensive. For the sake of brevity different approaches are simplified, collapsed and categorised when in reality they are complex, not easily separated and inevitably have multiple overlaps. Nor are these categorisations meant to imply that media studies have developed in any teleological fashion. The purpose of this section is simply to provide a sense of the broad theoretical landscape of media studies, the main areas of attention, and to clearly establish what I am arguing the Aotearoa/New Zealand research needs to be compared against.*

### **Communicative paradigms**

To study media is to study particular forms and processes of communications. Fundamental to life, in the broadest sense, “communication can be regarded as the [attempted] transmission of any influence (as messages) from one part of a living system to another part” (Sebeok, 1994, p.1). Mass media, their contents, and, within that, advertising texts are dominant forms within contemporary communications (Stevenson, 2002). In the majority of communities, media represent key power resources and public arenas within which major sources of expression and definition of meanings, values, and 'norms' take place (McQuail, 1994). Their pervasive presence has generated a wide range of theories as to

how mediums and their texts operate to influence, shape, and affect cultures, communities, and individuals.

Across disciplines there are different approaches to making sense of how engagements between people and communities with media and their texts might be operating. Key contributory strands can be traced through communications studies, social sciences (particularly psychology and sociology), and the humanities (most critically in structural linguistics, textual analysis, and more latterly cultural studies) (Barnard, 2000). For the purposes of setting out some explanation of what media studies encompasses and where it is 'at', some dominant genealogical strands can be unpacked into critical themes that structure both the histories of media studies, and contemporary practices (Kellner, 1997) . Approaches to 'mapping' the diversity of media studies in this way vary; structures have been based on epistemologies (Barnard, 2000), theorists (Stevenson, 2002), models (McQuail, 1994), politics (Kellner, 1997), or even breaks within traditions (Hall, 1995). The approach I will take here is to set out an overview based on key areas of focus: technologies, contents, audiences, and processes. It is an approach that I considered enabled relatively simple summarisation, but one that also drew attention to the importance of the relationships that exist between these foci of attention and theoretical and methodological developments.

Before I set out this 'rough guide', there is a different set of divisions structuring media research that needs to be clearly marked. Within all approaches you will find major theoretical, methodological, and political variances, but the most critical difference is the epistemological division between what can be termed 'positivist' and 'post-structuralist' approaches (cf., Kellner, 1997; McQuail, 1994). These terms signify a paradigmatic division in research about how the world – and the people in it – can be understood. [The terms are used here with the qualification that they necessarily collapse important distinctions because there is not the space here to articulate in detail the complexities of debates and positions surrounding these different ways of 'knowing'.]

Broadly, positivist approaches have an important history in the post-enlightenment development of Western sciences. In such frameworks, research is understood as an objective enterprise in 'truth'-seeking that can uncover measurable and generalisable facts about how media effects are produced. Researchers seek stable models through which to account for what is taking place. In contrast, post-structuralist approaches have a more recent history in critiques of modernity, and the shift that has occurred within a number of disciplines towards the recognition of the importance of language as a productive social force (Crotty, 1998). Post-structuralist – or what I refer to in this media studies context as 'culturalist' positions – highlight the way in which *all* forms of knowledge are human constructions that deserve critical attention. In these worldviews study itself is an interpretative act, shaped through paradigms, contexts, perspectives, and foci, making a reflexive approach to research a critical part of contemporary media projects. Culturalist enquiries seek to elaborate variable, as opposed to fixed, processes of socio-culturally and historically situated media engagements.

The positivist-culturalist division in media studies reflects a far broader epistemological shift in the social and human sciences (cf., Skinner, 1985). Within some disciplines, culturalist positions are the more marginal (e.g. mainstream psychology), within cultural and media studies this position is now dominant (Kellner, 1997; Van Zoonen, 1994). A qualification to this statement is required, because study of the media (as opposed to media studies as a discipline), is also conducted by groups within positivist dominant disciplines – for example, mainstream psychology. So although the culturalist approach is more generally accepted within media studies, particular groups of applied researchers conduct research grounded within more traditional positivist frameworks (Moore, 2002). It is also far from being a clear-cut division, a point that will be underscored by the research review in Chapter 4.

## Media approaches

### *Media as technologies*

The term media is often used to mean contents, either within or across mediums, but media is a plural term for commonly experienced technologies, not texts. This is not to say that mediums do not in themselves convey meanings as objects, but that this represents a different focus. Attention to what media 'do' as technologies has been the focus for a number of writers. Goody and Watt (1962-63), McLuhan (1964), Williams (1974), Meyrowitz (1985), and Baudrillard (1983) for example, have all contributed to highlighting structuring effects of media technologies within social worlds that deserve careful attention. Concerns about such effects have ranged from the impacts of particular media for whole societies, to media roles in group practices, and to media as they impact on individuals (Real, 1996). [In relation to alcohol one might consider the impact of Sky television broadcasts of sports in pubs.]

Media are not neutral containers. What they make possible, as well as how they are used, can radically alter traditional ways of doing and experiencing things (cf., Norberg-Hodge, 1991). Such alterations can become easily accepted as 'inevitable' elements of progress, and such progress naturalised as how things are (Panikkar, 1984). Debates about whether technologies should be adopted *before* they are actually used are rarely engaged in (Latouche, 1986). It has been argued that a focus on technologies appears to have taken a back seat to concerns with content (produced or received) within much of mainstream media work (Meyrowitz, 1985); a point which still has much validity. However, new media like the Internet and personal computers are [I would argue rightly] starting to renew such concerns (e.g. Manovich, 2001; Ruggiero, 2000).

A related approach – one that bridges the processes of technologies with those of contents – has been to consider media systems as distinct from, but still part of, other social systems (e.g. McQuail, 1994; Wallerstein, 1984). A media system has its own identifiable sets of practices and norms (McQuail, 1994) and its own inbuilt bias of construction/amplification (Chandler, 1996). These are understood

as interrelated with and constrained by other cultural, political, and economic social systems. A macro-focus to broader systemic concerns is an increasingly important, but not dominant, preoccupation of media studies (see Curran & Gurevitch, 2000 for discussions related to systemic concerns ). The systemic aspects that media studies *are* most intimately engaged with are systems through which meanings are produced, reproduced, maintained and potentially reworked – that is, with media contents.

### ***Media contents***

The strong emphasis on contents as a focus of media research has been, in part, an outcome of the ways in which audiences have been conceptualised. Some of the earliest writings about ‘mass media’ were concerned with the issue of ‘mass’ itself (McQuail, 1994); about how to govern it, sell to it, or about how others were seeking to do these things. Ideas about mass led to two discernibly different sets of attentions: a focus on contents as presented (texts), and a focus on contents as received (audiences). This was not the same as audience research in reception studies (see below). With audience as a recipient of mass content the social formations initially conceptualised as audiences were understood as large amorphous population bodies that contained members of all cultural and demographic groups. As McQuail (1994, p.38) identified, these individuals within audiences “lacked self awareness and could not act in groups in an organised way” – so mass audiences were understood not as acting but as being ‘acted upon’ by media contents. These masses were simply objects of manipulation and research (Ellul, 1965); the target of contents.

These concepts of mass audiences and mass responses led to mass research methods; audiences were simply homogenised groups of numbers. Large-scale surveys and quantified ratings research techniques were developed to measure and generalise ‘findings’ about responses to contents (McQuail, 1994). Development of these practices was driven, as much as anything else, by concerns with managing those responses, either as an issue of governance or as one of motivating consumers’ use of psychological models. This background led

to the emergence of what McQuail (1994, p.32) called the 'dominant paradigm' in applied media studies. This positivist paradigm relied on implicit assumptions of a normative (orderly, patriarchal, white, Western) society as the benchmark against which research about media impacts could be conducted. Strong inflections from psychological marketing traditions also led to the idea of communications as one way (linear) processes, and concepts of audiences as comprised of individuals with stable, internal traits and characteristics (e.g. Riggio, 1999). This produced the forms of applied media research which sought generalisable truths about media, responses, and effects that could be abstracted and explored by 'scientific' means (e.g. Bandura, 1973).

The actual contents of texts that it was believed audiences were manipulated by became the focus of a different strand of research. This content focus was fuelled by more ideological concerns, particularly around possibilities of mass manipulation (e.g. Althusser, 1971) and ideas about high and low culture (e.g. Postman, 1985). This high-low distinction defined cultural activities hierarchically, with forms like television representing low or 'popular' culture and understood as posing a threat to the domains of high culture and forms like art, theatre and museums. In research terms, views of mass media contents – particularly of television and advertising – as representative of low culture, led to an initial lack of attention by many media scholars to those particular texts (although in other disciplines marketers and psychologists were very active).

The concern that media contents might represent a form of mass manipulation led some theorists to take up a strongly critical stance towards the ideological operations of media – and to those using them. [Critical theories concerned with media's ideological contents overlap with concerns about the media as technologies. There a view of media as ideological apparatus also exists, reiterating the need to unpack the dual use of the term media]. These older critical media traditions have multiple genealogical strands, notably the work of the Frankfurt School and British and American forms of Marxism (Stevenson, 2002). Such traditions have understood media as ideological apparatuses of the

state (though latterly also of corporations), re-producing dominant relations, forming attitudes, and shaping ways of being (McQuail, 1994). These theories of manipulation (e.g. Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972) have left a legacy that, despite many inadequacies (particularly problems with ideas of 'distortion'), has been invaluable in drawing attention to the broader social and political roles of the media, their contents, and the association they have with re-producing dominant power relationships and ways of setting out the world or making sense – that is, 'ideologies'. Such critical work on mass content has located media as of and within a group of mutually reinforcing structuring forces that are interrelatedly re-producing and maintaining cultures (Wallerstein, 1984).

Later work around ideological contents raised concerns that earlier theorising had failed to consider possibilities for resistance, struggle, and debate. These more contemporary theorists – borrowing particularly from Gramsci – looked to broader ideas of hegemony as struggle, rather than dominance (cf., Hall, 1995). Hall theorised media texts as sites of struggle over how things could be understood, but with visibly dominant ideological ideas working to win audience consent within these ongoing processes. This still self-consciously political stream of work became most famously visible through the efforts of writers like Chomsky and Herman (1988). Gradually, more egalitarian research attentions also focused awareness on previously disregarded media forms like advertising. Advertising was understood as describing a particular framework of ideological operations within societies, and what developed into a dominant concern was the idea that advertising was operating as the 'handmaiden of capitalism' (Goldman, 1992). Advertisements were seen to be delivering information – from positions of predominantly capitalist interests – about how people should be in their worlds, and offering consumer products as providing the means to achieve those ways of being (Williamson, 1978).

What was made ideologically problematic about consumer-corporate advertising was the way in which the consumerist logic structuring it necessarily elided, or left absent, inequalities, injustices, irrationalities, and contradictions. Advertising

was heavily critiqued for promoting a normative, overly positive, vision of our world and our relationships (Goldman & Papson, 1996). The advertising vision was understood as an ideological distortion. But the notion of 'ideological distortion' problematically required some benchmark of 'truth' about how things should be, to compare such representations against. Another difficulty lay in the proposition that advertising was specifically constructing worldviews rather than offering performances that reflect something of peoples' worlds back to them. This ran the danger of advertising being viewed in isolation rather than understood within its socio-cultural and systemic locations (Montonen, 1997). Over time advertising theories were refined and advertising came to be understood as working ideologically, but as working ideologically in a dialectical relationship with the wider range of multiple practices, forces, and systems that constitute what is labelled 'culture' (Fairclough, 1992). In this way advertisements were understood as drawing on, as well as re-presenting, *particular* aspects of shared cultural resources to communicate ideas and – vitally – meanings.

Initial attention to meanings in media research located meanings within the text. A key methodological approach for analysis was semiotic. Semiotic approaches are used to determine the ways in which meanings are 'structured' within texts, attempting to identify underlying textual conventions and categorisations that work to make any systems of meanings being drawn upon in a text visible (Chandler, 2002b). Because meanings were thought to reside simply in the text, many such analyses tended to result in media 'experts' setting out their own stories about contents as if they were shared, stable, and obtainable with sufficient expertise. Over time different approaches to meanings based research made it apparent that the complexity of interpretative diversity brought to bear on a text by audiences was lacking in such accounts (cf., Ang, 1985; Nava, Blake, MacRury, & Richards, 1997).

An important issue that semiotic approaches *did* raise about contents was that some operations of texts, and people's engagements with them, work in ways that people may not be immediately aware of. To make sense of this

phenomenon required more complex theorisation about media engagements, which in turn required better theories about subjectivities than mass media theories had previously offered. In the past, media theories had tended to imply subjectivities rather than set them out (Flitterman-Lewis, 1992). A range of psychological perspectives and models were drawn on to address this need to better explain the viewing subjects' engagements, including cognitive (Bordwell & Carroll, 1996), biological (Anderson & Anderson, 1996), and psychoanalytic theories of the 'unconscious' (Prince, 1996). [I have highlighted the word unconscious here to emphasise that despite its common use in the field, it is a contested and problematic concept.]. Models provided by these divergent perspectives offered more complex theorisations about subjects within audiences. Psychoanalytic theories proved particularly popular (despite ongoing resistance to them within mainstream psychology) and they were enthusiastically taken up by many media researchers who felt they filled some of the critical gaps around subjectivities in media theories (e.g. Creed, 1998).

However, even within these imported theoretical perspectives – which acknowledged individuals and more complex processes – theories still tended to homogenise or generalise the person or the experience. Gramscian emphasis on struggle, and feminist uses of psychoanalytic perspectives, *appeared* to create space for notions of more diverse individual engagements, but ultimately people were still overly unified within these paradigms into categories – often naïve, duped (Van Zoonen, 1994), or pathological (Prince, 1996). A greater emphasis on individuals within groups, on experiential diversity, and on the complexity of the processes of receiving, interpreting, and responding to messages required attention to other influences. These influences arrived through the work of critical and politically motivated projects, particularly research from feminisms (Van Zoonen, 1994) and from developments in media research that followed the epistemological shifts wrought by the work of key theorists from post-structuralisms and social constructionism(s) (e.g. Geertz, 1983; Gergen, 1985). These projects were drawn on to problematise dominant models, which resulted

in closer attention being paid to individuals *within* audiences and opened up space for further developments in work on reception.

### ***Audience studies***

As discussed, initial theorisations and research on reception constructed an ideal spectator (for film) or viewer (of television), positioned – in a very deterministic model – as passive and vulnerable to manipulation by media texts. This reflected the dominant mass research models. Over time, however, reception studies moved to focus on members of audiences as social subjects. That said, the social subject is not an agreed idea and the paradigmatic divide identified above (between positivist and culturalist understandings of the world) is most visible in audience research, resulting in almost parallel developments in research projects. Thus, in reception studies, ideas about human subjects range from highly ‘normative’ and individualistic (positivist) models, to frameworks that make sense of a ‘generative social’, of which the individual is part and through which the person-experience is produced (culturalist). These differences are complicated by the fact that, in and between these very different world-views, theories of the subject also range (to greater or lesser extent) from passive and vulnerable (determined) to active and negotiating (agentic) (Phillips, 1999).

Various strands of work within cultural studies have introduced more complex and social understandings of the spectator/viewer. Where the positivist subject – even the more subtly influenced as opposed to straightforwardly affected subject – was still being theorised as responding in very specific and generalisable ways, the culturalist subject was theorised as unique, active, motivated, and engaged at multiple ‘levels’. In reception studies, culturalist perspectives came to inform the development of dominant models of the hypothetical spectator/viewer of contemporary media theories (Phillips, 1999).

Despite the radical shifts in media research that engendered the move towards the culturalist social subject, the positivist effects tradition remained operative in certain areas of applied research (Moore, 2002). This is particularly true of mainstream psychology where researchers’ dominant concerns remained with

measurement and quantification and vulnerable, acted upon, subjects (McQuail, 1994). A troubling characteristic of these models – from culturalist perspectives – would come to be seen as the way in which they maintained the construction of audiences as separate from researchers, implying researchers as both objective and as removed from media effects (Gauntlett, 2002).

Over time, concerns with effects models saw the development of a ‘softened’ positivist approach, emerging as ideas about perceptions and influences. Influences approaches understand media contents as having the capacity to affect attitudes and thinking longer-term in ways that will ultimately influence behaviours but that can never be understood as straightforwardly causal (Gauntlett, 2002). Audiences described by these models are still positioned as receivers in a transmission process, albeit more engaged in (cognitive) information processing activities, but they are still not the unique, active, contextually located interpreters of culturalist models, and the goal of demonstrating measurable relationships remains the driver.

The theoretical developments in audience studies also generated methodological shifts within culturalist projects, and traditional objectives and methodologies were increasingly rejected. Methodologically, research approaches became much more qualitative. This was not the small q positivist-qualitative research critiqued by Kidder and Fine (1987). Researchers now sought models that specifically resisted, rather than perpetuated, essentialising or generalising of the person or the media experience. The dominant research goal in mainstream media studies became to engage critically with the socially situated cultural, political, and economic activities of media (McQuail, 1994) and the non-linear processes by which diverse, socially situated individuals might experience those (Van Zoonen, 1994).

In contrast to earlier semiotic analyses, audience studies now located the attribution and construction of meaning as taking place within audiences rather than the texts (McQuail, 1994). In this way of thinking, media messages contained polysemic, as opposed to ‘layered’, possibilities that become realised

as meanings on the basis of the contexts and cultures of the person attending to the text (Fiske, 1987), not as discovered through semiotic mining by experts. Media texts were defined as the outcome of the ways audiences 'read' and enjoyed them (McQuail, 1994). Similarly, the idea of diverse audiences experiencing texts differently – and certainly differently from the ways suggested by content theorists – became realised through politically motivated studies attending to issues like race (Jhally & Lewis, 1992), and gender (Van Zoonen, 1994), and through attention to pleasures and meanings. Previously such responses had been overlooked (Ang, 1985).

Despite an overemphasis on the agency and power of the audience in some of this work (e.g. Fiske, 1987), such studies were important because they began to listen to, and make sense of, what audiences had to say about their experiences, rather than to ascribe meanings to them. Meanings were no longer located as stable within texts, nor as simply obtained by 'experts' alone. The initial tendency (by some) to overemphasise audiences as the source of meanings was soon critiqued (Curran, Morley, & Walkerdine, 1996) and for some, ideas shifted more comfortably into recognising meanings as (re)produced *between* text/s and individuals/s. Meaning in this sense could be understood as always – at some level – 'negotiated', not imposed. So researchers paid attention to how 'content' was interpreted, and also – a critical distinction to make – to how interpreted content was responded to (Fenton, Bryman, & Deacon, 1998).

Interpretations and responses were no longer held to be singular, not even for an individual. A text might be identified as containing a preferred or dominant meaning, but it was now understood as also containing, by presence or absence, information about the ongoing struggle around those meanings (developments drawing notably on theorists like Derrida, 1988). Struggle became understood as operating both within the text itself – in relation to broader concerns of systems and production – *and* within the ways texts could be 'read' (Goldman, 1992; Hall & Jhally, 1998) and responded to (Couldry, 2002). The complex nature of interpretation of a single text therefore became understood as not simply due to

the potential variability of interpretation between readers but also in the possibility of multiple levels of readings and in contradictions from within accounts of individual readers [including those who make a living from it, like media researchers]. From such a perspective any ongoing maintenance of positivist approaches seemed hard to justify (Curry Jansen, 2002). Individuals, be they 'naïve audience' or sophisticated critics, were all understood as engaging in a range of interpretations and responses, experiencing both possibilities for pleasures, and displeasures, towards a single text in ways that could be overlapping and even contradictory (Ang, 1985; Chandler, 2000; O'Barr, 1994). This more interpretative-culturalist view of media required attention to texts and *all* audiences, 'experts' included, and raised the possibilities of – and even the inevitability of – textual and individual contradictions.

The idea that media are a central site within which the negotiation and re-presentation of meaning takes place now underpins much contemporary media studies work (Gauntlett, 2002; Stevenson, 2002). Culturalist perspectives offer the idea of *both* media and subject position as effecting interpretative possibilities and constraints. The intricacy of the idea of constraint lies in the coexistence of dominant and less dominant meanings being potentially realisable as they inhabit the same discursive space and in the multiplicity of potential interpretative subject positions offered through such space (Hall, 1998). Despite common experiences of cultural resources and processes, meaning is therefore constrained but not closed. However, shaped expectancies can affect the way in which the 'receivers' of a message will tend to interpret the message, and result in people interpreting messages according to their expectations rather than through the triggering effect of what was intended by an 'author' (Sebeok, 1994). Constraint in this way emanates from subject positions as well as the text.

Bruner (1986), drawing on literary theories, also argues that texts can be structured with different 'aspects' that will enable meaning to be more or less constrained. This point has also been made by Phillips (1999), but in relation to the motivations of the spectator/viewer. Both are pointing out that texts can

contain different 'mechanisms' to operate on opening or closing meaning but Phillips identifies that these mechanisms are also worked on by the *motives* of viewing. Bruner's point is that some textual mechanisms function to better allow the individual to, at some level, 'write their own text'; so some texts can be deliberately more open and allow for 'subjectification' (fiction/stories/music), others function, conversely, to constrain and be more closed to contain meaning (documentary/news/research). In relation to the spectator/viewer, an example of motive may be that someone will deliberately choose to go and see a particular action movie to be entertained and therefore, despite usual aversions to violence, suspend those aversions in favour of textual pleasures. On another occasion that same person may conduct a strong critique of such films for a study and therefore different interpretative constraints will become realised through differently inflected individual motivations.

As well as being concerned with socially positioned individuals, some researchers have considered audiences as embodied beings, concerned with how biological, heritable, or physical aspects of embodiment may contribute to structuring how messages are received (Phillips, 1999). As Phillips points out, the reception of a text is responded to physically as well as emotionally or cognitively, but such concerns are not adequately focused on within media research. Exceptions have been in work examining media's operations on the senses (McLuhan, 1964), more recent cognitive studies of perceptual processes (e.g. Anderson & Anderson, 1996), or (in other disciplines) from more philosophic or evolutionary perspectives (Cole, 1996; Dennett, 1996). These more visceral or spatially situated aspects of embodied responses are, at this point in time, not a major component of contemporary theories about media, or advertising. This gap in attention to the embodied person has left a lack of emphasis on how pace, action, sound, and music can engage people (Kassabian, 2001). [A gap which seems particularly pertinent in a field like advertising where music, for example, is an almost ubiquitous feature of certain categories – such as alcohol commercials with more youthful targets.]

Within the more dominant culturalist models, although attention had finally been focused on the unique aspects and experiences of socio-culturally situated individuals, it became clear that theoretically there were still gaps requiring explanations. There was, for example, still a need to attend to and adequately theorise the *shared* aspects of experiences that unique individuals might have across groups (Hook, 2001). The difficulty this posed highlighted the complexities of the social and relational nature of the 'uniquely' occupied space of viewing. The 'individual' is distinguishable from the 'audience' but complex relationships exist between the two at a number of levels (Phillips, 1999). Common experiences, motivations, and resources can connect individuals into shared textual experiences, or at least to a sense of them as shared. Groups of individuals can also deliberately share the experience of textual engagement, which, whether at the time of viewing or in later discussions, can inflect each other's experiences and ideas about the text (Real, 1996).

Reception studies faced an additional challenge in regards to theorising advertising. Theoretically, research was focused on deliberate experiences of textual engagement, such as through the work of film studies with the spectator (Phillips, 1999) or television audience studies (Ang, 1985). Translation of these ideas about deliberate engagements to less intended engagements with advertising was not entirely satisfactory. The largely accidental nature of advertising engagements strained the credibility of attempts to translate theoretical models (such as the highly agentic Uses and Gratifications models) to work for advertising theory. Such theoretical gaps are presently being addressed through the process approaches.

### ***Process approaches***

The ongoing critiques of dominant paradigms and the reworking of culturalist-interpretative models have most recently seen the emergence of what can be termed 'process'-orientated approaches to media studies. In tackling the underlying assumptions of traditional approaches, culturalist agenda seek to engage critically with the socially situated, cultural, political, and economic

activities of media (McQuail, 1994; Nava, 1997) and to explicate the non-linear processes by which diverse individuals experience media engagements (Van Zoonen, 1994). Media, and advertisements, in these more 'processual' approaches cannot be understood as separate from other elements of culture, nor can any single texts, or individuals (Falk, 1997). Multiple practices of cultural transmission go on in unison, overlapping, colliding, reinforcing, and contradicting each other in a state of constant tension and renewal.

Many recent interpretative approaches can be defined as having a process-orientated focus. Arguably the first major work to make sense of a larger contextualised *process* was the (neo-Marxian) encoding/decoding model of Hall (1973). This model mapped elements of the interrelationship of audiences and media as a process that was neither stable nor predictable (Törrönen, 2001). Hall's model attempted to identify the multiple forces in operation, from production, through textual structuring, to interpretation. The original model was still constructed through the dominant paradigm of a 'real' – in that the process initially identified was one of systematic “distortion” (Hall, 1973, p.4) – but critically it opened up fresh space for an idea of mutual and dynamic engagement.

Later re-workings (including his own) of Hall's model focused on the ways in which it oversimplified preferred readings as dominant ideologies (Morley, 1992) and failed to acknowledge media as also delivering texts *within* which resistance or negotiation of dominant ideologies can take place (Törrönen, 2001). Such re-workings of Hall's model moved the field towards development of a framework that could finally draw the different areas of focus together. Meaning became understood as a process, one taking place within and between the elements (medium, production/text, viewer/interpreter, contexts) in the process and not residing in one or other part of it. This demanded an expanded research attention, one that could include the dialectics of contexts, production, texts, and audiences. Such models do not offer outcomes or causal links to 'truths', but instead highlight constraints and map processes (Van Zoonen, 1994).

Thus the text/audience interaction has latterly become theorised more as a mediatory process (Chandler, 2002a). Chandler, drawing on many of the ideas set out above, identifies mediatory frameworks as having shifted perspectives from traditional approaches into something much less linear with both macro, and micro-social application. In this view, the process is one where medium, production, text, and positioned interpreter intersect – within certain contexts – to mediate and constrain differently, making particular 'realities' more or less accessible. Text is entered into in dialogue, with space for oscillation or overlap with other texts/moments in play, and in this way a text may enter into dialogue with what is dominant outside itself. Such models have moved theories away from overly transmission-orientated positions but they also refuse to over-privilege the role and freedom of the viewer. Dominant ideas, cultural mores, and less critical – as opposed to more critical – engagements by audiences are recognised for the limits and constraints they engender.

### **So where are we now?**

To recap, the once dominant positivist approaches hold stable models that consider audiences as groups with stable internal traits, positioned in a transmission process, in which (through effects or more latterly influences) attitudes and ultimately behaviours may be affected by commercial content. In such models this has produced a concern with specifically identifying and measuring effects, or influences, that commercials produce. In contrast, the now increasingly dominant culturalist approaches seek to elaborate diverse ideas of variable, rather than consistent, processes of media engagements (Nava et al., 1997). Here media engagements are understood as produced through particular socio-cultural-historic conditions, in which such communications are interpretatively experienced (meaning being produced between the person and the text), as well as inflected through interactions between persons, places, conditions, and other texts. Culturalist methodologies are largely qualitative but unlike qualitative-positivist approaches, do not essentialise the subject or the

experience. [This is not to say that there is a straightforward culturalist - positivist split, or that positivist approaches do not still dominate in certain areas.]

Because of its hybrid vigour, there are no 'rules' to performing media studies. However the ways any research is performed – particularly in terms of epistemology and theory – need to be clearly addressed within *any* work (Crotty, 1998). At their core, the paradigmatic differences between positivist and culturalist positions represent radically different versions of how people and communities can be understood. Taking one particular approach over another, therefore, has vital differences in implications for research, policies, and programme or intervention designs.

For those that have taken it, the shift from positivist to culturalist positions represents a strong critique of those continuing to work to positivist-empirical models. Notions of truth to be discovered, researcher objectivity in the search, and possibilities for definitive answers have been relinquished within culturalist approaches, yet they remain the backbone of positivist media projects. At the level of what is being sought by a researcher, while positivism is engaged with a search for measurable effects, direct causality, or meanings as stable, in culturalist frameworks these things make no sense. In human terms, positivist approaches struggle to attend to, let alone account for, the diversity of people, experiences, or social processes, whereas in culturalist frameworks these things are the point of the work. Most critical of all perhaps, are the culturalist critiques of the rational individual subject that positivist-empiricism constructs, making questions of agency highly problematic, and highlighting a much more socio-cultural level of responsibility for 'outcomes' or behaviours (such as problem drinking). It is such differences in understanding that constitute the irreconcilable epistemological divide between the culturalist and the positivist.

## Chapter 4      Reviewing the Local Research

**Faced with the choice of changing one's mind or proving there is no need to do so, almost everyone gets busy on the proof. John Kenneth Galbraith**

*The previous chapter identifies the shift in media research that has led to the emergence of a culturalist-interpretative paradigm. This chapter will critically review the main body of Aotearoa/New Zealand based alcohol advertising research for 'fit' with such contemporary media enquiries, as well as for theoretical robustness on its own terms. In the Chapter 5 this local review will then be located within a wider academic context through a summarised review of key issues in international alcohol advertising research.*

[I should note here that Aotearoa/New Zealand has a small population; consequently research in any area tends to be produced by small groups of researchers. The result of critiquing research produced by only a handful of individuals is that it can read as a critique of the individuals. This is not my intention here and I apologise if this seems to be the case.]

### **The Aotearoa/New Zealand situation: Locating research in relation to a paradigmatic divide**

As might be expected, in Aotearoa/New Zealand alcohol advertising research from a health perspective tends to fall loosely into either culturalist-interpretative or positivist-empirical paradigms. What was evident when reviewing this research was that this division also, predominantly, identified the sectors engaged in research: academic projects being culturalist, and public health mostly positivist. The exception was Hill (1999), working from a public health perspective but within a distinctly social-constructionist framework. To offer a theoretical critique of the predominantly positivist public health research represented a different

proposition to a critique of the more culturalist academic studies. To manage this, I divided the two main bodies by their approach. In Section one I examine the positivist public health research; and then in Section two I examine the culturalist public health and academic research. After these separate reviews, key aspects of my critique from both sets of projects are considered.

## **1. The dominant public health approach**

### **A comment about categorisation**

My decision to categorise the majority of the public health research I reviewed as positivist might be challenged by some of the researchers. Within this body of work there are studies that are *positioned* in more interpretative frameworks (e.g. Trotman, Wyllie, & Casswell, 1994). However, this does not make the research culturalist. For example, in the Trotman et al. (1994) study the opening positioning of the research identifies an interpretative position towards understanding advertising engagements, but subsequent supporting theoretical statements argue that: with advertising “*effects are accumulated over hundreds of exposures...*” (p.7) and that such ‘effect’ is generated through “*...influence processes of conditioning, social learning, instrumental learning, and reasoned action...*” (p.7) resulting in “*...cognitive changes*” being “*produced and translated into pro-drinking attitudes and intentions*” (p.7) (italics mine). Thus the positioning may lean to the culturalist but the prevailing logic remains positivist. It has been through dominant logic (stated or implied) that I have categorised the research. This section of critique will specifically address the continued dominance of these positivist approaches in the public health sector. The problems with the positivist models have been highlighted in the previous chapter. Here I will be highlighting and discussing problems that exist within the research on its own terms.

## **Problems of structure**

The fact that there *is* interpretative positioning in some of the research highlights the way in which shifts in mainstream media approaches have, to quite a degree, impacted on the thinking of more traditionally positivist researchers. However, as the excerpts cited above indicate, the implications of these shifts have not been adequately addressed. This is an issue of structuring logic in research that requires attention. Clarity of research foundations is vital to the enterprise of enquiry, as is consistency with those foundations throughout any project. The epistemological and theoretical locations determining the research should structure any additional layers of theoretical explanations (e.g. those drawn on, or constructed as explanatory devices), (Crotty, 1998; Weiss & Wodak, 2003); and flow through to offer the same logic as structuring methodologies and methods, through which they can be assessed. However, within certain fields of research (particularly applied alcohol health where psychological positivist frameworks dominate), it is not unusual for projects to be methods driven and to lack explanations for theoretical locations (Moore, 2002). This legacy of methods driven research is likely to be the cause of the problem with the study cited. The difficulty of being methods driven is replicated throughout the local public health alcohol advertising research. Because the basic foundational locations of these projects have not been developed, the logic, theory, methods, and goals of the research lack consonance.

In the majority of local research, theories are not used to locate or explain the work. Instead theories are drawn on as extant resources of warrant to support the results of methods used. This produces substantial tensions. For example, in Wylie, Zhang & Casswell, the 'theoretical' section declares that:

There are a range of theories which explain the process whereby advertising might influence the viewer. The mechanisms discussed above in relation to the findings of the qualitative research are consistent with uses and gratifications theory (Rubin, 1986) and the psychodynamic theories such as that of Lannon & Cooper (Lannon & Cooper, 1983). They are also consistent

with Bandura's social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), which emphasises that learning takes place via modelling of behaviour that has valued outcomes. Another mechanism whereby advertising has an influence is via some form of conditioning (Atkin, 1990; Rossiter & Percy, 1987; Thorson, 1992). If alcohol is frequently shown in situations the viewer finds appealing the viewer will come to associate these appeals with alcohol, in the absence of advertising. There are a range of other theories that explain the process whereby advertising might have an influence, including mere exposure (Zajonc, 1968) and a range of information processing theories such as the hierarchy of effects models of McGuire (1985) and others (Rossiter & Percy, 1987) and the elaboration likelihood model of Petty & Cacioppo (1987). (Wyllie, Zhang, & Casswell, 1998a, p.751)

This paragraph seeks to warrant the research by drawing on multiple theories. However, utterly incompatible theories are being drawn on here in support of the same piece of research, without any explanation or reconciliation of theoretical differences. The resultant tensions completely undermine the work. For example, taking just two of the theories invoked, this happens when drawing on both Social Learning Theory (SLT) and Classical Conditioning Theory as explanation for research findings. SLT describes, in Bandura's (1977) original text, a highly dynamic relationship operating between viewer, text, and contexts. In SLT, textual meanings are produced dynamically, in interaction. In contrast, Classical Conditioning describes passive viewers acted on by a text; meaning in this model is produced as a linear effect. SLT and Classical Conditioning argue theoretically incompatible subjects: a dynamically located subject in a non-linear process, versus a passive, acted-on subject, in a uni-linear process. In the research cited, neither theory is clearly set out, nor is this use of such divergent positions reconciled. This use of theories in this problematic fashion is common (cf., Wyllie et al., 1997, p.106).

A second problem produced by drawing on theories in this general way is identifiable when the theory invoked lacks consonance with method. For example, SLT (Bandura, 1977) is often cited as support for particular research

approaches (e.g. Wyllie et al., 1997; Wyllie, Zhang, & Casswell, 1994a, 1994b). A concept drawn on by these researchers from SLT is that of 'reciprocal determinism'. Reciprocal determinism suggests a relationship between beliefs about alcohol and liking of alcohol advertisements. This idea is offered as support for research attempting to model and measure this proposed relationship. The method employed for this is structural equation modelling (e.g. Wyllie, Zhang, & Casswell, 1998b). However, SLT and structural equation modelling represent a slightly problematic pairing. Structural equation modelling is an analytical tool used here to look for amounts of media influences in linear pathways. Bandura's (1977) SLT offers an account of ongoing processes in which measure and linearity of cause and effect are meaningless because the individual and the observed are always (according to Bandura), moment by moment, dynamically shaped through experiences and contexts. Bandura's theory is of complex, interdependent, and unstable (changing) processes. Structural equation modelling is an analytic tool used on the basis of assumptions of stability.

Typically, the outcome of structural equation modelling in research identifies any results, such as correlations in theorised relational pathways, as low. For example, in one study (Wyllie et al., 1998a, p.757), the size of the relationship between 'liking of ads' and 'quantity of alcohol consumed' is 0.18, which (as even the authors state), in relational terms, is very tentative indeed. While these types of models can attempt to describe something about motivational processes, they are inevitably limited and lack predictive power. As Conner and Norman (1998, p.21) argue the problem with structural equation models is that in "attempting to offer such an explicit framework, other variables (cognitive and non-cognitive) may be neglected that are potentially important to understanding a health behaviour" (e.g. drinking excessively). This is a problem if you are working to goals of measure and prediction. As Wyllie et al. (1998a, p.758) have said themselves (in relation to this approach), other frameworks could suggest other relationships. This problem of seeking evidence for *specific* relational pathways is underlined when one considers the proposed relationship between liking ads and

quantity consumed in NZ research against overseas research. This research indicates that where ads have been banned, consumption has not been demonstrably affected (e.g. Langford, 2002).

Inconsistencies between theory and methods are also identifiable in reverse, that is, in research where methods have not been adequately examined for their theoretical implications. They also lack consonance with the initial framing of the research. To illustrate, many local studies examined were positioned as 'qualitative'. This carries strong implications, particularly if the researchers define qualitative and quantitative in opposition. One example states that: "Qualitative research offers the advantage of being able to explore responses to advertising in more depth than is possible with quantitative methods" (Wyllie et al., 1997, p.106). Framing research in this way can be read to mean qualitative-interpretative (Olsen, 1995). In media studies, if qualitative is invoked to 'mean' interpretative but the study is in fact positivist in structuring, this is misleading as well as confusing.

In the Trotman et al. (1994) example cited the authors suggest, in their content analysis of television alcohol advertisements, that a qualitative, semiotic perspective underpins the work. Drawing on Strate (1991) and Barthes (1987) the argument is offered that advertisements associate products with evocative images, and shared cultural themes, to evoke meanings. The authors suggest that such communications are impossible to measure quantitatively, and that their qualitative form of analysis can investigate and make visible cultural myths, ideas, and messages within a text. This positioning is highly interpretative. However, the *method* described is a process that recruits 10 independent Pakeha (NZ European) coders, each of whom is asked to rate and comment on 44 advertisements. Each advertisement is to be rated, on a scale of 0–5, for the presence of 17 *pre-identified themes*. This is not an interpretative study; it is a positivist approach in culturalist guise. This is by no means intended to suggest that the authors' strategy has been to *deliberately* mislead the reader. The lack of theoretical emphasis to the methodology causes the confusion.

The tensions created through unconsidered incorporation of ideas from culturalist-interpretative developments *without* theoretically working ideas through is repeated in studies that are positioned as interpretative but that then use a method of psychodynamic projection (Holibar, Wyllie, Moewaka Barnes et al., 1994). The projective technique used in the studies reviewed is a psychoanalytically derived method cited as taken from a classic Lannon and Cooper (1983) text. Whether one agrees with the Lannon and Cooper approach or not [I do not], their rationale for appropriate use of their method is clearly set out in their paper. They argue that their projective technique enables access to the level of 'unconscious' responses. But it is important to note that Lannon & Cooper identify projection as one of a number of *different* methods that should be used to explore meanings texts hold for consumers at *different* levels – and that the method *must* be appropriate to the level.

Lannon and Cooper (1983) argue that the level of engagement being researched needs to be clearly established and the appropriate method then employed. Their insistence is on a clear and consistent structure to any approach. Using the projective technique to simply access meanings *overall*, as the local researchers do, is theoretically at odds with what Lannon and Cooper had originally proposed. This is an inappropriate use of the model and there is no justification given for using it in this way. For a 'conscious' level of response, the recommendation was for structured questionnaires – which would be at odds with the interpretive positioning of the study anyway. In addition to this, as a method, projection is also dissonant with theories invoked in the same studies in support of the research, of social learning, conditioning, elaboration likelihood, and cognitive models of behaviours (e.g. Trotman et al., 1994).

Even setting aside the dissonance identified here, this use of projective techniques for media research requires more general critique. The projective method being used shifts the space of what is under investigation in the research. As the researchers cited here stated in studies using the technique, it involved:

asking all students to look into each advertisement as if it were more than just a television commercial, but rather, a scene. (Holibar, Wylie, Moewaka Barnes et al., 1994, p.8)

asking respondents to look into each advertisement as if it were more than just a television commercial, but rather a scene. (Wyllie et al., 1997, p.110)

When the methods and results of these projective processes are examined closely, it becomes clear that the participants are not so much responding interactively with a text as they are working in a space of imagining produced through the research method. This process of imaginative constructing draws the emphasis to prior experiences (of other stories or personal events) that lie beyond the immediate textual engagements. For example, Holibar, Wylie, Moewaka Barnes, et al., in relation to an ad about rugby sponsorship and winning, quote a participant as saying:

It's like all rugby league teams, if they win they have a big drunk [sic] up afterwards, and if they lose they still have a big drink up afterwards. (Holibar, Wylie, Moewaka Barnes et al., 1994, p.18)

The authors argue that this can be understood as meaning produced associatively through the text. But this talk is produced in response to a request to imagine beyond the text. It must be therefore considered that this participant is speaking of experiences or stories beyond the text generated through the method, as opposed to meanings produced through the text. Similarly, in Holibar, Wylie, Panapa et al., a participant comments – in relation to an ad about only wine being consumed on a bus trip – that:

It's just those sort of trips you drink mainly beer, some whiskey and only a couple of bottles of wine maybe...but definitely beer. (Holibar, Wylie, Panapa et al., 1994, p.14)

This participant's comment appears to be a specific recounting from well beyond the text, as opposed to a textual response. In fact, in this second example, the participant is reading *against* the text by imposing a version that requires whiskey and beer rather than the wine being advertised. These examples of recounting and resistance are unsurprising because participants are being asked to project, to imagine they were participants in a scene and what might come next. To even suggest that textual engagements generally can be explained as a process of 'unconscious' projection is a position that many theorists would reject (Bordwell & Carroll, 1996). To then argue that an unconscious act of projection can be replicated through a request to *consciously* project is a completely different theoretical proposition. The emphasis in the text-viewer dyadic is shifted into a new and different space where the subject, not the text, is now the point of emphasis in the exchange. This is a questionable technique for research purporting to examine the engagements produced *specifically* through a text. It is through this lack of consonance between theoretical explanations and method that tensions remain perpetuated as opposed to addressed.

### **Problems with the logic of the theorised subjects**

As the above critique starts to identify, theories about the viewing subject in the research are inconsistent and unexamined. For example, in the Trotman, Wylie, and Casswell (1994) research, the initial subject constructed through the opening positioning appears to be based on social learning theories (e.g., "As a powerful medium of transmission of cultural meanings, values, beliefs, and attitudes, television advertising in particular can be seen to perform part of the function of socialisation" p.7). Yet, further down the same page the viewing subject is no longer learning socially but being conditioned in a transmission process (e.g., "through influence processes of conditioning"). We are also offered a cognitive subject who has prior beliefs that advertisements are argued as able to measurably distort or alter, to negative effect (e.g., "cognitive changes are produced and translated into pro-drinking attitudes and intentions"). The problems with the multiple forms of subjectivities on collective offer in this same research project are first, as argued above, that the socialised subject is at odds

with the conditioned subject. SLT theorises processes of dynamic interactions experienced by viewing subjects, yet, the research argument immediately proceeds to return to an idea about the transmission of determining textual effects (and very specific effects too), which takes us to the second problem. The idea here is that there is a shared, stable, and normal 'base' to how people view alcohol and that this can be specifically distorted by advertising. This idea is also problematic. The implication is that the viewer will approach the text with stable, coherent, and specifically *negative* concerns about alcohol that the alcohol advertising texts will act to shift. This argument takes negativity towards alcohol as natural; a naturalisation assumption that requires critique. In addition, despite other claims to being a cognitive subject, viewing subjects are still being positioned as acted on, not interacting with. Any outcome is always produced as a linear effect from text to subject.

The next argument is offered that cognitive shifts are obtained through a form of negotiation because perceived costs of drinking can be reduced through promotion of alcohol as a harmless substance (also Trotman et al., 1994, p.7). Even if one accepts the more agentic subject implied, some form of prior negotiation, and interaction with those in the present moment with a text must be implicated. This notion of prior destabilises any idea of a specific construct to measure (pre-existing stable ideas about alcohol acted on specifically by the text) and argues a social and highly variable process. Ultimately the structuring logic remains driven by a persistent goal of proving effects.

A similar dissonance is generated in studies that set out an argument for a more active subject. For example, in Wyllie et al., active viewers are described as:

active recipients of media messages who vary in the level of attention paid and their response depending on their own needs and motives. (Wyllie et al., 1994b, p.5)

This research draws on a mix of the Petty et al. (1987) Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and Uses and Gratifications (U & G) theories (Ruggiero, 2000) to

explain 'active' viewer engagements. An ELM suggests that viewers will engage somewhere within a range of high to low elaboration when attending to persuasive messages ('elaboration' is defined as the amount a person will think about the message). The ELM proposition is that when viewers are motivated and can process the core content of a message they are influenced by the strength and quality of arguments offered by a text. When viewers are not motivated to attend to core ideas, it is suggested that they attend to peripheral cues – those irrelevant to the advertisement's main content but that still have appeal. In attending to peripheral cues, viewers are able to evaluate a message without extensive engagement. Thus, in the ELM, 'persuasion' takes place through either high or low elaboration likelihood – with attitude change able to be generated either way. So, 'active' here simply means a person is more or less engaged when receiving a message. There is little possibility of agency involving resistance or refusal. This subject is only *active* by virtue of attention and response being variable, so the viewer is only theorised as more or less involved. ELM does not allow for interpretive variability (of text or person) around meanings; the content of the text is still stable, as is the person. Hence, we are still dealing with the effects of texts as they act on viewers.

U & G theory is also invoked in research (e.g. Wyllie et al., 1994b). The U & G definition of an active viewer is of a subject motivated to *intentionally* and selectively engage with media and media contents. U & G looks to the psychology of the subject and the personality of the viewer, theorising the subject as having a range of psychological or social needs that engagements with mediums, or media texts, fulfil for them. U & G is about actively choosing to watch what is on offer. How this can work when related to advertising – which few individuals choose to sit down to watch in the ways U & G describes [media researchers' perhaps being an exception] – is not addressed. Yet, Wyllie et al. argue that the U & G theory of an active viewer is realised in their study because they are using advertisements the participants can recall having seen – the study's measure of 'active' engagement in the research (Wyllie et al., 1994b). Demonstration of recall is not what U & G theory means by an active viewer.

Active in U & G relates to the form (functional, instrumental) of the engagement. In fact, U & G can be argued to undermine concerns with alcohol advertising, because theoretically the viewer is engaged in highly agentic textual, or media, selections. Theoretically, motive will determine both selections and interpretative responses. This destabilises notions of effects.

The multiple theories about media viewers being drawn on in many of the studies reviewed are not being adequately assessed for their implications, their differences, or their contradictions. The logic seems to be that it does not matter what the subject constructions are as long as some arguments are present that can be employed to maintain a concern with the core motivation of proving advertising effects.

It would be fair to say that there can seem to be some commonality between the subjects implied through theories like SLT, analytic strategies like SEM, and culturalist media subjects. SLT seems to be a theory about more relational, rather than purely individualistic, explanations for media engagements. However, in culturalist terms – despite the emphasis to contexts and the social – Bandura still theorised from a predominantly individualistic paradigm. Bandura's paradigm was based on giving primacy to essential, or innate, mechanisms (drawing strongly on trait theory). So whilst SLT can have resemblance to, and resonance with, contemporary media theories of dynamic processes, the Banduran subject is not compatible with the culturalist-interpretative subject. The logic underpinning SEM also suggests more complex, and sometimes relational, interactions. Equally, although the SEM analysis in the study cited (Wyllie et al., 1997) does suggest more complex interactions than traditional 'effects' models, the logic of SEM still offers a world in which an individual is identified as the source of their sense of self and as engaged in some form of modificatory relationship with the external world. This persistently positivist construction of the subject remains problematic within culturalist frameworks.

## **Problems with the research goal to measure effects**

Despite interpretative positioning, or the use of language that softens the notion of effects to a search for influences (e.g. Wyllie et al., 1998b), the consistent goal structuring the majority of research projects reviewed was clearly to obtain *evidence* for a link between alcohol advertising texts and problems associated with alcohol consumption (e.g. Thomson, Bradley, Casswell, & Wyllie, 1994; Wyllie et al., 1994b). To establish any proof of 'effects' requires forms of their measure. Setting aside (for a moment) problems with ideas that media 'effects' are sufficiently stable and isolable, to *be* measured, the concept of measurement raises questions about the validity of the tools being used to measure with (Weilbacher, 2001). For example, when participants in one study are asked about what is being communicated by particular alcohol advertisements, the tool of measurement used is a survey, constructed of multiple items developed by the researchers (Wyllie et al., 1998b). A typical item asks participants to agree or disagree that an advertisement is communicating a particular idea. Respondents may or may not have interpreted what is being asked as implied by the texts, but they must respond to each item question as if they *had* considered the question of whether the texts were communicating in this way. So although a study can purport to be reporting on "10 – 17 year olds' responses to TV ads" (Wyllie et al., 1998b) the reported results are in fact responses by 10-17 year olds to statements about advertisements made by the researchers. This is an important difference.

The stabilisation of meanings through items and predetermined categories requires that participants' voices are not able to interrupt with original views or contradictions. A problem with such items of assessment lies around what exactly an item can assess; what does an item mean to whom? For example, what if you are being asked whether the people in the advertisement are 'likely to be drinking heavily or getting drunk'? As Paton-Simpson's (2001) New Zealand research identifies, people define alcohol consumption levels differently. What counts as normal for one person may be highly deviant for another. The Patton-

Simpson research highlights that drinking norms, even for individuals, are not homogenous, but variable and dependent on the context and company of consumption (Paton-Simpson, 2001). Single item measures can only leave such complexity and contradiction un-revealed.

Measures and numbers carry weight. As Weilbacher (2001) observed, simply obtaining *any* numbers from measures may have a ring of truth. However, suggestions that one can accurately define, locate, and isolate the myriad variables that might impact on drinking behaviours in order to quantifiably account for the relationship that drinking behaviours have to viewed texts about drinking remains deeply problematic. Similarly problematic is the assumption that survey responses – in person or by telephone – can be understood as measures of *actual* behaviours, or experiences. How can a set of responses to pre-set items be reported as if it is an accurate reflection of what respondents actually think and do? If method works so thoroughly to constrain what people have to say, any hope of obtaining insights into who and what is being affected will remain elusive.

### **Problematic presentations: ‘findings’ in the research**

In much of the research reviewed, the language and positioning of the work implied, sometimes deliberately, a neutral, objective ‘scientific’ voice. A culturalist perspective would argue that research texts, like media texts, are not objective but that they are working from particular positions. This view contends that any research ‘results’ that are reported require critical attention because what is reported will, intentionally or not, be selective and work to construct a particular story. In the present review, when statements in the research about ‘findings’ were examined closely, they became visible as quite particular positions about what was being studied. Some of these positions had a small but significant impact on the shape of the reporting. For example, in one study the statement is made that “almost half the men agreed that their favourite advertisements on television were alcohol advertisements” (46%). In fact, the majority of men (54%) *disagreed* with this statement, but this was not discussed. Thus the reporting was

identifiable as marking a particular emphasis and position (see Wyllie et al., 1998b, p.755). Sometimes, however, the positions structuring reporting produced large effects, for example, when researchers argued that their findings confirmed “the dominance of a tough, active, outdoors imagery” and of “macho image” in brewery advertisements (Wyllie, Casswell, & Stewart, 1991, p.194). However, the actual figures supporting this confirmation were low: 30% for tough outdoors, and on ‘macho’ imagery only 6%. Yet much ongoing research from public health hinges on the very validity of the idea that consumers perceive alcohol advertising as *suffused* with macho imagery and this particular study is cited as confirmation of such perceptions (Wyllie et al., 1998b, p.751). As Weilbacher (2001) notes in his ‘effects’ critique, numbers can have the peculiar effect of asserting truth [as can publishing research]; yet when the construction is examined, ‘truth’ is a particular story about figures seeking warrant.

It is not surprising that public health concerns structure public health research. But these researchers are positioning their public health responses to alcohol advertising as if they represented insights into the experiences and thinking of *other* audiences. One study (Wyllie et al., 1998b) will cite another (Wyllie et al., 1997) as warrant for what audiences have had to say about the ‘themes of appeals’ items being used, when themes reported are *not* from participants, but from a researcher going through participant talk to extract “themes that were of interest from a public health perspective” (Wyllie et al., 1997, p.111). My ‘findings’ of bias in the research disrupt (positivist) notions of objectivity in research. From an investment perspective [as taxpayer-funded research], from a culturalist perspective, and indeed from a positivist perspective, what I have found warrants critique.

## **2. Culturalist approaches**

### **Searches for meanings in a process of transition**

Within culturalist research texts, goals of seeking quantifiable effects are relinquished. Instead, more complex ideas around the relationships of meanings and identities are explored. There was not a singular approach in the much

smaller culturalist body of work reviewed, but the projects are broadly identifiable as culturalist-interpretative in intent. This does not mean that all the culturalist research reviewed totally 'fits' with the positions identifiable in contemporary media frameworks. What is clear is that the shift towards more culturalist positions has not been a straightforward or complete process. Traditional thinking still has structuring effects in some projects, and in the research reviewed the difficulties of shifting paradigms were sometimes visible.

In one key study, positioned within a culturalist-interpretative framework, the methodology used is semiotic. However, the research approach is described as a "science that studies the life of signs within society" (Bassett, 1994, p.5). Use of the word 'science' signals the need to be aware that this research may be structured through more traditional positivist forms of motivation and rhetorical 'warranting'. The analysis was then positioned as one that can:

identify the messages associated with visual signs and how meanings embedded in them are communicated. The objectives of such an analysis are to decode and construct liquor advertisements in such a way that not only are meanings exposed but also the techniques used in communication of those meanings. (Bassett, 1994, p.5)

The problematic implication here – from a culturalist perspective – is that all meanings are intended and they are *all* available to one (expert) person using the right tools. This excerpt locates meaning in the text, suggesting that meaning is determinate, and that it can, like some archaeological discovery, be 'exposed'. This approach is in tension with some of the key objections culturalist critiques have made in relation to traditional approaches: critiques of notions of objectivity, truth, meanings as stable, meanings as located in a text, or about final arrival where meanings are concerned. Despite this, within the research Bassett clearly orientates towards culturalist perspectives because he also argues that meaning depends on the relationship any advertisement has to existing cultures and cultural practices. Yet, the implications of this argument notwithstanding, we are

still offered a definitive account of content. One cannot take up all positions in the culture-text relationship and this must ultimately set limits on interpretations. Cultural practices and positions will differ within and between groups.

The unexamined limits to Bassett's locations become more visibly problematic in his comments about masculinity. He states that advertising portrayals, to varying degrees, can serve merely to "reinforce *undesirable* qualities such as those related to macho characteristics" (p.20), (italics mine). (This reference to 'macho' qualities refers to the study cited above (Wyllie et al., 1991, p.194).) Macho qualities may be undesirable within Bassett's communities of interest but they may be desirable, pleasurable, and of advantage within others. Yet, this problematised idea of 'macho masculinity' is offered as if it were a stable and coherent cultural resource to draw on. Despite taking a more culturalist position, ideals of 'normativity', 'objectivity', and 'truth' are still structuring the logic of the enterprise.

As compared with the majority of research, Bassett's work represents a much more culturalist position. However, yet to be disrupted are traditional structuring ideas about definitive points of arrival, the researcher as removed, and meanings as coherent. What does tough 'mean' to whom? Is masculine toughness undesirable? We could be referring to Sir Edmund Hilary. If we were, macho qualities may be highly desirable. Once again, the reading appears to be framed through public health concerns about alcohol. The research was funded by the Alcohol Advisory Council, so there may well have been a need to frame the research from a public health perspective to meet the expectations of the funding body. The problem with this is that the research is positioned to read as if it were speaking in broader terms.

Bassett's (1994) use of semiotics does raise the important idea that meanings in texts do not operate in any singular way. Such an approach can offer a way to examine contents in order to consider 'layers', or multiple inflections to what may be present. However, this is only half the shift required into culturalist

frameworks. Yet to be addressed by Bassett is the concern that readings are also multiply inflected through audiences, not just texts.

Interestingly, in the same piece of research, Bassett (1994) does however gesture towards views that he may hold beyond the constraints of the particular analysis he has conducted. In one comment he alludes to advertising being part of the processes of capitalism. Here Bassett hints at social theoretical possibilities for different forms (Marxian?) of analysis that might be brought to bear on this research to quite different effect. This remark suggests his research is inflected by the purchaser's expectations (production forces). Yet, despite being thus constrained, a brief moment of textual 'excess' (of Marxian politics?) was still interpretatively present (for me). It alluded to the potentially different motives and interests of Bassett. In this way, he usefully [intentionally?] highlights broader relationships around production, meanings, and contexts of readings as conditions constrain but cannot necessarily fully contain, what is in, or perceived to be in, *any* text.

### **Struggling with locations**

The work of Hill (1999) appears to be even more firmly positioned in a culturalist-interpretative framework, but Hill is clearly struggling with the culturalist location. Hill does argue that her reading of a Lion Red advertisement works dominantly from a social constructionist perspective and draws on performance theories. She takes the position that the cultures we inhabit resource the development and performance of identities – and looks specifically here at the textual resources on offer around gender. Gender in the framework Hill argues is not a set of innate qualities but something that is socio-culturally learned and performed. The individual as subject that Hill sets out seems strongly compatible with the subjects of culturalist-interpretative positions. However, this dominant theoretical position is then destabilised through the invoking of positivist perspectives as support for her culturalist argument. For example, “research has also shown that alcohol ads on television may be particularly important in shaping younger people's views on alcohol...most thought people in this [Lion Red] ad were

‘drinking heavily or getting drunk’” (Holibar, Wyllie, Moewaka Barnes et al., 1994, cited in Hill, 1999, p.68). Despite the epistemological distance between Hill's, and Holibar et al's projects, Hill uses the research as warrant for her work. More troublingly Hill goes on to state that “Alcohol advertising portrays drinking as part of attractive adult lifestyles that appear within the reach of normal aspirations, and are designed to appeal to *particular personality types*” (my italics). Culturalist positions would *not* ascribe to particular personality types. The use of positivist work as warrant and the statement that there are such things as particular personality types has critical implications for Hill's own performance as a culturalist researcher that really need to be addressed.

Despite the troubling invoking of positivist positions Hill takes a firmly culturalist perspective in linking the performance of hegemonic masculinities in Aotearoa/New Zealand to certain ways of drinking. In making this link Hill raises the critical issue that certain performances of being an adult ‘male’, which involve drinking to excess, can act as a point of recruitment for younger men to become new generations of excessive drinkers. From a social constructionist perspective, this constitutes the base for a strong argument. If one accepts that such performances of identities are shaped and resourced through cultures, media texts can be argued as primary sites of such socialisation for young people in contemporary Western communities. The representations on offer in ad-texts can therefore be argued as requiring critique on the basis of what they offer. If ad-texts offer indentificatory performances that strongly reiterate excessive consumption, then they must be challenged.

However, the role of alcohol advertising texts in potentially contributing to resource particular (and problematic) performances of masculinities is given too much weight by Hill. Contextualisation of advertising portrayals within the broader and multiple forms of social processes through which such masculinities are reproduced is not given sufficient attention. While Hill does draw attention to wider socio-cultural forces shaping Aotearoa/New Zealand's dominant performances of masculinities, the vital implications of this for advertising

portrayals are not addressed. Advertising representations must also be understood to be positioned within and resourced through such shaping forces; a problem not explored.

The very singular reading of the masculinities in the Lion Red commercial also leaves a gap around the pleasures and desires that such representations may resonate with. It may be useful to challenge dominant performances of masculinities, but what are the alternatives? Are the dominants 'wrong'? Where Hill (1999), like Bassett (1994), seems to interpret only aggressive and unacceptable masculinist qualities in liquor ads, what of interpretations that might understand the same texts as meaning community, pride, strength, and achievement? How can any versions of masculinities (or indeed contemporary femininities) be performed without invoking dominant cultural ideas? How can masculine *not* – at some level – mean toughness, determination, or strength within communities dominated through the structuring logics of competitive, individualistic, or capitalist interests? What *about* the wider structuring logics from which any representations in ad-texts draw for the enactment of such gender performances? How do questions of responsibility for portrayals become addressed, and who are they addressed to, when advertising is no longer abstracted from its social locations? This is a recurring and unaddressed issue in all the research. It reveals the problems and potential dead-ends inherent in critiques of any ad-text in isolation. We are taken back to the need to address the advertisements as part of broader social processes; to pull out or rail against their role or impacts in isolation lacks conviction.

The problem Hill *is* identifying – and in various ways this theme threads through all the research reviewed – is that various versions of adult masculinities are, for many in Aotearoa/New Zealand, socio-culturally and historically linked with drinking alcohol. In many communities, alcohol consumption appears to have a function within constructions about and performances of what it means to be a 'Kiwi'. Advertising clearly plays a part in the re-circulation of such ideas, and this makes advertising potentially a part of the processes through which we construct

gender, adulthood, and myriad other aspects of human performances of self and other. Hill's text is useful research. It opens up space for consideration of the processes through which subjectivities and texts may be connected, and therefore of textual responsibilities for what is on offer within texts, in ways most research cannot. However, because Hill's work is so focused on concerns about advertisers (arguably structured through very particular logic about advertising), it does not sufficiently address the multiple texts and contexts – the inter-textuality – of which advertising is one interrelated part.

