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– ARTICLE –

YOUNG ADULT DRINKING CULTURES IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

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ABSTRACT

Consuming alcohol is a commonplace leisure-time activity among young people in Aotearoa New Zealand but so far there have been few concerted efforts to describe these drinking cultures. While there are certain similarities to western European alcohol consumption, our particular societal cultural configuration means that patterns here differ. The current study employed in-depth qualitative methods to explore micro-cultures of young people's drinking using thematic analyses of focus group data from Māori, Pasifika and Pākehā[1].

We found strong convergence across ethnic groups in terms of the importance of alcohol to social life, but differences in the meanings attached to drinking and intoxication. For Pākehā participants, these were positively naturalised behaviours that were rarely questioned. For Māori and Pasifika participants, drinking was seen as more transgressive and problematic, perhaps reflecting the scrutiny they face living in our society. Findings provide new insights into both the detail of young people's drinking cultures and within-population cultural specificities that have important implications for policy and public health.

Keywords: young people; ethnicity; alcohol; drinking cultures

INTRODUCTION

In Aotearoa New Zealand and similar societies, there is growing disquiet about the damaging effects of alcohol on the health and safety of young people in particular. While the difficulties are in no way restricted to young people, with alcohol causing problems across the life-course by gender, ethnicity and class, in the public domain media stories about youth drinking behaviours are com-

monplace. They signal national reflection on the deaths, injuries and social discord arising from routine alcohol use among younger people.

The New Zealand Law Commission (2010) report on alcohol and society noted deregulation around alcohol over the last two decades that liberalised licensing, sale, marketing and age of access, has exacerbated the damage. There was a 9% per capita increase in the sale of alcohol in the 10 years to 2008 and estimates of $85m are given for the weekly spend. The report called for a 'paradigm shift' (New Zealand Law Commission 2010, 5) from the current regime, using new law to raise alcohol prices, regulate promotion, restore the legal age of purchase to 20 years, reduce opening hours, strengthen liquor licensing and improve treatment provisions. Perhaps unsurprisingly, despite being subject to a conscience vote, the recommendations were subsequently rejected by parliament with National, Labour and Green party MPs voting them down (Davison and Trevett 2012).

In the global setting, young people are shown to drink to intoxication more frequently than older drinkers (Babor *et al*. 2010); this is most likely in countries that have changed alcohol policy to enhance access to alcohol (Huckle, Pledger, and Casswell 2012, Measham and Brain 2005). Harms from alcohol account for 4.6% of the global burden of disease and more than a third of the life-course burden occurs between the ages of 15 and 29 years (Rehm *et al*. 2009). Acute damage from alcohol use includes alcohol poisoning, violence, injury and absenteeism while chronic problems centre on organ system damage, diabetes, cancers, addiction and dementia (Babor *et al*. 2010).

The complexity of reducing consumption and its social and economic consequences is reflected in a broad, detailed alcohol control literature, but also in the commercial and public resistance to change and represents a key challenge for public health.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

In this country young people in all their diversity meet, mingle and interact in schools, workplaces, sports and other social domains, but their life chances, experiences and relationships are structured by fundamental differences in social inclusion and exclusion. In this nominally bicultural democracy, patterns of privilege and discrimination favouring European settler populations are inscribed on contemporary social orders (Spoonley, Macpherson, and Pearson 2004) at the expense of indigenous and immigrant cultures. Commitments on indigenous sovereignty guaranteed by the Treaty of Waitangi have been

severely breached and minimally redressed, leaving deep divisions between Māori and Pākehā (Walker 2004). Life expectancy data show a current gap of 7.3 years between Māori and Pākehā and slightly smaller discrepancies between Pasifika and Pākehā (Statistics New Zealand 2013). While women live longer than men, they earn less and are subject to harassment and sexual violence (Ministry of Social Development 2010). Narratives of national identity stress unity, but there are ethnic, gender and class disparities in health, education and socioeconomic status that are deeply entrenched (Ministry of Social Development 2010).

Given these circumstances it would be surprising not to find marks of these wider power relations inscribed in patterns of alcohol use and experience. The ways in which people drink across different ethnic groups within this country show convergences and differences. A national survey found that Pākehā were more likely to drink every day than either Māori or Pasifika people, while Māori and Pasifika were more likely to consume a large quantity of alcohol within any typical drinking occasion. These differences appear less marked as drinking behaviours converge among the younger age bands (Ministry of Health 2009).

YOUNG PEOPLE AND DRINKING IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

Evidence suggests that levels of consumption among young people may be trending upwards (Huckle, You, and Casswell 2011). Huckle, Pledger and Casswell (2012) showed that from 1990–2000 increases in alcohol consumed and problems experienced were most extreme in the younger age bands surveyed. According to the National Alcohol and Drug Use Survey (Ministry of Health 2009), more than four-fifths of all 18–24 year olds consumed enough to feel drunk at least once in the past 12 months (no significant gender difference) while a third of males and fifth of females consumed enough to feel drunk at least once a week. In similar proportions, females and males engaged in risky practices (driving, work, machinery) while drunk, and experienced harms from alcohol in friendships, home-life, injury, absenteeism and financial position. Most young adult drinking occurred at home.

