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LCRA Review Project Team
Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation
35-49 Elizabeth St
Richmond 3121 VIC

By email: lcra.review@justice.vic.gov.au

Review of the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998

The alcohol beverages industry is a growing and sustainable economic powerhouse for Victoria, providing many tens of thousands of jobs, much needed economic investment and important community support throughout the state. This historically significant tax revenue contributor also plays a key role underpinning the future growth of the Victorian entertainment, food and tourism sectors.

The alcohol industry in Australia is committed to the responsible consumption of alcohol. We focus on supporting effective programmes that focus on education, awareness and changing behaviours relating to alcohol consumption. The alcohol industry works closely with stakeholders such as government, consumer groups and health professionals to implement solutions to excessive drinking.

To this end the industry has proactively established and founded DrinkWise and the Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code. More information on these excellent initiatives can be found in our enclosed submission.

Against the backdrop of economic contribution, decline in alcohol consumption and the proactive responsible attitude of the industry, our submission focuses on the risk of harm and most appropriate forum for harm minimisation. We respectfully submit that the most appropriate response to harm minimisation is to focus on the underlying causes of harm. These responses would take the form of targeted measures addressing the root causes of excessive drinking.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this review. Alcohol Beverages Australia would welcome any opportunity to contribute and provide assistance to the Victorian government in the future.

Should you have any queries on our submission or require further information please contact me on (02) 87547000 or Fergus@alcoholbeveragesaustralia.org.au.

Yours sincerely



Fergus Taylor
Executive Director
Alcohol Beverages Australia



Facilitating a Diverse Industry and Reducing Red Tape

1. Setting the scene – social, health and economic benefits of alcohol

The Australian alcohol industry contributes to Australian society in a number of ways. The industry makes significant economic contribution to Australia across multiple sectors such as manufacturing, distribution, retail, hospitality, tourism and exports. Highlights of the alcohol industry's economic contribution to the Australian economy include:

- \$19.717 billion in total economic contribution
- \$5.9 billion in direct alcohol taxes (excise, customs duty and WET), representing 12.63% of the Australian Government indirect tax revenue other than GST.¹
- \$2.45 billion in GST²
- 404,117 employees³
- 58,103 community groups sponsored⁴

The moderate consumption of alcohol has been proven to have positive health impacts as follows:

- Light to moderate alcohol consumption reduces the risk of cardio-vascular disease (CVD) and is considered to be cardio-protective, with the relationship between the amount of alcohol consumption and the risk of developing and dying from CVD being j-shaped.^{5,6}
- The relationship between alcohol consumption and risk of developing Type 2 diabetes is characterized by a J-shaped or a U-shaped curve, similar to what is observed for cardiovascular disease and all-cause mortality. Moderate alcohol consumers are at lower risk of developing Type 2 diabetes than abstainers and heavier drinkers.^{7,8}

Considering that CVD and Type 2 diabetes present a significant health and economic burden on Victoria, the health benefits of low to moderate alcohol consumption are welcome.

To continue to allow the alcohol industry to contribute to Australia's economy through the provision of jobs, taxation, cultural change and community sponsorship, it is imperative that that the scope of the alcohol industry's right to operate is not reduced. Any changes in regulations regarding liquor licensing must done so on the basis of sound evidence aimed at achieving tangible outcomes.

¹ Tax White Paper, Discussion Paper, Chart data, <http://bettertax.gov.au/publications/discussion-paper/chart-data/chpt9> (last accessed 12 December 2016).

² Australian Liquor Stores Association estimates.

³ Total employment across the wine sector (data from Economic Contribution of the Australian Wine Sector, AgEconPlus/Gillispie Consulting funded by the AWRI, 2015, pg 4-5), beer sector (ABS Australian National Accounts: Input-Output Tables 2012/13), clubs and hotels (PricewaterhouseCooper's report for the Australian Hotel's Association, 2009).

⁴ Extrapolated from PricewaterhouseCooper's report for the Australian Hotel's Association, 2009.

⁵ Klatsky, A.L. (2010). Alcohol and cardiovascular health. *Physiology and Behavior*, 100(1): 76-81.

⁶ O'Keefe, J.H., Bybee, K.A. Lavie, C.J. (2007). Alcohol and cardiovascular health: the razor-sharp double-edged sword. *J Am Coll Cardio*. 50(11): 1009-14.

⁷ Koppes, L. L., Dekker, J. M., Hendriks, H. F., Bouter, L. M., & Heine, R. J. (2005). Moderate alcohol consumption lowers the risk of type 2 diabetes: a meta-analysis of prospective observational studies. *Diabetes Care*, 28(3), 719-725.

⁸ Baliunas, D. O., Taylor, B. J., Irving, H., Roerecke, M., Patra, J., Mohapatra, S., et al. (2009). Alcohol as a risk factor for type 2 diabetes: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Diabetes Care*, 32(11), 2123-2132.

2. Reducing the regulatory burden

ABA welcomes the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation’s (VCGLR) consideration of methods to reduce the regulatory burden associated with liquor licensing. By streamlining processes and reducing administrative burden, the alcohol industry can focus on creating jobs and positively contributing to the social and economic climate of Australia.

Methods by which the VCGLR can minimise the regulatory burden related to liquor licensing are set out in sections three to six below.

3. Current license types

As outlined in the Consultation Paper, the current licensing system can lead to inefficiencies where a single premise requires multiple licenses to carry out the reasonable functioning of the licensee’s business.

In order to provide a streamlined approach to licensing the VCGLR should consider a method where broader liquor licenses are introduced that allow for authorisations to be granted relating to reasonable activity relating to liquor.

Taking the example provided in the Consultation Paper, the club would apply for a full club license. Once granted, or at the same time the club is applying for the full club license, they would also apply for an authorisation to be able to undertake additional activities such as pre-booked functions.

In relation to the online liquor sales, the broad license granted would be for the sale of packaged liquor and an authorisation granted for online sales. This would mean that if the licensee were to later consider a shopfront business as well, they would apply for an authorisation under their current license to sell from a shopfront.

By streamlining the liquor licensing method in this manner it avoids the duplication of assessing the same information and criteria to grant new licenses, cutting down the administrative burden on both ends. At the same time, it maintains the integrity of the liquor licensing system as the core criteria of granting a license is still robustly considered.

4. Improvements to the application and renewal process

Application Process

The current liquor license application process is cumbersome and archaic leading to inefficiencies and unnecessary administrative burden on the government and the industry. The need to notify certain parties of the application presents a practical example of this. The VCGLR can set up an online portal to better service applications and feed in the applications to the system. The notification process can be streamlined by providing access to this electronic portal to those parties that require notification, such as Victoria Police.

The interaction between the planning and liquor license process also provides an opportunity to reduce the regulatory burden on business and government alike. The areas of duplication within planning and liquor licensing should be handed over to the VCGLR to assess. This will mean that applicants do not need to duplicate information and different areas within government will not need to assess the same information.

Renewal Process

Currently, renewable liquor licenses are only valid for one calendar year and require renewal each year. The regulatory burden on both the Victorian Government and licensees is enormous considering there were 21,607 renewable liquor licenses in Victoria as at 30 June 2016.

A method to reduce this regulatory burden in the renewal process would be to introduce longer liquor licenses in line with the risk based licensing model. ABA suggests a tiered system for the length of a renewable license. Where a licensee reaches five stars under the star rating system, their license should become renewable for a period of 3 years. This will reduce red tape during the renewal process since it significantly reduces the resources associated with license renewal.

By extending the risk based model to the renewal of liquor licenses, the Victorian Government and licensees will make considerable savings in the time and resources dedicated to the renewal process, while maintaining the integrity of the liquor licencing system.

5. Risk based fee structure

ABA supports a risk-based fee structure. However, with the current costs associated with business in Victoria, the cost of licenses must remain stable to give confidence to business owners that they are able to conduct business without unnecessary additional costs. Any increase in licensing costs may threaten the ongoing viability of vibrant Melbourne entertainment precincts and would hamper economic and tourism growth.

6. Foster diversity and support small businesses

For a small business owner, navigating the complex liquor license application process can be difficult and time consuming. It often deters people from starting a new business, especially a small business that would provide local job opportunities.

To encourage the establishment of small business the VCGLR should consider adopting a small licensed venue case management system, similar to that of South Australia (SA).⁹ Under the SA case management system, small venue license applicants are assigned a dedicated case manager to assist in the preparation of licensing applications as well as navigating the planning and building assessment processes.

By providing this support to small business owners, the Victorian Government stands to create jobs while adding to the vibrancy of Victoria, encouraging a strong night time economy and creating a tourist destination of choice.

⁹ <https://renewalsa.sa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/FACT-SHEET-1-Overview.pdf> (last access 12 December 2016).

Harm Minimisation

7. Setting the scene – Australia’s relationship with alcohol

Before harm minimisation measures can be considered in the *Liquor Control Reform Act 1998* (LCRA), it is imperative that the actual and not the perceived relationship Australians have with alcohol is fully considered. Despite public perception, Australians have an ever healthier relationship with alcohol. This is confirmed when looking at the longitudinal data and the evidence around young people’s relationship with alcohol.

Longitudinal drinking patterns in Australia

There has been a significant downward trend in alcohol consumption in Australia over the last 50 years. In 1974-75 Australian alcohol consumption peaked at 13.1 litres per person, declining to 9.7 litres per person in 2013-14.¹⁰ While per capita consumption is not an appropriate indicator of harm, the data on harmful drinking patterns has also been improving over the long-term.

Young people and alcohol

The Australian Secondary Student Alcohol and Drug Survey has been providing insights into the drinking behaviour of young Australians since 1984. The results of these surveys show that between 2002 and 2011 drinking by 12 to 15 year olds had more than halved and for 16-17 year olds fell by 30%. Excessive drinking by 18 to 24 year olds fell by over a third between 2010 and 2013.¹¹ Considering these outcomes, young people’s relationship with alcohol in Australia is on the right track.

With the backdrop of responsible drinking in Australia and declining consumption along all fronts, it is difficult to justify further regulation of the industry with the aim of reducing alcohol consumption. Any further regulation through the LCRA or otherwise will result in a greater regulatory and financial burden for both government and industry with no gain in the area of harm minimisation.

8. Industry’s commitment to responsible drinking

The alcohol industry in Australia is committed to the responsible consumption of alcohol. We support effective programmes that focus on education, awareness and changing behaviours relating to alcohol consumption. The alcohol industry works closely with stakeholders such as government, consumer groups and health professionals to implement solutions to excessive drinking.

As an industry we have introduced the Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC). ABAC is a regulatory system for alcohol advertising. It enjoys the strong support of government with an Australian Public Service representative on the management committee.¹²

ABAC is fully funded by industry and provides a pre-vetting system for alcohol marketing which means the vast majority of alcohol advertising is approved by an independent pre-vetter, who

¹⁰ 4307.0.55.001 Apparent Consumption of Alcohol, Australia, 2013-14
<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4307.0.55.001Main%20Features62013-14?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4307.0.55.001&issue=2013-14&num=&view=> (last accessed 12 December 2016).

¹¹ [http://www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au/internet/drugstrategy/Publishing.nsf/content/BCBF6B2C638E1202CA257ACD0020E35C/\\$File/Tobacco%20Report%202014.PDF](http://www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au/internet/drugstrategy/Publishing.nsf/content/BCBF6B2C638E1202CA257ACD0020E35C/$File/Tobacco%20Report%202014.PDF) (last accessed 12 December 2016).

¹² For more information on ABAC: <http://www.abac.org.au/about/> (last accessed 12 December 2016).

assesses it for compliance against the Code, before it goes to market. ABAC also adjudicates on complaints received by the public regarding the ABAC guidelines.

In 2015, ABAC:

- Pre-vetted 1,589 marketing communications, rejecting 204.
- Received complaints relating to 71 different ads and packaging.
- 35 complaints were considered by the ABAC Panel.¹³

The alcohol industry also established and continues, with the help of government grants, to fund DrinkWise Australia, an independent, not for profit organisation to help build a healthier and safer drinking culture in Australia.¹⁴ Since its inception DrinkWise has delivered numerous major campaigns promoting responsible drinking, targeting what the evidence suggests are the two key drivers of harmful drinking – parental drinking behaviour and peer group norms.¹⁵ The most recent major campaign, *How to Drink Properly*, is targeted at 18-24 year olds and focussed on making drinking to get drunk less socially acceptable. The campaign has won the following awards for its effectiveness and innovation:

- 2015 Gold Effie for Not for Profit / Cause-Related Marketing
- 2015 Bronze Effie for Most Original Thinking
- BRW's Best Marketing Innovation
- 2015 Silver at the Asian Marketing Effectiveness Awards
- 2014 Silver for Youth Marketing at the Spikes Asia Awards

The work of ABAC and DrinkWise are testament to the alcohol industry's commitment to responsible drinking. Considering that the alcohol industry has been a leader in driving real and positive changes in drinking behaviour, and the data on drinking patterns in the community continues to improve, there is no case for further regulation.

9. The most appropriate forum for harm minimisation

The average night out to a licensed venue for the overwhelming majority of Victorians is about enjoying themselves with friends and family while consuming alcohol responsibly. These people do not experience harm. They do not drink alcohol to excess and they do not partake in any form of violence.

Australia, including Victoria is already one of the most heavily regulated jurisdictions in the world when it comes to liquor licensing. ABA submits that the harms associated with excessive alcohol consumption cannot be mitigated through the provisions of the LCRA as it is not the correct forum to do so.

The reasons for excessive drinking do not relate to the availability of alcohol which is what liquor licensing regulations ultimately regulate. Instead excessive drinking relates to more complex issues.

As such in order to curb excessive drinking and promote responsible drinking the Victorian Government must address the underlying issues that cause people to drink excessively. Targeted

¹³ ABAC Annual report 2015, http://www.abac.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ABAC_AR_15_3r.pdf (last accessed 12 December 2016).

¹⁴ For more information about DrinkWise: <https://drinkwise.org.au/about-us/about/#> (last accessed 12 December 2016).

¹⁵ <https://drinkwise.org.au/#q=campaigns&r=true> (last accessed 12 December 2016).

programs should be introduced specifically for those who do drink excessively. For the overwhelming majority of Victorians who drink responsibly, the freedom to enjoy the social and health benefits of moderate consumption should not be curtailed by blanket restrictions in liquor licensing regulation or other laws.

10. Violence

Risk of 'alcohol-related' violence on a night out

When considering mitigation of harm in relation to liquor licencing the harm considered is mainly alcohol related violence. In mitigating risk, first the likelihood of the risk occurring must be determined. Once the likelihood of the risk is established, the appropriate response can be formulated.

The risk a person faces of alcohol related violence on a night out has been estimated to be just 0.0125%.¹⁶ When put into perspective the risk of harm is so low that any further regulation of liquor licensing cannot be justified on the basis of harm reduction. When considering the policy response to alcohol related violence, be it in the LRCA or other public policy, policy makers should be responding in a manner consistent with a 0.0125% risk.

This is particularly important, given that any restriction impacts greatly on the freedom of the vast majority of people not involved in violence from partaking in the night life that Melbourne has to offer, to both locals and tourists. In turn it will also affect the substantial economic contribution the alcohol industry makes to the Australian and Victorian economy.

Reasons for anti-social behaviour in the night-time economy

Pinpointing the exact contribution of alcohol to violence generally is difficult. However, a leading anthropologist who specialises in the study of drinking cultures and works with the British Army on implementing change, Dr Anne Fox, was commissioned by one of ABA's members to undertake a study on our drinking culture, titled Understanding behaviour in the Australian and New Zealand night-time economies. The report provides a deeper understanding of the drivers of anti-social behaviour in the night-time economy, the role of alcohol in it and the policy approaches that will best work to address it.

The field work involved observations, focus groups, formal and informal meetings with Government officials, sports organisations, lawyers, ride-alongs with police, charity workers, medical specialists and accident and emergency staff.

In the report Dr Fox identifies three causes of violence in the night-time economy – violent individuals, violence-reinforcing cultures and violent situations. Dr Fox then provides a range of recommendations to address each of these.

Core to her recommendations are an acknowledgement that as long as alcohol is used as an excuse for poor behaviour it will continue to manifest it.

Dr Fox provides two core recommendations for addressing the cultural causes of violence and anti-social behaviour as follows:

- Shifting the focus from 'alcohol-fuelled' violence to just violence, including its causes and triggers. This would include addressing "the cultural reinforcers of violence, misogyny and

¹⁶ Galahad SMS Ltd (2014), *How Often Does a Night Out lead to an Assault*, Data Analysis Australia, <http://www.galahad.co.uk/downloads/> (last accessed 12 December 2016).

aggressive masculinity in all its cultural expressions from schoolyards to sports fields, politics and pubs, movies and media.”

- Empowerment of the community – “unifying and empowering local residents through mechanisms like accords may, in the long run, be as effective as tackling perpetrators head on.”

To address the underlying issues of violence to produce real and sustained difference the ABA recommends that the approach outlined by Dr Fox be applied by the Victorian Government. This will provide real action to address a real problem. For ease of reference, the report can be found at Attachment A.

Family violence

Australia, including Victoria, is currently facing a serious and concerning family violence problem. Australian governments at all levels should take urgent action to stop family violence. ABA supports zero tolerance policies for family violence and believes that in order to reduce domestic violence, accurate evidence must form the knowledge base for policies and programs.

We note that the Royal Commission into Family Violence found that alcohol use is associated with a relatively small proportion of family violence incidents and this continues on a downward trajectory in Victoria.¹⁷

ABA urges the Victorian Government to use the substantial body of research that points to the acceptance of violence, gender power imbalances, and deep-seated attitudes towards women as the substantive factors enabling and promoting family and domestic violence.

By using alcohol as a scapegoat for domestic violence, focus on the real causes of domestic violence is reduced, letting down some of the most vulnerable members of society. To avoid such a scenario the Victorian Government should:

- Recognise that the overall level of violence accepted and/or condoned in a society drives the level of violence that is alcohol-related.
- Recognise that the drivers of violent behaviour have their roots in childhood development and adolescent mental health. In addition, violence is often learnt behaviour from adults in the family group who view the use of violence as legitimate.
- Work towards reducing the cultural acceptability of domestic and family violence using a combination of education, social change programs, appropriate regulation of behaviours, and the certainty of legal sanctions for violence.

ABA is concerned about the detrimental effects voices in this debate may have where they do not have sound evidence base or are influenced by another agenda.

An example of this is the National Framework for Action to Prevent Alcohol-Related Family Violence (the Framework) by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE). The

¹⁷ Turning Point has indicated a 44% increase in family violence instances where alcohol was present in 2013/14 in Victoria. According to the Victorian Police Crime Statistics 2013/14 in 2004/05 there were 29,157 incidents where police submitted family incident reports. In 2013/14 this figure had risen to 65,393. This represents a 124% increase. This means that while there has been an increase in family violence overall, the percentage of family violence which involves alcohol has dropped significantly. This indicates that the issue being faced is with family violence and not alcohol.

https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/embridge_cache/emshare/original/public/2016/05/50/eaefd60f6/crimestatistics1314.pdf (last accessed 12 December 2016).

Framework attempts to align alcohol consumption to domestic violence. The overwhelming weight of domestic and family violence research and evidence suggests that alcohol is not a cause of domestic violence. Instead, power imbalances and gender norms are far better predictors of domestic and family violence.

Of particular concern are the “primary prevention” mechanisms outlined in the Framework which are concerned with reducing the physical and economic availability of alcohol in order to reduce domestic violence. There is no credible evidence to suggest a reduction in alcohol availability and in turn alcohol consumption would result in a decrease in domestic violence.

On the contrary, the evidence establishes that areas with high economic and physical availability of alcohol have lower rates of apprehended violence orders compared with areas that have lower incomes and more dispersed liquor outlets. This is supported by the evidence that shows high income urban suburbs in NSW, which therefore have the highest economic and physical availability of alcohol, have the lowest rates of apprehended violence orders.

Much like violence generally, to deal with the issues of family violence the Victorian Government must deal with the underlying issues that cause domestic violence. By doing so the government will be able to achieve real solutions to family violence with measures that provide real solutions and not a cover up of the symptoms.

Most recently, Mary Barry, CEO of Our Watch (an organisation creating change in culture, behaviours and power imbalances that lead to violence against women and children), has written on the relationship between alcohol and violence.¹⁸ She eloquently reminds us:

Rather than breeding in bottles, violence against women flourishes in environments that trivialise or excuse it. Let’s work together to challenge drinking cultures that emphasise male conquest and aggression. Let’s work together to challenge attitudes that position men’s drinking as an excuse for violence against women. And importantly, let’s focus on what the evidence says is fundamental to preventing violence against women: creating gender equality.

In terms of the Royal Commission’s recommendation that this review consult with experts in the field of family violence and alcohol, we recommend that the VCGLR consult with White Ribbon Australia. White Ribbon is a grassroots organisation working to a vision of a nation that respects women, in which every woman lives in safety, free from all forms of men’s abuse.

White Ribbon comes from a unique perspective of understanding the environment and causes of family violence along with the best ways in which to combat these issues.

11. Encouragement of best practices relating to harm minimisation

ABA acknowledges the discounts available to licensees under the star rating method. While these are encouraged, ABA submits that the discounts should be greater for those with four and five star ratings to 10 and 15 per cent respectively. This will further encourage best practices relating to harm minimisation.

In addition, for renewable licenses, where a five-star rating licensee is requesting renewal the license should be granted for three years instead of one in order to further incentivise best practice amongst licensees

¹⁸ <http://www.mamamia.com.au/alcohol-and-domestic-violence-2/> (last accessed 12 December 2016).

12. Controls on patron behaviour

ABA believes that the use of barring orders provides licensees the tools needed to be able to control the immediate environment within their establishment. It is important that this measure remains in place and that licensees receive full support in implementing barring orders.

Further, individuals should be held accountable for their behaviour. Where an individual engages in violent or quarrelsome behaviour, the full force of the law should be applied to hold the individual accountable and deter others from similar behaviour.

13. Freeze on late-night licenses

Currently in Victoria there is a freeze on late-night licenses. ABA submits that this freeze should be lifted. Considering that the risk of ‘alcohol-related’ violence on a night out is 0.0125% (see section 10 above), this is an over policing of a minimal risk. It is a blanket policy affecting the ability of responsible drinkers to enjoy the benefits of a vibrant Victorian night-life. It also diminishes the appeal of Victoria as a tourist destination of choice.

14. Compliance and enforcement provisions

VCGLR and Victoria Police both undertake inspections of licensed premises. This produces an overlap in the work of the two organisations. ABA recommends that the inspections of licensed premises should fall primarily with the VCGLR and to free up the resources of Victoria Police to be able to respond to crime within the community.

Further, the compliance and enforcement provisions should also take a risk-based approach. Compliance operations should target those on a one to two-star rating to ensure there is support for those organisations to help them to achieve a higher rating.

Lastly, to assist licensees with the compliance, the VCGLR should offer voluntary educational programs to licensees to help understand their obligations and how to meet them.

15. Other harm reduction methods

Limiting the availability of alcohol

A common response to harm minimisation of alcohol by government and policy makers is to limit the availability of alcohol. This is done in good faith in an attempt to reduce excessive drinking.

However, the consequences of doing so can be unexpected and dangerous. Research has shown that, for example, policies designed to limit alcohol use have the unintended consequence of increasing marijuana use.¹⁹

Further, the tragedy of deaths from toxic home brew are an unfortunate reality. The most recent case shows that the limitation of alcohol sometimes turns people to home brew, with dire consequences.²⁰

Minimum pricing

Minimum pricing has been suggested as a model to reduce the harms from excessive alcohol consumption. Unfortunately, many of these suggestions have been made on the basis of the

¹⁹ B Crost, S Guerrero, The effect of alcohol availability on marijuana use: Evidence from the minimum legal drinking age, *Journal of Health Economics*, Volume 31, Issue 1, January 2012, pages 112-121

²⁰ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-11-22/coroner-criticises-woman-who-made-toxic-moonshine/8045018> (last accessed 12 December 2016).

Sheffield Alcohol Policy Model (the Model). The Model has attracted serious criticism for its methodology and the accuracy of the assumptions that the model relies upon.

In the paper, *The Minimal Evidence for Minimum Pricing – The fatal flaws in the Sheffield Alcohol Policy Model* (see Attachment B), the following flaws in the Model were revealed:

- The Model uses a false assumption that a heavy drinkers will reduce their consumption in relation to a price rise.
- The assumptions used in the Model regarding the relationship between the price of alcohol and consumption have been refuted frequently based on real world evidence.
- The Model uses substandard data and uses figures without estimates of error.
- None of the effects of minimum pricing on the illicit alcohol trade were considered.
- The health benefits of moderate alcohol consumption were ignored.

Of the greatest interest is that the Model was based on the UK market and predicted that when alcohol consumption declines, a number of policy outcomes would come to fruition. However, none of the outcomes predicted in the Model have been observed in the UK despite the decline in alcohol consumption in the UK.

As such, the VCGLR should not turn to minimum pricing as a means to reduce alcohol consumption as there is no sound evidence to suggest that this would be the case. This would represent another blanket policy that achieves nothing more than punishing the overwhelming majority of moderate drinkers who experience health and social benefits from alcohol consumption and are already paying their fair share through alcohol taxation.

