

A healthy drinking culture: A search and review of international and New Zealand literature

Culture is learned not inherited. It derives from ones social environment not from one's genes [Hofstede, 1997 in Walker 2000, p 62]

Key Findings

Culture:

- Is the means by which we bring order and meaning to our lives and provide a sense of purpose, identity and belonging, while also acting as a framework of values to guide our actions [Eckersley, 2006, p 253]
- A way of life made up of habits, customs and norms [Giddens, 1997 in Roche et al., 2005]
- Not universally definable but summarised culture:
 - Is a body of knowledge, attitudes and skills for dealing with physical and social environment which are passed on from one generation to the next
 - Has continuity and stability because each generation tries to pass the culture on intact
 - Changes over time as physical, social, political and spiritual environments change.

Ethnicity and Culture

- Ethnicity is an important element of an individual's cultural identity
- Ethnicity itself partly determined by cultural attitudes, beliefs, values, customs and norms of ethnic group to which individual belongs
- Ethnic experiences filtered through group's history (e.g. colonisation, migration, enslavement), religion, physical characteristics, social class, minority status experiences such as persecution, discrimination, inequity
- Indigeneity – can't be spoken of in a reductionist manner, not homogenous

Culture, national identity and self image

Three major themes to describe how identities influence process of nation-building. Identities are:

- Dynamic and multi-layered
- Socially constructed and enacted through signs and meanings that characterise group life and permeate ritual
- Carry ideology and are part of the system of social relationships.

National self-image on other hand:

- Often shaped by shared experiences of iconic events giving individuals a sense of belonging to a nation
- National stereotypes exist as long term cultural images
- No single approach to defining

Western Culture

- Used to describe societies of Europe and their close geographical, linguistic and philosophical colonial descendants; generally enjoy relatively strong economies and stable government; and chosen democracy as form of governance
- Some ideas and principles which might be considered cornerstones:
 - Christianity and secularism
 - Rational deductive reasoning - emphasis on technological innovation and science coupled with a belief in progress
 - Emphasis on human rights, which are considered natural rights and the rule of law
 - Personal freedom as an important value
 - Expectation of personal responsibility
 - A strong sense of personal privacy and civil rights.
- Core component, as with any culture, is values. While most societies have tended to reinforce values emphasising social obligations and social restraint and discourage those that promote self-indulgence and anti-social behaviour Eckersley (2006, p 254) argues that “modern Western culture undermines, even reverses, universal values and time tested wisdom” and that this results in significant implications for alcohol use in these cultures.
- Materialism and individualism the two defining characteristics of modern Western culture (Eckersley, 2006) as they have most significant effect on psychosocial factors such as social support and personal control.
- Increasing fear and unprecedented consumption.
- Need to consider influence of individualism, materialism and social and economic disadvantage to get cultural change

History of Alcohol

- Alcohol is the psychoactive drug most widely used throughout the world
- Regular use of psychoactive drugs, including alcohol, comes “close to being a human universal, a culturally patterned behaviour found worldwide” (Gamella, 2002, p. xv)
- In English verb “to drink” often applies to alcohol rather than any other beverage
- 7000 years ago “drunkenness recognised as a major social problem” (Plant & Plant, 2006)
- Early drinking most commonly associated with celebrations and still meeting same need today – transcending everyday life

Effects of alcohol

- Impairment to sensorimotor skills fairly uniform but behaviour not
- Behaviour linked to people’s idea of what alcohol does (Mandelbaum, 1965, p. 282)
- Drinking behaviour is learned therefore culturally determined (MacAndrew and Edgerton, 1969)
- The way people comport themselves (when drunk) is determined by what their society makes of and imparts to them concerning the state of drunkenness (MacAndrew and Edgerton, 1969)

Drinking culture – what is it?

- Shared customs and attitudes – vary widely from essential and sacred to dispensable and destructive
- Impacts on alcohol expectancies
- Western culture and internalisation of expectations
- Beliefs not monolithic
- Cultures of drinking can change over time

Types of drinking cultures

Drinking alcohol:

- Valued by many for promoting relaxation and sociability; and most of reasons people drink are positive (Plant & Plant, 2006)
- Non-problematic drinking normal in both statistical and sociological terms
- Most risks associated with abuse
- Sporadic episodes of acute intoxication – broader range of harms than moderate drinking
- Problems linked with values, norms, attitudes

Drinking cultures can be:

- ‘Wet’, ‘dry’ and ‘blended’
- ‘Wet’ = high per capita consumption and permissive
- ‘Dry’ = low per capita consumption and strong sanctions
- ‘Blended’ = somewhere in between the two extremes