Since the purchase age was lowered from 20 to 18 in 1999, there have also been rapid rises in disorder arrests, excess breath alcohol and drink-driving crashes (Huckle, Pledger, and Casswell 2006), particularly among young people. When we examine these findings in more detail we find that Māori, Pasifika and those from impoverished neighbourhoods were more likely to experience higher levels of harm.

Studies with tertiary students living in halls of residence have also demonstrated that up to two thirds consume alcohol at hazardous levels, including drinking to intoxication weekly (Kypri *et al.* 2002, Kypri *et al.* 2009, McEwan, Swain, and Campbell 2011). Kypri *et al.* (2009) reported that Pākehā students were significantly more likely to have engaged in heavy drinking in the past week, than other ethnicities. Participants described a range of alcohol-related harms over a four-week period, including blackouts (33%), drink-driving (10%), unprotected sex (6%) and aggression (5%).

Together these findings quantify drinking and consequences, pointing to associations between consumption and harm, but tell us little about the experiences, meanings and, indeed, cultures within which they occur. Research that explores the experiential and social dimensions of alcohol consumption by young people is needed to add to the knowledge gained from survey work. Some qualitative research has highlighted that young people here view their frequent heavy drinking practices as normal, pleasurable, sociable and having a good time (Hutton 2012, Lyons and Willott 2008, McEwan, Swain, and Campbell 2011). Consistent with international evidence (de Visser and McDonnell 2012, Griffin *et al.* 2013, Peralta 2007) local research has demonstrated that young people engage in particular drinking practices to perform and maintain desired gender identities (Kraack 1999, Lyons and Willott 2008, Willott and Lyons 2012). Young women in both New Zealand and the UK tend to engage in drinking practices to demonstrate they are empowered, pleasure-seeking, independent and responsible. They also limit or control their drinking behaviours and alcohol consumption so as not to breach traditional feminine boundaries to avoid being viewed as bad, promiscuous or too masculine (Griffin *et al.* 2013, Lyons and Willott 2008, Rúdólfsdóttir and Morgan 2009). Men were more likely to use public drinking to demonstrate 'hegemonic masculinity' although in urban settings they show some variation with employment and class (Willott and Lyons 2012). This research has been conducted with primarily Pākehā participants and there has been little work that has explored how meanings, understandings, pleasures, and perceptions around alcohol consumption might vary across ethnic groups, or at the intersections between ethnicity and gender.

Research indicates that we might expect shared meanings and motivations around drinking practices in young adults across ethnic groups given the globalising nature of what has been termed a culture of intoxication (Järvinen and Room 2007, Measham and Brain 2005) in Western countries. This is characterised as entailing widespread determined drunkenness (Measham 2006) and routine hedonistic practices around 'controlled loss of control' (Measham

and Brain 2005, 273). It is supported by peer approval, pro-drinking meaning-making and lively discourses around extreme intoxication that circulate as marks of honour within peer-groups (Griffin *et al.* 2009, Szmigin *et al.* 2008). Survey data show that consumption patterns of young people in Aotearoa New Zealand are broadly in line with notions of a culture of intoxication, and with international findings from similar societies (Babor *et al.* 2010, Järvinen and Room 2007, Rehm *et al.* 2009, Wicki, Kuntsche, and Gmel 2010). However, we currently do not know whether the meanings and understandings of these ways of consuming alcohol are similar across young people socialising within different ethnic groups, or whether there are substantial differences, tensions, resistances or alternatives that appear when we explicitly explore in-depth meanings of drinking within young Māori, Pasifika and Pākehā people.

The aim of the current paper was to gain in-depth insight into the meanings of alcohol consumption and drinking patterns among young people within these ethnic groups. We were interested in both similarities and differences across ethnic groups, but also in the ways in which gender might interact with ethnicity to affect meanings and practices. In framing this research, we drew on a schema outlined by Gordon, Heim and MacAskill (2012) following a review of research on drinking patterns, motivations and cultures from five western European countries. The three dimensions of their schema include *hedonism,* namely the meanings, frequency and level of consumption around intoxication; *function*, the psychosocial drivers of drinking such as peer-group values, ritual and everyday practices; and also *control*, which is the regulatory, social and normative restrictions on alcohol use. Gordon, Heim and MacAskill (2012) suggest that drinking cultures can be conceptualised as flexibly manifest within a context-dependent, dynamic tension between the motivations of hedonism and function and the restraints of control, offering a widely applicable framework for understanding contemporary drinking. We employed this framework to explore where our three ethnic groups converged in their drinking practices and their meanings, as well as where variations occurred, while also attending to gender as a key analytic concept.

