

## DISCOURSES OF CONSUMER'S ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION: RESISTANCE TO 'ALL OR NOTHING'

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### RESISTANCE

*"I don't need to get drunk to have a good time... alcohol is just not part of MY life. But it is for many other people and that is the problem. Alcohol is a vital a part of how we interact with our friends, how we socialise, how we meet people... getting drunk is what people do! It's just there; always surrounding us." (Bonnie; 23 years)*

- Ubiquitous nature of alcohol in society
- Alcohol as an object & consumption practice
- Alcohol as integral to building social relationships
  
- Bonnie illustrates:
  - Resistance against dominant norm of intoxication
  - Resistance to alcohol as an object & process of socialisation/identity creation

## TOWARDS 'SENSIBLE DRINKING CULTURES'

- Quantitative, epidemiological methodologies
    - Alcohol related harm & risky drinker
    - Valuable for mapping degree & scope of alcohol problems
  - Policy articulation of 'sensible drinking cultures'
    - UK & Australia
  - Limited socio-cultural research – esp. Australian that
    - Describes a **particular group's drinking** behaviour while placing it within the context of **values and norms** which direct the group and **give its actions meaning**"
    - Controlled loss of control, bounded hedonism, new culture of intoxication
      - Brain 2000, Griffin & Szmigin 2008, Measham 2004, 2006
      - Parker et al 1998, 2007, Measham & Brain 2005
      - Nairn et al 2006; Piancentini & Banister 2006
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## STUDY OBJECTIVES

- 'how do young people engage with alcohol – or not!'
    - **Risky drinkers, non-drinkers, responsible drinkers**
  - Constructions of identity & relationship to alcohol
    - Meaning of alcohol to self/group/society
  - Understand cultural influences of young people's drinking as an explanation of 'how young people engage with alcohol'
  - Method & Sample
    - Qualitative – narrative method
    - Australia – SE QLD
    - Young adults - 18-24 years
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## DRINKING TO BELONG

*'I find if I'm not drunk then I kind of feel a bit out of it and I'm not as inclined to get up and dance ... I'm just not on the same level so I feel a bit left out ... I want to have a few more drinks so I can catch up.'* (Female, uni)

*'Going to nightclubs and not drinking is crap... I've done it as a designated driver .. but never again... being drunk is about being with others... having a good time that's where you want to be.. not drinking is not having a good time.'* (Male, worker).



## DRINKING TO BELONG

- 'Alcohol is my friend'
  - Sociality of drinking
    - Good times; Celebration
    - Pass time, '*something to do*', alleviate boredom
    - 'altered state of being', search for psychoactive pleasure, 'all or nothing'
- Functionality of alcohol
  - Connectedness – technology enabled
  - Pursuit of symbolic pleasure
  - Not missing out .... '*being in the action*'
  - '*who doesn't drink*'
- Degrees of intoxication
  - distinction between pleasurable intoxication and annihilated intoxication;
  - implies a sense of calculated hedonism with varying degrees of controlled loss of control
  - Managing intoxication is a planned event
- *Rather than a form of 'let it all out' experience and total abandon, young people's pursuit of alcohol pleasure is a **rational, calculated and strategically managed process***



## BELONGINGNESS

- Important commodity determining 'in-groups' / 'out-groups'
  - For identities to be intelligible to others people must gain recognition and validation from others (Butler, 2004)
  - Interaction with vast array of symbolic and cultural resources of contemporary culture facilitates construction of the 'possible self'
    - *Accoutrements of use & competence of behaviours* lay the foundations & ascriptions of identity
    - Consumption ritual – *repeated performances* enables the individual to validate their identity position
    - *Connectedness* of groups within the night time environment
- Peer pressure to drink
  - Inclusion vs social exclusion
  - non-drinkers perceived as '*not cool*'; *missing out on ....*'THE FUN'

## BELONGINGNESS???

### ABSTAINERS – SENSIBLE DRINKERS

- Cognisant not part of mainstream where drinking to get drunk is the norm
  - separateness
- Decision to drink sensibly influenced by their perception of positive/negative consequences derived from consumption practices
  - not vomiting, not having a hangover, operating clearly the next day
  - saving oneself; being responsible; being a good citizen
  - found it difficult not to be judgemental towards those to drink to excess
  - Visual representation of the drunken body as object (Nairn et al 2006)
- Strong sense of not being '*like those who go out and just get drunk*'
  - classification as different, as an out-group

## DEGREES OF BELONGINGNESS ABSTAINERS – SENSIBLE DRINKERS

*'I avoid all interaction with night time entertainment... it just gets boring when people drink, get drunk and do stupid things. I like to engage in experiences with people' (Female)*

*'when I decide not to drink I do feel ... Not part of the action.. But it is MY choice.. I do notice that I tend not to stay out as late as I would when I'm drinking'  
(female)*



## NEGOTIATING THE INTOXICATED ENVIRONMENT: INTEGRATING, BUT NOT! ABSTAINERS – SENSIBLE DRINKERS

*'When people realise I'm not drinking they look stunned...can't believe it. We always get into a bit of an argument but finally they realise I really don't want to drink... more importantly they accept that I don't drink. That's not to say they don't try to get me to drink...'* (Male)

*'So long as you're holding something that looks like it should hold alcohol... I usually just fill a glass of wine with soda and no-one knows it's not alcohol!'* (Female)

- Integrate with alcohol / without alcohol
- Accoutrements of use - 'The rouse'
  - Signifies membership, but not
  - Enables a veil of invisibility



## ALCOHOL & GENDER

*'seeking pleasure .. Just having some fun...  
What's the issue'.. Like it's what you do ...ya just get out of  
it all the time' (female, 20 years)*

*'it's a turn off .. Girls throwing up in the gutter.. Looking  
skanky... Acting feral...*

- 'Ladette' consumption
  - Women transgressing their alcohol consumption
  - 'nice' vs 'having fun', 'rebelliousness', 'slut', 'nудie' persona
- Moral panic vs dominant construction of femininity



## MARKETING, MEDIA & ABSTINENCE

- FebFast – Australia
  - FebFast challenges ordinary Australians to forgo their alcohol consumption during the shortest month of the year
  - raises funds to support programs helping to reduce alcohol and other drug related harms amongst young people.
  - 'creating a space for change'
    - Creating a community, Shared experiences
  - Awareness that **'drinking less' can make more of life**



## IMPLICATIONS

- Moving towards a model of 'moderation'
    - Policy articulation – safer drinking cultures
    - Research
    - Relevance and innovativeness
  - Examine the social reality of those who choose *not to consume* and those who choose to *moderate* their consumption of alcohol
  - Responsible, sensible, moderate drinking
    - Meaning to young people???
    - Standard drink knowledge???
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## IMPLICATIONS

- Creating contextual meaning
    - socio-cultural methodology unearth 'meanings'
    - 'created value'
  - Consider alcohol as a commodity & drunkenness as a practice as particular meaning within contemporary culture, especially among young people
  - Consumption to anti-consumption (Hyman, 2010)
    - Those who resist, defy, go against consumption
    - *'Anti-consumption does not preclude consumption, that the two phenomena must surely co-exist and that the reasons people have for going 'against consumption' are just as interesting as the reasons they have for consumption'*
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