Advertising, marketing and promotion

As outlined in section 8, the alcohol industry has a robust regulation system for alcohol advertising and marketing, through ABAC. ABAC provides an efficient and effective means to regulate alcohol advertising and ensuring that it is undertaken responsibly. Increasing any regulatory burden will be highly inefficient for government. In addition, there is a significant body of evidence that would suggest that marketing has no or very modest effects on alcohol consumption.²¹

Results from an international study of advertising bans in 17 OECD countries between 1977 and 1995 indicate that advertising bans did not result in a reduction either in the number of 'new' drinkers, in alcohol consumption overall, or in rates of alcohol abuse.²²

As such, ABA submits that any additional restriction on alcohol advertising would be unreasonable with no real outcomes.

Spirits Restrictions

Restriction of the sale of spirits after a certain time has been suggested as a measure to reduce the harms of excessive alcohol consumption. However, there is no evidence base to provide a basis for this measure.

On the contrary, alcohol, be it in beer, wine or spirits, affects the human body in the same way. Alcohol is a naturally occurring group of organic compounds. It is predominantly consumed in the form of ethyl alcohol or ethanol and is formed by fermentation or distillation of carbohydrate containing foods such as fruits, cereals and vegetables. The method of creation for the alcohol, be

²¹ Broadbent, 2008; Neslon and Young, 2008; Nelson, 2007; Gallet, 2007; Lariviere et al, 2000; Duffy, 1999.

²² Nelson, J.P. & Young, D.J. 2001. Do advertising bans work? An international comparison. *International Journal of Advertising*, 20(3), 273-296

it in through distillation (spirits) or fermentation (beer and wine), will result in the same outcome, the production of alcohol.

In addition, the practical implications of this measure results in illogical outcomes. For example, the restriction results in a ban of single malt scotch whisky served neat after a certain time. However, add coke to it and there are no restrictions to its sale. This is a policy position that has no evidential backing and makes little practical sense.

**Understanding behaviour in the Australian
and New Zealand night-time economies**

An anthropological study

by Dr Anne Fox

January 2015



Dr Anne Fox is the founding director of Galahad SMS Ltd in the UK. She is an anthropologist who has specialised in the study of drinking cultures for the past 20 years. She has been a consultant on substance misuse, assisting the British Army, the Home Office, the Youth Justice Board and other clients. Her presentations and education packages are always backed up by relevant research and are delivered in styles appropriate to the audience, to ensure maximum knowledge retention. In her PhD thesis, she proposed a radical new theory for the origin of drinking behaviour among humans. She is a frequent speaker at conferences and at Galahad's many educational courses.

Dr Fox conducted field research in Australia and New Zealand throughout 2013 to gain a deeper understanding of the drivers of anti-social behaviour in the night-time economy, the role of alcohol in it, and the policy approaches that will best work to address it.

Her fieldwork included observation, participant observation, 10 focus groups, formal and informal interviews with government officials, transport specialists, sports organisations, lawyers, ride-alongs with police, charity workers, medical specialists and ambulance and emergency (A&E staff), representatives of the drinks and hospitality industry, bar and hotel staff, drinkers in all types of entertainment venues, and RSL/bar/nightclub managers and owners. She visited over 25 towns and cities in Australia and New Zealand across a variety of drinking occasions. This was coupled with a thorough literature review in 2014.

Dr Anne Fox
C/o Galahad SMS Ltd
Brook House
Brook Hill
Oxted, Surrey
RH8 9LR UK
Telephone: +44 (0) 1883 712401



Lion initiated the project in mid-2012, with fieldwork commencing in July 2013. The paper was finalised in January 2015.

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INTRODUCTION

Drinking and drunkenness are nothing new. The world's oldest written recipe is for beer.¹ Both praise and admonishment for drunkenness can be found in the world's most ancient texts. In one ancient Egyptian text, a teacher at a school for scribes chastises his young student for his night-time carousing:

*"I have heard that you abandoned writing and that you whirl around in pleasures, that you go from street to street and it reeks of beer. Beer makes him cease being a man. It causes your soul to wander . . . Now you stumble and fall upon your belly, being anointed with dirt."*²

Today, despite all we now know about the science of alcohol and its effects, each generation of young people seems doomed to repeat this ancient pattern of destructive and excessive consumption. In Australia and New Zealand, there is heightened concern that, once again, young people are falling prey to a culture of drink, depravity and violence.

There is no escaping the fact that recent deaths recorded in the night-time economy (NTE) in New South Wales, Australia have been horrific. The names and photographs of the victims are etched in our memories and we owe it to them and their families to investigate the underlying drivers of this violence.

Yet the public debate about alcohol-related anti-social behaviour in both countries has tended to look only at what has happened and where, rather than why. There is a notable absence of significant studies of the cultural drivers of misuse and anti-social behaviour or of the backgrounds, motives or characteristics of the perpetrators of such violence. It is unlikely that we will achieve real and positive change in the drinking culture until we have a better understanding of what is driving it.

Most reports treat this phenomenon as if it were driven by exclusively modern social forces: television, advertising, 'youth culture' etc., or merely by the inevitable side-effect of the ingestion of ethanol. This paper will look at the influence of these factors in Australia and New Zealand, but also at the intersection of these modern influences with very ancient but ever-present human behaviours and needs.

This paper will address the key question of what drives and influences drinking patterns, anti-social misbehaviour and violence in the night-time economy (NTE), by presenting an overview of the drinking culture in both countries and an anthropological perspective on the problem areas and potential solutions.

1. Braidwood, R. J., Jonathan D., Paul C., Hugh C., Careton, S & A. Leo. (1953). Symposium: did man once live by beer alone? *American Anthropologist*, 55, 516-526.

2. Caminos, R.A., (1954) *Late-Egyptian miscellanies*. London: Oxford University Press. Pg 182.

METHODS

The research team at Galahad SMS Ltd was commissioned to investigate the nature of the nightlife drinking phenomenon and examine the socio-cultural forces involved in the NTE. The research project included:

- An extensive literature review
- 7 weeks of fieldwork in Australia and New Zealand including observation, participant observation, 10 focus groups (approximately 100 participants), formal and informal interviews with government officials, transport specialists, sports organisations, lawyers, police, charity workers, medical specialists and ambulance and emergency (A&E staff), representatives of the drinks and hospitality industry, bar and hotel staff, drinkers in all types of entertainment venues, and RSL/bar/nightclub managers and owners.

Over the course of 7 weeks, our researchers visited over 25 towns and cities in Australia and New Zealand and took part in the following drinking situations that, in different ways, characterised the typical patterns and styles of drinking:

- post-work drinking in major cities;
- weekend drinking in the ‘Night-Time Economy’ (NTE) in major cities and towns – including visits to nightclubs, pubs, hotels, bars, casinos, clubs, etc.;
- evening drinking during the week;
- Sunday ‘sessions’ at hotels, bars and RSL clubs;
- pre-and post-sporting event drinking in Subiaco WA and Melbourne VIC;
- indigenous drinking in Alice Springs;
- weekend night drinking with students in Palmerston North (NZ);
- mid-week night drinking with students in several cities; and,
- private parties at homes / restaurants (both with and without alcohol);

Our researchers frequented theme bars, ‘biker bars’, gay bars, ‘hippy’ bars, small bars, rooftop bars, backpacker bars, working men’s pubs, Asian karaoke clubs, beach bars, small-town taverns, and all variety of night-clubs, restaurants and local drinking ‘hotspots’ including parks, beaches and dried-up riverbeds.

Our researchers also did ‘ride- or walk-alongs’ with police in Wellington, Auckland, Brisbane, Newcastle, and Melbourne, where they also spent a Saturday night volunteering with the Salvation Army.

Although some information gathering was formal, for example through interviews and focus groups, we regarded almost every situation, from a taxi ride to a trip to the supermarket, as a data-gathering opportunity. Even ‘eavesdropping’ yielded some valuable insights.

The research primarily focussed on anti-social-behaviour in the NTE. It is acknowledged that domestic violence and drinking among indigenous populations are significant issues; however, these were not within the scope of this study and would require separate research to investigate.

PART ONE: AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND DRINKING CULTURES

Key Points

- Australian and New Zealand drinking cultures follow patterns of particular Westernised countries with 'festive' or 'episodic' drinking styles.
- Both 'good' and 'bad' aspects of the national character are reflected in the drinking culture.
- Despite being highly regulated, there is an acceptance of drunken comportment that is not tolerated to the same extent in many other Westernised countries.

The Australian and New Zealand drinking culture profile is consistent with what anthropologists call 'festive', 'ambivalent', 'episodic', 'non-integrated', 'temperance', 'dry', or Nordic drinking cultures. At the opposite end of the drinking culture spectrum we find the 'wet', 'integrated', 'non-temperance' or 'Latin/Mediterranean' cultural patterns. In Australia and New Zealand, drinking signifies a special, liminal time, separated from ordinary, quotidian life. A glass (or stubby) in hand signals a change in state, from formal to informal, from work to play.

It is important to remember that there are variations within these broad types of drinking culture. It is fair to say, however, that drinking in Australia and New Zealand has largely been segregated from most day-to-day aspects of life and corralled into times and places strictly delineated by both custom and law. There are laws about who can purchase alcohol; where, when and by whom alcohol may be sold; and how and when it may be consumed. Many Australians and New Zealanders we spoke with were surprised to learn that such widespread restrictions do not exist in many other countries and that drinking customs were not the same everywhere. In Germany, for example, it is common to see working men enjoying a small glass of beer with breakfast and in rural France, some men still take a 'coup de rouge' (a shot-sized glass of red wine) before beginning the day's work. Beer is sold from vending machines at train stations in parts of Europe and Japan. In Italy, a bar manager may offer young men a free shot of spirits to 'calm them down' if he senses a fight starting.

A burning question many people had for us was: how does drinking in our country compare to the rest of the world? Does Australian drinking reflect the 'national character'? Most would also offer an opinion on the subject (even those who had never travelled abroad), for example:

"I'll tell you everything you need to know, mate: we Australians love our beer. Why? Because we are a friendly people. That's what it's all about. You work hard and then you relax with your family, your mates, you have a good time, you laugh. And the thing is: we like to show how much we love our family and our mates – we're not uptight about it: that's why we love our beer." – Male, 50.

In many respects the nightlife drinking style we witnessed in many cities and towns across Australia and New Zealand was remarkably consistent with that observed in, for example, the UK, the USA, Holland and Ireland. There is, of course, a typically Australian or New Zealand 'flavour' to some drinking traditions, but these are mostly to do with terminology, fashion trends and choice of beverage rather than any strong departure from the typical ambivalent, binge-oriented, or episodic drinking style. As we will discuss in part two of this paper, it is not so much that the drinking culture 'down under' is different, but that variations in other aspects

of culture, both good and bad, can be seen more clearly when people are drunk. As Dwight Heath has said, alcohol is “a window into other aspects of culture.”³

Although national stereotypes can easily be disproved on a person-by-person basis, there is usually an undercurrent of truth in them: they tend to reflect, broadly speaking, the values, mores, norms, standards, communal beliefs that (to some extent) characterise the majority of Australians and New Zealanders. Australians and New Zealanders characterise themselves as strongly egalitarian, playful, outgoing, honest, down-to-earth and brave. Alongside the fierce Australian and New Zealander sense of loyalty, or ‘mateship’, spontaneous fun and cheerful lightheartedness, it is not hard to see how alcohol (the great equaliser) easily fortifies the bright side of the national spirit.⁴ But the flip side of the Australian and New Zealand national character reveals darker features of hyper-masculinity with its attendant norms of male entitlement, pride, honour, competition, fighting, racism and misogyny.⁵

To the foreign eye, the cultural differences between people from different states were far too subtle to be detected, but Australians we spoke to insisted they were so pronounced that, for example: “Western Australians are a completely different species to us!” insisted one woman from Victoria. As hard as I tried to distinguish between the night-time drinking cultures of Homo Victorianus and Homo Occidentalis, I failed to find features distinctive enough to justify this speciation. But it is a universal sociological phenomenon that, however homogenous a culture appears to outsiders, groups within the culture will see clear differences between themselves and others.

Although the differences between regions of Australia and New Zealand are less pronounced than the inhabitants of each might think, there are nonetheless widely varying patterns of drinking among different age groups, professions, ethnic and social groups.

The main characteristics of the Australian and New Zealand drinking culture⁶ are as follows:

1. A belief in the ‘disinhibiting’, or transformational power of alcohol
2. Strict rules, laws and prohibitions regarding age, sale and service of alcohol
3. Celebratory drinking
4. Transitional drinking, i.e. using alcohol as a marker between states such as work and play
5. Ritualistic pattern of episodic heavy drinking
6. Subculture of underage drinking
7. Use of alcohol in formal and informal rituals such as rites of passage (life-cycle transitions), affirmation of group membership etc.

3. Heath, Dwight B. (Ed.) *International Handbook on Alcohol and Culture*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1995.

4. The Australian devotion to play was emphasised in David Mosler’s book “Australia, the Recreational Society” Praeger Publishers (30 Jan 2002)

5. As described in, for example: Campbell, H. (2000), *The Glass Phallus: Pub(lic) Masculinity and Drinking in Rural New Zealand*. *Rural Sociology*, 65: 562–581; and Nicole Hardy (2007) *Gendered performances of spaces and beer drinkers in New Zealand*. *Te Kura Kete Aronui (TKKA ejournal)*. www.waikato.ac.nz/fass/study/graduate/tkka/vol-3

6. There are minor differences between the two countries; these will be discussed later in the report.

8. Association of alcohol and/or drunkenness with the following:
- a. Wealth and sophistication or deprivation and lack of social status
 - b. Masculinity or ‘machismo’
 - c. Relaxation
 - d. Sexual expression
 - e. Aggression
 - f. Anti-social behaviour
 - g. Pride and boasting
 - h. Excuse for misbehaviour (deviance disavowal)
 - i. Extraversion
 - j. Risk-taking
 - k. Freedom
 - l. Guilt and remorse

This ‘profile’ is, as mentioned above, typical of all ‘ambivalent’ drinking cultures.

Binge Drinking

Key Points

- ‘Binge drinking’ used to be equated with either short, highly intensive drinking or long periods of continuous consumption and prolonged drunkenness. In recent years, however, the term is also used to describe any drinking above the recommended safe drinking guidelines.
- This shift blurs the boundary between high risk consumption (both short and long-term) and low to moderately risky drinking.
- Per capita consumption of alcohol in Australia and New Zealand is below that of many European countries and has been declining for the past decade.
- Less than 10% of Australians and less than 15% of New Zealanders are classed as ‘heavy episodic’, but these drinkers may represent a fairly unmovable ‘hard core’ in the population.

A quick scan of headlines could easily give readers the impression that all Australians and New Zealanders are drinking to excess:

“Alcohol Abuse a Blight on Society” — The Northern Star (Lismore, Australia), April 21, 2012

“Why Do Aussies Get Hammered?” – The Morning Bulletin (Rockhampton, Australia), April 19, 2013

“My name is Australia and I’m an alcoholic” – Sydney Morning Herald, Aug 26, 2010.

“Too many young Aussies risk drinking themselves to death” –
The Wire (www.thewire.org.au) Wednesday, 20 November 2013

“Alcoholism is now so serious” – *Otago Daily Times*, 20 January 2014

“Young, dumb and full of beer” – *Bay of Plenty Times*, 1 January 2014

But a closer examination of the actual statistics paints a rather different picture.

82% of Australians and 80% of New Zealanders drink alcohol.⁷ The New Zealand Ministry of Health estimates that 15% of the country’s population are “hazardous” drinkers – that is, drinking in an established pattern that “carries a risk of harming the drinker’s physical or mental health, or having harmful social effects on the drinker or others.”⁸ 44.7% of Australians aged 18 years and over were classed as “risky drinkers”. But to be labelled as such only requires the consumption of “more than 4 standard drinks at least once in the past year.”⁹ It is therefore hard to determine accurately from official statistics what proportion of the Australian population engages in binge drinking, as defined more traditionally. According to WHO statistics, however, less than 10% of Australians can be classed as “heavy episodic drinkers”.¹⁰

It is important to understand what we mean by binge drinking. What is a binge? Until several years ago, it was commonly accepted that a drinking ‘binge’ was a period of continuous drunkenness lasting two days or more, during which time a person neglects his or her duties and responsibilities in order to become intoxicated.¹¹ The clinical definition of a binge would normally combine prolonged alcohol consumption with the neglect of self, job, children, studies, or other responsibilities. In 1992, however, Dr Henry Wechsler of Harvard University redefined a binge as the consumption of any amount over the US government recommended limit of, for men, five or more drinks (the equivalent of 70g of ethanol) per occasion.¹² In the UK, binge drinking took centre stage in 2004 in the Prime Minister’s Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy, which defined binge drinkers as “those who drink to get drunk”.¹³ Other researchers have argued that it is counter-productive to brand as pathological the consumption of only five standard drinks.¹⁴ The current guidelines in Australia recommend no more than two standard drinks a day to reduce the risk of long-term harm and no more than four standard drinks on a single occasion to reduce the risk of an alcohol-related injury; in New Zealand the advice is four or five standard drinks ‘per session’ for men and three or four for women.

Australian per capita consumption of alcohol is slightly lower than the UK, and more on a par with Southern European countries (e.g. Italy, Spain) which, incidentally, are integrated drinking cultures in which alcohol is not generally associated with anti-social behaviour. Alcohol consumption in Australia hit its peak at 13.1 litres (with beer being the predominant choice) per person in 1974-75 and remained steady for around a decade. It has been mainly on

7. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Profiles of Health, Australia, 2011-13. www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4338.0main+features62011-13; New Zealand Ministry of Health (2013). Hazardous Drinking in 2011/12: Findings from the New Zealand Health Survey.

8. New Zealand Ministry of Health. Op Cit.

9. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Op Cit.

10. www.who.int/substance_abuse/publications/global_alcohol_report/msbgsruprofiles.pdf

11. Schuckit, Marc A. The editor responds. *The Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 1998, 123-12

12. Wechsler and Isaac (1992). ‘Binge’ drinkers at Massachusetts colleges. Prevalence, drinking style, time trends, and associated problems. *JAMA*, 267: 2929-2931

13. Prime Minister’s Strategy (PMS) Unit - London: Cabinet Office, 2004

14. Dimeff, L.A., Kilmer, J., Baer, J.S., and Marlatt, G. A. To the editor. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1998, 273(24), 1903-1904

the decline since then, reaching 10.1 litres per person in 2011-12; 9.3 in New Zealand for the same year. Wine and spirits are now approaching beer in popularity.^{15 16} All this is much in line with trends in many other countries, the UK in particular.

So, the perception that Australians and New Zealanders drink more than their international counterparts would not seem justified. Less than 15% of the population drinks in a truly risky and harmful way, and per capita consumption is following a long-term decline trajectory.

The mainstream assumption has traditionally linked overall consumption levels with alcohol-related harm, although this has long been challenged by leading anthropologists. Recent figures now point to an emerging ‘paradox’, where per capita consumption decreases but harm rises. For example, Michael Livingstone, of the University of New South Wales, notes that per capita consumption appears to be going down in many countries, while the reported instances of alcohol-related incidents either remain steady or have increased.¹⁷ This trend was also studied in Sweden in “Drinking Less But Greater Harm”, where Hallgren et al¹⁸ found that, despite overall consumption falling, a hard core of heavy drinkers persists among young people.

One could view the converging lines representing beer and wine consumption (beer dropping significantly and wine on the rise) as a cultural change from a primarily beer-drinking culture to a more Mediterranean wine-based one.¹⁹ Although this may be true for a large percentage of moderate drinkers, based on observations of drinking patterns, it would appear that the core of young binge drinkers are using wine in the same way as they do beer. There is also a convergence between the drug-taking culture and drinking. Based on our observations, a significant number of young people view alcohol as just another drug and expect from it the same instant and total ‘hit’ or ‘high’ that they would from cocaine or ecstasy. When they don’t get an immediate ‘high’ they tend to ‘neck’ large quantities of alcohol in an effort to achieve this effect quickly.

I would argue that no matter how much external influence and pressure is imposed, a stable core of “heavy episodic” or “binge” drinkers will persist. As long as alcohol exists (and it always will) no amount of regulation, education, propaganda, restriction, or taxation will deter the ‘hard core’ of dedicated abusers from periodically (or regularly) exceeding the official maximum “safe” allowance.²⁰ For explanation, we must look to the social significance of the substance.

15. www.abs.gov.au. Apparent Consumption of Alcohol, Australia, 2011-12; 4307.0.55.001

16. Statistics New Zealand. www.stats.govt.nz

17. The Conversation, <http://theconversation.com/alcohol-fuelled-violence-on-the-rise-despite-falling-consumption-9892>, accessed Jan 20, 2014.

18. Hallgren, M. et al (2012) Drinking Less But Greater Harm: Could Polarized Drinking Habits Explain the Divergence Between Alcohol Consumption and Harms among Youth. *Alcohol and Alcoholism*. Vol 47, issue 5. Pp 581-590.

19. In France and Italy, where wine drinking confers no special status, the reverse may be happening. The young may turn to more ‘elite’ imported beers. See: Asimov (2013) Europeans Stray From the Vine. NY Times. www.nytimes.com/2013/11/27/dining/in-wine-drinking-europe-and-america-trade-places. Also: Véronique Nahoum-Grappe. Les usages sociaux de l’alcool: les mots et les conduites en France entre 1750 et 1850. *Social Science Information*. June 1987 26: 435-449

20. One can find a parallel here with smoking. In the US, after the ban on most forms of advertising, smoking rates dropped slightly, and then stabilised at around 25% of adults and 35% of teenagers [Los Angeles Times, March 29, 2001]

Belief in disinhibition

Key Points

- Alcohol is almost universally believed to be a 'disinhibitor': a substance that 'loosens our inhibitions'.
- But inhibitions are rules that we follow and break only when we believe we have licence to and, as such, are largely socially, not chemically, determined.
- Likewise, in a large part, drunken comportment is also culturally determined and can largely be voluntarily engaged and disengaged even when alcohol has been consumed.
- Drunken comportment can be heavily influenced by situational cues that reinforce cultural norms.

Apart from drinking patterns, it is mainly the beliefs about alcohol that define the contours of the culture, and in this lies the major opportunity to address harmful behaviours. One of the strongest and most universal beliefs we encountered among Australians and New Zealanders is in alcohol's transformational powers. A belief in the 'disinhibiting' power of alcohol runs through Australian and New Zealand society from the youngest to the oldest.

However advanced we may think we are as a society, belief in magic persists – not the rabbit-out-of-the-hat type of magic, but the magic of personal transformation through alcoholic beverages. Although a significant number of scientific experiments (and common sense) would suggest the contrary, alcohol is still widely believed to weaken the brain's 'restraints' on impulsive and violent behaviours, and cause the 'civilising' influence of natural urges to unravel. The following comment typifies this belief:

"There's a thin line that separates us from the animals, you know. When you drink, that line becomes thinner and some people cross it." – Male, 35.

Although conclusive evidence to the contrary exists, most people still believe that alcohol has the power to hijack their better natures, control their thinking and make them do "crazy and stupid things". Even an A&E director in Australia was convinced that alcohol depresses cerebral function causing a loss of self-control and that "It brings out the demons in people." The etymology of the word alcohol itself belies the ancient origins of this belief: according to Hajar (2000), the word probably derives from the Arabic word *al-kol* or *al-ghol* (from which we derive our English word *ghoul*), which translates simultaneously as either a shape-changing genie (or spirit), or a substance that can take away or cover up the mind.²¹

The phrase "it loosens (or takes away) your inhibitions" is like a magical spell that releases drinkers from the normal rules of behaviour. Interestingly, the social rules of alcoholic disinhibition allow for certain behaviours but not others: no one becomes so disinhibited and 'out of control' that they steal or pickpocket from others, for example. Most people would not excuse theft because the person was drunk. Neither is it acceptable to insult or injure vulnerable members of society such as the elderly, handicapped or children. But taking off ones clothes, urinating (but not defecating), shouting, fighting, singing, flirting, and even going home with the 'wrong' person – are all blamed on the drink.

21. Hajar, R. (2000) Alcohol: Friend or Foe? A Historical Perspective. *Heart Views*. Vol 1(9).

The disinhibition argument fails to recognise that inhibitions are rules that we follow and break only when we believe we have licence to, and, as such, are largely socially, not chemically determined. A belief in alcoholic disinhibition may lead to uninhibited behaviour, but this depends entirely on what is inhibited in the first place, which is culturally determined. The British, for example, tend to inhibit emotional expression and therefore have a tendency to maudlin sentimentality when drunk. Spaniards and Italians, on the other hand, are culturally much more emotionally extroverted and do not associate alcohol so much with romantic or sentimental expression.

Alcohol does not cause disinhibition, but is a *symbol* that gives people licence to behave in an uninhibited way. This was neatly demonstrated through a study of social networks in a New Zealand secondary school, as the authors summarised:

So-called 'disinhibition' was an accepted, expected and unquestioned assumption about alcohol made by most young people in all locations within the network as the basis for 'drunken comportment'. However, each group of adolescents within the social network set their own 'limits' as to the extent of their drunken behavior and whatever was allowable within these 'limits' was accepted as the 'norms' of drunken behavior for that particular group. These 'norms' may thus vary between groups within the larger social network, resulting in different styles of 'drunken comportment' within the same society.²²

It is important to remember that the action of alcohol in the brain is not independent of the existing physical neural scaffolding of thought, belief, and expectation. In every country around the world, children as young as six can 'act out' the characteristic behaviours associated with drunkenness in their culture before they have ever tasted a drop of alcohol. These drunken pantomimes will be different in every culture. In some cultures, no extroverted expressions at all are expected; in others, a total transformation of the drinker's personality is the norm.