METHODS

With ethical approval from Massey University Human Ethics Committee, and informed by the cultural, gender and socioeconomic insights from the alcohol literatures, we recruited from diverse social strata in a mix of rural towns, provincial centres and major cities in the North Island. We assembled 34 focus groups (n=141) through word-of-mouth snowballing techniques, with a target person from within wide networks of the research team, inviting friends to

participate. Selection was naturalistic, reflecting actual friendships, and purposive in that we sought socioeconomic diversity, similar numbers of groups by ethnicity and a broad balance of genders. All participants were aged between 18–25 years (M=20) and included 80 female (57%), 57 male (40%), and 4 Fa'afafine[2] participants (3%).

Groups ranged mainly between three and seven participants and consisted of twelve with predominantly Pākehā participants (4 all-female, 4 all-male, 4 mixed), twelve with predominantly Māori participants (2 all-female, 1 all-male, 9 mixed), and ten with predominantly Pasifika participants (3 all-female, 2 all-male, and 5 mixed).

Discussions took place in a range of locations, including homes, workplaces, and community rooms, and lasted approximately 1–2 hours. Interviews were conducted by three female researchers, ethnically-matched to the cultural composition of the groups, who used a shared interview guide of discussion topics to elicit spontaneous, rich, 'thick' experiential data around participants' alcohol use. Groups were asked about socializing, alcohol consumption and social media use, in flexible ways, encouraging free-flowing discussion on topics to emerge. Discussions were videotaped then transcribed verbatim using pseudonyms to protect identity. Transcripts were coded selecting all references to alcohol, drinks, drinking, partying, clubbing, nights out and similar terminology by TM, then discussed and the coding revised following input from all team members. We used inductive and interpretative approaches to develop thematic descriptions that we illustrated with key data excerpts (Braun and Clarke 2012).

DATA/FINDINGS

We report our findings using Gordon, Heim and MacAskill's (2012) framework of hedonism, function and control. We acknowledge that reporting in this way is at one level an analytic artefact, since, in use, the patterns overlap to create apparently seamless hegemonic forms that range freely across these dimensions. Yet the framework helps in examining patterns by ethnicity and gender, while retaining the nuance and complexity of the data.

Hedonism

There were clear convergences across ethnic groups and genders in descriptions of regular and routine alcohol consumption with a focus on drinking to intoxication, although some variations existed in the frequency of this and

whether it was characterised as problematic in any way. Participants from all ethnic groups provided detailed accounts of situations and contexts in which the implicit or explicit purpose of drinking was intoxication, though this pattern was often rendered as past practice or what other people do. Such narratives were most common within Pākehā groups, with Māori and Pasifika discussions less frequent and more circumscribed. Talk centred on forms of determined drunkenness, as well as discussions of drinking practices that provide useful insights about frequency and quantities of consumption. For example, one group of two Pākehā professional women and a fulltime truck driver in a large provincial centre, characterise the start of a big night out in the following excerpt:

> *Andy*: Usually you get home and someone's drinking already on their own and then like, yeah grab a drink, yeah. It's like the music's going and it's like 'yeah we're drinking tonight.' [laughs] All of us.
>
> *Beth*: Like 'shall we do something, it's Friday. Let's all drink together.'
>
> *Andy*: Yeah or like 'shall we go out for a meal and a feed and…'
>
> *Cathy*: That's like what I like about you Andy. You set the atmosphere. [Andy laughs] Music's on and you're already like half-pissed and I'm like yes! [hits couch arm] I'm getting a glass of wine [hits her knee] It is all go.'
>
> Pākehā FG11

As Cathy notes, Andy catalyses moves toward a night of drinking, responding to cues of music or the drinking of others, articulating the plan and the collective nature of the practice. The phrase 'yeah we're drinking tonight' is a script that seems to evoke familiar practices, people, locations and instances that enable excited anticipation. Andy gains support from Beth who elaborates options with him before Cathy, following their lead, projects her own engagement and distills the abandonment of restraint in the phrase 'it's all go'. This active co-construction, complete with gesture, positionings, and shared narration, evocatively captures the enjoyable dynamics of a located, embodied drinking culture. The interview continues, providing multiple accounts of heavy drinking occasions that follow from such beginnings, where intoxication as a pleasure in its own right is a celebrated central theme, while problems, such as hangovers, blackouts, vomiting, minor accidents and social tensions within the group are downplayed or minimised.

Other narratives of hedonism speak of seeking an experience of embodied inebriation within a group. For example, in the extract below three Tongan/Samoan male performing arts students and one female (Fakaleiti) actor/model discuss the imperative of 'the buzz' (Niland *et al*. 2013, 530).