Hill's challenge to advertisers is for them to address their responsibilities for contributing to the construction of particular aspects of subjectivities identified by public health as problematic. This seems a fair challenge, certainly within the social-constructionist framework used to set out this argument. An additional issue here, though, may be that the constructionist framework being drawn on is not dominant in advertising or marketing theories. The social-constructionist subject is not even dominant in psychological theories. This suggests that when Hill accuses advertisers of employing 'psychological skills' to achieve their ends, intent is once again being overemphasised. The structuring in advertising texts is predominately through individualistic, capitalist (consumerist) frameworks. Within the logic of capitalist frameworks, agency – and therefore responsibility – lies with the individual (a model that is very compatible with psychology's dominant constructions). For Hill to have an impact on advertising's dominant worldview with questions of responsibilities requires that common ground be first established; a ground upon which social-constructionist research can make sense.

Bassett and Hill's projects clearly reflect the impacts of culturalist positions from within contemporary theories about communications. These projects also continue to reflect the influences of positivism. The logic structuring their approaches often slides back into traditional ideas about the subject, 'truth', or interpretative stability that remain deeply problematic from a culturalist perspective.

## **Introducing some interdisciplinary research attentions**

Another body of local academic work addressing relationships between masculinities, alcohol, and (though to a much lesser degree) symbolic representations such as advertising, is also categorically culturalist-interpretative. This research was not from psychology or media studies but derived from sociologically-based identity studies focusing on masculinities. This small body of work was very consonant with positions in contemporary media studies, a compatibility locatable in their similarly culturalist origins (Campbell, 2000; Campbell, Law, & Honeyfield, 1999; Paton-Simpson, 2001). Campbell, et al. (1999) for example, combine analysis of socio-historical contexts, textual interpretations, and their own ethnographic observations to tell their story about what they see as the relationship between alcohol as commodity (material and symbolic) and the particular ways in which the alcohol industry, advertising industries, and male consumers may be using the cultural artefact 'beer' to construct and perform versions of masculinities. This research addresses social processes and people, weaving complex connections between individuals, communities, and social forces to set out a story whilst being clear that there are other stories, other ways of telling, and other strands one could bring in.

An interesting example of the usefulness of the Campbell et al. (1999) approach is in the way they argue that the alcohol industry, after deregulation, set out to expand the scope of beer drinking in response to the declining scale of beer drinking. This provides a convincing argument for how the alcohol industry and advertising might have roles in re-shaping processes of consumption. Such an argument could only stand on a thorough consideration of the interacting forces of legislation, social practices, production, distribution, and change. This body of work does not form part of the local alcohol advertising research being addressed in this critique, but it is included as an example of alternative culturalist frameworks that are being employed locally to make sense of similar issues.

Despite its benefits, there are areas in this rather different body of research that could benefit from critique. Categorisations tended to be overly complete and stabilising and to lack adequate explanations. For example, 'cockfighting' was a category given to describe the regularly competitive nature of verbal interactions between men in the bar (Campbell, 2000). The implication is of highly agentic and rather individual performances. How aware are participants of engaging in such performances? How might one understand such forms of interpersonal engagements if participants are not acting as deliberately as is being implied? Other forms of activities occurring within the same spaces are not addressed; surely cockfighting was not the only category identifiable? That said, Campbell offered a convincing account of how such sites and performances operate as sources of power within communities. This work opens up ideas about ways in which to examine alcohol and its roles in local as well as wider socio-cultural processes and relationships. This work is introduced here specifically to highlight what may represent more promising ways forward in making sense of such subjects.

### **Key issues and themes from both sets of research**

This section will now identify key issues identified as running through both the positivist and culturalist research projects. These are examined as themes.

#### **Theoretical gaps: addressing 'unconscious' processes**

Both public health and academic researchers raised concerns about advertising potentially operating at 'unconscious' levels (Bassett, 1994; Holibar, Wyllie, Moewaka Barnes et al., 1994; Wyllie et al., 1997). This concern with more, or less, aware 'levels' of textual engagements, and with how one deals with what potentially lies beyond awareness presented theoretical difficulties for both bodies of work. For positivism, variance and diversity are departures from dominant concepts of rational individuals and cognitive models. For culturalist theories, despite strong emphases on individuals and contexts, the psychological subject is as yet inadequately theorised (Hammersley, 2003a). In the local

research, as tends to be the case more widely (cf., Bordwell & Carroll, 1996), theories drawn on to fill such gaps are frequently psychoanalytic (e.g. the local use of Lannon & Cooper, 1983).

Psychoanalytic theories can seem to provide attractive alternatives – particularly at the limits of existing approaches that depend on stability and ‘norms’ – offering spaces in which explanations for variance and diversity become possible. However, despite their frequent deployment they are not reconcilable with positivist or culturalist positions about the subject (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). Tensions of logic between psychoanalytic models and other positions were unaddressed in the research, and, when referenced, such models tended to be offered as additions to not reconciled with the dominant stance in the research (e.g. Bassett, 1994; Hill, 1999). For example, when Hill says, that “the ‘Law of the Father’ rules boys as well as women” (Hill, 1999, p.73), this invoking of very deterministic Lacanian psychoanalytic frameworks is at odds with the highly agentic performative framework of the dominant argument.

This deployment of psychoanalytic models in research raises the problem of present epistemological and theoretical uncertainties about how to address what lies beyond immediate awareness. This requires recognition of the limits of present theories when it comes to the psychological subject. Recognising a text as able to ‘mean’ in other than what appears to be the dominant sense and that people can interpret and respond to texts in more than one way problematises positivism but it also requires more than is presently supplied by culturalist media theories. This is a critical gap media theorists need to address.

### **Masculinities and alcohol – the ubiquitous ‘macho’ man**

The performance of masculinities in alcohol advertising was a key theme across the research. As has been highlighted, public health research has suggested advertising has a direct effect of encouraging or increasing consumption through reproducing associations of alcohol consumption with ‘macho-masculinity’. Culturalist researchers also link particular masculinities and forms of alcohol use

and using a different framework include advertising within the range of social forces that perpetuate such cultural ideas (Bassett, 1994; Campbell et al., 1999; Hill, 1999; Paton-Simpson, 2001). It seems clear that there is a link between the ways in which certain desirable qualities of what constitutes an adult male are defined, made sense of, and performed by some groups, and the drinking of alcohol. All texts and experiences re-producing that message will, at some level, be re-creating that link, advertising included. However, attempts to locate the *cause* of this effect (understanding 'being a man' to include drinking alcohol) with alcohol advertising or to isolate and *quantify* the level of effect as part of a greater whole will fail. The process is too complex for such an approach.

As Campbell et al. (1999) set out in their work, there are many versions of masculinity and many spaces in which these are re-produced. A much broader look is required at what is involved, which must mean widened research agenda. Connection between what is on offer within alcohol commercials and what takes place within communities is an issue for research but simply looking at the text and the individual in the abstract does more to obscure the connections between maintaining, or disrupting, social roles, relations, and powers than it does to make them apparent. What is reinforced and how in an advertising text can be examined and even challenged, but what is being argued about masculinities in the current research constitutes a form of *social* critique. This needs recognition. What is also required is a disruption of the notion of masculinity, or aspects of it, as singular or as intrinsically right or wrong. What any culture has to offer – in terms of types and mixes of gender performances – may be problematic but they may also be pleasurable and valued and cannot be so simply dismissed. These are important concerns for media researchers to address.

### **Trouble with pleasures**

Value judgements about what is right or wrong come up a lot in the research, particularly in relation to pleasures. The presentation of research that has no space or sympathy for the pleasures of alcohol use overlooks some very important issues. Researchers challenge alcohol advertising if it seems to

suggest any association of drinking alcohol with good times, fun, and excitement, or acceptance by peers (Hill, 1999). But the issue is surely that drinking *can* be pleasurable, it can be associated with good times, and it can add to the general excitement. Paton-Simpson (2001) highlights the way in which alcohol is seen as pleasurable to many people and has a strong presence in moments of celebration and in the social elements of peer relationships. How can pleasure not be linked to alcohol?

Perhaps the issue is, in part, what alcohol can be sold for. Taste, purity, look, containers, and place of origin are all permitted ways in which to promote alcohol as a product. However, 'use' is delimited because to sell on *actual* uses and positive effects of intoxication – effects and pleasures of relaxation, initial mood elevation, or decrease of inhibitions – is not allowed. What can legally be sold are the benefits of a brand (an idea) not those of a product. Alcohol can provide pleasures and benefits. The dilemma of governance is that alcohol can also have effects of making someone ill, vulnerable, unsafe, at risk, or endangering their health. Alcohol cannot legally be promoted for its pleasures. On this the codes are very clear, but the very act of promoting alcohol will *inevitably* promote that which is associative to it. This is an argument for restriction that public health has often overlooked, perhaps because pleasure is such a persistent gap within public health work. Pleasures are an area that requires more adequate attention in research.

### **Accountability**

Accountability is about being liable. A critical question of accountability for those advertising alcohol lies in whether advertisements (and advertisers) are, despite the codes, finding ways to *deliberately* attempt to change attitudes to drinking (e.g. encouraging excessive consumption) as opposed to simply promoting a brand (Wyllie et al., 1998b). Are advertisers, as some would imply, really using semiotic layers to circumvent regulatory codes? (cf., Hill, 1999). Such an intentional abuse of the advertising codes would be a serious issue; personal or social harm may be at stake. The problems raised here are complex. First, there

is the problem of how what is *intended* to be in a text may be different from what is *interpreted* to be in a text. Second, there is the problem of how one can ever separate ideas about a *brand* of alcohol from those things that are associated with alcohol. Culturalist frameworks would strongly argue the limits of 'managing' either. In a culturalist framework what is interpretatively available through an ad-text depends on what those viewing it bring to that engagement. Arguments that only advertisers are accountable for associations between what is in an ad-text, and what is evoked through that ad-text, rely on traditional (very uni-linear) models that locate meanings in texts. They do not address the problem of how you actually manage interpretation if meanings are not located in the text.

Questions about how much is textually *intended* must require some form of research with producers. Intent cannot be simply assumed (Nava, 1997). Researchers need to find ways to determine how producers understand their work. Are alcohol advertising producers so semiotically shrewd? How does what is intended in production compare with what is interpreted? To date no such local research exists. In addition, regulatory codes and notions of their absolute enforceability are difficult to reconcile with the textual and individual variances proposed by contemporary media theories. This raises serious questions about the viability of present regulations. Do the codes constrain production, or are they an inadequate foil? What is required are research frameworks that can investigate whether and how they are working

Bassett (1994) makes a different – but related – challenge to advertisers about representative accountability. Bassett argues against the lack of diversity represented in portrayals of masculinities in alcohol commercials. The concern expressed is that what is represented (e.g. hegemonic versions of the masculine) does not include the full diversity of what is possible, and that such advertising may, through limiting their portrayals, be limiting the development of wider social definitions. Bassett's argument has interesting implications. How does advertising address the inevitable limits of its representatively constructed definitions? Is there some more inclusive possibility of desirable representations

that could be agreed upon for alcohol advertising? Whilst alcohol advertising reproduces particular versions of how 'men' are it is likely that, rather than deliberately constraining what is on offer, the advertisers simply uncritically reflect the dominant forms of masculinities that they understand to reflect their core audience. If advertisers widen their representations beyond their core audience, can they maintain sufficient resonance with that core audience? This raises interesting questions about the relationship between audiences and ad-texts, and about the limitations of what can be communicated through commercial advertising.

Theoretically, if one accepts ad-texts as sites of struggle and that meanings can never be fully fixed or closed (Chandler, 2000; Van Zoonen, 1994), then any ad-text will contain intended and unintended meanings. Advertisers will, paradoxically, therefore always risk such charges of both excess (e.g. communicating about pleasures of consumption) and constraint (e.g. around masculinities). Arguments that producers of alcohol advertising need to be held to account for what any ad-text portrays seems to be related to issues of 'voice' and warrant. Is it reasonable to expect alcohol advertising to produce public health versions of socially acceptable behaviours, identities, and relations? Contemporary media theories re-locate advertising as of, and within, broader social processes, institutions, systems, and contexts and argue that advertisers and their texts are constructed through the cultures they inhabit (Goldman & Papson, 1996; Perry, 1998; Real, 1996). This does not necessarily let advertising off the hook, but it does raise difficult questions about who can assess what representations and the legitimacy of imposing different positions or restrictions.

Advertising offers a particular version of how things are. Setting aside debates about truth or distortion, if you examine social relations portrayed in advertisements for alcohol and then consider Paton-Simpson's (2001) research into behaviours around alcohol, advertising appears to be positively socially responsible. If advertising cannot help but reference what is done beyond its own texts, who or what is at fault? If only 'good' can be re-presented in alcohol

advertising, then what is good? Who decides what is good? How is excess ever to be contained? Advertising's characterisations, behaviours, and performances make sense because they re-present ways of being that are sensible within the cultural context that produces them. This is not to present an apologist response for advertising – their productions will indeed be filled with absences, be sexist on my terms, stereotyped, and offer potentially damaging re-presentations, as may be any productions of our own. When held up against broader socio-cultural positions, all cultural texts are likely to be visible as coming from very particular places.

Concerns that alcohol-advertising texts are a form of 'distortion' and that such texts do not reflect 'reality', are forms of critical readings that open up a number of issues. Firstly, the notion that there is a stable, singular 'real', against which to benchmark any advertising portrayal, is very problematic and has been argued as such (Burr, 1995; Lumby, 1997). Secondly, to argue that any reflections of subject positions in advertising's representations are 'wrong' implies an untenable position for any 'other' interpretation of such representations. Those interpreting differently are, implicitly or explicitly, constituted either as unwitting dupe or willing victim (Lumby, 1997). For example, the implication for admitting to any pleasures obtained, as in the case of what many local researchers stress as the 'wrong' sorts of masculinities on offer in local alcohol advertising texts, is that no matter how pleasure is rationalised pleasure is wrong. Thirdly, such views falsely abstract advertising from the wider social context, which it is part of and reiterate the problematic idea of the producer of the ad-text as the sole author of meanings, eliding the diverse range of subjects and subject positions that negotiate meanings. Finally, there is the question of how what is represented in an ad-text reflects struggles (around how things can mean) that it is part of and lie more widely beyond a single text. What is it that an ad-text struggles to enable or contain? Any notion of struggle – around how alcohol, or those using it, can be understood – is not here; instead we have something stable. It is in struggle that one can see opened up the possibility for difference, for other pleasures, and the

possibility of layers of constructions of power, oppression and subjectivities. It is in such struggle and layers that change becomes possible.

### **Comments on theoretical consonance and theoretical comparisons**

Predominantly, the theories and methods of enquiry used in public health in Aotearoa/New Zealand are not compatible with contemporary media theories. Even on traditional terms, the methods-driven failure to examine structure and logic is far from adequate. But contemporary media theories have also made existing approaches to applied work problematic. Continuing on, as if there were no theoretical differences to discuss, seems unreasonable. For researchers seeking a more interpretative approach, but still working within positivist framings, far more robust attention to theory is required. For *all* media researchers there is now a strong argument for addressing and positioning research in relation to the shifts wrought through contemporary theoretical changes. The subject and subjects of positivist-empirical enquiries have been made deeply problematic. For any current media research, methods must start to account for the broader operations of media in societies and the complex engagements that socially located individuals have, both with mediums and with what they offer.

The more academic research, whilst seemingly more consonant with contemporary theories, still contained important tensions that require addressing. The logic structuring the research kept sliding back towards positivist versions of the subject, locations of meanings, and of the researcher as holding some 'truth' about what was on offer. Judging representations as good or bad or judging performances as right or wrong is not consistent with theories that argue for variance, contradictions, and that there is no moral bottom line. Implying meanings are stable or that all meanings are accessible to one person does not 'fit' either. Research projects need to genuinely attend to and create space for the complexities and contradictions of textual engagements for subjects in order to explicate media systems and to locate those within other social systems. Positivist approaches do not cope with complexities and contradictions.

Practitioners in the positivist paradigm are attempting to locate stable subjects and coherent meanings in spaces where stability and constraint are only engendered through the tools of the trade. Theoretically, culturalist-interpretative approaches seem to be what is required. What is available looks promising, but there is a need for far greater clarity about what 'doing' interpretative work means.

For critical psychology, or cultural/interpretative approaches to the study of media, subjectivity is plural and it refers to human experiences of identities and of the self, explored as the products of particular socio-cultural arrangements and local interactions (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). What is sensible here is to look for ways to make sense of those processes, without trying to falsely stabilise or abstract them. Whilst the subjects of positivist and interpretative approaches are ontologically dissonant, there is a space of intersection where positivism can accept a subject *acted* upon by discourses. The socio-cognitive models (as discussed above) that open space for peer influence, for example, do just this (Conner & Norman, 1998); whether a common concern with such processes will lead either paradigm closer to the other remains to be seen.

King (1992) identifies something important about interpretation and empiricism when he suggests that it is not that we cannot understand words one by one, but rather that an ordering of thought can be based on a whole system of categories that is hardly intelligible to us. This can be applied to the logic of the interpreter of texts, who potentially holds categories and interpretations far outside the logic of our own (e.g. academic, adult, western) paradigms. King (p.13) repeats a Wittgensteinian idea that asks us to “suppose someone were ignorant of the tradition among sculptors of making busts. If he then came upon the finished bust of some man, he might say that obviously this is a fragment and that there must have been other parts belonging to it, making a whole body”. This highlights the interpretative urge and the limits it may hold. It also suggests the need to broaden the interpretative community. At this point, alcohol-advertising research appears to be making the bust the body. We need to include other differently

located scholars (Greene & Sanchez-Hucles, 1997), the subjects of our enquiries (O'Barr, 1994) and other interpreters of texts (Ang, 1985). There is a strong argument for alcohol advertising research to be conducted within a more critical framework: a framework that always starts from the position of knowledge as culturally constructed and constrained by its paradigms and positions; therefore requiring a constant critical alertness of eye/ear/hand.

Rather than judge a text, or to suggest that a final reading of one is possible, the issue should be to try to make some of the complexities of engagements visible, and through doing so, open spaces for debates about that. To do so can still offer the potential for a politically motivated critique, but one that allows for a greater complexity of representation, the existence of contradictions, of displeasures and pleasures, and the validity of interpretative differences around meanings that are not able to be dismissed as purely negative or implicitly 'wrong' (Van Zoonen, 1994). Most existing approaches are politically motivated by the negative effects of alcohol use, but those concerns are not necessarily representative of the perspectives of the audiences they seek to speak about. Yet language and structure of the work often suggest, sometimes deliberately, a neutral, objective voice. Speaking with this 'objective' voice implies a research position that is comprehensive, authoritative, and that can 'know' and speak on behalf of others. O'Barr's (1994) advice is to look to the texts, the producers of those texts, and to the interpreters of texts themselves (and here I add context/s) for a far more comprehensive and less singular approach to making sense of a text. Such analysis perhaps has the potential to open up space in an area that, with many writers, appears to be marked by forms of closure.

[Clarity about where one sits epistemologically and theoretically, and consistently linking these positions with methodology would seem essential in any media research. Yet, examining the research within this review on this basis was challenging. The majority of the public health work was rife with theoretical and methodological tensions and contradictions that required careful unpacking. I found the lack of structure and declared locations in much of the public health

work very challenging until finally I realised that what was at issue was, in part, my own position. I had been expecting to locate all research within a theoretical paradigm because, driven by my own focus, I expected theory to drive research. What I found was that in the research world of public health, the work is driven by public health agenda – not theory. Once I shifted my thinking to accommodate this difference, things made more sense.]

Unsurprisingly, public health research takes a negative position in relation to alcohol. In terms of any promotion of alcohol, the central public health proposition is that advertising alcohol is a problem. The motivation from the public health perspective therefore is for research that can *demonstrate* that alcohol advertising is a problem. The result has been an ongoing search for identifiable and measurable relationships between alcohol advertising and negative outcomes, particularly increasing consumption, recruiting youth to alcohol consumption, and promoting the ‘wrong’ sorts of masculinities that may be associated with problematic consumption styles.

Working from proposition to theory in this way has seriously undermined the integrity of the research. Where research lacks theoretical clarity to begin with, resultant arguments are not generally robust and cannot stand close scrutiny. Also, drawing on a diverse and inconsistent range of theories to buttress research arguments, simply because they come from the same field, can produce highly contradictory work. This ongoing search for effects and a commitment to measures has often left the researchers adrift from any ‘fit’ with the theoretical landscapes they invoke. With theoretical commitments not adequately considered, the issues around what is politically at stake in the epistemological assumptions that underpin a particular approach are also avoided. Such theoretical non-commitment is an issue for research quality. Whilst my position clearly represents a challenge to public health research practices, I am not arguing for abandonment of concern for how alcohol is used or for how representational texts might be connected to problematic usage.

I am arguing that unless any attempt to identify textual responsibility is undertaken from a position of theoretical clarity, the project will fail. I am also arguing that shifting into more robust theoretical positions will considerably improve the chances of opening up spaces within which debates about textual responsibilities might take place.

## **Chapter 5 Re-locating the Local**

Every time we start thinking we're the center of the universe, the universe turns around and says with a slightly distracted air, "I'm sorry. What'd you say your name was again?" Margret Maron

### **A comparative examination of international alcohol advertising research**

*The previous chapter examines the dominant approaches in alcohol advertising research in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The critique offered was that the work was theoretically and methodologically problematic; and I argued for approaches that are more consistent with contemporary theories. However, as I identified at the beginning of the chapter, alcohol-advertising research in this country represents a small pool of research, from a small group of researchers. Carabine (2001) suggests that where any analysis is based on very limited talk or texts, that one should locate the work that has been done alongside other similar accounts. I decided it would be useful, and indeed necessary, to ask how my local critique 'fits' with what international researchers have to say about such issues. This next chapter therefore re-locates my local review within a broader, international academic context.*

### **The review process**

To locate my local review of the research in a more global context I decided to undertake a review of international publications addressing alcohol-advertising impacts. The objective was to compare what I had identified locally with what was being identified or identifiable in the field more widely. The way I established a timeframe within which to conduct the review was to focus on publications that had been produced in the last 15 years (1989-2004). Materials for the review were obtained through scanning peer reviewed journals, following up article

references and citations, using libraries, obtaining alcohol research centre publications, and searching the internet for online resources. This search produced a significant body of material. After reviewing this material I developed a summary of the main issues I identified as raised through the international research. The issues I identified were then used to structure the summary of the international review in this chapter in the form of key themes. The themes identified are: epistemological differences; shifts in research approaches; relocating ads and experiences of those within social contexts; attention to the youth effect; concerns with critical absences, pleasures, and reflexivity; and comments on conditions of debate, public opinions, and wining in increments.

### **Epistemological differences**

As with the Aotearoa/New Zealand research, organising epistemologies in international studies broadly fall into positivist-empirical or culturalist-interpretative paradigms. Theoretical developments – particularly within feminisms, post-structuralisms, and social-constructionist projects in media studies – have had important impacts on advertising research (Kellner, 1997; McQuail, 1994). However, in the area of applied alcohol advertising research within the health sector, many studies remain structured by the traditional approaches of positivism (Moore, 2002). These positivist studies have been increasingly challenged, with main critiques coming from two directions. First, paradigmatic critiques have been raised through culturalist approaches (Moore, 2002); and second, other positivist critiques have focused on problems of accuracy, design, and results within existing research (Atkin, 1995; Grube, 1993; Saffer, 1998).

Primary attention within paradigmatic critiques has been to positivist constructions of the subject – as an agentic, rational, separate individual who can logically conduct and regulate her or his own life to best effect (Törrönen, 2000). Tensions have been highlighted around the ways in which positivist logic of the subject undermines calls for restriction of alcohol promotion (Fisher, 1993; Sulkunen & Warpenius, 2000; Tigerstedt, 1999; Törrönen, 2000). Presently any

idea of 'misuse' of alcohol works through the possibility of rational, acceptable use (Moore, 2002). Abuse is therefore locatable as an individual issue, as opposed to being engendered through socially re-produced conditions, responses, or relationships. This organising principle of individual culpability is importantly entwined in the logics and institutions of contemporary capitalist consumerism – especially freedoms of choice and voice (Moore, 2002; Mundy, 1995). These individualising arguments combine to suggest that the ultimate control for alcohol use exists within the 'normal' person, not an advertisement. Therefore, any restriction of advertising represents unnecessary restriction for 'normal' consumers. This works to undermine any right to intervene in advertising activities, or to attempt to constrain them.

Prevailing logics within positivist frameworks also require that any concerns with advertising 'effects' must frame the subjects of that concern as those who are *not* normal – that is as 'at-risk' groups who do not (or might not) respond safely to alcohol promotion. Consistently identified in research as 'at risk' are: children, youth, women, minority groups (defined ethnically or sexually) and alcoholics (or problem drinkers) (Beccaria, 2001; Fisher, 1993; Tigerstedt, 1999; Törrönen, 2000). Problems surrounding such constructions of normal and abnormal subject/s that have been raised in critiques are, that, as well as well being politically questionable, such categories naturalise the dominance of individualising frameworks that structure much of the research, and that these reproduce the idea of a white, Western, heterosexual, male as a 'normal' subject (Beccaria, 2001; Tigerstedt, 1999; Törrönen, 2000). Questions surround the validity of defining 'normal' as an adult heterosexual male subject, particularly when adult heterosexual male drinking groups are a primary source of problematic alcohol consumption styles and associated negative behaviours (Schulenberg & Maggs, 2002; West, 2001).

Epistemological differences have also been identified between public health and advertising industries (Bush & Bush, 1994). In public health, one policy maker suggested that it would "be helpful to know how advanced techniques used in

alcohol advertising capture adolescents and children within a broad web of exposure that is beyond current regulation and public monitoring” (McKenzie, 2000, p.9). However, it may not be advanced techniques that are the problem for monitoring, so much as it is differences between what is being assessed, and the lenses or tools of assessment being used to monitor advertisements (Bush & Bush, 1994). Although dominant marketing epistemologies are positivist and rely on the logic of a rational subject, in their applied domains advertising agencies research products by examining how they connect to and resonate with meanings for consumers (e.g. Dretzin, 2001). What this means is that advertising agencies, as Dretzin makes clear, are working with a social-relational construction of the consumer as subject. In doing so, they are engaged in more culturalist-interpretative frameworks. This epistemological difference represents an interesting reversal of the paradigmatic divisions between theory and research in media studies. As yet, the culturalist-interpretative shift that has occurred in advertising’s applied sector is not really reflected in mainstream marketing theories. This division means that in terms of what advertisers are doing, or the techniques they are using, techniques are not so much ‘advanced’ as they are epistemologically different from what remains dominant in applied media research in the alcohol health sector.

### **Shifts in research approaches**

Historically, alcohol advertising research was largely quantitative and depended on experimental studies of short-term behaviours in artificial settings (e.g. Bandura, 1973). Recognition of the limits of early studies produced a response of more naturalised research and a turn to survey and interview based ‘qualitative’ methodologies (Fisher, 1993) These methodological shifts did not mark an epistemological difference. The methods of research had changed but the goals had not. The primary goal remained one of meaningfully and accurately identifying and measuring specific impacts of alcohol advertising. In relation to this aim, the newer research approaches were still identified as having problems of accuracy and inability to offer causation (Atkin, 1995; Unger, Schuster, Zogg,

Dent, & Stacy, 2003) and, despite the development of increasingly complex research models (Grube & Wallack, 1994), evidential support for alcohol advertising impacts remained elusive.

Thus a major issue that became identified in the field was the research goal itself: to identify direct effects. Effects-based research was challenged as being overly simplistic and methodologically unsound, and researchers who were otherwise epistemologically divided shared the view that there were better ways to address the processes involved (cf., Bobo & Husten, 2000; Grube, 1993; Parker, 1998; Saffer, 1996a, 1996b; Unger et al., 2003). Ideas of establishing a direct relationship between alcohol use and advertising were challenged as impossible because advertising represented only part of a complex range of interrelated forces that could contribute to the understandings of, responses to, and uses of alcohol (Atkin, 1995).

In a move away from attempts to determine direct relationships, researchers sought to broaden understanding of what constitutes the promotion of alcohol. They began looking at relationships that combinations of different forms of alcohol promotion (including mainstream alcohol advertising) might have with the ways in which people approach and participate in drinking (Bobo & Husten, 2000; McKenzie, 2000; Saffer, 1998; Unger et al., 2003). Increasing recognition was also given to the complexity of media engagements, stimulating the development of alternative models (e.g. Domzal & Kernan, 1992). In these alternative models, advertisements were made sense of as socially-located texts, to which audiences – as socio-culturally located beings – might bring particular experiences that would importantly inflect their interpretations (Alcoholism & Drug Abuse Weekly, 1996; Bush & Bush, 1994; Friedmann & Zimmer, 1988; Parker, 1998). Research started to examine how people's stories about alcohol generally connected to, or resonated with, their advertising interpretations. The suggestion was that advertisements may be understood to be *potentially*, but not inevitably, participating at some level in resourcing ways in which people understand themselves and their worlds (Friedmann & Zimmer, 1988).

Such changes in research attention highlighted the importance of focusing on the different meanings alcohol holds for people (Heath, 1995; Room & Sato, 2002). A call for attention to the role of meanings in alcohol research was not new (e.g. Friedmann & Zimmer, 1988), but having alternative frameworks within which to explore meanings was. Epistemological and theoretical shifts in media studies opened up alternative research strategies – and potentially new monitoring frameworks (e.g., Bush & Bush, 1994). Studies around meanings examined relationships between advertising and the multiple and ongoing processes through which people construct and negotiate identities and actions (Bang & Hill, 1998; Smith, Atkin, & Fediuk, 2000). A later focus has been on how types of alcohol, and forms of use, play roles in the articulation of particular identities within communities, and to the relationship those identificatory forms have to what is on offer in advertisements (McKenzie, 2000; West, 2001). Work has become particularly active around the interrelationship of alcohol and its representations with being adult, being gendered (Gough & Edwards, 1998; McKenzie, 2000; West, 2001), and being identified with groups (particularly ethnic and peer groups) (Alaniz, 1998; Mintz, 1984).

### **(Re)locating advertising texts, and engagements with advertising texts, within social contexts**

An additional shift in research has occurred where some researchers have looked beyond the traditional focus on mainstream mediums, an over-emphasis on television having been argued by some as a key reason for 'effects' researchers having failed to substantiate their positions. The argument is that focusing on television as if it were *the* commercial form has led to a failure to identify and set out other important (commercial) promotional forms and to examine their *interrelated* impacts (Saffer, 1998). Saffer's (positivist) argument is that examination of television advertising as one strand within a wider promotional web of activities can provide researchers with the numbers needed to make a case for arguments about effects, and thereby offer a substantial challenge to commercial interests.

Artificially abstracting a single aspect of consumers' wider promotional experiences about alcohol had caused neglect in attention to the diversity of ways in which exposure to the positive promotion of alcohol takes place more broadly within communities. Some researchers moved to examine other key forces that affect how, where, and in what ways people drink, highlighting the importance of interactions between commercial *and* non-commercial forms of promotion when seeking explanations for sources of ideas about alcohol, drinking spaces, drinking styles, and attached identities (Heath, 1995; Pauly, 1994; West, 2001). Sources of promotion – that is, any forms of advocacy around alcohol use, whether intended or not – have been highlighted through research projects in two areas: 1) family, friends, and communities (Bobo & Husten, 2000; Grube & Wallack, 1994; Montonen, 1997; National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 1997; White, Bates, & Johnson, 1991); and 2) non-commercial media portrayals, such as those in prime-time programming, children's films, and music shows or videos (Goldstein, Sobel, & Newman, 1999; Grube, 1993; McKenzie, 2000; Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2002). These researchers relocated advertising within broader social processes of reproduction – as opposed to origination – of meanings about alcohol. That they did so made the abstractions of traditional research problematic and considerably widened how far one might cast any net of representational responsibility (Montonen, 1997). Locating positive promotion of alcohol in broader socio-cultural contexts raised important questions around *all* social representations and enactments of alcohol use.

Attention to contexts and locations has also identified the need to attend to relationships between the particular social and material conditions of communities, and issues around promotion and consumption of alcohol (Alaniz, 2000; Beccaria, 2001). Alaniz highlights the complex interrelationships of unemployment, poverty, lack of leisure alternatives, and targeting by alcohol companies (through combinations of media, promotional activities, and outlets). This relocation of promotion within wider social analyses of conditions highlights

the critical nature of examining the lived contexts within which the *experience* of alcohol promotion and alcohol use takes place.

Related to locations and contexts is the small but vital developing area of research, that is, examining the ways in which particular forms of Western advertising are targeted to, and experienced within, non-Western communities (Alaniz, 1998, 2000; Alaniz & Wilkes, 1995; Atkin, 1989; Hackbath, Silvestri, & Cospier, 1994). Such studies suggest attention is required to particular ways in which alcohol industries (amongst others) specifically target non-Western communities, materially (e.g. through outlets or particular advertising strategies) and symbolically (through the re-working of traditional cultural forms of meanings) (Alaniz, 1998). Such acts – that is discursive colonising for profit – have only received limited research attention but they are critical issues for researchers to address. Similarly highlighted is the need to examine targeting within groups where the consumption of alcohol has not been a traditional practice (Alaniz & Wilkes, 1995).

### **Attention to the ‘youth effect’**

Attention to the potentially negative effects of alcohol advertising exposure on children and youth has been a key area of attention in international research (Unger et al., 2003). Recent increases in alcohol consumption levels, and in problematic drinking styles (binging) amongst younger people in many communities, have fuelled this focus (Montonen, 1997; Mosher, 1994; Singh, 2003; "A sober look at beer," 1996). Traditionally, as in other effects work, research has often attempted to directly connect problematic youth drinking to ads (McKenzie, 2000; Mintz, 1984; Montonen, 1997; National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 1997; Smith et al., 2000). More recent studies suggest that there is a need for research into the *interrelationships* of social forces shaping youth drinking cultures (Moore, 2002; Schulenberg & Maggs, 2002).

An important consideration is whether children and youth are engaged in an interpretatively different process to adults (e.g. Lipsitz, Brake, Vincent, & Winters,

1993; Waiters, Treno, & Grube, 2001). Children appear to watch advertisements more attentively than adults, and certain styles of commercial capture young people's attention more effectively than others (McKenzie, 2000; Waiters et al., 2001). Intended or not, in one study the now infamous Budweiser Frogs commercial apparently had a recall level with the children participating that was only exceeded by Bugs Bunny, beating Mighty Morphin Power Rangers and Kellogg's Tony the Tiger (Leiber, 1996). A critical issue around interpretative differences relates to whether commercials are connected to the meanings young people are *forming* about alcohol, rather than working in relation to meanings they have already developed about it (Aitken, 1989; Bang & Hill, 1998). If the meanings ads offer are formatively linked for young people, then the proposition by advertisers that alcohol advertising only affects brand preferences can hold only for existing drinkers and is reopened for critique.

A second question revolves around whether the positive portrayals in advertising texts are appropriate for younger groups of viewers that are argued as inadequately resourced with alternative views or experiences (McKenzie, 2000). However, it is interesting to note that in research examining the particular appeals that alcohol advertising holds for younger viewers what emerged through the talk from the children participating was the clear impact of counter messages on what they had to say. Expressed resistances to the perceived manipulation of alcohol companies were clearly in evidence and the interpretations of the children in the study were complex, layered, and reflected broad discursive influences in debates (Waiters et al., 2001).

Another controversial issue in youth research has been whether reaching children and younger people with positive messages about alcohol and brands is intentional (McKenzie, 2000). Concerns that advertisers deliberately target young people are driven by findings that, despite regulatory codes delimiting youth targeting, researchers have identified ways in which media – such as billboards, specific crossover television programmes (e.g. Beavis and Butthead) and magazines – are running alcohol commercials that achieve extremely high levels

of youth exposure (Alaniz, 2000; Smith et al., 2000). Researchers have raised concerns about the adequacy of present approaches to assess the impacts of such creative productions (Leiber, 1996) and exposure levels to those (Alaniz, 1998) for youth. Gaps in assessment of the range and variety of media exposure young people experience are created through the ongoing overemphasis on television already identified (Saffer, 1998), and gaps in assessments of creative impacts are created through research processes that are not adequately designed, either for the age group or to make sense of the meaning-based responses recent research indicates may be at issue (Bush & Bush, 1994; Duff, 2003). More research is clearly required that can engage with the range and diversity of young people's experiences in order to make sense of how those young people experience alcohol advertising in ways that may be unique from experiences of adults.

### **Concern with critical absences: Pleasures and reflexivity**

In response to health research concerns about associations to pleasures, regulatory codes have been designed to attempt to legislate connections to pleasures of alcohol use out of alcohol advertising (e.g. McKenzie, 2000). The logic of these regulatory approaches is generated through traditional views that understand advertisers' positive portrayals as myths or distortions (Bush & Bush, 1994; Kowalski, 2001; Yates, 1999). The idea of advertising 'myths' signals the concern that advertisers (and mass media generally) promote a false world view that somehow acts on the subject (Bell, 1996; Parker, 1998). The implication that pleasures are simply the illusory promises of advertising requires critique (e.g. West, 2001; White et al., 1991). Media do not *initiate* ideas about alcohol use as potentially pleasurable or offering benefits, they draw on existing ideas and performances that people can connect with (Moore, 2002; Parker, 1998). Alcohol can constitute a form of social incentive and reward, and drinking contexts can offer social benefits (West, 2001). Advertising texts offer particular versions of how things are, and like all portrayals these will include gaps, elisions, and absences. If textual interpretations depend on the interactions of people and

texts, then attempting to constrain ideas about alcohol as pleasurable or as providing social benefits seems an unrealistic challenge.

Health research texts are also argued as being constructed through particular positions. These positions are seen as inadequately reflected on at present (Törrönen, 2001). Critiques like Törrönen's argue that alcohol health researchers, like advertisers, are actively producing knowledge/s, and that they are doing so from positions of power in which they are constituted as experts with the ability to regulate, or to educate individuals to self-regulate, according to particular norms and ideals (Tigerstedt, 1999). Consideration, therefore, of researchers' positions is identified as a key concern in alcohol debates (Törrönen, 2001). This is a strong argument against any ideas about 'objectivity' and for far greater reflexivity in research.

### **Commentaries on conditions of debate: Public opinions and winning in increments**

Attempts to substantiate a direct relationship between alcohol advertising and the negative outcomes of alcohol use within traditional research approaches have failed (Atkin, 1995; Bang & Hill, 1998; Grube, 1993). Absence of unequivocal evidence, plus declining alcohol consumption levels across many communities, seem to substantiate advertisers' arguments that ads simply recruit consumers to brands rather than to problematic consumption (Bang & Hill, 1998; McKenzie, 2000; Saunders, 1993). In addition to the problems of obtaining sufficient evidence for arguments about effects, the main body of alcohol advertising research – as in Aotearoa/New Zealand – has been heavily critiqued, even within its own ranks, for a lack of theoretical and methodological robustness, and for producing results that are not 'substantively meaningful' (Atkin, 1995; Bang & Hill, 1998; Fisher, 1993; Grube, 1993, p.64). Public health research overseas has, as with local work, been identified as suffering from problems of design, methodology, incorrect inferences of causality, rhetorical instabilities, and lapses in accuracy (Atkin, 1995; Fisher, 1993; Grube, 1993; Nikelly, 1994). This has not

constructed a strong platform from which to argue for restriction of alcohol advertising.

Restrictive governance requires public support. At present, reasonably consistent public support exists for managing safe promotion of alcohol use. Detailed labelling, tackling drink driving, promotion of alternatives to alcohol in pubs, levies on advertising, education in schools, and laws around sales to minors are all supported by public opinion (Pendleton, Smith, & Roberts, 1990). However, proposals for the complete elimination of advertising is contentious (Beccaria, 2001; McAllister, 1995). Understanding that comprehensive bans may meet too great a resistance, it has been suggested that a better strategy may be to engage in multiple, smaller projects (Grube, 1993; Harper & Martin, 2002; Saffer, 1996b; Saunders, 1993), for example, targeting the reduction of exposure of youth to commercial promotions of alcohol. This may well mean looking at how co-operation might be achieved between former adversaries (Grube, 1993). Grube also suggests that seeking to eliminate promotion overall may generate responses by alcohol companies that may have unforeseen counterproductive effects, adding that it is probably *because* alcohol ads are on air that counter ads are funded, and that without one the other may not be in circulation. This may be an important consideration when research shows that young people are engaging with and expressing such alternative views as those offered through counter-messages, in response to questions about alcohol ads (Montonen, 1997).

Researchers have argued that engagement of and co-operation with alcohol companies and their associates, over matters like *actively* reducing the appeal to minors, and more *actively* assessing for the effectiveness and enforcements of their own codes, may be a productive and necessary form of intervention (e.g. Bang & Hill, 1998; Grube, 1993; Hawks, 1993; Mintz, 1984). Reduction of appeals to minors in ads would easily obtain public support, as would arguments for increasing resources that could support young people having balanced understandings about alcohol use. If sufficiently stimulated a necessary pressure

in debates could generate productive dialogue and action on such changes being enacted (e.g. Saunders, 1993).

## **Summary**

The similarities between the Aotearoa/New Zealand research situation and those elsewhere were revealing [and, in terms of this project, validating]. The actual volumes of work were markedly different, but shared themes and issues resonated strongly across the two. The key themes in the alcohol advertising research from the health sectors were: problems with goals of proving effects; recognition of paradigm shifts in research approaches; calls for relocation of issues around alcohol advertising within wider social contexts; concerns with research gaps, especially around pleasures and reflexivity; concerns about particular impacts of alcohol advertising for children and young people; and comments on the conditions within which research is being conducted and recognition of the role such research has in debates.

A point of difference between the overseas positions and my own is that overseas two main strands of argument have developed as to how existing studies might be improved. Where I am strongly advocating a culturalist shift, overseas calls are also to review and address existing research problems (especially accuracy and focus) in order to strengthen the models, methods, and findings of research (e.g. Nikelly, 1994). This reflects critique by positivist researchers of positivist research on its own terms. Although I have to a degree, replicated that critique here, mine is clearly a more culturalist appraisal. Despite the fact, identified through the examination of the local positivist research, that the positivist work could be significantly improved on its own terms, I would take the position that researchers also need to address their research activities at a more paradigmatic level. This call for more appropriate research models is also clearly apparent in international research (cf. Bush & Bush, 1994; Moore, 2002), and the more social theoretical critiques represent a strong argument for politicising and opening debate about the constructions of the subject in traditional health projects (Tigerstedt, 1999; Törrönen, 2000, 2001). Notable

overlaps between the two strands of critique lie in common advocacy for social re-location of questions about alcohol promotion, and in arguments for recognition of variances in models that have both overgeneralised and been overly narrow in their focus (Montonen, 1997; Saffer, 1998).

# **Section Two**

## **The present research project**

*The voyage of discovery is not in seeking  
new landscapes but in having new eyes.*

*Marcel Proust*

## Chapter 6 A Discursive Approach

**Theory is not just formal proposition, but also ‘any systematic set of ideas that can help make sense of a phenomenon, guide action or predict a consequence’. Such a view highlights theory’s function as the intellectual scaffolding for the research we do. P Dahlgren cites D McQuail**

*The aim of the present project is to explore the ways in which alcohol-advertising texts in Aotearoa/New Zealand engage people, using a culturalist-interpretative research framework. The next two chapters outline the theoretical and methodological framework that has been developed for this research.*

### **Finding frameworks**

Ascribing to a ‘culturalist-interpretative’ position identifies an epistemological orientation, but it does not specify particular theoretical or methodological frameworks. In media studies, despite the more general shifts towards culturalist positions that I have described (Chapter 3), theoretical and methodological developments are still required to progress the field towards an “adequate, comprehensive and systematic theory of advertising” (Harms & Kellner, 2002, p.1). The main difficulty in achieving a comprehensive framework for advertising research has been to obtain broader social theoretical explanations within which any focus of enquiry (macro, medium range, or micro) may still be adequately addressed, and within which robust methods of analysis are identified. Such a systematic approach to researching advertising engagements needs to encompass epistemology, theory, methodology, and method within a consistently logical and coherent framework.

To address existing gaps in the field media researchers have often ‘borrowed’ usefully from outside their domain (Dahlgren, 2004). Developments in discursive research have lately drawn attention to discursive theories as potentially fruitful for media researchers to borrow from (Carpenter & Spinoy, 2004). Although

discursive approaches are recent to media studies, many are epistemologically and theoretically compatible with the more process orientated culturalist-interpretative media positions (cf. Falk, 1997, p. 76, describing ads as circulating in a " public discursive sphere"), offering a potentially promising synergy. However, those working within discursive-theoretical frameworks have also struggled to determine a systematic approach to research that adequately operationalises epistemological and theoretical insights through to the detail of methodology and method. There is not any one approach sitting available to use as a neatly packaged strategy. In terms of this project this has meant that as well as being a project that uses discursive theories to develop media research frameworks, this is also a project using media research to develop discursive frameworks. Over the next two chapters I will first describe a discursive-theoretical approach to understanding media engagements, and second, the operationalisation of this discursive-theoretical approach through the methodology that frames the logic and detail of the present research endeavour.

### **What is a discursive approach?**

It is important to define what I mean by 'taking a discursive approach', because presently this constitutes the subject of ongoing and often heated debates (cf., Hammersley, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c; Parker, 2002; Potter, 2003a, 2003b). Discursive theories and research practices have emerged across a wide range of disciplines and offer epistemologically, theoretically, and methodologically diverse positions (e.g. Burman, 1991; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Fairclough, 1992; Gavey, 2002; Hook, 2001; Macleod, 2002; Parker, 2002; Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Slembrouck, 2001; Torfing, 2004; Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001a, 2001b). These debates are very broad because they encompass both groups making specific epistemological and theoretical claims (e.g. Wetherell et al., 2001a) and the ideas and methods of those defining the field through praxis. Often praxis can mean simply employing discursive *terminologies* as a sort of academic common sense (cf., Ashcroft & Ahluwalia, 1999; Curt, 1994; Stevenson, 2002), but such practices still contribute to

constructing how discursive work is understood. Despite their differences, some of the main features within discursive projects can be 'unpacked' in order to locate discursive approaches in relation to each other. I identify the most important features dividing discursive projects as differences of paradigm, and attention or focus. I will now clarify these distinctions in order to locate the discursive position developed for this project.

### **Differences in discursive work: Positioned through paradigms**

Attention to the basic foundations structuring discursive projects highlights a fundamental, though not always well-articulated, paradigmatic division. This division separates positivist and what can be broadly identified as post-structuralist, social-constructionist, or here (for brevity) more culturalist-discursive projects. Paradigmatically discursive projects represent part of a wider epistemic shift in the social sciences, offering an alternative framework of understanding to positivism. Positivist-discursive projects represent an uptake of the ideas and methods of paradigmatically discursive projects, but these are not part of any wider epistemic shift. The differences between these paradigmatically different positions are not reconcilable.

The main stance within positivist-discursive projects is that knowledge is an outcome of objective endeavours in truth-seeking about how things actually are. This is a worldview in which there is correspondence between knowledge and 'things'. The methods of science (rational or empirical) are seen as ways in which generalisable measures and rules can be established about our physical and social worlds (Burr, 1995; Derrida, 1988). The positivist subject is a rational, separate individual with stable internal traits who may be causally acted upon by the 'outside' world in ways that positivist research seeks to measure and predict. Because positivist approaches, through their logics, are naturalised as 'truths' about how things are, any notion of a requirement for epistemological positioning or critical reflection about one's own positions as a researcher is not recognised or examined.

Broadly, 'post-structuralist' or culturalist-discursive perspectives describe a position recognising human processes of meaning-making (that is language and any other forms of signification) as playing critical roles in constructing and mediating people's ways and experiences of being and acting (e.g. Burman, 1991, 1996; Parker, 2002; Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). Despite a common tendency to overemphasise language, 'processes of meaning-making' can [and I believe should] include all languages, acts, practices, relationships, institutional arrangements, material conditions, representations, and any other forms mediating and shaping human understandings, behaviours, and experiences. Processes of meaning-making must also include the actual embodied *experience*. Such views argue that humans' sense of themselves (their 'subjectivities') and their knowledge/s about life are experiences 'effected' through interactions of particular embodied, material, cultural, social, relational, experiential, and historic locations. This view also positions *researchers* as subjective beings in particular material, cultural, social, relational, and historic locations. From such a perspective, researchers are required to seek methods of gaining awareness of, and reflecting critically on, their own locations in their research.

[Common terminologies and common attentions do not mean a common logic. Ultimately it is the structuring epistemological logic of a research enterprise that identifies the perspective informing the work. If undertaken simply as new areas of attention and methods (e.g. examining language through conversation analysis but ascribing to a traditional view of the subject) and not as an overall change in the way people and things are made sense of, projects are *not* paradigmatically discursive (e.g. Hammersley, 2003a); but they can – deliberately or unintentionally – look discursive. As was described within the local public health alcohol research, sometimes research that is positioned as culturalist-discursive is attempting to be so when it is still structured through quite conflicting (positivist) logics.]

## **A second layer of divisions: Critical differences in focus**

At what I would call the 'meta-theoretical' level I have been describing, discursive theory can be interpreted as a form of 'grand theory' – though this would probably not be popular to suggest. The reason it might be an unpopular suggestion is that grand theories are usually considered essentialising and as inevitably constraining, and as failing to allow space for the range and diversity of human experiences (Dahlgren, 2004; Nava et al., 1997). I would counter, however, that *not* to make this claim is to avoid the obvious. A paradigmatically discursive-theoretical position clearly *is* a grand theory about human processes, one that represents an overarching argument about how subjectivities, life-experiences, cultures, and communities are produced and maintained. What I believe can be different about discursive theory is that it has the potential to represent a non-essentialising position. However, because discursive theories about *processes* tend to get conflated with theories about what the *contents* or *effects* of those processes might mean, even paradigmatically-discursive theorists can fall into a trap of defining those processes as having an essential and common form or effect. This is essentialising, and it is at odds with what the meta-discursive position would argue.

Any move to talk about what discursive processes *mean* represents a crucial shift from looking at how they work. This is not to say that interpretation and argument about how discursive processes are experienced by people should not be engaged with; of course it should. It is to insist on the vital difference between recognising processes, having opinions about those processes, or offering particular versions of how those processes should be understood. This would argue, for example, that where discursive approaches have been used in conjunction with Marxism/s or psychoanalytic theories (e.g. Parker, 2002), such work should be represented as coming from Marxist or psychoanalytic theoretical positions; not as theoretically discursive. If Marxism/s or psychoanalytic theories are structuring the views being offered about the social processes being researched, then these are the theoretical positions informing the work, and the

researchers are also taking a discursively methodological approach, as opposed to working from a discursively theoretical position (see the similar critique from Hepburn in Parker, 2002, p.240). In the same way, when attention is given to 'discourses' [a term I really find problematic because it implies something so bounded] in discursive projects, researchers need to clearly distinguish the ongoing processes (discursive participation) from ideas about what it is that is being produced (themes or stories about motives, effects, or contents) through those processes (Potter, Wetherell, Gill, & Edwards, 2002).

A meta-discursive position can represent a theory about processes, but clear separation is required of that theoretical position from theories about the meanings, contents, or effects of those processes. These things are local and contingent, not general. To avoid the trap of essentialising I would argue that this is a vital difference requiring clarification. As stated, because bodies of discursive work are diverse and presently in debate with each other (e.g. Parker, 2002; Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002; Wetherell et al., 2001a), my argument for such separations represents one position on how discursive theory should be understood.

### **The discursive theoretical framework of this project**

The discursive position informing this research is epistemologically and meta-theoretically discursive. It is also what I would term a materially aware discursive-theoretical position. It argues that all 'knowledge/s' of the worlds we inhabit are socio-culturally-historically produced, and that all experiences are mediated through culturally particular ways of making sense, and through culturally particular locations of materially located, embodied beings. This does not suggest [as detractors might argue] that there is no reality it argues that *any* 'realities' – defined in this context as what we 'know' of our worlds, or how we assume them to be – are inescapably mediated. Our bodies, objects, and material conditions are as much mediatory elements in discursive processes as languages, gestures, or images (Lury, 1996). This view argues that an individual *and* the social can be understood as producing, as well as being produced

through, social-discursive processes. Every word, every act, every space, every condition, every institution, every ritual, and so on – all re-produce the discursive in endless processes. Media are part of those processes.

To study these processes, attention or focus can range on a continuum from examination of the very broad (e.g. media impacts on societies, communities, media as a social force) through the more medium range (e.g. community groups as audiences, institutions of production, texts, genres), to the very specific (e.g. a filmic text, conversations in a scene, interactions, or textual ‘grammar’ – language, music, visual); as long as any form of attention is clearly located in a framework that identifies the focus is on one process within the breadth of the many other processes involved. Followed through, this discursive-theoretical position can direct attention to *how* such processes might be explored; that is, it can offer a strong methodological logic.

At a broad level, discursive activities – that is, those meaning-making activities that re-produce ‘knowledge/s’ in the form of ideas, acts, and subjectivities – are understood as processes in which there is an intrinsic ‘struggle’ taking place to set out how things are understood and done in particular ways. Through activities of talking, representing, behaving, and through setting out environments in certain ways, particular discursive formations (defined here as constructions about how things can be understood that are discursively re-produced), are re-enacted, challenged, challenging, or even being re-worked. The conceptual term used to indicate these processes of mediatory struggle that represent such an important aspect of human lives is ‘discursivity’.

Discursivity is not a linear process but an unpredictable struggle – a ‘struggle’ over how things are set out and argued as being able to be understood (Changeux & Ricoeur, 2000). It is also a struggle that takes place through how what is said, or done, is interpreted, understood, and responded to. In this way, listening – or in this context spectatorship, or viewing – also represent forms of participation in discursive struggle. Seeing, making sense, interpreting, and responding are as much a part of discursive processes as acting, speaking, and

offering versions of how things should be understood. Every time we act, speak, or respond we draw on the range of what is discursively available to us.

Discursive processes are necessarily something of which we, as participants, are not always actively aware of or deliberate about. Although 'struggles' over meaning take place at all levels of lived experiences, those struggles are predominantly engaged in without critical awareness [implications of what this suggests about the discursive subject/s are addressed below]. Critical awareness is entirely possible but not general. However, when critical awareness is engaged, opportunities for re-working ideas become more likely (cf. the excellent exchange between Changeux & Ricoeur, 2000).

In a discursive framework, an alcohol advertising text would represent a tangible moment of participation in and across broader discursive processes and spaces (conceptual and material). The ad-text can be understood as a small part of larger, ongoing socio-cultural process of sense-making; albeit a form of participation that can be multiply re-produced through repeated presentations and viewings – but, each time the experience of that viewing will be differently situated. What is represented within an ad-text (e.g. people drinking beer in bars) are forms of discursive engagements (about beer, people, places, leisure, and so on) that will re-produce (or potentially re-work) socio-culturally available discursive possibilities about people, drinking, bars, leisure and so on. Discursive processes produce discursive formations: constructions about how things can be understood. The ad-texts represent and attempt to engender recognition of and positive engagements with, reproductions of particular discursive formations. These are formations the producers of those texts are hoping will be reproduced again through interaction with their texts. It is only in interaction that any meaning is reproduced, or not. The person engaging with an ad-text will do so from particular locations and positions, and what they bring to bear interpretatively to the ad-text will determine their interpretative-response.

Theoretically, ad-texts, and engagements with them, can be made more readily apparent as *being* discursive processes by examining and making visible the

connections, divergences, or disjunctions between the themes in the ad-texts, the socio-cultural-historic contexts in which they are in play, and the multiple interpretations and responses of people engaged with them. In these interactions, one should find connections, resonances, and differences that will offer a sense of the wider debates (struggles) in which the ad-text and those responding to it are engaged.

So, as example, there will be multiple themes, positions, and versions of what is thought possible around beer use (and people using it) across different communities. Identifying a range of past and recent texts about beer, forms of talk about beer, and information about acts involving beer within a local context should provide a space of discursive-location for an ad-text about beer. By contrasting and comparing what is on offer in an ad-text within a wider local context one can reveal the positions and struggles taking place around what is on offer. Recognising and connecting to other interpretations of that ad-text from other people (beer drinkers or not) from that context will allow consideration of the variety of ways in which the local context is being reflected, and the ad-text is being engaged with; for example, through pleasure/s, recognition/s, resistance/s, and refusal/s around the stories and representations on offer.

In terms of its various contents, any discursive formation (what a particular text has to say about beer use, or as a formation produced through what is interpreted as said) is only *artificially* identifiable as singular or as an object. In fact 'a formation' is never truly isolable, bounded, or static; it is something that occurs within and as the *process*. One formation will contain and reference multiple others (e.g. what is said about beer speaks to leisure, gender, social relationships, and so on). But consideration of discursive formations *as if* they were specific and bounded can give a horizon to the work of analysis. An emphasis on '*as if*' is essential; '*as if*' offers space to a position that some discursive researchers have found difficult because attention to *particular* discursive formations appears to reify them (Wetherell et al., 2001b).

Through the wider processes of re-production, what is re-produced through discursive formations will alter subtly, or comprehensively, over time (multiple formations and shifts around gendered roles portrayed in advertising are a good example of this). Any changes wrought over time can be through major shifts in conditions (e.g. economic developments, inventions, medicines, wars), and /or through local variances – either very gradual, or more sudden. Theoretically, change is intrinsic but not usually rapid, and particular discursive formations can operate with relative autonomy, over long periods, and with great authority and power, e.g. positivist psychologies. Such strongly ‘institutionalised’ discursive forms can seem natural and will be far less immediately contested than alternative discursive space/s and forms. [The institutions, practices, texts, and talk of ‘scientific’-positivist psychological research, have existed in strongly naturalised discursive formations and are entwined in, and re-produced through, other naturalised discursive formations – e.g. science aligned to truth. Despite the arguably major upheavals across many disciplines that have seen positivism ‘denaturalised’ (Skinner, 1985), within psychology, positivist logic still holds a strong position in its institutionalised and still largely naturalised form.]

To make sense of how discursive processes operate through all aspects of lived experience, it is important to stress again that discursivity does not simply refer to activities of talk. Knowledge/s – the articulated products of historical/cultural convergences of humans’ discursive activities and interactions – are artefacts of culture (Gergen, 1985) but they also *inhabit* artefacts of culture (Brown, 2001). Discursive activities of, and engagements in, meaning-making can be about material conditions, artefacts, acts, and practices as much as they are about language use. To take us back to the immediate project, understood discursively – whether in an advertisement or in a social gathering – the act of drinking alcohol has meanings; the space in which it is consumed has meanings; who consumes, and what and how they consume, all have meanings – and these meanings can all be different for different people, or even differ for the same person in different contexts. Meanings about alcohol are multiple and diverse, there is no culture-free interpretation of it (Heath, 1995). What alcohol means to

whom is context-dependent, contested within the spoken and also contested as practiced, with meanings re-produced (or re-worked) through elements like speech, practices, and spaces. Attention to these different dimensions will therefore involve attending to what is visibly manifest, or less visibly so but still present as potential. For example, a 'man's beer' deliberately speaks to men but it also says something to women.

Research attention is therefore required to 'language in use' (what is done with, constructed through, included, or excluded through language, and the impacts and consequences of this (Potter & Wetherell, 1987)). Research attention is also required to what is used, done or participated in (including environments) that is not 'worded' as such but that words still inhabit (Brown, 2001). Images, objects, environments, the spoken, heard, symbolised, seen, enacted, and experienced all work together through dialectically related dimensions as part of the processes of discursive struggle to set out and make sense of how things are (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). Through these interactions, what is generated is a 'reality', something that is temporarily albeit unstably 'effected' (Foucault, 1983). The points at which 'realities' are generated (in the form of discursive formations) are the points at which a discursive researcher can engage.

Within an alcohol advertising text, the different elements of discursive activities (e.g. audio-visual representations, material setting out of conditions – literally how things are laid out, talk, acts and performances of identities) combine to re-produce particular discursive formations, and in doing so, they will be drawing on, negotiating, excluding, or working against other possibilities. A discursive framework makes sense of the creation of an ad-text as an attempt to produce such an 'effect' – a rhetorical construction that works to communicate ideas about a brand and its use (who, where, how), that might be re-producing various discursive formations around leisure, play, gender, pleasures, or positions available as a subject of discursive formations of being from Aotearoa/New Zealand and so on. [Again it should be stressed that the *producers* are unlikely to make sense of their work in this way, that is, as it is understood through a

theoretically discursive frame]. These dialectically produced formations will be visible as constructed through specific devices within the text – e.g. clothing, music, setting, actors, lighting, linguistic devices and so on. Because discursive formations are interconnected and reference multiple other ‘texts’ (through inclusion or exclusion), theoretically a text will also convey ‘excessive’ meanings, that is, it will convey *beyond* what is rhetorically intended by any producer of a text.