The behaviours associated with drunkenness – drunken comportment – are so ingrained in us from early childhood that we have strong 'neural nets' for these that can be activated without any alcohol at all. As long as the person believes alcohol has been ingested, their cultural 'drunk programme' will run. At Galahad, we tested this 'placebo effect' in an experiment with 30 adult volunteers who all believed they were drinking real alcohol. The drunken comportment exhibited by those given placebos was actually more pronounced than the 'control' subjects who were drinking real wine. Other experiments have shown that subjects given alcohol placebos can even experience blurred vision and slurred speech. These effects gradually reverse when the subject is informed that no real alcohol has been ingested.

This demonstrates two important things: one, that our behaviour when drunk is, to a large extent, culturally, not chemically determined, and two, that our behaviour is far more under our own control than we would like to believe. The brain state that enables the relaxation of inhibitions and 'freeing' of behavioural expression is a voluntary and reversible condition. Alcohol may help us to get into this desirable brain state, but it does not prevent us from coming out again. Many informants in Australia and New Zealand related a common

22. G. M. Abel, and E. W. Plumridge. (2004) Network 'norms' or 'styles' of 'drunken comportment'? *Health Education Research Theory & Practice* Vol.19 no.5 2004 Pages 492–500

experience: while in a ‘drunken state’ at a party or on a night out, they found themselves involved in some kind of emergency. For example, a friend is suddenly injured, or a call from home lets them know their child is ill. When this happens, they remembered being able to ‘sober up’ quickly and respond efficiently and intelligently to the crisis. Many young people in focus groups told us that, in order to be served or get into clubs they had to ‘pretend to be sober’ (this will be explored more fully later).

This is not to deny that alcohol does have some very definite physiological effects. At high doses, it is easy to see that the physical effects of alcohol can incapacitate all drinkers equally, regardless of cultural differences. No matter what the cultural norms of drunken comportment are, drinkers should not attempt to drive, operate machinery or be in sole charge of infants or young children, to give just a few examples. But what is harder to appreciate is the extent to which the behavioural effects or expressions of alcohol are culturally determined and can be voluntarily engaged or disengaged. Most drinkers are unaware that they are enacting a culturally scripted ‘pretence’ of drunkenness.

Inebriation is just like a mask: we can hide behind it to avoid judgment. But it is not the only device we use as a licence to act in a more free and uninhibited way. Anonymity and power are also social devices we use to avoid being harshly judged by others – a kind of social pain avoidance. In experimental situations, anonymity, or the physical masking of identity (such as the internet affords us), leads as often to pro-social as it does to selfish or anti-social behaviour.

Having social power can also ‘corrupt absolutely’, but, luckily for us, perhaps more often results in a greater sense of social responsibility. Most people make the assumption that when we are disinhibited that we will automatically behave in anti-social, or negative ways. Hirsch et al (2011) have found that inebriation is just as likely to increase pro-social behaviours, such as helpfulness.²³ In actual fact, we saw over and over again in the nightlife of countless cities and towns of Australia and New Zealand, that inebriation allows for significantly more pro-social disinhibition than the reverse. Some of our interviewees recognised this:

“Yeah, alcohol definitely changes you: mostly I become a better person, I think.” – Male, 20

“When I am drunk, I just want to be friends with everyone.” – Male, 18.

“I’m really antisocial normally. A bit of a sociopath! [Laughs]. What’s the other word for it? Misanthropic? That’s me. I just hate people. But when I go out drinking, it’s like I can just laugh at the stupid things ... at the way we all are ... the bullshit we talk about. And I just love everybody. I get more tolerant of fools and idiots. I’m a much, much nicer person when I’m drinking.” – Female, 40s.

One feature is consistent in all forms of disinhibition: behaviour can be strongly influenced by salient situational cues. As we will see in Part Two, explicit reinforcers of non-violent norms can significantly reduce aggression in both natural and laboratory settings.²⁴ Other studies have found that inebriated subjects in experiments can actually behave in a more empathetic

23. Jacob B. Hirsh, Adam D. Galinsky, and Chen-Bo Zhong. (2011) Drunk, Powerful, and in the Dark: How General Processes of Disinhibition Produce Both Prosocial and Antisocial Behavior. *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 6(5) 415–427

24. Jeavons, C. M. and Taylor, S. P. (1985), The control of alcohol-related aggression: Redirecting the inebriate’s attention to socially appropriate conduct. *Aggr. Behav.*, 11: 93–101

and helpful manner than sober subjects in response to a request for assistance.²⁵ We tend to forget that our social inhibitions not only stop us from hitting people, they can also make us overly squeamish about helping people.

Drunkenness and drunken comportment are most often regarded as being directly proportional to the amount of alcohol consumed. Based on my observations and review of the literature, however, I must concur with MacAndrew and Edgerton (1969)²⁶ that drunken comportment is variable and functional to the social purpose, and to the social and situational norms, and not to the type or amount of alcohol consumed.

Readers in the medical, psychiatric or addiction professions will invariably question the core claim of this paper that drunken behaviour is primarily a cultural, not physiological phenomenon. It is of course commonly accepted that alcohol provides an initial stimulatory effect at a very low dose followed by a depressant effect at higher doses, but in terms of the physiological response, there is still great uncertainty about the precise mechanisms in play when brain receptors respond to alcohol. Elsewhere in this paper I acknowledge that alcohol has a very real physiological effect, but based on decades of research in the field, I am convinced that these physiological effects in no way determine a behavioural response.

For many not immersed in the socio-cultural research base, this is likely to come as a surprise, and initially some find it hard to comprehend. We have become conditioned to believe that alcohol can make us transgress, can relieve our inhibitions or our self-control, and we believe this effect is generalised across the population. It is, if you like, among the most sacred of cows but this does not make it real.

The evidence for the cultural determination of drunken behaviour is overwhelming. Human beings ingest a myriad of foods and pharmaceutical drugs that have stimulatory or relaxant effects. If a doctor prescribes a muscle relaxant, she does not warn the patient that the drug might cause the loss of inhibitions. Patients are not for instance warned that that by taking the relaxant there is a risk they may end up removing items of clothing in a pub.

Just because alcohol relaxes us and reduces anxiety does not mean it causes inexplicable changes in behaviour or character or blocks impulse control. There are a couple of very simple observations we all can make that support this conclusion. First, the very same person on the same dose of alcohol can react in myriad different ways on different occasions and in different settings. This simply would not happen if we were talking about a purely physiological response. Second, morphologically similar humans in different cultures react completely differently to being ‘under the influence’. Some cultures see very little violence and anti-social behaviour, despite similar levels and patterns of consumption to other nations with high levels of such harm.

Addiction specialists see an awful lot of damage to the brain done by alcohol, and nothing I say here is designed to diminish that very real and concerning effect of excessive consumption. I do not deny that prolonged heavy use of alcohol (or any other drug) has a profound influence on the brain – in some cases leading to permanent changes which may, in theory, have a lasting effect on behaviour, although there is strong cross-cultural evidence that would even suggest that the behaviour of addicted individuals is strongly influenced by culture. But this is not the phenomenon under examination in this report. I am not in this paper focussed on the effects of long-term alcoholism. To do so would be require a dedicated and equally lengthy study of its own.

25. Steele, Claude M.; Critchlow, Barbara; Liu, Thomas J. (1985) Alcohol and social behavior: II. The helpful drunkard. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol 48(1) 35-46.

26. MacAndrew, C., & Edgerton, R. B. (originally published 1969). *Drunken comportment: A social explanation*: Percheron Press pbk. ed edition (31 Dec. 2003)

A thousand things we do, think and ingest have an effect on brain receptors -- anything from food, to exercise, anger, sex, sunlight, drugs and alcohol. But ALL of these are mitigated by our learned response to the sensation. The sensation of stimulation, relaxation or reduced anxiety induced by alcohol does not, in and of itself, produce any pre-determined behavioural response at all. Alcohol, like any other substance used ritually by humans (cannabis, mushrooms, ayahuasca, nicotine, Khat, Kava, Opium, coffee, Coca, etc.) is a vehicle for transmission of cultural forms.

By saying this, I do not suggest that the physiological affect of all of these substances is identical. Obviously, there are significant variances in the levels of stimulatory, relaxant and in some cases psychotic affect. However, this is a very different issue to the behavioural response exhibited by humans when they smoke or ingest these substances.

As an anthropologist who has spent thousands of hours observing drunken behaviour, I can confidently assert that it is as predictable as any other ritually governed human behaviour. Once you understand the ritual form, you can largely predict the behaviour. But the ritual forms differ widely.

Implications

The understanding that drunken comportment is culturally, not chemically, determined should be a core element in alcohol education and messages. As long as we continue to promulgate the myth that alcohol can radically transform a person's behaviour we can expect to see undesirable conduct in and around drinking venues. We must take the genie, the magic, out of the bottle and return the responsibility for conduct to the individual.

If we are looking to change the culture of drunken 'disinhibition', perhaps we should first examine what is so strongly inhibited in our culture that a chemical agent is required to 'loosen it'. We should also be wary of the message that we are sending to children that we cannot relax, be friendly, sociable, loving, helpful or tolerant without a drink.

The 'night out' ritual

Key Points

- Group drinking is an expression of the human need for social bonding, sexual display, mate attraction, and status display.
- Although 'night out' drinking may seem chaotic and unruly, closer inspection reveals a highly orchestrated ritual with repetitive patterns that provides young people with a deliberate communal transformative journey.
- That these rituals persist despite risk of harm indicates a deeper, evolutionary (or adaptive) function to the behaviour.

It is important to understand that 'going out' is a ritual – a highly significant one in the lives of many people, young and old. The significance of the phenomenon goes beyond the simple pleasures of drunkenness. In this section we begin to analyse what ritual is and does, what effect it has on the brain and how alcohol and ritual – the cultural and the chemical – interact.

Let's first have a look at the contours of the night out drinking. This deeper understanding of the ritual will, perhaps, light the way to change where change is needed.

For many Australians and New Zealanders, going out to entertainment venues for a meal, a drink or dancing is an important part of life. In the past, such evening entertainment was the preserve of the very rich; not only did the wealthy not have to wake at dawn to go to work, but only they could afford the candles. It is only in recent history that ordinary people have been able to purchase such luxury. Today, many of us see 'going out' as a reward for our hard work. In the 21st century, everyone can go to the ball. As one young lady working at an Auckland Chinese supermarket told me:

"You just want to have enough money so that, maybe every month, you go out with your friends or your family and have somebody who treats you nicely, and you have a nice meal and you can have a special drink and a special time. You know? Then you can go back and work hard again. [Laughs]."

For those of lower status and standing, 'being served' is an important relief and boost. As anthropologist Kate Fox observes:

When you go out, even if you are just having a few drinks at a bar or a meal at an inexpensive restaurant (or even buying a cheap lipstick at a make-up counter) you are 'served', you are waited upon, you are treated with at least some degree of deference, you are made to feel at least a little bit important. You become, albeit only temporarily, a high-status person.

It is easy to be scornful and dismissive about this, especially for pundits and commentators or professionals and executives who already have high status, who are listened to and deferred to all the time, but for many ordinary people, this may be the only time in their lives that they are treated with any respect. No wonder a 'night out' drinking, or a bit of 'retail therapy' is so effective! No wonder it is often those on the lowest incomes, those who can least afford it, who seek this form of therapy. If you are in a menial, low paid job, or worse still unemployed, where else in your life are you going to be treated with deference and made to feel that your opinions and preferences are important?

There is research evidence to indicate that this temporary raised status may even provide a serotonin boost. Experiments in which researchers artificially raise the status of certain monkeys within a group show an increase in serotonin in those monkeys' brains. The temporary rise in status that we experience when out drinking, eating or shopping may well be having the same effect – like a little zap of Prozac!²⁷

Many city bars are luxurious places. At one rooftop bar we could lie on sunloungers and sip cocktails around an elegant pool – anyone can feel like they are on a luxury cruise liner, even just for an hour. Other places are made to feel like dozens of connected yet intimate living rooms where you can lounge on a plush couch and be served. There are romantic places, fire-lit places, spaces to dazzle all the senses with colour and sound. For every mood, there seems a place to go. In focus groups, it was this variety and luxury that young people seemed to enjoy.

27 Fox, K. (2014) From an early unpublished draft of forthcoming book: The New Paleolithic: how we are recreating the tribal society. To be published by Hodder & Stoughton.

From observations, interviews and conversations it became apparent that three fairly distinct crowds frequent night-time licenced premises in Australia and New Zealand:

1. 8:30pm to 11:00pm – People out for a meal or after-work drinks, perhaps followed by a movie, show or live music.
2. 11:00pm to 3:00am – Party groups. A younger crowd of heavier drinkers and some drug users. Most will have begun drinking before going out.
3. 3:00am to 6:00am – Clubbers. In many cities, the majority appear to be poly-substance users.

Although there is obviously overlap, especially between categories 2 and 3, the three ‘waves’ have distinct characteristics.

In New Zealand, the Friday after-work drinking tradition seemed quite common. This is true in Australia as well, but in New Zealand, bosses seemed more likely to organise and pay for this.

“I work at a law firm and they buy us unlimited drinks from 5pm.” – Female, 29

“There was only one place I ever worked that didn’t have Friday drinks and that was because the bosses were Christians.” – Female, 26.

“I work at a call centre. I don’t finish until 8:30pm on Friday but we all go out after that.” – Female, 20.

The night out might seem, on the face of it, an unregulated, wild affair. Closer inspection, however, revealed that many young people found some security in the ritualization of drinking events and outings. The carefully planned pub/club circuit, the timing of drinks, the ordered escalation of ‘disinhibition’, and the ‘storying’ of events the day after, all provided a map of the transformative, communal journey. What looks to the untrained eye like random drunken debauchery is really social bonding, sexual display, mate attraction, status display – all underlying forces behind the “going out drinking” phenomenon.

“We always start out at someone’s house. Usually we have a bottle of wine each. It’s so much cheaper and it gets you ready for the night – in the mood. Then we meet up with more friends at a bar and we decide where we want to go next. Usually, by 1 am we’re in a club. We might go to two, depending on what kind of music we feel like. If we are still out after 4 am we sometimes go to [...] to just chill out.” – Female, 19.

“Yeah, like, it’s always, ‘nek’ as much as you can before you go out. Then we go roaming for a while, see where the girls are. We always try to hook up and then get into a club. They won’t let you in without girls. If we fail at that [laughs] we just carry on to different bars... see what’s happening.” – Male, 21

It is obvious that, for some, however, binge drinking and night-time carousing can have seriously adverse consequences—either immediate or long term, e.g.: hangovers, accidents, injuries, assaults and other increased health risks.

“I’ve seen lots of fights. Been in a few. I passed out on the street once and I’ve been mugged. But the worst thing about a bad night out is girls crying. They always end up crying and hanging on to you. Every time!” – Male, 19.

The question must be asked: if seemingly irrational behaviours, beliefs and traditions persist despite their negative outcomes, how can the phenomenon be explained? Whenever a society has an attachment to a particular form of behaviour that persists even when it causes obvious harm, it is possible that there was once an adaptive advantage to it, and so the behaviour became fixed. Whether or not it will continue to be adaptive will depend on the nature of the changed environment – cultural, social and ecological.

This evolutionary approach has become known latterly in anthropology as the ‘Novel Environment Hypothesis.’ Certain basic motivations, behaviours or mental functions of a species are formed in its ‘Environment of Evolutionary Adaptedness’ – the EEA. In the human case, this would be the Upper Palaeolithic – the latter part of the Old Stone Age, the time when the major adaptations that shaped us as a species occurred. It has only been about 10,000 years since the majority of us were living as hunter-gatherers, the way of life that formed us. That amounts only to about 400 generations – not long enough for us to have developed radically new psychological adaptations to the stresses of modern life. The Paleolithic adaptations we are stuck with include mental abilities and behavioural predispositions related to mating, sexual display, territoriality, group bonding, infant care, fear reactions, facial expressions, aggression, social power, empathy, etc.²⁸

The “discordance” between our adapted self and our modern condition is often radical, and even disastrous. Foods containing sugars, for example, were rare in the EEA and so a craving for sweet things was actually adaptive as an inducement to find sugar for energy. In modern circumstances with almost unlimited supplies of sweet carbohydrates, it leads to a frightening set of health problems. It is worth questioning, at least as a hypothesis, whether ritualized heavy drinking, rather than being simply a pathology, might be a response to some similar discrepancy, some failure of the modern system to provide for deep needs formed in the EEA more than 10,000 years ago. Could ritualised drunken behaviour be a re-enactment of an evolved ancient need for joyous bonding that still persists? Given what we know about alcohol and the brain, and the evolution of the brain itself, the question can at least be asked.

To understand drinking cultures, we must first look at what is in the human wiring: what needs or drives we are expressing and then look at the particular cultural circumstances in which these ancient needs and behaviours are expressed or frustrated. We could stare at a tiger in a zoo for hours and try to figure out why he is pacing up and down his cage. We could take precise measurements of his cage to determine the exact length and breadth that marginally increases, decreases or modifies pacing. We could even publish papers about it in scientific journals. But the truth is that the tiger is behaving oddly because he is not in his natural habitat. As Desmond Morris, Lionel Tiger and other anthropologists have remarked, we have created our own human zoo. The difference is that we have the capability to examine what we have done and try to adapt our zoo to fit us more humanely.

The night-out drinking ritual is a modern, perhaps maladaptive, expression of ancient human needs. In the following sections, we will examine the undercurrents of human nature that flow beneath the often inexplicably strange behaviours associated with night-time revelry.

28. Our Paleolithic past has left us with what has been characterized as *The Adapted Mind*, the title of the book edited by Barkow, Cosmides and Tooby (1992) that launched ‘Evolutionary Psychology’ as a sub-discipline. Barkow, J. H., Cosmides, L. E., & Tooby, J. E. (1992). *The adapted mind: Evolutionary psychology and the generation of culture*. Oxford University Press.

Wired for thrills: crowds, the night and fear of missing out

Key Points

- Being in a crowd, going out in the dark and staying up all night satisfy young people's atavistic urge for excitement, risk and even danger.
- Young people expressed a desire for both excitement and group belonging. FOMO or 'Fear of Missing Out' was put forward as a major reason for all-night revelry, despite awareness of the risks.

Perhaps it is to do with the longer periods of warm or very hot weather - whatever the explanation, Australians and New Zealanders have a particular love of the night. Staying out all night was an experience more common to the Australian and New Zealand young adults we spoke with than those in other countries. Many seemed most excited and enamoured by the night-time crowd, as these young adults explain:

"When you are out at night: you just feel alive." – Male, 23.

"I used to love staying up all night and then seeing the sunrise over the bay."
– Female, 20.

"When you make it to sunrise, you just feel like you have beaten something. You've beaten that creature of habit that has to go to bed at a certain time and you've freed yourself. Of course, you feel crap the whole day after!" – Male, 26.

The "international vibrant city" and 24-hour drinking

Australians of all ages told us they loved to stay out all night for reasons of personal transformation, sense of achievement and even for a simple appreciation of the aesthetic beauty of the dawn. But there is, of course, a darker side to the all-night experience, as evidenced by the mantra "nothing good happens after 3am." Many informants in the fieldwork were unsure of the origins of the custom. Some thought it had begun as a result of union pressure to allow shift workers their 'right' to a drink after finishing work at 3am. Others thought it all started after the summer Olympics in 2000. Many bar managers thought that the international backpacker phenomenon had gradually pushed venues to open later and later. But most police representatives, as well as city and government officials we spoke with reasoned that 24-hour opening was the result of deliberate planning to transform cities into "international" and "vibrant" centres that would attract tourism. Although many genuinely felt their cities rivalled other international cities for entertainment value, others were sceptical. One Australian police officer, for example, lamented that:

"We want to be Parisian, but we are full of Bogans from the suburbs! Families are bringing the kids into the city at 8 or 9am on a Sunday morning for a fun run and there are still zombies staggering all over the place."

Paradoxically, 24-hour opening, in many cities around the world, has resulted in a net reduction of violence and vandalism. Many city areas in the US, for example, have been transformed from 'hell spots', 'combat zones', and 'no go areas' at night into lucrative and far safer entertainment districts.²⁹

29. John Hannigan (1998) *Fantasy City: Pleasure and profit in the postmodern metropolis*. Routledge.

Almost all major metropolitan areas visited had serious problems, not with attracting revellers to the CBD, but getting them out again. Another police officer commented on the irony of the situation: “We tell people ‘come into the city: drink! Enjoy the nightlife! But if you want to get home again ... we can’t help you.’” Apart from policing, transportation was the single most contentious issue researchers encountered. Drinkers targeted this issue as a major cause of conflict and distress in their weekend experience.

As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “The test of civilisation is the power of drawing the most benefit out of cities”. The NTE may indeed generate good amounts of revenue, tax, and tourism, but it does have a price tag. Although very few places in Australia or New Zealand could rival other international capitals for night-time crowd management, transportation or eating options, cities in both countries, are, nonetheless, wonderful, visionary and inspiring places that, rightly, draw immense crowds into their hearts at night.

Significance of the night

What is the significance of the night in modern culture? Why is it important/attractive to be able to stay awake all night? What drives young people to stay out so long? Can evolutionary psychology shed any light on the rituals of the night and what implications does this have for regulating the NTE?

For millions of years, human activity occurred in small groups, bands or tribes. A crowd of more than 40 or so individuals would generate excitement, and would usually only have been experienced at times of festivity or celebration. Yet in the modern world, we must learn to cope with crowds of strangers on an almost daily basis. The hard-wired ‘arousal’ reaction is still there – probably triggered more strongly at night, when the gathering of a crowd would only signify either celebration or warfare – great excitement either way. And our brains thrive on excitement. Fear of the dark is also an evolutionary hangover. All of our hominid ancestors would have had good reason to be afraid. Most predators hunt in the dark and there is ample fossil evidence that our ancestors were, most definitely, prey.

Fear of the night and avoidance of night-time solitude would have been a healthy self-preservation strategy and thus ensured survival and reproduction of the trait. Our ‘fight or flight’ response is hyperactive and super-sensitive. Our brains are so sensitive to threat that our fear-reaction system bypasses the neocortex in order to gain precious seconds in evading danger. We panic first, think second. This advance warning system may have ensured our survival as a species (if you hang about too long trying to figure out if what you are looking at is a curly stick or a snake, you probably won’t live very long), but it did leave us with a colourful portfolio of phobias, and other anxiety and stress-related problems. The flip side of this stress, however, is reward. Our brains may be wired for stress and panic, but they are also generous with reward for escaping threats. Escaping the threat that triggered the ‘fight or flight’ response leads to a rush of adrenaline followed by a flood of endorphins – the brain’s feel-good chemicals. This euphoric rush is addictive among all the mammals, and we humans are uniquely adept at manipulating our own brain states purely for enjoyment. The fight-flight-escape reward circuitry can be activated by riding roller coasters, watching horror films, engaging in dangerous sports, diving with sharks, gambling, taking exams, flirting with strangers, mingling in crowds, and daring to stay out after dark. A “thrill” occurs when we experience fear and joy simultaneously. For a brief moment, we have cheated death. And perhaps that is what staying up all night is about:

“The first time I went out all night with my friends; it was amazing. We walked around the city, we went to dozens of places, drank loads and then we saw the sun come up at the beach and it just felt like: Wow! We did it! You know, like we had all survived something.” – Male, 42

The majority of our informants agreed, however, that, in general, “nothing good happens after 3am” – In fact this was repeated time and again by all those who voiced an opinion – from drinkers to police officers to bar owners and paramedics. It was a cultural mantra. When asked why they still stay out after 3am, the majority of young people responded: ‘FoMO – Fear of Missing Out’. This cultural meme was found in most Australian cities. In New Zealand young people we spoke with did not use the acronym but were still familiar with the concept and described a similar experience:

“On Friday night, I’d love to stay home and read a book but I have to keep up with friends. It started like that in high school. I got lonely and felt left out so I drank to keep up. If you missed one Friday or Saturday night you were like a leper! You wouldn’t get the ‘in’ jokes.” – Female, 19.

Knowing the special ‘in’ language of the group, as well as the stories, gestures, memories, and all the intricate details of social gossip is vital to maintain viable membership. ‘Missing out’ is risking social ostracism.

Young people also crave experience. One young man explained why he had to stay up all night:

Male: “At our age, you just have to do stuff: you need experience.”

Interviewer: “Experience of what?”

Male: “Of anything! Anything and everything. It’s no good just seeing stuff happen on television. You have to be there when it is happening. And if nothing is happening, you have to make it happen.” – Male, 19.

Another acronymic mantra heard was YOLO – ‘You Only Live Once’. One young man explained that that FoMO + YOLO means: “you stay out all night!”

Social anxiety, social bonding and drinking behaviour

Key Points

- Survival instinct tells us we must be part of a group; young people confirmed that they would never consider a night out on their own.
- The night out is a particularly complex and powerful social bonding ritual.
- Group dynamics, however, create stresses of their own. Teenagers and young adults experience social anxiety to a greater extent than older people, as evidenced by fMRI scans, and this social anxiety influences drinking behaviour.
- Most young people felt that they needed to be at least somewhat drunk before venturing out, even in their 'regular' group.

The night out is a group ritual. Almost all young people we spoke with said they would rather stay in than contemplate going out alone. Even the preparations for the night out are done in a group. Some females spoke of the panic they experienced on occasions when they found themselves separated from their group.