> *Atamai*: Before getting on the buzz, [problems are] the last thing that comes to our head
>
> *Leon*: You never ever plan that
>
> *Atamai*: Like you never think about the bad things 'OMG I can't wait to get wasted I can't wait to get on a buzz' and then shit happens. Next weekend 'OMGosh I can't wait to get wasted'. It's just the cycle starts all over again. It's that buzz, it's the feeling of not, what's the, WTF [what the fuck] or FTW [fuck the world]
>
> *Leon*: F the world
>
> *Atamai*: Yeah, it's just getting on that buzz, you just care less
>
> Pasifika FG10

Atamai characterises the drive to intoxication, highlighting the way in which the negative aspects of the experience of being 'wasted' are rendered invisible or insignificant by the anticipation of getting drunk, minimizing the chance of moderating the weekly cycle. With Leon's support she elaborates that beyond the desired sensations of intoxication there is an attitude that is expressed as both indifference and defiance that helps to explain how easily the problems and 'bad things' that attend intoxication are so easily discounted. If a person doesn't care about the risks ('WTF') or determinedly engages with them ('FTW') in a way that enacts or reinforces choices about how they are in the world, then the contradictions that surround intoxication from societal norms are of little salience to decisions to drink.

Although participants across all groups described the 'buzz' and the pleasures involved in drinking to intoxication, there were similarly many accounts of what would appear to be extremely negative effects of heavy drinking practices. For example, within a mixed-gender Māori group, participants described in detail consequences of heavy drinking:

> *Krystal*: Yeah there was this one time like I had been on game the

> whole night this was like I had my bottle of tequila and shit and I was going hard and woke up and then there were like I put, I must have blanked out …woke up at like 5am the next morning everyone had come in and I am lying there and I had puked and I am lying in it, I have only got like one shoe on and like
>
> *Tui*: yeah man that's the thing aye at the hostel they just um they just there is no stopping they just keep going til you actually physically can't go anymore which is pretty bad when you think about it
>
> Māori FG12

This extract has much in common with other similar accounts across ethnic groups. 'Going hard' is, as Tui elaborates, drinking until physiological shut-down occurs, while Krystal reports the harms of this intoxication – blackout, vomiting, and humiliation. Despite Tui's observation that the drinking occurs within a nominally collective culture of the hostel, Krystal was abandoned and her plight was not realised until early the next morning. This example highlights the inherent dangers of such loss of control, undercutting the hedonistic reasonings provided for such drinking. A similar kind of determined drunkenness was also articulated in the following excerpt from a group of Pākehā mothers in a school-parenting unit in a small town:

> *Leah*: Some nights I just get that pissed that I can't walk properly and I can't, I don't know, I don't remember what I've done the next day and stuff like that. But my friend's like 'you've done stupid things' and I'm like 'oh well I just got it out of my system'.
>
> Pākehā FG3

Leah's account notes consequences of such drinking such as trouble walking, remembering and other unnamed markers of drunkenness which are criticised in the reported comment from her friend. The negative judgment ('you've done stupid things') is rejected in favour of a rationale that elsewhere in the transcript she named as 'venting' – using intoxication as respite from her life circumstances – presenting something of a departure from alcohol use as simply hedonistic. This emotional unloading, where accountability for social dis-inhibition is minimised through reference to intoxication, was claimed and endorsed as periodically beneficial by others in the group. Other groups spoke of intoxication as a salve for tension, disappointment or sadness, or to mark the end of the working week and the start of two days off. Particular occasions

such as the completion of examinations or a work-contract were also seen as appropriate times for heavy consumption. Such accounts were often nuanced with an idea that while these practices had been characteristic early in their drinking careers, current drinking was more modulated with other drinking styles that were oriented to social function.

Participants provided contextual insights into the hedonistic drivers of their drinking practices through their talk about the quantities they drink and the frequencies of these practices. A group of Pākehā men in a small town provided a drinking timetable that, while emphasizing events around weekends, actually included every day of the week. Some Māori participants commented that their experience in university hostels was of parties 'every night' and events like 'what-the-fuck Wednesday' (a reason for drinking when there was no actual occasion). In the following excerpt a Tongan man, in a mixed-Pasifika group of health workers in a provincial city, described a style of drinking linked to time of the year:

> *Sam*: We used to bloody drink hard! We'd start two weeks before Christmas, finish March – every single day, cos it'd be party after party after party! Wake up and randoms in the house – 'Eh, who are you?'
>
> Pasifika FG6

Here, Sam provides a history, where the combination of the time span and the frequency, sum to an unremitting alcohol lifestyle where drinking events run into each other in a continuous chain. While he does not provide details of amounts consumed, the depiction of strangers sleeping off their intoxication in the participant's home may be seen as an indicator.

