

Alcohol policy for post-industrial society: meeting new challenges

Peter d'Abbs
School of Public Health & Tropical
Medicine, James Cook University
(Cairns)

Thinking Drinking: d'Abbs

1

OR Taking drinking cultures seriously

"Thinking Drinking" Conference,
Melbourne, 21-23 February 2005

Thinking Drinking: d'Abbs

2

The shifting focus of alcohol policy

- Public health policy
 - Goal: reduce alcohol-related harm at population level
 - Rationale: prevention paradox
 - Means: reduce per capita consumption
 - Strategy: harm minimisation
 - Supply reduction
 - Demand reduction
 - Harm reduction

Thinking Drinking: d'Abbs

3

Revisions:

- Drinking levels and drinking *patterns*
 - Distinguishing chronic and acute harms
 - Prevention paradox revisited
 - Regaining support
 - Revised NHMRC guidelines
- From drinking patterns to drinking cultures
 - Focus on 'binge drinking'
 - Societal tolerance for alcohol problems

Thinking Drinking: d'Abbs

4

Implications

- Acknowledges social dimensions of drinking
 - Drinker no longer an atomised individual
 - Drinker as social actor
 - Mirror?
- BUT
 - Conceptual and practical implications
 - Room: addressed some practical implications

Thinking Drinking: d'Abbs

5

Conceptual implications

- 1. Need to clarify what we mean by 'drinking culture'
 - More than drinking patterns/practices
 - Meanings
 - Signs, symbols
- Culture and epidemiology: the 'talk back' episode
- 2. The need to understand cultures from the 'inside'

Thinking Drinking: d'Abbs

6

Implications (cont.)

- 3. Need to question our own categories
 - Two dichotomies:
 - Responsible drinking and 'binge drinking'
 - Non-drunkenness and drunkenness.
 - Intoxication as taboo.
 - Intoxication as continuum
 - Managing intoxication
 - The three states: abstinence; responsible drinker; binge drinker
 - Limbo-land of risk.

Thinking Drinking: d'Abbs

7

Implications (cont.)

- 4. Drinking as pleasure, pleasure as consumption
 - Defining boundaries between work and play
 - Cultural changes in times and spaces for drinking
 - Jo Lindsay's work
 - Work/play changes: lunchtime drinking
 - Sally's story
 - Biographical and social changes
 - Other trends
 - Globalization, labour markets, & drinking

Thinking Drinking: d'Abbs

8

- Pleasure as consumption

- Brain, Parker et al:

- Drinking for a buzz
 - Psycho-active repertoires
 - Drinks as lifestyle markers

- Bounded hedonism:

- "You just don't drink on school days really you just feel tired and that" (Rach, female, age 15) (Brain, parker et al).
 - "I've got to go to work on weekdays so I only drink at weekends (Baz, male, age 16)." (Brain, parket et al, 16).

- Bounded and unbounded hedonism

- Explanation: a post-modern alcohol market

- Globalisation and traditional markets in UK
 - Emergence of illicit drug cultures

- Industry response

- New spaces
 - New drinks: merge with illicit; stronger
 - Marketed as consumer items.



Pleasure as consumption...

- "It'll be a two-prong shake-up. First, Bacardi intends to saturate the market with news that their premier RTSs now come in cool glass packaging, thus making it a more attractive on-premise drink, particularly to the more style-conscious female sector. Second, there'll be an enhanced ad campaign again featuring soccer rogue and film star Vinnie Jones, focusing on the brand's status as the ultimate party fuel while bolstering it's [sic] image as a "still-tough" alternative to beer." BYO Magazine.

Bounded hedonism...

- In Australia?
 - Duff: similarities
- Bounded hedonism as more pervasive
 - Sideways: Miles and Jack

Thinking Drinking: d'Abbs

13



Thinking Drinking: d'Abbs

14



Thinking Drinking: d'Abbs

15

- The sequel
 - Binges bounded; order restored
 - Increases in sales of Pinot Noir in US and Aust.
- 5. Controlling drinking
 - The silence regarding Informal controls
 - Controls as personal factors, informal (cultural) controls and formal controls
 - How mixed?
 - Relationship between formal and informal controls
 - Controls and the new public health

Thinking Drinking: d'Abbs

16

- 6. Explaining drinking cultures
 - Cultures as historical
 - Shaped by economic, social, political factors
 - Need to beware of simplistic explanations –
 - Economic rationalism; globalization
- 7. Messy research