Theoretically, a discursive formation can only be meaningful through relations constructed within and across it – between the different elements in articulation (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). This view argues that a discursive formation is constructed through the positions it identifies, and this puts what is dominant in a discursive formation in debate with what is implicated through it as alternative or other. What is in articulation can be said – or interpreted – within what is included through the formation on offer, but also vitally through what is excluded. So, an element in one particular discursive articulation can be ‘said’ as good (alcohol ad says pleasure – alcohol is a great social lubricant) but interpreted as bad (health review of the text – alcohol ad says drink too much and is a source of social harm). Each formation (offered or interpreted) of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ depends on what is *exterior* (people and conditions) as well as *interior* to the discursive formations in play (Macleod, 2002). For example, an ad-text may reflect the social situation of people enjoying alcohol together at a party having fun in one another’s company, but a person engaging with that text may reflect on it through the experience of being a non-drinker who found the company of people drinking alcohol at a party excessively boorish.

So, whilst a discursive production may seek to exclude other subordinate, or contradictory ideas, (drinkers can be a bore) those productions necessarily refer to other ideas, or contain what Derrida referred to as the *absent trace* of them (Derrida, 1994). In this way any texts contain the conditions for discursive struggles within themselves, depending on interpretations and responses. An advertisement for alcohol necessarily bears traces of formations around alcohol

harms, which, whilst they may or may not be taken up in interpretation, can never be wholly excluded as a possibility. Equally, public health talk about alcohol advertising can focus on formations about harms, but they cannot eliminate them as connected to pleasures. The view depends on focus and position.

In a discursive theoretical framework, meaning is not just about 'a text'. The space of representation, interpretation, and response to that text will bring multiple ideas, formations, presences, and experiences, which will interact with (enjoying, reinforcing, negotiating, disrupting) what the text has to offer. What is discursively produced, therefore, as the 'truth' effect of anything, is always contingent on the *interacting* contexts of conditions, productions, interpretations, and responses.

Theoretically the 'identification' of particular discursive formations within texts *must* be an interpretative act. If one is looking for 'evidence' of a particular formation, and of that formation being engaged with, then attention and comparisons are required, both around the locations of texts and multiple interpretations. This can offer visibility to the ways in which particular aspects of a text are connecting and resonating, and to how the same points signify differently for different people, or the same people across different contexts, and across texts. Such differences highlight the contingent nature of interpretations. So, from a discursive theoretical position, any academic interpretation/s alone – however well researched – should not stand alone (albeit that if they are well researched and located they may be useful). What makes any analysis meaningful is how formations or themes any researcher might identify and respond to resonate with or differ from what is socio-culturally available to other subject/s, through other texts, other interpretations and responses, and through connection of these perceived themes to broader contexts. Different 'worlds' generate different experiences; the goal is to obtain some visibility for the connections.

In media research, to gain any sense of 'locational contexts', some idea is required of the complexly interrelated elements of the socio-cultural, historical, economic, and political forces in play (Parker, 1992), and of people's lived

experiences (Giroux, 2002) in circulation around and enacted through audiences as embodied subject/s. All elements of contexts are themselves fully discursive and operate as sites of meanings that can work in *particular* ways to enable or constrain interpretative possibilities. Understanding this contextual complexity can give a necessary horizon to materiality (through conditions and located bodies) and space to address problems like capital and constraint as forms of interpretative resource or interpretative barrier. So, in terms of resources such as power or money, communities can be contrasted and compared for advantage or disadvantage, and the implications of more material and less immediately tangible forces can be considered. In discursive theory, advertising is relational to and needs to be considered within these broader lived contexts rather than extracted from them. Such an approach can highlight how any discursive formations being re-produced are sensible, why and how they resonate meaningfully, and how they might have relationships to certain conditions.

So, politics, economics, and material conditions are all part of the local interrelated systems and practices we label culture/s informing alcohol use. *These* are the contexts through which any debates about alcohol advertising and their representations in advertisements for alcohol are constituted (Fairclough, 1992). [I would argue that here in Aotearoa/New Zealand politics are dominated through neo-liberalism and an emphasis on individual rights and responsibilities. The economic structure is dominantly shaped through consumerism and it is a country in which economic resources are inequitably distributed.] 'Material conditions' refers to the interactions of multiple contingent circumstances, such as the actual economic resources people have when they feel like drinking; the discursive 'resources' they have about alcohol that they draw on, or that draw them into particular acts or positions when drinking; through to things like people actually having the time to consume alcohol; whether and how alcohol is available to them; the legitimacy they have of access to spaces of alcohol consumption; and the local 'rules' governing spaces and acts of consumption.

Attention to contexts as 'locations' is critical because any discursive formations in an advertisement are re-produced and made possible – or not possible – through these contexts. Making sense of the discursive locations of an advertisement, in context, can reveal a sense of the space/s, processes, and dimensions of the discursive struggles in which any one text is engaged (deliberately or not). This requires locating and drawing attention to the competing strands of talk and activities about alcohol (e.g. religious, political, health, feminist, commercial) and how different systems work in relation to alcohol (e.g. of peer relationships, legislations, social roles). This provides somewhere to locate an ad-text, *and* what we, and others, have to say about it, as activities in these broader debates.

It is important to identify that, whilst meanings within texts are potentially multiple, meanings are not simply open-ended. Interpretatively, the idea that 'anything goes' does not hold. Interpretations will necessarily experience strong constraints as conditions privilege particular versions, rather than create space for alternative versions to emerge (Hook, 2001). Particular formations in particular communities will take precedence and authority over others (e.g. for television executives concerned with revenue, alcohol advertising may be good, but for public health workers concerned with well-being, alcohol advertising may be bad). Context creates focus and the space in which the focus is salient.

'Contextualisation' (Slembrouck, 2001) of the re-productions of particular discursive formations and engagements can highlight those contexts and the effects they have on interpretive positions. Holding one discursive engagement (e.g. how one person responds to an ad-text) and exploring how it connects to, resonates with, or works against another is therefore a key part of discursive projects. It is not a better version of 'truth' that is sought. Rather the focus is on the processes involved in developing (producing) and connecting to (engaging with) particular ad-texts, identifying the range of debates being drawn on, and how they interact, as well as considering the impacts and conditions of those things. The argument is that once we examine ad-texts in these ways then we can perhaps consider what to do with them.

## **The discursive subject**

What does the discursive position taken for this project offer about the human subject? The ways in which we make sense of human beings are at the heart of any theories about 'how ads work', yet this remains a persistently problematic area for media theorists. As identified in Chapter 4, ideas about subjectivity/s are often implied, as opposed to specifically deliberated, in theories and research. Implicitly or explicitly, theories about the subject continue to be varied and contested, with both positivist and culturalist versions of the subject containing particular problems that have yet to be theoretically resolved (cf., Bordwell & Carroll, 1996; Gauntlett, 2002). Two key problematics have been ideas about 'unconscious' processes and explanations for investments (in this instance, investments in ad-texts or the identificatory positions they offer). The struggle over terms and ways of understanding people in media theories is similarly reflected in discursive debates (Gavey, 2002); contesting viewpoints represent fundamental and familiar philosophic struggles over how humans can be understood. What is clear from both fields is that more complex theoretical explanations are required; development of such explanations is something discursive projects might be able to contribute to.

How have discursively theorised subjects been understood? Within discursive projects differences around subject constructions are not too dissimilar from those in media studies more generally. The main point of divergence is between attributions of subject agency and arguments for subject determinism. In simple terms, theoretical views range from understanding an individual as hailed and positioned by a particular discursive formation or, in this case, the multiple formations in an advertising text (deterministic) to a person being understood as using discursive resources to suit their interests (agentic). This resembles debates that have developed in media theories, which have ranged between media-focused concerns with effects (determinism) and reception-focused concerns with more active audiences (agency). As within media debates the area of research attention (whether more to texts or audiences) tends to determine the

position taken. Social (macro) theorists lean to determinism (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) and the more locally (micro) focused, to agency (Wooffitt, 2001). Lately, arguments for 'soft-determinism' have sought to address the relationships between agency and determinism (e.g., Gavey, 2002; Wetherell, 1998). This latter position is closest to what is offered in the theoretical outline here. The argument is that people are both determined/re-produced and determining/re-producing (or even re-working) but with greater or lesser degrees of agency. Agency lies in the *level* of critical awareness with which people engage in discursive processes.

The notion of 'levels' re-iterates the gaps presently stretching the fabric of the overly 'thin' discursive subject (Hammersley, 2001). To address such gaps requires attention to the previously highlighted problematics of levels of 'consciousness' of processes in which people are engaged, and forms of investment in engagements. The question here is what can the discursive theoretical position I have set out offer to address these concerns? This theoretical position holds that media texts can engage people in multiple ways, and that both forms and awareness of those engagements will vary. All positions and meanings that any text might have to offer are only *potentially* available because engagements with what is on offer depends on what contexts (interactions between conditions, relations, a person's experiences, and what is on offer interpretatively) make salient. Engagements also depend on questions of a person's present focus and awareness. Issues around 'unconscious' processes and investments, therefore, are *both* related to contexts. Theorisation about differing levels of awareness and forms of response (to a text) must therefore revolve around interrelated questions of:

- What is active as potential? Which particular discursive formations is a text attempting to re-produce, re-work or implicate, that are possible in this (socio-cultural-historic) context?

- Prior 'knowledge/s and experiences. What resources and experiences does a person/group bring to a textual encounter? What of that potential (singular or plural) is presently made salient? How?
- Focus. What are the contexts for the person/people right now? What and who is working to elicit or make salient particular ways of 'seeing'/'hearing'?
- Attention. A person cannot hold all discursive possibilities at once. How is attention presently focused? How and why does it shift?
- Normality. What conventions and constraints are in play? What is 'normal' and acceptable in the immediate socio-cultural context? What stories are drawn on in interpretation and how do they connect to those on offer in the text? What seems so natural that it is 'allowed' unquestioningly? What elicits critique?
- How do elements of contexts shift to make things differently visible?

Thus, in terms of 'consciousness', this discursive theoretical argument offers that one person cannot hold awareness of all things all the time. This position argues that it is not possible for one person have access to all discursive possibilities at one time. No one can assume all possible positions at once and no single context can enable or make salient all possible versions/positions one person might have or know. The argument is that what does occur is contingent and local *through* what is made salient and elicited (*not*, as many would argue, simply what is repressed). For an individual, there are normalising (including-excluding, and the logics of inclusion and exclusion) effects to discursive processes taking place when they discursively engage.

In a similar vein, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argue that, discursively, people engage in more or less active processes. They suggest that because we cannot hold awareness of all meanings all the time, and because some things become naturalised as 'just how things are', it is only on reflection that these variable discursive dimensions become available for consideration. Theoretically, salience

and awareness will shift on the basis of influences such as new ideas being introduced, challenges to what is expressed, or through evoking alternative remembering. In research, therefore, attention is required to such shifts and what has generated them.

In terms of investments, what needs to be considered is that whilst the discursive formations in an advertising text are recognisable as processes of meaning-making that seek to set out the world, or aspects of it in particular ways we are not necessarily going to take up singular or obvious positions in relation to what those texts have to offer. Dependent on *context* we experience the world – or seek it out – from particular positions. In other contexts, or even in the same context, as some new idea becomes salient, we may seem to be contesting our own ‘logic’ as we shift flexibly into different positions (Edley & Wetherell, 1997). As Edley and Wetherell demonstrate, positions people take up are not stable, but become differently inflected moment by moment through what is made salient and elicited within context (1997). One investment may be easily abandoned for another.

So why might we engage in particular ‘views’ of discursive formations and/or the subject positions they appear to offer? The idea of textual investments has previously been taken up through a diversity of ideas in research: through functionality or purpose (Alcorn Jr., 1994; Edwards & Potter, 1992); strategies of avoidance (Hanly, 1983; Hoffman, 2003); cognitive utilitarianism and psychoanalytic theories – separate theories, but both related to ideas that connect investments to reward or cost; and identity perspectives, relating to values and identifications (Rothbard & Edwards, 2003). Despite their many differences, these approaches all offer a common concern with the multiple dimensions inflecting investments – whether agentic or determined – of such things as previous experiences, present contexts, relationships, and culturally dominant precedents. Whilst these concerns with investments have drawn attention to ways in which taking up different positions can be understood as local, flexible, and contingent, what has been missing in these explanations is

some engagement with the idea of *investment itself as an ongoing process* rather than as something that can be stabilised and bounded.

If investment, like identity, is understood as an ongoing dimension of discursive processes rather than examined as a discrete element that is separate from it, then space is created for contingency, flexibility, and the range of more or less aware engagements through which we discursively engage and are engaged. Thus we may have complex and plural investments in particular re-presentations of masculinities offered in a commercial promoting a beer sponsorship of the All Blacks. These investments may resonate through many facets of our different life contexts, and it may be those that we are engaging with. However, until such contexts are salient, an aware response indicating any form of investiture in what a text has to offer may simply be as “I like the music in that ad” or “go you All Blacks”. The argument therefore is that investment, like discursivity, is (by degrees) a flexible and contingent process. If this position is correct then methodology must attend to plurality – of interpretations and responses and of positions taken in relation to those things – in order for investiture to be properly considered.

Because unconscious processes and investments have been persistent gaps in discursive theories, and indeed media theories generally, it is unsurprising that other already existing frameworks have been drawn on to explore these issues. In particular, as alluded to above, various incarnations of psychoanalytic constructions of the ‘unconscious’ have been employed as frameworks that can engage with these issues (the wide acceptance of having an ‘unconscious’ is a good example of how particular discursive formations can become naturalised) (cf Billig, 1997; Hollway & Jefferson, 1997). Again, this form of borrowing in discursive work parallels media studies where there has also been a heavy use of psychoanalytic ideas (Bordwell & Carroll, 1996). Whilst this theoretical borrowing may have seemed a more fruitful option than developing existing theories more fully, it has brought with it some irresolvable tensions.

Whatever they *can* offer, psychoanalytic positions argue a subject that remains dissonant with the subject implied by discursive theory (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). For example, a Lacanian psychoanalytic framework has been suggested as one explanation for why discursive interpellation of the subject (being hailed and positioned by a text) succeeds (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). The concept is of a fundamentally fractured or split self, which offers a subject driven by an endless and unrealisable search for unity. The suggestion is that temporary, albeit unstable, unity is available through discursive positioning. The trouble with this idea is that close attention to talk, as has been undertaken in Conversation Analysis, reveals the very flexible approach people adopt to taking up and shifting across positions in discursive activities (e.g. Edley, 2001).

A fundamental drive for unity would seem to be at odds with the discursive flexibility Edley's research highlights. Even if one accepts cultural/textual offerings of imagined unity, when the way people talk and respond is examined, individuals seem to very comfortably shift (and cope with others shifting) between quite different subject positions rather than attempt to maintain coherence or unity. Also problematic is that one person can take up different positions across different contexts [I might be an excessive consumer of alcohol drinking heavily on a night out, who is also an alcohol researcher working to oppose alcohol promotion and excessive consumption]. Any unity sought in this flexible context-dependent process would require a pathological process of repair because each shift in position must continually deal with the challenge of what is being shifted out of and replaced.

The critical issue for discursive theory would seem to be the very idea of a 'fractured' subject. Fracture implies a movement from whole to parts and a whole that requires, or seeks, a fundamental coherence. However the 'whole', if one accepts a discursive position that argues 'identities' as processes, does not need a theory of fracture – there is no whole. Discursive theory offers a complete idea of subjectivities as process, as contingent movements and flexibility operating within the constraints of possibility (*strong* constraints) produced through

context/s (of experience/s and space). The fractured or split subject does not seem to *fit* discursive theory. Perhaps the dominant metaphors of psychoanalytic theories have become a problem. 'Fractured' or 'split' could be re-worked to be understood as another way of 'seeing' fluidity and shifts.

A different approach to combining discourse theory and psychoanalysis has been to understand the 'unconscious' as formed through dialogue in and with the social discursive world (Billig, 1997). This initially seems an attractive proposition. However, this particular reworking of Freud suggests that through such dialogue we repress and acquire a general and *fundamental* capacity for repression. This idea shifts the theory of discursive struggle subtly but importantly. The concept of 'repression' argues that whether 'unconscious' or not, things must be 'held back' by an individual. Discursive theory stresses positions not as results of what is *inevitably* held back but also as what are *elicited* through contexts. These represent different versions of subjectivities. So, rather than simply borrowing from psychoanalytic models that essentialise a pathological subject or find only repression and projection (which is not to say such a move as repression may not *potentially* occur), attention to and inclusion of *focus*, *salience*, and *awareness* may offer theoretically more consistent alternatives as explanations for discursive subjectivities.

As I understand it, a contextually-located discursive subject is engaged in the ongoing social re-production of discursive processes. Discursivity is both produced through and produces the subject. A subject cannot hold awareness of all things all the time, nor can a person have access to all discursive possibilities, nor can they assume all possible positions at once. The context a subject inhabits can enable or make salient all possible versions/positions one person might have access to or know about, but what does get elicited, or made salient, is contingent, local, and shifting. What is elicited depends on what are operating as constraints as well as what are operating as liberators. Eliciting may include a response of holding back by the subject – that is repression – but this is not the *only* mechanism of response, nor is such holding back necessarily pathological.

By attending to the range and diversity of what a subject has to say or do, within the contexts in which they are located as they say or do them, we should be able to begin to make sense of the processes involved.

[Despite media theories not having specifically articulated the detail of such a theory of the subject, the resonance with contemporary media perspectives is apparent here. For example, Chapter 3, Process approaches.]

### **Diversity not relativism**

To argue that there is no such thing as an unengaged-with text, that there is no 'true' or final meaning to be uncovered, and that interpretations will inevitably vary, may be challenged as being overly (and problematically) relativist. This argument about discursivity is, however, that meanings can resonate sufficiently within and across groups and that it is sensible to describe pleasures, irritations, expressions, ideas, and themes that are shared. In a discursive framework, it can be the role of research to examine how textual ideas are aligned to (or interruptive of) particular social institutions, cultural conditions, and broader discursive formations (Giroux, 2002). It is important to emphasise again, that despite discursive plurality, freedom and originality can be thoroughly overplayed – much of what is said/done is discursive re-circulation (Hook, 2001). This makes the appearance of connections, resonance/s, and differences sensible *and sensible to pursue*. It is here that interpretative analysis represents more than rhetorical skill, it represents a test of the argument.

By working *across* texts, acts, representations, practices, and institutions, and the contexts in which these things are located (that is, the conditions of their discursive emergence), research can make visible the resonances, connections, and differences that highlight any single text, or practice, or condition, as *of* particular socio-cultural historical space/s rather than as simply back-grounded by it (Fairclough, 1992). The words resonance, connection, and difference are the anchor points for what discursive analysis seeks to make visible. It is *resonance* rather than *evidence* that is sought. However, because we have access to records of discursive processes – in texts, representations, acts,

practices, and conditions – ‘evidence’, of a sort, exists. This becomes more than rhetoric. The focus here is on the ‘nature of the space’ and what it is that enables or constrains what can take place in that space (Couldry, 2002).

### **In summary**

The logic that the discursive-theoretical position described here offers for research is that the central focus for a discursive approach must be on the range and diversity of what is discursively on offer around the subject of interest, and on how people are located and positioned within that range and diversity. This inverts the logic of positivism. Diversity (variability) is no longer a problem for understanding, nor does it have to be controlled. Diversity becomes the point of access for mapping and understanding what is taking place. By mapping the range of what is discursively on offer about a subject (like alcohol), and then locating what people have to say about this (e.g. through ad-texts, or in response to them) in the wider discursive context (all on offer about the subject), locations, positions, connections, and differences can be made apparent. Through contrasting and comparing visibility is obtained. Recognition that positions and locations can be fluid requires discursive methodology that can attend to range and connections and the subtleties of movement. A form of ‘Discursive Sonar’ is required.

## Chapter 7 Methodology and Method

Listening to both sides of a story will convince you that there is more to a story than both sides. Frank Tyger

[Sonar: A method or device for detecting and locating – a sensing strategy, which can examine an environment by the way in which that environment transmits, reflects and/or absorbs communications.]

Discursive research – indeed qualitative research generally – has been challenged as to its methodological adequacy (e.g. Antaki, Billig, Edwards, & Potter, 2003; Barker, 2003; Parker, 2002). Methodology and method can lack consonance, be conflated, or tend to be poorly articulated and offered in terms that can both obfuscate understanding and evade detail (Macleod, 2002). This makes discursive work an easy target for challenges (Torfing, 2004) and the adequate operationalisation of theory is something discursive researchers have to confront (Carpenter & Spinoy, 2004). However, if methodology makes sense as a follow-on from what has been set out theoretically, there should be little need for apology although there will always be room for constructive critique. My own approach to operationalising theory owes a debt of acknowledgment to the work of Parker (2002), Brown (2001), Fairclough (1992), MacLeaod (2002) and Hook (2001), all of whom are key contributors to the area and all of whom offer useful reviews around particular issues of methodology and method in discursive work. My approach reflects both synergies and differences with theirs.

### **Operationalising a discursive approach**

#### ***1. Locating the work: establishing contexts***

Following the theoretical position outlined, this project seeks to locate alcohol advertising texts as of and within wider discursive debates about alcohol and its use, and to consider the processes through which those texts are (or are not)

engaging people. Theoretically, advertising texts, *and* any engagements with those texts, represent active fragments of participation within much broader discursive processes (conceptual and material) through which ideas about alcohol are re-generated (maintained, transformed or altered). This argues text-participant engagements as discursive processes manifested through interactions between texts, as cultural productions in cultural contexts, and socio-culturally, historically, relationally, materially, and experientially located individuals. Both texts and engagements draw on and are constructed through possibilities within the available discursive range (salient knowledge/s and experiences). [I realise experience is a form of knowledge but I emphasise it because too often this dimension of 'knowing' is given insufficient attention.]

Present contexts and histories are rarely included in current contributions to debates about alcohol advertising (see submissions to the 2003 Liquor advertising review (Advertising Standards Authority, 2003)). But in a culturalist framework, the socio-cultural setting represents the conditions of intelligibility for production and interpretation. Establishing this context offers location for any research with texts or participants. The main consideration here is of the ways in which the formations on offer in any advertising texts and talk about those texts connect, resonate, or differ – both with each other and within the wider range of formations around alcohol circulating within Aotearoa/New Zealand communities. This exercise can also offer somewhere to locate the positions expressed in the reviewed research of Chapter 4, which perhaps make more sense when understood as a particular form of participation within these broader debates.

Theoretically, an overview of broader social histories, conditions, and discursive formations re-generating ideas about alcohol locally cannot ever be complete (being process) but an adequately researched background should convey a sufficient sense of the discursive range constituting the wider contexts in which to locate the productions-engagements of interest. This can represent the 'locational text'.

In this project, methodology therefore requires that attention first be given to the wider discursive range that represents the context for the more local discursive activities of producing and engaging with ad-texts. A useful approach to exploring such locations and conditions can be found in a (loosely) Foucauldian strategy of examining histories and attending to the different ways in which particular communities, institutions, and talk have shaped cultural expressions around a particular subject over time (Rainbow & Rose, 2003). To generate a sense of this locational space in relation to alcohol in Aotearoa/New Zealand, mapping key points of activity and struggle around how alcohol is made sense of and used requires attention to a reasonably comprehensive range of materials available about this subject. Information, in the form of various arguments and positions about alcohol in Aotearoa/New Zealand, is available within a wide range of historical literature (fact and fiction), documents, research studies, Government and organisational information and policy documents, drug and alcohol health papers and reports, media programmes and articles, general reports, public notices, and websites.

Although a local and unique space, Aotearoa/New Zealand has been – and perhaps now to a lesser extent, continues to be – influenced by strong Western relationships, processes, and themes. It was felt therefore that any review would benefit from not being restricted to local publications but, whilst focusing on those, also considering key reports, studies, and books referring to the history of alcohol use from other perspectives from overseas, both Western and non-Western (e.g. Heath, 1995).

The method identified through which to generate such a locational text was to undertake a wide-ranging literature review covering academic and non-academic sources. The contention was that this technique could cast a reasonably broad net across multiple forms of discursive participation in debates around alcohol that, whilst textually linguistic, would incorporate talk about acts and practices, and therefore provide information about broader discursive processes surrounding alcohol. The texts obtained for review were generated through a

search process that included the internet, academic libraries (accessing local and international databases, journals, and magazine and press archives), New Zealand Breweries Archives, the Hocken Library, private collections, Government departments, Alcohol Advisory Council libraries, alcohol related charitable trusts, local and overseas book sellers, and contacts with different media organisations. Once initial documents, programmes, and information had been reviewed, key themes were identified and used to structure a report that provides the textual location for this research (Chapter 8).

## **2. Engaging with variances: Divergent perspectives**

With an adequate form of locational text established, the alcohol advertising texts and responses to those texts can be considered within that locational context. This practice argues for examining advertising texts, and participants' engagements with those, as *part* of ongoing discursive processes about alcohol. The process of bringing attention to the relationship of one to the others (person, text, contexts) provides a sense of discursive processes being enacted. Critically, it will be both the *consonances* and *variances* within and between contexts, texts, and interpretations-responses that will give visibility to these processes. Logically, the range of what is offered as a locational text will never be a complete or finite 'whole' of interpretative possibilities and responses, nor is it suggested such a thing is possible. Boundaries will always need to be set or a project of this nature would never be completed. What should be achievable is: 1) a grasp of the processes through which discursive engagements with the advertisements in question are being enacted; and 2) a sense of the range of resonances and differences that the selected texts interpretatively-responsively elicit and for whom, within a local context with particular participants. These outcomes should provide a useful contribution to local debates.

Mapping textual and interpretative variances and consonances requires multiple perspectives. It has been argued that if a researcher comes from within a culture through which a text is intended to be sensible, there is a good chance that the key formations around which a text is constructed will be available to them

(Parker, 2002). I would agree. A well prepared academic review should offer a strong sense of debates and, as Parker argues, thus prepared, a reasonable analysis should be the result. However, as my review of the existing research identified, like everyone else, researchers come from particular positions that work to reduce what can be textually recognisable – in ways of which we are not necessarily aware. For example, the gap highlighted around pleasures was identified as engendered through the particular perspective of alcohol being a problem in the local research review. This emphasises how necessary it is to attend to other versions of and positions about what a text has to offer. I would argue that the requirement for other interpretations and responses remains *essential* if it is to *be* a discursive analysis. It is only through the critical attentions of others that any diversity of engagements and positions can be acquired, and it is this that can offer any analysis its depth and wider relevance.

### ***My 'voices'***

I have already introduced my [less academic] voice of interruption. I now need to introduce other forms of my 'voice' in this research. Part of the objective of the project was to locate a more academic view of the alcohol advertising texts in the study in relation to other participants. In order to compare an 'academically' informed analysis of the advertising texts with interpretations and responses of other non-academic participants in the research, I could have recruited another media researcher and used that person's voice as a point of comparison. However, from a discursive perspective, the device of 'hearing' *myself* speak, in the contexts of locations and of other voices, offered greater potential. My academic 'voice' would offer a media inflected analysis as a point of comparison but theoretically locating that voice and examining it against others (producers and other participants) would also act as a reflexive technique to illuminate my positions. This meant I needed to take up and make clearly visible more than one role, or voice, in the actual research.

The method I developed to do this was to identify: Jane (J1), the voice of a person conducting an initial media analysis of the ad-texts in the research, who

also conducted the interviews; and then, Jane (J2), the voice of Jane the PhD student, who is interpreting and critically reflecting on what Jane (J1) and the other participants had to say in the research. These voices are different by virtue of being engaged at different stages in the process. As Jane (J1), I conducted a textual analysis of the advertising texts selected for the research prior to any other work on the project. I also conducted all the interviews prior to any analysis of what participants had to say. Any of the work from my initial analyses of the ad-texts, or the interviews I conducted, is clearly marked as undertaken by Jane (J1) and as different from Jane (J2), the voice of the person using those materials for the participant comparisons. As Jane (J2) I could then reflect back on the ways in which I had engaged with the ad-texts as contrasted and compared with the ways that other, differently located, participants engaged with these ad-texts.

My method of academic analysis of the ad-texts as Jane (J1) required multiple viewing of texts in order to note and develop responses to the range of talk, activities, visual and audio cues, and themes I identified. Once the texts were identified, a series of re-views of those texts explored the advertisements from a number of (conceptual) analytic positions (e.g. gender, culture, and ethnicity). Analysis of the texts was through attention to:

- *The detail of audio and visual activities* and the ways in which they interact. Within the specific aspects of visual attention, I was looking at actors, colours, lighting, clothing, environments, objects, and behaviours. Audio attention was to music, noises, language, accents, and tone.
- *Constructions within the text obtained through categorisation and exclusion.* What type of spaces, people, activities, or ideas were included, validated, marginalised, or excluded in the ad-texts?
- *Specific story/s being told about 'how things are'.* Examining how talk, activities, and environments work to construct different categories (e.g. alcohol, gender, ethnicity, leisure) and the implications of those.

- *Discursive constructions around objects/subject positions.* Examining the types of subjects and positions on offer, how these are constructed and the implications of these.
- *Enunciative strategies and any points of dissonance or struggle and gaps and absences around those.* Examining the rhetorical work being done in the ad-texts and the different debates implicated through what is on offer.
- *Looking at any of the different elements of all the above as mechanisms of engagement.* Considering how and why particular elements in the texts work to engage consumers and how those same mechanisms might act to exclude or create resistance or refusal for others (e.g. gendered appeals).

From these processes of analysis, I (J1) constructed a review of the ad-texts in the form of essays. These were used as the materials that provided my academic voice of participation for Jane (J2) to analyse. [With occasional interruption]

### ***Participant voices***

Methodologically, exploring what connects or diverges interpretatively with what was intended to be conveyed in a text can offer a vital horizon for processes of analysis of textual engagements. This requires that the voices of production, as well as those of interpretation and response, are included in research. Theoretically, interpretive variance exists between text and the person engaged with the text, variance being inherent to textuality and interpretation. However, making sense of that textual variance will be clearer if it can be established what was *intended* to be in a text as well as examining the range of what is interpreted as in it. This strategy can explore attempts to construct and constrain interpretation/s on the part of ‘author-producer’, and then identify if those texts connect, miss, or ‘exceed’ any intention as they are then interpreted and responded to.

Methodologically the research requirement is to explore both diversity and consonance within textual engagements. Discursive diversity is argued as

engendered through breadth to positions, contexts, and experiences. The methodological logic that follows this argument requires strategies of participant recruitment in research that can obtain such diversity – through particular experiences, ages, genders, backgrounds, and so on – for any breadth of discursive range to emerge. In contrast, consonance will be engendered through commonality. Theoretically, despite the uniqueness of media engagements, commonality in certain areas (e.g. if all participants are health researchers) will produce resonances as well as differences. Therefore, methodological logic would argue the benefits of some form of commonality being identifiable between participants. A connection of youth was determined as the common link for the interpretative participants (see below). However, I also decided to obtain a common anchor for all participants (producers and interpreters) of ‘critical engagement’: commonality of critical engagement is defined here as a connection through having experience of engaging with texts in ways that question, interrupt, and critique. These experiences of ‘textual critiques’ were identified as having occurred through: my academic training in media studies; processes of advertising production for producers; and training in media studies for young media students.

A decision was made to recruit young (aged 16 – 17 years) high school media students as interpretive participants. Many variant positions could have been brought to this project. However, because of the consistent concerns expressed locally and overseas about youth engagements with alcohol and alcohol advertising texts, working with young people offered a very pertinent form of participant variance. The decision was therefore made to recruit young people who were senior high school media students. As such these younger participants would already have had some experience of engaging critically with media texts. Additionally, having chosen media studies as one of their final year subjects, the students would be in a position to benefit personally from participating. The producers, the students, and I would all be able to engage critically with the texts, but from different – and with the students from specifically youthful – perspectives.

It was identified that the critical engagements of producers with advertising texts were likely to be dominated by a *particular* type of media expertise and position: that is, a commercial marketing orientation. Dominant forms of critical reflexivity for producers are likely to operate from positions related to client needs or commercial creative perspectives. In theoretical terms, therefore, as well as the themes and ideas that producers intend to be on offer in the texts, discursive formations should be operating in the ad-texts they produce, that they as producers of those texts (constrained through their own focus and positions) will be less immediately aware, or entirely unaware, of.

To explore the realms of what producers may be less aware of as themes in their work required some deliberate strategy through which such reflexivity might be engaged. In discursive-theoretical terms a strategy that is likely to engage a producer from a more critical perspective is by creating engagement with how others may view their work (e.g. public health interests or Advertising Standard Authority codes). Methodologically, this move will act to shift context and engage a critically reflexive perspective. Obtaining engagement by producers that is both commercial and critical should offer a more developed account from production perspectives. By increasing criticality more should be apparent of the discursive debates that the producers are engaged in which shape their work (e.g. around the codes).

The strategy determined to achieve this duality of response was a two-stage interview. Firstly, I decided to seek a sense of the background to the work and of what the producers had intended to communicate to whom. Producers were therefore invited to talk about the ad-texts in general commercial terms. This formed the first section to the interview, orientated to making sense of their positions as commercially located producers of advertising in relation to the texts. Once completed, a more critical form of engagement was sought. In this second section of the interviews I asked producers to reflect more critically on the ads, and to consider, for example, whether there were themes in the texts they felt might communicate in ways that were less intended by them. Then I asked them

to comment specifically on issues related to the ads around the Advertising Standards codes, and to reflect critically on ways in which they perceive challenges might be brought to themes such as gender, sexuality, and cultural performances within the ad-texts.

A point needs to be made about identifying the idea of 'critical engagement' as an anchor. Culturalist-interpretative research is not an attempt to replicate 'natural' experiences (theoretically this is impossible). Any participation in research represents a particular form of discursive engagement that will be different in certain ways from 'normal' processes of production or viewing, the act of being participants in research forms part of what constitutes the context of engagement. As has been argued, texts can be engaged with in ways that are more or less aware. Theoretically, taking part in research will represent a more critically aware form of textual engagement. Methodologically therefore, working with participants who have had some experience of more critical forms of textual engagements should enhance the range of engagements with the text, bringing what people may usually be less aware of more easily into discussions (e.g. naturalised performances of gender). Selecting participants who all brought some experience of critical engagements offered a method that would facilitate interpretative range.

### ***[Sample Sizes***

I have been asked about the validity of working with such a 'small' sample in this research. This is a concern that raises two key issues. Firstly, this project is designed to investigate the potential offered in a discursive-culturalist approach to media research. This is an investigation of a model *prior* to any further application of that model to broader study. This is not to say that larger or more complex studies cannot be undertaken within this framework – they can, and, once this process is completed, they will be. Secondly, 'sample' size is a reference to positivist concerns with being able to generalise. Within the culturalist-discursive model of this thesis such a concern is not relevant. The present framework seeks to understand interpretative commonalities but not to

suggest that interpretative commonality can mean the same experience. The point is that this is an alternative model, and criterion for assessment of it, will also be alternative to what is usual for establishing 'validity' in more traditional media research.]

### ***Identification of texts***

Determining which particular texts should be used for this study simply required a current example of alcohol advertising. Given that the main focus of the existing research reviewed had been television commercials, these were determined as the relevant form of text to consider. For research purposes, what was required was something currently (when the project began) on air and reasonably 'typical'. Because of the methodological decision to work with youth, I decided there were benefits to using not one but two differently targeted advertisements. Because of the attention in alcohol research to the issue of youth engagements, I decided that working comparatively with two commercials – aimed at younger or older target audiences – would potentially bring out interpretative differences between engagements that may be of interest.

At the time of this project the dominant alcohol advertiser in Aotearoa/New Zealand was Lion Breweries and its dominant advertised product was beer. Lion Red and Speight's were the brewery's two main beer brands. When I was planning this research, both had new campaigns going to air. The incumbent agency (MearesTaine) identified that Lion Red was aimed at a younger '30-something' target group and that Speight's was targeted at a more mature '40-something' target group (2002). An additional factor underpinning selection of the texts was the relationship of my partner to the agency responsible for the commercials (an agency principal and creative writer on the two campaigns), which offered a unique level of accessibility to materials and the people in production that would not be so straightforward to obtain through another agency. The 2002 Lion Red and Speight's campaigns were therefore identified as the texts to use for the research.

## ***Research processes: Recruitment of participants and management of participants' sessions***

### *Producers*

The method of producer recruitment was to have involved identifying the agency responsible for the most dominant market share of televised alcohol advertising. Given that this was, in fact, my partner's agency, I asked whether he would undertake the initial approach to his colleagues to determine whether they would be comfortable working with me on the research. My relationship (as partner of one of the agency principals) and position (*not* working on arguments to the benefit of advertisers) was discussed during this approach but the agency team was interested and willing to participate. After initial agreement in principle, all team members were provided with information sheets about the project (Appendix 2). Once the individuals had time to read the information sheets (one week) they were contacted and asked whether they had any questions about the research and research processes. Informed consent was sought for their participation. All three of the main members involved in the development and production of the commercials (the writer, art director, and the television producer) agreed to participate.

Initially it was agreed that informal sessions were to be conducted in a group for the three producers. The agency then contacted me to say they had decided individual feedback was preferable, suggesting that this avoided the complications of coordinating group times and that 'one on one' was a more familiar process, one that people were comfortable with. Additionally, one of the agency's principals (not my partner) suggested that the nature of agency relationships (boss-employee) might mean that more freedom in communication would be obtained if individuals were able to discuss the ads privately. The method preferred for providing feedback was determined by participants as responding to prompt questions. I decided it was important to highlight rather than attempt to minimise my impact (shaping) on the flow of talk and ideas.

Transcripts therefore would need to incorporate my participation, and my analysis would need to consider this aspect of the talk produced.

In the case of protecting the confidentiality of the agency participants, it was clear that this was not possible as any advertisement is always able to be linked to those that created it. Such information is freely available in the marketplace. The producers, aware of the wider knowledge of their relationship to the clients, agreed they would be participating under those conditions. Specific contributions however were to remain anonymous and a number system of **P1** or **P2** and so on, was used. Gender was not, initially, to be specifically identified (only one producer was female) although it was agreed that talk was likely to identify gender. After my initial analysis identified clearly that gender was identifiable through the excerpts, it was agreed that gendered references (e.g. he or she) were appropriate and acceptable.

### *Students*

The method of student recruitment was to approach a local (zoned) high school as an appropriate channel through which to connect with young media students for the research. In this way, development and management of contact and of the sessions could be conducted through the safety and supervision of the school, their teachers, and existing cultural supports. Criteria for selection of the school were for a local, mixed-gender school with a diversity of socio-economic groups and ethnicities represented in the school's roll. Initial contact was through the school media studies teacher to discuss the research project, to provide an information overview of it, and to identify the correct procedure through which to seek permission to involve the school's seventh form (final high school year) media studies group in the research. The overview included discussion about my relationship and role in relation to the agency that had produced the commercials.

Because the pupils were all over the age of consent, parental approval for involvement was not required although this was agreed after determining through the school whether additional Board, or parental consent would be desired by the

school. Further information was provided for the teacher to approach the principal. Given the nature of the project and its relatedness to the students' studies, approval was straightforward. Once school approval was obtained, students were approached by their media studies teacher and asked whether they were interested in participating. Information sheets were provided to potential participants (Appendix 2). Once the individuals had time to read the information sheets (one week) and to ask any questions about the research and research processes, consent was sought for their participation. The students represented a range of different cultural groups, but the school determined that there were no culturally specific procedures that should be engaged in to conduct this research. Informed consent was sought by the teacher, in the class before the research session. All students agreed to participate.

The research session was to be conducted across the two time-slots allocated for the students regularly scheduled Thursday media classes. These time-slots spanned two consecutive lesson periods and had a lunch break in the middle. In the first session, viewing, feedback, and discussion about the commercials were to be conducted. After a lunch break discussions were to be continued. The entire two-lesson session was scheduled to run for approximately two hours. At the start of the session I identified my role, my background, and reiterated the rights of the participants. I made it clear that I was tape-recording each session fully and also identified myself as the only person who would be transcribing all materials and that all participants and their particular contributions would be anonymous. A teacher was present at all times. After discussion with the class as to how they would prefer to provide feedback, students identified that they would be most comfortable in small, self-moderated groups, in which individual and then group feedback and discussion would take place. Students felt most comfortable working in groups. Breaking into small groups of friends was suggested in order to work in an environment of already established relationships where people could get straight into the task rather than worry about managing new group dynamics.

To minimise the impact of my own presence, it was decided that the groups would tape their own sessions and facilitate without my participation. Students stated they wanted contributions to be through groups rather than identifiable to an individual and suggested they preferred identification to be attached to specific quotes as gendered and numbered e.g. **F1**, or **M1** but not ethnically identified or identified by a name or pseudonym. Participants were provided with a tape of the relevant advertisements. They were asked to view the tape as a class and to note down their initial responses and ideas about the advertisements before getting into groups. Each commercial was played once. They were asked to think about the two advertisements, what they felt each was trying to say and their responses to those the different messages and techniques they perceived to be visible in the ads.

All group sessions were individually taped for transcription. Group sessions were identified as completed when all participants felt satisfied that they had been able to feed back all ideas and issues they had in relation to the advertisements. Once groups were completed, feedback was sought from participants about the research and the research process for incorporation into the final report as part of the process of reflecting on and learning about the research process and the benefits and concerns such a process may have had for those participating. At the end of the research session, all students (and the teacher) were given a double cinema pass as thanks for their time. This completed the research session.

#### *Addressing Potential Harm to Participants*

Full ethical approval was obtained for the research. It was considered that exposing young people to alcohol advertising below the legal drinking age may be argued as potentially, and undesirably, encouraging them to engage with those advertisements, or with ideas around alcohol. However, given that participants were to be young people who were media students, already critically aware of media texts, it was considered that the act of critical engagement through the research should make them less, rather than more, susceptible to

such influences. Given the age of participants, 16 to 17 years, it was determined that it was highly unlikely that any of them would not already be exposed to the campaigns under discussion, all of which were already on air after 9.00 p.m. at night.

For producers, information offered from this research could potentially be used against their interests if the research findings were to assist in the removal of alcohol advertising from the media. This is a small risk, and it is unlikely that one study could produce such a profound effect on the field.

### ***Generating transcripts: Participant Materials***

All discussions with producers and students were taped and transcribed. These transcriptions, plus my own original analysis of the advertisements, represented my three sets of participant texts. Talk is too nuanced for even highly detailed transcripts to adequately convey a sense of tone, emphasis, or the complexities of group dynamics. As Edley (2001) argues, in transcription, intimacy with materials is required. In order to have an adequate sense of the talk I personally transcribed all materials. There are multiple possible approaches to transcription notation (Wetherell et al., 2001b). Initially I had planned to use a detailed notation process using a slightly modified version of the Jefferson system outlined in Wooffitt (2001, p.62). However I trialled this system by recording family (with permission) and I realised that, although this form of notation was ideal for paying close attention to the activities of speakers and what they were accomplishing through talk, it was not necessary or even helpful in focusing on the ebb and flow of the contents of talk in relation to *this* project. [One transcription of talk can offer multiple possibilities for research investigation. In the reflexive review (final chapter) I engage in some reflection on what else the talk in this research raised as issues for me, and what might yet be examined from these same transcripts.] In keeping with the aim of this research the transcription notation system I required for analysis was one designed to attend to content and tone. There is no specific convention for this but I developed the following simplified system:

- ... Three dots indicate a significant pause in a sentence of more than half a second
- [ ] Square brackets include a description by me, e.g. [parodying a western draw!]
- ( ) Rounded brackets indicate word that I was unsure of
- ( ) Empty brackets indicate what I could not hear
- Underlined Indicates speaker emphasis
- Indicates a break where the talk is now from a new section of the materials

### ***Analyses***

Theoretically, locations and positions expressed by participants will be illustrative of discursivity in process as engagements within wider processes through which meanings are re-generated. Talk about the ad-texts will be illustrative of debates and conditions occurring more widely as participants draw on and inflect what is said, through employing available, salient resources (knowledge/s of any kind) elicited by the topics under discussion. Exploration of locations and positions is therefore required at three different levels: by locating intent and interpretation in relation to each other; by locating participants in relation to the advertisements and to each other; and by re-locating the positions and ideas expressed by participants in relation to the locational text (Chapter 8). Analysis of participant engagements with the advertisements required consideration of commonalities, divergences, and outright differences around what was intended to be conveyed alongside what was interpreted and responded to as conveyed in the texts, as well as at the more complex level of link-points generated through the texts. Link-points are defined as key points in the ad-texts that acted as mechanisms through which shared connections were generated, in the form of common resonance or common refusal (e.g. around music, environments, actors, ideas, and so on). Analysis of participant texts therefore required clear separation into stages: 1) initial engagements; 2) inter-textual analysis; and then 3) re-location

within the context of the locational text. These stages form three separate chapters (9, 10, and 11).

*Stage 1: Initial analyses of participant texts*

First, the more basic issues of producers' intentions versus interpretative participants' engagements and responses required address. This meant examining each set of participants (including J1) as clearly 'speaking' about the texts in order that basic positions and differences could be visible. This initial comparison enables some fundamental questions about textual engagements to be considered. In this stage of the research analysis of the producers' talk therefore required attention to what participants expressed as their intentions about what should be represented and how these 'should' be interpreted. Explanations were highlighted about ways in which the producers had shaped the texts to be interpreted in particular ways. Attention was also given to any rhetorical validation of, or even struggle around, particular positions or ideas and to particular stories, personal experiences, or positions drawn on as warrant for their work or for desired responses.

Analysis of the student talk required attention to what participants had to say that was specifically about what they interpreted as intended to be understood in the advertising texts as well as their responses about what they interpreted as on offer. In addition, attention was given to the ways in which personal experiences were brought into interpretation of or response to the texts.

Analysis of my (J1) responses to the advertisements required attention to what I had written about the texts that reflected my interpretation of what they were intending to communicate and then to any responses I had offered about those communications. I also focused on any experiences I had brought to bear on my analysis and strategies employed to warrant my views. All analyses included (numbered but not indicating priorities):

- Identifying the range of discursive formations present in the participant materials.

- Examining the ways in which different formations appeared to be interrelated. Looking for how formations combined and worked to mutually reinforce, or even to create tensions with, dominant and less dominant positions formed.
- Looking for the link-points around which formations were being generated and at the debates these formations represented, and also at any strategies of warrant used to maintain particular positions around those link-points.
- Identifying the subjects and subject positions talked about, including subjects felt to be represented in the ads; subjects addressed by the ads; subjects excluded through the ads; and positions participants constructed about themselves or others. Identifying attributes, responsibilities, and relationships implied through subjects described.
- Identifying references to what was absent in the texts.
- Looking for practices, conditions, and institutions that were identified and at how these were argued as referenced and/or reinforced, resisted, or undermined through the ad-texts and responses to those.
- Considering forms of identity being identified, implicated, or performed both in ads and talk.
- Considering particular cultural performances identified as taking place and identified with, or resisted – e.g. masculine, feminine, play, class, ethnicity etc.

### *Stage 2: Inter-textual analysis*

The second stage of the analysis worked to contrast and compare the resonances, connections, and differences expressed across the range of participants. This stage of analysis moved into a cross-textual examination of the participant materials by looking at the differences in analyses of, and responses to, the texts between participants. This stage of analysis was conducted through working around 'link-points'. As identified, a 'link-point' is the term given to the junctures at which engagements converged; points of discursive connection,

divergence, contestation, or disjunction and focused around particular questions, issues, or subjects (e.g. gender, look, music, personal experiences, etc.). This analytic process identified the temporary structuring/s that occurred within discursive processes (*as if* they were more bounded) and expressed these temporary structurings as themed link-points. These links are explored individually although they are interrelated and thread through each other. Examination involved:

- Identifying shared references to what is within the text, responses generated through the text, and references to experiences and what is within the local or broader socio-cultural space/s beyond the text.
- Identifying differences in what was referred to as being within the text, to responses generated through the text, and around experiences referred to from local or broader socio-cultural spaces beyond the text.
- Identifying how participants were articulating and responding to particular subject positions, performances, and representations on offer in the texts. For example, how did the students 'recognise' what the producers intended? How did their views connect to, or differ from, the producers', each other's, and my responses?
- Examining references in the talk to structuring forces and material conditions shaping experiences and ideas around alcohol, its promotion, and use. Looking to particular processes of inclusion or exclusion; e.g. legislations; values; 'norms' (such as who may/may not drink where, in what way, or to what level); rituals (e.g. drink is celebratory; or drinking taboos); social procedures; material conditions; and the rhetoric of definitions (e.g. alcohol as good/bad, or to notions expressed about 'true' or 'false').

*Stage 3: Re-locating analyses in the context of the locational text*

This stage of the analysis contrasted and compared the participant materials with the locational text. This involved taking the link-points of the previous stage of

analysis and examining how these connected, diverged with, or differed from the themes offered through the locational text.

- Examining link-points, formations, strategies, and positions in relation to the socio-cultural-historic contexts offered through the locational text. Where were any resonances, connections, and differences?
- Considering who stood to gain or lose from particular positions taken. It is important to identify here that this is not to offer a unified subjectivity in relation to gain or loss, but to explore ideas around those. So, as a young media student, what might be gained or lost by taking up a position that either approves or that challenges what is on offer in the advertising texts, or in wider debates about alcohol? What were weaker or subordinate positions? What positions might offer spaces of interest from an intervention or policy perspective?
- Considering broader context of debates. Who or what – in institutional terms – stood to gain or lose from particular positions? What might be gained or lost?
- Who validated what, and what was marginalised?
- Where, and in what forms, did power seem to be operating?

### ***Taking a reflexive turn***

Reflexivity is argued [by some] as a critical component to discursive methodology (e.g., Parker, 2002). However, the question remains, how does one systematically and meaningfully address the requirement for reflexivity methodologically? Part of reflexivity is to declare, consider, and reflect upon existing commitments, relationships, and values as they relate to research (see Chapter 2). That said, commitments, relationships, and values can shift as you go, particularly over such a lengthy project. So methodology requires attention to movement and also reflection.

Discursive researcher Slembrouck (2001) makes the same point about movement in relation to reflexive processes, when he argues for re-contextualisation of work through making visible records of the researcher's *processes, shifts, and changes*. Slembrouk highlights how, rather than existing statically in relation to any work, we are *always* engaged in processes around it. Research may be described as if it was a bounded and coherent undertaking, but it is in fact a constant process of decision-making, adjustment, and movement. Recording any decisions, developments, and changes to our commitments, thinking, theorising, positions, and values that occur as we go, can be a way of making the processes more visible, of reminding us that they occurred, and of enabling us to reflect back on those.

Theoretically, I have argued for understanding complexity to positions – that those we hold can be multiple and even contradictory. I have also argued that positions we are less aware of can be made more apparent through contrasting and comparing them with the positions of others. To address this multi-dimensionality I have, therefore, layered reflexivity into this research in different ways. These layers are of declaration, recording, and reflection.

First, at the beginning of the project I engaged in a process of declaring my positions, as I was aware of them, in relation to the research. This is a useful strategy because by attempting to offer some visibility of my positions for others, I also generated a heightened level of awareness about those for myself.

Second, to manage the records of shifts and changes taking place for me in this research, I decided that I should keep journals and notes that I then needed to engage with critically by reflecting back on them later in the process. Therefore, records of readings, ideas, processes, and perceived shifts in my own positions were kept for the duration of the project. A summary discussion around these materials forms the concluding chapter of the work.

Thirdly, an additional and important reflexive device for me in this project is constructed through my own role as research participant, which – as I explained

above – should offer an interesting form of illumination and critique to my own position/s, through exploring them in relation to the positions of others.

Finally, I have allowed myself to ‘speak’ in different ways through the project. Through [interruption], I have intended to offer a sense of debate, contradiction, and reflection. By highlighting my initial analysis as Jane (J1) as different from my later analysis as Jane (J2), I have enabled myself to reflect both on where I appear to be located now, as well as where I ‘was’.

In this multi-layered way I hope to have built reflexivity into the project in a way that can, as Slembrouck (2001) argues we should, make reflexivity a potentially useful form of pedagogy, rather than simply an emotional or retrospective positioning.

## Chapter 8      Locational Context

**We cannot understand who we are...unless we understand where we came from. Jock Phillips**

**We walk into the future backwards, because the only thing that's certain is the past. Māori proverb**

### **Alcohol as cultural artefact/s in Aotearoa/New Zealand**

*This chapter represents my version of the research context, what I refer to as my 'locational text'. In it I have constructed an overview of some of the broader discursive terrains within which alcohol, as artefact, exists in Aotearoa/New Zealand. From a culturalist perspective there is a tension in setting out a 'history' like this. I must be clear that this review is one story – and only my story – about many stories; an attempt to highlight the plurality of what might be told, and the positions such things might be told from. When working out how to frame this chapter, I found it difficult to separate and sequentially set out these thoroughly interconnected 'themes'. My hope is that despite arbitrary inclusions and exclusions, summations and elisions, there is still a necessary sense of the richness, complexity, and overlapped nature of histories, present relationships, and a sense of ways in which certain themes have become dominant and why. This review should provide some sense of the contested and multiple positions held locally about alcohol, of the contingent and shifting nature of the forces and conditions through which such positions have been constructed, and why the historical and continuing processes of struggle described here are a necessary context for making sense of communications about alcohol in the present.*

## **The cultural diversity of alcohol's histories**

Histories in Aotearoa/New Zealand, as anywhere else, are a culturally complex and varied mix, shaped through diversities of worldviews, experiences, processes (particularly here of migrations and colonisation), social roles, and material conditions. The histories of alcohol and its use in Aotearoa/New Zealand – like any other stories about how things were and are – are inflected in multiple ways through such differences. Particular versions can obscure or even deliberately attempt to overwrite others; Pakeha versions of histories discursively colonising Māori versions (King, 2003); the pioneering bloke taking precedence over the 'new chum' [a derogatory term for a less than 'rugged' colonial settler] or the pioneering woman; or the more puritan history of some obscuring the very bohemian pasts of others (Eldred-Grigg, 1984). Aotearoa/New Zealand's histories are histories of struggle, and alcohol has played a part in that.

## **Differences of culture: Māori and Pakeha**

**That Māori and Pakeha, in addition to what they shared, should still have separate heroes and heroines at the beginning of the twenty-first century was yet another indication that the habits, values and attitudes of both cultures retained sufficient force to be identified as separate traditions....The two cultures were in a relationship of mutual exchange...[but] there is, as yet, no sign that, despite the exchanges, the different character and flavour of each culture will be diluted or disappear in the immediate future. (King, 2003, p.518-519)**

Alcohol was not culturally 'indigenous'; it arrived in Aotearoa/New Zealand from Western communities – with Captain Cook, in 1773 (Brien, 2002). Before this arrival, Māori communities apparently did not create or consume any intoxicating substances (Te Ropu Māori, 2002). Because alcohol was a comparatively recent import, some cultural differences around attitudes to alcohol and its use are reasonably well recorded. However, important subtleties in these differences can

be difficult to find in debates about alcohol, dominated – as the majority of the literature is – by political Pakeha perspectives (Brien, 2002; Phillips, 1996). Issues around alcohol consumption for Māori are often constructed as different from those for Pakeha, but particular negativities tend to be amplified and filtered through very specific sets of concerns (mostly health) while other, more positive, differences tend to be rather neglected.

For example, the most frequently reported form of cultural difference is that hazardous drinking, and alcohol-related rates of death and illness, are experienced at a higher rate in Māori than in non-Māori communities (ALAC, 2002). But the positive cultural differences between Māori and most non-Māori communities around alcohol use – though not often raised – represent an equally important form of information. Despite a widespread adoption of alcohol use and growth in rates of consumption within Māori communities, even after over 231 years Māori generally still consume alcohol at significantly lower rates than non-Māori (Dacey, 1997; Ministry of Health, 2004; Te Ropu Māori, 2002). When recognising cultural differences in alcohol consumption, researchers may gain from exploring the reasons for such low rates and the likely protective effects of community and tribal relationships that would seem to be indicated (Te Ropu Māori, 2002).

From the early 1800s, when the impacts of alcohol consumption started to be recognised as a social problem (Phillips, 1996), Māori tended to be presented as victims, dependent on a paternalistic Pakeha for laws and treatment. In fact Māori were not great consumers of alcohol at the time and little evidence existed of Māori drinking (Te Ropu Māori, 2002). Despite the fact that in 1858 Māori convictions for drunkenness were 2.7% of the Pakeha rate (Te Ropu Māori, 2002), legislative measures pushed by prohibitionists were enacted to prevent the sale of alcohol to Māori (Brien, 2002). Such discriminatory legislation remained in place until after the Second World War, when Māori were finally allowed in licensed establishments (Te Ropu Māori, 2002). [It was hardly

appropriate to be willing to die for your country and then not be able to drink with other non-Māori soldiers in the pub at home (Brien, 2002).]

Discriminatory Pakeha portrayal and treatment of Māori was certainly a factor behind such legislation, which was in part paternalistic but also motivated by concerns to prevent social 'unrest' (Eldred-Grigg, 1984). Another, less obvious, strand of support for such legislation came from Māori tribes. Some chiefs, concerned with increases in alcohol consumption in their communities, gave such legislative moves their support because they viewed them as material barriers to alcohol's negative impacts (Eldred-Grigg, 1984). This was not uncontested, and younger Chiefs favoured more equal laws – but the support signalled part of a strong culturally-based resistance by Māori to alcohol that is not usually given adequate attention. For example, in the 1920s Apirana Turupa Ngata (1874-1950) established an exemplary community project among his Ngati Porou people. He allowed the arrangement of finance and stocking of land with cattle and sheep and financed paying back of the mortgages through a two-year prohibition on alcohol, with funds successfully diverted from pubs to strengthen the community (Te Ropu Māori, 2002). In present terms this would constitute a public health triumph. It also signals the critical nature of community roles in shaping consumption habits. Many other stories of tribes successfully pushing drinking habits in more moderate directions are available (Eldred-Grigg, 1984).

The more recent (later 20<sup>th</sup> century) growth in higher rates of hazardous consumption and alcohol-related death and illness in particular sections of Māori communities needs to be located in histories of colonisation and in present day material inequities (Te Ropu Māori, 2002). Failure to do so abdicates social responsibilities and it also misses protective factors that still keep overall figures lower than average within Māori communities. Differences in issues around alcohol consumption, and therefore different response strategies, are certainly indicated for Māori. Drinking is likely to have different meanings in Māori communities and more research around this is required by Māori researchers (Te Ropu Māori, 2002). In any media project, it becomes critical to reflect that where

consumption of alcohol may hold culturally different meanings interpretations of liquor advertisements are also likely to hold culturally significant differences. This means analysis of alcohol advertising is required from within Māori frameworks to assess Māori engagements. Deconstruction of advertisements to determine how they might relate to Māori by non-Māori is likely to reflect non-Māori concerns.

Controversy erupted in New Zealand when a poster with a Māori man holding his young child was used to promote Lion Red beer (Hill, 1999). The idea of the male Māori stereotype, unable to hold his liquor and as linked to drunken domestic violence was raised. This construction could be argued as prohibitionist, Pakeha, and paternalistic in origin and at the very least deserves approaching with caution. In addition, locating drinking as the *source* of such problems masks broader social forces requiring scrutiny.

Interpretation of texts will vary through the lenses of alternative histories and positions. Through attending to such variances, deconstructions and responses can become more meaningful. Researchers have identified that there are issues around alcohol for Māori which need to be researched specifically within Māori frameworks (Grey & Norton, 1998; Te Ropu Māori, 2002). In the latest Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) liquor advertising review, the panel noted that there were no submissions from Māori groups. This occurred despite the fact that in previous reviews concern had been noted about the possibility of specific effects of liquor advertising and of moderation messages within Māori communities (Advertising Standards Authority, 2003). With no Māori groups contributing there may be a problem with the process of review. [Although the present project represents Taiwi research, attention has been given to exploring themes of cultural differences. Opening conversations around those differences, as opposed to silence about them, seems by far the preferable option.]

### **Differences of gender: Drinking in a man's country?**

In the countries from which it was brought to Aotearoa/New Zealand, alcohol was once a very domestic drug, brewed primarily in homes. Like many other things alcohol had been affected by the forces of industrialisation and capitalism. The

impacts wrought through these forces saw a division develop around its production and consumption (Bell, 1996; Fisher, 1993; Miles, 1989; West, 2001). Whilst brewing was still active in the home well into the 1900s – and women and children were often regular drinkers – production of alcohol began to move out of the domestic sphere and become more commercialised. As it did so, consumption beyond the home became more gendered (Watney, 1974). Around this time, employment patterns also changed and jobs shifted – particularly as urbanisation occurred – and men were increasingly removed from the domestic sphere, developing purchasing power, employment-based companionships, and different spaces in which to drink. This gave alcohol consumption (acts, company, and space) a distinctly gendered inflection (Miles, 1989).

