

Culture and Alcohol:

The what, when, where, how and how much



Brave New World

"O wonder!

How many goodly creatures are there here!

How beauteous mankind is!

O brave new world,

That has such people in it!"
(*The Tempest*, Act V, Scene 1).

William Shakespeare



Utopia or unbridled hedonism where does
our future lie?



Aldous Huxley



"Brave New
World"

Artist Tony
Hamilton



The concept of culture

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

- 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, indigeneity and cultural identity

- Ethnicity 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.



Western culture continued

- 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



Drunkenness – major social problem



Hogarth's Etching – Gin Lane



History continued

- **19th century western response – informal social sanction**
- **Legislation - maintain social order & regulate production/distribution**
- **No treatment response**
- **19th to 20th century – increase regulation**
- **Link to economics, politics and social order**



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 and drinking culture

- 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



Classifying drinking cultures

'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 or dry

Wet	Dry
Moderate, integrated, non-temperance	Immoderate, ambivalent, temperance
Higher per capita consumption, lower abstinence rates	Lower per capita consumption, higher abstinence rates
Wine-based	Beer or distilled liquor-based
Alcohol widely available/easily accessible	Access more restricted
Wine part of diet consumed regularly with meals	Alcohol consumed less frequently, high per occasion consumption intoxication often end in itself
Strong informal sanctions against public drunkenness	Public drunkenness tolerated, even expected
Alcohol not seen as obviating personal control	Overpowering individual's capacity for self-management



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'



Social norms

- Essentially a social act in most societies
- Subject to a range of social & cultural constraints & enabling factors

Four near universal 'constants' in social norms

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



Symbolic meaning and values

Main symbolic uses:

- 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



Cultural values

Hospitality, kinship and reciprocity

- In Australia and NZ 'mateship' is implied by drinking together
- '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 places

Social activity so specific, designated environments for communal drinking to take place

Physical nature of drinking places reflect different attitudes towards alcohol although there is some convergence appearing – climate plays a part

Wet	Dry
•Highly visible	•Enclosed, insular, even secretive
•Large windows	•Solid walls, substantial screens, partitions
•Open spaces	•Contains activities of customers

Primary functions of drinking places

Facilitation of social bonding primary function

- Socially integrative
- 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 Australia and NZ

Australia (from National Alcohol Strategy, 2006) – can be applied to New Zealand also

- Is driven by normalisation of alcohol into everyday consumer behaviour
- Not considered part of drug culture
- Does make positive contributions to Australian 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 'unAustralian' not to take part or not to drink alcohol

Key features continued

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

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

Important Māori leaders



Princess Te Puia



Sir Apirana Ngata



Ethnicity and drinking culture

Māori are:

- 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
- Socio-economic status – 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



Indigenous Australians

"Aboriginal drunken comportment was & remains, a rejection of the norms of the dominant culture". [Hall & Hunter, 1995, p.14]

- Male settlers outnumbered women 2-1; alcohol traded for sex and labour
- Legislation prohibiting consumption early as 1838 but didn't stop it – drinking hidden, drunkenness not – intoxication provided a rare avenue for confronting European's expectations of right and proper behaviour
- The 'drunken Aborigine' still influences the way Aboriginal people are treated in society. [Midford, 2005, p. 891]
- Moderate drinking does take place – live in town and in paid employment



Indigenous Australians continued

Some indigenous commentators now drawing attention to cultural content factors within social life of indigenous peoples:

- Drinking often a group activity
- Dynamic of fellowship
- Complex requirements of personal autonomy & need to reaffirm relatedness by making demands & claims on others & by demonstrating & accepting generosity [Brady, 2004]



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".