There was broad consensus across ethnicity and gender, that two or three drinking occasions per week was commonplace. The combination of weekday, domestic consumption in the evening with weekend nights 'out' where intoxication was a focus, was a clear and widespread pattern. Participants were adept at reporting the quantity and mix of drinks that they consumed. Some gave details on strength and 'fit-to-purpose' of particular choices they made to produce desired levels of intoxication. In relation to beer and pre-mixes, broad measures were by box-per-person while wine and spirits were described primarily in terms of bottles, with alcohol concentration factored into estimates. A kind of 'alcohol accountancy' evident here is calibrated to personal experience but in many instances the claims about the amounts consumed are large. For

example, a Pākehā woman in a group of professionals in a major city described her consumption as follows:

> *Pam*: I think my biggest nights I would have had probably a bottle of wine, then I would have had maybe three shots in town, tequila shots or something and maybe four other drinks.
>
> Pākehā FG6

Consumption of perhaps 15 standard drinks by a woman as in Pam's account represents an extreme on the spectrum of consumption but her story shows this as a recognisable experience not a hypothetical limit.

Function

In Gordon, Heim and MacAskill's (2012) framework, function concerns the psychosocial drivers of drinking, such as peer-group values, ritual and everyday practices. Hence we expected that meanings of the function of drinking practices would vary across ethnic groupings, due to varied cultural values, norms, and practices. However, again there were clear convergences in the function of participants' drinking practices and meanings of drinking across ethnic groups, although there were some differences in terms of abstention and resistances to heavy drinking, and also differences in how practices played out across genders. Participants widely represented drinking as a social activity that both entails and enacts friendship, creates ambience and produces valued patterns of interaction for drinkers and non-drinkers alike. They acknowledged considerable peer and societal pressure to drink, and a set of established habits that constitute a steady momentum of drinking expectations, demonstrating that alcohol is deeply inscribed in the social practices that participants enjoy and value. Diverse drinking styles were seen as a naturalised accompaniment to a wide range of social activities that occur in many different settings including city clubs/bars, local pubs and private homes.

Participants discussed drinking styles ranging from drinking at home with a few others, to full-blown 'big night' scenarios in town, though both ends of the spectrum were reported as often entailing intoxication. Peer-group contexts were reported as the commonplace and preferred social settings for drinking. In this excerpt, Māori men, two blue-collar workers and a student, in a provincial city talked about a special class of night out.

> *Micheal*: We used to have like Thursday nights where um

Frank: Every month every Thursday

Micheal: Our boys' night

Kahurangi: It was like *the* night aye

Frank: Yeah it was like a drink heaps of alcohol go to the pub drink heaps of alcohol listen karaoke come home and drink again

Māori FG6

This co-construction highlights comfortable company and regular, gendered drinking practices in both home and commercial premises. The gender-exclusive framing – 'our boy's night' – and repeated emphasis on quantity, places the drinking centre-stage in these events, with the activities seemingly peripheral to the bonding entailed. Similar accounts of friendship and drinking (Niland *et al*. 2013) were evident in all ethnic groups and encompassed both single and mixed gender dynamics, reflecting perhaps a general need for safety and security in drinking environments.

Many participants across all ethnicities spoke of a wide range of settings such as meals, parties, sports events and outdoor activities in which alcohol was pivotal to relaxation and enjoyment. Alcohol was sometimes explicitly portrayed as critical to the atmosphere within which socializing occurred:

Nick: For our age group, if it's not there, then it's dumb

Val: it's not a party

Nick: once again I don't need it, but for our age group as a whole, if there's no alcohol

Val: it's just flat

Kerry: Alcohol is kinda related to a good time, so if this is not there (mimes lifting a can), then there is no good time

Pasifika FG1

This exchange in a group of Pasifika male and fa'afine actors in a major city, stresses the importance of alcohol to their socializing and outlines its en-

trenchment in their social networks. The co-construction essentialises alcohol as creating the ambience, catalyzing a 'good time' and avoiding social awkwardness at gatherings. Another way in which alcohol was ritualised was through shared drinking practices linked to a timeframe, as Tom in a mixed-gender group of students in a major city describes:

> *Tom*: Like there was this whole sort of ritual like I was at a hall last year where people would start drinking like as much alcohol as they could between eight o'clock and eleven o'clock
>
> Pākehā FG8

Here the term 'ritual' is used to signal regularity in a kind of formulaic overconsumption that was intended (as discussed later in the transcript) to fuel the subsequent engagement with the night-time economy. The combination of the quantity of alcohol needed to sustain a night in town and the time-limit before moving to licensed premises, was described in this and other data as challenging and often 'messy' when drinkers miscalculated consumption, with disruptive effects.

Other social practices included drinking games that were particularly associated with initiation to sports teams, flats or university study. Card and word games, bar tours, lock-ins, hand games, circle games, 'beer-pong' and body shots, were described by Pākehā participants but only rarely mentioned by Māori and Pasifika participants.