The major surge in alcohol use in Aotearoa/New Zealand took place with the arrival of the predominantly European 19<sup>th</sup> century colonists. The European colonists were an interesting collection of peoples, representing a narrow – as opposed to more general – cross-section of European communities and ideals. Male arrivals well outnumbered female, and the majority had to be tough to cope with what was a pre-dominantly frontier life (Phillips, 1996). To some, the rugged nature of local conditions represented a particular opportunity and this attracted a particular sort of immigrant. In Europe, a division of traditional domestic partnerships had been wrought through industrialisation and market specialisation. This division had affected far more than alcohol practices. Rises in urban occupations had reduced the need for jobs that expressed traditional masculine identities through physical strength and struggles with nature (Phillips, 1996). As Phillips writes: those with concerns about the ‘effeminate’ nature of urban life and anxieties about changes in traditional sex roles were offered an answer in the form of emigration (1996, p.5). An immigration guide to Aotearoa/New Zealand of the time (cited by Phillips) talks to such anxieties:

[rather than]...becoming the snubbed clerk with the pale wife and the seedy children, nailed to the dingy desk for life for £60 a year, I would turn and breast the current; pull off my coat, take six months at some manly handicraft

and then...secure cheap passage to Australia or New Zealand...to achieve a happy escape and a good deliverance from that grinding, social serfdom, those effeminate chains, my born and certain lot in England. (*Hursthouse, 1857, p.659-60*)

This quote speaks to what was perhaps one of the most important conditions in 19<sup>th</sup> century Aotearoa/New Zealand – its overt maleness. It was not only in Pakeha communities that men outnumbered women. Māori women numbered fewer than men, even before colonisation. After colonisation brought the havoc of new diseases, the imbalance became even greater. By 1859 estimates were of 19,000 women to 25,000 men. Even in other migrant communities, there were gendered skews. For example, because the Imperial Chinese Government did not permit female migration, despite settlement by Chinese colonists, by 1878 only five Chinese women were recorded on the New Zealand census (Eldred-Grigg, 1984). A number of forces combined to produce Aotearoa/New Zealand as a distinctly male space.

Opportunists, trades-people, businessmen, missionaries, and more genteel folk were all part of the colonising cultural mix (Eldred-Grigg, 1984), but for many years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, tough, rugged, practical, single males and their attendant – although quickly locally shaped – cultures were very dominant (Phillips, 1996). Conditions of work in many areas were hard although far from anarchic. As a workforce, the majority of such men were largely disciplined – and abstinent – whilst on their jobs. The conditions of work in rural areas were at best demanding and often appalling. Social differences were largely set-aside on the job and ‘mateship’ became a vital bond in circumstances where safety and efficiencies, as much as companionship, depended on strong relations with other men. Harsh and almost wholly masculine, these working conditions shaped leisure and drinking patterns. Abstinent on the job, the frontier workforce would play hard when it came to ‘town’. With no families, few women, and no traditional urban leisure spaces, there was little to do other than drink, gamble, or pay for sex (Eldred-Grigg, 1984). ‘Melting a pay cheque’ was standard practice as men,

largely in the company of men, drank in quantity, both as a form of release and an expression of masculinity. Masculine pride was given a meaning through such feats of excess. “Social disruptions” were usual fare in the face of such concentrated drinking sprees (Phillips, 1996, p.61). In urban areas, jobs were more bounded within working days, and regular evening drinking with other men at pubs (as opposed to coming into town at the end of a week) was the common pastime.

Traditional roles meant that for many women drinking was somewhat at a remove from these male drinking spaces – although women drinking remained common. Brewing beer and fermenting wine in the home, for example, were still important parts of housekeeping for many women. However, it was now only in more celebratory spaces that drinking could be shared more commonly (Eldred-Grigg, 1984).

### **Moral differences: Contesting frameworks in discursive struggle**

Alongside the heritage of the pioneering kiwi bloke, colonial Aotearoa/New Zealand has a strong story around a puritan ancestry and Victorian values. This dominant myth is one some historians have latterly identified as the heritage of small (religious middle-class) social groups that came to very successfully impose a particular moral framework on what they considered an erstwhile majority (Eldred-Grigg, 1984, p.1-2). Many people – men and women – in Aotearoa/New Zealand challenged the more conservative and religious sectors of immigrant communities. Māori frameworks, and those of many migrant Europeans, encompassed a diversity of views, lifestyles, roles, ways of behaving, and sexualities. As more middle class immigrants arrived and urbanisation increased, the ‘uncivilised’ nature of what some perceived as the dominant pre-industrial ethic became contested. Social disruptions engendered through alcohol use were highlighted as a key source of social improprieties, and alcohol became challenged as a major problem.

Governance was determined as the answer. Nearly a century after the arrival of alcohol, the first laws to control it were passed (Brien, 2002). Despite being piecemeal and poorly enforced at first, the political tide was turning to legislation. In part, this was due to the establishment of Aotearoa/New Zealand as an English colony, a consequence of which was the quick arrival of English laws (Eldred-Grigg, 1984). However, the rise of local legislature around alcohol use also arose because drinking in Aotearoa/New Zealand was perceived as a point at which many social 'ills' could be challenged (Phillips, 1996). The major push for the reform of undesirable behaviours came from middle-class Pakeha prohibitionists (Hocken, 2000) although some politicians had also recognised potential gains in staunching the economic losses of 'squandered' pay cheques in favour of investments and prosperity (Phillips, 1996). Governments' involvement in the management of alcohol had always been heavily shaped by economic concerns (Eldred-Grigg, 1984).

The push for social reforms and prohibition was ultimately to shape alcohol use in ways that early prohibitionists could never have imagined. The result was conditions that perpetuated the very drinking styles reformists had been so keen to eliminate. Somewhat misleadingly called the Temperance Movement (moderation was *not* the intention), the acronym of their catch cry – **'We Only Want Social Evils Reformed'** still reverberates meaningfully today – as a derogatory denotation for a non-drinker (Brien, 2002). The real impetus for prohibition was gained through two highly successful alliances.

The first alliance was with certain churches and suffrage groups, and the second was with the War Office. The association between prohibition, churches, and suffrage groups reflected growing moves locally to make Aotearoa/New Zealand a more family-orientated country. Alcohol was not the only concern of the arriving middle classes. 'Loose' morals were perceived as a major problem, and a desire to tighten the moral framework was operating generally within reformist groups (Eldred-Grigg, 1984). Politically, it was determined that an orientation to families was the answer. The costs of running households represented far greater

potential for the country's economic growth than communities of single men. A family orientation required cleaning up the streets and curbing the visible excesses of drinking that were rife around Aotearoa/New Zealand (Phillips, 1996).

### **Political differences: Gender in debates**

The alliance between prohibition and suffrage was an important political connection. Through the efforts of the prohibitionists, suffrage became strongly linked to temperance. The outcome of this was that every push for suffrage in Aotearoa/New Zealand resulted in an oppositional response from the liquor industry (Brien, 2002). The liquor industry viewed women's suffrage purely as a temperance plot, and the success of suffrage petitions panicked the liquor lobby, which responded by promoting anti-suffrage petitions in public houses – some of which were in return for free drinks (Page, 2002). Prohibition and suffrage became so conflated through this antagonistic relationship that alcohol – already gendered – became very strongly so (Cast, 2002). Ultimately, it was the freedom to vote and to influence society overall that women were after, but it was the strong concern expressed by some groups to vote on alcohol issues that made alcohol appear to be *the* issue for all suffrage groups.

Some in Government, however, did recognise the politics of gender as a potentially influential force through which to curb excessive alcohol use. A key reason women in Aotearoa/New Zealand got the vote so early (in international terms) was that for those seeking to clean up the excesses of the country's 'frontier' society the women's vote was perceived as one that could offer an advantage. Some politicians understood that a desire for a more conservative family-friendly environment was by no means the only ideal held in Aotearoa/New Zealand's communities. Single men may not have wanted it at all – after all, it had been escape from such traditions that had motivated many to become colonists. Recognising this, reformist politicians, seeing a woman's vote as actually representing a husband's vote, thought wives were therefore a way of

gaining a strong increase in a more conservative family electorate, and thereby shaping the country away from the ideals and values that many of the communities of single men locally still preferred (Phillips, 1996).

### **Forces of war: Mixed impacts of the services**

In 1917 the second Prohibition alliance took place, one that was to result in a long-lasting change. This time the alliance was between prohibitionists and those involved in managing the war effort. With war in progress, there was a concern across Britain and her colonies that the boys being sent off to fight should be in good condition. This was a not unreasonable concern as it seemed that an unduly high proportion of local populations having to be turned away from recruitment due to physical deficiencies, often argued as resulting from excessive drinking (Watney, 1974). Requests were made to reluctant licensees to limit the drinking of new recruits before they went off to war, but such requests were not popular or well enforced (Brien, 2002). Ultimately, the outcome of publicans' reluctance, and of much political manoeuvring, was to result in a decision to limit drinking times generally. This limit on time was ostensibly in order to curtail servicemen's drinking but it was a move that also recognised gains in efficiency produced from a disciplined workforce more generally (Phillips, 1996). In Aotearoa/New Zealand this meant that licensed premises were to close at 6pm. This law remained in force until 1967.

Commercial brewing was undertaken through regional rather than local interests (Campbell et al., 1999), but the liquor industry and its disparate representatives were not historically well organised (Brien, 2002). Ironically it was the impact of moves by prohibitionists that provided the impetus for liquor interests to become sufficiently united to oppose Prohibition (Brien, 2002). By 1919, when the historic wet-dry referendum was called, representatives of the liquor industries had gained ground. The ultimate coup for liquor interests came when Auckland brewer Moss took a trip to lobby overseas servicemen to vote wet in the referendum. He succeeded. The decision to stay wet was swung by those

overseas votes (Brien, 2002) – just 3,263 of them (Phillips, 1996). Moss had tapped into an important argument about freedom, leveraging the relationship between what Aotearoa/New Zealand's troops were fighting for and their right to drink.

## **Impacts of change: Shaping new environments**

Consequences of successful Prohibition have been well documented. Analysis of what occurred in the United States showed massive increases in social costs through crime and ill health as Prohibition took effect (Thornton, 1991). In Aotearoa/New Zealand, perhaps because Prohibition was not as successful, the social consequences are less clearly set out. Although the referendum to stay wet represented an ultimate failure for Prohibition, this did not eliminate its impact (Brien, 2002). Prohibition efforts produced local laws that could see areas become dry (free of alcohol sales and drinking outlets) and local licensing reduced (Smith, 1999) – an important factor contributing to later overcrowding in bars (Phillips, 1996). Those making a living through the sale of alcohol as well as those living in regions that were dry and who wished to drink were deeply affected by such achievements (Brien, 2002).

Perhaps the most important success of Prohibition had been to work with the reform movement in using the reformist focus on the image of the family to create a strong psychological division between the home and drinking. The desire was to undermine the strongly male culture that Aotearoa/New Zealand had developed around drinking, and promotion of family was seen as the key platform through which this could be achieved (Phillips, 1996). In fact, the moral separation of alcohol and domesticity was remarkably successful and, at a public level, Aotearoa/New Zealand cultures appeared to support and express an ethic of moderation. However, rather than destroy the male culture causing concern, the result was that it became contained and segregated, only to be perpetuated in a subsequently “more intense form” (Phillips, 1996, p.76).

Infamously known as the six o'clock swill (Smith, 1999), the 6pm closing law had important and long-term effects on the spaces and processes of consumption – and the gender of consumers:

The bars were something else again. They were designed purely for stand up (and fall down) drinking, between 5pm and the 6pm closing...the object was, drink as much as possible...More politely described as 'gnat's water', beer was poured directly into a 'jug' or 'handle' from a pressure bowser...What little conversation there was, hinged upon rugby, racing and beer, punctuated by the cry "*Gedditdahny*", or, if you refused to drink up or drink further, a bellicose "*Whadarya?*". (Fox, 2002)

The critical impact of the six o'clock law was that, as Aotearoa/New Zealand began to change, as urbanisation increased, and as gender roles began to shift, drinking spaces remained legislated in a curious suspension – an odd, but loud, echo of the gendered frontier drinking ethic. Traditionally, in urban areas alcohol and community activities were well connected. Hotel bars had served as spaces for families, meetings, celebrations, and even – on occasion – polling (Eldred-Grigg, 1984). Although women were never wholly banned from drinking on premises, the nature of bars meant that they were now certainly no place for women to be. High class hotel bars were exceptions, but even in such private hotels the presence of women in bars was frowned upon and pressure was put on hoteliers within their own organisation to stop such 'fraternisation' (Brien, 2002). In 1941 the Hoteliers Association passed a resolution that any indiscriminate meetings of men and women in hotel lounges should be prevented, and that hoteliers should aim for the complete abolition of excessive public drinking by women (Brien, 2002). Up until 1961, legislation even ensured that licensed establishments ceased to be a place for women to work (Brien, 2002). With music, dancing, entertainment, food, women, children, and even seats all gone, nothing remained but to stand and drink (Brien, 2002).

Commercial drinking, its delivery, and the spaces of consumption were thus contracted and reinforced as being morally-split men's worlds (Cast, 2002).

Severed from the social and the celebratory within local communities (New Zealand Herald, 2002), drinking establishments had but one purpose, and drinking became a literal performance where the specific bodily skill of consuming large quantities and 'holding your beer' was prized (Campbell et al., 1999). Consumption of alcohol was a crowded, shoulder-to-shoulder, masculine engagement, and the talk accompanying it was filled with men's preoccupations – often of war by returned servicemen seeking shared experiences (Te Ropu Māori, 2002), or of sports as shared male interests (Fox, 2002). Drinking in the pub became a test of male identity (Phillips, 1996). Today this culture still informs attitudes, and rugby, racing, beer, and the six o'clock swill tend to be recalled with nostalgia as part of the good old Kiwi bloke syndrome (Miller, 2002). That such 'blokeishness' was heavily legislated into being appears to be forgotten (Phillips, 1996).

### **Consumption re-worked: Enacting new changes**

In 1967 six o'clock closing was abolished. After this legislative shift, processes of deregulation saw significant changes in and around the alcohol industries. Many important social and structural transitions at this juncture shaped the emerging spaces of use and the engagements people had with alcohol. The highly contracted scope and gendered nature of drinking began to re-expand. Some drinking activities shifted by necessity away from pubs. The particular character certain bars had acquired made some expansion inevitable in order that drinking spaces could suit women. Deregulated and altered spaces of drinking, plus internationalisation of products, affected consumption styles and consumption levels, and these commercial changes led to changes in consumers' choices (Campbell et al., 1999).

In response to deregulations and the arrival of new imported products, strategies and product promotion were required for local interests to compete. Brand identities began to emerge. Consumption of alcohol became more publicly promoted. As Campbell and Colleagues (1999) point out, socially, other major changes were happening too – economically, politically, and within workforces.

The second wave of the women's movement acted on spaces of work, family, and identities to contest traditionally male domains and practices (Phillips, 1996). The social times and spaces of alcohol consumption were shifting along with other traditional boundaries. As well as impacting on adult consumption, changes for young people – of increased leisure time and purchasing power – led to young people consuming alcohol differently. Subject to less traditional ways and supervision, young people's own rituals began to emerge (BBC, 2002).

Increasingly, wine and imported beers were being drunk in cafés (Campbell et al., 1999). The advent of the café culture and movement away from pubs altered identifications to allow for more 'sophisticated' versions of 'the drinker'. Cultures developed in which people engaged with alcohol in new and different ways. A fundamental shift had taken place around relationships between people and alcohol in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and the hegemonic, masculinist version of what that relationship was about was no longer stable. Plural drinking behaviours and subjectivities had erupted back through the peculiar moral surface of restraint that had pushed drinking into such constrained spaces, such plurality caused those spaces to re-expand, but the legacy of that past was far from gone (Campbell et al., 1999).

### **Contemporary debates, conditions and positions: Paradoxes and political complexities**

Despite ongoing links between alcohol, health problems, and social disruptions, in contemporary Aotearoa/New Zealand, as internationally, alcohol is still identified as a drug of equivocal status. Argued as neither inherently good nor bad for people, alcohol has continued to be recognised for its potentially beneficial, as well as harmful, effects (Heath, 1995; Watney, 1974). Contemporary research suggests life-span benefits for moderate drinkers compared to non-drinkers (ALAC, 2002; Easton, 1997) and that, even more complexly, harms and benefits can occur even within the same occasion for the same person (Heath, 1995).

Although there are many negative outcomes that alcohol has been identified as potentially, but not inevitably, linked to, alcohol's *direct* role in generating such negative outcomes has remained difficult for researchers to establish. For example, although multiple illnesses are argued as due to alcohol consumption (ALAC, 2002; Ministry of Health, 2004), these health problems have not been identified as present for *all* drinkers, only for 'hazardous' drinkers (Easton, 1997; Hutt & Bowden-Chapman, 1998). Defining what proportion of a population is 'hazardous' in health terms has remained very difficult (Stewart & Power, 2001). More general hazards of drinking – such as links to social harms – have proved even more problematic to map out with accuracy. For example, linking alcohol to violence and crime has proven particularly difficult (ALAC, 2002). Many have agreed that there would appear to be an association between alcohol and violence. However, correlation, it has been argued, is not cause. Although violence is often associated with alcohol consumption, most occasions of consumption do not necessarily result in violence (e.g. Liquor Review Advisory Committee, 1997). Problems associated with alcohol use have been identified as so complexly interrelated to other contributory factors that it has resulted in no unequivocal finding of 'effects'. This appears to be an echo of the fundamental problem of proof in traditional media research.

Proof or no proof, population health risks and social harms related to alcohol remain a public issue – that is, they constitute a significant cost burden to the state and are visible signs of disruption to social stability that the state has to attempt to address (ALAC, 2002; Hutt & Bowden-Chapman, 1998). However, alcohol consumption is also a private concern involving personal benefits and pleasures and potential health benefits, with by far the majority of people using alcohol safely, or at least 'benignly' (ALAC, 2002; Easton, 1997, p.26). This mix of impacts – private and public – repeats an historical divide that is reflected in the contemporary politics of Aotearoa/New Zealand's debates (Hutt & Bowden-Chapman, 1998). The two main sides of debate are still that alcohol does harm, so prohibition/restriction through governance is required; versus alcohol does no harm to the majority of people and even does good to a majority, and therefore

liberation/pro-drinking and freedom of choice should prevail. These positions have been in contention since social use of alcohol has been recorded (Watney, 1974). What has changed is the political climate. The dominance of the moral Protestant ethic that could promote a particular (family) life and restraint has been shifted through contemporary frameworks of liberal individualism and free market choices to a more neo-liberal climate (Sulkunen & Warpenius, 2000).

Over the last decade, the estimated costs of problematic alcohol consumption to Aotearoa/New Zealand in one year (1990 – 1991) were put as between 1 and 4 billion dollars. These figures include lost production, reduced working efficiency, excess unemployment, direct costs related to hospitals (through hospitalisation and treating accidents), accident compensation claims, and policing (ALAC, 2002). Whether behavioural or economic such costs and burdens require managing and these statistics have long supported defining the problems associated with alcohol as public issues. It is defining the *scope* of state response to the problems associated with alcohol – through whole population reforms or by addressing the proportion of the population that visibly represent the problem – that is core to contemporary political tensions (Hutt & Bowden-Chapman, 1998). With less than 20% (ALAC, 2002) of the population affected by problematic consumption, whole population reforms – such as wholesale advertising bans – are difficult to argue in the present political climate.

Instead, concern about potential harm has led Aotearoa/New Zealand to establish more moderate mechanisms to mitigate alcohol-related problems through a range of governance exercises. These include an excise tax on alcohol, the establishment of the Alcohol Advisory Council of New Zealand, development of health promotion programmes, legislation to control the sale and supply of alcohol, and support for the liquor advertising reviews (Ministry of Health, 2004). These mechanisms are promoted, in part, because the Government still sees alcohol predominantly as an issue of economics. Public benefits as well as social costs around alcohol are substantial. In contemporary Aotearoa/New Zealand, alcohol generates significant tax revenues (\$1.37 million

per day), domestic business (4% of GDP), exports (\$260 million), employment (40,000 people – \$855 million in wages), agriculture/horticulture (24,000 hectares of farmlands), unquantified levels of tourism (ALAC, 2002), as well as countless social interactions and pleasures. Alcohol also has an intimate relationship with recreational sports in Aotearoa/New Zealand – as reflected in a concerned submission from Sport and Recreation New Zealand (SPARC) to the ASA advertising review in 2003:

We are also conscious that the review could potentially impact on sponsorship revenue, which is one of the main revenue sources for the sports and recreation sector, at a time when other funding streams are declining. This submission seeks to balance public health considerations against the viability of a sector, which also makes significant contributions to the health and welfare of New Zealanders. (SPARC, 2003)

The advertising review panel were impressed by this argument – repeated in similar submissions – highlighting the relationship liquor has to promoting pastimes that see young people playing sports when they might have little else with which to constructively occupy their time (Advertising Standards Authority, 2003). Thus, in Aotearoa/New Zealand understanding the ways in which liquor affects lives is complex. Gender, working conditions, politics, economics, struggles between industries, leisure practices, moral frameworks, community movements, wars, and availability of products and resources are all part of the interrelated forces working to shape the consumption of alcohol, and how that consumption can be understood.

### **Contemporary research foci: The importance of meanings and the subject of youth**

Historically, once colonised, Aotearoa/New Zealand ranked among the higher drug-using countries of those recorded in the world (Eldred-Grigg, 1984). Now, internationally within the 50 countries for which data is collected, Aotearoa/New Zealand ranks 23rd in per capita alcohol consumption (CAANZ, 2003). The

present figures represent a drop down the international order over the last five years. Recently a changing pattern of heavier drinking occasions is being noted (ALAC, 2002; Casswell & Bhatta, 2001), particularly among young people (especially 14-15 but also 16-20 year olds) who are increasing their consumption levels per drinking occasion (Hocken, 2000). Clearly alcohol consumption patterns shift over time (ALAC, 2002), but the 'why' of such alterations in consumption levels has been a gap in research (Grey & Norton, 1998; Lyons, 2004). Accounts of histories identify that, alongside material conditions, it is the *purpose* of the drinking – the meaning of the act and how communities feel about such things – that shapes the act (Phillips, 1996; Watney, 1974). However, whilst the meanings that drinking holds for people have been recorded in writings about alcohol's histories, contemporary research has been heavily skewed towards numbers and measures rather than making sense of reasons. Recently, some notable exceptions have been emerging. Campbell, Law and Honeyfield (1999), Paton-Simpson (2001), and the innovative youth projects reported by Mahony (2002b) and Lyons (2004) all look specifically at the *act* of drinking, the different purposes it serves, and what alcohol as a cultural artefact means to whom. Mahony and Lyons focus on a more recent area of acute concern to public health – that of youth.

Alcohol use by young people, particularly underage drinkers, is a dominant issue of concern in contemporary research. Young people appear to be disproportionately represented in statistics on alcohol-related harms and they are more likely to drink heavily – which is to say, hazardously (ALAC, 2002). Some would argue that alcohol uptake by young people relates to identifications and performances of being adult, but this is not so clear-cut. As Paton-Simpson (2001) points out, the paradox is that alcohol can be interpreted and responded to as performance and territory of being youth, as well as of becoming adult. Youth culture in Aotearoa/New Zealand has a reputation for binge drinking of its own that has quite a history (BBC, 2002).

Despite concerns about youth drinking, the legal drinking age in Aotearoa/New Zealand was lowered to 18 years in 1999. This move was argued as designed to 'normalise' alcohol use but it was also argued as increasing the likelihood of youth alcohol harm (Casswell & Bhatta, 2001). Concern has also been expressed that the advertisements for alcoholic products, particularly those on television, whilst adding to the normalisation of alcohol consumption, seek to recruit younger drinkers to the habit quite intentionally through the promotion of lifestyles rather than products (Kelly & Edwards, 1998). Industry representatives suggest that there is no such deliberate intent (the Advertising Codes of Practice specifically state that advertisements must not use models under 25 or promote behaviours of the under 25s) (Stewart, 2000). They further argue that the increasing normalisation of alcohol taking place is part of a wider trend that is to the good because it demystifies alcohol and makes it less appealing to young people as forbidden fruit. Stewart argues that in the absence of prohibition people in Aotearoa/New Zealand recognise that the State's powers to affect attitudes or to control social behaviours, especially those of young people, are very limited. Instead, Stewart argues, it is family and societal norms – not advertisements – that have the greater influence over if, when, and how, our young people use alcohol. (Juxtaposed alongside Aotearoa/New Zealand histories, one can hear the echoes of old arguments and positions.)

Construction of social norms and the issue of parental involvement are important points. Citing American statistics, Stewart (2000) identifies how US work shows the significance of parenting in influencing development of attitudes to alcohol. Among the factors highlighted as affecting youth decisions about drinking alcohol, parents are identified as a leading influence by 62% in the 12 – 17 age group. This is followed by friends (28%), teachers (9%), television (7%), and advertising (4%). You could argue that this use of overseas statistics is inappropriate. However, in terms of underage drinking, research in Aotearoa/New Zealand identifies that 46% of underage drinkers report obtaining alcohol through their parents and 58% through their friends, with these sources being the most common suppliers (ALAC, 2002). Although these figures reflect a reduction in

parental supply over the last two years, this is still a major issue. Inadvertently perhaps, by highlighting social norms, Stewart points effectively to the complexities of what can be understood as alcohol promotion. Where traditional research focuses on causal links to advertising, Stewart underscores wider community roles in promoting alcohol use.

Despite adult concerns and much talk by adults about 'youth', some young people have instigated positive changes on their own. The old 'Chunder Mile' days at university are gone and Massey University's once notorious 'Tour de Coma' cycling pub tour and its 'Soak Days' have been overshadowed by the students' Safe Drinking Promotion Committee; Students Against Drunk Drivers (SADD) have been formed nationally, and Waikato University has chilli-eating competitions instead of keg-skulling sessions (BBC, 2002). This perhaps suggests that, given the opportunities, positive authorities (self-governance) as opposed to negative authorities (legislative strictures) may be important and effective ways of enacting forms of peer influence for young people. Such a view would argue for including young people in research, debates, and as sources of solutions to hazardous consumption. Currently, younger voices are barely audible in research about alcohol, where they are predominantly talked about or represented as numbers (Stewart & Power, 2001).

[Since I researched and wrote that paragraph, well over a year ago, my daughter began university in Auckland. After induction week (March, 2005), she suggested that alcohol (commercial) interests still have or have (re)gained a strong material presence on campus. In her words "it seemed like they're all trying to get us to drink instead of study". She identified that alcohol was prevalent at all orientation events where costs were heavily reduced through sponsorship and 'ready to drink' mixes (mixers and spirits) were heavily promoted (available for \$2 a can). It would be fair to argue that these are legitimately targeted promotions aimed at adults of a legal drinking age, but the events – e.g. the 'drinking Olympics' where prizes were supplied for feats of excess (e.g. skulling) – were all held during university lecture hours (could this happen in workplaces without outcry?). This

example of promotional activity is one that would probably fall under the radar of traditional public health reviews of alcohol promotions.]

In summary, many groups of young people in Aotearoa/New Zealand appear to be drinking at levels that are a cause for some alarm. A particular source of concern is whether, and, if so, how alcohol advertising may have a specific role in young people's development of problematic drinking styles. An attached concern, lies round whether those people promoting alcohol commercially to adults also intend to recruit under-age drinkers to under-age consumption. Arguments expressing concern for the ways in which younger people experience alcohol promotion have lately been made more complex.

Research has now highlighted the important roles played by families and friends in encouraging and supporting young people's under-age drinking choices. What is clear is that there are presently significant gaps in research understanding about young people and alcohol that require addressing. One of the most important of these gaps is around understanding what drinking alcohol, and drinking alcohol in particular ways, might mean to young people. Another is in understanding how young people particularly, are being engaged by, and engaging with, alcohol advertising.

### **Politics and warring factions: Present states and ongoing politics**

In the struggle over controls around alcohol, public health researchers have complained about the organised and savvy lobbying efforts of the various groups within the liquor industry (Thomson, Casswell, & Stewart, 1994). This position – of being politically savvy and organised (set in motion over 100 years ago) – may offer a lesson for contemporary public health interests. Earlier moderation interests were very political and saw the benefits of alliances; they appeared to understand that politics required organised and savvy lobbying. The intimation in the concern expressed by Thomson et al appears to be that such politics are to

be eschewed as a tool of pro-alcohol interests; perhaps the lesson is that they should not be.

In 1998, the work of The New Zealand Public Health Organisation was terminated. Its organisational demise was apparently related to its inability to work in a 'politically savvy' way in the contemporary environments of alcohol policy (Hutt & Bowden-Chapman, 1998). The staff in the organisation generated major opposition, through what were perceived as consultative gaps, when they failed to confer with all representatives of liquor interests. Their work was seen as a threat, not only to the liquor industry, but also to other Government-funded departments working in the field in different, and more inclusive, ways (most importantly the Ministry of Health) (Hutt & Bowden-Chapman, 1998). The demise of The New Zealand Public Health Organisation illustrates the fact that debates about alcohol cannot be freed from politics: they are politics. It will be interesting to see whether responses by local public health organisations begin to see a more organised and savvy lobbying response than has been the case to date. Such responses have been recommended (Saunders, 1993).

Given the economic implications (for Government), present politics would seem to require the inclusion of the liquor industry in debates. The sheer size and scale of the liquor industry in Aotearoa/New Zealand means that for Government, these debates are as much about economic livelihoods as they are about public health and personal well-being. Such debates are also – as many lawyers employed by pro-liquor interests have worked out – about the Bill of Rights. Alcohol is a legally available drug. Whilst this is the case those in favour consider attempts to ban its promotion a transgression of this legislative guarantee of people's legal rights (Advertising Standards Authority, 2003).

In contemporary Aotearoa/New Zealand, the dominant positions in the ancient pros/cons debate argue that we are in a politically neo-liberal environment where state interventions are constrained and where, in health terms, moderate consumption of alcohol appears to have some potential benefits. It is the rhetorically-constituted 'problem individual' whose heavy consumption is held to

create the negative outcomes that concern the state (ALAC, 2002) and not the implied 'other' of the 'normal consumer'. There has been an ongoing political tussle over whether it is appropriate to target consumption reduction across the whole population (a great threat to the liquor industry, not necessarily to the benefit of moderate drinkers, and not in the neo-liberal political spirit of contemporary New Zealand), or to simply target 'problem drinkers' (Hutt & Bowden-Chapman, 1998). Groups like ALAC (2002) seem to be working from the position that what is needed is some collaborative compromise between public health and industry that works to promote moderation and to highlight the hazards of excess, as well as addressing what problem drinking is, and ways for problem drinkers to get help. However, ALAC is a government-funded organisation. Less moderate and less connected non-government organisations find ALAC's position less than acceptable (Alcohol Healthwatch, 2005).

### **Could collaboration see messages about safe consumption appear in liquor ads?**

There was lobbying for this in the latest review but such recommendations were outside the remit of the review panel (Advertising Standards Authority, 2003). For now, in Aotearoa/New Zealand, around any right to consume or promote liquor, we are leaning to favour the many, not the few, around any right to consume or promote liquor. There is, though, still the ongoing issue of the vulnerable percentage of people for whom alcohol can be a very hazardous substance. Such vulnerability is not easily addressed; when set out simply as 'health risks' it is not well articulated. Alcohol is not alone in this type of debate. Indeed some of the greatest public health challenges ahead for Aotearoa/New Zealand in the next decades are identified as hazards affecting those vulnerable to the effects of overeating (Ministry of Health, 2002). Initial challenges have been fired at the promotional efforts of the fast food industry and it has been suggested that they should not be able to advertise (Ananova, 2002) or that advertising of this nature should be limited – especially when aimed at the young, who are considered

most vulnerable (Ministry of Health, 2002). What is raised through these debates is the role of representations in our lives. It is the stirrings of a very complex debate around all forms of representational responsibilities.

It may be a mistake to debate the roles of single forces in isolation. Consider alcohol and economics. One way of working to reduce alcohol consumption is through economics. In the last decade Aotearoa/New Zealand experienced a minor economic recession (Casswell & Bhatta, 2001). Alcohol was affected because having less money means people drink less (ALAC, 2002; Casswell & Bhatta, 2001). So, similarly, any cost increases – whether through tax or corporate profit motives – should produce consumption decreases. However, when recessions are experienced, such decreases in alcohol consumption are shown to be most likely for those with least money (Casswell & Bhatta, 2001). Economic barriers are not likely to solve the problem of hazardous drinkers with money – those with the means will apparently still drink. In fact, those with least money are *already* least likely to report drinking (ALAC, 2002). Generating economic barriers could be argued as another form of social deprivation for those already in positions of economic inequity. If alcohol truly does benefit moderate consumers, then increases in the cost of alcohol, through higher taxes, is hardly appropriate for social groups already so disadvantaged in terms of health outcomes.

To return to obesity and concerns surrounding the fast food debate, the Ministry of Health suggests that the universal adoption of a diet consistent with the Ministry's *Food and Nutrition Guidelines* could have an impact equivalent to the total elimination of smoking (Ministry of Health, 1998). The Ministry advocates 'five a day' (servings of fresh fruit and vegetables) and the use of lean meats and fresh seafood (Ministry of Health, 2002). This recommendation is being made universally. Families struggling with poverty for whom what is 'good for you' is economically out of reach, may have good reason to prefer the unhealthy alternative of a McDonalds burger for \$1.95 (on billboards in Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand in September 2003). Such recommendations are failing

to address the social inequities that exist; for some families this universal dietary health panacea is simply out of reach.

Debates about public health must address the dialectical relationships of multiple social forces and the positions people hold within those. In the same way, a more complex consideration of how social processes interact deserves to be taken up in the debates about alcohol advertising. Advocating economic barriers by those not disadvantaged appears to be as erroneously simplistic as notions of alcohol advertisers as the cause of problematic social drinking styles. Equally, it seems disingenuous of the alcohol advertising industry to refuse *any* relationship to forms of consumption. It appears to be clear that advertising and consumption are not isolated forces in a causal relationship. However, to deny any relationship at all is just as problematic.

In terms of reduction of harm, multiple legislative impacts over the last decades appear to have made some difference. Graduated drivers licences and awareness of breath testing are reportedly reducing drinking (Casswell & Bhatta, 2001). Also, host responsibility appears to have had some effect in bars and clubs where people have experienced an increase in staff advocating less drinking and making purchasing tougher for the under-aged (ALAC, 2002). Expenditure on the promotion of awareness of the risks of drinking has been ongoing. So, although Casswell and Bhatta (2001) report a growing liberal social climate towards drinking, it could also be argued that the climate is reflecting growth in discursive engagements around concern for responsible drinking.

On the other hand, there are greater numbers of licensed retail outlets, new kinds of premises, longer hours of opening, easier access for young people to night-clubs, and the introduction of products like the new ready-mixed drinks (Casswell & Bhatta, 2001), all of which, some would argue, are designed to deliberately target the young (Greens, 2003). Some legislative changes appear to be designed to reduce irresponsible drinking (e.g. harsher penalties on drink-driving) and seem to be having some effect whereas other legislations do not appear to be working to promote responsibility (e.g. longer opening hours in which to drink).

Government policy can therefore seem inconsistent. This perhaps reflects that the debate about alcohol use is occurring within and across groups and that Government is no exception when it comes to being undecided about rights and wrongs. The themes of these debates and the struggles they represent are visible in submissions around the ongoing consideration of the legitimacy of and issues surrounding the broadcast marketing of alcohol brands. If we look across multiple texts, the context is that of a broader debate and struggle. Negotiation of meanings is taking place across texts and conditions, not within them in isolation.

The Advertising Standards Authority five-yearly independent review (2003), considering issues around alcohol promotion, released the *ASA Panel Report*. The report appears to recognise that these issues are complex and that unless there is more dialogue between the different sides the representatives of those different sides will remain trapped in rhetoric (without participants necessarily recognising that). The review report states:

the Panel believes that the procedure used for this and earlier reviews could well be modified. Limiting the process to receiving written and oral submissions has meant that we were presented with much the same opposing views as in the past. The Panel is therefore of the view that the process be altered with the objective of involving dialogue between interest groups representative of the various facets of our multi-cultural society. It is envisaged that techniques such as focus groups and joint research could be utilised. The Panel noted that although there was substantial agreement on the problem there was little agreement on suggested solutions. It is hoped that such a process would assist that process. (Advertising Standards Authority, 2003)

The panel recognises that the submissions process is part of a broad struggle over meanings and that the panel's mediatory role in this is limited until the different factions can be brought together. Mutual dialogue and shared solutions should become the altered focus.

## Why these contexts of struggle matter

I have said that no argument about how we engage with the meanings of what advertising has to say can make sense unless such argument is set within the rich and complex histories from which are drawn the cultural resources that make advertising's representations sensible to us. In previous chapters I identified the preoccupations of local research into alcohol advertising with the ways in which alcohol advertising texts map out the contours of drinking as masculine, and of masculinity as preoccupied with being hard, loving sport, and eschewing the feminine (Hill, 1999). If we set those alcohol advertising portrayals alongside these histories of alcohol's use, and alongside the socialisation and gender performances these histories shaped to be locally dominant, then what is on offer in alcohol advertising texts seems unsurprising.

If we look across at other advertising texts in contemporary Aotearoa/New Zealand, from washing powder to babies' nappies, masculine toughness and a preoccupation with sport is almost ubiquitously on display. Alcohol's local histories can be argued as having made significant contributions to perpetuating such cultural performances of gender. However, from the perspective of those histories, the liquor industry is not so much exaggerating forms of Kiwi masculinity to promote alcohol, as it is re-presenting them as meaningful. Such portrayals are likely to make sense to consumers because those portrayals *already* mean something to consumers, although what portrayals 'mean' is unlikely to be stable or consistent; a point that the next stages of the research will hopefully illustrate.

This chapter has argued that our engagements with alcohol are fundamentally linked to, amongst other things, stories about age, gender, and ethnicity in Aotearoa/New Zealand. This chapter has also argued strongly that alcohol and its uses are inseparable from other social forces and practices. Forces like economics, technologies, war, and political movements have all had relationships with and have affected alcohol use. Alcohol consumption is a social practice (as is its promotion), existing in a relationship with other social practices and forces.

As a social practice it is *fundamentally* political. Recognition that politics will inflect *any* interests and positions taken up about alcohol argues that such politics need to be identified and those motivated by them located in relation to each other. Histories show us that what alcohol means to whom depends on contexts of consumption and interpretation.

### **The texts**

The Lion Red and Speight's commercials used for this research are provided on disc inside the back cover of this thesis. Now would be the time to view them. The original scripts are also appended. It may be noticed that these scripts are not exact matches to the filmed texts. The appended texts are the original scripts. I am informed that the approved script is only used as a guide. The final product is shaped through casting, producers, the director, and apparently what seems right on the day (MearesTaine, 2002).

## Chapter 9 Initial Engagements

### Is there any such thing as a single entendre? Kenneth Williams

*This chapter explores the differences between the ways in which the texts had meanings for the different participants in the study, contrasting the intentions of the producers with the interpretations and responses of the other participants.*

After engaging with the participant materials (producer transcripts, student transcripts, and my original Jane (J1) reviews of the ad-texts), I wanted to strongly convey a sense of what I had ‘heard’: that is, voices representing distinctive positions that were both individual and yet also related and interacting (both through commonalities and differences). I decided to employ distinguishing devices to communicate a sense of the different participants ‘speaking’, which could give greater visibility to what they had to say as distinct from one another. Hence all materials quoted directly from the participant materials are set out sequentially and are identifiable by colour. **Producers: blue; Students: red; and, Jane 1: green.** In addition to this, any comments I as **Jane 2 (in my authorial meta-analytic voice)** make will be in shades of grey. This is to signal my (privileged) form of research participation in a meta-interpretative role and to disrupt notions of final arrival or ‘truth’ in what I have to say. (Other possibilities for making sense will always exist; this is not an attempt to *be* exhaustive.) To heighten a sense of the ‘negotiated’ nature of the texts, I have also interwoven selected excerpts from the different transcripts, juxtaposing them around the same questions in this chapter (and around link-points in the next), adding my meta-interpretative, Jane (J2) commentary, to each stage.

[The use of only three colour groups in this section identifies main participant categories as this research is orientated to examine broader locations. It would be possible in a different form of analysis to consider providing different colours to every voice, closely examining the inflections of each student and each

producer as they represented their unique positions and experiences of the texts in a form of discursive Conversation Analysis]

The analysis in this chapter is separated into two sections. The first section deals with the Lion Red ad and the second with the Speight's ad. This chapter will examine the producers' versions of their intent for the ad, their intended target audiences, and their intended core messages – each time then looking at all the other participants' interpretations and responses (the students and I as J1), and my later interpretative (J2) comments around both. Taking this approach has created quite a lengthy section, but this was felt to be necessary to enable all the different participants to be heard in some detail and to allow the more specific detail of those intentions (producers) and responses (J1 and the students) around the individual commercials to form a background to the broader analysis of Chapter 9. Breaking into two sections will highlight important differences and commonalities across the texts.

## **Lion Red: Interpretations and responses**

**J1: Original summary of the commercial:** A series of teasers (30 second 'trailers' to the main ad) run before the main commercial. These identify characters and setting. Three men, living in the country, are waiting for something. The 'something' is revealed as operating at two (interrelated) levels. On one level, within the content of the ad, there is a self-conscious referencing of the ad, signalled as a creative return to a particular representational space: Lion Red territory as realised through a known song. On the other level, there is the characters' story: that of three good mates from the country, whose lives are clearly quiet, getting to head off to the city for a big night out, hoping for fun and perhaps romance. The men are waiting to go to town by bus. Upon arrival in the 'smoke', rejecting many types of drinking establishment (and, the inference is, many types of drinkers) they find a pub suitable to their tastes where the dominant drink is Lion Red and the crowd representative of Lion Red drinkers. In this crowded and lively bar a singing competition is taking place. The trio are persuaded to participate by three attractive but, to them, inaccessible young

women. The song they sing is re-worked from an old Lion Red commercial – ‘Blood Brothers’ – and pleases the pub crowd. Despite finding women but not romance, having enjoyed the city, Lion Red, and a Good Night Out, they head home in a socially responsible manner by taxi.

**1: What was understood as the intention of the commercials?**

**P1:** To put into some sort of context, the uh...at the time that we were engaged to do the, uh, the new Lion Red commercial, it was after having, uh, the brand had actually moved from [another agency] to my company um and the main catalyst for this move was the uh ...um...I'd have to say disastrous ‘Chins’ campaign....which uh, had, which was the last work that [the other agency] did for the brand and uh I guess it wouldn't be overstating it to say um, that it had a fairly, um, derogatory effect on the brand. It was a campaign that no one liked, and, um, a lot of people really, really disliked. Uh...and...it did a lot of damage to what you would have to say was arguably the strongest beer brand in the country. So...I guess ah, our first task was to ahh...um, without apology, was to get the brand back on track. Get Lion Red into ah an arena where, um, it was, ah, where it was much more comfortable, where it spoke to its, you know, core market, um, and didn't alienate them in the way that the chin heads campaign did. So uh we, ah, created a campaign that harked back to the days of the Red Blooded campaign, uh, which ironically [name deleted] and I did in an earlier guise at [the other agency] anyway and, um, just put it firmly back into, into um, a playing field where we believed that, that Lion Red could actually compete. Uh, that was a bit more middle of the road than the, um, the extremities that the Chin Heads campaign seemed to explore.

**P2:** When we...ah, got back on the business, we were um...first of all um, introduced to some really interesting research, ah, that was conducted in um, some fairly earthy pubs around, around Auckland. Um, um I vaguely remember one of the best ones was somewhere in Pukekohe where they introduced a lot of the patrons on tape and we listened quite intently to their um, summations...of

what, what was their life all about and what was Lion Red all about. And the interesting thing is as they were describing the personality of Lion Red and the Lion Red drinker, what they were actually doing...is describing that commercial of ten years previous. And it was quite uncanny they would describe the guy and what he would do when he'd arrive at the bar, the kind of things he would get into and I remember I kept saying to my partner um, that's the Lion Red commercial. So what they had done, if you like was that they had taken if you like, the visual culture we'd created in this ad and that had become their pictorial essay of what, what Lion Red was all about; quite interesting. So...again it seemed incredibly obvious, but I just felt that we had all of this advertising from the original Red Blooded that had gone all sorts of ways, had become very confusing and schizophrenic and I just felt what ever we were going to do in the future and, what ah, maybe what we should do...is kind of get back to our roots; and without apology I recommended that we do a, should do a new version of Red Blooded. So rather than go off on another crack at this is where Red is guys which might backfire for all sorts of reasons, yet again, if we went back to Red Blooded the least we could do is sort of consolidate our position. Tell the drinkers "hey we're back in that land that you kind of describe anyway; we're back in that environment that you feel most happy in"

## **J2: Repairing damage and shifting position for the brand – Did we get that?**

**J1 view:** Before this advertisement Lion Red aired two rather notorious (for many offensive (e.g. Hill, 1999)) series of commercials: the 'what it means to be a man campaign' (see Chapter 8) and the very bloke-ish – 'Chins' campaign. The trailers pre-empting this new commercial reference these prior campaigns. The main characters in the trailers stare at a literally changing Lion Red billboard and talk about the desirable creative shift this represents. One of the men suggests that this change is one people have waited for, that it will be significantly connected with a known history and that it should be understood as a source of some excitement. From a marketing perspective it seems like an apology for or

attempted suturing across recent creative times. It is revealed that the new ad will take us back to a well known jingle in the form of the 'Red Blooded' song. This seems unsurprising as a strategy. The multiple executions of recent years cannot have been consistent for the brand. A creative move to more defined roots seems reasonable, and, one assumes, is done with the expectation that the target audience will recognise and respond to this. In the teasers reference is made – by the more knowing of the trio – to 'the chords of the song' implying that what is coming is musical. Sure enough, the main advertisement reintroduces 'Red Blooded', sung Karaoke style by the main protagonists. For the men and women in the bar, it is clearly an old favourite; all present join in. This offers the song a position as part of what Lion Red is liked for, offering a reassuring familiarity. I assume it has researched well. The music is part of a celebratory feel in the ad and presumably locates the target audience as viewers who are old enough to know the original ad and its jingle – a potentially exclusionary device for younger viewers. However the jingle is catchy and will also arguably act as an effective device to engage a new generation.

### **The media students' views**

- M2** Why all the country scenes?...They're annoying...like they have five country scenes for Lion Red at the beginning.
- M1** It was a gimmick, it didn't make any sense to me. I mean what, what was actually on 'TV, Monday Night...9.10?'...What did that stuff mean?
- F2** For the launch...those were the trailers.
- M4** Those trailers were boring ... what were they about? Huh.
- F1** It made no sense. **(G1)**
- M4** What about Lion Red Chins...the faces in those ads?
- M3** Much rather have the Red Blooded. **(G1)**

- F1** Oh my god what about those stupid chin ads? The chins, the disgusting Lion Red chin things.
- F2** Euw so and those billboard they just gross me... **(G4)**
- M1** With the Lion Red one they have all the segments with the stuff before...other adverts before.
- F2** Yeah it's intriguing
- M1** Yeah, and um the Lion Red one, how it has the trailers, it does two things; it intrigues the audience in order to make them watch the final adverts and by that time to be interested enough to pay attention to the final advert and it also gets us familiar with the characters, which ads to the appeal
- F2** Yeah it does like, if it's just an ad for beer then we probably wouldn't pay attention to it right? **(G2)**

**J2 Commentary:** Our responses revealed differences in interpretative locations as well as ways in which such locations are structured. Age was an obvious difference in location. As one might expect, the strategy of signalling a creative return to the old Lion Red campaign (through the song) was not one that connected well for the younger students. The students were too young to know the original 'Blood Brothers' ad (these students would have been 6 or 7 years old). This discursive gap meant that for the students the device of alerting audiences to the fact that they would be encountering something creatively familiar (through the trailers) in the new Lion Red commercial was irrelevant and even annoying. The students' responses to the trailers were, however, still nicely illustrative of how interpretive and responsive variances are structured through the position, or frame, one is 'looking' from, and how that can differ amongst a group of people. In Group 1, **M2**, **M1**, and **M4** simply respond to the content of the trailers as 'boring', but **F2** in the same group and **M1** and **F2** in Group 2 drew on what they have learned in media studies to warrant the logic of using trailers. This generated a quite different response of 'intriguing'. Pleasure here is in recognising the work being done by the trailers. The displeasure in Group 1

appears to lie in a lack of resources (knowledge possibilities) to draw on and to inform interpretations. Any 'failure' of the trailers with the students is not about the tool but is about the students' experiential locations outside intended targets; hence the references are lost on them.

However, the previous 'Chins' campaign (having run in more recent years) had not passed unnoticed; and recognising other Lion Red ads offered a different space of interpretative anchorage. The negative chord the producers identified as struck with core Lion Red audiences by the previous agency's campaign, seemed to resonate resoundingly with these participants; the students really disliked 'Chins'. For these students, who recognised the new campaign as a creative shift – even if the 'where' of that shift was not clear – the commercial was appreciated simply on the basis of being better than Chins. My own exposure to the previous 'Red Blooded' campaign meant that, despite not being a core Lion Red drinker, I got the point of a creative return. The research story behind this ad was new to me although I had guessed (or drawn on my own experiences in the field to guess) a research component; I was surprised at just how pivotal it had been in shaping strategy. The production background described revealed the complex nature of advertising's participation in wider discursive struggles over meanings. In this instance it appears to support arguments that the (Lion Red) brand is not simply a creation of advertising; it is a story that is 'out there', being engaged with by people and constructed through the acts and locations of communities who have taken up the brand. These are interacting forces. Across two quite different campaigns, [the old agency's] attempts to set out what Lion Red 'means' had been rejected by Lion Red's core drinkers and not taken up by other groups beyond them. In this process the ad-consumer-brand relationship is by no means linear and Lion Red's audiences are not passive recipients but participants in the processes through which 'their' brand is being constructed. Interestingly, the production perspective seemed to clearly recognise the audiences' roles in shaping their creative products and to accept this as a normal part of their creative process. Dominant theory informing local public health critiques do not offer space to explore this.

## **2: Who was perceived as the target audience?**

**P1:** In essence what we were trying to say, oh, uh who were we talking to? We were trying to reunite Lion Red's core market.

**J1:** Which is what?

**P1:** Oh it's uh largely blue collar, a working men's kind of beer heavily male skewed, heavily um ah ...um ...um...I don't really have a lot of things at my finger tips but it's um...yes it's, it's, it's real market is not uh urban merchant bankers, it's largely blue collar. Probably working men is the short answer. It's drunk a lot by Māori and Pacific Islanders uh...and uh, you know, well, I guess with our, with that commercial we were trying, desperately trying to get back some of the ground that had been lost in the previous years by uh by those strange, uh, by strange marketing of the brand. We wanted to remind them that Lion Red isn't totally schizophrenic, it hasn't forgotten about you it's on track and if we, you know, if we maybe swung maybe too far back into some pretty broad beer cues it was because we felt we had to, we really had to, to get the brand back on track.

**P3:** Well, you've got your core Lion Red drinkers, which are your old, hard-core drinkers, and with the previous campaigns they had disassociated those drinkers, in some respects. And...um, they were wanting to gain the young drinkers, they're always after the emerging drinker; and also the, uh, city drinker as well, of sorts.

**J1:** Right, which is quite a range?

**P3:** Yeah, it's sort of a cross, there's a cross target market, so, which I think is a really hard one because you're trying to hit your core blue collar, you know, 'Once Were Warriors' kind of bloke, yeah, any pub kind of number, you know, cheap piss basically, that sort of like, full on area. But then you, they wanted to try and hit the emerging market as well. So it was actually quite difficult and it's always been quite difficult.

**J1:** To talk to both?

**P3:** To talk to both. So trying to find something that's gonna not offend the older lot but still try and get the younger lot, which is why they usually use young,

young men. So, you know, the plus twenty-five, well you have to anyway. But you go as, you know, that younger sort of market and that's why the country was involved and the guys came to the city.

**J1:** 'Cause it spoke to both?

**P3:** 'Cause it spoke to both, yeah, cause it like went across both.

**J1:** So when you say emerging drinker um, what do you mean?

**P3:** Well the young, the younger market that are just hitting the drinking age; "What beer are we going to have?" Cheap piss, basically "we wanna' get drunk, aaah those Lion Red ads are pretty cool, I'm gonna' drink Lion Red" it's that sort of...mentality...and it's the party aspect, the huge big we're having fun in a pub drinking piss with our mates, it's all about sociability. That's the key factor whether you've got the old drinkers or the young ones, or the middle ones or whatever. They wanted to hit the freezing workers, they wanted to hit the guys who work in fish factories, they wanted to hit the farmers, they wanted to hit the guys...you know the city guys as well. So that was massive and in that ad, if you look closely, you'll see people dressed in different outfits that represent all their drinkers.

**J2 commentary:** The producers were after their 'core' Lion Red drinkers; A target of blue collar working men with a Māori and Pacific Island bias, an imaginary community defined both by what it includes and by what it excludes (particularly urban merchant bankers) – Who did the participants think they were talking to?

**J1:** This latest work seems to attempt to move the brand away from overtly male representations into something a little softer and less exclusively male. However, the roles women play in these spaces are still subordinate to what is ultimately a tale for and *about* men. When women appear, they arrive as possible sources of male pleasures and their company – although desirable – is clearly not essential. The bar itself is populated with multiple characterisations of Lion Red drinkers in a Lion Red drinking space – displayed in vast array. There is what might be

locally understood as a public bar with a 'Westie' air, populated with men and women of all kinds, and for want of a better way to draw them together they are working class. Though the ad positions this bar as in the centre of the city ('the smoke') this is not an upmarket central city bar. These are working class people, play hard people, blokes and girls, mums and dads – all out for a Good Friday Night any where in New Zealand-----The three 'fantasy females' are also, in some sense, part of the initiatory process that appears to be worked around being a Lion Red drinker. The three women soliciting participants for a singing competition could be said in this way to be linked to soliciting for Lion Red drinkers too. For me this says that female sexuality is part of the lure and the offer of drinking the product. The women appear 'knowing' and desirable as they seek the participation of the three protagonists, but ultimately they are not for this trio of ingénues and they leave with others, who are clearly more 'core' than the new recruits. It is my sense that this ad is recruiting rather than simply speaking to the converted – or as the brief might say – targeting potential Lion Red drinkers.

**The students said:**

**M4** The ads are full of old geezers.

**F1** But they behave young.

**M2** But their colloquialisms...

**M4** What?

**M2** The way they speak, that like...makes them young.

**M1** Good word that eh?

**M2** I reckon it's very well done though eh? **(G1)**

**F4** Um...what type of person do you think the advertisement is talking at?

**M1** Age.

**F4** But other than that.

**M2** I think blokes.

**M1** Yeah [indistinct]

- F3** Yes .. definitely. This is so stupid, this is so sexual.
- M1** Getting girlfriends, you know? **(G1)**
- F1** The Lion Red ad is related to 20 – 30 year olds.
- F2** Having a big party on a Friday night...Lion Red takes you there.
- F3** And they're both aimed at guys.
- F4** Yeah they are aren't they? The women in them are like objects basically.
- F3** Yeah I reckon in the first one [Lion Red] you've got your skank ho trash 'n' all the guys are all [indistinct].
- F4** Cause you've got like, your different stereotypes of guys...you've got your young country folk...your city boys-
- F1** The bikers, the hard nuts...
- F3** Basically everybody who drinks Lion Red.
- F4** It's a real man's drink...a man's, man's drink. **(G2)**
- F4** I reckon the Lion Red stuff is targeting men, like, dirty middle-aged men.
- F2** They're making beer out to be a real boy's drink.
- F3** It is...it is. **(G3)**
- F1** I do relate to it [Lion Red] because the people in it are you know, our age.
- F2** They're fucking not.
- F1** But they're supposed to be young, you know? **(G4)**
- F1** Lion Red's got a whole kind of stigma surrounding it too 'cause it's like, you know, it's kind of symbolic of you know like, down south and bogunsville and stuff.
- M1** Westies, Westies.
- F1** Yeah, and the kind of shit that you don't drink unless you're totally wasted and then it's like .. oh that's left, sure, I'll go for some but it's cheap, that's an upside to it I think.
- M1** Yeah, obviously you wouldn't drink Lion Red 'cause it tastes good.

**F2** Yeah, like Once Were Warriors, on Once Were Warriors it's the biggest drink they had on Once Were Warriors.

**F1** It's totally promoted as being a boy's drink eh? Like, it's the good old wholesome New Zealand guy...a hard working farmer. **(G4)**

**M2** I don't personally relate to the Lion Red one because I don't go to pubs. **(G1)**

**J2 commentary:** A creative problem expressed by the producers was that the old (hard core) Lion Red drinkers had previously been alienated by ad-texts that appeared to invite different (not core) communities into the Lion Red space, communities that were clearly discursively beyond what traditional Lion Red drinkers recognised as the 'authentic' Lion Red subject. Yet the new campaign had a brief that demanded expansion to include emerging drinkers. A point of creative resonance was therefore required that could link the old and the emergent in shared space. **P3** identified partying and socialising with your mates as what were focused on as the points of connection through which to achieve this crossover.

Positive interpretations and responses from the students were certainly more about general partying than the (less connected to or enjoyed) specifics of how that had been set out. Partying was clearly a meaningful and easily identified cue; as a link-point, in this sense for all concerned the ad seemed to be doing its job. However, although cues of partying and sociability found resonance, this was not so of the characters who despite attempts at youthful 'colloquialisms' were still seen as 'old geezers'. The secondary target **P3** had referred to – of emerging drinkers – was one the students were quick to identify, but they largely rejected this ad as able to speak to anyone as youthful as *their* age group. From this perspective, the seemingly incongruous age restriction in advertising representations (25 versus a drinking age of 18) seems to be acting as a rather effective representational barrier. One of the producers raised this in our discussions as having come through in their own research:

**P2:** we have to have people in the scripts that um, are twenty five and look it, you know. Often we get criticised, and this is an absolute fact, I have sat in, in many groups talking to young beer drinkers and their biggest criticism is “you never show us in beer ads” and when we explain that they have to be twenty five and look it they go “oh, really, oh yeah OK, I can understand that now”. Um, which is quite interesting they actually get pissed off because they don’t see themselves in the beer ads.

**J2 commentary:** What is interesting about this comment is that there are clearly no 25 plus age restrictions around *researching* alcohol advertising with young people. This may be an area that requires further consideration within regulations. In responding to the text, differences over perceptions of the targets sought, highlighted identificatory or locational differences of age, gender and range of experiences. For example, my interpretations, and those of many of the female students, were visibly inflected and connected through discursive strands one could term ‘feminisms’. We ‘saw’, and found problematic, the highly gendered appeal, and the main women in the bar representing objects of heterosexual male fantasy. However, where I interpreted a working class target, this was not a categorisation the students used (with the exception of the comment made about the farmer). This may have been indicating a youthful unconcern with employment, employment hierarchies, or even perhaps dating working class as a discursive category. What seemed to be lacking in relevance for the students was the specific relationship that I interpreted as invoked, between the end of a working week and ‘earned’ play. That said, working class was arguably invoked, albeit in a slightly different form, through more economic references.

Economic conditions (e.g. drinkers with less disposable income wanting ‘cheap piss’) were clearly understood by producers and students as part of what makes Lion Red desirable, recognising that some of what ties people to this brand is financial necessity. My failure to highlight this particular structuring of brand preferences (and this economic aspect of what can constitute ‘working-class’)

highlights my present position of social privilege. It has been a very long time since I had to buy Lion Red by the crate because it was all that was affordable. The students, on the other hand, often referred to their low incomes. There were complex ideas within the students' interpretations and responses to what they perceived as the negatives surrounding the social locations of the Lion Red targets. They alluded to interactions between ethnicity, social disadvantages, and material-geographic ways in which inequities between communities become manifested as distinct environments in which unique cultures develop. Being from an economically disadvantaged community does not preclude pleasures and pride about the cultures such a community includes, and it is these things Lion Red seeks to tap. As an exchange in **G2** identified:

**M1** If you go in a supermarket and there's like, two beers for the same price and one's like, Lion Red and the other's one you never heard of...like, which one are you going to go for?

**F2** Obviously Lion Red, it's a product that's well known, it's well trusted.

**J2 commentary:** With other brands competing in the same arena (less taste but less cost), buy-in to the brand itself (that is, engagement in any part of what a brand 'means' beyond price) still holds a key role in shaping success or failure for the product. As **F1** (**G4** above) identifies in her comments, commitment to Lion Red is more complex than economics; communities also connect to Lion Red through positive recognitions. Here **F1** also – inadvertently – sets out nicely the contradictions within the resonances that Lion Red potentially offers as she shifts between positions that:

- Lion Red has some stigma attached (belongs to less desirable communities); that it only gets drunk by those seeking to be wasted (only used inappropriately); It's a boy thing (shared aspects of male cultures beyond economics are working in this text)

- Some of the boy thing ‘means’ the “good old wholesome Aotearoa/New Zealand Guy...a hard working farmer” (an ethic of hard work and a connection to rural communities where drinking may not be engaged in to ‘get wasted’).

