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**Drunk Feminine Bodies:**  
**An Exploration of Young Women's Embodied**  
**Experiences of Intoxication**

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## **Abstract**

Young women's frequent heavy drinking in New Zealand has increased substantially in recent years and is one of the country's leading health problems. Theorising drinking as an embodied experience bound up in social relationships offers valuable insights into the maintenance of this behaviour. This research utilised a theory of embodiment to better understand the physical pleasures and sensations involved in becoming drunk, and how experiences of being a physical body are intertwined with the social environment while drinking to intoxication. Five friendship discussion groups were conducted in Wellington and Dunedin with 23 women aged 19-26, and were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis revealed that the women's accounts of their drinking were highly contradictory, and two major contradictions were identified which demonstrated how the women negotiated different performances of femininity while drinking. Firstly, there was a strong emphasis on being heterosexually attractive in the discussions, which contradicted the idea that getting drunk allowed them to forget other people's judgements. Secondly, the importance of sharing the pleasure of drinking with friends was contradicted by descriptions of drunkenness as embodied and individual. The women also described two intricate and precarious 'balancing acts' they engaged in when drinking heavily. They discussed balancing between performances of acceptable feminine behaviour and risking 'looking tragic' when drinking to intoxication. Managing the physical effects of drinking heavily so as not to appear 'tragic', or have a hangover was also described as a well-learned balancing act, which the women were expected to expertly perform following years of training. This research offers valuable and novel insights into the social and embodied aspects of drinking that maintain young women's heavy drinking. It extends on previous research into the gendered nature of drinking practices and the embodied experience of intoxication, and how this assists in decisions to stop or slow drinking, and highlights the importance of understanding drinking from an embodied, gendered and social perspective. The findings could contribute to the establishment of more effective approaches to changing young women's harmful drinking practices.



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