“You feel so vulnerable: I thought I could be attacked any minute. You just stand out. I stayed on my mobile every second until I found my friends. It was stupid really. I don't know why I was so afraid. There were loads of people around, even police cars.” – Female, 24

For men, the fear was mainly due to loss of status:

“You can never go alone, like. Nah, you just wouldn't do that. If I didn't have mates to go out with, I'd just stay in and watch the telly. It would just look sad, pathetic like to be sat at the bar by yourself. Girls are never going to talk to you so you won't stand a chance to hook up.” – Male, 28

We are much like our primate cousins in this regard. A lone chimp is an outcast, a nobody, and most likely to fall victim to predators of his own or another species. Being part of a group gives us both protection and status. Thus, in all cultures solitary drinking is frowned upon – a solitary drinker is stigmatised and somewhat shunned. Drinking is a quintessentially social activity, and it is to the social group that we must look for deeper understanding.

Although going out in a group may provide us with the safety of numbers, it also increases social stress. It is not just snakes and sabre-tooth cats that shaped our evolutionary fight-or-flight response: our skill at negotiating interactions with other humans was equally, or even more important to survival and reproduction, as Joseph LeDoux (1998) explained: “social situations are often survival encounters”.³⁰

In evolutionary terms, the terror of exclusion in any form, even symbolic, stemmed from a realistic fear of death. This fear is an in-built reaction in young people; as natural as the newborn's grip. The problem is that, unlike in our hunter-gatherer past, when you belonged automatically to the tribe into which you were born, many young people today must first find a tribe or a group to belong to, and there are so many out there. The nightlife scene may be about 'mate shopping'³¹ as we will see later on, but it is also about 'group shopping' – going out in the company of different groups to 'try them on for size and fit'.

30 Joseph LeDoux (1998) *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life*, 1996, Simon & Schuster; 1998 Touchstone edition

31. (as anthropologist Kate Fox has termed it).

Social anxiety is so intense that many young people stated that they would never even consider going out sober. The majority of young people in focus groups and those approached in pubs and clubs agreed that they felt incapable of negotiating social situations without alcohol. One young male said “since I turned 18, I have never gone out sober.” Putting oneself on display, entering the night-time realm, interacting with strangers in crowds and finding our place and sense of belonging in our own group, all of this causes stress and often high levels of anxiety, especially in the young. It can be a pleasurable anxiety, full of promise and excitement, but so intense that many we spoke with would not consider going out without first ingesting copious amounts of alcohol.

“I would never, ever even consider going out unless I was drunk first.” – Male 23

“You’ve got to have that buzz on before you hit the bars. You need that bit of courage and confidence.” – Male, 18.

“We always pre-load at somebody’s house before we go downtown. It puts you in the mood and then you get nice and drunk and you can go out. We probably have at least a bottle of wine each before we step out of the house.” – Female, 23.

What is at the root of this extreme anxiety and reliance on alcohol?

Recently, many scientists have begun to explore our responses with fMRI³² scans. Liebermann (2013) for example, has pinpointed adolescent stress in the brain: When an adult is asked “what do you think of yourself?” (i.e. do you think of yourself as funny, handsome, clever, etc.?) it is the medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC) that is activated – the part of the brain linked to our conceptual sense of self. But when asked “what do others think of you?” the adult brain activates a different area called the “mentalizing system” that we use primarily to detect and evaluate what other people are thinking. By contrast, when an adolescent is asked what he thinks of himself, both areas are activated. In other words, the fMRI confirms what every parent of a teenager knows: that their sense of self, their self-esteem, and often their happiness is intricately bound up with their perception of their place in the social group – with what others think of them. This results in a unique kind of adolescent stress that can be experienced either through the highs of group acceptance and belonging, or through the real pain of rejection or exclusion. Social pain (loss, jealousy, rejection, ridicule, etc.) is experienced in the brain in the same way as physical pain. It is a human universal experience that most of us, but young people in particular, will do almost anything to avoid.³³

Over the past two decades, discoveries in neuroscience have confirmed what anthropologists have long known, that we are hard-wired to be social – to connect and interact and harmonise with a group. Through sensitive detection strategies, verbal and body language, we are highly adept at evaluating other people’s psychological and emotional states and recalibrating our own to match another’s. This “social mind” adaptation is as vital to our survival as a species as the fight-or-flight response. But this harmonisation becomes increasingly difficult in larger groups, and we increasingly rely on group-level ritual in order to achieve at least the illusion of group cohesion and agreement. Alcohol, used in these rituals, provides a quick and convenient chemical shortcut, as we shall see below.

The anxiety many young people felt and their heavy reliance on alcohol to navigate the social world is, however explicable, still quite alarming. In Part Three, possibilities for a new form of social education for young people will be discussed.

32. Functional magnetic resonance imaging or functional MRI (fMRI) is a functional neuroimaging procedure using MRI technology that measures brain activity by detecting associated changes in blood flow.

33. Matthew D. Lieberman (2013) *Social: Why our brains are wired to connect*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

How is drinking a ritual?

Key Points

- Ritualised behaviour is necessary to overcome social anxiety and achieve group cohesion.
- While human rituals vary, all are imbued with symbolic meanings that enable us to minimise stress and strife in group interaction.
- In ancient times, group rituals involved psychotropic mechanisms (such as dancing, repetitive drumming, chanting, etc.) to achieve a specific brain state conducive to feelings of oneness and cooperative social harmony.
- In modern times, these rituals have largely been supplanted by a chemical shortcut - ethanol - that mimics the brain state achieved through such ritual activity.
- Alcohol serves several functions in the ritual process:
 - > It lessens anxiety, allowing for freer social interaction
 - > It provides a ritual focal point for group bonding
 - > It chemically mimics the effect of ritual in the brain allowing for a rapid immersion in a brain state conducive to group bonding
- As teenage drinkers become full participants in the ritual, they soon learn that the goal is not the individual subjective experience of intoxication, but the collective ritual of shared experience.
- The communal journey of the night out is a lengthy, largely choreographed ritual, symbolising group fusion and personal transformation.
- The rewarding effects of alcohol are heavily influenced by non-pharmacological factors: the expectation of the effect, the company of like-minded people, the drinking environment, etc. All these components change the internal environment of the brain.

Human social anxieties can only be overcome through ritual. The larger the group, the more elaborate the ritual. As we have seen, many seemingly inexplicable aspects of human social behaviour may be deeply rooted in human impulses, hard-wired by evolutionary programming. The ripples and echoes of these ancient impulses can often, I will suggest, be seen and heard in ritual.

There are many definitions of ritual. For brevity, I will select just one, by Randall Collins in his book “Interaction Ritual Chains”:

*Ritual is a mechanism of mutually focused emotion and attention producing a momentarily shared reality, which thereby generates solidarity and symbols of group membership*³⁴

In d’Aquila’s (1993) analysis, a ritual has to be “structured or patterned” and it has to be “repetitive” – that is, “to occur in the same form or nearly the same form with some regularity.”³⁵ Moore and Myerhof (1977) also see a ritual as “repetitive”, “stylized” or

34. Collins, R. (2014). Interaction ritual chains Princeton University Press.

35. D’Aquila, E. (1993). The myth-ritual complex, a biogenetic structural analysis. In: Brain, Culture, and the Human Spirit, edited by Asbrook JB. Lanham, MD, University Press of America, 45-75.

“orderly”, even “acted.”³⁶ Such activity produces a euphoric, trance-like state in which anxiety is reduced and a feeling of oneness with others is enhanced. Some authors have argued that the need for anxiety reduction, or ‘brainsoothing’ among our ancestors gave rise to religious ritual and belief.³⁷ The point of all these social harmonising rituals is what anthropologist Chris Knight (1990) called the “ritual synchronisation of emotions.”³⁸ This is achieved by getting large groups of people to do the same thing at the same time, especially accompanied by rhythmic movements, causing a release of endorphins in the brain. Repetitive motion performed by a group is an incredibly powerful feature of all human societies. There is not one tribe, not one society on the face of the earth that does not have some form of ritual synchronization of group emotions. Whether it is through drumming, dancing, chanting, twirling, marching, prayer revivals, singing hymns, raving, clubbing, we consistently seek this state, even in the most outrageous ways, so that we can feel that we are actually intimately bonding with large groups of people, because this is the state that we have evolved to be comfortable in. This is the state that makes us feel safe and rewarded.

For our hunter-gatherer ancestors, the ability of many people to move as one body would have had an added survival advantage: to animals, groups of humans in synchronised movement appear as one frighteningly large animal.

The ritual dances in which almost all indigenous hunter-gatherer peoples engage serve several functions, including practicing synchronised hunting moves, and encouraging cooperative behaviour in the group. Recently, through a series of experiments, Wiltermuth and Heath (2009) confirmed what tribal elders and military instructors have known for centuries: that behavioural synchronization, such as simply walking in step with others for a brief period of time, results in more cooperative and unselfish behaviour.³⁹ This effect of enhancing the cooperative urge occurred equally strongly whether the behavioural synchronicity involved motor activities such as marching, rowing or dancing, or more social activities such as singing. Wiltermuth and Heath conclude that:

“Synchrony rituals may have therefore endowed some cultural groups with an advantage in societal evolution, leading some groups to survive where others have failed.”

In post-Neolithic ‘modern’ agricultural societies, many of these group rituals were relegated to a few times a year. As the nation states developed, and human groups expanded into ever larger communities, the outlets for group-bonding activities were further and further restricted. Larger groups and societies lost the natural methods of group bonding inherent in small groups; yet the larger the group, the greater the need for formalised or ‘ritualised’ group bonding. Some forms of religion, for example, actively repressed most expressions of communal ecstasy, and channelled them into sedate and choreographed forms.⁴⁰ Spontaneous outbursts of communal joy and bonding and sensuality were, and still are, widely feared as reminders of our sinful bestial and savage nature.

36. Moore, S. F., & Myerhoff, B. G. (Eds.). (1977). *Secular ritual*. Uitgeverij Van Gorcum.

37. Feerman, J. R. (Ed.). (2009). *The biology of religious behavior: the evolutionary origins of faith and religion*. ABC-CLIO. Tiger, L., & McGuire, M. (2010). *God’s brain*. Prometheus Books.

38. Knight, C. (1990) *Blood Relations: Menstruation and the Origins of Culture*. Yale University Press: New Haven, Conn.

39. Recent advances in neuroscience have also confirmed that the urge to copy or synchronise our behaviours seems to be built into the brain in the form of mirror neurons that are activated when the individual either performs an action himself, or sees someone else performing it. Wiltermuth, Scott S., and Chip Heath. (2009) “Synchrony and cooperation.” *Psychological science* 20.1 : 1-5.

40. Ehrenreich, B. (2007). *Dancing in the streets: A history of collective joy*. Macmillan.

Although the agricultural / herding life possibly provided greater safety and stability, when compared with the hunting-gathering lifestyle, it was *boring*. Millions of years of evolution had primed our brains for excitement, change, risk, challenge. Hunting could result in daily thrills, nightly celebrations and re-enactments of triumph. Unlike the hunter-gatherers, who sat down to share a ‘feast’ on most nights, the agriculturalists could only do so within the time-frames allowed by those in power, or by the tyranny of the planting and harvesting timetable. Thus, it is possible that the first ‘binge’ culture was born. It is arguable that the modern worker who goes out until the wee hours, eating, dancing, drinking and socialising, is unconsciously trying to recreate the happier Palaeolithic conditions that we are born to expect.

So the ritual of going out drinking is about group harmonisation, group synchronisation of emotion, and of behaviour. Undeniably, alcohol helps achieve group synchronisation by mimicking the brain state seen in ritual (as we will see below), but it only works if all drinkers are affected in the same way and at the same time. As all individuals are affected differently by alcohol, this *should* be impossible. But what we can observe is that the chemical effects are moderated by cultural norms, by the ritual, to achieve the goal of group synchronicity. This cultural dance of drunkenness is learned at an early age through observation and imitation of older drinkers. As teenage drinkers become full participants in the ritual, they soon learn that the goal is not the individual subjective experience of intoxication, but the collective ritual of conformity. In many modern, Westernised nations, individuality is prized over conformity. Perhaps this is why we need the solvent of alcohol so much more than in Eastern societies, where conformity is thought of more as ‘harmonisation’ of the group for collective pleasure and benefit.

How ritual affects the brain

The effectiveness of ritual in group synchronization depends on a particular process of brain stimulation. To summarize: there are two basic processes related to the two hemispheres, left and right, of the brain. The left hemisphere (dedicated to analytic, verbal and causal thinking) is related to the *ergotrophic* or energy-expanding functions of the sympathetic and central nervous systems. The right hemisphere (which governs emotional, visual-spatial and creative or gestalt activity) is related to the *trophotropic* or energy-reducing (calming) functions of the peripheral and central nervous systems: those that maintain the baseline stability of the organism.

Normally the hemispheres function by rapid alternation, but over-stimulation of either hemisphere by collective ritual activity (synchronised movements, dancing, drumming, chanting, etc.) can result in the two firing together. This causes a chemical “spillover” from one hemisphere to the other (via the *corpus callosum*), with consequent feelings of the falling away of individual consciousness, the loss of boundaries and distinctions, the oneness with others, the embrace of opposites and contradictions, and the feeling that death is not to be feared. The only other physical experiences that come close, and that in fact involve the very same neurological processes, are orgasm, deep meditation and some types of epileptic seizures.⁴¹

Traditional healing rituals in many tribal societies across the world employ similar neurobiological strategies that some researchers have suggested co-opt the neural mechanism involved in human attachment and bonding. The result of such ritual is, say Frecska and

41. D’Aquili, Laughlin and McManus. (1979) *The spectrum of ritual: a biogenetic structural analysis*. Columbia University Press; Also: *Being Changed by Cross-cultural Encounters: Anthropology of Extraordinary Experience* by David E. Young and Jean-Guy Goulet (Eds) 1994.] Also Lex: B.W. (1979) *The Neurobiology of Ritual Trance* in d’Aquili, Laughlin and McManus (1979) 117-51.

Kulcsar (1989), a “deep psychobiological synchrony between adults.”⁴²

How alcohol mimics ritual

Alcohol can be seen as chemically mimicking, or inducing, the physiological response brought about by repetitive action or trance and healing rituals. What is known as “alcoholic myopia” in fact exactly simulates the trance-like experience, and facilitates the transformational element of drinking rituals and the feeling of attachment to others, of group synchronicity.

fMRI scans have confirmed that inebriation (in the short term) increases the connectivity between regions of the brain and hemispheres.⁴³ This brain state has been shown in previous experiments with sober subjects to be associated with relaxed, euphoric states and pleasurable, floating feelings.⁴⁴ Lukas et al (1991) have shown that subjects in EEG experiments who were given alcohol reported intense pleasurable and euphoric feelings (usually 10 to 15 minutes after drinking). The EEG simultaneously showed abrupt alterations in their brain activity; specifically, the bi-lateral extension of increased alpha-wave activity over the entire scalp and frontal cortex of a kind not normally recorded unless the subject is performing repetitive movement, which the subjects in Lukas’ trials were not. Lukas et al conclude that ethanol may cause “a synchronisation of the thalamo-cortical connections and an increase in alpha amplitude...”⁴⁵ precisely simulating what occurs during ritual.

Group drinking may have evolved as a substitute for the all-important synchronising rituals we enjoyed more frequently in our hunter-gatherer past, and as a simulation of the even more ancient, primate need for physical contact – grooming. Actual physical contact between members of a group elicits a physiological response. As our human ancestor groups grew in size, oral communication had to replace physical touch as the primary means of appeasement and bonding. It is my hypothesis that alcohol’s actions on the brain serve to give language, verbal communication, a more physical component, and thus bring us closer to our primate feelings of group safety.

Research has found that alcohol and many other drugs affect our brains differently depending on our mindset. Even the toxicity of a drug changes depending on whether we choose to take it or it is forcibly administered.⁴⁶ This actually makes perfect sense. Alcohol and drugs act on the neuronal pathways and neurotransmitter chemicals in the brain. Their effect will depend on what pathways are already active and which neurotransmitters are already present. But alcohol is no ordinary drug. Take heroin, for example: given the right dose, the user will invariably experience predictable effects. Not so with alcohol. As we saw above in the explanation of disinhibition, the rewarding effects of alcohol are heavily influenced by non-

42. Frecska, E and Kulcsar, Z (1989) Social bonding in the modulation of the physiology of ritual trance. *Ethos* Vol 17, no 1.

43. Lithari C, Klados MA, Pappas C, Albani M, Kapoukranidou D, et al. (2012) Alcohol Affects the Brain’s Resting-State Network in Social Drinkers. *PLoS One* 7.(10):e48641 See also: Fingelkurts AA, Kivisaari R, Pekkonen E, Ilmoniemi R, et al. (2004) Enhancement of GABA-related signaling is associated with increase of functional connectivity in human cortex. *Human Brain Map* 22: 27–39.

44. Brown, B. B. (1970). Recognition of aspects of consciousness through association with EEG alpha activity represented by a light signal. *Psychophysiology*, 6(4), 442-452.; Matejcek, M. (1982). Vigilance and the EEG: Psychological, physiological and pharmacological aspects. EEG in drug research. Stuttgart: Gustav Fischer, 405-508.; Wallace, R. K. (1970). Physiological effects of transcendental meditation. *Science*, 167(3926), 1751-1754.

45. Lukas, S. E., Mendelson, J. H., Amass, L., Benedikt, R. A., Henry Jr, J. N., & Kouri, E. M. (1991). Electrophysiological correlates of ethanol reinforcement. In *Neuropharmacology of Ethanol* (pp. 201-231). Birkhäuser Boston. p 224.

46. Dworkin, S.M., Volkner, C., Dworkin, S.I. (1988). Toxic consequences of cocaine are augmented by non-contingent drug administration. *Abstr Soc Neurosci*. 14:961

pharmacological factors: the expectation of the effect, the company of drinkers, the drinking environment, etc., all these change the internal environment of the brain and mediate the effects of alcohol.⁴⁷

The power of this ethanol-soaked synchronicity can be neatly illustrated by the numerous stories told during focus groups and in drinking venues. One recurrent theme was what one might call “the loneliness of the designated driver.” Many who were placed in this position spoke of being “on the outside” of the group and its experience. Some felt compelled to feign drunkenness to “fit in.” Another common experience was of one person joining a drinking group quite late. Every time I asked what the latecomer would do, the response was always “catch up” – that is, drink quickly to try to approximate the state of inebriation the others were in. Always using the metaphor of the journey, the sober person would sometimes judge that the group was “too far gone” or “too far ahead” and leave. One young man said: “it would be like trying to catch up to a group of skydivers by getting on the next flight.”

It would, of course, be entirely possible to inebriate oneself very quickly. But this is not the point. The point is the participation in the ritual – going on a journey together, at the same time, performing the sacred rites in the correct sequence and expertly synchronising one’s state of mind to the others in the group through shared preparations (dressing up), expressions, jokes, stories, gossip, increasingly ‘liberated’ body language, gestures of affection and group belonging. To ‘cut in’ halfway through this ritual and be accepted is akin to the groom just swooping in for the “I do” part of a wedding ceremony. It is the entire ritual that binds the group, not just the alcohol. One study has in fact confirmed that the effect of drinking in a group leads to the experience of greater euphoria than drinking the same quantity alone.⁴⁸

Implications

As we have noted above, our need for ‘disinhibition’ is caused by the strength of our cultural inhibitions. Most of us no longer live ‘cheek by jowl’ with our extended family and tribe as we did for millions of years of human evolution. Separation makes the mind grow anxious. We long for the bonding experiences, but we have re-structured our modern lives with privacy, independence, separation and the insular nuclear family taking priority over our communal tribal life. Alcohol has great power to facilitate our social bonding rituals, to ease us back together, but greater common understanding is needed of how this happens and how much (or how little) alcohol is necessary to achieve this.

47. Kornetsky, C., Moolten, M., and George Bain (1991) Ethanol and Rewarding Brain Stimulation. In Meyer, R.E., et al (Eds) *Neuropharmacology of Ethanol: New Approaches*. Birkhäuser: Boston.

48. Pliner P, Cappell H. (1974) Modification of affective consequences of alcohol: A comparison of social and solitary drinking. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*; 83:418–425.

Group drinking and extreme behaviours

Key Points

- Group drinking is a form of 'signaling' behaviour. It signals you are willing to make sacrifices for the sake of the group, and membership cannot be achieved without 'sharing the journey.'
- The greater the need for proof of group loyalty, for status, belonging, or to attract a mate, the more extreme the behaviour is likely to be.
- Drunken self-ridicule also serves as an 'appeasement' display to signal non-violent intent.

Young people seem to have no qualms about doing certain ridiculous and embarrassing things when drunk. Willingness to do 'crazy things' is an expression of loyalty. The 'red card' tradition among university students in New Zealand is a perfect example. At the start of the year, each member of a flat or house gets a red card. At any point throughout the year, the student may 'pull' their red card and all other members must submit to whatever ingenious, ridiculous, dangerous or humiliating task the card holder can think up. The tasks almost invariably involve copious amounts of drinking. One female in a focus group confessed:

"I live in mortal fear of the red card. God knows what we'll have to do next time. But whatever it is you HAVE to do it. Unless you want to ruin your entire social life, there is no way out of it." – Female, 20

A group of young men tried to explain the importance of such behaviours:

Male 1: "When you are with a group of close mates and everyone is drunk you can do crazy things together. It could be dangerous or illegal (hopefully no one gets hurt) but it adds a dimension to your relationship – something you couldn't tap into otherwise." – Male, 22

Male 2: "Yeah, it gives you good memories." – Male, 20

Male 1: "I mean, you don't go to the movies and say 'damn that was a good night out!'"

Male 3: "It makes you feel free. But I only really have this experience with 3 or 4 good friends." – Male, 24.

Many post the photos on their own websites or Facebook pages as if to prove how much the centre of attention they are. Making a spectacle of oneself (in a particular way) is no longer social suicide.

"It used to be the last man standing was cool; now it's the first one to do something stupid who is King." – Female, 50s

There may be three possible explanations for this:

1. Ridicule (and self-ridicule) reduce threat: this diminishes competition and increases group cohesion
2. Self-handicapping is a form of "expensive signalling" which demonstrates group loyalty
3. Extreme behaviours are a form of status and sexual display

Overt displays of incapacitation through alcohol can serve to increase trust and bonding in a group. Drunken self-ridicule can also be interpreted as a form of appeasement display – a signalling device used among males to establish the hierarchy – and in mixed-sex groups, self-humiliation can ease sexual tension by indicating non-violent, playful intentions.

Paradoxically, among males of many cultures, drinking to incapacitation is taken as a sign of strength and manliness. According to Zahavi and Zahavi (1997)⁴⁹, intentionally and obviously handicapping oneself may be a way of signalling to rivals and predators that one is actually more powerful than appearances would suggest. If the signal is outrageous enough, the predator is likely to think it is genuine, and not waste any energy on the chase. Think of the peacock's tail: one would think that such an obvious encumbrance would have spelled swift death for peacocks in the wild, yet they survive. Jared Diamond (1991)⁵⁰ in *Rise and Fall of the Third Chimpanzee* also gives the example of the gazelle that when approached by a stalking lion, instead of fleeing as fast as it can, leaps straight up and down into the air.

Both authors explain that these ostensibly self-destructive signals also serve as indicators of fitness to females of the same species. Bright, predator-attracting plumage, ridiculously long tails, and extremely risky behaviour all signal to females that the male has survived despite his 'handicap', and must therefore be genuinely strong. Extrapolating from Zahavi's 'handicap principle', Diamond (1991)⁵¹ speculates that chemical abuse and other risky behaviour by humans can be partly explained by the same principle. Incapacitating oneself with alcohol (or other drugs) sends a signal of superiority to both rival and potential mates – an extreme form of showing off.

As Butler (2006)⁵² noted in her research among the Quichua speakers in Ecuador, drinking to intoxication with one's peers also sends a strong signal that one is willing to incapacitate one's self, to sacrifice one's 'surplus' resources (e.g., time or money), and possibly risk injury, in order to maintain group cohesiveness. Although parents and teachers often refuse to accept it, any teenager in an industrialised nation knows that crazy dangerous behaviour can gain you status. Group incapacitation through drink also serves as a warning to 'freeloaders' that the benefits of group membership come at a price.

Drinking foul brews in order to gain trust and respect may be a more ancient custom than we think. For example, in their book 'God's Brain', one of the authors recounts a trip to West Africa in which he was asked by the village chief to drink a bowl of soup containing worms and bugs. Later they were told that the custom was developed for visitors because: "Those who drink the soup do not hurt us."⁵³

Perhaps it is also a cultural adaptation to living in our new crowded world that we must go to greater extremes to attract attention to ourselves. At all cost avoid being a "nobody" – have your 15 minutes of fame, whatever you have to do for it. Anyone can post a Youtube video and have the illusion of fame and impress their friends with drunken exploits. The recent "neknominate" craze that has 'gone viral' provides the perfect example of modern technology used to satisfy our atavistic need for bonding and recognition. In this drinking game, now popular in several parts of the globe, friends encourage each other to video themselves as they

49. Zahavi, Amotz and Avishag Zahavi.(1997). *The Handicap Principle: A Missing Piece of Darwin's Puzzle*. New York: Oxford University Press.

50. Diamond, J. M. (1991). *The rise and fall of the third chimpanzee*. Random House.

51. Diamond, J.M. (1991) Op Cit

52. Butler, B. Y. (2006). *Holy intoxication to drunken dissipation: Alcohol among Quichua speakers in Otavalo, Ecuador*. University of New Mexico Press.