The students and I both identified a goal of recruitment, but where they heard ‘youth’ I simply interpreted ‘new to the brand’. The students identified far more clearly than I that, although the actors in the commercial were ‘old’ compared to them, their mannerisms and talk could be interpreted as connected to (or attempting to connect to) something younger. I missed this point precisely because of my age. **P3’s** comments demonstrate that in terms of intended cues the students were right. My own interpretation of attempted recruitment (through the women and their ‘solicitation’ to participate in the Lion Red song) identifies my position as adult, female and interpreting through a particular lens of sexual politics. Such responses suggest ‘excess’ (reading beyond what is intended) is precisely about such interpretive locations.

Like **P3**, the students also identified Lion Red drinkers as people who would be engaged within cultures of excessive consumption. Their talk around this differed noticeably from their (frequent) talk across their sessions about their own acts of alcoholic excesses. Adult ‘Westie’ excess was negative whereas their own overindulgences were offered as normal, amusing, and acceptable aspects of being young. The ‘Westie’ theme was one commonly drawn on and interpreted as a basic and recognisable (shared) stereotype, strongly evoked through the multiple characters represented in the ad. Westie is a very local idea in New Zealand, invoking working class, and denoted by what could be dated as 80s resonant dress and hairdos (tight jeans, big hair, or ‘mulletts’ – shorter on top and longer at the back) and also ‘excessive’ acts. Westies’ are a source of ‘boy racers’ and drunken risk taking. The Westie construction is also – arguably – ethnically white. But we also have the *Once Were Warriors* character invoked – this is urban, poor, and Māori. This image also connotes excess and risk, particularly of violence. Both *Once Were Warriors* and ‘Westie’s’ interpretatively

negative twists are identifiably attached to external material realities of disadvantage, referenced through Lion Red being cheap, not tasting particularly good, but used in particular (*other*) cultures of drinking to excess that have something to *do* with being economically disadvantaged. Resonances of cheap and getting wasted generated through the ad were identified as about individuals (Westies and boguns) and geographic connections (Westie and Southern) well *beyond* the ads, that these students were clearly – through their negativity – distancing themselves from. The students were themselves youthfully ‘poor’ but keen to identify the difference between this and the lifetime disadvantages Lion Red seemingly could signal.

In terms of other shared resonances, an interpretative response common to us all was that the text was speaking as male, and to men, something the girls in the groups often found offensive and alienating. This raised an interesting point. Between 10 and 20% of Lion Red drinkers are female, yet the ads are clearly very male. I asked the producers about this and **P2**’s response was:

**P2:** Look at any beer category, whether it’s Heineken, Stella, Becks or that stuff, Corona, right down to Lion Red, Speight’s, Waikato: the more earthy brands; and there is a high percentage of loyal female drinkers. So...um, our problem is ...or would be I should say, ‘cause I haven’t had the guts to do it yet but would be to actually write a commercial completely from a women’s point of view. And say let’s write this commercial um...I mean here’s a classic example, it would be incredibly difficult for me at this stage, even though the breweries acknowledge that there is a, you know, a strong core percentage of women drinkers throughout all the brands, whether they would go ahead and produce a specific commercial, they would worry that the, the male market would say [deep voice] “uh, uh, so, it’s a girl’s beer now”. So they, they have this huge problem, how do we do that? So you get the classic beer commercials like the Lion Red commercials, specially the new ones, where you have lots of women in it and there’s a lot of kind of sexual kind of innuendos and all sorts of things but it is always traditionally from the male point of view.

**J2 commentary:** Clearly, the act of ‘putting lots of women in it’ to soften the overt maleness of what is on offer can work; at least it did with me. But for the female students it seemed to be an inadequate gesture. However, as **P2** made clear, the act of speaking directly to women would be potentially too damaging to the brand’s ‘masculinity’. The producers are afraid to try and warrant this with the power of their audiences to reject such a move. The outcome of maintaining this dominant concern (to preserve a male voice) was strongly and negatively responded to by the young women in the groups, both in terms of the absence of attention paid to them as a target, and in terms of the portrayals of women that *were* on offer. When I questioned the producers further about why women *did* drink Lion Red, they had no real answer because not only do they not advertise to women they do not do research with them either.

**P2:** If they smoke Marlboro all they’ve seen is billboards with cowboys but it doesn’t matter. I mean it’s interesting I, I walk down Kensington High Street when I’m in England and I always find it fascinating that you go past Range Rovers uh, or Volvos and you see a woman getting out of them and there’s a pack of Marlboro on the dash and I always think, I wonder why they smoke Marlboro? There’s never been an ad [for women]...----it’s hard to sort of show this without a lot of research, um and in, within the beer thing I think it’s maybe, maybe it’s almost yeah, well, the ads will all be kind of male, you know, it’s always about hoons or, in the case of some of the beers, or it’s always about super slick guys...I dunno, yeah it’s an interesting one and quite honestly I really need to think about that.

**J1:** I think what it is that you’re pointing to is that there isn’t any research...

**P2:** Yeah. It would actually be fascinating too. It would be fascinating too I mean asking... ----Yeah...do you like the guys in them? Do you like, do you like looking at the guys, you know? [laughs]. You know I’ve been challenged about all sorts of things about advertising, you know, from the basic morals of advertising to, “why don’t you show this or that, or the other?” But I’ve never actually had a

woman say why don't you show, why can't you write an ad about women?.....--  
--maybe they kind of feel at ease with it and they kind of expect it...I don't know.  
Mm.

**J2 commentary:** Maybe my age group does 'kind of expect it' – not being represented in a very male culture – but the younger women participating in this research seem to expect something else. It seemed as if age-related differences in expectations were threaded through this topic.

**3: *What was perceived as the core message/s?***

**P1:** Um, Lion Red is uh, is uh, a fun brand ...it's uh, you know beer is about enjoyment and being with friends and having a good time and not being ...you know too deep and meaningful it's all about how it should be and um, inclusive kind of fun, in broad terms its uh, it's what we were really trying to say about the brand.-----I guess when you're doing ads like this you look for...I guess you look for an angle really. You look for a structure that you can maintain that is uh, that is consistent with the brand and that is a story that you can uh, that you can comfortably tell. And so we just thought well that three boys from the country going to the city for a Friday Night Blow Out kind of thing was as relevant as any other and allowed us to sort of ...uh, use the brand to show how uh, it could be a catalyst for having a good time for these guys-----avoiding some of the more extreme kind of places for a nice warm homely kind of public bar kind of a feel, for the guys 'n gals 'n everyone sort of being relaxed and having a good time-----  
---Well...you know this is the artifice of advertising if you like...sure it's ...it um, in an ideal scenario they would be. It allows us to create the environment in which we can play. The fact that they, that a lot of public bars may not look quite like that or be peopled by such clientele...uh well you know there was really neither here nor there it was. It wasn't too far uh ...too unbelievable that we couldn't get away with it----in as much as advertising is, is all fantasy. I mean it's ...are there public bars with Karaoke machines in them? Sure. Are there public bars women are comfortable going to? Yes there are. You add all these ingredients together

and put them into you know, something that could possibly be called a stylised...sort of public bar but...it wasn't totally unbelievable.

**J1:** So what's sort of the um, take out message...of the commercial for the people you were talking to?

**P1:** Um...that Lion Red is the beer mates drink when they go out to have a good time.

**J2 commentary:** So Lion Red is a fun brand for a Friday Night Blow Out with your mates – And our interpretations?

**J1:** A story about three men who leave a quiet and seemingly exclusively male space to head to civilisation, to be where men play, in spaces that women also inhabit. Drinking Lion Red is linked to merriment, song and strongly to possibilities for female companionship, not purely to expressions of being male. Lion Red still offers us a highly masculine set of characterisations but these are not aggressive (or to me unduly offensive) beside Lion Red's recent works (e.g. – the controversially withdrawn billboard that read 'If you want me to spend more time in the kitchen I suggest you put more beer in the fridge', which I objected to fairly strongly). The three key men are very non-threatening; they dress casually in jeans and jumpers, they are slightly shy when first approached by the girls, and are almost old fashioned in their references to women with talk about 'how to talk to a lady'. Most important is the domain. The bar is populated with multiple characters representing Lion Red drinkers in a Lion Red drinking space – in vast array. There is what might be locally understood as a public bar with a 'Westie' [West Auckland] air (urban but not capital), populated with men and women of all kinds. Though the ad positions this bar as in the centre of the city ('the smoke') this is not a central city space. These are working class people anywhere – blokes and girls, mums and dads – all out for a Good Friday Night. The slightly different characters are the girls persuading the lads to sing – who evoke something like a radio station promotion, but even this fits the bar. The majority of the crowd is not the 'beautiful people' of many ads; they have a recognisable

quality to them of 'real' working New Zealand at play. We are in an imagined space where a friendly Friday in a public bar creates a temporary democracy and commonality. It is busy, rowdy, cheerful, and under control. For me, there is an un-containable excess in this representation: it evokes bars, but also bar brawls, drinking and merriment but also drinking to excess. Yet, it manages to retain a tone that is ultimately domestic and kept under control. It feels like the people in the bar could be your mates' Mum, Dad, brother or sister – and probably are – and that therefore any excess would be pulled back in because an evoked community spirit and 'right' would prevail.

**The media students said:**

**M1** What do you think the [Lion Red] commercial is trying to communicate?

**M2** D'you reckon beer is fun?

**M1** [Laughs] But.. yeah, yeah ..communicates fun and ... you get laid.

[Laughter from the group]

**M1** But they didn't .. but they didn't get laid.

**M2** Yeah I know.

**F2** and he got... they got chicks.

**M2** ...they almost did.

**F2** And makes him sing [the man in the commercial] very good...makes him sing. **(G1)**

**F3** They are not logical, what they are is symbolic...the ...young men in Lion Red...mmm.

**F2** Young people going out are looking for a good time

**F3** The symbolism and stories are used to appeal to the target audience ...and...um, cause the, the Lion Red one..makes you think like you could be like them... so Lion Red going out for a beer is like any young man going out for a beer...but it is also telling you..doing this going out and having just one beer can mean you will have a great time..a whole lot of fun..it makes you think that

**M2** ...the Lion Red ad ....shows what the place you drink, like the atmosphere of where you're going is like..it shows you that when you go out drinking you have a good time...have some fun. **(G2)**

**M1** What about language?

**M2** Let's get drunk, that is what they're trying to say.

**M1** That is what it's trying to say, it's said as 'we wanna go to a bar and drink lots of beer'.

**F1** What's represented here is a culture of alcohol, a drinking to be drunk culture, of binge drinking. **(G4)**

**J2 commentary:** It seemed we all got the core message: Lion Red is trying to communicate itself as about fun and a good night out. As intended, these resonances had the potential to be shared across a wide range of people and positions. More specific interpretative differences were smoothed over through connections to the core message – when the core message was the focus. We all incorporated our own versions of what a Friday Night Blow Out represents into what we interpreted and responded to. Beyond fun and a good night, meeting women or getting sex was a strong theme when considering what such a night out might involve. This runs very close to LAPS codes, which seek to restrict connections between sex and alcohol consumption, and yet as **P3** observes going out to drink and meet women are hardly separable in the heterosexual framework shaping the ads.

**P3:** Predominantly male with a, well, with a sprinkling, not a sprinkling of women, you know you have to have almost, um, it has to be believable; you have to have a pub like that and I mean who would be in the pub? You have to look at the environment and you know, who are those people drinking with? So you've got your boys, out for your boys' night out, your just general social drinkers and their big thing, their huge, huge factor is sociability. They've got to be seen to be having fun. So then you sort of like, put a sprinkling of women in, 'cause that's

really important, 'cause that's part of, even though you can't show it, necessarily in certain ways, part of the sex factor; although you can't be seen to you know, with drinking to be able to pull women, that's part of the LAPS laws; but with your normal situation you can't have a pub full of men.

**J2 commentary:** The problems of separating lived experience from representations (which still meet the LAPS codes) start to get raised by this comment. How do you show a heterosexual singles sociable night out without sex or romance being part of what is interpreted as the offer and still avoid being unduly masculine? What the students had to say around drinking and sex also raised this issue. In their talk the students suggested that sexual activity was commonly connected with youthful drinking.

**M4:** ...alcohol actually leads to sex more than any other thing I find...well I haven't really had much of anything else [other drugs] but...of what I had...it does **(G1)**

**F2** I think girls are a lot more powerful these days. Like, you can go up to a guy and party and they're like [needy], "Oh, I just want to fuck you".

**M1** [laughs and interrupts] Yeah, [defensive] well why not?

**F2** [ignores him and continues] ...and you'll be like, I'm drunk, so are you, so why not? And he'll be like.. Oh.. OK You know? [Girls all laugh] Fuck yeah. I don't think girls would do that back in the days of [indistinct]. **(G2)**

**J2 commentary:** This seemingly ineradicable link – between a night out drinking and sex/romance – was, however, interpreted as quite different from the idea of the advertisers *using* sex to sell. Getting sex when you drink was an experiential connection from well beyond the representation. The three girls recruiting singers for the Karaoke were judged to be in the latter category, of sex only being in the representation in order to get attention:

**M2** Sexual things...sex appeal is used to get our attention...and it definitely appeals...it works well.

**M3** Yeah, sex appeal

**M3** That, that definitely appeals....and it works well.

**F2** Does it?

**M2** Yes [Laughter from the group] (G1)

**F1** Yeah and the girls are all just sex objects and they're all like [scathingly] yeah, wow, wu huu- (G2)

**J2 commentary:** Where the young men seemed to find it acceptable and desirable to 'use' women in ads in this way the girls in the groups were extremely hostile towards it. What was interesting about the comments by **F1 (G2)**, in the two different excerpts above was the way in which she shifted position as the context changed. Women in the first excerpt can be understood as actively available for sex. In the second excerpt, it is not all right for men to see women as sexually available. Agency appears to be the difference. The way in which the Lion Red men and women were 'seen' by male and female students was quite different:

**M2** That bar has like, big beer drinking white boys from Hicksville and nice as girls and you've got the putang boys-

**F1** Ewww, nice as looking girls, I don't think so [girls laughter]

**M2** They were to me. What were you looking at?

**F2** [Heavily sarcastic] Dazzling. (G4)

**J2 commentary:** As already identified, another reading generated through the ad was 'excess'. Excessive consumption was strongly attached to the 'Westie' reading but, as the last excerpt from **G4** highlights, it was also related more broadly to something within cultures of drinking in Aotearoa/New Zealand. This

connection of a 'type' of drinker, or drinking behaviour, to a brand was something I asked about:

**J1:** If your stereotypical punter is a guy who goes out on a Friday night and gets 'blind' and that's clearly someone you're engaged in communicating to then how are you not doing it? Communicating about drinking to excess?

**P1:** If that person's typical of his ...ah...group, I guess, then that's what he does, it's nothing to do with us. I don't see how uh...if we can't communicate drinking to excess we have to play a certain line with our ads um...but there's really nothing else we can do...because um, but we can't be accused of playing up those cues because we don't have the opportunity to exploit it.

**J2 commentary:** It seems that if one accepts the interrelationship between brands and people (in ad-speak: core consumers), then as long as a brand stays connected to communities where certain (here excessive) behaviours are dominant, any communications will invoke those communities and ways in which they are perceived to behave. Making sense of how communities' appropriations of brands might work to construct brand identities reverses popular arguments about how brand and identity relationships work. Opening space for an idea of both/and (a much less stable two-way relationship) allows such things to be considered. The students interpreted excess in the ad, but because it evoked certain communities so strongly it was not their own kind of excess. A barrier to recognition was particularly present through the 'working' motif, which acted as one of the more aging aspects of the offer.

***Summarised issues arising:***

**J2 commentary:** For the participants, the brand Lion Red is not a creation of advertisers. Lion Red exists in acknowledged interrelationships between particular communities, ways in which people within them behave, the conditions they inhabit, the material product (container/look/taste/price) *and* the constructions of advertisers. Advertisers have to therefore understand these

contributory forces shaping brands as therefore shaping what they construct about that brand in any text, or advertising representations run the danger of being rejected. In this research project, none of us as participants were core Lion Red consumers. We all recognised the subjectivities on offer as reflective of Lion Red consumers and used a common language to describe them. However, these subjectivities were sufficiently divergent with our own identifications and locations that it was clear that we did not understand these textual identities as at all reflective of 'us'. This is an important point because alcohol advertising is often argued as appealing to young people very generally with messages about excess. What emerged through the analysis was that the excess on offer was recognised and located in lived experiences of the 'others' who *were* Lion Red users. The resonance obtained was through our shared recognition of who were being constituted as Lion Red consumers in this ad, and in that these representations were *not* speaking to us.

Economic and material-geographic locations were underscored as important structuring forces shaping construction and consumption of brands although the socio-political implications of this were not highlighted. In reviewing the texts I recalled my previously forgotten history when cost determined the brands I bought but recognised that this experience (which once dominated my Friday night shopping life) only became salient as elicited through the research, not the ad. I had completely forgotten my life as a Lion Red purchaser. This seemed to nicely illustrate the theory argued in Chapter 6 that we do not have access to all our relevant experiences all the time – they can be elicited and become salient in different contexts.

Within the multiple forms of debates and experiences drawn on in the talk, locations and positions were continuously shifting and structured through what was elicited in context. Commonalities, divergences, and differences between locations and positions became clearly visible. For example, the students moved between interpreting as media students using media resources and frameworks to interpreting from positions more inflected by gender, youth, and so on. These shifts took place as the conversations (contexts) moved. What these excerpts

demonstrated were different locations (of experience, age, gender, etc.) and positions in discursive debates (e.g. it being OK to use sex to sell versus not OK).

The constraints of the LAPS codes (e.g. using actors who appear to be, and are, 25+) were in evidence as actively working to limit representations, and through these enacted limits to contain interpretative relevance. However, the limitations of the LAPS codes were also raised. Realistically, romance/sex and particular occasions of alcohol use are highly overlapped categories. Invoking (single) people socialising invokes possibilities of connecting to romantic or sexual partners. Excess is also very difficult to constrain when, in the local context, cultures of excess (albeit plural ones) are dominant.

## **Speight's: Interpretations and responses**

**J1: Original summary** Two men, one old and grizzled, one young and clearly heading for a similar life path (both repeats of characters from an original Speight's 'Southern Man' series of ads) are in a brewery, participating in a tour of the premises. As the main tour group passes, our two heroes remain awestruck in front of some large gleaming copper vats. The older man waxes lyrical about Speight's beer. Engrossed and belatedly realising the tour group has left and the brewery has been locked for the weekend with them in it, they mock calling for help in lowered voices and then happily agree to head for the tasting room for the weekend.

### ***1: What was understood as the intention of the commercials?***

**P2:** I remember when the client first briefed us [10 years ago when the original Speight's Southern Man ad started], when he very first briefed us, on the very first ad, he really expected a scenario where the 'Southern Man' would be rescuing um, Japanese tourists out of a, you know from off a cliff or at least pulling a sheep out of a bog or out of barbed wire or something and throwing it over the back of the horse and you know, finishing in the pub the, quietly sort of you know, sort of being unassuming and drinking his beer and that was the

image and then we came along and said “...uh, your first script is about two guys having a conversation by the fire” and they were very disappointed, no action, no, no in that sort of, but everything that those guys talked about typified the opinions, the attitude and the personality of the ‘Southern Man’.

**P1:** When we won the business back from [the other agency] at the same time as we won Lion Red uh ...it really wasn't difficult to slot back into that mindset because nothing had changed. Uh, even after we left the company they carried on in the same vein, writing, you know TV commercials about tough, you know, unsmiling Southern men who go about their business and the reward at the end of it is the fact they're Southern Men who are drinking Speight's. You know, it's just the Marlboro man all over again...uh, you know, Otago doesn't have a lock on uh, bloody farmers on horseback mustering sheep by any manner of means that's 'cause it's a New Zealand thing, but the fact that it was able – through our advertising – to sort of claim it if you like, it was such rich territory that uh that here we are 15 years later, doing the same, uh, basically telling the same story.

**J2 commentary:** They were re-producing ‘Southern Man’s’ values – Did we get that?

**J1:** As with Lion Red, one cannot but read this text in light of earlier texts that Speight's is deliberately invoking. This time characters rather than music are revisited, taken from a long running campaign that appears – given its longevity – to have been creatively very successful, the original Speight's ‘Southern Man’ ad. Once again, multiple executions have taken place in the interim, but these have been very similarly styled and largely consistent. This ad takes us back to the original pairing of characters and, in some sense therefore, resumes participation in their lives (the older character is even the original actor). In the original ad the men were portrayed as at rest during work mustering in the hills. Now they are in a new situation, engaging in a brewery tour in their leisure time. Once again the creative re-working of a well known representation is not simply a shift to regain a past; it is a revisiting of the past to move it forward. Towards the end of the

commercial as the two men head into the tasting room (and in narrative terms towards the end of this particular story), the older man says that 'yup, this could be the beginning of a whole new adventure'. This signifies that this ad is designed as one of a series in which the characters will take part. It is both an affirmation of the old and a clear move from past to present, and into an imagined future.

From the golden hue of the lighting, through the burnished gleaming copper of the vats, to the heavenly light emanating from the tasting rooms, the evocative visual cues employed are weighty with symbolism. The gold refers to the product but also to a nostalgia for ways of being men – representationally at least. The Speight's males are comfortable in their own company – the female is not required to add to their fantasised engagement. The referencing here, in clothes and demeanour, is distinctly of the western adventure genre, evoking resonances to pioneering and uniquely male comradeship. Women are not required.

### **The students' responses:**

**F1** And the other one...you know [Speight's], a relaxing beer for your 35 – 50 year olds, you know? Sitting at home after a hard day, yeah imagining your first drink.

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**F2** ...Speight's is like old Southy guys.

**F3** Yeah.

**F2** [crossly] Looking all tough 'n' city girls doesn't drink Speight's but

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**M2** ...the Speight's one's all about The Southern Man.

**M2** The characters say mate a lot...good on yer mate...blokey; not too many syllables in the words.

[laughter from the group]

**M1** It's like slang almost.

**M2** Yeah, colloquialisms.

**(G1)**

**F3** OK, no they're meant to be typical macho men that – OK, but you know those um.. that ad with the guy?.. um the Speight's lad on the river where he doesn't go after that girl?

**F3** Yup.

**F2** Just 'cause she doesn't go after everything he's looking for, which is pretty shallow anyway 'cause he's like [mocking deep voice] 'a box at Eden Park'.

**F1** Yeah.

**F2** ...And stuff but um.. and then he doesn't go after her because she doesn't drink Speight's. I mean what kind of a...

**F1** What?

**F2** What is that trying to suggest to our society? I mean do we really want to live in a society that kind of enforces [laughs self-consciously] enforces those kind of attributes to each other?

**F3** No [name deleted] I don't think we do eh?

**(G3)**

**M1** So Speight's are like alcoholics.

**M2** Yeah.

**F2** The ads are targeted to old alcoholics.

**(G1)**

**J2 commentary:** Despite the key reference in the ad being to a commercial that was 10 years old, the students, like me, were able to locate the new commercial alongside the original. This was probably because the older ad had actually been re-aired before the new launch as a reminder of the characters and the themes. The intent to communicate Southern Man was recognised, but the students' responses to the ad were somewhat negative again often disliking its overtly male inflection. Despite introducing a (comparatively) younger character to Speight's world, this commercial (much more than Lion Red) was interpreted as speaking to a distinctly older age group. Responses to the 'Southern Man' symbolism placed the ad as dated, even anachronistic, a symbol of a particular

history that seemed irrelevant. These younger people seemed slightly lost for resources to draw on in response to the ad. For the younger women, the text located them as female, and their responses were to draw on contemporary politics of correctness to position this ad – and other Speight’s advertising executions – as giving inappropriate social messages. Connections or resonances for the students were much more lacking here than with Lion Red, and divergence and differences were their main positions. There was no party, and the form of socialising represented was well outside their experiential sphere. The resonance of leisure connected, but in such an exclusively male space there were limits to any recognition.

## **2: *Who was perceived as the target audience?***

**P3:** Speight’s target market is the Southern drinker, the Southern man...the Southern bloke. That’s what I would describe the Speight’s man as. And you’re constantly reminded when you’re doing the Speight’s ads, would a Southern bloke associate with these values, or would he say it that way? How would he use a mobile phone, do they have mobile phones? Um, you know all those, those kind of things come through with Speight’s.

### **J1: What are the primary values of the Speight’s man?**

**P3:** Um, they’re hard, core...they’re reasonably basic, um, blokey...male...um, almost back country Southern men. Southern Man’s got a whole different thing going on. They’re not modern they’re not, I can’t, I can’t, I’m just trying to think of the, the right words, um, what I know them to be. The masculinity feel is appealing about the Southern man; the almost annoying thing is that they’re almost, a little bit in the dark ages. They’re not your metrosexual kind of men, they’re kinda hard core outback, ride horses rather than motor bikes, I quite like that actually, I do like that personally that is [laughs]. You know, they’re from nice, sort of, reasonably basic families but they’re...they are...how to say it, they are men of few words. They know what they like, they know what they don’t like and they’re just sort of ...passionate about things they love, which are fairly basic sorts of things actually and one of them is Speight’s. They’re passionate about

their beer, passionate about their dogs, passionate about their horses [laughs] and their land, you know and things like that, you know, it's a really back to nature basic kind of feel, you're not talking to city people really.

**J1:** Mmmm. Who's your audience?

**P1:** Um it's Kiwi's that one, unashamedly it's...

**J1:** Mm hm, what does that mean?

**P1:** Well in as much as in there's no...well the Kiwi would be embodied by one of two people you know in general if we look at ourselves we'd say that it was either uh, ...you know Frank Whitten in his role as the older of the two musterers, you know, you see things through his eyes and um...everything is viewed in that regard, and it's uh, it's an old All Black, it's Colin Meads, it's Buck Shelford it's ..if uh, I guess if you wanted a summation of I guess what the best of New Zealand male is, it would be the All Blacks or what Speight's has created through its advertising, which is the Southern Guy, he's tough and practical and all those sorts of things but you know he always knows which way is up and he keeps on going back to the old values and doesn't change no matter what the blandishments are.

**J1:** This is about men speaking to men and relationships men have of learning maleness and companionability. Metaphorically this speaks to a golden era of (male dominated) cinema where female protagonists often did not exist and men performed male ways of knowing and being in territories they mapped as their own. The characters are dressed in long flowing coats and leather hats – the Australasian version of the rangy cowboys – part Clint, part ranch-hand. This imparts toughness, a particular performance of male, which is recognisable and sensible to people in Aotearoa/New Zealand today because it references the pioneering history and the patriarchal cultures that predominate in contemporary symbolisms about the country. The toughness performed is potentially able to evoke a dominant response to that toughness as desirable and pleasurable as it appears to represent a quality of survival and achievement that in itself references a positive version of 'White New Zealand' heritage.

**The students said:**

**M1** The association for the people in the South Island, like the old men in the South Island one [Speight's], it makes them look like alcoholics...which is probably true. [Laughter from the group]

**F3** Yeah, makes them look like real men.

**M3** Because they've got nothing, they've got nothing else to do.

**M1** And they've got like, like deep husky voices...and they were like..[puts on drawl] 'let's get a beer'.

**M2** The actor was actually an Aucklander.

**M3** Yeah, but he was playing a South Islander.

**M2** Yeah, they always have cowboy hats and...yeah, they don't shave properly.

**M1** I don't shave properly.

**M2** What about logic?

**F3** They are not logical, what they are is symbolic...the cowboy in Speight's, the young men in Lion Red...mmm.

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**F3** The symbolism and stories are used to appeal to the target audience ...and...

**M2** Speight's makes you be a real man by drinking their beer...'cause they're real men.

**M1** Yeah but I think most people who watch the advert actually know what it's like to be a man.

**M2** Yeah.

**M1** I mean they have their own perception of that.

**(G1)**

**F1** Are the characters likeable? ...no they're not likeable at all.

**F2** No...I hate that guy; he came on all sinister with that beard.

**F1** Stupid.

- F3** OK and that young guy, he has no friends, I mean, shi... he like hangs out with someone twice his age.
- F1** Who might empathise with it?
- F2** Old men.
- F3** Old men who wanna be the typical New Zealand guy and they fail miserably.
- F2** Yeah, yeah and stupid men who are all macho and they want to go and join that ideal. idyllic kind of New Zealand way of life like the farm and the sheep. **(G3)**

**J2 commentary:** There was a shared understanding of the idea on offer of the Southern Man. This symbolic construction, resonating through talk, clothes and attitudes, was easily recognised. Despite **P3** connecting Southern Man values to more contemporary spaces – through talk about basic people and nice families – this connection to the present was struggling (discursively) with **P3's** view that Southern Man is also a “little bit in the dark ages”, and the discursively disruptive presence in **P3's** talk of the contemporary “metrosexual”. The experience of, or argument for, any contemporary resonance was not made by the students or by me. Interpretatively, this local version of the Marlboro Man engaged us, particularly with ideas about rural Aotearoa/New Zealand and a colonial past, but not to these same values as they might be realised in other representative forms in the present. **P1** argued that there was a connection between the intrinsically Kiwi qualities on offer in Speight's and contemporary sporting heroes. Such values may be more general to **P1**, but, thus expressed (as Southern Man), they did not seem to be able to resonate for us. There seems to be a struggle, taking place over where the identity of Southern Man can belong. Given that the students and I were not the target, the lack of connection to our present/s was not surprising. However, the gap suggests that, whilst the values may be Kiwi, the ways in which they are represented may be dated to an aging male audience. **P1** did not consider this to be the case:

**J1:** Do you think that it is going to become more difficult to resonate with that particular story [Southern Man] as things change in New Zealand?

**P1:** [clearly surprised] I don't know...um...I suggest not. I should think that, you know, whether the story is true or not it, it's something that, that we like to believe. It's something, you know, harking back to the old Marlboro man example again...you know guys like that probably don't really exist but everyone would like to think they do...and the same with the Speight's man guys like that probably don't exist...I mean sure there's tough riding cow-cookies all over this bloody country but you know, Speight's was the first to actually grab it and use it as part of their marketing figurehead. I think even in a thousand years time those sorts of values of strength and...um self-determination and being true to what you sort of believe in, um, will endure. Because people want them to endure because like fairy tales they like stories that you know, talk about basic principles of honour and truth and bravery and love you know, those sorts of characteristics that are the big sort of driving emotions that we live our lives by which will endure long after we've tarmacked over the McKenzie country [laughs] you know people still like to believe that there are individuals out there that you know it's the lone gunfighter, it's Shane you know, it's the, the last Samurai, it's the bloody you know it's the last pilot in the battle of Britain it's sort someone you know, it's Mad Max you know? It's the same person. It's, it's uh, someone who doesn't necessarily fucking exist but people would like to know that he or she is there because it provides comfort. That's all we've done with uh, this campaign is to, is to create stereotype sure but it's a stereotype that people....relate to. Yeah, you know? Its high noon, it's the sheriff who through his own bravery and, whatever...has got to face down, you know, the twenty or so bad guys and will do it with barely a scratch because we wanna believe that there are heroes and these guys are just heroes that's, it's the 'Driza-bones' [the canvas coats worn in the ads]...they're kind of like folk heroes, they don't exist but um, you know...we would like to think that they do.

**J2 commentary:** Perhaps we would like to imagine that heroes exist, but if we listen to what these younger people are saying, these core values may not be embodied in people wearing the same clothes or behaving in the same ways as they have done in the past. Concerns about the unduly masculine nature of alcohol advertising on offer to young people, in relation to portrayals like Speight's, may seem unnecessary if the ads are failing to recruit through a lack of relevance. Even if the values remain constant, their forms of expression will change for new generations, and any gendered exclusivity (e.g. of toughness) may require re-evaluation. Theoretically, discursive processes will always generate changes and re-production will gradually become re-working. But if advertisers do not recognise this, other forces (e.g. declining markets) are likely to generate the changes they seem to be resisting due to attachment to their own positions.

What was interesting about the 'alcoholic' comments was that for the students there seemed to be no adequate reason for the act of drinking in the ad. Other than **F1's (G1)** comment above that Speight's was for older people "at home after a hard day", there were no links made to work and the rewards of a drink. Without socialisation and parties, drinking purely for the sake of drinking seemed irrelevant to the students. The reflection of their versions of pleasures was lacking.

### ***3: What was perceived as the core message/s?***

**J1:** Hmm. Right. And so what is the outtake from that particular commercial? Speight's is what?

**P1:** Uh um, well Speight's is still the, well, you know it's still the, the beer for tough bloody Kiwis...you know they get locked in there they...call for help in a, a completely half arsed, half hearted fashion and um, that's really it, I mean you know there's not I mean there's not ..I mean the marriage had been established the fact that we could take it into somewhere like the brewery is um...doesn't change the characters involved, doesn't require anything more of them but just to be who they are. This has been established through all the previous

commercials. They see things through their eyes, they expect the world to conform to the way they view things not the other way around. They are consistent you know, in all, in all the ads preceding those, you know they're all about Southern values and once again, it was the things you are prepared to give up...to uh, stay true to those sort of Southern values, which we were making up as we went along; its toughness, truth, staying true to your province and what that represents, you know, masculinity, mates and blah de blah de blah...

**J1:** What form of masculinity?

**P1:** Um, basically that you'd put your mates, um, that you'd put your mates and that before anything...

**J1:** The notes of the mouth organ offer something hauntingly melancholic; its music places these men beyond 'civilised' cultures but neither the music nor the men are any 'primitive' other. This is the sound of civilised man choosing to refuse culture and to step out into primitive unknowns, shrugging off what is urban and civilised in favour of a more rugged way of being. The music speaks to knowledge of the ways of nature, to being in and coming through its dangers; a learned knowledge on offer to initiates at campfires whose glow is also evoked in burnished copper vats. The text speaks of potency and restraint and implies wisdom resides in the manners and ways of men who live a certain way. This is not a maleness that goes to parties – no participatory reveller Southern Man. This is a slightly cynical removed maleness, which does not need others or unnecessary objects, other than perhaps occasionally more like itself. The company of like others, true comrades, can be part of the pleasure. Such self-sufficiency also speaks to control. Clint and 'the Duke' did not drink to get drunk, they drank as part of the ritual and performance of being hard men and to ease the pain and burden of being the kind of men they were, who could not/would not access the pleasures and comforts of the domestic. Whilst it is possible to argue that this ad-text does not evoke or link drinking to excess, or to the pleasures of being intoxicated, its textual offer also evokes the excesses of such male domains: pain, brawls and violent deaths. This is homage to toughness and to

clear boundaries of how being male once was constituted. Whether the producers mean it to or not, for me the text carries the imprint of liquor needing to be strong, of men needing to be able to be stronger, and of enacting violence as defensible. In their being 'looked at', these men are also perhaps constituted as fantasised objects of female desires – the unreachable, challenging, remote – male as other. In old movies, the role of women was to wait for men like these; to patch them up if they got into trouble and to tolerate any drunkenness that did occur. Despite being a male space seeking to communicate with males, such work necessarily says something to women.

### The students said:

- F1** The guys try to be really funny and it's not funny eh? Like all 'help, help', it's not funny. The thing that makes it so sad is that someone had spent ages and ages doing that and trying to think of that and writing the best dialogue and the best storyboarding and everything.. they must have taken months to figure it out and that's what puts me off sitcoms, when you see something and it's not funny and someone has spent so long trying to get it to be funny.
- F1** Yeah, I mean maybe if you said it just now I'd be like hah [laughs] but...is it?
- F2** And then they have canned laughter, I want to have canned laughter so I can just like.. press the button and when I say something really funny...boom boom.
- F3** What about the clothes they wear, why would you wear those hats and jackets and stuff in the...
- F4** Ah.
- F3** ...and the boys from the country wear all um...
- F2** 'Cause that's um, what New Zealanders wear [name deleted]. Guys.. do you not respect the Swandri? Look get it straight.. it's what I wear, is what

- I am and it is also who you are...my hat and my gumboots eh...and the cowboy hats. (G3)
- M2** We haven't talked much about the Speight's ad.
- F1** But the Speight's ad's fine.
- M2** Yeah, the Speight's ad's good. I like it.
- F1** The thing is there's probably people working there every day so they can't get locked in...it's unrealistic. It's probably not a beer you'd get drunk on anyway.
- M2** Yeah, it's just a quirky little thing.
- F2** Yeah, just a nice funny little ad.
- M1** yeah, it's pretty good and it doesn't really mean anything and they're just trying to advertise their brand, they're not kinda saying that it's a.. that it's a...
- F1** Yeah, they're not trying to make a fucking song and dance...ah. [realising what she's said in relation to the Lion Red commercial]. (G4)

**J2 commentary:** What was interesting about the students' comments is that they seem to identify that, despite the (rather negative) reactions the groups had to the 'Southern Men' (and their ways), the ad did not really 'mean' much to them. Because the ad wasn't attempting to speak directly to them and because what was on offer was so 'other' for them (e.g. no socialisation), there was no clear relevant meaning for the students to connect to. Whereas Lion Red was recognised for connecting to fun and partying, the Speight's offer – of a set of very particular and older male values – lacked relevance. Any pleasure expressed as obtained from the text seemed to be in reference to its creativity rather than its relevance. The strong reference to genre (cowboy) seemed to constrain interpretation to mean much more to a significantly older audience experience, experience with the original ad, but also with adventure serials, and of an era the ad works so hard to evoke, a golden time of the past. I obviously strongly recognised and 'knew' the western stories. I grew up watching my Father watch 'Yippies' (westerns) on Saturday afternoons. I thought Westerns

were strange, and their overtly male preoccupations made them seem desperately boring, but I did learn the definitions on offer, of attractive qualities to desire in cowboys and Indians – self-sufficiency, courage, and a certain constraint. My own childhood experiences recognised and responded to these wider textual connections and cues.

What the last comment from my excerpt as Jane 1 above also identifies is that, however inadvertently, Speight's might be speaking to (some) women through communicating a form of maleness that they may have been shaped to find pleasurable and to desire. P3 affirmed a female lure of some kind to be the case:

**P3:** Yeah, weirdly enough with the new ads, women tend to buy more Speight's because of...and we're not quite sure why, but they're um, more women started buying more Speight's when the new set of ads came out and I think it was because of Nick [the younger actor in the commercial].

**J2 commentary:** For me, this remark became more interesting when I rediscovered what I had written before in my original materials as J1 (above). The new Speight's ad had seen women take up the product, but this had not been intended, and the client was unsure what had happened. My own interpretative response perhaps engaged in part with what was going on. Nick seemed to be functioning as a fantasy object that could connect to certain desires with a lineage through particular Western histories. Even though Nick offered a more contemporary twist than the cowboy films of my youth, he was able to evoke pleasurable and desirable resonances through what he, as Southern Man, has to offer. The (much younger) students did not identify or connect to this. True, Nick was much older than the students, but perhaps also at issue was an absence of familiarity with what was on offer (what he signified). Arguably, this will be because as desirable masculinities continue to be reproduced they become reworked through forces of change and dominant contemporary forms. In fact, the desirability that Nick's character offers can be

more fragile when disrupted through masculinities contesting it in contemporary contexts, as P3 goes on to say:

**J1:** What is it that's cute about him, other than his looks, because there's something he stands for, what is it?

**P3:** I reckon it's um, it's that whole [sighs] ahhhh...you know he could be, "ah, I've got a chance with him" you know it's like that typical [Kiwi] bloke thing...

**J1:** How do we, do women, get spoken to within beer messages?

**P3:** I think we look at the, I think the modern woman would look at the Speight's ads, they're beautifully crafted, they're beautifully shot, they have a sexy guy in them, a young guy, which we quite like. The product's actually not that bad, depending on which product you buy, your average can of Speight's I don't think girls would really go and buy that, they're gonna go for a bottle, they're gonna go for a decent, semi sexy bottle; packaging is huge and um, Speight's seem to come in smaller bottles not with a long neck and you'll often find women drink long neck beers, just because, I don't know why, probably penis shaped [chuckles].

**J1:** More elegant?

**P3** Or [laughs heartily] do not put that in; but funnily enough short and stubby does seem to encompass the outback man. You're not going to have great sex, you're not going to have that much fun; they're pretty boring.

**J2 commentary:** What this last comment offers [having ascertained with **P3** – much to her amusement – that it was OK to put it in] is some expression of the limits to the values of the archetypical Southern Man. As Derrida might say, he necessarily contains his own undoing. A privileging of, and preference for, Southern Male Values and Southern male company must limit knowledge-ability around the company of women, and therefore contemporary heterosexual sex, interrelating, and romance.

***Summarised issues arising:***

**J2 commentary:** In direct contrast to the Lion Red responses, the Speight's brand is interpreted and responded to as a creation of the advertisers. The text seemed less based in day-to-day lived experiences, and more in the ether of identity fantasies. For the students and me, the identities on offer did not really belong to geographically located communities, they derived from an imaginary space, and for the younger students it appears to be an imaginary space that is dislocated from their present. The interpretative gap here appeared to be very much between age (of the target) and youth. Speight's also raises questions around how one might understand the implications of the discursive differences between forms of engagement in stories that make reference to the material day-to-day, and those referencing more mythic spaces.

## Chapter 10 Links: Points of Engagement

### Are you really sure that a floor can't also be a ceiling? M.C. Escher

*This chapter integrates interpretive responses to both commercials for a more comparative view across the two ad-texts. The analysis is focused through the device of themes, identified from link-points from within the participant materials. This analysis will subsequently be re-considered, or 're-located', along with the work from Chapter 9, through themes drawn from the locational text into the analysis in Chapter 11.*

Sonar can only be effective if some 'structure' exists to be revealed. Discursivity is process, not structure, but structuring effects occur within those processes. The 'structuring effects', used as the analytic focus in this research were 'link-points'. A link-point is the term given to denote the junctures at which discursive engagements converge. These are points of discursive connection that, in the form of talk, experiences, or conditions recounted, involve recognition, agreement, divergence, contestation, or disjunctions that are focused around particular questions, ideas, or subjects. So, for example, gender, experiences with alcohol, ethnicity, and 'Westies' were all link-points in these materials. Thus, this analytic device of 'links' is designed to communicate the temporary structuring of discursive processes. The links are not neat, linear, or bounded. The themes that constitute them are interrelated, overlapping, and thread through each other, with more than one link identifiable in a single exchange – as overlaps of dialogue in this chapter will demonstrate. These link-points are the *as if* that was required, the artificial abstraction that could be used to make the discursive processes taking place apparent.

The themes used to structure this section of analysis are constructed as part of the analysis of J2. They are identified as:

- Pakeha imaginaries and Māori 'realities': Cultural structuring/s
- How to be a man: Defending and contesting (dated?) masculinities
- Bloke's stuff: Drinking men and mate-ship
- On men seeing women: Pleasures and objections to fantasy hetero-sex
- Mixing sex, romance and alcohol: Texts and lives
- Discursive spaces (of consumption): This is not where we play
- Brands and identities: Acting like normal consumers?
- The politics of alcohol: Pleasures and problems
- Pleasures in (devices of) engagement: "Here to entertain you!"

### **Pakeha imaginaries and Māori 'realities': Cultural structuring/s**

**J2 commentary:** Ethnicity emerged as a link-point that was generated through both presences and absences, most significantly through the Lion Red ad-text. Aesthetically the Lion Red text worked to communicate both the absence of Māori bodies and to invoke Māori communities.

**M2** The ads are full of white people...white.

**F2** Yeah white.

**M4** No there was a Māori man.

**F2** Was there?

**M3** Yeah...one of those guys who was talking on the fence.

**F2** Oh. They were quite white...but there was one-

**M3:** Darkie.

**F2** Not quite so white

[laughter].

**M3** Is that important to you?

**M2** No, no it's not important to me...but some people might feel there's a racial issue.

**F1** It's way too PC.. you've got your short ugly guy, then you've got your kind of tall guy, then you've got your brown guy, it's just way, way, way too PC. It's like, they've got all these people here just because they've, 'cause they wanna be like, yeah, yeah-

**M1** Hey I didn't see any Asians in it.

**M2** Not depicting real life in Auckland then eh?

**F1** Or politicians in there.

**M1** Yeah politicians drink all the time. **(G4)**

**J2 commentary:** One of the three main characters in the Lion Red ad was Māori and there were Māori and Pacific extras in the bar scene. However, as the above excerpt from the students identifies, the overall feel of the ad was skewed white. This was interesting when the main target (for Lion Red) was given, by the producers, as skewed to Māori and Pacific communities and there *were* Māori and Pacific actors in the commercial (although fewer than Pakeha). I originally came away from watching the ad with a similar experience of an absence (as I perceived it) of Māori characters. I had raised this with P1 in the critical section of the interview who argued that:

**P1:** No, there's a Māori guy. There's a Māori...

**J1:** Given your target though, as heavily Māori; an interesting choice of characters.

**P1:** Well you've gotta juggle, gotta juggle, you know, ethnicity with the actor's ability to do the job. There's no point, a guy might have the right look and all that but if he's a lousy actor you're just stitching yourself up. So you've gotta juggle things like their ability, it's a sort of pure production issue rather than one of pure storytelling.

**J2 commentary:** P1's comment of "there's a Māori" also seemed to imply that his own interpretation was also that Māori were less represented than they might have been. It seemed that the effect of the dominance of Pakeha faces on camera – as two of the three main protagonists – had produced an effect of 'whiteness' that had negated the efforts of what P3 described as a production effort around the main bar scene that included:

**P3:** People dressed in different outfits that represent all their drinkers.

**J2 commentary:** As the earlier student's comment identified – "Cause you've got like, your different stereotypes of guys" (F4, G2, Chapter 9, p.171) – the outfits may have produced the desired effect, but ethnicity, it seemed, may not have been so adequately represented. Somehow it had become underscored – for some at least – as absent. The desired skew could have been addressed with more Māori or Pacific leads. With a primary target that was ethnically skewed, why even *have* a dominance of Pakeha leads? Was this, as P1 attempted to argue, a production issue shaped by availability of actual talent, managed through the skill (and difficulty) of juggling? Arguably not, as the locally-made film that was referred to – *Once Were Warriors* – showed, there is ample Māori acting talent available. Perhaps there were other production issues shaping this effect. The debates (cited in Chapter 4) sparked over the Lion Red billboard that had been dominated by a specifically Māori drinker may have had an impact. The challenge to that Māori image had been to what it invoked of the material realities of certain Māori Lion Red drinking communities – often excessive and attached to social inequities and negative outcomes. So a dominant 'Māori look' may have been perceived as bringing too much undesirable information about such social realities to any interpretation of an ad.

However, despite some perception of 'whiteness' in the ads, there were many references by participants to what P3 described as the:

**P3:** Core blue collar, you know, 'Once Were Warriors' kind of bloke.

**J2 commentary:** As stated, *Once were Warriors* was a distinctly Māori movie. The earlier comments from the students highlighted that they had clearly got this reference. This was an interesting contradiction between perceiving the ad as overly Pakeha and yet connecting, as the *Once Were Warriors* allusion showed, to 'Māoriness', highlighting the complexity of ways in which interpretations can be plural and inconsistent. The economic realities of Lion Red (cheap, working class) appear to be ethnically skewed for us as participants even when the representation is not. Broader discursive encounters appear (in the form of experiences of other communities) to disrupt and contest the effect of whiteness represented. The outcome is an unresolved tension between a perceived failure to represent and an inability to avoid representing. The realities of social-material conditions in local life thus assert themselves whether they are deliberately excluded or not.

**J1:** [In relation to Speight's] ..a positive version of 'White New Zealand' heritage.

**J2 commentary:** The ethnic skew in Speight's troubled me as J1 much more than Lion Red. The pioneering heritage on offer was so resolutely celebrating colonialism I found it challenging. Yet, for the students Lion Red was the much more active point of disjuncture.

**F3** They are not logical, what they are is symbolic...the cowboy in Speight's, the young men in Lion Red...mmm. **G1**

**J2 commentary:** Speight's men were recognised by the students as 'cowboys', but the aesthetic was not recognised for being ethnically oppressive as Lion Red's had been. The more contemporary nature of Lion Red appeared to raise

more contemporary absences; hence Māori and Asians became noted for not being there.

### **How to *be* a man: Defending and contesting (dated?) masculinities**

**J2 commentary:** Masculinities emerged as a key link-point in the materials.

**J1:** You get charged a lot in beer advertising of portraying themes that are 'unduly' masculine and unduly masculine macho characteristics....how do you feel about that in relation to Lion Red and Speight's?

**P1:** In a sense if we do our job properly it is inevitable that we will attract um...ire from somebody. Clearly we can't be all things to all people and we do our advertising in such a masculine category...that, brown beer, you know? You really have to play to some of those cues. And it's inevitable yeah, that feminists, females, um...you know, the politically correct...uh, can find a lot of ammunition in one of those ads to uh, targets to shoot at. But that's inevitable.

**J2 commentary:** This was an interesting exchange. At one level **P1** did speak the 'truth'; in marketing terms a strongly masculine category *would* have to play to culturally relevant cues, and **P1** offers any identification of those cues as evidence of a job well done. However, in terms of critically reflecting on whether these representations may problematically perpetuate something less socially desirable, the discursive strategy (of warrant) used is to cast those who might be concerned about such things as more extreme than any masculinity/s in question. The 'politically correct' (feminised through association) and 'feminists' are themselves positioned as the problem. **P1** was critically reflecting on what was on offer, and recognising that it may be problematic, but he moved to defend this, in order to maintain his original position. This producer knew me well enough to locate me in a feminist category. Yet to manage his position it seemed, either that he was offering me a category of 'problem' feminist, in which I could choose not to be included; or he had temporarily 'forgotten' my

identifications beyond the moment. What was clear was that these were unapologetically ads for certain men. [It has, however, occurred to me as I write, to find it interesting to consider the lack of challenges to advertisers about ads that may be considered overly feminine in their portrayals. Is masculine bad and feminine good in health advertising research frameworks?]

As the producers intended, we (participants) all agreed that both advertisements were constructed to speak in men's voices and to appeal to and represent the interests of particular types of men. For the students, the nature of the 'performances' of gender on offer that were there to achieve effect of this particular male 'voice' was one of the most debated and focused-on areas about the ads. Each ad was seen to offer prescriptive but product specific representations about masculinity. The dominant strands of 'talk' in the ads were identified by the students as how men can get women, how, where, and with whom to drink, and how to act to be understood as a particular sort of man.

**M2** These ads are about being a bloke...but they're different blokes (G1)

**J2 commentary:** Speight's Man was understood as different to Lion Red Man, but both were seen as offering particular re-productions of recognisable – and to the student groups seemingly largely undesirable – versions of Aotearoa/New Zealand maleness: the 'real' Kiwi Bloke and the 'Westie'. In fact, what the producers were offering was not so far from what the students interpreted, but their positions about these representations differed and they 'judged' them differently. Both offered interpretations of the Lion Red man as an unsophisticated drinker, out for fun with his mates, a 'Westie' drinking to be drunk rather than for the quality of the beer. However, where the producers were accepting, acknowledging, and speaking to communities that could recognise and relate to these (masculine) portrayals, the students predominantly interpreted them as negative and rejected them as undesirable.

**F1** Lion Red's got a whole kind of stigma surrounding it too 'cause it's like, you know, it's kind of symbolic of you know like, down south and bogunsville and stuff.

**M1** Westies, Westies.

**J2 commentary:** For me as **J1** on the other hand Lion Red was understood as less overtly male.

**J1:** This latest work seems to attempt to move the brand away from overtly male representations into something a little softer and less exclusively male.

**J2 commentary:** As with the interpretative differences between the students and me around ethnicity (highlighted above), my concerns about male exclusivity were more centred on Speight's:

**J1:** This is about men speaking to men and relationships men have of learning maleness and companionability. Metaphorically this speaks to a golden era of (male dominated) cinema where female protagonists often did not exist and men performed male ways of knowing and being in territories they mapped as their own.

**J2 commentary:** As has been highlighted already, Speight's also came under fire by the students for offering what was read as a dated and misogynistic characterisation of maleness. The archetype being rejected here was an older and perhaps more singular image, of a traditional (colonial) 'Kiwi Bloke'. **P1**'s positive view (p.195) of the 'timelessness' of this image may be overly optimistic. If one is looking for 'evidence' of interpretative excesses, it is surely present in the students' readings of the advertisements offerings about gender. For the majority of the students, even if they had liked either ad for some things – and overall many did, enjoying humour, music and production values – when the issue of the gendered nature of the commercials was raised they generally

rejected the performances on offer. Yet the intent, as **P1** said, was to give a sense of the *best* that Aotearoa/New Zealand men had to offer.

**F2** I don't like the way they only relate to these like...typical New Zealand men.

**F1** Yeah, they make New Zealanders seem so stupid.

**F2** And they make us seem like total losers... like the guys in the Lion Red ad is just like these drinking [indistinct].

**F1** Yeah, like what's up with it?.. and those stupid Tui billboards.

**F3** OK, no they're meant to be typical macho men... **(G3)**

**M1** Hang on, I think that the uh...commercials create the spirit of that, the beer drinking, the rugby watching... the screw women as part of it...that sort of shit.

**F1** And it sells it.

**M1** Yeah, [sarcastically] and then you're a top kind of guy.

**F1** They need to change their image. **(G4)**

**J2 commentary:** In this final excerpt the main issue of what is being contested about the Lion Red masculinities by the students becomes apparent, and once again this highlights some differences from me. The discursive constructions of maleness on offer are being challenged by the students, but the challenge is about the failure these representations offer, as far as they are concerned, to articulate any social changes that have taken place, for women – or men – around how gender can be understood. For me as **J1**, I *do* see change from Speight's to Lion Red. My understanding is of Lion Red as more inclusive, and my resistances seem to be more focused around the masculinities Speight's has to offer, perhaps because these are the masculinities I grew up contesting. Different forms of struggle appear to be taking place because perhaps, in this instance, we inhabit discursively different spaces.

The Lion Red ad could be perceived as offering some form of changing agency for females by having the three women in the bar approach the men and not the other way round. But maybe because the ad speaks *as, and to, men*, this act remains primarily interpreted as the constitution of male desires rather than the product of emergent female ones. The act of approaching the men in the bar being interpretable as one of female agency was perhaps also insufficient because of how the girls signified in discursively conflicting terms in their dress (as 'Westie slappers'). The act may be more agentic, and even akin to the earlier comment (p.182) by **F2**:

**F2** I think girls are a lot more powerful these days. Like, you can go up to a guy and party and they're like [needy], "Oh, I just want to fuck you". (**G2**)

**J2 commentary:** However, the look of the bar women and the dominant voice of the ad-text work too effectively to enable this possibility for recognition. As a link-point gender was an important locus of activity. As well as producing a focus on how men were being represented, the text also identified important information about male relationships and about women.

### **Men's relationships: Drinking men and mate-ship**

**P1:** It's about the Speight's man, what he, you know, about what attracts him and the iconic Speight's ad he talked about a girl, about a very attractive girl you know, who's come from a rich family, you know her father had a typical yacht, a bloody Mercedes, a place on the harbour and a box at Eden Park kinda thing you know and yet...and it's a classic story of the nymphomaniac that owns a brewery, you know what I mean? It's like everything you could possibly want, and yet the Southern Man is still prepared to toss that all in to, to be true to his mates, which is, you know, if you actually analyse it and pull it apart it's quite pitiful...

**J1:** [Laughs]

**P1:** [Laughing too] but...but um, it's not, it stands up because it's, it's uh...it's an ideal. It's a heroic stance. It's not meant to be taken seriously and it's certainly

not meant, you know uh, to be, to have any kind of...you know homosexual overtones. But if you looked at it in the cold light of day you possibly could, but you know of course it's not because it's all about masculinity and mate-ship, rather than two guys being on their own, if you know what I mean.

**F3** OK and that young guy, he has no friends, I mean, shi... he like hangs out with someone twice his age. **(G3)**

**F3** the second one is, um, you know? The quiet, lonely pub by themselves

**F2** Two men together...ooooo...having a dodgy time. **(G2)**

**M2** The characters say mate a lot...good on yer mate...blokey, not too many syllables in the words. **(G1)**

**F2** ...And stuff but um.. and then he doesn't go after her because she doesn't drink Speight's. I mean what kind of a...

**F1** What?

**F2** What is that trying to suggest to our society? I mean do we really want to live in a society that kind of enforces [laughs self-consciously] enforces those kind of attributes to each other?

**F3** No [name deleted] I don't think we do eh? **(G3)**

**J2 commentary:** The traditional ideas **P1** expresses about masculinity and mate-ship do not seem to be resonating much for the students. Without such resonances, the intimacy of this strong male bond seems foreign or suspect. Even the more contemporary version of mate-ship, offered through Lion Red, seems slightly incongruous to these young people, whose preoccupations are perhaps different. In Lion Red the 'mates' greet the disappearance of the three girls with the bikers with a shrug. This shrug references being with your mates and having a good time, behaving uninhibitedly, desiring, but not depending on,

female engagements to make the experience complete. This is not a position the students really engaged with:

**F2** Uh, it's just this really camp.. don't you think? Where the three guys get drunk together and in the beginning they said maybe we'll get lucky and he looks at his friend [laughter from the group] hey come on.. I think he knows who he really wants.

**F1** That's why when those girls walk out they're like, oh well, that's OK. If they were normal people they'd run after them. They wouldn't be singing they'd be outside with them somewhere.

**M1** Yeah but they were after the big bikkie guys with muscles and tattoos.

**F1** Instead they're on the fucking stage singing [sings] 'ooh eee ooh, red blooded'

**M1** It was such a crap ad, it so pissed me off. **(G4)**

**J2 commentary:** In the students' conversations it was clear that 'hooking up' is a key component of youthful socialisation (see below). Shrugging off an opportunity to hook up seemed therefore to be incongruous, or even (within youthful heterosexual normatives) suspect, behaviour. Even **P1** (above), who holds a clearly heterosexual view of the maleness on offer, acknowledges the possibility that this could be misconstrued, that the very idea of being comfortable with masculine exclusivity of companionship holds within it ideas that can disrupt its heterosexual norms. His comment (above) to deflect this (*it's certainly not meant, you know uh, to be you know uh, to be, to have any kind of...you know homosexual overtones*) identifies his own engagement in the discursive struggle that such assertions of masculine exclusivity of relationships must, in contemporary contexts, engender.

## Gendered 'seeing': Pleasures and objections of engaging with heterosexual imaginaries

**J2 commentary:** As well as speaking to men about men the ad-texts spoke, through presences and absences, about women:

**J1:** Apart from token drinkers in the background, the female characters featured in Lion Red appeared only to be there as representatives of fantasy objects of particular heterosexual male desires.

**F1** Yeah and the girls are all just sex objects and they're all like yeah, wow, wu huu-

**F2** Yeah.

**M2** Yeah it's that beer drinking thing. **(G4)**

**J2 commentary:** A beer drinking thing, when men who drink together generate fantasy versions of desirable women? The female representations on offer were contested by many of the students, especially the young women, who found them offensive. The difference was, however, that, although the young men did recognise and critique the objectification taking place (drawing on recognisable discursive resources about objectification of women to do so), they identified that for them, *as men*, these were still desirable portrayals of *fantasised* women they responded to.

**M1** Yeah...but what about the women?

**M2** They're just like sex symbols, the women in the Lion Red ad, they were just.. um.. portrayed as things to look at.

**F3** I found it quite ridiculous how [M1 interrupts]

**M1** Good to look at.

**M2** Yeah, shown as things to look at.

**F3** [continues] I found it quite ridiculous how women were shown, it, that first one, in the Lion Red one I mean, it was like, so much of the pleasure, like, god, what do they want to tell a woman with that? **(G3)**

**J2 commentary:** **F3**'s comment identifies that, despite her own antipathy towards the representations on offer, she also recognises that these representations can be part of the pleasure for other (probably male) viewers. The women in the Lion Red text communicate around certain male desires – of one form at least. Overall, the young women appeared much more politicised in relation to gender representations than the young men. Discursive formations constructed through themes of female empowerment, and that spoke to shifts that have taken place around the ways in which women can behave socially, were constructed pre-dominantly by the female students as a form of response to these portrayals.

**F2** I think girls are a lot more powerful these days. Like, you can go up to a guy and party and they're like, oh I just want to fuck you.

**M1** [laughs and interrupts] Yeah, [defensive] well why not?

**F2** [ignores him and continues] ...and you'll be like, I'm drunk, so are you, so why not? And he'll be like.. Oh.. OK You know? [Girls all laugh] Fuck yeah. I don't think girls would do that back in the days of [indistinct]. **(G4)**

**F3** I mean beer's supposed to be blokes and wine and like the little sweet drinks are supposed to be girls.

**F4** What I'll say is go hard you girls that drink beer.

**F1** Well I mean times are changing guys, I mean on the Export ads there's girls. **(G2)**

**F2** And beer is so like, soft anyway. I can drink shit-loads of them and not be drunk.

**F1** Yeah right. That's good eh?

**F2** Yeah it's cool.

**M2** I also think there is a male and female thing with drink. D'you know what I mean?

**F1** I think there's this kind of thing where it's like, oh yeah, boys can drink more than chicks but guys actually drink quite a lot of beer and girls drink a lot more top shelf.