> *Pam*: we had what was called the house crawl… We had fifteen rooms in each… kind of block of rooms, five on each floor and each room would um we have like a house theme and I think we did countries or something and each room you'd have a different country and you'd decorate it and in each room you had a bottle of spirits and you weren't allowed to leave that room until the whole bottle of spirits was drunk between fifteen of you.
>
> Pākehā FG6

Within this closed system, there is effectively a bottle of spirits per person and a collective imperative to consume all in the charade of a journey through culture diversity. Elsewhere in this transcript it is clear that not everyone was willing or able to complete the circuit and heavy intoxication was the inevitable outcome for most who tried. This and multiple other accounts empha-

sised loose rules, but normative expectations, enforcing consumption, while maintaining a playful, even festive atmosphere. Drinking games were widely understood to increase both speed and volume of consumption.

Within the Māori and Pasifika groups especially, a number of participants, mostly women, reported abstaining for professional, religious or personal reasons, while maintaining their friendships with drinkers and participating socially in drinking events. Participants mentioned other roles such as caring or sober driving for intoxicated friends that seemed to fit within the drinking cultures of their peers without challenging heavy consumption.

Control

Control refers to the regulatory, social and normative restrictions on alcohol use. The current regulatory environment of Aotearoa New Zealand places few legal restrictions, beyond bans on drinking in public places, around alcohol use for those over 18 years of age. This context was thus similar for all ethnic groups, although geographic location and licensing laws by region varied. Participants did not engage in much discussion about alcohol regulations except to illustrate the widespread accessibility of alcohol. For example some participants described the weakness of constraints on alcohol sellers, as this group of male Pākehā students in a major city comment:

> *Alex*: I've been pretty surprised because Jack, the last couple of nights I've gone out with him, has gone up to the bar and ordered ten Jaeger bombs
>
> *Jack*: [laughs]
>
> *Alex*: all in one, and for some reason the barmen just serve it. Like it is ridiculous. That must be how many standards? They must be like two standards each and then they're just serving twenty standards to what? Three young men just so they can get a hundred or a hundred and fifty back over the bar.
>
> Pākehā FG7

Alex's critique turns on the sale of 'ridiculous' amounts of this high-strength spirit to his small party with implicit reference to the legal requirement that the sale of liquor in licensed premises should not encourage or produce intoxication. His calculations highlight the scale of the problem to suggest a double

standard driven by profit motivation.

The legal age of purchase, relaxed trading hours and flexible on- and off-license availability, were reflected in wide consensus that access to alcohol was a non-issue. Rather the limits to consumption included price, time and social/cultural norms, as well as the impact of biophysical limits and psychosocial harms.

Many participants across all ethnic groups spoke of cost as a limitation, articulating a kind of 'micro-economics' of intoxication, calculating cost, percentage alcohol and quantities required, against personal budgets and describing measures adopted to mitigate it. Chief among these and evident across the cultural range was pre-loading (Wells, Graham, and Purcell 2009) or 'alcohol banking'[3] (Hadfield 2011) against the expense of drinking in the night-time economy. These female Māori students in a provincial town spell out the logic.

> *Facilitator*: What's the reason for drinking before?
>
> *Khloe*: So you don't have to buy drinks when you're in town, very expensive.
>
> *Michelle*: Very expensive in town
>
> *Khloe*: So if you drink before you go to town, then you don't have to buy anything while you're in town.
>
> Māori FG4

Alcohol purchased at cheaper off-license outlets is consumed rapidly before going out to the late-night venues of choice, to reduce the price of drinking in city clubs and bars. Other activities designed to avoid the high prices in bars and clubs included smuggling alcohol into venues, taking advantage of price promotions that venues provided and persuading other patrons to purchase drinks.

Local cultural norms, including family expectations, parental role-modeling and customary hierarchies, were reported as acting as a strong brake upon drinking, especially for Māori and Pasifika participants. In an all-female Māori focus group of young professionals in a provincial city, Mana offered this observation within a discussion of drinking in moderation:

> *Mana*: I think a lot of it has to do with our upbringing in regards to

> our parents' behavior… I've never seen my mum drunk, I've never seen her–I've seen her probably have a sip of champagne um our dad, I can, I mean he's only been drunk 3 times that I remember.
>
> Māori FG8

Group members describe relatively modest self-allocations of alcohol (4 drinks in a weekend) and a broader discussion of not needing alcohol to enjoy socializing.

Pākehā participants were more likely to talk about concern or interventions for or from peers or partners. Other constraints on drinking included undertaking parental roles and employer or professional standards, such that for one group of Māori participants; their role as youth-workers effectively cast them as models. Other Māori and Pasifika groups discussed similar restraints on drinking relating to their jobs in social work, teaching and security and also to the negative connotations that might attach to their behavior as 'representative' of their ethnic group, a notion not present for Pākehā participants. A number of Pasifika participants commented upon the role of religious affiliation, including the influence of non-drinking friends and family within the congregation, as limiting their consumption. Laola, in a Samoan female group in a large city, elaborated:

> *Laola*: I don't drink and I have two kinds of directions as a non-drinker. I have my church people and we all don't drink and we hang out … then my friends who do drink … I like having fun with them too, but I would never mix the two
>
> Pasifika FG5