53. Tiger, L., & McGuire, M. (2010). *God's brain*. Prometheus Books.

“nek” (drink in one go) a drink, upload the clip to Facebook and then nominate another friend to do the same. The social objective is to link friends together in an unending, symbolic chain. It is, in effect, a virtual version of the toast – an ancient ritual to honour the Gods and bind a gathering. Draining the entire cup is proof of the fullness of friendship. In a modern world in which we have sacrificed a degree of the intimacy and immediacy of communication that has shaped our evolution, this is an example of a new adaptation for an ancient need: to establish a community event, a deepening of camaraderie, and to maintain social bonds.

As anthropologist Kate Fox explains in her forthcoming book, many of the modern technological innovations we now have (mobile phones, the internet, shopping malls, etc.) are helping us to re-gain some semblance of the social habitat we have evolved to need.

As far as evolution is concerned, modern industrial societies only happened in the last ten seconds or so and don't count – our stone-age brains are still wired to live in small, stable, close-knit tribal groups, and we are struggling to cope with the social fragmentation, isolation and alienation of modern urban life. ... We are using technological advances to counteract the adverse social effects of previous technological advances. With the industrial revolution, we ingenious but flawed humans inadvertently created a social world in which our stone-age brains are highly uncomfortable, but we are now using the same ingenuity, and space-age technology, to recreate the social conditions for which we are adapted, to get back to our comfort-zone.⁵⁴

Of course, young men will use any opportunity to compete with each other in order to raise their social status and ‘show off’. Taking risks, engaging in extreme sports, fighting can all enhance a man’s reputation and stature, making him appear to be at once a formidable opponent not to be trifled with, and a desirable mate, as we will see next.

Wild Men and Crazy Bastards

Key Points

- Extreme drunken behaviour allows men to display, or enact, an enhanced version of themselves, with the intent to impress or frighten potential allies, mates or foes.
- In the past, such displays were sanctioned and encoded in tribal ritual. While the need for this type of display still exists in modern men, the opportunities are reduced.
- A common belief in the power of alcohol to change a person’s behaviour is used to excuse such wild displays while preserving the normal, sober norms of non-violence.

Extreme drinking displays can also be interpreted as a modern version of ‘wild-man’ (or ‘wild pig’) rituals. In hunter-gatherer tribes, versions of the ‘wild-man’ rituals allowed low-status, stressed or frustrated males to engage in a “temporary insanity”, to ‘run amok’, scream, destroy property and generally act wild. Marshall (1979) explained that this serves as a “dramatic performance in which individuals may manipulate the public image of themselves”⁵⁵ – really a kind of big, sanctioned, adult temper-tantrum, after which the male feels better for having displayed his awesome power and reminded everyone not to push

54. Fox, K. (2014) Op cit.

55. Marshall, M. (1979) Weekend Warriors: Alcohol in a Micronesian Culture. Mac Marshall. Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield Publishing.

him too far.⁵⁶ The ritual serves to allow extreme behaviour without causing the actor to lose his moral standing in the community. Alcohol is now the ‘stand in’ for these ancient and useful rituals.

The ‘Crazy Bastard Hypothesis’ also seeks to explain the disproportionate involvement of young males in extremely risky activities. For men, displaying a seeming willingness to risk one’s life is an advantage in the status hierarchy game as it sends a clear message that the man would be either a formidable foe or valuable ally in a fight. Fessler, et al. (2014) demonstrated that such individuals are envisioned by others to be bigger, stronger and more violent than other men, regardless of their actual physical size and strength.⁵⁷ This makes sense of the old line “I thought you’d be taller” that people utter when meeting someone of high social standing such as a film star.

In tribal warfare, ‘crazy bastards’ were the most prized fighters, as in the Sioux and Crow Native American traditions, for example. The ‘crazy dog’ heroes were venerated in song, story and myth. Such wild acts appear inexplicable to us now because we are outside of the context that such behaviour could be of any practical communal use.

Sexual / status displays

Key Points

- The NTE is the modern setting for ancient mating rituals which include the overt display of sexual availability, fertility, wealth and male strength.
- A significant difference, however, between ancient and modern rituals, is the absence today of supervising community elders.

On nights out in drinking ‘hotspots’ around New Zealand and Australia, Galahad researchers could not help observing that the vast majority of revellers were in the 18-25 age range and most were either on the lookout for a potential mate, or in active ‘courtship’ with a partner. Love was in the air. Although behaviour inside venues was relatively controlled, on the street the ‘sexual display’ was more overt: catcalls, wolf whistles, hooting, flirting and even simulations of copulation were everywhere as groups of males and females approached, retreated and teased each other in playful flirtation.

As we have seen above, any seemingly wasteful expenditure of energy and resources is a strong indicator that the behaviour has to do with sexual display and mate attraction.

“Going out: it’s all about hooking up. Even if you are already attached, there’s always the chase.” – Male, 21.

56. It is a hypothesis that the high rates of drunkenness among males of certain modern-day displaced and colonised hunter-gatherer groups today may be a widespread enactment of such rituals. David McKnight (2002) and others have noted that it is the males of hunter-gatherer groups who are the most deeply affected by the loss of tribal hierarchies, land rights, hunting and warfare. The fighting men among the Truk Islanders that Marshall studied, nomadic Native Americans, the Australian Aboriginals, and others have all been made ‘power failures’ by the colonial state, and most engage in heavy drinking. McKnight, D. (2002) *From Hunting to Drinking: The Devastating Effects of Alcohol on an Australian Aboriginal Community*. Taylor & Francis.

57. Fessler, Daniel MT, et al (2014) Foundations of the Crazy Bastard Hypothesis: Nonviolent physical risk-taking enhances conceptualized formidability. *Evolution and Human Behavior*. 35 (1): 26-33.

Miller (1999) goes as far as to suggest that nearly all oddities in human culture are “courtship adaptations”:

*Human culture makes a great deal of sense as a set of courtship adaptations shaped by sexual selection through mate choice. The costs and aesthetics of cultural behaviour that make it so inexplicable in survival terms make it perfect as a set of reliable fitness indicators that help advertise one's superiority over sexual competitors.*⁵⁸

Although many nights out experienced by Australians and New Zealanders are constructed around a variety of social bonding situations (family celebrations, friendship affirmations, work-related events, or pure entertainment) a large amount of the social activity in the NTE can easily be explained as a ‘mate’ market – opportunities for attraction of potential mates.

“You go out at night at Surfers and your pulse just goes crazy. There are girls everywhere! And I mean girls! Girls, girls, girls!” – Male, 23.

Those of us who have found our mates, married and had children tend to forget how time-consuming our mate selection process may have been. For a lucky few, this process is quick: they fall in love as adolescents and never look for another choice. For the majority, the ‘interviewing’ or ‘sizing up’ process means we must trawl through dozens, or perhaps even hundreds, of candidates to find our perfect mate.

Club managers and bouncers are adept at ensuring that the ratio of males to females in a club remains overbalanced in favour of females. Those we interviewed spoke of ‘the ratio’ being all-important for everyone having a good time. The ideal ratio, it seems, is 60-40 female to male. Let it slip past 50-50 and there will be fights, among both males and females. That these clubs are spaces for sexual display is also obvious in the rules for entry. In focus groups, young Australian and New Zealander women explained that older people, particularly females, would not be allowed in, no matter how ‘young’ they tried to dress. The implication was that the club owners know what they are selling: the space is reserved for the young and fertile.

And there is nothing inherently wrong with this. In the majority of all cultures throughout history (and even currently), the elders create times and places for young people to meet and display. The difference is that, in times past, these mate-selection gatherings were organised and supervised by community elders, parents, relatives, even if from a discreet distance, and were therefore safer and better regulated.

Implications

We must accept that sexual display, mate attraction and courtship are functional, adaptive human behaviours that require dedicated space and ritual time. In modern life, the NTE is the primary arena for this important human show. The show must go on, but, as it has been for hundreds of thousands of years, it is safer when managed by responsible, caring, ‘elders’ who can engineer the correct balance of freedom and propriety.

58. Miller, G. F. (1999). Sexual selection for cultural displays. In R. Dunbar, C. Knight, & C. Power (Eds.), *The evolution of culture*. Edinburgh U. Press.

University drinking

Key Points

- Informants in this research indicated that the first few years of university are high-risk times for heavy episodic drinking.
- Students felt that group drinking was related to a strong need for bonding, acceptance, excitement and relief from stress.
- ‘Couch burning’ in New Zealand is an example of the ritualistic expression of these needs.
- Informants perceived their binge drinking ‘careers’ to be over very quickly. Some felt their bingeing days were behind them by age 19.

From interviews, observations and focus groups, researchers developed a good picture of drinking by university students, especially those in their first year. The comments made by these 19-21 year-old university students in Wellington were fairly typical:

“When you first move away, you just don’t know who you are. Young people are really unaware.” – Female, 21.

“Yeah, drinking is a good way to bond.” – Female, 19.

“You get out of your skin more.” – Female, 23.

“It is also boredom: I mean \$8 is not even enough for a movie ticket, but it will get you a bottle of wine.”—Female, 19.

“It’s a trust thing. But you should only drink with people you trust.” – Female, 20.

Our informants in Palmerston North and Dunedin gave accounts of many rituals, such as ‘couch burning’, that could keep a team of anthropologists busy for years analysing fire rituals and cultural remission.

Despite our highly technological civilisation, it is hard to underestimate the ongoing importance of fire in social relations. Especially in the Vedic tradition, where fire is considered to link the human and spiritual worlds, making a fire signifies “life, wealth, procreation and continuation of family, clan and lineage”.⁵⁹ Daniel Fessler (2006) even claims that humans have evolved psychological mechanisms dedicated to controlling fire.⁶⁰ In his study of children’s attraction to fire he finds that, in societies where fire is routinely used as an important tool, children master firemaking and control in middle childhood and quickly lose their sense of awe and fascination. In these societies, ‘playing with fire’ is a necessary part of the learning and socialisation process. In Western societies, however, where young children are not allowed to experiment with fire, the fascination remains until late adolescence and results in a much higher incidence of pyromania. I find an interesting parallel here with learning to drink. In societies where alcohol is a routine, mundane, everyday, unexciting part of life, adolescence do not generally use it as a form of rebellion or stolen pleasure. Again, I am not suggesting that the solution is to give toddlers booze and flame throwers, only that we might do well to examine the unintended consequences of our ‘risk averse’ culture.

59. Heesterman, J.C. (1983). Other Folk’s Fire. In J. Staal, ed. (1983) Agni, the Vedic Ritual of the Fire. 2 vols. Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press.

60. Fessler, D. (2006) A burning desire: steps toward an evolutionary psychology of fire learning. *Journal of Cognition and Culture*. 6(3):429-451.

The practice of couch burning in New Zealand started on streets dominated by student houses. A cheap couch is set alight in the street or on the pavement and the blaze draws out students, providing a focal point for strangers and friends who gather around the flames. The fire provides light, warmth, and a sense of illicit excitement. When the police or firefighters show up, a sense of solidarity – us against them – unites the student groups.

“I loved my first 6 months at Uni. We always burned couches on the street. One night we burned 4 couches. All the students from the houses brought couches to sit on as well and we just sat there and watched the fires. Now the cops come by about every hour to try to stop it. But they still do it. If a cop car has just gone by you know you have at least an hour before they come back. And some of the student houses will have a brazier in their back yard now.” – Female, 22

In the aftermath of these celebration, the press invariably quotes the police or firefighters who label the students as irresponsible drunks. For example, the Otago Daily Times ran this headline in March 2011: “‘Idiotic behaviour’ angers firefighter” – leading into a story on the couch burning at an annual keg party. The concern for students’ welfare is well-placed, but rather than condemning the entire tradition as irresponsible, alcohol-fuelled anarchic mayhem, we could instead seek to understand the human need it represents.

University students’ drunken antics and bonfires have been going on since medieval times. In many parts of Europe these cultural remission events are ritually scripted/sanctioned into the student year, as this Oxford graduate explained;

In pre-World War Two Oxford, on ‘bonfire night (November 5th) Oxford inhabitants of big houses that faced onto public spaces would move all their good furniture to the back of the house and put the cheap furniture to the front because gangs of drunken university students would ‘loot’ it to fire the great street bonfires. There was an implicit contract here: no one got hurt. It was an unspoken agreement between the ‘townies and gownies’. In those days, we students floated on a sea of beer.” – Male, 79.

Other traditional student carnivalesque events include: ‘Raisin weekend’ at St Andrew’s in Scotland; Walpurgisnacht, widely celebrated across Europe; the russefeiring tradition celebrated in Norway gives high school leavers licence to misbehave; in the Black Rock desert of Nevada, many students attend the pyrotechnically spectacular ‘Burning Man’ festival in early autumn before returning to their university studies.

In the USA, the longstanding rivalry between Texas A&M and the University of Texas initiated the tradition in the early 1900s of a giant bonfire. The students would cut down trees to construct a huge stack of logs, sometimes up to 40 feet tall. The bonfire attracted thousands of students each year. Tragically, in 1999, the log stack collapsed during the building and 12 people were killed. Although the University refused to sanction the event after this, since 2003, students still hold an off-campus version every year with a new safer professional construction design for the bonfire.⁶¹

Many of our informants in the fieldwork felt that their binge drinking ‘careers’ were over by the time they turned 21, or even as young as 19:

“You drink like an idiot when you are young, and then one day you just say to yourself: I’ve had enough. I still drink. I still like a beer but I don’t nek them like I used to when I was young.” – Male, 19.

61. Personal communication with Texas A&M alumnus; see also: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aggie_Bonfire

“We go out once every couple of months now. In our first year [of Uni] it was all the time. When I go into town now and I see how people are.. yuk! Was I like that once? You just look at all the little boys... it’s off-putting.” – Female, 24.

Although the binge-drinking ‘careers’ may be short lived, the period coincides with the final stage of adult physical brain development. The risk of damage to neuronal structures increases with the duration, frequency and intensity of alcohol consumption.

Implications

Perhaps the key to harm reduction in these situations is to integrate ‘couch burning’ or other similar practices into a more mainstream university practice – for example, find a place on or near campus and create a central bonfire as a gathering place. Allow students to use fire as a focal point for initiating friendships, sexual display and celebration but restrict this to a space where extreme risky behaviour can, to some extent, be monitored. Keep the space open and free to give students at least the illusion that this is not a policed area. This is highly unlikely to eliminate ‘couch burning’ entirely, however, as an ‘official’ or ‘permitted’ bonfire will lack the ‘forbidden-fruit’ element.

Underage drinking

Key Points

- The vast majority of those interviewed began drinking before age 18.
- First drinking experiences most often involved high-risk amounts, in the company of peers or older siblings.
- Drinking was seen as a key factor in acceptance into a social group and achieving adults status.
- Most young people felt they should have been taught more about alcohol before reaching the legal age.
- There is a lack of safe, public space available where teenagers can congregate after dark. Streets, parks and beaches were looked upon as a poor substitute, hence the excitement of pubs and clubs.
- The existence of a separate youth culture, and the alienation of ‘malfunctioning’ teenagers, is a social abnormality particularly prevalent in the industrialised western world.
- Poor attachment between parents and children engenders a higher need for peer attachment and potential involvement in unsupervised, risky drinking.

The majority of our informants in the fieldwork begin drinking alcohol before the age of 18 – girls more than boys. Several interviewees described the desperation to grow up quickly so they could go out drinking. When I asked them to dig deeper into these memories, some realised that the desperation was not necessarily to do with alcohol, but with being part of a social group. One young woman explained:

“When we were younger, everything was about parties and who was invited and who wasn’t. It was horrible if you weren’t invited or if you found out other people in your class had gone to a party and you hadn’t – young people are so sensitive. Things like that really hurt. I remember longing to be old enough to go out – not so much because we wanted to drink but so we could not be left out – ever again! No one can say you are not invited to a bar! When you are old enough to go out, it’s like you can go to a party every weekend.” – Female, 21.

Others simply equated drinking with the privileges of adult status:

“I remember just longing to be old enough to go out drinking. I just wanted to feel like an adult.” – Male, 20.

In very few places around Australia or New Zealand were there good facilities for teenagers to use after dark. In one Australian town, a police officer took me on a ride-along on a Saturday night. As we drove down the beachfront road, I noticed group after group of young people, seemingly just standing around beside parked cars. I asked the officer who they were. He explained that they were teenage ‘car hoons’, just hanging around. I asked the officer if there was anywhere else for them to go and he said very casually, “Oh, there used to be a youth club but it shut.” The image stayed with me of teenagers, huddled in protective groups in the chill night, tracking the passing police car with studiously neutral expressions. Why should teenagers not have the warm, bright, lively places to go to in the evening that the rest of us enjoy?

In focus groups and informal conversations elsewhere, young people were asked about their relationship to their parents and its influence on their drinking. Those who had close, honest and open relationships appeared to have had fewer adverse experiences with alcohol as teenagers.

“My dad made his own beer and, as kids, we were always allowed to taste the new batch. I never remember getting drunk though. It was always just small tastes. I didn’t even really like it but I pretended to just to please my dad! My parents drank wine and beer a lot but they never got drunk. At least not in front of us. ... When all my friends were sneaking drinks and getting drunk, I wasn’t really interested; that seemed stupid and childish to me.” – Female, 23.

More longitudinal research is needed into the ways young people learn about drinking and the influence of parental patterns of drinking and attitudes towards alcohol. The recent study by Jones and McGee (2014)⁶² was based on survey responses of 12 to 17 year-olds. Not surprisingly, it showed that stricter parental controls reduces underage drinking. It tells us nothing, however, about the longer-term effect of different parenting styles on post-18 drinking. It did show that having siblings, peers, or parents who ‘approve of drinking to get drunk’ is predictive of frequency of adolescent drinking. No real surprise there. Without qualitative studies, no real insight is possible into the effectiveness of parental attempts at educating young people how to drink. Some in the Australian debate seem intent on demonising parents who believe that home is the best place to learn sensible drinking patterns. This is not to say that children should be initiated into drinking earlier – as I will touch on later, brain development continues until around the age of 21 and large amounts of alcohol can negatively affect a developing brain. However, children should also not be deprived of a good role model of moderate and responsible drinking in the home, and as they transition to legal drinking age, should be able to be supported by their parents if they choose to drink.

Attachment, in humans, is a survival instinct from birth. The infant knows instinctively that a strong attachment to a caregiver is more important even than food. The design of the human infant is dovetailed to the attachment response in the adult – to the precise flow of chemicals that allow us to bond so completely with a helpless and demanding creature. Most parents assume that their children will remain attached to them just by virtue of the parental

62. Jones, S.C and Magee, C.A (2014) The role of family, friends and peers in Australian adolescent’s alcohol consumption. *Drug and Alcohol Review*. May;33(3):304-13.

connection. The unfortunate truth, as Bowlby and others have demonstrated is that, without continuous and consistent commitment to the relationship, bonds of attachment between parent and child can weaken and rupture.⁶³ If this happens, the child or adolescent still has a powerful survival instinct for strong attachment, and will re-connect with those who offer the most consistent and intimate presence in their lives: usually their peers. If the adolescent has experienced limited closeness to family members, peer influence can become stronger than parental influence (Moore et al., 2010; Young et al., 2008).⁶⁴ Drinking, as we have seen, can become the primary vehicle for peer-group acceptance. Research among schoolchildren in Switzerland, for example, found that, among socially well-integrated schoolchildren, having been drunk more than once was associated with a reduction in the risk of being bullied.⁶⁵ This clearly indicates that drinking is seen by young people as integrating them into a group.

Detachment of children from their parents has become so commonplace in many westernised societies that we have come to view adolescent rebellion and even hatred of parents as completely normal. But it is not a universal norm, and is almost completely absent in traditional, tribal societies. In indigenous tribes around the world, and many larger societies, there is a distinct culture and youth are part of that culture—they participate in its rites, celebrations, and events. Most are considered to be adults after they have undergone puberty rites at around age 13 or 14 and can also then be included in even the most sacred and secret rites and rituals of the tribe.

As a result of our child-rearing practices that focus on detachment and independence, in modern, Westernised societies, we have ended up with not one but two cultures: adult culture and youth culture. Young people are not allowed to partake fully in the rituals and interactions of adults, or even to understand them. We section and partition off our sexual, social and recreational selves from young people to protect them from harm. We then expect them, at 18, suddenly to enter this world with a full map and set of internalised instructions. We are continually surprised that many spend years in a disoriented and often inebriated fog before ‘finding their way’ out into true adulthood.

Barber (1992) and others provide evidence for the value of family vs peer support in relation to substance misuse:

*Whereas level of support in friendships were unrelated to changes in substance use, greater levels of support in relationships with mothers were associated with less frequent use of all substances in the 10th and 11th grade, as well as fewer negative outcomes. Analyses indicated that mother-adolescent support was predictive of lower levels of all substance use in the 10th grade (with the exception of tobacco), as well as decreases in hard drug use in the 11th grade. Indeed, parent support has consistently been a strong protection against pathology and substance abuse.*⁶⁶

63. Bowlby J (1979). *The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds*. London: Tavistock Publications..

64. Moore GF, Rothwell H and Segrott J (2010) An exploratory study of the relationship between parental attitudes and behaviour and young people’s consumption of alcohol. *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention and Policy* 5: 1–14.
Young R, Sweeting H and West P (2008) A longitudinal study of alcohol use and antisocial behaviour in young people. *Alcohol* 43(2): 204–214.

65. Kuntsche, E.N., Gmel, G. (2004) Emotional wellbeing and violence among social and solitary risky single occasion drinkers in adolescence. *Addiction*. 98:331-339.

66. Barber BK. (1992) Family, personality, and adolescent problem behaviors. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 54:66–79

In many other drinking cultures around the world, young people are more fully integrated into the rituals of drinking and, usually slowly and in carefully diluted doses, into drinking as well.

There is, of course, a problem with suggesting that youth be integrated into the adult drinking culture in Australia and New Zealand. First, in anything but minute doses, alcohol is extremely damaging to a developing brain and children should, rightly, be protected from this harm. Few parents would be aware of what quantities or levels of dilution would be appropriate and safe at what age. Second, attempting to shoehorn one aspect of a culture into another is usually doomed to failure and rarely produces the desired result. As we have seen above, introducing wine into beer-drinking cultures can result in bingeing wine drinkers; increasing opening hours of pubs in ambivalent cultures rarely turns them Mediterranean, as we have seen in the UK, and so on. However, it does seem clear that complete exclusion from the rituals and practices of drinking merely serves to heighten adolescent curiosity and leads to the ‘forbidden fruit effect’, fuelling illicit underage consumption and lengthy periods of bingeing after 18.

Among focus group participants, there was a sense of desperation for ‘real’ information on alcohol, as the following comments demonstrate:

“In school, we were never told how to drink. All we were told was ‘don’t’! Or, ‘don’t drink more than 5 drinks’, and all the bad things that will happen to you. Well, that’s just not realistic. It’s not what happens in real life. Everybody drinks more than that. I think we could have saved ourselves a lot of pain if someone had just been honest with us from the start.” – Male, 23.

“I remember that big giraffe who was supposed to show you how to be healthy. But after that: nothing. By the time me and all my friends were really drinking, no one told us anything useful.” – Female, 19.

“My sister and her friends taught me to drink. I got so drunk that I was throwing up all night and I passed out on the bathroom floor. My parents were furious. I was 13. But I wanted to do it. Looking back, I wish my first experience hadn’t been that horrible. I mean, my sister didn’t know anything except how to get drunk. We all thought that is just what you did, so we did it.” – Female, 20.

All young people wished they had been given realistic and useful information and practical instruction. Many older people and parents made an analogy with driving:

“We don’t expect our teenagers to teach each other to drive. And we certainly don’t want them to learn to drive safely by crashing a dozen times first! And yet this is what we do to them with alcohol. We forbid them to touch even a drop and then, when they turn 18 we say: ‘Off you go!’ and expect them to know how to use it safely.” – Male, 50s.

It is vital that parents and teenagers understand how large amounts of alcohol can negatively affect a developing brain, and that brain development continues until around age 21. Young people we spoke with assumed that the reason for the under-18 prohibition was the impact of alcohol on behaviour. This simply led to exaggerated rebellion and resentment, as evidenced by the following typical comment:

“Before I was 18 I thought it was so hypocritical that we couldn’t drink. The grown-ups would get drunk at the weekends and not let us have any so we used to sneak it and steal it all the time and feel so clever doing it right under their noses! When my Dad caught me drinking with a friend when I was 15 he yelled at me and I yelled back ‘well you do it!’ and he said ‘Yes but I know how to handle it.’ That is so hypocritical. Even then I could handle it better than he did!” – Female, 22.

In focus groups where it was requested of us, at the end, we shared information about the devastating impact of drunkenness on brain development. This was invariably met with stunned silence followed by choruses of “why didn’t anyone tell us?”

Implications

A serious and dispassionate review of the way in which we initiate young people into drinking is most definitely called for. We must also address the ways in which we educate young people about alcohol.

Young people have the right to clear, non-judgmental and impartial information about the effect of alcohol on their bodies and brains and how this differs from adult consumption.

There is a need for instruction for parents on how to ensure their children understand how to drink safely. Guidance should also enable parents to evaluate their own drinking patterns and assess the impact of their lifestyle on their children.

Parents should not be shamed, criminalised or vilified for choosing to instruct their children safely and responsibly.

This will be discussed further in Part Three.

Non drinkers

Key Points

- Many Australians and New Zealanders either do not drink at all, or drink very moderately and not to get drunk.
- The experience of non-drinking young people exemplifies the strength of the brain response to joyful sociability and its resemblance to intoxication.

Numerous conversations with non-drinkers throughout the research trip revealed fascinating insights into the similarity between the sensations of drunkenness and physiological feelings that accompany the experience of sober, but intense, festive camaraderie. Although they were in the minority, non-drinkers were included in every focus group. Most went on regular nights out with their friends but either did not drink or only had one or two throughout the night. With encouragement, many overcame their reticence and spoke about their experiences.