**M2** Ooooh. [as if the previous comment were a challenge or wrong and he is challenging it]

**F2** If you go to a party girls'll have a bottle of vodka and guys...

**F1** If it's drinking, you know, what people are drinking.. is it the alcohol or the volume? **(G4)**

**J2 commentary:** Here, in response to the ad-texts and the absences they spoke to, was the contrast of discursive alternatives about how women *can* be 'seen', that were constructed in opposition to the text. From these young women's perspective it seemed the offer – the positions for women in the Lion Red text – was insultingly inadequate. Their rejections seemed to be attached to a more general rejection of feminine 'softness', which encompassed dated femininities (these days versus those days), feminised products ('little sweet drinks'), and a contemporary uptake of traditionally masculine acts, such as taking the lead in obtaining sex, and drinking 'shit loads'. These young women were setting the drinking bar even higher for women than for men, by drinking harder liquor, and girls drinking 'more top shelf' than boys. In this framework, the logic of top shelf preferences (like assertions of sexual agency, greater excesses than men, and pleasures in risks), acts both to disrupt and reject certain forms of femininities for these young women, and to assert alternatives. The particular way of 'seeing' women in the Lion Red text was a construction that was **P1** argued as warranted. But for **P1** these were not 'slappers', they were 'beautiful' and to be 'striven for':

**P1:** I guess in broad terms, you know, females in beer advertising, they just, they just tend to fall into a couple of categories...they're either beautiful...uh

...beautiful um attainable...the one that the guy that pulls the bird at the end of the day...sort of success or they uh...huh...they um....unattainable and something that is being striven for...s...and um you have to act a certain way and you know, be cool and follow certain social patterns to actually um...be in the running to get one, you know.

**J1:** So, who are the women in your Lion Red ad?

**P1:** Well in that particular one they're, you know, they're the gorgeous spunks that um...prompt them to get up onto the Karaoke and go and strut their stuff ...and um, half way through they leave with some other guys and our blokes don't really care. So, hey ho, they'll just carry on, they're having such a good time anyway that they don't really need, that kind of um, that acknowledgement from females really, they're good being blokes and just doing their thing.

**J2 commentary:** This is a radically different position, one which recognises a completely alternative – very positive – way of interpreting the discursive constructions on offer in the ad-text. Is it perhaps that these fantasised women are deriving from the preferences of the male producers as much as they are recognising the fantasies of Lion Red beer drinkers? However, the DB Export ad, which the students identified as a more positive example of a beer ad (**F1 Well I mean times are changing guys, I mean on the Export ads there's girls. G2**), and within which women have roles, was written by the same team (when DB had been their client). The DB Export ad referred to describes a group of young, mixed gender, urban flatmates, represented through much more contemporary values, conditions, and gender constructions. **[In the DB commercial referred to, desirability was still on offer, but the terms were very different.]** In the context of the interview for this research, however, **P1** did not recall having a role in producing an ad where women were *more* than the couple of categories he now describes as 'typical' of beer ads. In the context of the present research, his previous work – and therefore his other way of 'seeing' women in beer ads – is not elicited. In this context **P1** argues that in beer ads women are *only* represented from this particular (male) perspective. This would seem to support

the idea that context determines recall and positions. It would also suggest that the more contemporary inflection in the DB ads was generated through a more youthful, or less traditional (or both), target than those sought by Lion Red or Speight's. **P3** on the other hand introduced an alternative, contesting, position into the dominant production perspective about the desirability of what was on offer:

**P3:** You always have the beautiful women...or supposedly, yeah, you know the 'good look'.

**J1:** Who chose that look?

**P3:** [Whispers] Well, it wasn't me [laughs and talks normally], yeah uh, the boys, yeah...that was actually quite hard choosing the right women. They had to be able to dance, they had to look good and they had to have a certain, not too, not too....you know...not too...well they sort of ended up looking a little bit too Westie I felt.

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**J1:** P'raps that's a woman's perspective, I don't think the boys saw that at all

**P3:** No, probably not.

**J1:** What did you think they looked like?

**P3:** Yeah, Westie slappers.

**J1:** But, but the boys thought they were...

**P3:** Gorgeous and they could move and they looked fantastic. They were buzzing over those girls. It just went on and on and on, like the whole shoot "Aww did you see that?"

**J2 commentary:** **P3's** gender is made clear in this exchange, as is some of the effect of her gender on interpretation and responses. This gendered way of 'seeing' in fact worked both ways, and across ages, to structure strongly resonant interpretations and responses to the three women. The ways in which the male producers 'saw' and signified desirability in the women worked to generate resonance (albeit with occasional dissonance) for some of the younger

men. This ability to generate resonance across age groups was also working for female participants in the research – but not as **P1** and **P2** would have intended – as we women translated these objects of male desires into undesirable identities that were not respected. These strongly contrasting ways of seeing desire were something it seemed that the producers had not grasped. Although the producers feel constrained not to speak directly to the 20% of beer drinkers they identify as female, for fear of alienating male beer drinkers, it is doubtful that they want to alienate those women either. Desirable representations of male and female attractiveness were identified as frequently used devices in advertising, ones the students expressed in discussions as legitimate. But for the students, the issue seemed to be that what was on offer in the Lion Red ad was too polarising. The (bodies of) female protagonists, and their dress, were too ‘strong’ as discursive devices. These devices could only ‘speak’ negatively to the female students – and **P3** – about ‘slappers’, despite any resonance there might otherwise have been between the bar women’s agentic act of approaching the men and these young women’s expressions of such agency. In contrast, the young men found the fantasy recognisable, acceptable, and even appealing.

**M2** Sexual things...sex appeal is used to get our attention...and it definitely appeals...it works well.

**M3** Yeah, sex appeal. That, that definitely appeals....and it works well.

**F2** Does it?

**M2** Yes.

[Laughter from the group]

**(G1)**

**J2 commentary:** The ‘acceptability’ of sex appeal appeared to be related to visual representations of male or female attractiveness that are pleasurable and desirable but that do not politically engage the viewer, a sort of above the line/below the line politics of awareness. Within discussions it became clearer that what constituted objectionable objectification was variable and depended on

position/s. For example, in **G4** the significance of gendered 'looking' was raised when **F1** expressed her enjoyment of a sexy man in a whiskey ad, but then her distaste for the 'sexy' women of the Lion Red ad.

**F1** No, you know what ad I like is the whiskey one, the Jim Beam one where there's that really foxy guy is walking down the road, you know? .. um [puts on a deep southern US accent] 'do I say yes or walk away'.

**M1** Oh yeah, [challenging] you just like that ad because of the guy. **(G4)**

**J2:** Here the responses to a Jim Beam ad reverse the gendered nature of looking, and **M1** displays his own tension to recognising a male object of female desires. Similarly in **G4**, for **M4** the blokes are putang (a derogatory term) and the girls are nice as, but for **F1** the girls are absolutely not 'nice as':

**M2** That bar has like, big beer drinking white boys from Hicksville and nice as girls and you've got the putang boys...

**F1** [horrified] Ewww, nice as looking girls, I don't think so [laughter from the group].

**M2** They were to me. What were you looking at? **(G4)**

**J2 commentary:** As discussion around the gendered nature of beer ads developed, there were also identifications of the way in which products themselves can be interpreted and responded to as gendered. As highlighted in excerpts above, beer 'means' male, while other, usually sweeter, drinks 'mean' female. Conversation touched on the arbitrary nature of how objects become gendered in this way, and the idea was expressed that through alternative constructions things could change.

**F2** Do you think beer is a man's drink?

**F3** I know a lot of girls that drink beer but it's mainly guys though.

**F2** I drink beer. I don't like wine.

**F3** But maybe d'you think girls would drink more beer if it were advertised towards them?

**M1** Yeah.

**F2** Possibly, yeah.

**(G2)**

**J2 commentary:** The earlier comments from **P2** identify, however that, to speak to women, the producers would have to make the 'discursive strength' (defined as the level to which something is discursively dominant or contested) of their offer of the beer as male too vulnerable. One outcome of this has led to a research gap around women and their views, hence the surprise, and the clients looking for answers, when women responded to the Speight's ad. For the Speight's ad, females were not even present or required. Despite some women responding to the text very positively by buying the product, their pleasures were not on the research radar. [That said, from **P1's** comments about the gorgeous Lion Red girls, research is not registering any displeasures either.]

What the Speight's response demonstrates is that whether producers intend it or not, beer ads are saying (different) things to (different) women. Albeit unintentionally, something in the Speight's ad provided certain pleasures for some female viewers. For some women, Nick's character may signify a little like Lion Red's women for men, offering a recognisable construction of desirability that can resonate. So, whilst an ad may be, as the producers' state so clearly, designed to speak to men, it will also be saying things to women. *What* women hear is different, inflected as it is through positions and experiences. Unlike Speight's-buying women, **P3** and me, the female students identify that Speight's simply communicates to them about their representational absences. Recognition of desires or pleasures *for* women were absent for the young students, who perhaps lacked experiences with the discursive resources we were drawing on.

Interestingly, in the Lion Red ad-text, male desirability is not recognised by any participants. The younger men in the Lion Red ad did not communicate desirable maleness to the young women or to P3 or me. Yet, as P1 said of men in beer ads, they "have to act a certain way and you know, be cool and follow certain social patterns to be actually um...in the running to get one, you know." Despite being in a less exclusively male space, despite many connections in the ad to sex and romance (see below), in terms of desirability the Lion Red men were not in the running.

### **Mixing sex, romance and alcohol: Texts and lives overlapping**

**J2 commentary:** A common concern in current health research is that the ad-text for alcohol is a space of fantasy: a division between text (not real) and life (real) that misses the 'textuality' of 'real life'. The problem with this division is highlighted in the usually (in current research) under explored area of desire. When the girls from the bar left with other men, the boys shrugged and carried on. Women were not essential to the pleasure of the night. Shrugging aside, the Lion Red males were far from immured to the pleasures of desiring females. Their talk constantly referenced ideas like 'getting lucky', being with 'ladies', and 'knowing something that could 'make it (drinking a beer with your mates) better'. As the students said:

**F3** ...this is so sexual.

**M1** Getting girlfriends you know.

**(G1)**

**J2 commentary:** Like these comments, what the men in the Lion Red ad are referring to is mixed – desire, sex *and* getting girlfriends. Women are romanticised at one level with quite old-fashioned talk, such as 'liking a lady' and knowing how to 'talk to a lady'. This seems to refer to the 'real' pleasure of female company and possibilities for 'real' romance. Yet there is also talk of getting lucky, the girlie bar and the woman and her snake (the strip bar); here the references are more distinctly, but still not directly, sexual. The connections

between drinking, the spaces of drinking, and a desire to link up socially with members of the opposite sex for romance or sex, are, in the Lion Red ad, very clear. As P3 identified, the extras depicting drinking women that were “sprinkled” through the bar can be interpreted as part of the implicit lure and the offer of social drinking for Lion Red. You (a bloke) go out to meet your mates but are also hoping to meet women on a ‘normal’ (probably singles) heterosexual ‘Boys’ Night Out’.

More directly (and differently), sexual, however, were the three main girls – so polarised in the talk as ‘Westie slappers’ or ‘gorgeous spunks’. They were the form of sexual lure on offer in the ad itself. This sex, however, seemed to be functioning more as a source of resonance to (some) men’s shared fantasies than a connection to *actual* sex. The connection seemed to be to drinking with your mates as a space in which such fantasies are constructed and discussed but commonly interpreted and responded to (for better or worse) as fantasy. The girls seemed to be interpreted as less about alcohol and *having* sex, than as communicating something about male desires. Different again was the connection between drinking and having sex for young people. Their associations between alcohol and hooking up or getting laid were recounted through *experiences*. That alcohol *can* often lead to sex or ‘hooking up’ was proffered as normal, and desirable, in spaces where young people drink.

**M4** Alcohol actually leads to sex more than any other thing I find...well I haven't really had much of anything else but...of what I had...it does.

**F2** And they say that alcohol doesn't...that actually..no..that it lowers your sex drive eh?

**M4** Hang on, who gets sex after taking ecstasy? [Laughter from the group]

**F3** We don't all take ecstasy.

**M4** Exactly..but how many times have you drank alcohol and hooked up with someone?

**F2** Yeah but if you have sex with ecstasy you get a lot of sex. **(G1)**

**F2** And you'll be like, I'm drunk, so are you, so why not? And he'll be like..  
Oh.. ok You know? **(G4)**

**J2 commentary:** The 'how many times' comment normalises the associations made by these young people between the pleasures of alcohol and sexually intimate activities. The association between sex and alcohol is something the LAPS legislation tries to contain. But what was highlighted, by the students, is that these pleasurable reasons for drinking exist well beyond what ads have to offer. Alcohol was a key component of fun and pleasure within the youth socialising being recounted. Their sex appeared to be more real than fantasised. Sex and drinking appeared to have been engaged with from very early ages for some of these young people.

**F1** (Laughs) Everything happens so fast. Like, by the time you turn 16 you've probably been having sex for at least two years and by the time you're 18 you've been drinking for at least.. you know.. **(G4)**

**J2 commentary:** For someone **(F1, G4)** who has had sex since early teens it seems likely that romance and sex are interconnected constructions. This is different territory to the men's 'talking to ladies' or knowing how to speak to a lady by 'asking her about her perfume'. Once again there appear to be age differences working around what is on offer, and what is available to draw on to make sense of that. But there also seems to be a gendered issue between real and imaginary. Tension between 'real life' and the imaginary is operating, but the way in which this tension is operating is quite complex. For male responses to 'work' around the bar girls, the ad-imaginary is connecting to a 'real'-imaginary. The fantasy *in* the text is reflecting fantasies *beyond* the text. The shrug when the girls left can seem acceptable if the girls are simply symbolic. But not so for the female student who thought the boys should have pursued the girls: "That's why when those girls walk out they're like, oh well, that's OK. If they were normal people they'd run after them. They wouldn't be singing they'd be outside with

them somewhere” (F1, G4). This interpretation is of the bar girls as more ‘real’ and the connection F1 seems to be making is more to her own experiences of ‘normal people’. But perhaps here too, there are overlaps of real and fantasy. Sex is ‘normal’ outside somewhere, maybe, but also how romantic would it be to be run after by a man you had given a backward glance to?

The Speight’s link to sex, although much more subtle and unintended, was also through a lure of fantasy – but here desire was the lure for women into the male space of Speight’s. To ‘see’ desire symbolised in the younger man in Speight’s, though, you had to be old enough to have the relevant discursive resources to draw on. Here the imaginary of female desires beyond the text intruded unintended. This is an ‘excessive’ interpretation, which is a reminder that the connection a text has to what is ‘seen’ may be coming very strongly from our own locations, which in turn are also constructed through images and ideas.

The problematic binary of real/imaginary that is more unusually thought of as operating in tension between what is in an ad-text and ‘real life’, is raised in these portrayals of desire. The imaginary operating here is one brought from life beyond the ad-text to the ad-text through the external fantasy invoked. This disrupts traditional research ideas about an ad-text as fantasy and life as real. The tension between real and imagined operates in life as much as it does in the text. As P3 said, even if you meet an outback type and they communicate that desirability, “funnily enough short and stubby does seem to encompass the outback man. You’re not going to have great sex, you’re not going to have that much fun; they’re pretty boring”. Ad-text and life are both domains in which fantasy and reality are part of each other. Fantasies are ‘discursive texts’ within the ‘real’. Therefore any *portrayals* of fantasy are still bound by a need to engage through how ‘real’ those portrayals of fantasies are for those engaging with them.

### **Discursive spaces (of consumption): Whose playground is this?**

**J2 commentary:** When there is too large a gap between what is portrayed in an ad-text and a person’s lived ‘reality’ – be it understood by that person as their

fantasy or their 'reality', possibilities for engagement can be destabilised or derailed through a lack of recognition. To be considered engaging, an ad does not need to *be* communicating something real. Some aspect of the ad-text needs to *feel* real, whether through a story, conveyed ideas or generated emotions. So, despite identifying the wholly constructed nature of a commercial, what was expressed by students and producers was, that ads still need to engage by offering resonances of something that is recognisable in common and shared.

**P1:** you know this is the artifice of advertising if you like...sure it's ...it um, in an ideal scenario they would be in. It allows us to create the environment in which we can play. The fact that they, that a lot of public bars may not look quite like that or be peopled by such clientele...uh well you know there was really neither here nor there it was. It wasn't too far uh ...too unbelievable that we couldn't get away with it.

**J2 commentary:** Part of communicating brand identities requires information about the spaces where consumption would be appropriate, where particular people would drink, how particular brands might be used (e.g. parties or alone), and what happens in spaces where certain brands are consumed. In discursive terms, spaces or environments communicate about brands and products, and about people. The ads reviewed offered representations of drinking as socially acceptable components in socialisation or relaxation. The spaces of consumption on offer in the ad-texts – pubs or tasting rooms in a brewery – represent legitimate and recognisable adult spaces of socialisation or consumption. As has already been identified, in terms of general 'feel', Lion Red's 'partying' could seem relevant and enjoyable. However, gaps in Lion Red's ability to resonate for the students became an issue when they examined some of the details of that space:

**M1** But for teenagers it's not like that...we don't go to the city.

**F3** No, we drink in our rooms with our friends.

**(G2)**

**M1** It's roughly realistic.

**M2** It's right ...but not really sitting on, on a hill somewhere ...singing...

**(G1)**

**J2 commentary:** What these students raise are the drinking spaces (outside or in friends rooms) that are usual for them, and as they do so the contrast marks the differences between these students' 'realities' (experiences) and what the ad-text has to offer. Such differences began to highlight the absence of youth experiences from the 'normal' ideas about alcohol use being expressed in the ads – an absence the students repeatedly identified in talk that differentiated youth from adults. Dissonance was expressed by the students, between how and where they, as young people, drink alcohol, and what was on offer in both the ads. Where 'partying' could be common, the where and how of the party diverged. These students identified their (under-age) drinking (like the sex cited above) as taking place outside adult spaces, mostly in their rooms or outdoors, often 'just walking round' towns. This drinking is not invisible to adults, but it operates much less visibly on the fringes of awareness and expresses gaps around the access that adults have to such youth culture – even when adults had provided the alcohol (which was suggested as being often the case). Youth drinking was identified as something these young people hold as their own activity, with behaviours (permissions and boundaries), rites, and rituals (e.g. a drinking to jingles game cited below) that are of their own devising. Because this youth drinking is outside social norms and not legitimate, drinking alcohol identifies them as already in the 'wrong', yet perpetuates the risk of drinking in spaces lacking in safety.

**M2** I think the town is played um, completely wrong. Most towns don't have flashing lights and stuff, most towns have teenagers walking round really, really drunk and the police after them... like The Beat [TV programme]. That town had nobody in it.

**M1** That town had nobody in it, just bars with people inside them.

**M2** People in bars getting drunk.

**M1** And there's more police there, I didn't see any police in that.

**M2** Beating people up like us. **(G4)**

**F1** N-u..no, no no..because .. well Lion Red one...because I never go into pubs. **(G1)**

**M2** I don't personally relate to the Lion Red ones because I don't [go to] pubs. **(G1)**

**J2 commentary:** These comments express more of the dissonance between the students' lived experiences and the advertising. These comments also highlight the impact of material conditions on ways of using alcohol. The spaces on offer in the ads represented ways of 'being' that these younger people largely did not – but also could not – share. There were resonances of what is similar or shared about drinking that they did identify and connect to in the ad-texts, for example, that drinking can mean 'fun and having a good time with friends', which was a strong how and why about what drinking is about for the students. Despite any resonance, the students identified that the details of 'how' you socialise and in what environments are age specific. Partying at the pub was for 20 – 30 year olds, staying in and relaxing an activity for much older people. Neither form of leisure on offer in the ad-texts was about them.

**F1** The Lion Red ad is related to 20 – 30 year olds.

**F2** Having a big party on a Friday night.

**F1** And the other one...you know, a relaxing beer for your 35 – 50 year olds, you know? Sitting at home after a hard day, yeah imagining your first drink. **(G2)**

**J2 commentary:** It seems an important issue that in youth environments drinking and having sex or 'hooking up' (see above) are expressed as a common feature of teenage socialising. If bedrooms and non-adult company are common features

of youth drinking spaces, perhaps the outcome of alcohol being so linked to sex is not so surprising. What came across, poignantly, was that by far the majority of these young people do drink, and will drink, regardless of legislation, or the difficulty in locating spaces to drink in. Because they are under age and cannot drink in public spaces – although they often still do – they are often in the situation of being on the wrong ‘side of the law’. The ‘them/us’ divide that exists between these young people and adults is intensified through being closed out of the legitimacy of adult spaces. Youth communities have their own spaces and norms around alcohol consumption. [This has really strong resonances for me, with my eldest son’s activities of drinking alcohol in parks with his friends when he was under-age, and tense encounters with police at parties.]

### **Brands and identities: Acting like normal consumers?**

One link-point that was clearly highlighted across the groups was of a relationship between drinking and communities. This was not a straightforward relationship. There was recognition of how particular *brands* of alcohol can have a connection to particular communities (e.g. Lion Red and *Once Were Warriors*), and brands were understood as something that could offer a person access to or reaffirm their memberships with such communities. However, drinking any alcohol, regardless of brand, in particular ways was also identified as mapping forms of community (e.g. the excessive culture of ‘Kiwi’ drinkers). Although brands and drinking styles overlapped, they were distinct. Community territories were defined in complex ways. These identified how one form of community can intersect with and take precedence over or diminish another. Community could be defined geographically (e.g. ‘Southy’ males or ‘Westie’ ones), through ethnicity (e.g. *Once Were Warriors*), and through codes related to values, acts and dress (think Swandri’s and slappers), through age, or activities (old geezers, or young people singing together when they drink), or through gender (e.g. girls drinking top shelf) and so on. One form of community did not necessarily exclude another. Context identified salience and connection. The producers talked about

building such community links (Chapter 9), and the students and I spoke about recognising them.

**P1:** Oh it's uh largely blue collar , a working men's kind of beer heavily male skewed, heavily um ah ....um ...um...I don't really have a lot of things at my finger tips but it's um...yes it's, it's, it's real market is not uh urban merchant bankers, it's largely blue collar. Probably working men is the short answer.

**J1:** The majority of the crowd are not the 'beautiful people' of many ads; they have a recognisable quality to them of 'real' working New Zealand at play.

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**J1:** These are working class people, play hard people, blokes and girls, mums and dads – all out for a 'Good Friday Night' anywhere in New Zealand

**M1** They both, both of their adverts, you know, a lot of adverts, well, you know, a lot of beer adverts that basically try to promote the whole thing about community and like the group or whatever...centred around that and the product so that, like, with the Lion Red one they're all singing the you know, red blooded song and everything is like, you know, everyone who drinks this belongs to this, you know?----Obviously product endorsement, but what they're trying to do is establish a kind of a thing where they're saying if you drink this kind of drink then you belong to this club or whatever, you know?

**F4** This certain stereotype of people?

**M1** Yeah.

**F3** [Mock announcement] You could enter this stereotype...you, but not you.

**M1** And it was with both of the ads...Speight's as well.

**F2** And look what a good time you could have if you enter this stereotype.

**F3** Yeah fully. **(G2)**

**J2 commentary:** The students recognised an appeal to community in the ad-text, but where I interpreted working class this was not a form of community the students identified with. There was, however, recognition of the way belonging through brands can be interwoven through broader cultural values about belonging. For example, the community of excess producers identified was one the students did understand:

**P3:** Cheap piss, basically [talking to people that have an attitude that] “we wanna’ get drunk, aaah those Lion Red ads are pretty cool, I’m gonna’ drink Lion Red” it’s that sort of...mentality...and it’s the party aspect,

**F1** What's represented here [Lion Red] is a culture of alcohol, a drinking to be drunk culture, of binge drinking.

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**F2** OK. I think alcohol in New Zealand is a really big.. a really big deal.. um, ..I think it's because of the like, pioneers that came to New Zealand and they didn't have anything else to do but drink and...

**M1** Have sex.

**F2** And have sex.

**M2** Yeah...while drunk. [Both laugh] **(G4)**

**F2** I think it's like a cultural thing for kids like, like in France.

**F3** In France all the kids drink like, watered down wine 'n' stuff.

**F2** Yeah ,when you're really young...like 13, 14.

**F1** Yeah, 'cause it's just everywhere cultures different.

**M1** Yeah 'cause over there you can drink and not get drunk but um, if you, if you get caught over there and you're drunk then that's like completely dishonourable, sort of like frowned on...something like that. **(G1)**

**J2 commentary:** I also identified excess, but for me the tone in the ad-text was also evocative of the protective possibilities that are also part of communities

within which such excesses take place – or at least, my own experiences of those:

**J1:** For me, there is an un-containable excess in this representation, it evokes bars, but also bar brawls, drinking and merriment, but also drinking to excess. Yet, it manages to retain a tone that is ultimately domestic and kept under control. It feels like the people in the bar could be your mates Mum, Dad, brother or sister – and probably are – and that therefore any excess would be pulled back in because an evoked community spirit and ‘right’ would prevail.

**J2 commentary:** The thing that the students did highlight is the ways in which communities of drinkers are not just about the creations of advertisers, and that they are not singular. Forms of ‘communities’ identified, were constructed as about consumption styles, cultures, socially located people, different acts, different types of alcohol, and different ‘norms’ that range across cultures. There was an understanding that part of any message about a brand will be at some level connected to what is in cultural dominance. The dominant offer in Aotearoa/New Zealand was argued as that that life without alcohol can be negative and that socialisation may not be complete without drinking. Despite being critical of this, as came through in discussions, the students’ own stories about alcohol and socialising were strongly reflective of the same ideas.

**F1** Here we are in media talking about our favourite thing, which is alcohol (Laughter). You know what I really like is getting shit-faced.

**F2** What about you do you like being shit-faced?

**M2** Well I like being shit-faced too, thank you kindly. **(G4)**

**J2 commentary:** Drinking – and often drinking excessively – was being expressed as representing a major and normative part of their social experiences and *not* drinking was being offered as extraordinary:

**F4** I don't relate because I don't drink.

**F3** You don't drink?

**F4** Yeah well ....-

**F3** [very quietly to F4] You don't drink?

**F4** Yes I don't.

**F3** Oh my god... (G1)

**J2 commentary:** even 'sensible' drinking was being expressed as outside 'normal' for these young people:

**M2** It doesn't really apply to me really 'cause when I drink I've always been told to drink sensibly so like, well, you drink but then you have a break and then have a little bit more um...

**F2** Eh? I've never heard that one.

**F3** I wish I had.

**F4** You use the words of the meaning of responsible drinking  
[Group laughs heartily] (G2)

**J2 commentary:** A strong contradiction emerged despite the normalisation of drinking and of drinking a lot that the students were attempting to convey. They expressed indignation about the implication that life, or in the instance of the Lion Red ad, life in the country, requires alcohol to make it bearable:

**M1** This stuff, having all the guys sitting round doing nothing for ages and then going to town, it's boring, it shows you how boring life is in rural New Zealand.

**F1** It makes me feel depressed and feel lucky I don't live there.

**M2** Yeah it's boring.

**M1** Awful, it shows how boring people's lives are in New Zealand, just sitting in a bus stop for five days.

- M2** And the fact that they're like, trying to face reality.
- F2** And it says the only excitement they have is alcohol, it's stupid. They're trying to tell you if you live in the country the only thing you've got to look forward to is coming to the city and being drunk...and that's not true at all, you can have fun in the country.
- M1** Yeah. **(G4)**
- F4** I hate that they try and romanticise the fact of alcohol so much. Like it's so cool and a way of life but it's not.
- F2** Yeah and so trendy but it's not...it's just a drink.
- F1** It's nice... to drink.
- F2** I don't like the way advertising tries to make you feel stuff.. and it knows it's trying to make you feel.
- F1** But by not advertising alcohol you're just pretending it's not there and it's still going to be a problem 'cause they'll find more kind of elusive ways to advertise.
- F2** Like cigarettes aren't advertised but still everybody buys cigarettes.
- F1** And they advertise it through people, they kind of get people out there and they get them all doing it.. like smoking and stuff and people see them doing it and think they look cool.. and they just put like, ideas out into people's minds but it's not through direct advertising. **(G3)**

**J2 commentary:** Even as they drew on such ideas, ideas that contested their own (shifting) positions, a key issue that was being struggled with was – as **F1 (G3)** observed – “it's nice to drink”. Advertising may not be able to directly identify the benefits of drinking but, from experiences the students were clear about the positives that consumption offered. As expressed in the contesting logics being drawn on in the excerpt above, the students were also clear that *promoting* the benefits of alcohol is political.

## The politics of alcohol: Pleasures and problems

**J2 commentary:** Unsurprisingly there was a high level of reference to *personal* experiences in the student materials that was not replicated in my (**J1**) writing or the producers' materials. Where the producers and I were highly focused on the ad-texts, the students' conversations were much less constrained. The political problematic of the good versus the bad of alcohol was referenced in my **J1** and the producer materials, but much less experientially than it was for the students. Peppered through students' discussions about the commercials was talk about their uses of, attitudes to, and relationships with alcohol: about how and why alcohol is used, by them, and what using it means to them. Despite expressing a high level of normalisation about alcohol and a dominant view of alcohol as a pleasurable drug, the students' positions shifted back and forth across the good *and* the bad of alcohol use. Their arguments ranged from alcohol as good and pleasurable and as up to individuals to use responsibly to alcohol as bad and as needing forms of management to prevent harm. These themes appeared across the student materials talk in a number of guises that were strongly reminiscent of the debates of public health and the alcohol industry discussed in Chapter 4.

**M1** Yeah...yeah, right now we are currently recording...so ladies and gentlemen what do we think about alcohol?

**M4** I disagree with the idea that alcohol is not a stimulant...even though it's not particularly a stimulant I find it a stimulant...it, it makes me, makes me..I find drinking alcohol before school makes me able to ask questions I was not able to...that I was too ashamed to ask before..it gives, gives me confidence to ask..I'm not saying I need it..I'm just saying it helps.

**F1** Really?

**M4** Really.

**F1** You're saying it gives you confidence with [teacher's name deleted].

**M4** I don't care what [teacher's name deleted] thinks...she's an alcoholic as well. You know I don't think there are enough decent alcohol ads anyway.

**M1** It's true there isn't enough good ones...alcohol actually leads to sex more than any other thing I find...well I haven't really had much of anything else but...of what I had..it does.

-----

**F2** Yeah but when we have a few drinks we can all start to sing with our friends [laughter] play the stereo. **(G1)**

**F3** Have you ever tried those drinks that are like purple or like, dark blue?

**F4** D'you like them? Do.. I mean do they taste like liquorice?

**F2** Oh, um, Galliano shots..I got so ripped off them.

**F4** Yes, they're so nice. **(G2)**

**F2** And you'll be like, I'm drunk, so are you, so why not? And he'll be like.. Oh.. OK You know? **(G4)**

**J2 commentary:** These were strong expressions of the benefits and pleasures of alcohol use. This is not to say that these same pleasures could not be interpreted as problems; drinking before school is clearly an issue. The point is, however, that the tone of much of what the students had to say about alcohol was strongly connected to benefits and pleasures. However, in direct contrast, the students also frequently engaged with what alcohol is bad for. They clearly expressed alcohol as constituting a health risk, hazardous to personal safety, and as able to lead to thoroughly undesirable outcomes. Although some of this talk drew on themes from health, such as 'risking your unborn baby' or 'damaging your liver', talk also reflected the life experiences of the students. They had thrown up, done things they regretted, felt awful the next day, been chased by police and seen people get hurt. In this way the talk of the groups drew from the two dominant sides of debates about the good versus the bad of alcohol. One strand echoed the public health/advertising arguments; the other the more experiential can feel great/have a great time versus can get truly 'fucked up' or can 'fully regret' it of the young people themselves.

- F1** Why what's your bad experience?
- M1** Oh a hangover from drinking .. not a good thing.
- M2** Hey, hey, hey, we're getting...we're getting...
- F2** One KGB too many eh?
- M2** Oh yes, too many [laughter]. **(G4)**
- F1** [dramatically] You might not make it home tonight.
- M1** [dramatically] 'Warning, memory loss of the night before.  
[laughter]
- F1** And large, excess consumption causes vomiting.
- F2** And um, and um..loss of consciousness.
- F1** And headache...and amazing headache the next morning. **(G2)**

**J2 commentary:** Dominant positive associations were between alcohol and sociability, fun, and as part of what you do when hanging out with friends. The role of alcohol in reducing inhibitions was cited as a key benefit of drinking. The students spoke about how drinking can relax you, increase your confidence, liberate you from anxieties or insecurities, and increase your ability to socialise, so like the Lion Red ad you can 'start to feel OK about singing'.

- F1** ...although you know when you are drunk you do realise you know you could do anything, you can sing fantastically. **(G2)**

**J2 commentary:** However, the politics of absence were also noted by the students. They pointed to the unrealistic nature of the overly positive offers in alcohol advertising generally, and in doing so highlighted their clear awareness of the alternative 'realities' that exists about how to understand alcohol use and its impacts:

- M1** Yeah and they didn't show people being drunk and abusive.

**F1** Yeah, they didn't show people throwing bottles at car windows and stuff, or girls with their skirts too short or too long or too black or too white or anything. **(G4)**

**J2 commentary:** The students identified that advertising is constructed through very particular, very positive, perspectives and that it leaves out other less favourable or negative positions. The opinion they expressed was that what was offered in any ad did not represent the 'real' experience but that 'real experience' was something you have to go 'out there' to learn.

**F1** Yeah but the thing about life you learn is what you see isn't what you get, like KFC, you see the burgers on TV.

**M1** Yeah, yeah.

**F1** And they look really good but you know when you go there it'll have like...

**M1** Soggy crusts...

**F1** Soggy shitty stuff on at and it'll be disgusting and cold but you already know that before you go. What if you literally thought, yeah...what if you thought that everything you see you could actually get like that, that would be amazing eh? **(G4)**

**J2 commentary:** The 'realism' about problems of alcohol use that was identified in the Lion Red ad and that resonated strongly – and positively – was the recognition of the need to address drinking and driving through the men taking a taxi home. This engaged the young audience in a number of ways. They all agreed that such a socially responsible message was appropriate, but they also all identified the issue of taxi fares usually being beyond a young person's reach, either because of the amount it would cost, or because at the end of a good night out the money is always spent, not left over for cab fares. In a country with a minimum driving age of 15 years old, the need to get home safely is a key issue.

This economic barrier to a safe ride home was something the students identified as exacerbated by the power inequities they face in adult relationships, in this instance with taxi drivers.

**M1** The thing about the Lion Red ad...it's like, actually Friday night and promoting anti drink driving because of the way they caught a taxi home.

**M2** But I mean...who on earth carries 65 bucks in their pocket to pay for it? Did you see they do that?

**F1** I would have spent it all on beer before I made it to the taxi.

**FV** Um, but, well, at least they're like, making the effort, which most of them don't 'cause ads don't show the down scale of alcohol, or the dangers because it won't sell the product. **(G2)**

**M1** I think it's a good thing it showed them getting a cab.

**F1** Yeah they caught a taxi home.

**M2** Yeah that's pretty good.

**F1** But it's stupid 'cause they would've jumped it man, they wouldn't have had any money.

**M1** Yeah, normal people would've just ran out.

**F1** You wouldn't be up front with a taxi driver, he'd be in the back seat...

**M1** And the taxi driver'd be looking in the mirror at him. **(G4)**

**J2 commentary:** The way the students felt a taxi driver would treat them, marked the difference between adult and youth in a way that *only* young people could identify. By putting the taxi scene into the ad-text the producers had been responding to LAPS codes, but they had liked the scene as a realistic and contemporary response that could 'educate young people':

**P2:** I really think it is uncool to drive, to drink and drive now. It's taken a long time and there's still lots of people who do it but I think, certainly you've still got the younger people, it's like smoking you see, you've got to, you've got to educate

them and it takes at least, it takes at least a decade to come through and for an attitude to change and, and it is changing which is terrific and I think in the case of the taxi thing, that kind of thing just feels natural anyway now, that the guys would get a cab. Um, I mean we'd never show them driving and drinking anyway, I mean we'd never want to but it kind of, it doesn't feel like ooh we've got to be goody, goody and show them in a cab, it just feels incredibly natural. I suppose, one of the bits in that particular commercial I liked was the guy sitting in the front fumbling and trying to put all of his loose change together and, and looking at the meter that was creeping up to 60 bucks and I think that's my favourite bit in the whole commercial.

**J2 commentary:** Is the inclusion of the taxi ride a useful educative strategy for young people, or is the message lost in the fact that it is a material reality that taxis are beyond most young people's reach? It should be considered that a meter creeping up to 60 bucks may seem a lot of money to the students, but it might also interrupt connections and 'realisms' for a cash-strapped core Lion Red drinker too. From our economically privileged positions, the producers and I did not recognise this 'realism' as an issue. Within the groups there was a generally high level of awareness of the political nature of perceived engagements of *young* people with alcohol advertising. An interesting example of this was in the Lion Red advertisement. One of the actors was identified by the students as having previously appeared on the children's show '*What Now?*'

**M2** You know the guy in the Lion Red ad? Well that's Gazza from What Now buddy [What Now is a local kids TV show].

**M1** That's pretty stupid.

**F1** That's stupid you know.

**M2** He's on a little kids show mate and now he's on a Lion Red ad.

**M1** What do little kids think about that.

**F2** That's totally off, that sucks, it's about as off as you can get.

**M1** It shouldn't happen.

**M2** Promoting to us that we should be drinking.

**F2** Glamorising alcoholism isn't he? Trying to make it seem accessible to young people. You can be a red-blooded blood brother. **(G4)**

**J2 commentary:** Rather than Gazza's presence engaging more effectively (which one might fear that it would), this faux pas by the advertisers led to very critically engaged responses from the groups. Once again, this highlighted the participants' awareness of and engagement with much broader debates. For the agency, Gazza's presence was a bad mistake for which they disclaimed responsibility.

**P1:** In that particular instance...um...we were stitched up by the actor [name deleted] when we cast for performers they were given a sheet and they have to fill it out in some detail...um...it asks direct questions like [cough] have you been in advertising, in ads before for other brands? Have you appeared in children's programmes? Have you appeared in ...you know do you have a criminal record? Do you have drunk driving con...you know all these things that expose us to, to opprobrium later on. He neglected to fill out that part of his form. One can only speculate as to why. Maybe he needed the money, maybe it was just pretty much an oversight as we thought, however that was the fault of the actor in question and we can put checks and balances in place but if people don't follow them then there's not a lot more we can do. So yes that happened, it wasn't good, it was very embarrassing for us, to our client, there was a huge amount of embarrassment and...um...it certainly wasn't a decision on anyone's part to do that. We felt we'd been stitched up and we had to throw ourselves on the mercy of the Advertising Standards Board at the time because this was something that we...that nobody knew.

**J2 commentary:** This mistake highlighted the location of an ad – and all in it – as multi-texts in social contexts. Within discussions around youth and alcohol advertising the politics of such advertising, potentially appealing to 'them' as

youth were well known, and a range of discursive strands from debates around this concern were drawn on. The 'promoting it will create a desire to drink' arguments, versus advertisements' 'we only promote the brand' arguments, were both drawn on by participants. But for the most part, students identified the issues as more subtle, locating core issues as lying somewhere around forms of consumption as processes of identification. The strands of discursive resources with which to articulate the politics of consumerism were obviously not well known, but the idea was present:

**F1** I mean they don't really advertise it aimed at us...even though most people our age drink it.

**F2** They don't realise that they are kind of advertising to us though? As well?

**F1** But they know it, they're just trying to cover it up so they don't.

**F2** Yeah...probably.

**M1** Does anyone reckon that like, um, you know, when kids are like, affected by advertising that's like, you know, Coke and Sprite and what not...that that's like a peremptory sort of thing for alcohol?

**F3** No, I think it's just a thing about advertising in general you know? It doesn't really matter what the product is.

**M1** They can't advertise alcohol the way they advertise like, Coke and Sprite, but if you look, if you look at the adverts there are, there are, quite large similarities like, in how people use them you know? ...Something underlying it... **(G2)**

**F3** Alcohol is part of capitalism.

**M4** That has nothing to do with alcohol...dammit alcohol and capitalism and alcohol are like this far apart [physical gesture is clearly being made here] and totally apart and they do not cross...[speaking to mike] let them show that I am crossing my fingers...[laughter from the group]. **(G1)**

**J2 commentary:** Despite awareness of the politics surrounding alcohol use, it was also made sense of as enmeshed in mundane social contexts, related to how people live their daily lives and what seems 'normal' in Kiwi culture.

**M2** We have a beer fridge.

**M1** Yeah, we have a beer fridge.

**F2** That's really Kiwi...a beer fridge [laughter]. **(G1)**

[Interestingly, one of the things I first noted as different about Kiwi culture when I moved here was the phenomenon of the beer fridge.]

**Pleasures in (devices of) engagement: "Here to entertain you!"**

**J2 commentary:** The producers, media students and I all catalogued multiple techniques we perceived in the texts that were designed to engage potential audiences. Whilst our lists were very comparable and encompassed what one might expect from any media critique (e.g. look, relevance, pace etc.), two devices of engagement so particularly emphasised as pleasurable and important that they seem significant to highlight, music and entertainment. The students emphasised the importance – for them as young people – of music as a highly effective form of engagement, both in terms of its presence and, at times, its absence. In contrast, the producers and I identified music as a smaller part of a larger package. Although I had highlighted its importance as a signifier, I had not realised the specific nature of its importance for youth. Where the producers and I catalogued music as an ingredient in the mix that communicates an idea, the students centred on music as a fundamental source of pleasure and entertainment in their lives.

**M2** I reckon the sound tracks very important.

**F4** The Lion Red one, yeah.

**M1** Yeah, it gets all quiet and then they get to town and have a few drinks it all gets lively.

- M3** Just havin' a good time, yeah.
- F4** No you don't have the music like they do...you just sing on your own...that's what we always do...hang around...and then start singing stuff.
- M2** Really?
- F4** Oh yeah.
- M2** Yeah for the Speight's ad.
- M1** it's like mmm.
- M2** it's no music.
- M1** Yeah.
- M2** its like...no.
- F2** No.
- M3** I think it gives a sense of like, speaking the truth...you know? It's quite believable...you know when you've got music its like party atmosphere and everyone's feeling good but when there's like...not music...it's all truthful...like very real. **(G1)**
- F1** In the bar, going back to the bar again, you know, the music, its music, the music, it's exciting, it's loud and adds another level to the whole thing
- F2** The music's exciting yeah and it feels good watching them have a good time. **(G2)**
- F2** I don't like beer but I think... I guess I like the music.
- F3** You can like the ads but not like the product.  
[Group voices: 'yeah'] **(G3)**

**J2 commentary:** As **F4 (G1)** identifies, as well as being a source of pleasure, music can evoke links to drinking in multiple ways. Whether they are listening to it or making it, for these younger people, music, like sex and romance, appears to have strong links to spaces and activities of alcohol consumption. It was the importance of music *generally* as part of a common youth experience that the

students identified as making it such a potentially effective device for *specifically* engaging youth attention by advertisers. Any ability to engage with music was argued as determined by the relevance of the tracks used. Whereas it was suggested that contemporary music could enhance connections and recall for youth, use of older tracks would date the ads and engage only groups to whom the music was more relevant.

Jingles, like the one in the Lion Red ad, were identified as music, differing from 'normal', but potentially enjoyable in their own right. As if to make the point about impact, discussion about jingles led to many being easily recalled and often sung verbatim in the sessions. One group said that they deliberately sang jingles (of all kinds) as a drinking game, the object being to sing through without mistakes, mistakes requiring another drink. The Lion Red jingle was clearly top of mind in the sessions. The high level of familiarity with the 'Blood Brothers' song certainly exceeded what was likely to have been learned from the session viewing. This makes the point that, whatever the media target, or the restrictions of the 9.00 pm watershed (in place at the time of this research, but now altered to 8.30 pm), these young people were very familiar with the ad. Whilst this may draw attention to the inadequacy of an 8.30 pm advertising watershed for 17 year olds, it should be stressed that such a cut-off would probably be acting to exclude younger audiences, and therefore may still serve a purpose.

Humour and narrative or storylines were also identified as pleasurable devices of engagement. However, as with music, humour needed to be relevant and not 'overdone' or it would be rejected. To be on target, humour like any other discursive form, depended on the resources and experiences of the person it seeks to engage. In transcripts where **P2** thought the whispered 'help help' gag in Speight's was very funny, two of the students thought it a sad miss. The main point about humour and stories, like music, was that they were identified as key ingredients that make ads a form of *entertainment*, rather than simply about products. Engaging by entertaining was set out, by both producers and students, as 'better' and important.

**P2:** What we write, especially the breweries they're looking for now is high entertainment----- what's key is at the end of the day, will they like it? Will they like this ad? And it's almost the first whereas in the old days it was dry research that da, da, da, da, da, tick all the boxes, their first and foremost concern now is "is this a script that they're really going to enjoy?" So huge entertainment value...

## **Summarised issues arising**

**J2 commentary:** Link-points were a very valuable mechanism through which to engage with the discursive processes taking place that constituted the interactions between participants and texts in this research. Focusing on links vividly highlighted the ways in which recognition, agreement, divergence, contestation, and disjunctions occurred for participants as they focused on these different ideas and questions that were raised through the texts. By contrasting and comparing the different responses and positions participants expressed around these link-points, the interpretative complexity of the ad-texts became apparent. A sense of location of the participants in relation to the ads and to each other also became apparent.

Where it seemed an ad-text sought to convey a dominant idea, interpretations of and responses to those ideas varied and sometimes varied strongly. Variances were engendered through the lenses of alternative knowledge/s, histories (discursive and experiential), and positions taken that the participants interpreted and responded through. To 'see', 'hear' or 'speak' about the commercials in the study, we all drew on unique locations. As we drew on the different ranges of resources and experiences we had, the ways in which we had commonality or difference began to emerge. For example:

**F1:** [horrified] Ewww, nice as looking girls, I don't think so [laughter from the group] **M2:** They were to me. What were you looking at? (**G4**, p. 202)

What we said demonstrated that when the advertisers constructed the Speight's and Lion Red representations in order to communicate certain ideas elements of

those constructions could *connect* us even through the diversity we represented. An example is when successfully invoking fun and partying for all of us. However, other elements worked to reveal the clear gaps and differences in our locations, positions, experiences, and resources. For example, some of the men and women ‘saw’ certain things quite differently through the inflection of gender. At other times gender was in turn divided by age.

It was our ages, and the positions age engendered, that made apparent some of the cultural shifts in motion between the generations involved. The students revealed the producers’ ages [and mine], and those of the actors in the Lion Red ad-text. ‘Speaking’ like youth may appear to be creatively incorporated into Lion Red, but the students identified that ‘speaking like’ is not sufficiently authentic to be interpretable as speaking as youth. The students also raised issues of age differences in material-economic and power privileges, demonstrating that solutions like taxis are only solutions if you have the resources.

It is a cliché of advertising that younger people are always needed to keep the business alive and fresh. There seems to be some point at which the ability to know how to ‘speak’ beyond our own generational, gendered, ethnic, and material boundaries becomes very difficult. In terms of how we might try to speak to younger generations, perhaps constructing a ‘voice’ that can be heard is most difficult to maintain in contemporary youth communities, within which change and pace are perhaps the primary emphases.

When seeking to constrain textual meanings available for interpretation, those who advertise brands seem to be on particularly difficult terrain. Coded clothing, looks, talk, and environments may define the identities an advertiser wishes to set out, and the people they wish to speak to, or, as with Lion Red’s passing by of the ‘gay bar,’ those they do not wish to speak to. However, once brands are in the marketplace they clearly bring the communities associated with that brand’s use, and the cultural contexts those communities of users inhabit, back into interaction with the advertisers’ texts about a brand. ‘Real’ communities and their ways of using alcohol were constantly reiterated as the contexts of any

development of or interpretation of these commercials. Any attempt at abstraction in this light seems ludicrous.

**F4** But if parents if like, drink around their kids 'n' stuff, I don't think they're too worried about letting their kids try it. **(G2)**

**J2 commentary:** This from **F4** [a deliberate note from me] reiterates parents and families as 'real' community contexts within which these young participants are learning about alcohol. What is said, heard, seen, and enacted in daily contexts was the discursive range that was drawn on to argue about what was on offer through the ad-texts in this research. There was, in this analysis, a constant reiteration of the permeability between life and text. This research revealed participants' locations and the logic structuring their positions as engendered through engagements with the ad-texts but as constructed from *beyond* the ad-texts. Participants constantly defined the ad-texts and themselves in, through, and against their wider cultural histories, present contexts, relationships, and communities. I have argued for re-locating ad-texts and responses to ad-texts within their cultural contexts, but it is noteworthy how much the talk of all participants was already doing that work.

## Chapter 11 Relocating Positions

**J: Do you ever think other people might read, or interpret your ads in ways that you don't intend?**

**P1: Uh ...I'd be crazy to think otherwise**

*This chapter represents the third stage of analysis. This will involve re-location of the initial analyses from Chapters 9 and 10 within a wider cultural context. In this stage I will consider (as J2) what was on offer through the participants' materials, through the dominant strands of histories and debates that were identified in the locational text (Chapter 8). This chapter differs from Chapters 9 and 10 in that it is deliberately written from the position of and strongly in the voice of J2. For this stage of analysis, I have focused on how the link-points from the previous stages of analysis connected, diverged with, or differed from the themes identified through the locational text. The analysis is structured through the key themes I identified as emerging from comparisons across the participant and locational texts.*

The themes of this chapter are identified as:

- **Māori and Pakeha: Distinct communities with certain commonalities**
- **Still drinking in a man's country? Beer ads as sites of resistance to change**
- **Still binge drinking: Cultures of excess**
- **Sex and alcohol: an issue but in who's frameworks?**
- **Winds of change: Blowing two ways?**
- **Drinking and youth: Intensified isolation**
- **Good and bad: An ongoing paradox**
- **(Re)locating health researchers: Raising responsibility**

## Māori and Pakeha: Distinct communities with certain commonalities

**Whilst it is sensible to speak of distinct cultures, Māori and Pakeha have things in common as well as ways in which they differ (King, 2003)**

**J2:** Commonalities as well as differences were raised through the research. Certain inequities highlighted in the locational texts seem to be echoed in the commercials in this study. Awareness of these inequities was echoed in the participants' talk. As cultural texts, the ad-texts were Pakeha dominated. Regardless of target markets the producers identified (for Lion Red, primarily Māori and Pacific nations), both advertisements were, for the participants, representationally Pakeha. This raises rather double-edged issues for Māori communities.

On the one hand, the ethnic bias of the commercials could be interpreted as the ongoing and problematic perpetuation of (oppressive) Western cultural dominance identified through the locational text, but here through contemporary media. Examples of this are the Speight's' ads repetition of colonialist elisions of Māori; Lion Red's inter-textual allusion to the effects of colonisation (*Once Were Warriors*); or the way in which the texts were 'speaking' to Māori through positions shared with Pakeha (class and economics) and not through uniquely Māori inflections. All these were arguably forms of representation that perpetuated Pakeha dominance. On the other hand, it is questionable whether it would be desirable to see Māori-centred texts promoting alcohol, produced by Pakeha-dominated commercial interests. Appropriation of Māori-relevant discursive resources for profit by Pakeha organisations seems highly problematic. [In this instance equity might have a Janus face.]

As research participants, our sensitivities to these representational politics varied and were differently focused. Recognition of the overly Pakeha nature of the ad-texts was common. The colonial histories that were referenced within the Speight's ad-text were clearly identified and drawn on to make sense of that ad.

But where I located the Speight's characterisations within a wider Western tradition of skewed (and problematic) versions of settled spaces that also structure the present, this was not a concern expressed by the younger participants. I found the very colonial nature of Speight's *more* problematic than Lion Red because of its utter omission of any 'Māoriness'. For me this way of seeing, the 'lens' of the White Colonial, was at the root of the devastation wrought by colonisation on Māori communities. The students recognised these local white 'cowboys' as historical references, but from their perspective this was a rapidly aging and less relevant concern than the one they had with Lion Red. Lion Red garnered more critique from the students for its perceived whiteness because the ads seemed to be working to recruit Māori whilst failing to have them adequately represented. The students' responses to this aspect of representation appeared structured through concerns about tokenism and absence, and reflected a more contemporary, and perhaps more local, concern with the discursive politics of equity (drawing on themes of correctness but probably also inflected through awareness of Te Tiriti).

In contrast, the producers seemed unconcerned with the cultural skew to what they were offering, expressing it as merely an outcome of 'juggling talent'. However, as suggested in the previous chapter, it may be that the producers were very aware of some of the problematic politics of representation, and therefore constructed texts deliberately designed to avoid them. Certainly, unlike Speight's, Lion Red was not an exclusively Pakeha text. The reason it could 'speak' to Māori, beyond the embodied presence of one lead actor, was that economics and class *were* working as part of shared cultures that represented other forms of community. So the absence of Māori-centred connections in the texts does not preclude engagement for Māori drinkers.

As was clear in the previous stages of analysis, positive resonances as well as disjunctions can work in simultaneous and different ways within a single text. Mechanisms of connection, such as socialising, as well as of rejection, such as not recognising ethnicity, can co-exist. Like the bonds of returned servicemen, identified in the locational text, contemporary material realities, such as

economics, employment and geography, are part of what is able to thread through and connect drinking alcohol for people who are, in other ways, from identifiably different communities. Lion Red appears to be a drink for the economically disadvantaged working class, a community in which Māori are overrepresented.

However, economic disadvantage does not mean negative. This 'category' can also offer positive meanings, like hard working, the convivial atmosphere of public bars and the pleasures of playing hard on a 'Friday Night Out'. There can be pleasurable recognition of commonality evoked through what others wear and how they act (girls dressing like spunks, being relaxed enough to go out in a jersey, having friends who are bikers with tattoos). All this can add up to a pleasurable ethnic egalitarianism that can connect otherwise disparate forms of community in ways those unconnected may not recognise. What is required is research from Māori researchers around what a brand like Lion Red has to offer Māori communities, and why an aesthetically white commercial may still resonate meaningfully for Māori drinkers.

Te Ropu Māori (2002) argued that the growth of hazardous consumption for Māori communities requires some location in the histories of colonisation and of present day inequities. Both producers and students located such hazardous forms of consumption as taking place in communities of 'Southys' and 'Westies', and in those like *Once Were Warriors*. In invoking these filmic and geographic communities, both groups *were* connecting the brand to people living in conditions of present day social disadvantage, including Māori. But awareness of or willingness to engage with the historical structuring of those present day conditions for Māori appeared to be absent.

### **Still drinking in a man's country? Beer ads as sites of resistance to change**

As identified in the locational text, the impacts of industrialisation and capitalism on alcohol use in the previous century were re-worked through major social and regulatory changes in the latter 20<sup>th</sup> century, so that public drinking became a much less gendered activity. Despite the far more egalitarian nature (in gender

terms) of contemporary alcohol consumption, the historical 'maleness' drinking in Aotearoa/New Zealand, its meanings and origins, *appear* to be alive and well in these portrayals. The inhabitants of the ad-texts and the histories they draw on are nostalgically located as drinking in a 'man's country'. The drinking environments depicted are coded as and resonate as male spaces within which male companionship continues to be offered as the most valued commodity. It would seem that the described social shifts around gender are being resisted through these texts. However, perhaps the act of having to resist indicates that the ubiquitous macho man may not be quite so ubiquitous after all.

Despite the ad-texts being fantasised male spaces, and as seeking to communicate with males, these ad-texts also spoke to women. For some (older) women, the younger Speight's man was (potentially) a fantasised object speaking to certain desires that acted to engage these women in similar ways that the Lion Red women engaged men, albeit with apparent limits in contemporary contexts. Particular feminist theories might argue that in their representational absence these women are reduced to projecting themselves into a fantasised space in the Speight's ad-text in order to connect. However, analysis identified that it seemed to be more a case of recognising and taking pleasure in a fantasised male object of desire. This recognition appeared to be 'looking' rather than projecting, a looking evoked by men from a 'Man's country' who could connect to the shape of some women's discursively structured pasts.

In contrast, the younger female students were unimpressed with what the ads had to say to them about men. To these women the Speight's fantasies seemed anachronistic and the Lion Red ad-text's offerings were wrong. The commercials also suggested a lesser status and value for them as women either through being ignored or by being offered constructions of women they found offensive. The very male-centred portrayals of desirability, were rejected by the female students. **P3** and I were similarly sceptical, and identified the source of the Lion Red bar girls look as a very heterosexual male construction. This was a gendered difference in 'seeing' women. Despite recognising and acknowledging the resistance of the female students to the Lion Red women, the younger men

reiterated that for them, the Lion Red portrayal of desirable women represented a culturally recognisable and prevalent form of desire.

The producers made it clear in their discussions that their agency conducts no research about beer with women. If they did, the advertisers might be surprised. Despite a marked antipathy to the weight of the male 'voice' structuring the ad-texts, and the specific refusal of what the texts offered about women, the female participants also found positive resonances and pleasures to be obtained through the ad-texts' wider themes. Lion Red was liked for evoking fun and parties, and Speight's simply through the generally entertaining nature of the ad-text (e.g. Speight's being a 'quirky little ad'). Going out drinking may have been historically male, but in contemporary contexts it is also a female activity. Hence, despite being on offer for men, certain aesthetics worked to offer alternate forms of engagement for women through what those women brought to bear on those aesthetics interpretatively. Partying, fun, and music were all textual mechanisms that could resonate as contemporary forms of female pleasures. Gendered refusals (e.g. for being so male) did not necessarily mean *wholly* rejected ads. Liking the ads for other reasons did not override or remove the gendered nature of these ads as an issue for these women; this like-dislike paradox highlighted the very complex nature of textual responses and of pleasures. [It also highlights the encroachment of the feminine on traditional man's space, no matter how he tries to keep her out.]

As **P2** highlighted in the previous chapter, resistances, such as to women encroaching on male spaces of drinking, often come shaped through the views of the 'real' men advertisers speak to in their research. Any discursive struggle taking place over gendered changes in these commercials had origins well beyond any concerns of the male writers. An example was offered from the very first Speight's ad where **P2** described a formative research session run with a group of (male) Speight's drinkers in the South Island:

**P2:** in the original script I should tell you ah, if you remember it he's got a photograph of his girlfriend from Auckland and uh, she's got all of these things and her fathers got a box at Eden Park and in the original cut ah, when the other guy, the older guy says "she's a hard road to finding the perfect woman boy", he then actually crumples up the photograph and throws it into the fire and then says "no hurry eh?" Now the client was really nervous about that, thought we'd gone too far and that we'd really upset women, so um, we dropped that bit from the original cut and of course I, [in the research session] I read the script where, where he does this. And this one guy was kind of shuffling around and he looked at me and said "Sheilas'll probably hate it" and then there was a pause...and then he said ..."fuck 'em" [**P2** laughs heartily]. So anyway, I got the thumbs up from the guys and the client actually watched the [research] video and he thought "oop they like it, let's run it", and that's how it was born.

**J2:** The Speight's ad offers resonances to the tough, rugged, practical, single male that describes pioneering pasts in ways that are clearly responded to strongly by men in this agency's research. The Speight's men are, as **P1** argues, saying something about people and places some people *would* still like to believe in. The colonial histories resourcing the construction of Southern Man are not creations of an advertising agency; the advertisers simply claimed some of that discursive space. As **P1** said:

**P1:** Otago doesn't have a lock on uh, bloody farmers on horseback mustering sheep by any manner of means, that's 'cause it's a New Zealand thing, but the fact that it was able – through our advertising – to sort of claim it if you like, it was such rich territory that uh that here we are 15 years later, doing the same, uh, basically telling the same story.

**J2:** The male space of Speight's *is* imaginary. The producers of the ad-text deliberately invoke histories rather than connect to present conditions although **P1** does draw links to the present through connecting Southern Man to the All

Blacks and more contemporary filmic archetypes. The environment is distinctly contemporary. However, whatever **P1** intends should be evoked, resonances between the frontier toughness in the Speight's text and the contemporary lives of the students were not generated in this research. The Speights ad-text may well have different potential in rural youth communities or for younger more sporting males. These students had sufficient knowledge of the references on offer to fully make sense of Southern Man despite not desiring what Southern Man represented. Shared male interests in a cultural mix of rugby, racing, and beer were connected to what was in the ad, and the making of such a connection highlighted the way in which themes of the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century can echo strongly today. These themes may be shifting from discursive dominance into a struggle for survival, but they are still easily recognised.

Another strong recognition, generated through both commercials, was the historically vital role of 'mate-ship', still affirmed in the texts as an important and sustaining bond. Whilst the embodiments of the Speight's mates were more historically locatable (unlike their environments), Lion Red's use of the mate-ship theme offered a more contemporary re-working. That said, when the Lion Red lads from the country head for 'the smoke', the terminology does still invoke echoes of an older era. The voices of the rural workforce that played hard when they came to town. However, the Lion Red town in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a different place. Here, we have moved beyond nostalgia to deal with the present. Spaces are less gendered, and the bars depicted are culturally differentiable through class (the wine bar), sexual preferences (the 'gay' bar), and entertainment (the public bar Karaoke). Where Friday night 'melting' of pay was primarily the domain of men, largely in the company of men as they drank in quantity, these bars offer the company of women, no one is visibly drinking to excess, and part of the 'melt' is in a socially responsible manner to a taxi driver.