Managing different orientations to alcohol as a non-drinker clearly involves some challenges, and keeping her two groups of friends apart suggests that Laola views the church group as likely to be critical of the drinkers. Another group of female Samoan workers in a large city expressed the belief that their culture gave them protection from the harms of alcohol consumption:

> *Cheryl*: Samoan–good drunks
>
> *Angela*: And we know when to stop
>
> *Terina*: yeah

Cheryl: Yeah we know when to stop

Pasifika FG2

This co-construction of their drinking as self-limiting and intoxication as unproblematic due to their ethnicity sits uneasily with literature that suggests that Pasifika alcohol use is characterised by polarities between abstention or light drinking and heavy consumption (Ministry of Health 2009). Such assertions are unlikely to act as any kind of restraint on harmful drinking.

In all ethnic strands there was a sense that the rules around alcohol consumption for males and females were different (Lyons and Willott 2008). More restrictive expectations, commonly couched in terms of safety and propriety, were placed upon young women than young men, as seen within this mixed-gender Māori focus group of security workers in a provincial city.

Victoria: There's nothing more unattractive than a drunk, drunk chick who can't stand up

Mira: Or wearing real short skirts or her skirts riding up type of thing

Victoria: Or falling over herself

Mira: And with no friends there

Victoria: yeah no one to help her out like it's just real unattractive

Māori FG9

The 'drunk chick' was co-constructed as the lowest of the low, constituting a disciplinary frame around such behaviours. The combination of intoxication, clothing style and social isolation, were seen as grounds to judge or even marginalise women who transgress with alcohol (Griffin *et al*. 2013). However it was recognised also that commercial venues were active in attracting female customers, as explained by this professional Pākehā woman in a major city.

Jan: I think boys tend to have a slightly harder time at getting into bars if they look a little bit drunk … bouncers will let [women] in and it's probably something to do with the fact that oh yeah get as many girls in as possible [laughs] and then all the boys will want to

> come to the bar kind of thing.
>
> Pākehā FG6

Although Jan's offering seems to be rather sympathetic to males, her point highlights a deeper exploitation of women drinkers by licensed venues. In several groups there was acknowledgement of contradictory promotional activities such as 'ladies nights', discount drinks for women and waived covercharges, aimed at exploiting the presence of younger women, in order to attract male drinkers to premises. For the most part however the demarcations were discriminatory as articulated in this Pasifika group of women, men and fa'afine workers.

> *Jesse*: I think a lot of girls are starting to have it as like you know how they have accessories like a handbag, it becomes, the alcohol becomes the accessory in the club like 'I must have this accessory too'
>
> *Stephen*: To make me look cool
>
> *Jesse*: make me look like I'm Madonna or somebody. Really it's just foolish
>
> Pasifika FG4

Jesse and Stephen's disparaging comments were aimed at young women who openly use alcohol as a marker of a particular identity. However the silence in this transcript of parallel uses of alcohol among young men illustrates part of the gender imbalance that was common in the data. The norms and standards around gender expressed in these excerpts are a clear theme within the wider discourses about alcohol in these groups. They resonate with Jayne, Valentine and Holloway (2011) suggesting that contemporary discourses of femininity are linked to entrenched ideology about women and respectability, evoking censure for behaviours that pass unremarked in men.

The possibility of risk or harm acting as constraints on drinking was heavily discounted among our participants, although there are many accounts of drinking events that were ended abruptly when biophysical limits were reached. Characteristically such negativities were considered as 'in the past' or somehow the property of others, while the self was reframed as invulnerable. Where harm was acknowledged, it was within the context of individual costs such as accidents, injury, blackouts, fighting, 'lost weekends', hangovers and

absenteeism that could be narrated as in some sense honourable (Szmigin *et al*. 2008). However there was also a strong awareness of more specifically social damage. One group of male Pākehā students in a major city scoffed at the notion of serious biophysical harm but enumerated social difficulties with partners, families and possibly employers as things to be taken seriously.

DISCUSSION

These findings demonstrate that, despite the diversity among and within the ethnic groups in our sample, there were strong convergences in participants' accounts of drinking practices and their meanings. The findings provide insights into why and how our participants drink, the imperatives, attractions and restraints around alcohol particularly in cultural, relational and 'everyday' terms. Drinking was seen as a key peer activity, an end in itself, a site of social bonding and a strong contributor to the ambience of social life, meanings which were consistent across the ethnic groups. Discussions around social dimensions frequently tipped into accounts of intoxication that expressed determination, excitement and pleasure. However, participants also reported regularly consuming large quantities that would cause diverse harms; few reported that these were serious deterrents to further intoxication, suggesting that the apparent excitement and pleasure of consumption may be used to defend experiences that were contradictory and not solely pleasurable.