“I always have a good time. My friends don’t bother me to drink any more because they know I don’t like it. It just makes me feel sick right away. ... I just get a bit wild along with them. I can’t help it. I get really giggly and silly and I feel like dancing and ... just having fun really.” – Female, 19.

“I never really drink. Maybe just one to get the night started and that’s enough. When you are out you get high enough anyway. [Laughs] Not from anything. I mean I just get this stupid happy feeling.” – Male, 21.

“I’ve been booted out of clubs before for being drunk. And I don’t drink!” – Male, 40s.

“I got refused entry to a club because the security thought I was drunk. I hadn’t had anything to drink!” – Female, 18.

Other informants related similar accounts of sober parties and family gatherings at which they had felt drunk. These anecdotes remind us that alcohol is truly a substitute for the real thing, the wonderful endorphin-generated tingle and buzz of ‘communitas’ – genuine social belonging, acceptance and joyful human bonding.

This type of intoxicating social bonding is what hundreds of thousands of years of evolution has left us longing for. In the right circumstances, this completely natural high can be almost indistinguishable from the chemically induced intoxication. But, in modern times, when we attend a gathering that is not of our family, tribe, or intimate group, we still seek the reassurance that we belong. As alcohol stimulates the brain in the same way as natural endorphins, it can mimic in us this feeling, making us better able to cope with crowds of strangers. But it is important to remind ourselves that we do not need it; we can generate the buzz ourselves.

Implications

The experience of non-drinkers deserves greater prominence in research. Young people would benefit from the knowledge that all their peers do not drink to drunkenness and that the sober night out experience can be equally rewarding.

Information about the naturally intoxicating brain response to sociability should accompany alcohol education in order to enable truly informed choices.

PART TWO: VIOLENCE AND ANTI-SOCIAL-BEHAVIOUR IN AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND CULTURE

We saw in the last section that we use alcohol to facilitate our “ritual synchronisation of emotions”. In small gatherings of members of the same “tribe”, family, group or organisation, this is rarely problematic; the tensions arise when we do so among great crowds of strangers in large cities at night. There is bound to be a degree of tension, rivalry, competition, one-upmanship, and jealousy between groups – especially when there is also a mix of cultures and ethnic groups among whom we find large variations in the “display rules” (to use Paul Ekman’s term)⁶⁷ of emotional expression, sexual signalling, body language, response to provocation and threat, notions of personal space and allowable physical contact, acceptable forms of address to attached females and so on. There are bound to be territorial conflicts for space, tables, service, transport etc.

Groups and individuals will differ in their emotional states: some may be out on a buck’s or hen night to celebrate an upcoming wedding; others may be out to commiserate with someone who has just broken off an attachment. In fact, it is surprising, given the volatile mix present in some venues that seem inherently conducive to violence (dark, noisy, cramped, etc.) that more incidents do not occur. The big questions are: how and why do violence and anti-social behaviour happen in the NTE? What is the role of alcohol in these behaviours? What is the influence of the drinking culture and what other factors either foster or inhibit violence and anti-social behaviour?

There is a relationship between alcohol and violence, but it is not such a straightforward one as many would have us believe.

Alcohol and violence: nature of the relationship

Key Points

- There is no simple causal relationship between alcohol and violent behaviour.
- There is no evidence that, for most normal, healthy individuals, the presence of alcohol in the brain results in, encourages or unleashes violence.
- Alcohol can, in some cultures and situations, be a facilitator of aggression if aggression is there to begin with, both in the individual and in the cultural environment. It does not produce it where it doesn’t already exist.
- The disinhibiting and anxiety-reducing effects of alcohol lead to pro-social behaviour more often than violence. The connection between violence and drinking remains a minority one.
- The cognitive effects of alcohol lead to “myopic concentration” and to more delayed, rather than more impulsive, thinking and action.

For many people, headlines validate fears about out-of-control drunken youths. There is no question that, in some societies, there is a strong correlation or association between alcohol and some forms of violence, but what most lay observers fail to understand is that causation is not demonstrated by correlation. The real question is: what exactly is the nature of the link between alcohol and aggression – is it direct or indirect, is it chemical, cultural or environmental?

67. Ekman, Paul. (2007) *Emotions revealed: Recognizing faces and feelings to improve communication and emotional life*. Macmillan, 2007.

This question is not merely academic: the implications are quite serious. If alcohol does indeed cause aggression, government supply-side controls and other prohibitive measures could be seen as justified and the primary solution to address the issue. If, on the other hand, alcohol is merely used as an excuse for violent behaviour, is a side-effect of violence, or is even a moderating influence on aggression, government efforts would be better concentrated on social education, health promotion, and sanctions on violent individuals.

If three out of 10,000 weekend drinkers in Melbourne hit someone else, how can we conclude that the alcohol caused this violent act when the other 9,997 people seemed to have been unaffected?

A recent paper by Data Analysis Australia Pty Ltd entitled ‘How Often Does a Night Out Lead to an Assault?’ reviewed all current statistics on both reported and (estimated) unreported alcohol-related assaults in Australia and set this figure against the estimated number of ‘nights out’. The resulting ratio was 0.11% of nights out result in alcohol-related violence.⁶⁸

Put another way: 99.89% of drinking occasions remain violence free. If alcohol were a prescribed medication, a side-effect that was reported in only 0.11% of cases would not be considered to have been caused by the drug.

Why then is alcohol commonly seen as a cause of violence? Because of the very common error of what scientists call “selecting on the dependant variable” or “selection bias”.

If we want to test scientifically the hypothesis that, for example, having a tattoo is associated with criminal activity, and we drew our sample from prisons, that would surely validate the hypothesis. However, if we draw our sample from the general population, we would probably struggle to find a connection. Similarly, if we want to test the hypothesis that alcohol causes individuals to behave violently, and we look only at A&E and police statistics, then we will continue to see a strong correlation between alcohol and violence. However, if we were to draw our sample from the general population a completely different story would emerge.

It is understandable that a police officer or an A&E director might consider alcohol to be the cause of the majority of issues they deal with at the weekend. But theirs is, nonetheless a biased view. They are dealing with the 0.11%.

This kind of reasoning is also a result of the human obsession with causation. We don’t deal very well with randomness, accident, chance or events that have multiple causes. It makes sense, in evolutionary terms that we should be this way. If one has a clear understanding of the cause, the danger is more easily recognised and avoided, so we have knee-jerk attributions of cause to any danger.

As Daniel Kahneman (2011)⁶⁹ points out in his book “Thinking Fast and Slow”, we are primed from birth for two things; one, to detect causality in events, and two, to give more weight to, and be highly attuned to, what is bad or threatening, from animals and insects to angry faces. We routinely attribute cause to events without properly considering the connections or the context. Consider the following exchange I had with a young man in a bar in Perth:

Researcher: Have you ever been witness to a fight, or taken part in violence while drinking?

Man: Not me personally, nah; but one of my mates did. We were all out, a group of us, and [Name] got really drunk and, for some reason he just started beating this fella. No reason; he was just really drunk.

68. Data Analysis Australia Pty Ltd. (2014) ‘How Often Does a Night Out Lead to an Assault?’

69. Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. Macmillan.

Researcher: Were you all drunk?

Man: Oh yeah, we'd all been drinking the same like.

Researcher: Had he had significantly more to drink than the rest of you?

Man: Nah. Don't think so. We all started together. He was just really drunk.

So, despite the fact that all the men probably had ingested roughly equal amounts of alcohol, the cause of the violent behaviour of one of them was inferred from two facts: he was drunk; he hit someone. If we tell the story differently, it becomes harder to make this judgment:

Five men went out drinking. All of them got drunk. One of them hit a stranger.

If alcohol alone makes people violent, we would expect to find incidents of violence spread evenly across the full range of drinkers, from female post-menopausal librarians to young male rugby players, but we don't. We would also expect to find an equal incidence of violence among drinkers in all societies, but we don't. We would expect to find equal levels of violence in all drinking situations, from weddings to funerals to Saturday nights out on the town, but we don't. The conclusion of this, and many previous studies, is that alcohol can, in certain cultures and situations, be a facilitator of aggression if aggression is there to begin with, both in the individual and in the cultural environment. It does not produce it where it doesn't already exist.⁷⁰

In the following sections I will examine the arguments and science behind the belief that alcohol causes aggression and then investigate the actual and observable cultural influences on aggression and violence among drinkers in the NTE. This digression is necessary as it is futile to speak about the cultural influences on alcohol-related violence when the belief persists that it is chemically induced.

The main arguments in favour of 'alcohol causes violence' are:

1. Alcohol simply causes an aggressive response.
2. Alcohol reduces anxiety, thereby making drinkers less worried about the consequences of bad behaviour and therefore more likely to engage in it.
3. Alcohol reduces 'cognitive function,' rendering drinkers unable to think clearly and therefore more likely to commit violence.
4. Alcohol loosens the inhibitions, making drinkers more likely to act on impulse and display aggression.

We have refuted argument 4 in Part One. Critchlow's point serves as a useful summary:

Because alcohol is seen as a cause of negative behaviour, alcohol-related norm violations are explained with reference to drinking rather than the individual. Thus, by believing that alcohol makes people act badly, we give it a great deal of power. Drinking becomes a tool that legitimates irrationality and excuses violence without permanently destroying an individual's moral standing or the society's system of rules and ethics.⁷¹

70. Giancola, P. R. (2002). The influence of trait anger on the alcohol-aggression relation in men and women. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research* Vol. 26; Moeller, F. G., Dougherty, D. M., Lane, S. D., Steinberg, J. L., and Cherek, D. R. (1998). Antisocial personality disorder and alcohol-induced aggression. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*. Vol. 22.

71. Critchlow, B. (1986). The powers of John Barleycorn: Beliefs about the effects of alcohol on social behavior. *American Psychologist*, 41, 7: 751-764.

We will return to this later. For now, let us turn to the first three cases:

Argument 1) Alcohol causes an aggressive response

This first argument has purportedly been validated through a series of laboratory experiments. The classic design for a test of alcohol's effects on the aggressive response in humans usually involves a 'competition' with a hidden opponent. The subject is usually not told the true purpose of the experiment, but instead told that the test is about 'reaction times.' Aggression is measured by the frequency, duration or intensity of 'electric shocks' given to the 'hidden' (non-existent) opponent, or by the length of loud blasts of noise directed at the 'opponent.'⁷²

Bushman and Cooper analysed 30 experiments with human subjects and concluded that alcohol may facilitate aggression, but only when combined with certain other physiological and psychological factors. They also note that the studies that report more significant increases in aggression after drinking invariably fail to allow a non-aggressive alternative.⁷³ In real life situations, there is almost always a non-violent option. Nowadays, if experiments do not offer the non-aggressive alternative, researchers are somewhat obliged to point this out, as Giancola has, in a recent alcohol-aggression experiment in which "subjects could not elect to not shock their opponents."⁷⁴

Nevertheless, how do we account for the increased aggressive response? It has been demonstrated that alcohol can induce a 'myopic' state in which the drinker becomes focused on what he or she believes to be the most important aspects in their environment. If a person in this 'myopic' state is told that the only thing they must focus on is pushing a button, it is entirely plausible that this focus will become more and more intense as the Blood Alcohol Content rises. Gustafson (1993) for example shows that intoxicated aggression is greater in situations where an anger response is deliberately provoked.⁷⁵ But all these experiments prove is that, under extremely artificial conditions and under provocation (the game is, after all an aggressive exercise), inebriated individuals will simply do more of the only thing they are allowed to do. In real life, the options available to someone being aggressively provoked in a bar are numerous. A few slightly more interesting experiments have shown that the myopic focus can be quite easily influenced towards pro-social behaviour by either distraction or violence-inhibiting cues. Simply by providing a relevant and explicit norm of *nonaggression*, Jeavons and Taylor (1985) found that they could reduce the intensity of the shock the inebriated subject delivered by 75%!⁷⁶ And, as has been mentioned above, Steele et al, 1985⁷⁷ found that, in environments providing strong cues for helpful behaviour, drunken individuals are actually *more helpful* than sober counterparts in the experiment (see page 14).

The presence of dominant situational cues has also been found to either promote or reduce risky sexual decision making amongst intoxicated individuals.⁷⁸ MacDonald et al (2000) have

72. It is overlooked in many such experiments that the effect of alcohol myopia, and not increasing aggression, may be causing subjects to concentrate more intently on shocking their unseen opponent.

73. Bushman, B. J., & Cooper, H. M. (1990). Effects of alcohol on human aggression: An integrative research review. *Psychological bulletin*, 107(3), 341.

74. [Emphasis mine] Giancola, P. R. (2002). The influence of trait anger on the alcohol-aggression relation in men and women. *Alcoholism: Clinical and experimental research*, 26(9), 1350-1358.

75. Gustafson, R. (1993) What Do Experimental Paradigms Tell Us about Alcohol-Related Aggressive Responding? *J. Stud. Alcohol*, Supplement No. 11: 20-29; MacDonald, T. K., Fong, G. T., Zanna, M. P., & Martineau, A. M. (2000). Alcohol myopia and condom use: Can alcohol intoxication be associated with more prudent behavior? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78(4), 605.

76. Candace M. Jeavons and Stuart P. Taylor Ph.D (1985) The control of alcohol-related aggression: Redirecting the inebriate's attention to socially appropriate conduct. *Aggressive Behavior* (11), Issue 2, pages 93-101.

77. Steele et al (1985) Op Cit.

78. Cooper, M. L. (2006). Does drinking promote risky sexual behavior? A complex answer to a simple question. *Current directions in psychological science*, 15(1), 19-23.

found that intoxicated individuals shown salient cues have actually reported more prudent intentions with regards to unprotected sex than sober individuals. In their paper on alcohol myopia, Grant and MacDonald (2005) indicate that this finding casts a unforgiving light on the ‘disinhibition theory’:

It is important to note that disinhibition theory cannot account for these findings; it cannot explain situations in which intoxicated individuals behave more prudently than sober individuals. If alcohol is a general disinhibitor, intoxicated individuals should always exhibit disinhibited behaviour.⁷⁹

The picture that seems to be emerging is that drinking can either increase or decrease an individual’s potential for aggression, depending on the focus of attention and the environmental cues.

This has important implications for both policy and practice. While ‘individual responsibility’ remains paramount, it would appear that responsible practice in the service of alcohol should now incorporate aggression-inhibiting cues in the design of drinking environments

Distraction and a certain degree of ‘cognitive loading’ (that is, being forced to think about something) can diminish the potential for alcohol-related aggression. This may explain why there is so little aggression in casinos or around the pokie machines. Gamblers are already myopically focused on what they perceive to be the most important thing. A pub quiz or other pleasurable barroom distraction has a similar effect. When drinkers are engaged in an activity that is pleasurable and has a modest degree of difficulty, incidences of violence are rare. Listening to live music or stand-up comedy, playing darts, chess, or other bar room games, karaoke, competitions and tournaments, all these can serve to distract drinkers from frustration and unite them as a group. Many young people feel they have to get drunk and then create their own entertainment. What is needed in drinking venues is a de-emphasis on the consumption of alcohol for its own sake and a refocus on the entertainment and group conviviality. We need to encourage the establishment of night-time venues where alcohol is ancillary to the entertainment, not the centre of it.

Argument 2) Reduced anxiety (anxiolysis theory)

Alcohol reduces anxiety. Drinkers are therefore more likely to be aggressive because they are less anxious about the consequences of violence, so the theory goes. This theory, and the ‘disinhibition’ theory, both rest on the fallacious and unproven assumption that aggression is the underlying human condition. Hoaken et al (2003) and others have made attempts to explain that it is only fear of punishment or harm that keeps us from behaving violently towards each other. The normal physiological responses to danger or to the threat of punishment, such as increased heart rate and other ‘arousal cues,’ say Hoaken et al, “... can be seen as ‘reminders’ of the socialization process; arousal means threat, and threat means punishment. Thus, fear should adaptively inhibit the types of behaviours that might initiate an aggressive interaction ... as anxiety cues are reduced [under the influence of alcohol] individuals may be more likely to engage in behaviour that has been previously associated with punishment or threat.”⁸⁰

79. MacDonald, T.K. et al (2000). Alcohol myopia and condom use: can alcohol intoxication be associated with more prudent behavior? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 78 (4): 605; Grant, N. K. and MacDonald, T.K. (2005) Can alcohol lead to inhibition or disinhibition? Applying alcohol myopia to animal experimentation. *Alcohol and Alcoholism* Vol. 40, No. 5, pp. 373–378.

80. Hoaken, P., Campbell, T., Stewart, S., & Pihl, R. (2003). Effects of alcohol on cardiovascular reactivity and the mediation of aggressive behaviour in adult men and women. *Alcohol and Alcoholism*, Vol. 38, 84–92.

Current opinions on human nature, however, are far rosier. The vast majority of us will only resort to violence under conditions of extreme provocation or threat, not simply because we think we won't be punished. Most human rituals, in fact, are designed to avoid conflict and violence. Reducing the perception of social threat, and reducing feelings of social anxiety, leads to a general decrease in aggressive feelings. And this, in fact, is what we see worldwide among drinkers.

Sumner and Parker (1995), after an exhaustive review of the evidence, concluded that “there is nothing ... to support the idea that people who have been drinking heavily are likely to attack others simply because their aggressive impulses have been unleashed.”⁸¹

In the first section, we saw how alcohol can mimic the brain state normally achieved through repetitive ritual in order to decrease anxiety. Many studies have substantiated the widely held belief that alcohol can reduce social anxiety.⁸² Other studies have brought to light additional unique qualities of alcohol that enhance the social experience.

David Warburton of Reading University, who conducted experiments on alcohol and cognition, found that alcohol lowers the impact of words that have threatening connotations, such as ‘cancer,’ as opposed to neutral words such as ‘cover,’ by altering the brain’s ‘word-processing’ speed.⁸³ A second study showed that alcohol also enhances our “mood-congruent memory” – that is, our capability to remember ‘happy’ words. These two studies suggest that alcohol can ‘dampen’ our perception of threat and perhaps exaggerate our perception of happiness, but neither of these effects can be shown to lead directly or inevitably to aggression.

Gilman et al 2008 conducted fMRI scans and demonstrated that alcohol attenuates the response to emotionally threatening stimuli (fearful face images)⁸⁴. Apparently alcohol makes the amygdala less effective as a threat detector. Alcohol also activates dopaminergic neurons, creating a feeling of well-being. These combined effects are thought to trigger an increase in ‘approach’ behaviour. In the majority of individuals, this will merely increase sociability and lessen the anxiety associated with social interaction.⁸⁵

Argument 3) Cognitive deficit theory

That alcohol may leave drinkers thinking more slowly or less clearly does not imply that the decisions they then make will veer to the violent choice. The evidence of the ‘sober act’ also implies that rational cognitive function is possible under the influence.

81. Sumner, M., & Parker, H. J. (1995). *Low in alcohol: A review of international research into alcohol's role in crime causation*. Portman Group.

82. Greeley, J., & Oei, T. (1999). Alcohol and tension reduction. *Psychological theories of drinking and alcoholism*, 2, 14-53; Stoner, S. A., George, W. H., Peters, L. M., & Norris, J. (2007).). *Liquid Courage: Alcohol fosters risky sexual decision-making in individuals with sexual fears. AIDs and behaviour II (2): 227 – 237*.

83. Warburton, D. (1999). ‘Pleasure for health.’ In Peele, S., & Grant, M. (Eds.). (2013). *Alcohol and pleasure: A health perspective*. Routledge.

84. Gilman, J. M., Ramchandani, V. A., Davis, M. B., Bjork, J. M., & Hommer, D. W. (2008). Why we like to drink: a functional magnetic resonance imaging study of the rewarding and anxiolytic effects of alcohol. *The Journal of Neuroscience*, 28(18), 4583-4591.

85. The results of Gilman's fMRI scans were largely reproduced and validated by: Sripada, C. S., Angstadt, M., McNamara, P., King, A. C., & Phan, K. L. (2011). Effects of alcohol on brain responses to social signals of threat in humans. *Neuroimage*, 55(1), 371-380.

Evidence suggests that alcohol slows down information processing.⁸⁶ Most research studies on cognitive deficits associated with drinking, however, focus on long-term use among alcoholics⁸⁷ or rely on experiments with rats.⁸⁸ Very little research has investigated the short-term changes to intellectual function in humans after a few drinks and in natural (not laboratory) settings. Additionally, as Peeters et al (2014) recently concluded, most of these studies raise serious questions about causality:⁸⁹ does alcohol cause neurotoxic effects that diminish cognitive function, or do individuals with pre-existing diminished cognitive function tend to drink more? The jury is still out. What is equally unclear is how a slightly slower processing speed affects the outcome, the decision making. There is no evidence that a brain slightly subdued by alcohol will make decisions or choices that would be radically or morally different from the sober brain. In fact, many informants in this research felt that, while they were physically less capable, and their thinking process was slowed down, they were still capable of quite clear thinking:

“Being drunk is like swimming: you know exactly what you are doing; you just take longer to do it.” – Male, 39.

“I think things through much more carefully when I am drinking. I’m much more worried about doing or saying something stupid.” – Female, 33.

“I can kind of ‘see’ my brain working when I am drunk. I have to think about things longer, but I don’t think I really think differently. It’s like everybody has a slow motion brain. It’s really funny.” – Female, 23.

Although some research suggests that intoxication can lead to more impulsive behaviour, other studies appear to support the anecdotal evidence from this fieldwork that drinking results in greater deliberation, as Ortner et al (2003) conclude:

Alcohol intoxication does not always increase cognitive impulsivity and may lead to more cautious decision-making under certain conditions.⁹⁰

Certainly, there is no evidence that, for most normal, healthy individuals, the presence of alcohol in the brain results in, encourages or unleashes violence.

86. Tzambazis, K., & Stough, C. (2000). Alcohol impairs speed of information processing and simple and choice reaction time and differentially impairs higher-order cognitive abilities. *Alcohol and Alcoholism*, 35(2), 197-201.

87. Moselhy, H. F., Georgiou, G., & Kahn, A. (2001). Frontal lobe changes in alcoholism: a review of the literature. *Alcohol and Alcoholism*, 36(5), 357-368.

88. Yali Tu et al. (2007) Ethanol Inhibits Persistent Activity in Prefrontal Cortical Neurons. *The Journal of Neuroscience*, 25 April 2007, 27(17): 4765-4775

89. Peeters, M., et al (2014) Psychological Changes and Cognitive Impairments in Adolescent Heavy Drinkers. *Alcohol and Alcoholism* (March/April 2014) 49 (2): 182-186

90. Ortner, C. N., MacDonald, T. K., & Olmstead, M. C. (2003). Alcohol intoxication reduces impulsivity in the delay-discounting paradigm. *Alcohol and Alcoholism*, 38(2), 151-156.

So what does lead to violence? We are left with three interlinked possibilities:

1. Violent individuals
2. A violence-reinforcing culture
3. Violent situations

When all three coincide, it is likely that violence will result, with or without alcohol.

Violent individuals

Key Points

- Highly aggressive and angry men tend to drink heavily and frequently.
- Many violent offenders are born with brain abnormalities or have been subject to childhood abuse.
- Violent individuals are not violent all the time. They may display violence in public spaces felt to be permissive of violence or when significant 'frustration factors' are present.
- Alcohol does not increase anger; the reverse has more truth: anger predicts heavy drinking.
- Irrespective of intoxication, 90% of violent men 'select' their victim - i.e. they can control what they do and to whom they do it to.
- There is a lack of information on the profile, motives and drinking behaviour of violent offenders.
- A small proportion of repeat offenders are likely to be committing the majority of assaults.

Let's address violent individuals first. Some psychiatric disorders are associated with pathological anger and aggression. These include psychotic disorders, depression, bipolar disorder and various personality disorders.⁹¹ Numerous studies have shown that alcohol may facilitate anti-social or aggressive behaviour in those predisposed to aggression. The same is true for benzodiazepines, another depressant drug that, like alcohol, binds to GABA receptors in the brain. Benzodiazepine is normally given for sedation in the management of behaviour disorders. However, Dietch & Jennings (1988) conclude that, in the general population, the incidence of "aggressive dyscontrol" after administration of a benzodiazepine is less than 1% -- similar to the incidence with placebo.⁹² Given the conclusion above that less than one percent of drinking occasions results in an aggressive incident, it is at least a working hypothesis that the majority of these incidents may be committed by individuals with aggressive predispositions.

Mary McMurrin, for example, found that alcohol increases aggression in people who are both anxious and anti-social.⁹³ In addition, it does seem to be the case that violent reactions after drinking can be amplified in individuals with the following rare conditions: hyper-aggressivity, Anti-Social Personality Disorder (ASPD) or frontal lobe damage. Hyper-aggressivity exists in only 1% of the human population, and ASPD in only 3% of males.⁹⁴ And several studies have

91. Fava, M. (1997) Psychopharmacologic treatment of pathologic aggression. *Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 20, 427-451.

92. Dietch, J. T. & Jennings, R. K. (1988) Aggressive dyscontrol in patients treated with benzodiazepines. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 49, pp184-187.

93. McMurrin, M. (2011). Anxiety, alcohol intoxication, and aggression. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 16(2), 357-371.

