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
    - Nairn et al 2006; Piancentini & Banister 2006

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
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 abject (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

- 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???

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’