Preloading was routine and rituals were employed by the young adults regarding drinking practices, including drinking games, to rapidly attain desired states of drunkenness. Price, personal limits and cultural and gender norms were included among potential constraints on drinking but participants rarely spoke of any form of legal or regulatory restriction of their drinking.

However despite similarities there were also important differences in drinking practices and meanings across ethnic groups. Pasifika participants gave a strong sense of drinking being highly valued within the peer-group but more widely understood as transgressive of their cultural norms, with dominant culture surveillance, intergenerational consequences and sensitivities presented as significant controls. While drinking at clubs/bars, local pubs and domestic settings was commonplace and frequent for many Pasifika participants, some of whom made strenuous efforts to hide their consumption from family and church in particular, there were others who told us they did not drink at all. Māori participants, with a few non-drinking exceptions, clearly valued peer-group drinking at commercial and private venues, and there were more accounts of heavy intoxication, drinking games and drinking in family settings

in the wider dataset. They also told of family influences moderating drinking and taking actions to avoid publicising their drinking to family, school, work and community connections, for fear of censure and repercussions.

With few dissenters among Pākehā participants, there was a pervasive trope of drinking as an accepted, routine activity within peer social events in the diverse settings referred to above. Little sense of sanction beyond knowing personal limits was attached to this status quo and the hegemonic understanding was that they were established drinkers in a regime that was a central and valued part of adult life and identity.

While the research observations of gender convergence around drinking practices (Lyons and Willott 2008) in terms of quantity, frequency and intoxication are well represented in our data, marked gender specificity remains and varies with cultural milieu with women reporting normative expectations in different ways to their male counterparts. Young Pākehā women in particular spoke of moderated intake, controlled self-determination and social availability, whereas the men articulated high-consuming, extroverted, socially assertive styles.

These cultural and gendered differences resonate with the findings of the Ministry of Health (Ministry of Health 2009) survey. Variations in the type and strength of the controls that apply within and towards ethnic and gender groups influence drinking cultures and practices. This supports the theoretical framing advanced Gordon, Heim and MacAskill (2012), which conceptualises population-level drinking cultures as existing in a tension between drivers and restraints on consumption. Our findings suggest that the interlocking motivations of hedonism and sociality generate a rationale for consumption that is not restrained by regulation or policy, but checked mainly by notions of limits, easily subverted price and avoidable cultural controls. Gordon, Heim and MacAskill's (2012) framework highlights how variations in outcomes for different segments of the population arise within differing dynamics among hedonism, function and control. We suggest that, while there may be similar rationales provided for consumption across groups, the drivers and controls that arise from the specific cultural and gender norms of each group and societal influences such as power, inclusion/exclusion, poverty, education and opportunity, operate differently for different groups (Ministry of Social Development 2010). The tensions between hedonism and what are obviously unpleasant experiences raise questions about hedonism as a driver and the extent to which it is used as a rationale in the knowledge that consumption is not purely a hedonistic pursuit. This interpretation is supported by data that described heavy consumption as a release from stress and other testing life events, suggesting

mental health benefits.

Having said this we believe that the relatively sparse framing offered by Gordon, Heim and MacAskill (2012) provides a useful framework with potential for development and elaboration, particularly if it is able to address broader societal drivers of consumption. The constitution of each of the three domains and the dynamics of how they articulate with each other needs further examination, if it is to provide a comprehensive and generative approach to understanding drinking cultures.

Our study was restricted to North Island communities and future research could usefully extend throughout the country. The use of female interviewers for discussion groups contributed to the data obtained (although we saw no obvious reticence on the part of male participants in contributing to discussion of topics that might be considered sensitive in cross-gender contexts). Further, asking young adults to discuss their drinking practices within groups of their friends may have suppressed more negative accounts, or less normative behaviours that participants may voice in other settings. Future research could beneficially use a range of methods to capture young adults' voices in different situations and contexts, to allow greater insight into motivations and perspectives around alcohol consumption and drinking cultures.

In conclusion, the current study highlights some specificities of young people's drinking cultures in Aotearoa New Zealand in the context of the globalizing consumption practices described in the literature (Babor *et al.* 2010, Gordon, Heim, and MacAskill 2012, Järvinen and Room 2007). Our rich experiential data allowed us to elaborate existing understandings to encompass important dimensions of culture and gender, and results emphasise that while there are major convergences across groups and genders, and with international research, there are also key specificities that are highly relevant to policy-makers and researchers. The insights and intricacies of such drinking cultures reported here present multiple challenges to the pursuit of a major change around alcohol use (New Zealand Law Commission 2010) in support of reducing consumption.

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NOTES

1. Māori are the indigenous people, Pasifika are migrants from diverse Pacific Islands, Pākehā are European settler peoples.

2. This is a term used, with some variations, in Pasifika cultures for people born male but whose spirit is female.

3. These practices both entail the rapid consumption of large amounts of cheap alcohol in private venues before going out into the bars and clubs of the nighttime economy.

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