94. Regier, D. A., Farmer, M. E., Rae, D. S., Locke, B. Z., Keith, S. J., Judd, L. L., & Goodwin, F. K. (1990). Comorbidity of mental disorders with alcohol and other drug abuse Results from the Epidemiologic Catchment Area (ECA) Study. *Jama*, 264(19), 2511-2518.

found that such people tend to also drink heavily and more frequently.⁹⁵ For example, one study found that the “aggression-increasing effects of alcohol” were “specific to individuals with the higher aggressive tendencies while sober.”⁹⁶ There is no suggestion that these conditions are caused by drinking, as they are usually evident from an early age.⁹⁷

Another popular misconception is that alcohol causes people to react with anger. A recent study by Harder et al (2014) has proved that the reverse is true: anger among men predicts heavy drinking, not the reverse.⁹⁸ Hopkins et al (2005) have also found that heavy drinking is associated with violent sexist attitudes among men.⁹⁹ What this tells us is clearly not that drinking causes aggression, but that highly aggressive, angry men choose to drink heavily and frequently, quite possibly to excuse violent behaviour. As White and Hansell (1993) explain:

“The findings indicate that early aggressive behavior leads to increases in alcohol use and alcohol-related aggression, but that levels of alcohol use are not significantly related to later aggressive behavior. Thus, the data suggest that alcohol-related aggression is engaged in by aggressive people who drink. These data lend support to other research that indicates that early aggressive and antisocial behavior is predictive of later alcohol-related problems.”¹⁰⁰

A policewoman in Australia confirmed this with an astute observation based on several years of weekend patrols in a major Australian city:

“I have never met a violent drunk who was not also violent when sober.”

Adrian Raine (2013) aptly demonstrates, in his book “The Anatomy of Violence: The Biological Roots of Crime”, that there is a biological basis to violence. Many violent offenders are born with brain abnormalities. Neurological deficits can be compounded and also created by other risk factors such as birth complications, lack of early nurturing in infancy, poverty, malnutrition, and being born into violent home environments. This interaction of social and biological factors can predispose certain individuals to aggressive and anti-social behaviour and violence.¹⁰¹

But as Englander (2003) reminds us, 90% of violent men are, to some degree, ‘specialists’ – that is, they confine their violence to a particular place, home or the street, or to a particular sex or type of person. This, in itself, she reasons, “suggests that even if individuals do have marked personality or biological tendencies toward violence, most are still able to control their impulses well enough to choose their victims.”¹⁰²

With all that is known and emerging on the biosocial roots of violent behaviour, it is highly disappointing that the only investigation into the profiles of recent ‘king hit’ crimes in Australia looked only at the Blood Alcohol Content of the victims.

95. Gerald, M. S., & Higley, J. D. (2002). Evolutionary underpinnings of excessive alcohol consumption. *Addiction*, 97(4), 415-425. Boyle S. H., Mortensen L., Grønbaek M., Barefoot J. C. (2008) Hostility, drinking pattern and mortality. *Addiction*; 103: 54–9.

96. Dougherty, D. M., Bjork, J. M., Bennett, R. H., & Moeller, F. G. (1999). The effects of a cumulative alcohol dosing procedure on laboratory aggression in women and men. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 60(3), 322.

97. Many people in this research expressed concern that violence by women was increasing. Although this is a common perception, in terms of serious assaults, all statistics point to a continuation of historical trends: over 90% of all violence is committed by males.

98. Harder, V.S., Ayer, L.A., Naylor, M.R. and Helzer, J.E. (2014) Alcohol, moods and male-female differences: daily interactive voice response over 6 months. *Alcohol and Alcoholism*. Jan-Feb: 49(1).

99. Hopkins, M., Miller, D, and Kotchick, B. (2005) The Archetypal Man’s Man: An Examination of the Relationship Between Alcohol Abuse, Hostile Sexism and Masculinity Among College Males. *Undergraduate Research Journal for the Human Sciences*. Vol. 4

100. White, H. R., Brick, J., & Hansell, S. (1993). A longitudinal investigation of alcohol use and aggression in adolescence. *Journal of studies on alcohol and drugs*, (11), 62.

101. Raine, Adrian (2013), *The Anatomy of Violence: The Biological Roots of Crime*, Random House.

102. Englander, E. K. (2003). *Understanding violence*. Psychology Press.

Detailed in the journal *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*¹⁰³, researchers from Monash University and the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine reviewed 90 king-hit cases resulting in death, cited in coroners' reports over a 12-year period to December 2012. Toxicological reports for 63 of the cases revealed that alcohol was involved in the majority (49) with the *victims*' blood-alcohol reading registering at up to four times the legal driving limit in Australia.

The authors of the study state that:

Assaults are an ongoing problem in Australia and king hits form a large group of these substance-related and often unprovoked attacks. Importantly, this study indicated that alcohol intoxication increases the risk of victimization, not just aggressive offending. This reiterates the serious consequences of alcohol-fueled [sic] violence in Australia.

The study may have indicated an association between the victim's intoxication and assault but it gave no evidence at all that alcohol intoxication "increases aggressive offending". The attacks were "substance-related" only insofar as the majority of the victims were under the influence of alcohol. It may be that the perpetrators had been drinking as well, but as I pointed out earlier, the vast majority of other people enjoying 'nights out' on the dates in question will also have been drinking, so this in itself tells us nothing about the real causes of the incidents. Many of the cases used in the study were clearly not even related to the 'king hit' phenomenon: one was a knockout punch delivered during a boxing match; another occurred during a rugby match. Several others related to domestic disputes.

In any event, the study did not advance our understanding of the characteristics and motivations for violence that occurs in the NTE.

In future research, we should look to other models. One pioneering study in the US, for example, identified with great precision the characteristics of the most prolific alcohol-related offenders in an American college town. By reviewing municipal arrest records and cross-checking information on students with university records, Leinfelt and Thompson (2004) were able to confirm that one fifth of alcohol-related offences in town were indeed committed by students. But, rather than tarring all students with the same brush, or recommending restrictive measures that would affect all students, the researchers went further. The study also revealed that certain key characteristics correlated with being arrested. These were being male, a first-year student, a fraternity member, participating in athletics and being enrolled in one particular college of the university. In other words, a small percentage of university students, and particularly fraternity athletes, were committing a disproportionate amount of offences. Such a precise profile allowed resources to be targeted directly at the problem.¹⁰⁴

Despite the apparent lack of data on the 'king hit' offenders, it is possible to infer certain characteristics from existing data, media reports and other sources such as doctors, surgeons and police – at least on the economic and educational background of some offenders. Motivation for assaults are harder to uncover. Many offenders will seek to excuse their crimes by blaming the alcohol and/or other substances for their violent actions.

So who are these offenders? There is a strong possibility that repeat offenders are responsible for a disproportionate amount of crime in the NTE. Police in one Australian city called it the 80/20 rule – 80% of the offences committed by 20% of offenders. If concrete evidence can substantiate this claim, the implications for policing and policy are significant.

103. Pilgrim, J. L., Gerostamoulos, D., & Drummer, O. H. (2014). "King hit" fatalities in Australia, 2000–2012: The role of alcohol and other drugs. Detailed in the journal *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 135, 119-132.

104. Leinfelt, F.H. and Thompson, K.M. (2004) College-student drinking-related arrests in a college town. *Journal of Substance Use*, 9(2), pp 57-67.

Newcastle is an Australian town that was the site of an evaluated experiment to reduce weekend violence and mayhem. In 2008 a raft of measures were imposed on licensed venues, including earlier closing, lockouts from 1 am, restrictions on the sale of certain drinks, and other measures affecting the management of drinking venues. The police in Newcastle have adopted a ‘zero-tolerance’ approach to misbehaviour in the NTE and imposed heavy, on-the-spot fines for even minor misdemeanours.

While the results of the Newcastle experiment appear impressive – a reduction in violent incidents from 99 per quarter in the Newcastle CBD before the change to 68 per quarter after – they have not been repeated as successfully in other areas such as Geelong.¹⁰⁵

One reason for this may be that Newcastle police reported to me that they employed another strategy – one that has not been widely noted in scientific evaluations of the measures – a dramatic increase in bail compliance checks. As Newcastle police Superintendent John Gralton explained:

“5% of the population causes 90% of the problem ... Our bail compliance checks have gone from 40 to 400 a month.”

Every night, police in Newcastle systematically check that offenders who are out on bail or probation and subject to curfew are not out on the street. In the face of the following statistics, this seems a sensible tactic:

- Up to 40% of prisoners will re-offend while on parole¹⁰⁶
- Approximately 60% of those in custody in Australia have previously served a period of imprisonment¹⁰⁷
- 11 Victorians were murdered by parolees in less than 2 years¹⁰⁸

Research is desperately needed into all cases of violent assault in the NTE. Not into the blood alcohol content of the victims, but into the backgrounds and psychological profiles of the perpetrators. Until we have such a study in our hands, all we have to rely on are the occasional leaked court reports and anecdotal evidence provided by those who have involvement with such cases.

Early and purposeful intervention in the lives of young men who commit violent acts could speed up cultural change. In most countries, drink drive offenders are required to attend educational classes in order to regain their license. Likewise, perpetrators of any kind of assault should be required to attend some form of rehabilitative or educational classes depending on their personal needs and circumstances. Such instruction should focus on counselling, motivational interviewing, lifestyle change, drug and alcohol use, and violence and conflict avoidance. Violators of minor public order offences, such as urinating in the streets or ‘failure to move on’, could perhaps be offered a reduction in their fine in return for participation in alcohol education courses.

Alcohol-related violence is just one expression of a culture of violence. If we look closely at the perpetrators of alcohol-related violence, it seems apparent that many are the embodiment of a violence-reinforcing culture.

105. Miller, P., Palmer, D., McFarlane, E., & Curtis, A. (2014). Key stakeholder views of venue lockouts in Newcastle and Geelong. *Crime Prevention & Community Safety*, 16(1), 38-53.

106. SA Police news (19 June 2011). www.sapolicenews.com.au

107. Drabsch, T. (2006) Reducing the risk of recidivism. New Parliamentary Library Research Service; see also the Australian Institute of Criminology www.aic.gov.au/crime_community/communitycrime/recidivism.html

108. The Herald Sun, April 19, 2011 - <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria-police-computer-system-failure-lets-parole-violators-commit-murder/story-e6frf7jo-1226041187325>

Violence-reinforcing cultures

Key Points

- Alcohol-related violence is just one aspect of a culture of violence.
- There is no direct relationship between per capita levels of consumption and rates of violence.
- A drinking culture is both a part of and a reflection of the culture as a whole.
- Efforts at alcohol control will be ineffective if not related to changes in the macho culture of violence.
- Scapegoating alcohol as the sole cause of violence merely diverts attention from violent men and the maladaptive cultural norms that allow their behaviour to develop and proliferate.
- Poorly designed drinking environments can also be a trigger for violence.

Theoretically, the proportion of men with hyper-aggressivity (or any other condition that predisposes them towards violence) should be relatively similar in all societies, and yet we find wide cultural variance in rates of general violence and ‘alcohol-related’ violence as, for example, Graham et al (2011) report:

High variability among countries was evident for some consequences, such as fights after drinking, with 26.2% of men from Costa Rica, 20.3% of men from Nicaragua and 17.6% of men from the Czech Republic reporting fights after drinking compared to 3.5% of men from Denmark and 3.7% of men from Spain.¹⁰⁹

The difference of course is the culture. Not only the adult drinking environment, but the way in which young boys are raised also contributes to levels of violence. Levels of alcohol consumption do not themselves correlate with levels of violence. Some binge-drinking cultures are famously harmonious and peaceful (the Danes, for example).

In 2005/6, Luxembourg had the highest rate of per capita consumption worldwide (at nearly 16 litres of pure alcohol per person – compared to around 9 litres for Australians in the same year) and only 2.5% of the population classified as ‘abstainers’¹¹⁰, and one of the lowest homicide rates in the world (UNODC & WHO figures).¹¹¹ In Jamaica, by contrast, between 1961 and 2001, per capita consumption rates fluctuated between just 2 and 5 litres per person. In 1995, nearly 58% of the population abstained from alcohol.¹¹² Yet in 2005, Jamaica had the highest homicide rate in the world: 58 per 100,000 people.

Or take Iceland as another example – a country with high rates of per-capita alcohol consumption (12 litres per person and only 17% abstainers¹¹³), high rates of gun ownership, a culture of heavy pre-loading and all-night bar opening, and yet violent crime is almost non-existent. One explanation is the high levels of equality in Iceland in terms of both income and quality of life. Practically speaking, there is very little difference in the lifestyles and opportunities of the rich and the poor. Icelanders place great value on egalitarianism and sexual equality.

109. Graham, K., Bernards, S., Knibbe, R., Kairouz, S., Kuntsche, S., Wilsnack, S. C., ... & Gmel, G. (2011). Alcohol-related negative consequences among drinkers around the world. *Addiction*, 106(8), 1391-1405.

110. OECD Economic Surveys: Luxembourg (2008), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

111. UNODC: Global Study on Homicide. <http://www.unodc.org/gsh/>

112. Thomson, I. (2011). *The Dead Yard: A Story of Modern Jamaica*. Nation Books.

113. www.who.int/substance_abuse/publications/global_alcohol_report/profiles/isl.pdf

Violent crime aligns precisely with income inequality in almost every country analysed. As Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) affirm, in unequal societies “...status becomes more important, status competition increases and more people are deprived of access to markers of status and social success.”¹¹⁴

Australia and New Zealand rank in the world’s top ten countries for income inequality¹¹⁵ and there are indications that the gap is widening.¹¹⁶

Some of the world’s most alcohol-soaked cultures have the lowest rates of violence, while some of the most abstemious countries have the highest. Obviously, many factors can account for this, but the point is that there is no direct relationship between per capita levels of consumption and rates of violence. Violence aligns more precisely with the nexus between cultural patterns of drinking and cultural patterns of violence.

Many scholars have noted that certain societies exhibit a group of cultural characteristics that appear to propagate violence. These features correlate strongly with all measures of violence such as homicide, domestic abuse and even warfare. The beliefs and practices, the value and portrayal of violence in a society can nourish and perpetuate an insidious and destructive male subculture.¹¹⁷ Violence, violent solutions and violent heroes are not only tolerated but often glorified in these societies.¹¹⁸

On the other hand, violence-repressing cultures such as Japan and Denmark, for example, are rich in social and cultural solutions for non-violent conflict-avoidance and have strong community-based values. Virtually no support is found in these cultures for aggressive responses in day-to-day situations.¹¹⁹

Violence-reinforcing cultures tend to share the following features:

1. cultural support (in media, norms, icons, myths, games etc.) for aggression and aggressive solutions
2. glorification of fighters
3. violent sports
4. socialization of male children towards aggression (through cultural/ritual means and also through non-attachment parenting and early separation/independence from mother)
5. belief in malevolent magic (such as witchcraft or the power of alcohol to turn someone violent or evil)

114. Wilkinson, R. G., & Pickett, K. (2010). *The spirit level*. Penguin Books

115. according to the United Nations (UN), the World Bank, the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_income_equality; and www.oecd.org/els/soc/49499779.pdf

116. Greig, A., Lewins, F., & White, K. (2003). *Inequality in Australia*. Cambridge University Press; Mosler, D. F. (2002). *Australia, the recreational society*. Praeger Publishers. See also www.oecd.org/els/soc/49499779.pdf

117. Russell, E. W. (1972). Factors of Human Aggression: A Cross-Cultural Factor Analysis of Characteristics Related to Warfare and Crime. *Cross-Cultural Research*, 7(4), 275-312.

Breckenridge, K. (1998). The allure of violence: Men, race and masculinity on the South African goldmines, 1900–1950. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24(4), 669-693.

118. Cohen, D. (1998). Culture, social organization, and patterns of violence. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 75(2), 408; Cohen, D. (2001). Cultural variation: considerations and implications. *Psychological bulletin*, 127(4), 451.

119. Florence Denmark and Leonore Loeb Adler (2004) *International Perspectives in Violence*. Greenwood Publishing Group.

6. conspicuous inequality in wealth
7. a culture of male domination (indicators include high incidence of rape and domestic violence and pay inequality)
8. strong codes of male honour
9. endemic racism and misogyny
10. corporal and capital punishment
11. a higher-than-normal proportion of young males in the society
12. militaristic readiness, and participation in wars (societies that are frequently at war have consistently higher rates of inter-personal violence as well)

It is beyond the scope of this report to analyse fully the extent to which each of these features is embedded in Australian and New Zealand society, but we can find fairly solid evidence for the presence, to a greater or lesser extent, of features 1-9.

Number 5, “a belief in malevolent magic” may seem at first unfamiliar in modern Westernised cultures, until we are reminded of the persistent, universal belief (mentioned in Part One) in alcohol’s magical ability to transform people, to “bring out the demons in people” and cause them to do violent and evil things.

To summarise: around the globe, a range of either violence-repressing or violence-reinforcing characteristics can be found in different societies.¹²⁰ What becomes apparent, when we look at drinking behaviour in a particular society, is that it is driven not just by one single factor (such as availability of alcohol, for example) but by a complex engine of multiple beliefs and practices that, like pistons in a combustion engine, move in different directions yet are inexorably welded to each other. Of interest here is where, why and how the features of a drinking culture and a violence-reinforcing culture intersect to produce what is commonly referred to as “alcohol-fuelled” violence, but should more accurately be termed “culturally-fuelled violence” (or maybe just “violence”?).

If we superimpose these violence-related cultural features onto the list from Part One of drinking-related cultural features in Australia and New Zealand, we can see a certain ‘cross-pollination’ of a few key aspects that emerge as being related to both:

1. A belief in the disinhibiting powers of alcohol
2. The association of alcohol with masculinity, power and status (a ‘macho’ drinking culture)
3. Drinking environments conducive to violent behaviour

The key point to remember is that a drinking culture is both a part of and a reflection of the culture as a whole. It cannot be isolated from the cultural body and fixed or replaced independently like a diseased organ.

Domestic violence will not go away by locking up all the perpetrators – as young boys are continually being socialised into a culture of male entitlement, new generations of domestic

120. Tsytsarev, S. V., and Callahan, C. V. (1995) “Motivational approaches to violent behavior: a cross-cultural perspective.” In: Adler, L. L., and Denmark, F.L. (Eds) *Violence and the Prevention of Violence*. Westport, Ct.: Praeger Publishers.

abusers will emerge. Similarly, alcohol-related violence will not go away by raising or lowering the price of booze; opening bars later or shutting them earlier; restricting or banning advertising, etc. Unless the culture of violence changes, violence, in whatever guise, will continue. Efforts at alcohol control will be ineffective if not related to changes in the macho culture of violence. Scapegoating alcohol as the sole cause of violence merely diverts attention from violent men and the maladaptive cultural norms that allow their behaviour to develop and proliferate.

Violence rituals and situations

Key Points

- Violence in males is related to cultural cues, mostly about personal status in the group.
- Young men will initiate, stage and provoke fights purely for the fun of it.
- These are cultural not chemical (i.e. alcohol related) responses as comparative data shows.
- Cultural norms of 'honour' and 'payback' perpetuate the justification of the violent response.

Even the most violent criminals are not violent all of the time – only given the right mix of environment, setting, cues, provocation and excuse. Understanding the dynamics of the various situations in which violence erupts is crucial to explaining and preventing these occurrences.

Fighting in the NTE can be subdivided into four main types:

1. An attack on a weaker victim – to gain status, or power
2. Fighting in front of an audience for effect
3. Fighting as a form of fun / thrills
4. Fighting in defence of honour or status

The well-publicised 'King-hit' or 'Coward's Punch' incidents appear to be mostly of the first and last variety.

While the most recent tragic deaths and horrific injuries sustained by king-hit victims were unprovoked attacks, from interviews with police and drinkers, and from a review of many such cases, it would appear that a truly 'out of the blue' king hit is a rare phenomenon. In the majority of cases, the victim and the perpetrator had been previously engaged in an argument or a fight. After the victim had thought the fight was over, and one or both parties had left the scene, the perpetrator suddenly reappeared from behind to deal a sneaky blow. As a young man I met in a Sydney bar explains:

"People think the King Hit is 'unprovoked' but ...[shakes head]. It happened to a mate of mine. A few of us were out and this guy wants to start something. He was just like wanting a fight, you know what I mean? I'm not like that. I'm a really warm person you know. We got rid of him and went somewhere else and him and his mates followed us! There were a few words, but we thought he'd given up and gone and then, when we were walking to the taxis he just came up behind my mate and just whacked him. We would have chased him but we were worried about my mate. He recovered all right but it could have been bad. But that's how it is, right. It's not the beer, yeah? We all drink beer: It's idiots who have something to prove."

Some, like one 13-year veteran of a police force in Australia, claim that this is not a new phenomenon:

“I’ve seen plenty of one-punch homicides; it is nothing new. Same problem as before; it’s just that CCTV has highlighted it.”

Good publicans can defuse or even prevent fights between patrons by spotting signs of trouble. But many bar owners, managers and bouncers we spoke with confessed that the main objective was on ‘getting it outside’ – “don’t be judge and jury, just chuck it out.”

Altercations that carry on into the street can result in greater harm. This highlights the importance of encouraging coordination between publicans, police, government and the broader community to avoid simply moving the issue from one space to another.

Fighting for honour or status

In general, societies and subgroups that actively subscribe to strong codes of honour tend to have higher rates of homicide. For example, in the southern states of the US, where violence-reinforcing ‘honour-code’ cultures have been entrenched since colonial times, homicide rates have historically been up to 10 times higher than in northern states.¹²¹

A study of young offenders found sixteen main triggers for violence; the number one trigger was “being offended by someone.”¹²²

“How do fights start? It’s the high-school heroes, the hormones. It’s all like who’s King of the Jungle stuff.” – Male, 22

Australia and New Zealand clearly share these cultural patterns. The strong male honour codes are historical hangovers from herding cultures in which portable, vulnerable, wealth (cattle, sheep, etc.) and unreliable law enforcement fostered a culture in which a man had to gain and maintain a reputation fierce enough to deter ‘predation’ by others. The cultural pattern has persisted long after its adaptive functionality expired, as Joshua Greene (2013) explains:

“Once a belief becomes a cultural identity badge, it can perpetuate itself, even as it undermines the tribe’s interest.”¹²³

Female informants in the fieldwork often commented on the hypersensitivity of some males to perceived insults or ‘slights’ and their tendency to respond aggressively. Many blamed the alcohol, as this young lady explained:

“Alcohol just makes blokes so edgy! They think everybody is looking at them funny or insulting them. They turn into such idiots sometimes.”

“It’s always a girl.” – Male, 20.

“Alcohol: it makes you not care. Alcohol is an enabler. People use it as an excuse.” – Female, 23.

121. Nisbett, R. E. (1993). Violence and US regional culture. *American Psychologist*, 48(4), 441; Cohen, D., Vandello, J., & Rantilla, A. (1998). The sacred and the social. *Shame*, 261-282; Vandello, J. A., Cohen, D., & Ransom, S. (2008). US Southern and Northern Differences in Perceptions of Norms About Aggression Mechanisms for the Perpetuation of a Culture of Honor. *Journal of Cross-cultural psychology*, 39(2), 162-177.

122. McMurrin, M., Hoyte, H. and Jinks, M. (2012), Triggers for alcohol-related violence in young male offenders. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 17: 307–321.

123. Greene, J. (2013) *Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them*. Penguin Press.

In both Australia and New Zealand, focus group participants cited ‘payback’ as a major motivation for fighting. The following explanation was typical:

“It is just part of the culture: you can’t let something go. If somebody does something to you, there has to be payback. It is expected. If you don’t do something to them, it’s like they’ve won and you are seen as weak.” – Male, 19.

In an honour code, macho culture, an insult is a form of test. To do nothing in response is to demonstrate weakness. While the responses may seem ridiculous and out-of-proportion to females, to males, the need to respond can feel, inexplicably, like a life-or-death matter.

This hyper-reactivity is referred to in several qualitative studies on alcohol-related violence. Most young men will explain the aggressive response as ‘necessary’ to defend their honour and save face, or earn the respect of their peers.¹²⁴ As Wells (2003) concludes from his study on young males in bars:

*“... male honour, face saving, group loyalty and fighting for fun were the main motivations for barroom aggression. The most notable explanatory factor for barroom aggression among young males in the study was an overriding general acceptance and even positive endorsement of aggression in bars, suggesting that greater attention needs to be paid to the cultural values that shape the attitudes and behaviour of some young men.”*¹²⁵

Many young men will deliberately seek out or create confrontational situations to test and prove their loyalty to the group, as well as their aggressive potential and capacity for the instant switch to violence – in other words, their perception of their ‘masculinity’.

The numerous authors who have written about male violence and have investigated the common patterns and motives involved in male-on-male homicide,¹²⁶ all agree that they are disproportionately caused or triggered by public contests of honour or reputation. As journalist John Birmingham remarks: “This is where street violence is born. In toxic masculinity.”¹²⁷

As mentioned above, societies with a strong code of male honour tend more towards violence. But even within nations, we find subcultural differences. For example, in the USA, Southern states have a far stronger code of honour than Northern states. In the South, men are far more likely to respond aggressively to a perceived affront. Here we can also see an instance of culture having a direct effect on the brain: in laboratory experiments, Nisbett and Cohen (1994 & 1996) found that Southern men experience greater increases in testosterone and cortisol levels when they feel insulted or affronted whereas Northern men do not. In other words, a different emphasis in the upbringing of Northern boys has shaped their brain response.¹²⁸

124. Tryggvesson, K. (2004) The ambiguous excuse: attributing violence to intoxication – young Swedes about the excuse value of alcohol. *Contemporary Drug Problems*. 31:321-261

Benson, D., Archer, J. (2002) An ethnographic study of conflict between young men in the context of the night out. *Psychology, Evolution and Gender*. 4:3-30

125. Graham, K., Wells, S. (2003) ‘Somebody’s gonna get their head kicked in tonight!’: aggression among young males in bars – a question of values. *British Journal of Criminology*. 43:546-566.