These are very tamed Fridays really. The bar girls are perhaps a little less tame, and in their very male-centred offer of evoked pleasures they echo gendered divisions of the past that the present still has to deal with (when women *were* sought for sex and men did not know how to relate to them). Men and women

seem still unfamiliar in each other's company; sex and romance are still divided in this space. When the girls' disappearance is met with a shrug, the reiteration of the reference to male drinking is still ultimately about being with your mates and having a good time, to men behaving uninhibitedly, to desiring but not depending on female engagements to make the experience complete. This softer, more contemporary offer echoes histories but nods to change: both in muted forms.

This compromise, despite being muted, is a reproduction that is still dated through the tensions it generates with the more contemporary views of the students. The 'macho' man who has been reported as a key concern for researchers (Chapter 4) is losing power, both in the text and through engagements; these images are being undermined and working hard to defend their position/s. Speight's men are trapped to re-produce histories of reducing relevance. Unless reworked, these representations will age with those who recognise them. The Lion Red men have moved on, they are confronting being of the present and needing to cope with the future. They are being re-worked already.

### **Still binge drinking: Cultures of excess**

Alcohol is legitimised and very polite in these portrayals. These are sanitised versions of alcohol use, a point clearly identified by the students and the producers. As the students observed, no one in any alcohol ads seems to be negatively affected by what they drink. [Paradoxically, the insistently positive nature of these ads is held in place by the double forces of corporate positions and legislative constraints.] Yet, what remains uncontained, despite LAPS regulations, is connection to ideas about drinking alcohol *to* excess. Whilst drinking in the commercials may not be excessive, it is the prevalence and normatively enacted processes of excessive drinking within local communities *beyond* the commercials that became inevitably invoked through the links those communities have to brands. The 'Westie' and 'Southy' embrace of Lion Red highlights particular spaces (public bars), performances (Friday Night Drinking),

and geographical areas where, for some, excessive drinking takes place. As P1 argues, explanations for such interpretive excesses hardly lie in an ad.

Are the reasons for drinking to excess the same as they were in the past? Research is required. It is clear is that the cultures of excessive drinking identified by participants were not singular. The young women, for example, seem to be developing their own cultures of excess as distinct from those of young men. So it would probably be a mistake to think excess 'means' the same thing for each person, even within an identifiable community connected to dominantly, such as youth. Excessive consumption can signify in different and very particular ways *within* communities. For example, for these young women, excess seemed to be connected to expressing a form of equality through the products they consume, and the *ways* in which they drink those products (more than boys). For these students, many of their youthful excesses were connected to how young people 'normally' party. This must support the questions raised earlier around notions of 'risk' as a categorisation. If drinking to excess offers access to normalcy, then 'risk' does not grasp what is taking place.

Despite their own excesses, the students did not identify with or connect to the cultures of excess they highlighted through the ads. The students were negative and rather disparaging about the communities they identified as likely to engage in the excesses they responded to as evoked through the ads. In this way, the students expressed the idea that their own understandings of excessive consumption were different. This supports the idea expressed previously that drinking and drinking to excess is meaningful in very complex ways. However, it is hardly desirable for an advertiser to recognise and connect to any *particular* idea of excessive drinking as being meaningful – as in the example of young women. [Once again the inequitable bias expressed through a lack of female-centred research, or a lack of female centred ad-texts may hold benefits.]

Here though, lies the holy grail of information about how alcohol advertising representations *could* deliberately work to generate increases in amounts of drinking. If advertisers *specifically* identified that the act of drinking to excess can

be a meaningful and desirable expression of identity, and then specifically exploited that link, they would be doing what they are accused of, that is, working to actively increase consumption levels. At this point, as **P1** said, even if advertisers really understood such links, (which perhaps if they conducted research with young women they would) they could not exploit them. LAPS codes are part of what successfully constrains advertisers not to exploit such connections around alcohol. [So, it would seem, is the gendered nature of the targeting.] What LAPS codes cannot contain is what people do beyond ads and the ways in which those experiences can structure interpretations. Enjoyment of excessive consumption was identified as about experiences of embodied effects, simply 'loving getting wasted':

**F1:** "Um alcohol, automatically what I think is ooh, good time, you know? You don't really need to drink beer you can drink some other alcohol that you like and still get drunk and have a good time. **(G2)**

**J2:** Why get drunk to have a good time? Themes of reduced inhibitions, pleasures, and sociability threaded through the discussions. Most of all, drinking was simply about having some fun, a form of release that was 'normal'. In the past, drinking to excess was also connected to release, especially celebrations and fun. These shared themes resonated through the students talk about the ads, and through their accounts of their own experiences. What release and fun mean are context-dependent and get re-worked as meanings shift over time – but as themes they remained strong. [With pioneers it may have been easier to assess what release was *from*.]

### **Sex and alcohol: An issue but in whose frameworks?**

Sex and alcohol can be clearly, but not inevitably, linked. How sex and alcohol were identified as linked in these ads revolved complexly around and between desire and romance, with sex as a possible outcome. The idea of sex and/or

romance as tied to socialising with alcohol appeared to be operating differently to sex as a mechanism for seeking attention by an advertiser. The question of whether sex-desire *should* be used to get attention in advertising seemed to be attached to the politics of representation, certainly not to alcohol consumption. Acceptable desire was 'allowed'. This is not too far from the public health stance around 'acceptable masculinities'. This reiterates questions around what is acceptable and who decides. As in the past, such questions about acceptability and who does decide are tied to locally dominant moral politics. These ad-texts' displays can clearly be contested, but any impetus for their removal is tied to disputes about how desire is constituted as a mechanism for encouraging looking. The question remains: who has the right to set the boundaries?

The linkage of sex, romance, and alcohol was different. This link was not overtly enacted, nor set out in the ad-texts as a benefit of drinking, but it was a sub-theme identified in the Lion Red text. Socialising, as something done *with* alcohol and as linked to romance and sex, was also constantly invoked through experiences *beyond* the text. This link is arguably normalised, and on its own it is hard to challenge as a health issue. It is certainly not a link one could argue as engendered through alcohol ad-texts. However, the Lion Red ad-text did reiterate this connection for the students. It is risky sex that sits at the core of health concerns. Yet the point made through what the students had to say in this research was that 'normal' sex for young people may be what public health positions would understand constitutes 'risky' sex. This difference in understandings between constructions of normal and risk raises questions over the merits of the construction of 'risk' as the issue in youthful sexual activities, and also around how interventions might be framed.

As the locational text identified, in the past increases in uninhibited behaviours and 'morally questionable excesses' (sex and binge drinking) within certain communities underpinned the growth of resistant responses from church, prohibitionists and other groups representing 'family value politics'. Similarly, some in the present moral environment are very concerned to constrain youthful

acts such as drinking to excess and risky sex. In the past, however, as the locational text *also* identified, when drinking excesses were apparently constrained, these excesses then found outlet in more concentrated forms (through the 6 o'clock swill). What the students in this study identified is that the current environment, through a combination of legislative constraints and social 'norms', has led to youthful consumption of alcohol occurring in intensely youthful, unsupervised spaces where 'norms' of excess have developed. Interventions need to address such complexities.

For these young people, apparently alcohol *can* make you feel good, lower your inhibitions, and lead to *desired* (as well as what may be undesired) forms of sexual intimacy. Dominant discursive formations in health exclude these important ideas and leave them in the range of what was 'not said'. Such pleasures and desires do not have adequate space in debates. When the students critique the idea that drinking interferes with libido – their experiences being of 'more sex' when using alcohol – they highlight the way in which 'problems' with alcohol are also discursively constructed from particular positions. Excessive alcohol consumption may affect sexual performance for many adult males, but the same may not be true for younger men and quite the opposite may be true for women. There may be little relevance to employing such adult concerns as a source of discouragement for younger drinkers. Morally 'wrong', 'risky', or 'sexually negative' may simply represent adult positions. Such positioning may also encourage resistance as a means of expressing difference.

### **Winds of change: Blowing two ways?**

The major social and structural transitions that have re-shaped spaces of use and engagements with alcohol are still in process. Change does not mean any *comprehensive* overturning of one way for another; it means that shifts identifiably affect what has been dominant and that evidence of forms of struggle *and* resistance to such changes will be available. Transitions around masculinities are a good illustration. In terms of how masculine identities are understood, local histories, the ad-texts in this research, and participant

responses to these ad-texts are an excellent example of the processes of change being enacted. The male drinking legacy of the past that worked to constrain masculine plurality is what these newer representations struggle to reinforce as well as to challenge. The texts speak to nostalgia and resistance, but they also speak, despite themselves, to the altered grounds on which they work. This is not an absent Derridean trace destabilising attempts to naturalise ideas within the text – these are presences to be dealt with. Even whilst rejecting other choices, Lion Red has to set out the profusion of choices that now exist around spaces in which to drink and the plural identities of drinkers. ‘Sprinklings’ of women, ethnic groups, and gay men are admitted into the Lion space, albeit to be dismissed, but they are *there*. Speight’s men are drinking on a brewery tour that is entirely contemporary. The cowboys have been dislocated from the rural scene and dropped into a present that deals with men at leisure. The texts may be shaped more slowly than other spaces, through social shifts around masculinities and gender, but the fundamental shifts described that have been destabilising the hegemonic masculinist drinker are making their presence felt in these portrayals.

One could argue here that this is a process of incorporation where change is being recognised and reworked into the offer. But these texts seem far more resistant and encroached upon than appropriating. This would seem to suggest that ideas of hegemonic forces consuming contesting forces are too linear. These different discursive possibilities are engaged with each other and transformation of both seems inevitable.

Even as I interviewed the producers, Speight’s was commissioning a new series of ads that incorporate a female lead and designing commercials that refer to mobile phones and the internet. The socially responsible understanding is now that a taxi is taken to get home. Change is making its presence felt. Plural drinking spaces, behaviours, and subjectivities are not being *contained* by, but are erupting through, the surface of these texts. The Lion Red men in their bar exist in a town filled with alternative choices – of bars, forms of entertainment, and types of people. The texts are forced to manage change in an ongoing

process of struggle. Struggle is being enacted within the discursive domain of the text, not fast enough for the younger students perhaps, but it is there.

### **Drinking youth: Intensified isolation**

Young people (especially 14 – 15 year olds but also 16 – 20 year olds) are increasing their consumption levels per drinking occasion (Hocken, 2000). As argued previously the 'why' of such alterations has been a gap in research (Grey & Norton, 1998; Lyons, 2004). Historical reviews have argued that, alongside material conditions, it is the *purpose* of the drinking – the meaning of the act and how communities feel about such things – that shapes the act (Phillips, 1996; Watney, 1974). Concern has been expressed that advertisements for alcohol intentionally seek to recruit younger drinkers to the habit of alcohol consumption through the promotion of desirable adult lifestyles rather than just promoting products (Kelly & Edwards, 1998). Drinking can 'mean' adult. The lifestyles on offer, from Speight's and Lion Red were rejected by the students as adult. **P3** described, from a production perspective, the problematic nature of working across generations of targets who may have more intergenerational differences than they have commonality. Although the agency deliberately and successfully incorporated cues that had some relevance for younger drinkers, the ads were still judged by the students as aged because of the actors, the environments, and the characterisations. Alcohol use by this small group of young people appeared to relate to identifications and performances of being *youth*. But it was important to note that they also spoke of the physiological, sensory, and emotional pleasures and benefits of using a legal drug.

As has already been identified, the review by Phillips (1996) (cited in the locational text) identified an historical public-private split that was created when apparent social acceptance of values of moderation saw drinking excesses legislatively contained, and the public turned a blind eye to what happened less visibly on the margins. Governance of individuals' drinking has long been perceived as a point at which many social 'ills' can be challenged (Phillips, 1996). Arguably it still is. The early 19<sup>th</sup> century cleanup of the streets has a

contemporary equivalent the students pointed to, of policed streets and attempts to curb the *visible* excesses of public drinking, which for these students often meant younger people's drinking.

**M2** Most towns have teenagers walking round really, really drunk and the police after them. **(G4)**

**J2:** In earlier times, the curbing of public excesses supported an ethic of moderation. However, rather than destroy the predominantly male culture of concern, the result was to contain and segregate that culture to be perpetuated 'in a more intense form' (Phillips, 1996, p.76). Is this a part of what is happening now for some young people? Multiple restrictions on drinking in public places are presently being enacted in New Zealand (Miller, 2002; Taylor, 2003). Such moves represent strong attempts to manage certain forms of drinking through the creation of material barriers to consumption. Fair enough, perhaps. For young people, however, such outside spaces seem to be the primary drinking locations. Perhaps we should be asking what the hazards are of legislating youthful consumption of alcohol to be in ever more invisible spaces. For young people increased leisure time, growth in purchasing power, and social separation seems to be leading to alcohol being consumed in ever more isolated spaces. A combination not well designed to reduce risks.

### **Good and bad: An ongoing paradox**

The paradoxes of alcohol: (as good and bad and as a private and public issue) shaped the commercials and the responses to them. All participants recognised the harmful as well as beneficial effects of alcohol as a drug of equivocal status. A wide range of familiar arguments about what alcohol was associated with, for good or bad, were drawn on in the talk, and they strongly reflected the debates that have shaped histories of use in the past.

The problem of the pleasures, versus the negative impacts, of alcohol consumption that were raised by the participants reflected the unresolved division in Aotearoa/New Zealand's wider debates. The struggle articulated was that: alcohol does harm so some prohibition/restriction through governance is required; versus alcohol does no harm to the majority of people and therefore liberation and freedom of choice should prevail. Both the students and producers located 'problems' primarily with individuals and agency for addressing those problems with the person. In the participant materials a much more subtle point about the intersections between agency and determinism did get raised, but not explored. Participants recognised and articulated a relationship between consumption styles and performances of identities, within certain communities. For example, references were made to how 'Westies' drink, or how young people use alcohol. However, the determining nature of understanding our identities through acts that reflect what is dominant in communities was not addressed.

A strong concern expressed in the local research I reviewed was that any engagement with alcohol advertising will engender positive views about alcohol. For example, "*cognitive changes are produced and translated into pro-drinking attitudes and intentions*" (from Chapter 4). A key point made in this research was that, for these participants, the pleasures and benefits of drinking reflect their 'real' experiences, not something imagined. Reduced inhibitions, perceived increases in fun, the benefits of taking a drug that produces effects of physical relaxation, and enjoying acts like singing more were all offered as benefits these participants had enjoyed because of alcohol. These are the specific benefits advertisers are not able to sell, but it is difficult to imagine how one might keep such associations away from texts. Equally, although the ad-texts did not offer the 'bad' of alcohol in these texts, the participants easily made associations between what is 'bad' about using alcohol through their engagements with the texts. Alcohol can be experienced, and understood, as good *and* bad. Neither association can be constrained.

## **Re-locating the health research(ers): Raising responsibility**

In my introduction I expressed the concern that the majority of local health research was positioning advertisers as if they were 'external to' and 'acting on' as opposed to existing *within* communities. I argued that producers and their texts are located within and shaped through their social contexts and that they should be researched as such. By re-locating the ad-texts and the responses to those texts, within the locational review, the forces shaping the texts and participants' responses have become apparent and are visible as connected. Aotearoa/New Zealand's cultural histories, its varied cultural presents, and its economic and material conditions are clearly part of what shapes these commercial representations and responses to them. This same observation also applies to the local health research. In Chapter 5 I identified the concern, expressed by some international researchers, that dominant alcohol health research models were individualising and pathologising subjects as if they were separate from rather than interrelated through communities (Beccaria, 2001; Tigerstedt, 1999; Törrönen, 2000). Shared forces and conditions are shaping the positions and texts of *all* those involved in debates around alcohol advertising. Re-locate health texts within the locational text, and these too become identifiable not as isolated studies, or "independent alcohol science" (McCreanor, Casswell, & Hill, 2000, p 179), but as part of ongoing struggles over how things can be understood.

In the same ways that the advertising texts were identifiably connected to particular forms of masculinities, the health texts are connected to and echo historical resistances to those forms. Arguing that certain masculine qualities are 'undesirable' is as much an attempt to constrain what masculinities can be on offer as what is taking place in advertising texts. As with the processes described in Aotearoa/New Zealand's histories, the subjects constructed through dominant textual critiques about alcohol use are also part of debate about and critique of people within communities. Because the separation of texts from contexts is the usual practice in alcohol health advertising research, important locations and

connections, as well as the wider forces that act to maintain them, are not addressed or examined.

The forms of governance that seek to restrict excessive alcohol use by young people, or by any other communities, require the support of the wider public/s. In the case of young people that must include young people themselves. Highlighted in the locational text was the remarkable way in which a smaller group expressing 'Victorian' family values in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century managed to capture the wider public imagination. Also identified in the locational text was the way in which a failure to connect to the sensibilities of key stakeholders can cause a surge of resistance. Awareness of holding a position in debates, as a position, is vital. To believe one is outside debates, or holds the 'right' position, misses the point. If the sensibilities of young people or their families are not engaged when seeking restraint, then acts of excess may simply be perpetuated as forms of resistance.

The structuring wrought through material and economic conditions shapes communities' engagements with alcohol. Participants clearly identified Lion Red as a product that reflected such an outcome. Present day economic and material realities also shape the institutional activities of public health organisations. Public health research organisations are arguably as caught up in a contemporary capitalist framework as advertisers, and the people that use advertised products. Health research projects are driven by available (contested) funding streams and purchasers' (dominantly positivist and neo-liberal) research agenda. These forces operate as strong constraints that make immediate changes to research unlikely. This perhaps explains a seemingly institutionalised reluctance to recognise that most current research does not bear close examination or produce meaningful results, yet funding continues to be provided as if it did. If a spotlight were publicly turned onto the problems with existing research, the outcome would be likely to drive changes in this industry. And it is an industry. Tax dollars and tax-funded grants continue to fund the bulk of ongoing research. So whilst accountability for practices funded by taxpayers is overdue, it may also be unlikely.

## **The benefits of re-location**

Relocation gave a vital visibility to the participants' engagements with the ad-texts as part of wider ongoing social processes. When examined in isolation, the ad-texts and the participants were identifiable as engaged in extensive forms of debate. However, it was only when set in their locational context that these same debates between participants and ad-texts were identifiable as part of far wider and ongoing processes of struggles over meanings in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Through comparison between the participant materials and the locational text a vivid account was obtained of the interrelationships between the two. Whilst there were clear connections, comparison was also able to locate shifts, changes, and differences. Debates over how we should drink (less or more), how we should understand alcohol (good or bad) and how we should understand each other (through gender, ethnicity or notions of community) remain active and apparent.

However, it also became clear that the details and emphases in many of these debates are shifting. These struggles and shifts reiterate discursivity as an ongoing process. For example, gendered boundaries, already altered, are being contested in new and different ways (for example, as girls take up and even extend traditionally masculine acts to define contemporary femininities). Traditional forms of masculinities, which were so recently discursively dominant, are clearly struggling with multiple forms of resistance and change. Pakeha ways of 'seeing' continue to be dominant. Yet where in the not too distant past a very aesthetically 'white' text may not have excited debate or resistance, now it does. Whilst the ad-texts were the focus the debates engendered through this focus, identified that the struggles inside the ad-texts represent struggles from well beyond those texts.

Thus, relocation offered a sense of the wider forces and processes in play that constitute how alcohol is understood and used in this country, and located participants within those. It also offered an understanding that the participants and I, the ad-texts, and the local health researchers, represent but a small part of those larger forces and processes. It was also clear that these debates are

largely engaged in so 'naturally', that for the most part, critical awareness of being a participant is uncommon. This analysis argues the benefits of becoming more critically aware and of looking at where we have come from in order to develop greater agency over where we might be going. As researchers, the major benefit of making sense of *ourselves* in this larger context is that then we might better recognise our own positions and consider what may be at stake for other people that we had not previously recognised (e.g. economic barriers for those already disadvantaged). Putting ourselves in the big picture can show us where we sit in the frame.

## Chapter 12 Taking Stock

### **There are no facts, only interpretations. Friedrich Nietzsche**

This project was undertaken as a reaction to the continued dominance of positivist logic structuring local alcohol health advertising research. The project was also a reaction to what I perceived as a failure by the researchers involved in local alcohol research in producing work that did not adequately reflect contemporary theoretical developments in communications studies. I was also frustrated by the appearance of culturalist language and methods in research that was clearly still so structured through the logics of positivism. Now, I think that my initial review of the situation was not entirely fair on the researchers. I did not sufficiently acknowledge the strength of the existing forces shaping the current research. Most importantly, I did not properly identify what was taking place to produce the appearance of culturalist thinking in research as discursive process.

I would now argue for understanding the researchers as participants in discursive processes, whose work is being shaped through increasingly visible struggles between positivist and culturalist paradigms, but that these researchers are not always critically aware of the processes in which they are engaged. Positivist logic has been, and still is, a hegemonic force in social science research in contemporary Aotearoa/New Zealand. However, post-structuralist or culturalist projects have been emerging to contest that dominance for some time. As I identified in the local review, much of the current research does reflect a struggle between dominant logic and more culturalist alternatives. Often the language of the research (interpretative), the methods being used (listening to talk), and the positioning of the projects (as alternative to quantitative), appear to reflect the impacts of culturalist thinking even whilst the overall structuring remains positivist. In my review, I challenged the appearance of these signals of the culturalist turn as insufficient acts of positioning that ultimately represented a

failure to make an adequate epistemic shift. However, when I reframed what I had encountered as discursive processes, I finally realised that it was unsurprising the shifts I had identified were not always being engaged in *deliberately* by the researchers. Nor was it surprising that culturalist thinking was making such appearances or that there were overlaps in the work.

I would now argue that what is taking place in the local research reflects ongoing discursive struggles in the wider research domain. The methods and ideas of alternative (post-structuralist, or culturalist) frameworks are being incorporated into traditional approaches. This is not necessarily a deliberate process. Where it is not deliberate, and because positivism is traditionally a-theoretical and methods-driven, the results produce projects with unexamined tensions. As I argued, when I set out a discursive-theoretical framework, discursive activities and processes are ongoing, and they are something people are largely engaged in without critical 'awareness'. Yet my challenge to the local work, and those producing it, seemed to expect the researchers to behave as if they were fully critically engaged and aware participants in such discursive processes. Discursive theoretical logic would argue that such critical awareness would not be the case, unless the researchers were *already* working within culturalist frameworks. I had allowed the logic structuring my own thinking to shape how I was 'seeing' and 'judging' the research. However, it is still necessary to challenge such appearances and incorporations. The taking up of culturalist alternatives in incomplete or under-examined ways is poor practice. It also acts to defuse the political potential of the culturalist turn.

For those working in a culturalist framework, it is important to recognise that the culturalist alternative is – in historical terms – a relatively recent arrival. The epistemic and meta-theoretical logic of a more post-structuralist, social constructionist, or 'culturalist' alternative is reasonably well argued, and seems very sensible to those of us committed to such perspectives. However, important *detail* – at more macro and more micro levels – to that alternative has to be worked out. [This is why there is so much difficulty with naming this alternative

turn as an 'it']. The fact that it is possible to get away with identifying an epistemic bifurcation within Western thinking, and yet that to name any alternative position as meta-theoretical, or singular, is so debatable is a case in point (cf., Burr, 1995; Skinner, 1985. See also discussions in Chapters 2 and 6). The issue of detail is why debates are raging, as they are, for example, about discursive alternatives. *The detail* of culturalist frameworks is why alternative research frameworks are not sitting 'out there', neatly packaged, for people like me to pick up and use. A key part of the culturalist project must therefore be to develop the detail of culturalist research frameworks to use as alternatives. I had to work really hard to get to grips with the detail of operationalising discursive theory as far as I have in this project. As I have been challenged to grapple with that detail [and I can't thank Kerry and Joe enough for forcing me to do so], the lights have come on for me. *This* is the work to be done to shift the local research field: both the broader arguments and the nitty gritty of the culturalist alternative need to be worked on and effectively articulated. It has to be demonstrated that this alternative can work, and that it does make sense. Culturalist alternatives may seem attractive, and they may have had an impact, but, as the logic they are structured through argues, they have to win consent.

### **Summarising the gains of a culturalist shift**

*I argued that there were two ways gains could be realised through a culturalist research approach to making sense of alcohol advertising engagements; firstly through addressing the problems that I had identified as dominating the local research, and secondly through providing fresh insights into the nature of engagements with alcohol advertising. This chapter will now review the outcome of the present project against each of these arguments.*

### **Existing research problems addressed:**

The main inadequacies in the existing research were identified as:

- The problematic abstraction of alcohol advertising texts and engagements with those texts from within their socio-cultural-historic contexts.
- An overemphasis on mainstream media and a failure to consider the interrelated roles of wider commercial and non-commercial promotional activities.
- The construction of a very singular 'alcohol as problem' focus, which was leaving major gaps in understanding – particularly around pleasures – and falsely positioning alcohol as an intrinsically negative concern.
- Attempting to control, as opposed to considering, the implications of the interpretative diversity of people's responses to alcohol advertising texts, resulting in a set of problematic outcomes: false constructions of stabilised and singular positions; constraint of alternative voices and responses; dubious arguments about 'unconscious' processes; and the positioning of researchers as impartial observers.
- A lack of theoretical and methodological rigour.
- Arguing knowledge of production positions, processes, and intentions without engaging in any research that included producers.
- Problematically constructing excess alcohol consumption solely in terms of ideas of abnormality and 'risk'.

The present research was undertaken as a 'test' of what the particular culturalist-discursive model identified for this project could offer in terms of tackling such inadequacies. This section examines the ways in which the model developed for this project has addressed the problems highlighted, the benefits of having done so, and areas where further development is required.

## **1. Re-locating the abstracted: The benefits of considering ad-texts in contexts**

In the theoretical overviews (Chapters 3 and 6), I argued that ‘meanings’ generated through engagements with advertisements are constructed through constant interplays of complex contextual forces. I also argued that it is only through re-locating such advertisements and those people engaged with them, into their cultural contexts that this interplay can become clear. For the present project I proposed that visibility of socio-cultural and historic contexts and the locations of texts and talk within those could be obtained in two ways. First, through the development of a locational text that described key features of local relationships with alcohol and alcohol use. The reviewed research also formed a part of this locational work. Second, identifying and focusing on the range and diversity of ideas and positions expressed in the talk of the participants, which would also act as a form of locational text. It was proposed that, combined, these would offer a ‘rough-map’ of the wider discursive-context. This discursive-context would then act as the locational space within which the ad-texts and the participants could be discursively situated. Such location would offer visibility to both ad-texts and talk as forms of participation in wider discursive-processes and enable some understanding to be obtained of the discursive ‘mechanisms’ at work in the immediate context of what was being produced between participants and the ad-texts.

### *Capturing some breadth to the discursive terrain*

This wider ‘discursive terrain’ sought as context is, of course, a purely conceptual space, one that can be defined as constituted through the range of *all* possible ideas about alcohol available in Aotearoa/New Zealand. As I have argued, a definitive account of the ‘whole’ of any discursive terrain is impossible to obtain because it would be attempting to describe what is produced through constantly shifting discursive processes. However, by attending to a diverse range of contributions to the ongoing reproduction of these discursive processes, and by

abstracting those for the purposes of research, this project obtained an informative idea of discursive context.

The range identified as representing the wider discursive context was very broad; a multiplicity of histories, debates, politics, research projects, media texts, and myriad forms of talk, activities, and conditions were drawn on and highlighted as contributory strands to the wider 'web' of local meanings around alcohol. These different strands or 'tributaries' were manifested in many different ways within the ad-texts and the participants' talk, covering subjects that ranged across advertising, youth, women, men, forms of dress, acts, environments, speech, and so on. Importantly, the more material dimensions of discursivity were made apparent through references to acts, conditions, environments, and life-experiences.

Understanding the advertising texts and participants as located within these 'broader webs of meanings' (Geertz, 1983) and relocating them there gave strong visibility to both the ad-texts and the participants as drawing on and (re)producing ongoing discursive processes. The benefit of this context was that it became clear how focus and positions interact to shape the ways in which debates were being set out and taken up. Through paying attention to people and texts as engaged in processes of discursive struggle, it was possible to explore the ways in which different arguments and positions were 'working' and how ideas and positions on offer were being re-produced, re-worked, and responded to, and by whom. Such an analysis is only possible *through* locating the ad-texts and the research participants in a wider discursive context.

[As established in Chapter 4, traditional research argues that alcohol advertising texts offer very particular versions of how to make sense of alcohol. As my own analysis of the local research argued, so does local public health alcohol advertising research. The framework of this project offers both as representing positions within a *wider* discursive terrain.]

### *Text-life relationships: inter-textuality*

In traditional research, and with only the ad-text in focus, arguments are made that the ad-text is the source of information about alcohol and alcohol brands, and that such ads construct people's thinking about how they should consume a brand (e.g. where Lion Red is concerned, excessively). This project argued for the importance of understanding much more complex relationships between products as represented, products as used, and people using products. My interpretation of the ways in which the participants in this study explored various aspects of the ad-texts was that they were exploring the ad-texts for what they had to say about a brand and assessing how those textual elements felt for any 'fit' discursively with ideas obtained through their lives and experiences *beyond* the texts. This was the linear ad-to-person process described by traditional research.

Participants all understood the ad-texts as communications about products and their use, but participants also related to the products as objects in use well beyond the texts and drew on what they knew about the products from beyond the ad-texts to judge the ads. Conditions and uses beyond the ad-texts were communicating strongly about the brand and how it was perceived as used generally. So, in relation to Lion Red for example, it was *experiences* of using, or seeing others use Lion Red that were drawn on to judge the 'reality' of the text, and to express the 'realities' of Lion Red as a brand. So: "the people in this ad are not shown as pissed" but "you use Lion Red to get pissed" interacted. Similarly, "Speight's tastes good, Lion Red does not", "Lion Red is cheap piss", represented experiences drawn on that formed criteria through which participants understood the brand although these ideas were certainly not on offer in the texts. This inter-textuality between the advertisements and the 'real' world argues strongly against the very uni-linear and abstracted models that have traditionally been used to explain advertising's 'effects'.

Another important form of inter-textuality was revealed through obtaining information about the production context and how this context had shaped the

advertisements in the study. The producers identified the already-negotiated nature of the advertising texts being studied. They described how the agency's consumer research was drawn on to shape the development of the ad-text, and the extent to which such research with their consumers had shaped these ads. These producers highlighted that, for them the groups and communities that had adopted the Speight's and Lion Red brands and the ways in which those communities used and understood those brands were key parts of a brand and therefore key reference points when constructing any creative executions describing those brands. In this way the producers recognised their ad-texts as having relationships to pasts and presents (e.g. through expressions of 'mateship') but also to 'real' people and their day-to-day life-worlds (e.g. Westies). Where traditional research projects argue a linear, brand-to-consumer 'effect' relationship, this approach argues that any boundaries between brand/ad-text and user/community are demonstrably more permeable and less linear than traditional research describes. As Nava (1997) has argued, from a culturalist position one cannot uncouple capitalism from culture; the very notion depends on the logic of positivist epistemologies.

Traditional research abstracts ads and engagements with ads beyond any social contexts. Yet far from being an advertiser's original constructions, taken *in* context the central themes of the examined ad-texts were identifiable as recognisably re-producing dominant and less dominant ideas and the struggles around those *from* local contexts. A good example was in how the ad-texts offered representations of historically locatable hegemonic masculinities (of the 'Kiwi bloke'), and men enacting identifiable traditional performances of male alcohol consumption (drinking mates), but in spaces that had now admitted women, and through talk that made resistant references to alternative masculinities, such as those encompassing homosexuality. Thus, working with the materials as discursively-located enabled the connections and disjunctions between the ideas and themes in the texts, the ideas and themes within the range of interpretative responses to those texts, and the ideas and themes from the wider socio-cultural-historic contexts to become visible, reiterating both texts

and engagements with those texts as forms of participation in wider social-discursive activities.

*'Mechanisms' of connection*

Effectiveness of any 'mechanisms' in the ad-texts was realised through the ways in which what was interpreted to be in the texts connected or was disjunctive with the priorities, preferences, positions, and contexts (immediate and wider) of those engaging with the texts. By attending to where different participants were positioned, and positioning themselves and others in the context of the debates that occurred in discussions, it became clear why particular aspects of the representations in the texts made sense and connected (or not) for different participants. Local versions of hegemonic masculinities became identifiable as: meaningful and important for the male producers; meaningful and important for key consumers of the brands the producers had done research with; as having a history within certain forms of desire for some women; and as recognisable but dated and irrelevant for many of the younger students in the research. The representations of masculinities on offer resonated (or not), through being (or failing to be) recognisable, relevant, and pleasurable for participants.

This process of contrasting and comparing the ad-texts and the participants' talk in context revealed interpretive range and divergence, but this contrasting and comparing also revealed link-points, which acted as key mechanisms to generate shared connections. Fun, for example, was a major link-point for all participants. Link-points identified not only made common connections apparent (or reiterated differences) but these link-points also identified some of the complexity of interpretative structuring that can exist for participants.

As stated, 'pioneering man' was liked by the male producers, and their customers, for whatever positives that evoked. Pioneering man had unintentionally positive resonances for some women as well. In the references made by **P3** and me, (to the phenomenon of the desirability of the pioneering bloke), we identified that despite recognising pioneering bloke's origins, and despite discursive alternatives having come into our range, this discursive history

that had structured desire in our pasts still held a certain sway for us. Even as we identified the desirability as both mythic and probably unsatisfactory, we still experienced the pull of this as a constituting force. Thus the pioneering bloke was to a certain extent able to be an effective and pleasurable mechanism of engagement for us even whilst also acting as a point of difference. In contrast, for the younger women, pioneering man engendered a shared connection of more straightforward refusal. This reiterates the complexity of interpretation of particular representations and argues against simple judgements of what is right or wrong. Much of the local research argues that the pioneering bloke is interpretable only as offering problematic and undesirable masculinist qualities. For some men and women, pioneering man is not so straightforward. To dismiss 'him' as negative is not only overly simplistic but it begs the question of what you put in his place. In this context, conventional research arguments about negative representations of masculinity requiring governance seem unsatisfactorily one-dimensional and subjective.

The iteration of the interpretative diversity participants bring to the ad-texts is not an argument that the contents of the ad-texts are stable and that the participants alone generate interpretative differences. The use of contextualisation also offered visibility to the ways in which the texts themselves were demonstrably engaged in struggles and resistances (e.g. over masculinities) and about which the ad-texts spoke *within* themselves. Törrönen's (2001) position (highlighted in Chapter 3) that media frameworks must understand resistance as internal, as well as external, to the text is also answered through this research approach. Through contextualisation and comparison of positions within the ad-texts with external positions, the contents of the ad-texts were revealed as visibly engaged in an *internal* struggle. The ad-texts were 'managing' what they were offering within a context of what was more widely on offer. Thus the dominant forms of masculinity being re-presented in Lion Red were revealed in the ad-text as engaged with being contested, through admission of the alternatives (women and gay men) that the text sought to accommodate or marginalise but could not exclude.

These processes of location into contexts identify how both the texts *and* engagements with them are not stable but are shifting in a constant process of struggle over what things mean. The theoretical idea that was argued (Chapter 6) of the semi-stable 'effect' (where through such interactions a temporary, albeit unstable, 'effect' of a 'reality' is generated) makes sense through the analyses in this research. The method of working in a framework of context acts as a form of what I term discursive sonar, making what is not apparent visible through discursive re-location. Where traditional research collects and stabilises responses into common expressions, this approach works by constant relocation of the diversity in texts and participants' talk in relation to each other, and in relation to the wider discursive domain. Working to contrast, compare, and locate the range of what is on offer in this way reveals the processes taking place.

## **2. Focus: broadening the agenda**

In Chapter 5 I highlighted Saffer's (1998) arguments about the need to widen the focus in alcohol research to broaden what is included in the study of commercial alcohol promotion. His concern was with the present underestimation of the sheer weight of commercial activities. My research argues in support of what Saffer is saying. The students in the study clearly highlighted that key elements of commercial promotion – including packaging, product composition, and on-site activities – were part of their experiences of and understanding about alcohol. Focusing only on television commercials (which was the dominant focus locally) misses the sheer range of what is available and being engaged with. [Although this research has been focused on television as a comparative project my plans for future research around young people's media engagements describe a considerably broadened agenda.]

Focusing on single mediums also misses the *interactions* of commercial forms, a concern also highlighted in Chapter 5 (Alaniz, 1998). Again, this research would support Alaniz's view. As the discussion on contexts identifies, to understand the range and impacts of alcohol 'promotions' one must recognise the interactions of ideas being drawn on about alcohol. Both commercial and non-commercial forms

of activities and conditions were constantly referred to by the students, who offered non-commercial media texts, family, and – vitally – their friends, as all having key roles in the normalisation and promotion of the benefits of enjoying alcohol. This suggests that the research agenda needs to be wider and the processes studied need to be more complex. The simple argument that mainstream commercials are responsible for alcohol consumption levels, and that removing alcohol commercials from television will reduce consumption, is inadequate. If we are to make sense of how to intervene in the ways in which people choose to drink, we need to understand the complex and interacting ways in which forms of drinking are promoted. [In the last week as I have been writing this, a local magazine campaign from ALAC (the Alcohol Liquor Advisory Council) has started up. This highlights parents' drinking styles as having an important impact on how children understand drinking. Some changes are in evidence.]

### **3. Alcohol as problem: The problem of pleasures**

Pleasures were raised in two different ways through this research. Firstly, the pleasures and perceived benefits of alcohol use were strongly emphasised. Secondly, there were forms of pleasure that were obtained from the commercials. In the local research, neither form of pleasure is given adequate attention. Attention to pleasures in this project provided unexpected insights and highlighted the importance of including such forms of engagement in research.

As established in Chapter 8, many people enjoy drinking alcohol. They drink it for many reasons and, as evidenced by what participants had to say in this research, some of these reasons include the benefits of experiencing what alcohol offers physiologically, emotionally, and psychologically. Alcohol is enjoyed particularly as a form of relaxation that is connected to enjoyable experiences of socialisation – especially through reduced inhibitions and gains in confidence. Dominant research models simply do not allow space to address the issue that alcohol itself, and not just advertising, is connected to ideas about such pleasures. Despite the way that traditional research argues the case, the

connections between alcohol advertising and pleasures are clearly not something only constructed and promoted in commercials. Once again, this highlights the text-experience interrelationship, and the importance of experience as a process shaping understanding.

Pleasures enjoyed through engaging with the advertisements in this research were identified as obtained in many different ways. By recognising and examining elements of the texts that participants identified as pleasurable information was revealed about the forms of engagements taking place. For example, the aesthetics of production values, the use of music, evoking fun, and the use of humour were key elements that participants identified as providing entertainment and that they enjoyed as pleasurable points of engagement, even when other textual elements were not liked. The easy interplay of what was liked and disliked came through in talk and stressed the interpretative variance that can exist for the same person and between people in responses to one text.

Although pleasures were sometimes identifiably 'community' specific – the pleasures of desire had very gendered aspects – textual pleasures were also often common points of connection for diverse groups. Alcohol as connected to fun, for example, resonated strongly for most participants even when interpretative variability in responses to other aspects of the ad-text was still operating (e.g. responses to the look of the Lion Red women divided participants who were still connected around fun).

The particular resonance students identified around music as a source of textual pleasure raises questions about any use of contemporary (youth-audience targeted) music to promote alcohol, or of using jingles that reflect these. It also reiterates the concern (highlighted in Chapter 3) that there is a lack of emphasis in current research, on how pace, action, sound, and music can engage people (Kassabian, 2001). Yet music is an almost ubiquitous feature of alcohol advertising, and alcohol companies are often key sponsors of music events.

The focus on pleasures revealed that participants could like and dislike the ad-texts for different reasons. This reiterates problems with current research models

where meanings are argued as singular or judged as 'right' or 'wrong'. For example, a position expressed in the local research is that the masculine toughness and ruggedness on display in beer commercials is undesirable (Bassett, 1994; Hill, 1999). The connection being made by these researchers seems to be between toughness or ruggedness, and bad. However, as this research identifies, tough and rugged can signify desirable and pleasurable. Some acknowledgement is required of the notion that 'masculine' qualities and behaviours linked to 'masculinity' are potentially non-violent and pleasurable. As the international research highlighted, particular (masculine) qualities do not have *automatic* links to negative or violent outcomes when people drink (Gough & Edwards, 1998).

An anxiety that is likely to underpin the local public health research concerns about masculinities is that the combination of aggression and alcohol use is a problem. This is an important point. Within some communities, and for some individuals, alcohol can be very strongly linked to violence. However, it should be considered that the enacted violence being referred to has origins beyond advertising representations, *and* from beyond particular masculine characteristics. Constructions of violence as linked *directly* to particular masculine qualities require challenging. The participants identified that they understood the masculine qualities being referenced through the ad-texts as reflecting something recognisable about 'Kiwi' masculinities more widely. But the masculinities in the Lion Red commercial were also understood as having a strong connection to and as evoking very *particular*, materially located communities. Lion Red communities were highlighted as being in locations of social and economic disadvantage. The masculine qualities being discussed were identified as specifically *inflected* through those locations and material conditions.

Should we then argue that masculinities that evoke disadvantaged communities must not be recognisably portrayed as drinking in media texts because they come from spaces where high levels of social problems exist? Would a

commercial for a high-cost brand be more acceptable because the same masculinities on offer would be located in representations reflecting advantaged communities where less violence is visible as enacted? This research argues that there is a question being raised around the particular *communities* being represented rather than the *qualities* on offer and it is recognition of these communities that is evoking the problematic links. If so, attempting to constrain such representations of masculinities (as some researchers presently argue is required) feels uncomfortable. The risk seems to be that an acceptable public face for communities using alcohol is being sought. Yet the social issues that produce trouble 'hotspots' remain unaddressed.

This project argues that there is much greater complexity to the debate about alcohol, its pleasures, and its connections to problems than is presently given space for in research. It also argues that, in a discursive framework, the complex problematics of relationships between particular communities, forms of masculinities, and products and their use can begin to be explored more carefully and completely.

#### **4. Destabilising singularity: Creating space for recognising voices and positions**

The creation of space to attend the diversity and range expressed through the different voices in this project constituted a highly effective form of locational device as well as a mechanism for reflexivity in the research. The multi-voiced responses of participants in this project highlighted the alternative, and variant, interpretative-responses an ad-text can produce *and* revealed the points at which more common connections and resonances were generated. Different participants from other locations would generate more positions. As stressed in the introduction, this form of research is not meant to offer complete or definitive explanations. It offers ways to hear diversity and uses these to illuminate how engagements are produced for particular individuals, groups, or psychological 'communities' (e.g. gender or youth). Illumination is obtained through attending to the different and shared ways in which people experience and react to a text. For

example, there was a fairly robust response to the male-centred desire on offer through the Lion Red women, which made gender inflected ways of 'seeing' desire very visible. [This particular point of focus also highlighted the discursive nature – and dialectic interplay – of embodied selves and material signifiers like dress, hair, and acts. For participants it was the way the women were dressed that 'spoke' to how they were understood.]

Across the 'interpretative communities' generated through interactions different forms of engagements became apparent. As a 'test' of method this project was deliberately not large, but even so, a reasonable 'map' of key points was developed – of connections and differences around forms of Kiwi heritage, gender, age, spaces of consumption, histories, debates about alcohol. This approach has also met the requirement that Phillips (1999) argued for (highlighted in Chapter 3), of being able to distinguish individual from audience but to also recognise the complex relationships that exist between the two.

Previous research has shown that interpretative variance operates less around differences over *overt* textual meanings than in *responses* to those meanings – that is, in positions people hold about what is on offer in texts (Fenton, Bryman & Deacon, 1998). This observation was often borne out in these analyses. 'We' (students and I) 'got' most of the main ideas that the advertisers (producers) suggested they *meant* to convey, but we often 'saw' them differently. In other words these ideas 'meant' differently to us, and we responded differently, from different positions. The differences in our responses revealed important information. They also acted as a reflexive device, which revealed (my own and others') particular forms of 'culture blindness'. An example of this was the responsible driving message in Lion Red's protagonists' taxi ride home. The socially responsible nature of the act was identified by all of us, but the producers and I did not even register the material barrier of cost to being socially responsible in this way that the students identified. The students also highlighted a form of power relation that they felt they would be faced with between themselves and taxi drivers. Although we would all be customers, the producers

and I, as adults, could obtain a position of customer power that the students as youth were unlikely to have access to.

Both these differences, around money and power, revealed my positions and the producers', as adult, as financially privileged, and as in a category that taxi drivers would be likely to treat with respect. These differences, raised by the students around economic resources and social power, would be likely to be repeated across other social groups and communities, and certainly not just with young people. This strongly supports the argument that one person, academic expert or not, cannot speak for others or 'see' for all, nor can that person ever 'see' at all without the condition of their participation, which must *inflect* what is seen.

Contrasting and comparing an academic perspective by locating that academic 'voice' as that of another [albeit one hopes reasonably learned] participant, makes some of the filters of the researcher's own concerns available for reflexive critique. The exercise can become one of pedagogy. Through such processes of deliberately creating space for and attending to differences, I gained perspectives I could not have gleaned otherwise, recognising material differences (such as fares and differential power relationships as barriers to taxi rides), which highlighted my positions and privileges. These insights were *only* obtained through using the positions expressed by others as points of illumination to my own.

The particular benefits of working with *young* media students were perhaps that youth brings the hint of change. The students revealed how far the (older) advertisers and I were from these young people's positions. The two texts examined, were positioned by older people to speak (primarily) to older people. The actors, drinking spaces, and ways of making sense of gender in these commercials declared their age. Despite attempts to be more inclusive and to use language that young people might respond to, the advertisers were older and 'spoke' to older communities. Younger people revealed this quite vividly. [This project has made me very conscious of my 'social' age.]

An additional benefit of working with groups of others was that the impact of others on interpretations and responses was also raised. Phillips' (1999) argument that motives of viewing can create different interpretative constraints (Chapter 3), was supported through the displays of contextual constraints effected through participant interactions in the research. The interactions of participants, texts, and contexts identified how responses can become differently inflected through others' positions. As participants recalled other ideas or received new input, a 'reframing' was produced, generating shifts in attention and focus. In the context of the groups, individual ideas could often become shaped through or redirected by the multi-discursively constructed ways of knowing and life experiences that constituted the overlap between individual and shared resources within groups. So, pleasure could switch to critique ('spunks' to 'slappers') through salience being altered by the expression of an alternative position, by an 'other'. The effects of shifts of context on interpretation and positions raises questions about aware versus unaware responses.

For the participants [myself included], there seemed to be a threshold of awareness in relation to what engaged us, and how, in the texts. Multiple textual elements and interpretative positions were clearly operating, but what became an engagement, and the form it took, often depended on what was elicited or became salient. Differences were generated through recalling alternative ideas or other experiences working to shift what was able to be 'seen'. For example, Lion Red's portrayal of the bar woman could be sexy for one person, but when it was positioned as sexist that person's view could be shifted. Contextual shifts – remembering other experiences, views of other people, recalling other events, being challenged to take up different positions, and so on – could inflect what was seen, how it was seen, and how it was enjoyed, or not.

These contextual shifts offer support for further developing the concepts outlined in Chapter 6 around salience and awareness as important elements in interpretative processes. Traditional models cannot address the fluidity of interpretive-responses identified as taking place in this research. Even culturalist

models do not necessarily allow for this fluidity and ways in which it is engendered, to be given sufficient weight or attention. This project certainly argues flexibility as deserving better focus. Different dimensions may exist to what has previously been categorised simply as 'unconscious'. This research also argues that such dimensions may be more accessible than has been previously understood.

Whether or not there is a mechanism operating within the text to open or close meanings, the context and motive of viewing clearly can reinforce or undermine that effect. In this way duality of meanings becomes possible in the same space. This explains why people can comfortably like or reject aspects of the same texts, and why sometimes they can oscillate between like and dislike. Issues of context reinforce arguments for recognising the multiplicity possible to the resonances, divergences, and disjunctions that any participant can experience when engaging with a text. Understanding context starts to offer some *logic* to that multiplicity.

### **5. Rigour in research: extending accountability**

I have made strong claims that much of the existing research is lacking in basic standards of theoretical and methodological rigour. On those terms the question is, how does my own research fare? The quality of research should be assessable to the extent that it is logical, coherent, and maintains its flow of epistemological, theoretical, and methodological commitments; mapping the sort of structure that Crotty (1998) recommends, with an internal logic structuring the undertaking. Proper assessment of this project requires critical evaluation by others. On examination, the structural integrity of this research project seems maintained to me, but as a researcher, sheer proximity can cause blindness to flaws. I would argue that perfection is unlikely and that review is now required. This project constitutes a new approach to research. I am setting this approach out for further development. Evaluations and critique will enable this development to happen. At this stage I would argue that the research result appears to strongly support the approach.

However, rigour in research requires more than theoretical and methodological structuring. Quality in research requires a multi-layered approach which in Aotearoa/New Zealand should firstly incorporate attention to Te Tiriti commitment. Secondly, mechanisms are required through which to develop and maintain quality standards in research. These are both areas that the present framework could benefit from through further development.

In relation to Te Tiriti, I would argue that the discursive framework used for this research may have much to recommend it for bi-cultural work, but significant collaboration with Māori researchers is required to explore this idea. Certainly, a discursive approach would seem to be far more compatible with Māori world views than traditional frameworks. It offers visibility to what have been otherwise elided histories, it acknowledges rather than contains struggles, makes diversity central to research, and creates space for alternative positions and voices. In research terms these would represent significant gains.

In terms of quality mechanisms, this project argues the gains of working across interpretative communities, and of building reflexivity into research. It is only through contrasting and comparing different voices that positions – others and our own – become clear. Taking a role as participant was a useful device, acting as illumination to my own voice and positions, and was a way of learning about those for me as a researcher.

## **6. Producers: Why should they be listened to?**

As identified in Chapter 4, local research contained arguments about what producers of alcohol advertising intended to communicate, but these arguments were not based on any research that actually involved agencies. This project contests the absence of research with the producers of texts, and instead suggests that their inclusion can be useful, revealing important information about production processes, producers' positions, and the different forces shaping advertisements.

Examined from within a discursive framework, the producers in the study appeared to be approaching the construction of their commercials in a fairly sophisticated way. However, it was also clear that theirs was a very praxis-driven 'model' and that they lacked any clear theoretical frameworks within which to locate or articulate the logic of their work. [When I was discussing this aspect of my research with a marketing director, my partner interjected with: "the people Jane's talking about credit us with all sorts of theoretical cleverness but we don't work with theory. What we do is we sit and stare at the sky and think up good stories that connect for people". The point I had been making, one that I think my theory-shy partner was missing, is that this theoretical gap means that, despite doing what they do very effectively, they could potentially improve the work.] The 'common sense' driving the MearesTaine approach to advertising, gained through experience, has been to listen to the customer tell them about their brands and to reflect ideas about those customers back to them in the ad-texts. In so doing, agencies like these are effectively engaged in discursively-orientated research. As argued (Chapter 5), the approach appears to have originated through method, but it lacks clear explanatory frameworks (something Mica Niva identifies as the intuition, as opposed to the science, of the advertising business (Nava, 1997)). However, as an approach it appears to be working well for the agency. Neither their method nor their lack of theoretical framework would be clear if I had not *asked* about their processes. The insights provided by their answers underscore the value of including producers in such research.

By including the voices of production, this research highlighted both producers and their advertising texts as socio-culturally locatable 'productions' of their times, contexts, and backgrounds. Located, the two ad-texts studied were vividly visible as woven from, and through, recognisable and particular histories about Aotearoa/New Zealand. Listening to the creators of the ad-texts describing how and why they had re-produced these histories revealed their own engagements with, commitments to – and in **P3's** case, divergences with – such tales and 'views'. In this way, the advertisers in the study were sometimes revealed as slightly 'culture blind' to their own positions, particularly around ways in which

they understood gender, ethnicity, and age. A robust theoretical understanding of their work could better alert them to the particular ways in which they 'see' things. Not having awareness of their positions and how these shape their work could be argued as constituting areas of weakness in brand knowledge for the agency.

The background story that MearesTaine offered about why they were given the Lion Red business identified that where MearesTaine have developed a highly effective praxis-driven approach to the brand, the implication was that the prior incumbent had not. Given the strong emphasis *on* customer research in advertising, the other agency was almost certain to have undertaken research with customers. The problem may have been a lack of clarity about *why* they were listening to the customer, and what they were listening for. The Lion Red 'How to be a Man' series cited by the producers (Chapter 8) had clearly tried to widen the versions of masculinities on offer to Lion Red drinkers in their commercials. After this arguably more inclusive series of ads failed to connect for core customers, the next creative executions offered a very caricatured version of masculinities through the 'Chins' campaign, which was also 'refused'. This would seem to suggest that the previous agency *had* been listening to customers, but that they had not adequately understood the relationship between the text and those customers. [Of course they may have just asked the wrong people.] By initially trying to bring in too many of the resistant or contesting forces around the core masculinities on offer into their stories, they alienated their core customers, but by then trying to shift so strongly back into an extreme and exclusionary version of masculinity they had slid into parody and were even more strongly refused. This is speculation, but *because* it is unlikely the agency in question was not engaged in customer research, the key issue that would seem to be reiterated is the absence, in advertising agencies, of any clear explanatory frameworks structuring their work.

Without explanatory frameworks through which to inform others, MearesTaines present advantage may simply be a combination of experience and good instincts. This makes theirs a vulnerable form of organisational advantage. With

clear frameworks, advertisers' effectiveness could be improved more generally. Given the contested versions of how advertising works in health research, it is unsurprising that advertisers should be operating without consensus about how advertising works. This may seem an obvious point but it does argue against the homogenised and sophisticated version of advertisers offered through much of the local health research.

That the work of advertisers appears not to be theoretically grounded argues a less sophisticated position than the one advertisers are often credited with (e.g. as per Montonen 1997, Chapter 5). That said, through praxis these producers have come to recognise, and understand the importance of, the relationship between people, peoples' daily lives, and their ads. This observation argues strongly for better bridges between theory and praxis. As outlined in Chapter 5, alcohol-advertising research, in advertising agencies and in the health sector, is very methods-driven and lacks connections to theory. More integrated approaches would seem to be required (Gibbons et al., 1994), where context-based knowledge production can form a part of theoretical development.

These producers had understood the dialectic nature of brand construction, and that it operates around the intersections between creative representations, people, and peoples' day to day *uses* of a brand. These beer brands were not something these producers understood as simply a creation of their advertising but as an idea that is 'out there', actively being constructed through use by people in communities. Because of this, the stories on offer in these ad-texts were arguably more informed by consumers than the other way round. This argues that agencies cannot hope to wholly control a brand once it is being used, but that they must ultimately take a more subordinate role of building around the ongoing discursive-intersection between ad-text, people, and use. This is not something existing health research identifies or incorporates.

This research revealed some of the positions of the advertisers, and some of the interests and intentions shaping their work. It also importantly identified some *limits* being experienced by the advertisers. These limits are a very key point for

public health to be aware of. As has been highlighted, it would seem that the LAPS codes may be doing a better job at keeping things in check than they are often given credit for. The codes were revealed as holding quite effective boundaries around the advertising process – in ways the advertisers themselves often found challenging. The requirements to use actors that are, and look, over 25 years old in commercials, to not show any excesses, to not show alcohol's effects, and of only being able to intimate pleasures, were all identifiable in the research as constraining both production *and* the interpretative-responses of viewers.

Advertisers have been challenged for their lack of inclusiveness (Bassett, 1994), but research with producers identifies that advertisers cannot offer inclusive stories. Lion Red's history draws attention to this problem. These are highly targeted commercial texts, shaped to communicate with quite specific groups of people. The challenge of that requirement is for these targeted texts to incorporate the positions, biases, and problematic assumptions (e.g. overtly preoccupied with male concerns) *of their communities of interest* if the advertiser has the strategy right. Forces shaping production of an advertisement emerge, in simple terms, as dialectic interrelations of: *client interests* (commercial and personal), *agency interests* (commercial, creative, and personal), *public health*, and wider *monitoring interests* (particularly legislative) and, most vitally through research within target communities, *consumer interests*. This argues that research challenges to advertisements' 'overly narrow' portrayals are problematic, because overly broad representations can lose business. Also, as already stated, such challenges can represent uncomfortable questions about the visibility of particular people in communities.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that the inclusion of producers in advertising research has much to recommend it. Contrasting and comparing what producers had to say about their ad-texts with what other participants interpreted and responded to revealed much about the positions of both. In addition, the framework guiding this project was consonant with the approach being used by

the advertisers, answering calls for alcohol advertising research to employ more appropriate lenses of assessment (e.g. Bush & Bush, 1994. See Chapter 5)).

### **7. The problems of 'risk': Re-focusing on 'normality'?**

Traditional research elides the thoroughly equivocal nature of the relationships many people have with alcohol. Consumption in Aotearoa/New Zealand has been liberalised, and the dominant message seems to be that it is generally acceptable, and that it is 'normal' for many people to drink alcohol. A small body of research has argued that it may be exactly the 'normal' aspects of drinking that are the sources of problems (see Chapter 5), but the majority of research keeps identifying ideas of 'at risk' subjects and groups. This reiteration of abnormality and 'risk' is raised as a problem through this research. If what the students had to say is accepted, then excessive drinking might well be 'normal' for many of them. Even if what they had to say was a performative response for my benefit, the *expression* was still of the idea that excessive drinking can be considered normal for many young people. The producers, the students, and I also identified that we understood excessive drinking as normal for many people in Kiwi cultures. If one accepts binge drinking as a cultural issue, then this reiterates the concern that dominant logics structuring ideas about risk in the current research require critique. It also argues that the ad-text is not the source of excessive consumption. Socially excessive consumption of alcohol is an issue within communities that appears to be tied into social norms. This also argues that responsible as well as irresponsible drinking will be bound up within the ways in which people identify. If we as researchers wish to know about, and intervene in, these complex relationships to reduce consumption levels, then we have to make sense of where the logic of how to drink comes from. To do so we need to use the right research tools, and to collaborate, not only professionally, but with communities themselves (Advertising Standards Authority, 2003; Mahoney, 2002a).

Recruiting communities to an agenda of appropriate consumption will require more than the environmental controls 'on availability, or pricing' that McCreanor

et al. (2000, p.183) argue for. It will require what those same authors highlight [but then fail to explore] as traditional constraints. As Heath argues: “formal controls are far less effective in shaping behaviour than are the unofficial informal controls that people exert in their daily interactions, through gossip, exhortations, or other forms of social sanction” (Heath, 1995, p.343). This statement is identifying that any formal participation in setting out the discursive domain has to navigate, and struggle with, myriad positions and ideas held within popular cultures. If commercial advertising – or health writers – engagingly re-present what communities already make sense of as desirable constructions about moderation on those communities’ own terms, then those messages may have a good chance of being heard. However, as the advertisers in this study astutely identify, if one wishes to connect to communities of interest one has to engage with them in terms they find meaningful, and entertaining. Outcomes of actually listening to, and allowing space for, both the positive and the negative stories people have about their relationships with alcohol can support far more than commercial interests when it comes to communicating about alcohol, or managing how it gets consumed.

Could collaboration see messages about safe or more appropriate consumption appear in liquor ads? Could it see acknowledgment of pleasures of consumption in health texts? Wider cultural shifts around what is considered appropriate have already brought changes into advertising’s representations. The Lion Red taxi ride was a case in point. Within the latest liquor advertising review, recommendations to consider advertising texts as spaces where messages about appropriate consumption might be enacted were argued as outside of the remit of the review panel (Advertising Standards Authority, 2003). Perhaps the remit should be expanded. This research argues that this inclusion of a message about social responsibility was very engaging. Even though this research has highlighted some of the problems around advocating taxi use for youth, (and for others in positions of economic or power disadvantage), it also identified how the inclusion of socially responsible and appropriate driving, after alcohol use, was engaged with by the students and responded to very positively.

## **In summary**

After reviewing each of the different areas above what becomes apparent is how much one overlaps into another. Ultimately these arguments about each individual area of inadequacy in existing research are of course an argument about the whole approach. If the overall logic of the research is basically not sound, then the structure will be able to be undermined at so many points that repair is impossible. Dominant models appear sufficiently undermined by the many challenges that have been made about them, as to be in irrevocable disrepair. However, the process of answering existing inadequacies through this alternative framework identifies that the basic structure and logic of the culturalist-discursive alternative is sufficiently sound to hold across the different areas on which traditional approaches have so often been challenged. The next question becomes: what new things does it reveal?

## **Achieving fresh insights? Benefits of looking differently**

*This section will consider whether the approach taken in this project has offered any fresh insights around the high priority concern of how young people engage with alcohol advertising. It will show how this approach has acted as a form of discursive sonar, revealing locations, positions, and perspectives that could not otherwise be obtained.*

The section will address two key issues in youth alcohol advertising research. Firstly, I will address the question of whether young people are engaged in an interpretatively difference process to adults. Secondly I will examine the question of whether alcohol advertisers *intend* to recruit under-age drinkers.