	Wet drinking cultures	Dry drinking cultures
Alternate terms	Southern European Mediterranean Moderate Integrated Non-temperance	Northern European Nordic Immoderate Ambivalent Temperance
Consumption patterns	Higher consumption per capita, lower abstinence rates	Lower consumption per capita, higher abstinence rates
Type of alcohol	Wine-based	Beer or distilled liquor based
Availability	Alcohol widely available and easily accessible	Access to alcohol more restricted
Frequency	Wine part of diet and consumed regularly with meals	Alcohol consumed less frequently but in larger amounts in a single session where intoxication is often the end in itself
Integration	Alcohol integrated into daily life and activities and consumed as part of regular family life	Alcohol consumption often pub-based and not as common during everyday activities
Sanctions	Strong informal sanctions against public drunkenness	Public drunkenness tolerated even expected
Personal control	Alcohol not seen as obviating personal control	Alcohol seen as overpowering individuals capacity for self-management
Countries found in	Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, many South nations	New Zealand, Australia, UK, USA, Canada, Scandinavian nations

Minimising Abuse and Harm

Cultures most successful at preventing abuse & minimising harm don't control patterns through regulatory framework but:

- View alcohol as natural part of life – no ambivalence
- Teach young people by example of moderation
- Encourage drinking among family/friends rather than same gender settings
- Discourage heavy, episodic drinking
- Sanction negatively & promptly unacceptable drinking practices
- Respect the choice not to drink and don't pressure
- Free of belief that alcohol can solve problems, signify adulthood, grant power or confirm 'manhood'

Alcohol consumption is essentially a social act in most societies that is subject to a range of social & cultural constraints & enabling factors. There are four near universal 'constants' in social norms around drinking alcohol:

- Proscription of solitary drinking
- Prescription of sociability, sharing and reciprocity
- Social control of consumption & behaviour
- Restrictions on some people drinking e.g. 'underage'

There are also common symbolic uses of alcohol the main ones being:

- Labels defining nature of social situations or events e.g. Champagne and celebration
- Indicator of social status
- Makes statement about affiliation or national identity e.g. vodka and Russia
- Differentiates genders

Key cultural values for New Zealand and Australia around alcohol and its consumption are connected with hospitality, kinship and reciprocity. In Australia and NZ drinking together implies 'mateship':

- 'Social credit' specifically mentioned among indigenous Australians whereby even people without much money can confirm ongoing networks of reciprocity by sharing alcohol
- Drinking together more than eating together serves to bind members of a group in a way that other activities do not.
- Ritualistic function – life cycle events, transition from work to play
- Cultures where drinking associated with recreation and irresponsibility & regarded as opposite to working show higher levels of alcohol-related harm

Drinking Environments

Drinking is a social activity and both New Zealand and Australia have specific, designated environments for communal drinking to take place. The physical nature of drinking places reflect different attitudes towards alcohol although there is some convergence appearing – climate also plays a part.

<p>Wet culture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly visible • Large windows • Open spaces 	<p>Dry Culture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enclosed, insular, even secretive • Solid walls, substantial screens, partitions • Contains activities of customers
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The primary functions of drinking places are:

- Facilitation of social bonding
- Social integration
- Egalitarian (at least for men) e.g. egalitarian nature of Australia and NZ = “classless” society and mateship
- Pub culture male dominated historically
- Western nations where alcohol is consumed in integrated situations (mixed age/gender) rather than in settings devoted exclusively to drinking more behaviourally benign

Key features of New Zealand’s drinking cultures

- Is driven by normalisation of alcohol into everyday consumer behaviour
- Not considered part of drug culture
- Does make positive contributions to New Zealand society – intrinsic to cultural significance of socialisation, entertainment, celebration hospitality
- Is influenced by the promotion of alcohol
- Will not change by telling people they drink too much
- Drunkenness normative – linked with the ‘shout’, ‘mateship’, and ‘wowsersism’ i.e. it is not ‘Kiwi’ to not to take part or not to drink alcohol
- Early drinking marked by binge drinking – “drunkenness & explosive drinking” definitive of social characteristics of early settlement by the English [Brady, 2000]
- Has significant influence on contemporary drinking patterns and culture which is still largely male, pub culture, 6 o’clock closing ‘drinking swill’
- 2007 – still OK to get drunk and drink to get drunk
- Recently women drinking a lot more in both countries and drinking in a similar way to the men

Ethnicity and drinking culture

Māori people:

- Less likely to drink, drink less often but drink more on a typical drinking occasion
- At a higher risk of physical and mental harm
- Similar to other indigenous populations that have experienced colonisation
- Younger demographic spread
- Lower -socio-economic status affects drinking patterns – drinking small amounts more frequently associated with higher income and older age groups
- Most important are their patterns of sociability – getting together in medium to large groups for periods of several hours/days

- Many abstainers, many heavy drinkers, few moderate drinkers

Where to Next?

- Have the information to begin to expand our understanding of New Zealand culture and how drinking culture 'fits' and reflects that culture
- Consult with New Zealanders – particularly those with a stake in the future – to develop a 'raw' picture of what a future drinking culture could look like
- Articulate that drinking culture as an aspiration and something to value – connect emotionally with New Zealanders
- Develop policy frameworks needed to enable aspiration to become “the way we do things around here”.