## **Recognising the youth effect**

I included young students as participants in the present research because, locally and internationally, younger peoples' engagements with alcohol advertising represent a high profile area of concern. As stated in Chapter 5, an important

consideration is not only how people are engaged by alcohol advertising texts more generally, but also whether children and youth are engaged in an *interpretatively different process* to adults (Lipsitz et al., 1993; Waiters et al., 2001).

In this research it became clear that the students' *processes* of interpretative-response were not so much different as their interpretative-responses were *differently structured through their particular positions, priorities, and contexts*. Some, but by no means all of these were identifiable as about their age. This research argues that 'youth' is a particular form of inflection shaping interpretative-responses. Age can see a youth-effect. For example, the representations in the ad-texts were clearly interpreted by the students as signifying adults, in adult spaces, and as not like young people, or consistent with young people's life-worlds. It was also clear that the adults and the adult spaces represented in the ad-texts were not particularly aspired to or desired by the students. What they heard and saw produced rather rejecting responses like: "old geezers trying to be young"; responses shaped by their positions as *being* young. Similarly, just as what **P3** and I saw and heard about 'desire' was shaped by our ages and gender – the younger women expressed their versions of desirability as not like the representations we connected to, and as structured in different ways (e.g. the Jim Beam man, who clearly offered a more desirable alternative).

However, youth as a 'category' – of experience or belonging – was also easily superseded, by other forms of 'psychological community', or connection. Gender, for example, connected responses *across* ages around the Lion Red women. This argues that 'youth' should not be constructed as a homogenised group, and that inflections of youth can be in turn complexly refracted through many other forms of connections. The particular differences, around how things are interpreted and responded to from positions inflected specifically by youth, deserve close attention. To 'access' such inflections, adults need to listen to young people.

However, this research also opens up some of the complexity of trying to 'see' differences engendered through being in positions that are not shared by a researcher. In this project, it was clear that the adults involved were 'seeing' from spaces that are inflected by age. For example, only when it was brought to my attention could I consider the power differential between adults and younger people in relation to taxi use. I had to listen to these younger people to make sense of that experience, and the impacts it might have. The benefit of this process was the way it revealed the shape and location of my own positions, acting as a reflexive and pedagogic device for me as a researcher. However, there is still a need to be careful about how, as a researcher, one then *interprets* what other people have to say. If what younger people have had to say is reviewed solely through the lenses and frameworks of adult concerns, important differences can simply be reworked to be maintained as adult concerns.

In the research, an important example of this was the expression of interpretative and responsive flexibility from the students. Interpretatively these younger people appeared to manifest a high level of flexibility. They shifted very easily around positions in relation to the texts, and they appeared, to some degree, to be 'trying out' ideas on offer. They argued the pros and cons of alcohol use very flexibly, demonstrating enthusiasm for exploring the ideas in focus and seemingly taking up different positions with equal passion. If excerpts from either end of the range of those discussions were extracted, they would falsely communicate a singularity that was not on offer. [This strongly reiterates problems with existing methods, which attempt to minimise, or contain variance.] But if this 'flexibility' itself were constructed through traditional models and concerns about adolescence, it could all too easily be framed as repeating an idea of adolescent 'vulnerability'. The idea that young people's ideas are less fixed and that they are more open to persuasion is commonly used as an argument for why youth are vulnerable and in need of protection. However, these students did not appear to be naïvely vulnerable in the ways they took up different positions and ideas. On the contrary, they often seemed to be what I would term very culture-aware, speaking critically and even reflexively about their own positions, as well as those

of others. Of course this experience was in a context of working with young people being trained to develop critical approaches towards media. However, other areas of politicised thinking and responses were evident in their talk that drew on a wide range of themes, from well beyond the resources of media studies, to critique much more than the texts in their discussions.

The existing emphasis on the idea of youth as a developmentally vulnerable life-stage (highlighted in Chapter 5) may be overlooking something of a contemporary Western cultural phenomenon. The subtle and widely informed nature of the students' engagements in this project argues that these are not naïve and 'acted on' participants. As has been the case in other studies (e.g. Waiters et al., 2001), these young people seemed to both recognise, and engage with, quite different rhetorical and institutionalised strands of debate about alcohol (e.g. from health education or counter messages) and to use those easily to work against the content that was in the texts. These young people picked up and shifted out of positions according to the shifting contexts and focus in the sessions (e.g. moving from alcohol as good to bad). Part of the pleasures being expressed by these young people seemed to be *exactly* their critical awareness of, differences with, and exploration of the ideas and the behaviours the advertisements offered. They easily critiqued the ad-texts as sanitised versions of alcohol use and were clear that this was only one dimension of the arguments about alcohol. They were similarly clear about the one-dimensionality of health messages about alcohol, and the lack of recognition these offered about fun and pleasures.

This is not to invert the argument around vulnerability and essentialise late adolescence as a critically aware phase in present Western cultures. However, younger people today may be shaped through very culturally inflected forms of flexibility and critical awareness, engendered through being young people in contemporary environments that expose them to increasingly multiple, as opposed to singular, aspects of social debates. This potential, in terms of the possibilities for discursive plurality, must also be considered for its location in a

cultural context of consumerist-inflected encouragements to actively and flexibly explore identificatory possibilities. So, when 'hearing' others speak, it is important that researchers closely examine their own preconceptions about the people they are listening to. Despite this I would not *wholly* abandon the idea of flexibility as a window within life, which may be widest for young people whose experiences are less and whose habits are potentially less formed. Such youthful flexibility has the potential to be viewed as opportune as opposed to vulnerable. Curriculum resources could certainly encourage any such flexibility to be usefully employed in critical engagements with representational forms.

There was an aspect of the students' talk, which did seem to constitute a uniquely youthful expression about their engagements. This was what I would argue as a critical awareness of attempts by adults to recruit them, as young people, to certain positions. The students recognised that these ads, *and* other sources of information about alcohol, were engaged in broader social rhetoric and debate with each other, and that these are representatives of different positions in debates that seek to recruit *them* to particular versions of how things should be understood (e.g. "they want 'us' to think that"). There was expression of an ongoing differentiation between them (adult) and us (not adult) and of youth as a specific category others seek to influence. This was not so much about what was on offer in the ads – although this was the main focus for the 'them'/'us' being expressed – but directed towards adults more generally, and particularly towards parents and teachers. There was awareness that what others have to say (texts or people) can be social activities *of* recruitment. As stated above, expressions from the students, recognising and positioning themselves as youth did not mean there were not many other psychological resonances of belonging or connection expressed (e.g. ethnicity, gender, dress and activities) for the students. These other connections identified differences *between* youth. However, there was a clear connection to the category being expressed as youth which was spoken of as one that 'adult others' seek to influence. There was a sense of opportunity for influence in this category. But the resistance and the desire for difference as youth, and not adult, was also expressed. This should not

be underestimated. It may be through the refusals expressed by youth that adults have to engage.

One could speculate as to the degree to which the identity of 'youth' is produced through ideas constructed by those who are not youth, or through practices and discourses constructed by those who *are* youth. Both are likely to work to offer spaces and positions of identification, but through quite different stories. It is important to understand how different these stories might be. Without such awareness, the interventions of well-meaning adults may meet nothing *but* resistance.

Also raised in the group sessions was the importance of recognising young peoples' experiences as a key dimension inflecting interpretative-responses. These students drew on, and *extended*, the dominant strands of debates around alcohol use to incorporate their own *experiences* as a form of participation. The experiences they spoke of highlight the need for research to address the complexity of benefits and impacts learned about alcohol by young people as something obtained well beyond ad-texts. Ideas and positions the students expressed about alcohol appeared to draw heavily on their own experiences of using it, and watching others use it. From what the students had to say, alcohol appears to be easy for them to get, and family and friends are often the people that get it for them. They live in environments where drinking is normalised and adults around them often drink excessively. They suggest that they drink alcohol in largely unsupervised environments and that viable alternatives (spaces where they are legitimately able to consume alcohol that includes socialisation with adults) are not often on offer. International research has highlighted similar issues (Chapter 5). Research needs to recognise that, for young people, experience has a vital role in interpretation. The impacts of conditions on drinking also need to be recognised and explored in health research.

This project suggests that these young people are drinking not so much in response to the lure of advertisers' lifestyle portrayals as they are because consumption of alcohol is both a cultural, and particularly a *youth* lifestyle 'norm'

in Aotearoa/New Zealand. If these ad-texts promoted youthful drinking norms they would be culpable for seeking to recruit youth, but the ads were identified by the students as culturally adult. Other advertisements for alcohol might be more dubious. Accurate monitoring for forms of texts that do engage young people on their own terms urgently requires frameworks able to identify and focus on the difference.

### **Issues of intent**

An question of some importance is “whether reaching children and younger youth with positive messages about alcohol and brands is intentional” (McKenzie, 2000, highlighted in Chapter 4, p.68). The producers in this study say they are targeting young people emerging into the market as drinkers, but only once they are at an age those advertisers can legitimately pursue, presently 18. The producers are, as identified, constrained by the LAPS codes which, amongst other things, preclude use of any actors under twenty five, or who look under twenty five, in their commercials. Hence the disparities recognised by the students between what was discursively on offer through talk, acts and looks, in the texts. The producers of the Lion Red text may have sought to incorporate a certain youthfulness to the text’s ‘voice’, but from the students’ reactions it was clear that if that voice is not authentic, it cannot be effective. This highlighted how *the LAPS codes are working effectively* to keep the margins of recognition (in terms of young people seeing things they can relate to) wider than they would otherwise be, creating an effective discursive gap, or barrier, where adolescent youth cultures are concerned. The age 25 restriction is probably something to keep firmly in place. This research does raise the question of why however, liquor interests are allowed to *research* alcohol with those aged under 25. [Again, it is only through talking to producers that one could gather this piece of information.]

Advertising agencies clients are also in pursuit of emerging drinkers. This difference, between advertising agencies and liquor companies, may be an important distinction to make. I would argue that commercial liquor interests are

less subject to promotional constraints because they are operating outside the high visibility and glamour of mainstream media activities. Why is there virtually no research around the less visible promotional forms that commercial liquor interests are engaged in? The fine line between legitimately targeting those who are of a legal age to drink, and targeting by marketers with tactics designed to appeal to those underage, is arguably being crossed in places where little health research is being done. 'Below the line' promotional activities may need better constraints and at the least they would seem to merit more debate. Youthfully-engaging packaging, tastes that include products that are very sweet or creamy, or the appearance of alcohol sponsored events in educational environments, would appear to be intentional and therefore of issue. Listening to the students in this research identified how they seemed to think that this was the case.

As stated previously, this research identifies that young peoples' *processes* of interpretative-response are not necessarily unlike adults. What is unique is how young people's interpretative-responses are *differently structured through their particular positions, priorities, and contexts*. As researchers we need to learn how to explore those positions, priorities, and contexts, without falling into the trap of being culture-blind to our own. Contrasting what young people have to say, with what we as adults think, may be a good place to start.

### **The benefits of a discursive approach**

The outcome of this project strongly supports the positions of contemporary media theorists; media engagements are socially located and complexly plural. This project also argues for the particular benefits of a discursive framework within which to make sense of contemporary media engagements and through which to conduct media research. One of the most significant and exciting aspects of this project is that it has seen the productive and 'replicable' operationalisation of discursive theory, something previously described as an ongoing challenge (cf., Wedge & Glasze, 2004). This is not a reference to positivist replicability (results) but to culturalists' having a workable model set out that can be drawn on; something discursive research has always found a

challenge. This 'replicability' is obtained because the epistemological, theoretical, and methodological logic of the enterprise is robust, consistent and reasonable. This is a framework that has much to recommend it over traditional methods of conducting advertising research, and for media studies more generally it is an approach that may have a useful contribution to make to an adequate articulation of a "*comprehensive and systematic theory of advertising*" (Harms & Kellner, 2002, p.1).

The framework used for this research both theorises and, importantly, demonstrates ability to cope with exploring, the complexities of the processes that constitute textual engagements. It offers explanation for, and location of, textual engagements in broader social processes. It also provides a research framework that can enable attention to range from wide concerns about the media, to something as specific as one part of one text as the focus of enquiry. The project dealt with the complexities of interpretative and responsive variances, and used those to highlight where and how texts and people were positioned, and how commonality and shared resonances, as well as disjunctions, were able to be produced, locating these things into personal contexts, shared contexts and broader socio-cultural contexts. The outcomes of the research argue strongly in support of the approach as one that can be taken up and applied.

By understanding media engagements as discursive processes and through creating space in which to examine the complexity of those engagements, this project has revealed something of the intricacy of what is taking place in media engagements without being overwhelmed by that. Where traditional models continue to suffer the vagaries of attempting to contain and manage variance and diversity, this framework embraces variance and diversity, making them central to the approach. Concerns that attending to the range, variance, and uniqueness of experiences might simply produce an unmanageable reductionism (Chapter 6) are unfounded. The unique inflections, shifts, and variances expressed did not defeat analysis. It was only through examining the range of connections,

divergences, *and* disjunctions on offer that one could consider how, why, and in what ways different people engaged with a text, how engagements shifted, and what it is that makes engagements common or uncommon between people and groups. Those issues that specifically connected or separated interpretative responses (like constructions of desire, or performances of masculinities) were identifiable as textual 'mechanisms' through which resonance was obtained (or not). The resonances that were obtained were achieved through the ways in which the ad-texts could reflect the socio-cultural constructions through which people are woven into, or with which they weave, their cultural discursive spaces and identities. The framework of this project has an explanatory power that traditional research lacks and it opens up many fresh areas within which to conduct further study and from which to contemplate interventions.

This has been a project concerned with developing and assessing the benefits in a culturalist-discursive model for media research. I would now argue that the outcome has been sufficiently successful for the model to be employed, built on, and extended. In alcohol research this approach can be applied across groups and communities to offer a much more complex and informative picture about alcohol advertising engagements for policy makers than has been available to date. An important place to begin for Aotearoa/New Zealand would be bi-culturally; but this model is something only Māori researchers can determine the appropriateness of. The notion of contexts and the range of discursive engagements examined can also be much further developed. One could examine and compare engagements across and between different dominant discursive forms. For example, media engagements can be located in relation to those with education, home, peers and key community groups. Different constructions perceived as offered through key social 'texts' and environments around particular subjects (like alcohol use, but for many other concerns) can be examined for how they are drawn on to shape and rationalise life choices and therefore be connected to outcomes.

Advertising texts make sense to people – or not – because what they offer is shaped through the cultures both people and ads inhabit. The things these texts can ‘mean’ are not stable or consistent across groups, or even for one person, because cultures, communities, and people are not stable or consistent in ways that traditional research describes. Examining an advertising text or a response to a text in isolation is therefore quite inadequate to explain how and why people engage with it. ‘Contextualising’ on the other hand, reveals locations – of a text, what is set out in it – and how different people interpret and respond to those texts. Within their contexts the ad-texts in this study, the participants, myself as a researcher, and the local research texts I reviewed, were all identifiable as (artificially suspended) examples of participation in much broader discursive processes. Our engagements in those processes became clear as conducted from particular positions, through the use of particular resources, and under particular conditions. These processes are those through which the ongoing generation of ideas and the interrelationships that constitute our cultures take place. One can focus more widely or more narrowly on particular aspects of those processes, but it is only possible to do so when the wider context of what is being focused on is made clear. A good example of discursive processes being enacted was offered at the beginning of this chapter. Social science communities are engaged in discursive struggles over how we should understand our worlds. This research project is one very small part of that.

Since I began this thesis I have become aware that the culturalist turn in media studies has produced other projects seeking ways to make sense of how the overall implications of the culturalist turn might be developed into an accessible explanatory framework. Nick Couldry, for example, has argued for the possibility of a “new paradigm of media research” that understands media, not as texts or structures of production, but as “social practice” (Couldry, 2004, p.115). Couldry’s view certainly validates the position taken here; arguing that any media work requires relocation into frameworks that understand media processes as part of broader social processes, through which actions and knowledge/s are generated, maintained, and re-worked. Couldry also highlights that, as yet, no one has

successfully developed and 'branded' an alternative media studies approach in a way that has broad accessibility and appeal. Given the contested nature of discursive theories, this is an issue for any discursive approach. From here, what is required is more work on how to effectively communicate, in a very accessible form, the sophistication that this discursive approach can represent for media research.

## Chapter 13 Reflexive Responses

**Easy reading is damned hard writing. Nathaniel Hawthorne, 1804-1864**

*This is written as J4; a new 'voice' in the mix. This move, to a new voice (and colour), is a gesture designed to (once again) interrupt expectations and reiterate the processes. Shifting contexts shade inflections.*

*I have had the privilege of working with some amazing people in the last few years. There is a 'type' I now recognise. Despite extraordinary erudition, they facilitate and never insist and whilst knowing much they are incredibly humble and open about 'knowledge/s', always learning whilst being learned. I aspire to that. I am a long way off. Much of what I have really achieved in my time as a student has been to gain such critical insights about how far I have to go, and how much learning is project that cannot be completed. In this final chapter I want to set out a sense of what I have 'learned' through this particular project and how it has affected my own position/s thus far.*

### **My identificatory positions: Convergences and interruptions**

Academically this work has taken me far outside of the spaces I thought I would have to go (critical studies, media, marketing, public health, psychology), introducing me to many different people, writers, and ideas. In fact I have found that what often seemed different (a discipline) was not always so different after all when the meta-structuring of ideas and currents of thought across times and cultures were examined (e.g. through sociologies, anthropologies, and philosophies). For example, in terms of recognising currents of thought that shaped this project, Nietzsche was setting out what one would now call a discursive position over 100 years ago. I am working in a long tradition. I think perhaps many of 'us' in academia (particularly those from my earlier backgrounds of mainstream Western psychology and marketing) are rather

narrowly educated, hence such things as meta-structuring logics come as a surprise. Some academic specialisations seem to have led to a lack of a sense of location in broader debates and practices. For example: the 'culturalist-interpretative' turn seems radical-fringe to mainstream psychology, yet it is so prevalent elsewhere it seems extraordinary it is not a major topic of conversation. (How did post-structuralism get into quantum physics and not mainstream psychology?) I now see such separations as a particular legacy to overcome. The wider differences and convergences across disciplines with our own ways of making sense represent the parameters of possibilities, knowledge/s, and debates about how things should be. We may have much to gain through recognition.

What this has all meant is that where I started by trying to relocate media experiences within cultural histories and contexts I found had to do much the same with my own learning; a/historicism dogs many projects. I have had to *start* (I know see how such things become lifelong projects) to learn the discursive formations, the histories and presences of many philosophical and theoretical debates to make better sense of how things seem to be and how they might become. Philosophically I am now at the point where I question *any* project of enforcing one (person's/institutions) position over another. Our neo-liberal pluralism may mean diversity is recognised but it exists in an environment of (to borrow from and alter Habermas) *non-constitutional* 'democracies' where majorities *do* seek to lay claim to authoritative voice and to prescribe for 'Others'.

As I set out in the main text, my position is heavily inflected through an academic perspective, shaped through psychology and media training. However, my position is also heavily inflected by a background in advertising, and familiarity with marketing and advertising's clients. So this work also carries an advertising perspective and language that an academic without the same experience would not necessarily recognise. Where I initially felt slightly apologetic about this, I now think it helps. My pasts may have usefully converged. That said I am aware of my position as inflected by being a partner of one of the ads writers. I flinched when

they talked about targeting youth – even though they meant legitimately targeting – because it is such a contested area. Through such reactions I have learnt to recognise some of the ‘screening’ I do around my partner’s work. I get the fact that if advertisers generally were let off the leash they would produce brilliantly targeted youth work. I am glad they are on the leash.

Through the project the question people have often asked is: do I think *ads* make people drink? I think all cultural forms of communication about how to be how to act what to use and so on, are part of the discursive spaces within which we make sense of ourselves and what we should do, but do ads themselves significantly determine choices to consume or consume too much? No. Do they evoke cultural groups and norms that promote particular forms of alcohol use? – yes, they cannot do otherwise.

Any one approach to theorisation or research can see critical nuances of process go unnoticed because any interpretative paradigm being used will constrain what is seen or able to be registered (King, 1992). Highlighting what he describes as optical clashes between critical interpretations, King identifies the fervour with which some heuristics are held and applied, and that the act of interpretation can become not an interpretative perspective but an insistence upon the perspective as *the* interpretative perspective. I do seem to be rather insisting upon a culturalist/interpretative perspective here – an issue to address and a call for attentive reflexivity on my part. In my defence I would like to suggest that I think I still am open to other ways of sense making but that the assumptions the subjects and methods of *scientific/empirical* study fail to make sense to me. I am comfortable with a framework that always starts from the position of knowledge as culturally constructed and constrained by its own optic, and therefore requiring a constant critical eye/ear. For me this holds integrity.

### **Addressing Māori issues: Taking up a position as Manuhiri**

This will always be the hardest part of learning for me really, how to navigate with integrity in areas [general media] where everything you do concerns Māori interests, [how can it not?], when you are always culturally other. It is a journey I

have taken rather unguided, so my response at this point may still be hopelessly naïve about where I stand. What I can say is that through this project I have learned to make sense of myself as Manuhiri. This means foreign but choosing to live here. I can actually say this and feel what would locally be called a sense of 'mana' [strength/pride]. I never really thought I was anything else, but the position I kept being put into – simply of colonising Pakeha [meaning NZ European] – raised many painful questions, reduced my sense of anchorage and dislocated me from where I come from. I am not 'NZ European' I am English. This is not an apology, complaint, or any sort of refusal. I accept the multiple oppressive and colonising forces I am wrought through as a legacy to devote myself to addressing through critical awareness and re-working. But the oppressive and the harmful are not all I am. And, I am not from here. Pakeha is too encompassing for me as a term. I came here from another place; it is the place to which I will always belong through my birth. I live here but I will never belong here – I do not seek to. As Manuhiri I have had to learn to find my self in spaces where apology seemed like the only acceptable sound to come from my mouth, my whiteness had become visible to me only as a signal of negativity so any move to talk seemed untenable. Now I sometimes speak, albeit usually very carefully. Being Manuhiri does not mean I do not have anything to offer Māori communities through my work. Whether I do, or not, remains for those communities to judge. As I make sense of it a discursive framework may have something to offer Māori media scholars. I would love to engage with someone about what I am engaged with through my work. I am going to have to learn how.

### **On being in a university: Still just visiting?**

When I think about the institution 'University' I get overwhelmed either by my own Tiggerish optimism about what might be done to change things or the exhaustion of others about why things can't change. I have been continuously confronted by what I would call a culture of fatigue in universities. There are many reasons for being tired in present conditions. Change is definitely needed. I worry that if I stay in academia too long I might also become exhausted. Creative energy and excitement are a necessary injection, but they have to come from within as well

as beyond, they need to be cultivated and desired. Being thrust into the business of being profitable (as universities in this country now have been) must have been painful for many academics. Set profit aside and then what are the values driving this endeavour? Profit is not a value for me. It is certainly not a source of excitement for many academics I know. How can educational institutions only be judged on research, and not on teaching? What can be the *raison d'être* that motivates in present conditions? For now, I still feel like a visitor and I think that is my safety net that prevents me losing my energy.

### **Theories to practice: operationalising the approach**

I was naïve about much of what was going on with existing research; naïve about what taking a discursive approach might mean in practice, naïve about what my participants would think about my 'ethical' standards, naïve about satisfying my cultural 'obligations' – I could go on for quite some time. Existing research, though 'wrong' in my view, is conducted in institutions and conditions that keep it the way it is. I am more sympathetic to the people I have been challenging now than I was, although I vacillate over this and still get exasperated at the waste. I am also still worried about the power held by such people and institutions. Applied researchers probably do not have time to worry about power, latest theories, or to reflect critically on their work. They are running businesses on budgets. That said, part of the business depends on publishing in peer-reviewed journals and the business shapes lives; hence I vacillate.

Taking a discursive approach seemed theoretically do-able. In practice I had to 'write my own book' about what that meant. There is a lot of work to be done to operationalise discursive theoretical approaches more effectively. I can see why one end is really loose and the other bogged down in excruciating detail. I feel like I have really made headway but that there is a great deal to learn and be done yet before this is really accessible stuff. The rewards have been worth it though.

In terms of practically working within my own 'ethical' framework I kept finding myself compromised. For example, I really wanted to go back to students with

my analyses and give them a chance to look at those and discuss what I had said. Ultimately, once the initial work was over they simply didn't care. The group work was fine and benefited their studies. Initially the idea of coming back seemed okay but then life took over and as the end of school approached they had more interesting things to do. One could argue the failure as one on my part, a failure to adequately engage them in the benefits of the second stage. I think in part that this is true. But this seems to be attached to an issue of time lag. Analysis takes quite a long time. By the time I was ready to go back it was too late in the year for this group. I would now consider the timing of return, and work in a way to re-engage participants, if that was required. For this project I decided to 'chill out' about re-engagement. Because what I was after was my own analysis of talk, the research did not even depend on going back. I realised I had been after a form of 'validity' that in this instance was not required. It was also, perhaps, a knee-jerk way of being appropriate in research. If I really did need ongoing participation, now I would find a way to really work with participants in ways that ongoing participation would benefit them too.

### **Working with others: Supervision**

It still seems incredible to me that not one but two ridiculously busy people take the time to read and evaluate my stuff. But I am grateful. This feedback and, for want of a better word, companionship, is vital. Having (learned) sounding boards for your ideas is critical but even more so is the encouragement and interest and enthusiasm for what you are doing. In this area I started with no ideals or ideas, I just jumped in. So it is not so much shifts but present learning that this has been about. Having two supervisors was a privilege derived from work that comes out of two different disciplines but I suspect the gains are huge. I would not really want to fly solo. Two utterly different perspectives offer so much when they 'see' things so differently. It is a sort of mini interpretive-community, incredibly valuable, systematic reflexivity a friend called it. The big thing is, however, that you are really on your own in terms of discipline, organisation, deadlines, and so on. Having a background that predisposed me to set my own deadlines and meet them really helped. I suspect if you don't the potential for disaster is quite large. It

led me to wonder if there shouldn't be more of a training requirement for students to undertake before they start – a paper perhaps?

### **Working with others – participants**

Two comments:

What a privilege working with people in research is.

As I have said before – I would seriously question the notion of 'informed consent'.

### **Equipment**

I don't know why I haven't read about this in any research and certainly no one warned me, but one of the greatest challenges I found was in equipment failures. I had tape players (hired from professional sound equipment studios) fail mid session; recording quality so compromised by a problem with a microphone that transcription was absolute purgatory; and in the worst instance a tape so damaged by slippage in the spool as we had recorded that the whole recording was useless. Knowing you have irretrievably lost a whole two hour session of talk is bad enough, going back to the participant (in this instance my partner) and explaining you wanted them to do it again was dreadful (he insists he spoke much better on the lost tape). Luckily he, and everyone else, was incredibly supportive. I now use back-up recorders and test mid session that everything is still OK. [Always keep back-up.]

### **Transcription**

I started with the idealistic notion that you should always do your own. I have not really shifted. Rest assured there were days when I wanted nothing more than to give the tapes to someone else to type up – a professional typist for a start. My hands and arms hurt quite often. But there is something about listening to every intake of breath, and rerunning sentences really carefully; it gives you a much deeper sense of what is going on but it also reveals your own hearing biases. Innumerable times I would rerun a sentence and find I had transcribed it slightly incorrectly; just a word here or there, a pause in the wrong place but moments

where I had ‘heard’ rather than truly listened. I’d say you have to go through at least two or three times to really comb out any tangles.

I actually find I have more sympathy for the conventions of conversation analysis now – once you run this many transcriptions you can start to read their stuff and it *does* make sense. Terrible stuff to try and read if you haven’t had such ‘training’. In this study it wasn’t the point to have such a nuanced convention but in certain instances I can see I would use it but it is a whole new written language to learn.

### **Reflexivity itself**

Much is said about this and yet what it is takes some working out. I now think it is a particular discipline, kept through having good processes and records. I kept loads of notes. The trouble is they were on scraps of paper, serviettes, envelopes, in journals, in folders, in margins and so on. It was not that I didn’t have a journal but I would find myself thinking about the project in places where I had not taken a journal (a testing process for friends when eating at their house). I suspect I lost some notes and may even find the ‘best’ bits after this is printed. Just the other day I found a useful scrap in an old travel pouch. I would now try harder to keep a journal on hand all the time rather make a note for later. I suspect I will always be scribbling notes on scraps too. Through my sometimes haphazard techniques of noting where I was, I can see where I came from, how I shifted and where I am – as much as one can see such things. This is the value. Because we shift positions all the time – sometimes in small ways and sometimes radically – we become the voice of an ‘other’ through such a process of movements and reflection; or at least I think we can. There is the learning.

### **Reflections about discursive research**

This last section is one I have shifted around endlessly – not being quite sure where to put it but not wanting to leave it out. This was not a project concerned with the detail of interactions in talk, or my effects on what was said. The orientation was to engagements with two ad-texts. However, in the interactions

that ensued were things I learned and that also highlighted what else might yet be done with this material.

### **Talk as processes**

What was clear in the research is that in practice as in theory generation of meanings takes place through complex discursive processes. Management of these processes within research processes is also complex. The identification and bounding of any aspects of talk for example, were analytic moves on my part. The categories are mine and talk is not neatly bounded. [As I have already observed, move close to the edges of one space and you find you are already in another.] Additionally, because much of what underpins activities in talk must be unsaid – that is, thought – assumptions on my part had to form the basis of categorisations. These were often made through attention to contexts and – vitally – tone. For example in relation to the Lion Red ad:

- M2** You know the guy in the Lion Red ad? Well that's Gazza from 'What Now' buddy [What Now is a younger kids TV show].
- M1** That's pretty stupid.
- F1** That's stupid, you know.
- M2** He's on a little kids show mate and now he's on a Lion Red ad.
- M1** What do little kids think about that?
- F2** That's totally off, that sucks, it's about as off as you can get.
- M1** It shouldn't happen.
- M2** Promoting to us that we should be drinking.
- F2** Glamourising alcoholism isn't he? Trying to make it seem accessible to young people. You can be a Red Blooded Blood Brother. **(G4)**

With no awareness of intonation, or context, one could take this set of comments at face value, but attention to the background and tone can change the complexion of what is apparently on offer. Here the discursive formation is of alcohol not as desirable but as adult and as something that should not be

promoted to young people. They are not just arguing for protecting ‘little kids’ (M1) either but also ‘us’ (M2 and F2). Yet, in the majority of the groups discussions most of the students expressed a desire and preference for drinking alcohol (only one student said they did not drink), so why the move here to critique promoting alcohol to ‘us’? This move could be interpreted as a move by the students to offer up a critique they may perceive me – as adult alcohol researcher – as looking for. This response could be seen as the students recognising the restrictions around advertising of alcohol (which were identified) but expressed in an ironical tone in relation to those. The response could be seen as a way of finding fault with an ad, because there was something about the ad overall that the students did not really like. The response certainly positioned the actor and the advertiser as irresponsible. In contrast to much of the talk this excerpt downplayed youth agency and played up the determining powers of advertising and adults. Why?

Much of how an excerpt like this becomes interpreted within the research depends critically on context, vocal intonations, and the researchers own interpretive positions. My actual reading was that the tone of the talk was not heavily ironical although irony was not wholly absent. Neither was the tone wholly serious. Initially the tone (M2) seemed to be exploratory (a sort of hey check out what I noticed) and then firmed up into something with more conviction as M1 and F1 responded to it as a negative. What had been interpreted was materially there – the actor was someone who was in an ad promoting beer and had appeared in a kids programme. The way in which they responded to this was resourced through known themes, (alcohol should not be promoted to kids) co-constructed (they explored this together) and inflected by the research context, (I think in a different context they might not care a jot that ‘Gazza’ had been on ‘What Now’ but that the combination of a media studies critique and interpretations about my research is likely to have set up this particular position).

What this example is designed to say – and perform as example of here – is that the voices in any discursive research are unlikely to set out neat, coherent, or

linear flows of ideas in any exchanges. These non-linear and messy processes of talk – shifting, negotiating and exploring – are partially visible in the quotes used within the analysis but because they are interpreted within analysis they are ‘stabilised’. At times talk is patterned but what it is patterned by depends on where you look and on *how you use it*. This effect of ‘where and how you look’ suggests that interpretive research communities can be a vital addition to research. Without the lenses of different positions and agendas, maintaining integrity can quickly become a problem. This may well be an issue in the present research. I may have been and may still be doing exactly what I am concerned to avoid. In part I hope this is avoided through holding variant voices and identifying my positions within the contexts of other voices and the broader locational texts, but other researchers with different agenda would be a useful addition to the process.

### **Talk as a form of negotiation**

The engagements with the two texts under discussion were not bounded exchanges. These interactions were meta-textual-cultural-experiential-discursive engagements. The products, stories, and ideas within the texts were inevitably connected to what lay beyond them and to the socio-cultural locations of the texts and individuals involved. This process of connecting constantly shifted through changes in contexts and positions (e.g. being in class as media students performing critiques, being young in response to representations of much older people, being aware of legislative restrictions on advertising, being aware of health risks of drinking, and being someone who likes to sing when they drink and so on).

The interpretative processes taking place pre-dominantly involved location and response to textual elements rather than textual wholes, using what one might term experiential repertoires (of previous discursive resources-experiences) to locate these aspects of the texts. So, as the young participants constructed and explored different versions of what these particular advertisements were ‘doing’ these students used a variety of discursive forms of resources (what they have

known, done, heard, seen or been told), to construct present formations and positions, which ebbed and flowed, as other people drew on different arguments, ideas, and positions. Media theories, health models, psychological theories, youth positions, wider discursive formations about advertising, and formations particular to brands (e.g. Speight's is classy, Lion Red 'Westie') were all used and explored as the talk rolled around. In this way the sessions became a socio-culturally located space of *negotiations about negotiation*.

### **Making sense of talk: Using links and recognising activities**

Talk was active but also contained ideas. I identified that I used the ways in which talk, in its various formations, can cluster around an anchor point, or link, as a useful focus for analysis of ideas. So when, as participants, we explored what the brands were attempting to 'be' in relation to an anchor points (e.g. masculinity), we drew on what we had experienced, or knew from others, particularly from institutionalised sources (identifiable positions – e.g. health) and positioned ourselves in relation to those things. In this way although the ads were the present focus the talk was identifiable as part of other wider conversations.

Attention to talk also offered multiple examples of talk as a social activity and as used to 'do' things. For example, attention was sought or attention deflected, tension created or moves made to reduce tensions. More mundanely boredom was expressed (by one or two less enthusiastic participants) and relieved with humour or tangential flows in the conversations. Moves were made to hold people to task, or even to constrain them to particular positions, or ways of being. It made me realise how much there is to explore through attention to talk around the dynamics of group processes.

There were multiple 'talk activities' taking place within the participant talk in this study; in fact there were far more than could be taken up in this one project. The present focus was on offering visibility to ways of engaging with particular texts. However, it is useful to briefly identify other activities that were taking place to

give a sense of the complex nature of what such research *can* engage with. During the early stages of analysis I loosely categorised activities of:

- Managing positions: there were different, expected, and unexpected devices used to attempt to maintain or challenge positions (those in the ads, of each other, of adults and so on). Activities of warrant, maintenance, interruption or challenge included appeals to logic, calls on experience or expertise (self or other), common sense, humour, surprise and emotion.
- Engaging in Bracketed Talk. In amongst the main talk there was what I would term 'bracketed talk' that flowed in and behind the main conversations, although engendered through them, but that then went on as an aside which obtained no wider responses but was interesting in its own right.
- Theories of things. Within the talk were strands or themes that could be identified as derived from specific broader 'discursive formations', not only about alcohol but also across the board, about humans, lives, how they are, and why they are that were fascinating on their own and had much to say about the positions of these youth.
- Pace. Pace varied tremendously. Talk would surge and be brisk and excited and then at times fall back almost languishing until a new and revitalising idea took hold. When things got faster much more co-construction of ideas went on.
- Testing. In the talk between participants that was either individual exploration of ideas or negotiation through ideas with others there seemed to be a process of working out taking place, a testing of themes, positions and ideas until something 'felt' appropriate or was to some extent agreed upon. In this way, some talk was clearly a building process between participants where each would contribute 'bits' as they literally put together an idea.
- Gendered talk. There was also, interestingly, talk that flowed in gendered chunks when young women or young men took over the talk for a noticeable period of the ongoing exchange whereas at other times talk was simply

exchanges across both. It was a rich, vivid and fascinating ebb and flow of pace, ideas, and engagements from a varied group of young people with very varied lives.

- Subjectivities were explored, taken up and refused.
- Shared re-calling was undertaken that amply demonstrated the idea of shared resonances that can meaningfully connect individual experiences (and save us from relativism). This nicely illustrative excerpt was taken from discussion around an unrelated ad:

**F2** No, no the saddest ad ever is like [here **F3** joins in and they both say in unison] 'the shoe one'...

**F3** Oh I hate that , I'm like, you're thinking, oh my god what a sweetie and oh, then.. I'm all fucking wanker and he does that and he gives her the tab.

**F2** I know, I think she looks all happy and she was like...uh [sharp intake of breath]...

**F3** But the way she looks so happy.. it makes me wanna cry.

**F2** [emotionally] I know.

**F3** 'Cause she loves him so much and he got her those shoes.

**F2** I know.

**F3** [really emotional] How happy would she have been?

**F3** I hate that ad 'cause I hate the sadness of it all. **(G3)**

This final exchange raises and engages with a point within discursive research debates. In (some) discursive literature much is made of the way talk is mutually constructed and of such polite manoeuvres as 'turn taking' that give conversations the metaphoric air of a dance, albeit one of some intricacy. In talk and in previous research I have conducted, I had recognised and make sense of such theoretical ideas as potentially 'visible' in practice. One *can* identify flows, tactical manoeuvres, and patterns. Yet in this research experience something far less structured often took place. By turn overlapping, interrupted, shared,

individual, co-operative, contested, supported, validated, and negotiated, the talk consisted of multiple flows, interruptions, crossovers, and disjunctions of themes and ideas produced individually and between and across people. Rather than co-constructions or co-productions in talk, when it came to the student groups there seemed to be both a series of individual workings and of people working together. These different activities occurred in overlapped surges and tangential outbursts rather than as a consistent individual or co-production. There was a sense of intensity and struggle going on rather than something orderly. That said, there were clearly moments where talk was quite smooth and literally co-constructed, and two or more people worked almost in harmony to set out a verbal representation of how something is, was, or might be.

Of course the student groups knew each other. Familiarity may have been responsible for both debates and easy verbal co-operation. Another difference could lie, once again, in that these people are young. The majority of reported studies tend to be from groups of adults. There may be issues about the ways in which younger people communicate and engage with communications; with less restraint when it comes to challenging the ideas of others and perhaps with less concreteness or attachment to their own positions. It may be that talk with a younger group is predisposed to be less mannered, more overlapping and more exploratory than that of an adult group. The students were not working with a researcher running the group.

Equally, familiar adult groups working without a researcher may produce less than mannered talk. Reporting and analysis of group talk in research usually attempts to create coherence around particular ideas and therefore avoids the 'messiness' that talk might actually represent. The highly complex nature of talk only becomes visible through the sort of research attention where space is deliberately created for messy-coherent-linked-diverging. Traditional approaches seek to stabilise, and judge, meanings or intent. From the analyses produced in this project I would argue that this stabilisation is not useful or appropriate. Interpretative stability is engendered through research.

## Communicating

Last words? It doesn't matter how good your stuff is if you can't communicate it effectively. Genius takes complex ideas and makes them simple and accessible. In my own head, discursive theory *is* brilliantly simple and accessible. Getting it out of my head is pretty hard. What I find toughest is writing accessibly – my *bête-noire*, and, I suspect, that of my poor supervisors. As an academic writer, indeed any sort of writer, I have a long way to go, but what I am working with around discursive theory *is* good stuff. I feel surer than ever that a discursive approach has something good to offer; I just have to find ever better ways to communicate how.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Scripts

### Script 2: Lion Red:

“Night on the Town” (2 minute TVC; 12 August 2002)

Background track: Bluesy, Mid-West, laid back and chilled. Open on the outskirts of a small North Island town. (Think: Helensville or Dargaville). The sun is beginning to set, as three guys lean up against an old farm fence by a rural bus stop. Across the road sit two crusty old Kiwi blokes. Behind them, the background of an old rusting red tin shed in a paddock.

**OLD BLOKE 1:** Where yous goin’....?

*The senior of the three, Barry, in a very casual drawl, calls back.*

**BARRY:** The ‘Smoke’.

**Ricky:** *(the Māori guy of similar age continues)* Few beers...check out the honeys’.

*The camera then moves to the youngest and most naïve of the three, Spud, who completes the dialogue with some enthusiasm.*

**SPUD:** .....Might even get lucky eh!!!

*The camera returns to the two old blokes. The older, who hasn’t moved and looks about 107, shows a look of confusion.*

**OLD BLOKE 2:** Huh???!

**OLD BLOKE 1:** The Trots....

**OLD BLOKE 2:** Oh....

*As the country bus pulls up between the old fogies and our 3 boys, the older of the 2 blokes calls out in a creaky old voice.*

**OLD BLOKE 2:** Last bus.....eleven.

*We dramatically cut to bright lights and big city; a busy, throbbing street (a mix of Ponsonby Road, K Road and Newmarket). We see our three guys almost doco-style, as they weave their way through the Friday night crowds. Spud, the youngest, stops continuously to check out various watering holes, but interest in any is immediately dampened by a very determined Barry who walks on ahead. For instance, in a series of quick cuts, we see Spud peering into an up-market, trendy café bar – which is met with an immediate, negative response from Barry.*

**BARRY:** Nah....

*We cut to another scene where Ricky and Spud read a blackboard menu which reads: Margaritas – 2 for 1. Again we hear Barry’s voice.*

**BARRY:** NO!

*We cut to the reflection of Barry looking at a sign ain a pub window that reads in lights: O’Rafferty’s Bar Diddly-Diddly Band tonight! Again we hear Barry’s all-too-familiar response.*

**BARRY:** NO!

*Another quick cut to Spud walking away from the door of a very suspect bar as he calls out to the other two.*

**SPUD:** All men....must be an RSA!

*This is met by disbelief from the other two, as they both look heavenward in response to Spud's naivety. Finally we see Barry and Ricky either side of Spud as they carry Spud out of an entrance of an exotic nightclub by his elbows. Spud, whose feet are some distance off the ground, protests.*

**SPUD:** But she was BEAUTIFUL! And I think her pet python liked me!

*At this, Barry takes on a fatherly tone, as he berates Spud in the busy street.*

**BARRY:** No beauty in shameless exploitation of a young woman's ability on an upright pole Spud!

*He then pauses and, slightly embarrassed, mutters as he turns to walk on:*

**BARRY:** "Besides....my sister works there an' they water the beer. Come on..."

*At this, both Spud and Rick give a look of surprise to each other, then eagerly follow. We now cut to all three guys, their backs to the camera, as they stare at a very inviting, classic inner city pub, Lion Red emblazoned against the ink black sky of a cold and wintry night. Inside, we can hear a full-on crowd, you can almost feel the heat and smell the beer. By the sounds of it, Karaoke night is in full swing. This is endorsed by a board leaning against the entrance announcing the fact. As the camera stays on the back of the three, pausing in adoration, we hear Barry mutter:*

**BARRY:** Never seen the Taj Mahal, but she comes damn close.

*To which Ricky mutters: "Yo blood..."*

*As we enter the doorway, we hear Barry mutter again: "How's your throat Spud?" We cut to the interior, where we see a near-capacity, full-on bar. Karaoke in full swing in one corner, a heaving crowd of all generations, and Lion Red being pumped at a furious pace, barely able to keep up with demand. Whilst all around is going off, there is a small, near-silent oasis in one corner of the bar, as we see three pristine, ice-cold handles of Lion Red in a row, awaiting consumption. Our three boys look down reverently at the vessels, momentarily pausing as if giving a mark of respect to the beer they are about to consume. As Barry at the end comments dryly but solemnly: "This is the nearest thing I've come to a religious experience....apart from that time with the Wanganui netball team..."*

*While Barry makes his comment, Spud can't help but notice the guy to his left quietly sipping on a RED. It is, in fact, Michael Hurst of Red-Blooded I, who briefly smiles in acknowledgement. Then, as the three savour their first gulps of Lion Red in complete unison, they are interrupted by a very colourful bar woman, who enquires over the din of the crowd:*

**BARWOMAN:** Fancy yourselves as Robbie Williams, boys....??

*The three start shaking their heads in mock shyness.*

**THREE TOGETHER:** "Naah..."

*All three then launch into a choreographed move a la "Top Gun" – they've obviously done this before. We then dramatically cut to all three, now in*

*different parts of the crowded bar. All now with individual mikes and each doing 'their bit' of the rap intro verse to the new version of 'Red Blooded' Then, as they get to the chorus, the whole bar joins in. As they sing we cut away to great shots of Lion Red being poured and served in extreme close up. As the guys really get going – each in a different parts of the crowded bar, we cut away to the following: The whole bar; male and female all, rhythmically moving their arms from left to right, hip hop style. Detail shots of some of the patrons, doco style and including some wonderful old and colourful characters! Cutaways of our three guys from earlier scenes (i.e. in a busy down town street) singing the song, perhaps even with bystanders (and the lady with the pet python!!!). Also, a cutaway two our two old codgers, still sitting on their seat out in the stick, their bodies subtly shimmying to the beat whilst the words red-blooded have now appeared on the red, corrugated shed behind them. We could also cut away to the driver of the country bus, as his shoulders move rhythmically to the song....rock clip style – all very up and full on! Intercut with the pumping music continuing into the night but at a quieter level, as we see an exterior shot of a cab motoring along a dark, lonely country road. Inside, we see Ricky and Spud taking up the back seat, arms laden with burgers and fries. In the front seat, Barry sits pulling out notes and coins from every pocket, his eyes darting down to the ever-increasing fare on the meter which has now moved from \$64 to \$65.*

**SPUD:** Awesome night eh?

**RICKY:** Whack Bro....whack....

*This is interrupted by Barry comments up front, who mutters: "Apart from that unfortunate incident with the lady and her pet snake!" We cut back to a close up of Spud still munching on his fries as he turns to Ricky and speaks under his breath.*

**SPUD:** Reckon it WAS his sister?

*We then cut to the exterior as the car disappears into the dark distance down the country road. We hear Ricky's reply as the Lion Red roundel appears bottom centre of screen.*

**RICKY:** Thought did cross my mind, Bro'.

## **Script 2: Speight's**

### **60 SECOND TVC "Mecca" (Revised : December 20, 2001)**

We open on two musterer's horses tied up outside the Speight's brewery in Dunedin. We clearly see the sign "Brewery Tours". The light is golden, giving the impression it's the last tour for the day. Cutting to interior, we see the huge, glistening copper brewing tuns. The light from the setting sun shines through highlighting the majesty of the tuns, as a tour party – the day's last – is being ushered out of the room. We hear the voice of the tour guide.

**Tour Guide:** Now, if you'll just follow me...

As they clear frame, we reveal our two musterers standing reverently staring up at the magnificent copper vessels, transfixed and completely unaware the tour party has moved on. The older man mutters unemotionally.

**Older man:** You're looking at the Eighth Wonder of the World, boy...and probably the Ninth.

**Younger man:** Reckon.

The younger man suddenly becomes aware that they are completely alone. As Frank stands gazing up at the copper vision, the young bloke wanders off to investigate. We cut to a high, wide shot: the older man is bathed in a shaft of golden light from one of the old brewery windows and dwarfed by the immense tun. He mutters to himself.

**Older man:** Times like this you feel humbled by yer own insignificance... His soliloquy is interrupted by the return of the younger man.

**Younger man:** Tour's gone...door's locked an' she doesn't open 'til Monday. We're trapped.

**Older man:** Some might say that, boy. Some might just say...(he gazes heavenward).....thank you.

**Younger man:** S'pose we could call for help.... Together they call out almost inaudibly and with little enthusiasm.

**Both:** Help. The younger man looks at his mentor.

**Younger man:** It's no good, mate. The older man responds dryly.

**Older man:** Dunno 'bout you, but all this yelling's left me fair parched.

With a knowing look, the young musterer responds with a nod of the head towards the Tasting Room door.

**Younger man:** Shall we?

**Older man :** Good on ya mate. Cut to a handsome pack shot.

**Voice Over:** Speight's. Pride of the South for a hundred and twenty five years. We briefly cut back to the two walking towards the clearly visible Tasting Room door. With echoes of the final scene in Casablanca, the older man comments

**Older man:** This could be the start of a whole new adventure, boy.

## Appendix 2: Information Sheets

### Information Sheet For Media Student Research Participants

**Project:** Alcohol advertising study of selected advertising texts.

**Researcher:** Jane Cherrington

**Research Supervisors:** Kerry Chamberlain of Massey University Psychology Department – Albany Campus. Joe Gixti of Massey University Cultural and Social Studies Department – Albany Campus.

**Contact Details:** Jane is able to be contacted on (09)3786909, or via e mail on [janecherrington@paradise.net.nz](mailto:janecherrington@paradise.net.nz)

Kerry Chamberlain is able to be contacted at Massey University, Albany on 443 9799 extension 9078 or via e mail on [K.Chamberlain@massey.ac.nz](mailto:K.Chamberlain@massey.ac.nz)

Joe Gixti is able to be contacted at Massey University, Albany on 443 9799 extension 9049 or via e mail at [J.A.Gixti@massey.ac.nz](mailto:J.A.Gixti@massey.ac.nz)

#### 1. The nature and purpose of the research:

This project is designed to consider whether the current approach of New Zealand alcohol advertising research is able to provide a sufficiently complex picture of why and how alcohol advertisements engage audiences. This is a three-part project. Part one is a review and critique of existing research, part two is a socio-cultural locating of the topic. These parts of the project are being done outside of the research you have been asked to participate in, but the results of the research you engage in will be considered within findings in these areas.

The third part of this research project is an attempt to map out a more complex understanding about the roles and processes of alcohol advertising than those that have been undertaken in New Zealand to date. This is the part of the study you have asked to be involved in. It is more complex than existing research because it brings in a greater range of perspectives – those of the producers of ads, those of potential audience members and that of an academic researcher. As a participant in the audience focused part of the study you will be asked to undertake a critical reading of New Zealand television alcohol-advertisements and to discuss your responses with your classmates. What can be read or interpreted as being present in a single advertisement varies between readers and there is no 'right' way to 'read' or feel about a text. This study is interested in the way readings might vary and in the way individual readers feel about and interpret different themes and messages they perceive as existing in the selected texts. The research for producers and students and the researchers own critique will be undertaken separately. Each set of research will be analysed and compared to look at how different groups 'see' ads differently. Because you as participants are being asked to be consciously critical this is a very active way of

watching ads. Such an involved way of watching will produce a much more complex response than a 'normal' reading by an individual watching a commercial. It is the research contention that this has the potential to make visible and articulate processes, themes and issues about advertising texts that current analytical process will not.

**What will be asked of participants:** You are being asked to read this information form and if you are comfortable with the information, the research and the conditions of the research, to sign a consent form that will be provided. As a participant you will be asked to do three things:

- 1) to look at videotape of alcohol advertising and to take notes about this before participating in a group discussion with classmates
- 2) to participate in an initial group session with classmates to critically discuss ads and how they 'work'
- 3) to attend a second group session next term, once the research analysis is complete, for feedback on the report produced from your work.

The initial research process will run for a maximum of two hours. The second group session next year will run for a maximum of one hour. The initial session will focus on the advertising. The second session will offer the opportunity for you to examine the way in which your participation has been written up by the researcher and to feedback on this. Attending each group will be other participants from your media studies class, your teacher and the researcher in attendance as a facilitator. The group times will fall within school hours. In the first group session there will be an initial discussion reiterating your rights as participants and checking understanding and questions or concerns about the research or the research process. Before looking at any ads you as participants will be invited to initially discuss your personal views and positions in relation to the research. This will include, if participants wish, the opportunity to put forward your values and identifications (e.g. of social roles, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and/or any other key self-identifiers) as you think they are important or useful to establishing your own personal context for the purposes of the research. All participants will have agreed to confidentiality of any information, you will determine what personal information you choose to provide and whether it can be used in the research. The session will be taped on audio-tape. You are able to ask for the tape to be switched off at any time. The researcher is the only person who will use the tapes and will transcribe them (write up what is said into text form). No names or other personal identifiers will be able to link you with the transcripts. Once transcription is completed tapes will be destroyed.

The objective on completion of the first session is for all participants to have given all feedback on their initial readings and then to have had a discussion by the group on their responses and key themes that they feel emerged for them individually and in common. The researcher's role will be to purely facilitate not to contribute to feedback at this stage. The process and discussion will be lead

by the participants, but if requested the researcher can offer some questions that may be used as prompts. A draft report will be produced from the feedback of the sessions. Prior to writing up of the final research report draft materials will be offered back to you to look at prior to the second meeting. In a second session after the Christmas break the researcher will seek active feedback on the way in which your experiences are presented in the draft report and obtain any additional feedback or comments to include in summary to the research, both about the research and about the research process.

**How the researcher obtained the participants' names to approach for the research:** You have been identified as a possible participant as a media studies student in sixth form within the school.

**How the research information will be used:** All feedback will be used to produce a research report on the topic. This report will be in the form of a thesis and submitted for assessment to Massey University via the research supervisors identified above. The thesis is examinable and contributes to a masters qualification. The report may be used at a later date by the researcher as a basis for further study or as the basis for articles to be submitted for publication to journals. All materials used in collecting information for the report including audio-tapes and notes will be destroyed by the researcher once transcripts are completed. Transcripts will be securely stored in the researcher's research materials archive and only accessible to the researcher. No further use will be made of the transcripts without the further permission of the participants.

### **The Rights of Participants**

All participants have the right to decline to participate

- All participants can refuse to answer any particular questions
- All participants can withdraw from the focus group at any time
- All participants can withdraw data obtained as their original contribution up to three weeks after the initial session (After this time it will not be identifiable by individual participant)
- All participants can ask questions about the study at any time during participation
- All participants will provide information on the understanding that no names will be used unless permission is given to do so to the researcher
- All participants will be given access to the summary findings of the study when the study is completed

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Regional Human Ethics Committee, Albany Campus, Protocol MUAHEC 02/017. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Margot Edwards, Acting Chair, Massey University Regional Human Ethics Committee, Albany, telephone 09 443 9799, email [M.F.Edwards@massey.ac.nz](mailto:M.F.Edwards@massey.ac.nz).

## Information Sheet For Advertising Agency Participants

**Project:** Alcohol advertising study of selected advertising texts.

**Researcher:** Jane Cherrington

**Research Supervisors:** Kerry Chamberlain of Massey University Psychology Department – Albany Campus. Joe Gixti of Massey University Cultural and Social Studies Department – Albany Campus.

**Contact Details:** Jane is able to be contacted on (09)3786909, or via e mail on [janecherrington@paradise.net.nz](mailto:janecherrington@paradise.net.nz)

- Kerry Chamberlain is able to be contacted at Massey University, Albany on 443 9799 on extension 9078 or via e mail on [K.Chamberlain@massey.ac.nz](mailto:K.Chamberlain@massey.ac.nz)

- Joe Gixti is able to be contacted at Massey University, Albany on 443 9799 on extension 9049 or via e mail at [J.A.Gixti@massey.ac.nz](mailto:J.A.Gixti@massey.ac.nz)

### 2. The nature and purpose of the research:

This project is designed to consider whether the current approach of New Zealand alcohol advertising research is able to provide a sufficiently complex picture of why and how alcohol advertisements engage audiences. This is a three-part project. Part one is a review and critique of existing research, part two is a socio-cultural locating of the topic. These parts of the project are being done outside of the research you have been asked to participate in, but the results of the research you engage in will be considered within findings in these areas.

The third level of this research project is an attempt to map out a more complex understanding about the roles and processes of alcohol advertising than those that have been undertaken in New Zealand to date. This is the part of the study you have asked to be involved in. It is more complex than existing research because it brings in a greater range of perspectives – those of the producers of ads, those of potential audience members and that of an academic researcher. In this part of the study you will be asked to critically review selected television alcohol-advertising campaigns you have produced. What can be critically reflected on as being present in any single advertisement varies and there is no 'right' way to reflect on or feel about a text. This study is interested in the way reflection might vary and in the way individuals feel about and interpret different themes and messages they perceive as existing in advertisements.

The research for producers and students and the researchers own critique will be undertaken separately. Each set of research will be analysed and compared to look at how different groups 'see' ads differently. Because you are being asked to critically reflect on your own work this may produce a much more complex response than a 'normal' reading by you would. It is the research contention that it is this that has the potential to make visible and articulate processes, themes and issues about advertising texts that current analytical process will not.

For an audience perspective, research will be with a group of people immediately beneath the legal drinking age who have some experience of critically analysing texts. The reason for working with people who are not legally able to drink is that a key critique of alcohol advertisements has been that they must act to recruit new generations of drinkers. Despite this critique little work has been done around finding out how these texts are communicating to people below the legal drinking age or about how young people are responding to ads from within the context of their lived experiences. This research is a move towards asking about that. Hopefully this research participation will form a useful addition to your own work and assist in informing your own critical awareness of the roles and processes of your work.

**What will be asked of participants:** You as participants will be asked to read this information form and, if comfortable with the information and the research, to sign a consent form that will be provided. You will be asked to attend two group sessions. Prior to the research you will be advised of the selection of the alcohol advertising determined as the focus for the research. You will be asked to review the advertising and the initial client brief behind the work prior to the research, in order to enable recent familiarisation with the materials and the generation of ideas and issues to bring to the first session. The first session will run for approximately two hours. The second session will run for approximately one hour. The initial session will focus on the advertising. The second session will offer the opportunity for you as participants to examine the way in which your participation has been written up by the researcher and to give feedback on this. Attending each group will be the other key participants in the production process of the commercials – including the writer, art director and account director. The researcher will be in attendance as a facilitator. Times for the groups will be negotiated to suit you and your agency. The initial group session will be conducted as a feedback and discussion session about the advertising for participants. You will be asked to determine the process you prefer for providing feedback in the session. This will mean identifying the structure that you would like the group work to take. There will be an initial discussion reiterating your rights as participants and checking understanding and questions or concerns about the research or the research process. You will be invited to initially discuss your personal positions, values and identifications (e.g. of social roles, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and any other key self-identifiers) as you deem important and/or useful to establishing your own socio-cultural context for the purposes of the research. You will determine what of this personal information can be used in the research. The session will be taped on audio-tape. You can request the tape be turned off at any time. The objective on completion of the session is for all participants to have given all feedback on their initial readings of the advertisements and then to have had a discussion by the group on their responses and key themes that they feel emerged for them, individually and in common. The researcher's role will be to purely facilitate not to contribute to feedback at this stage. Although the process and discussion will be lead by the participants if desired there are questions that may be used as prompts. A draft

report will be produced from the feedback of the sessions. Prior to writing up of the final research report, draft materials will be offered back to you for review. In a second session the researcher will seek active feedback on the way in which you individual experiences are presented and obtain any additional feedback or comments to include in summary to the research, both about the research and about the research process.

**How the researcher obtained the participants' names to approach for the research:** Participants will be identified as the creative team that worked on the selected advertising campaigns for their agency.

**How the research information will be used:** All feedback will be used to produce a research report on the topic. This report will be in the form of a thesis and submitted for assessment to Massey University via the research supervisors identified above. The thesis will be examinable and contribute to a masters qualification. The report may be used at a later date by the researcher as a basis for further study or as the basis for articles to be submitted for publication to journals. All materials used in collecting information for the report including audio-tapes and notes will be destroyed once transcripts are completed. Transcripts will be securely stored in the researcher's research materials archive. No further use will be made of the transcripts without the further permission of the participants.

### **The Rights of Participants**

- All participants have the right to decline to participate
- All participants can refuse to answer any particular questions
- All participants can withdraw from the focus group at any time
- All participants can withdraw data obtained as their original contribution up to three weeks after the initial session (After this time it will not be identifiable by individual participant)
- All participants can ask questions about the study at any time during participation
- All participants will provide information on the understanding that no names will be used unless permission is given to do so to the researcher
- All participants will be given access to the summary findings of the study when the study is completed

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Regional Human Ethics Committee, Albany Campus, Protocol MUAHEC 02/017. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Margot Edwards, Acting Chair, Massey University Regional Human Ethics Committee, Albany, telephone 09 443 9799, email [M.F.Edwards@massey.ac.nz](mailto:M.F.Edwards@massey.ac.nz).

### Appendix 3: Consent Form

I have read the information sheet and have had the details of the study fully explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions *at any time*.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will not be used without my permission. (This research will only be used for this research and publications arising from this research project.)

I agree to keep any personal discussions held in any group sessions confidential. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the information sheet.

**Signed:** .....

**Name:** .....

**Date:** .....

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Regional Human Ethics Committee, Albany Campus, Protocol MUAHEC 02/017. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Margot Edwards, Acting Chair, Massey University Regional Human Ethics Committee, Albany, telephone 09 443 9799, email [M.F.Edwards@massey.ac.nz](mailto:M.F.Edwards@massey.ac.nz).