126. Wolfgang, M. E. (1958). Patterns in criminal homicide; Luckenbill, D. F. (1977). Criminal homicide as a situated transaction. *Social Problems*, 176-186; Daly, M., & Wilson, M. (1988). *Homicide*. Transaction Publishers. Alder, C. M., & Polk, K. (1996). Masculinity and child homicide. *British Journal of Criminology*, 36(3), 396-411; Polk, K. (1994). Masculinity, honour and confrontational homicide. Just boys doing business? *Men, masculinities and crime*, 166-188.

127. The Age: The secret of street violence. Comment. Date. January 23, 2014
www.theage.com.au/comment/blogs/blunt-instrument/the-secret-of-street-violence-20140123-319u8.html#ixzz2rvRmm2ZW

128. Cohen, D., & Nisbett, R. E. (1994). Self-protection and the culture of honor: Explaining southern violence. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 20(5), 551-567; Cohen, D., Nisbett, R. E., Bowdle, B. F., & Schwarz, N. (1996). Insult, aggression, and the southern culture of honor: An experimental ethnography. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 70(5), 945.

Collins (2008) makes the point that ‘partying’, (and, we would add, much of the drinking in NTE venues), is, in a social sense, stratifying.¹²⁹ In the case of private parties, this is rarely a problem, as those deemed inferior or unworthy are simply not invited. But on the streets, in public space, there are still many who are socially marginalised – not wealthy enough, not fashionable enough, not famous enough, not ‘cool’ enough, or not in the right kind of company to be allowed in. Although there is superficial egalitarianism in the NTE, the reality is that status and class stratification are everywhere.

Those who feel they are on the ‘outside looking in’ at prestige, privilege, flaunted wealth, etc., are hypersensitive to perceived status insult, and prone to what Collins terms, “boundary-exclusion violence”. It is the sense that “I’m just as good as anybody else” that leads to “righteous anger by those excluded”, says Collins.¹³⁰ These sorts of confrontations can erupt seemingly over nothing, as a smartly-dressed man in a Perth bar explained to me:

Me: Have you ever been in a violent situation when you are out drinking?

*Male 1: Yeah, last Friday night this man just comes right up to me [in a bar] and glares at me and says ‘what the f**k are you looking at?’ I wasn’t doing anything! We were all going to leave but we stayed in that bar for ages after this guy left. I was afraid he was waiting for me outside.*

Me: Did you not do anything to provoke him?

Male 1: No! Honestly, I was just having a beer and talking with my friends.

Male 2 (a friend): [laughing] I think it was your suit that provoked him. You should have gone home and changed first.

In Australia and New Zealand we saw and heard of, again and again, the aggressive male response to a perceived affront. This was a primary cause of fights in the NTE. Alcohol was blamed – but it became increasingly clear that this was a cultural, rather than chemical response.

It is this culture that must be addressed. Young boys need not be raised to react aggressively to every perceived slight, taunt or jest. Non-violent conflict resolution, face-saving calming and avoidance techniques can all be taught, but also required is a re-evaluation of all other features of the violence-reinforcing society that influence the socialisation of young boys.

Fighting for fun

Young boys are primed by natural selection for playfighting and will initiate, stage and provoke fights purely for the fun of it. Much of this fighting is ‘staged’, playful, and rarely results in actual injury. This is a necessary rehearsal for the real dangers we faced during the millions of years of our evolution that shaped our behavioural instincts. The vast majority of these mock fighting encounters are all bluff, bluster, and bravado with no real violence involved. But the build-up, the chase and the adrenaline rush give enough of an illusion of battle to satisfy the need for thrills, establish reputations of bravery and ferocity and to cement group loyalties. Many such staged battles (like many sports) are a blend of play and ritualised aggression.¹³¹

129. Collins, R. (2008) *Violence. A micro-sociological Theory*. Princeton University Press.

130. Collins (2008) *Op Cit*.

131. Gray, P. (2014) The play theory of hunter-gatherer egalitarianism. In: Narvaez, D. and Valentino, K, (EDS). *Ancestral Landscapes in Human Evolution: Culture, Childrearing and Social Wellbeing*, Oxford University Press, 192

During the fieldwork, researchers witnessed several mini confrontations among individuals and groups. In one instance, a group of young people (four males and one female) was playing a vicious kind of cat-and-mouse chase around the darkened streets with a rival group. One of the young men had a swollen and bloodied hand but all seemed quite exhilarated by their game of taunt and chase.

In a similar vein, a report in the New Zealand Herald described the following recent incident:

It's Saturday night and downtown Auckland is packed. Groups of shirtless men are shouting about finishing off their day at the Nines with a trip to Showgirls. Teenage girls wearing "rap god" singlets are still giddy from the Eminem concert.

Then, the crowd stops walking. On each side of the crawling traffic, two young men are shouting and throwing hand gestures at each other. One yells: "South side!" The other responds from the opposite side of the road: "West side!"

Then both rush on to the road, seeming not to care about the cars around them. A punch is thrown and it's all on. A crowd piles in until about 30 people are shoving and punching each other. One man is pushed towards the glass windows of the Body Shop. He falls but scrambles back to his feet.

The brawl pushes back again on to Darby St, then Queen St, and back around the cars on to the other side of the road. Some motorists look alarmed as the fighting melee of bodies pushes past. Others just shrug; it's another Saturday night.¹³²

Bad as it sounded, I could not find one report of an arrest or a serious injury as a result of this brawl.

Some young people indicated that such a fight could relieve boredom:

"Sometimes you are so keyed up for something to happen and nothing happens. Some nights out are just boring. And then you feel like you have to make something happen. Some blokes will turn any stupid thing into an excuse for a fight – just to have something to talk about the next day." – Male, 20.

It is confrontations like these that sustain and bind a group with, usually, exaggerated recounting later of skirmishes and heroics.

"The fight narrative is the leading ritual of the group; occasional fights are needed in order to feed material into the narrative ritual..."¹³³

Certainly, what a young man will do to prove his loyalty, commitment and strength to his male peers often defies logic. A few male informants in this research had, at one point in their lives, felt that they had to commit an act of violence – or at least demonstrate willingness to fight – in order to gain approval and acceptance from male peers.

"You feel like you won't be looked at like a real man unless you've been in a fight." – Male 19.

132. By Susan Edmunds "Saturday night's all right for fighting" The New Zealand Herald Sunday Feb 23, 2014. www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11208092

133. Collins, R. (2008) Violence. A micro-sociological Theory. Princeton University Press.

Drug use and violence

Although many deny that drugs play a significant role in violence in and around licences premises, there was clear evidence from many sources, including police, of a significant amount of drug use – Ice, GHB, steroids and others – among weekend revellers in many cities. Focus group participants were extremely candid about their dual use of drugs and alcohol to chemically engineer their moods on a night out. Many bar managers and police were of the opinion that the 3.00am to 5.00am crowds consisted mainly of drug users.

In one nightclub in Melbourne researchers noted that no drinks at all were being sold yet everyone in the club was most certainly ‘under the influence.’ Researchers reported that they were offered drugs every time they went to the toilets. Police confirmed that in and around this club a significant amount of GHB was being sold. Young people told us that an \$8.00 dose of GHB could rival a night’s drinking, as this young woman explained:

“One little vial of it can send you to heaven for 3 hours. It is so much cheaper than alcohol. But I don’t do it all the time because it isn’t really social. You are all alone in your own world.”

In Sydney’s King’s Cross area, researchers were routinely approached by staggering, glassy-eyed ‘Ice’ users, some of them acting in a threatening manner. In a town north of Perth, researchers observed fairly obvious drug sales occurring in and around bars.

In New Zealand, use of cannabis (‘weed’) appeared to be common among young people. None felt it was problematic or led to violence, as this university student in Wellington explains:

“Most nights I would rather just relax with weed and a good book and avoid all the stupid drunkenness. But you feel you have to go out. I’d have no friends left if I didn’t!”

The direct role of drugs in violence or anti-social behaviour, however, remains unclear. Anecdotal evidence from users, police, bouncers, bar staff and others would suggest that most drug users are extremely placid. Certain substances, however (most notably ‘Ice’ and steroids) were felt to contribute more directly to aggressive impulses.

Other informants in the fieldwork agreed that the bodybuilding ‘gym’ culture has normalised the use of anabolic steroids among men. Although steroids are designed to increase testosterone, which in turn is associated with male aggression, whether the use of these drugs directly contributes to violence (often termed ‘roid rages’) is still largely undetermined. Until proper research is conducted among the actual perpetrators of violence in the NTE, these questions regarding the role of drugs will remain unanswered.

Male bonding, masculinity, 'mateship' and violence

Key Points

- Male bonding is a hard-wired precursor of aggressive behaviour, but not of its form, which is culturally governed.
- Real solutions are hard to come by. In the long term, the only reasonable suggestion is to find ways of socialising young males into adopting non-violent responses to provocation and to associate restraint with status, respect and manliness.

In 1969, a ground-breaking book by anthropologist Lionel Tiger introduced the world to the concept of 'male bonding'.¹³⁴ In evolutionary terms, the male-male bond is as important to survival as the male-female bond.¹³⁵ For around 400,000 years, *Homo sapiens* existed in small bands or tribes, numbering not more than about 150 individuals – the size of a decent wedding. Our species' survival was predicated primarily on the success of:

- Group bonding (for protection)
- Reproduction
- Food provision
- Rearing of young

That's really all it is about. Why then is *male* group bonding such a universal feature today? Is it simply an extension or variation of the group bonding described in Part One? It serves several unique functions. First: protection in hunting and in warfare. The loyalty of other men was a life-and-death necessity. For a man, the bond between them was more important than the bond with his female partner, if he had one. Let's face it, in blunt terms, reproduction requires a primary time investment of... 3 minutes? And does it really matter if she truly loves you or is loyal unto death? Hunting and warfare, on the other hand, require a level of trust and even love among men that necessitates lengthy and repeated bonding rituals and frequent tests of loyalty. Men, as Tiger explains, 'court' other men to be fighting or recreational companions. He speculated that:

*The significance of drinking to men's groups ... may be taken as one index of the relationship of drinking to male affiliation. In some cultures, where a variety of inhibitions prevent the warm expression of male-affiliative sentiments, the role of drinking may be unusually important in permitting affiliation to occur at all.*¹³⁶

The second function of male group bonding is status. In reality, successful reproduction requires a lengthy secondary time investment to rear children. Females are rightly choosy about mates: they want good genes, as expressed through strength, skills. They also want commitment, long enough to provide and protect them at least until the child is weaned. This keen discrimination leads to fierce competition among men to prove their fitness and desirability. In species that form social hierarchies, there is often a co-occurrence of female choice and male-male competition.¹³⁷

134. Tiger, L. (1969). *Men in groups*. Transaction Publishers.

135. Fox, R. (2005). Male bonding in the epics and romances. *The Literary Animal: Evolution and the Nature of Narrative*, Evanston, 126-144.

136. Tiger, L. (1969) Op Cit.

137. Berglund, A., Bisazza, A. & Pilastro, A. (1996) Armaments and ornaments: an evolutionary explanation of traits of dual utility. *Biol. J. Linnean Soc.* 58, 385-399.

It is only through such competition that men can earn a social position, a rank and a reputation. Females of many species, including our own, prefer high-status males, but it is other males who confer this status. It is a governing principle of both animal and human behavioural studies that high status among males confers greater reproductive success. The drive to attain status, particularly among males, is therefore a ‘hard-wired’ imperative.¹³⁸

In short, bonding among men is a complex mixture of genuine affection and fierce competition. The competitive element, though, is usually relegated to mock fights, aggression displays and playful banter and mockery. In highly ritualized male bonding cultures such as in traditional German student fraternities, heavy and collegial drinking was accompanied by highly ritualized duelling with sabres. The combatants wore “protective” masks designed to allow an opponent to inflict a cheek wound: indeed the wound and its subsequent prominent scar, was a sought-after badge of honour. Brawls or fist fighting however were considered disgraceful – an unacceptable form of low-class behaviour – and could result in expulsion from the group.

Although most primate males may have a propensity to be aggressive, in the struggle to survive they had to evolve strong social mechanisms for overcoming this aggression in order to hunt for, protect and defend the group. Male bonding, prey seeking, and inter-group aggression may be wired into the male brain, but actual violence, or violent responses are not hard-wired.

Anthropologist de Garine said: “Drinking is classically viewed as expressing the social system.” There are many descriptions from varied societies showing that displays and offerings of copious amounts of beer signify prestige, status and power. The point is very clear in the work of, for example, Wiessner, Wiessner and Schiefenhövel (1997)¹³⁹ and Rehfish (1987).¹⁴⁰ Similarly, Carrington, McIntosh and Scott (2010) observed that, in a ‘resource boom town’ in rural Australia:

*... personal accounts of male-on-male violence in pub settings appeared to be driven more by social hierarchies and divisions related to who belongs, rather than by amounts of alcohol consumed.*¹⁴¹

As long as alcohol is identified in our society with “hard men,” young men who have been humiliated in a fight, or called “poofs” and “faggots” in front of their peers, feel that they can redeem their masculine identity in the pub. The downtrodden, low-ranking male may use drunkenness as an attempt to gain a reputation as an unpredictable and formidable fighter. In the extensive research I have conducted on drug and alcohol use in the military, I have noticed that soldiers who had failed to achieve any status within the platoon (‘power failures’) often turned to alcohol and to ‘wild-man’ antics in an attempt to retrieve at least some kind of a reputation.

As Durrant (2012) notes:

*Status and reputation are important commodities that, in some contexts, are worth fighting for, especially when there is an audience of peers.*¹⁴²

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138. Betzig, L. L., Mulder, M. B., & Turke, P. (Eds.). (1988). Human reproductive behaviour: A Darwinian perspective. CUP Archive; Clutton-Brock, T. H. (Ed.). (1988). *Reproductive success: studies of individual variation in contrasting breeding systems*. University of Chicago Press; Cowlshaw, G., & Dunbar, R. I. (1991). Dominance rank and mating success in male primates. *Animal Behaviour*, 41(6), 1045-1056; Ellis, B. J. (1995). The evolution of sexual attraction: Evaluative mechanisms in women. In: Barkow, J.H., Cosmides, L.E. L Tooby, J.E (1992) Op Cit.
139. Wiessner, P. W., Wiessner, P., & Schiefenhövel, W. (Eds.). (1997). Food and the status quest: An interdisciplinary perspective. Berghahn Books.
140. Rehfish, F. (1987) Competitive beer drinking among the Mambila. In: Douglas, M. (2013). *Constructive drinking*. Routledge.
141. Carrington, K., McIntosh, A., & Scott, J. (2010). Globalization, Frontier Masculinities and Violence Booze, Blokes and Brawls. *British Journal of Criminology*, 50(3), 393-413.
142. Durrant, R. (2012) Alcohol and Violence in Evolutionary Perspective. In: McMurrin, M. (Ed.). (2012). *Alcohol-related violence: Prevention and treatment* (Vol. 57). John Wiley & Sons.

McClelland et al (1972)¹⁴³ theorised that men drink in order to assuage their need for feelings of power. Marlatt, Kosturn and Lang (1975) demonstrated experimentally that denying men who are provoked an outlet for retaliation led to increased drinking, compared to men who were allowed to retaliate in some way against provocation.¹⁴⁴ Of course, providing such outlets for retaliation may decrease drinking, but, unless we are willing to turn bars into sanctioned ‘fight clubs’ or duelling venues, this cannot be part of a workable strategy.

Real solutions are much harder to come by. In the long term, the only reasonable suggestion is to find ways of socialising young males into adopting non-violent responses to provocation and to associate restraint with status, respect and manliness.

The measures that all societies have evolved to safely ritualise and suppress the male potential for aggression, or to channel it into pro-social activity, must be fully explored and exploited.

Masculinity in Australian and New Zealand culture Drinking with other men is a performance. It enacts a particular version of masculinity characterised by ‘hardness’, fearlessness and superiority – what sociologists have termed ‘hegemonic working class masculinity,’¹⁴⁵ or ‘aggressive masculinity’.

The ‘archetypal’ Australian or New Zealand male is a tough act to live up to. Speaking about her research with abusive men, Dr Clare Murphy commented on the overall expectations of men in New Zealand society:

Key Points

- Masculinity, however defined, is something that has to be constantly proved and demonstrated.
- Masculinity has been redefined throughout history and can be reworked through consistent and committed change to cultural norms as perpetuated through media and targeted messages.
- A cultural shift in violent norms associated with masculinity is possible.

“... men controlling women, men should be tough, men should be physically strong, they should be providers, financially successful, protectors of women, men are superior, men should always be independent and always know what they’re talking about, really in control.”

Conversely, “love, care, empathy, seeking help to deal with issues, even seeking help for healthcare” were all considered feminine and unmanly.¹⁴⁶

Australia and New Zealand share a common heritage in this respect, as Nicole Hardy writes about New Zealand:

“...the connection of New Zealand’s national identity with the land and rural lifestyle, contributes to the Hard Man identity commonly associated with beer. It instils a form of togetherness among male beer drinkers and enables those who drink beer to feel part of

143. McClelland et al (1972) *The Drinking Man: Alcohol and human motivation*, New York: Free Press.

144. Marlatt, G.A., Kosturn, C.F., Lang (1975) Provocation to anger and opportunity for retaliation as determinants of alcohol consumption in social drinkers. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*. 84 (6):652

145. Canaan, J. E. (1996). “One thing leads to another”: drinking, fighting and working class masculinities. *Understanding Masculinities–Social Relations and Cultural Arenas*. Open University Press, Buckingham.

146. Murphy, Clare. (2009). ‘Men’s intimate partner abuse and control: reconciling paradoxical masculinities and social contradictions.’ A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Queensland University of Technology.

the rural identity familiar within New Zealand. The regulatory practice of drinking beer in a rural space is due to the repetition of the gendered performances used to represent beer drinking in television advertisements. The masculine bodily act of standing at the bar of a rural pub with your 'mates' restates the hegemonic performances that are considered socially acceptable. It is these repetitions that influence the national identity of New Zealand."¹⁴⁷

And M. Crotty reports in a similar vein about Australia:

"Despite losing its overriding image as a "bushranger" frontier and evolving into a predominately urban society, Australia has maintained a reputation for aggressive masculinity. The nation's sexist ideology, rooted in the very birth of the country over 200 years ago, still runs rampant today... The tradition of "mateship" – the reliance of a man on his "pal" – stems from Australia's history of the "lonely, womanless and often dangerous life in the bush or outback." ¹⁴⁸

Robert Hughes (2010) echoes this sentiment in his book *The Fatal Shore*:

"The feeling of reliance on one's mate would lie forever at the heart of masculine behaviour in Australia." ¹⁴⁹

'Mateship' is frequently expressed as a central feature of the Australian and New Zealand characters. There is no evidence, however, that the Australian or Kiwi male friendships are qualitatively different than in other parts of the world. And the stereotypical drinking man of Australia and New Zealand is a near perfect mirror-image of the drinking man in many other cultures. Peralta (2007), finds, for example, that in general:

*.. alcohol use among white men was found to symbolize the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity. Masculinities were constructed via drinking stories, the body's ability to tolerate alcohol, and the relevance of drinking too little or not at all, which symbolized weakness, homosexuality, or femininity.*¹⁵⁰

Many advertisements for beer focus on seemingly innocuous or positive aspects of male 'mateship'. In a culture with strongly homophobic undercurrents, a beer is perhaps the only gift one man can give another to symbolise friendship and loyalty. It is perfectly reasonable and relatively harmless that drinks' manufacturers should reflect this in advertising – getting men to switch brands as one represents a better 'gift' than another and will increase bonds of friendship. However, wrongly portrayed, this conflation of beer and masculine bonding could serve to reinforce the less desirable aspects of 'macho' culture that include brutal competitiveness and misogyny.

Masculinity itself, however, is, like beauty, defined differently across cultures and throughout history. In the early nineteenth century, Australian men were not always required to be quite as Rambo-like. But, as M. Crotty explains, the pressure of internal and external threats to the Empire engendered a redefinition of true manhood:

147. Nicole Hardy (2007) Gendered performances of spaces and beer drinkers in New Zealand *Te Kura Kete Aronui. Graduate and Postgraduate eJournal*. Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Vol 3, 2007

148. Crotty, M. A. (1999). *Making the Australian male: the construction of manly middle-class youth in Australia, 1870-1920*. PhD thesis, Department of History, The University of Melbourne

149. Hughes, R. (2010). *The fatal shore*. Random House.

150. Robert L. Peralta (2007) College Alcohol Use and the Embodiment of Hegemonic Masculinity among European American Men. *Sex Roles* 56:741–756

The ideal of manliness was thus gradually reworked to focus more on physical strength, courage, chivalry, patriotism, and military capability. Masculine qualities were lauded rather than suppressed. Feminine qualities were increasingly despised, and the model of manliness promoted in elite secondary schooling, juvenile literature, and youth groups in the early twentieth century was a vastly more masculine, anti-domestic and muscular construct than that which had predominated fifty years earlier.¹⁵¹

What does seem to be a universal constant is that, however it is defined, masculinity is something that has to be constantly proved and demonstrated.¹⁵² As Kaplan and Ben-Ari (2000) write:

The recent literature in men's studies has shown how hegemonic masculinity is not a set of given traits but rather a series of ideals that need to be constantly attained. Masculinity is never simply achieved once and for all; it must constantly be accomplished. The recurring notion is that of men persistently attempting to affirm and prove their manhood.¹⁵³

The positive implication of this is that the concept of masculinity can be reworked. Other cultures provide examples of how this can happen. Hodgson (2011) describes the shifting markers of high status among Masai men of Kenya. Traditionally, a boy would have to kill a lion to be considered fully a man. Prohibition on lion hunting forced a re-direction of cultural definitions of manhood. Now, educational achievement is equated with high status and manhood in Maasai tribes.¹⁵⁴

In Australia, a good example of altering hypermasculine cultural 'memes' can be found in the recent media rebranding of the 'king hit' into the 'coward's punch'. Although the long-term effectiveness of this has yet to be measured, it is a step in the right direction. Concurrent with this change came a media campaign initiated by an ex-boxer aiming to educate young men about the devastating effects of a 'one-punch' hit. The primary message of the advertisement – that there are alternative responses to perceived affronts and there is social kudos in walking away – is likely to be effective. Some thought, however, should be given to the significant focus on explaining in very clear terms how one punch can deliver sufficient force to kill someone. While on the one hand those men who have no intention of inflicting serious harm may respond to this message, for other violent and risk-seeking men knowing how very effective their violence can be is not necessarily deterrence. It is akin to telling young people how risky binge drinking can be. A focus on the violent or dangerous potential of a behaviour could merely increase its appeal.

Young men do not restrain themselves from fighting for fear of killing their opponent; they show restraint when the social norms and all social signs of approval are for non-violence – when their status is raised for showing restraint. In our research with the British Army, we have seen that prevailing notions of the perfect masculine body can have a knock-on effect on

151. Crotty, M.A. (199) Op Cit.

152. See, for example: Roper, M. & Tosh, J. (1991). Historians and the politics of masculinity. In *Manful Assertions*. Roper and Tosh (eds). London: Routledge; Gilmore, D.D. (1990). *Manhood in the Making*: cultural concepts of masculinity. New Haven: Yale University Press; Connell, R.W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

153. Kaplan, D. & Ben-Ari, E. (2000). Brothers and others in arms: managing gay identity in combat units of the Israeli Army. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 29, 4.

154. Hodgson, D. L. (2011). Being Maasai. *Becoming Indigenous: postcolonial politics in a neoliberal world*. Indiana University Press.

substance misuse. British soldiers today have a greater focus on body image – looking good – than they did 10-20 years ago. It is not enough these days to have been into combat; today's soldier feels he has to look the part – to have the superhero action-man body with big arm muscles and a '6-pack', 'ripped' stomach. Despite the prevalent drinking culture in the British Army, heavy drinking is now perceived by many young soldiers to be detrimental to achieving this perfect physique (although heavy sessions do still occur as this is a vital element in 'warrior bonding'.) The idealised, masculine body is, of course, a signal to both males and females of status, strength and sexual desirability. Lest we mistake the commitment to abstinence among soldiers as a new trend in health consciousness, it should be noted that abuse of bodybuilding steroids among British soldiers is now on the rise. The moral of this story is that young men are prone to any form of substance misuse if they believe it will give them an edge in the high-stakes competition for sex and status.

An increasing re-emphasis on the 'heroism' inherent in male intelligence, sensitivity, restraint, compassion, fatherliness, etc., in all cultural media, as well as in schools and the home may help to realign masculinity with non-violence. Violence and aggressive responses must be re-defined in the popular consciousness as emasculating traits, the expression of which will result in social ostracism and sexual failure.

Anti-social behaviour: an anthropological perspective

Key Points

- Definitions of anti-social behaviour are relative to group norms and situations.
- The anti-social-behaviour of teenagers could have been adaptive in the evolutionary past.

Anti-social behaviour is loosely defined in most countries. It boils down to behaviour, or acts, that are deemed:

- threatening, intimidating or dangerous
- offensive (e.g. spitting)
- destructive (e.g. vandalism)
- annoying (e.g. loud music)

Millie states that, in effect, "Anti-social behaviour (ASB) becomes something that contravenes certain cultural and societal norms of behaviour"¹⁵⁵.

Prevailing behavioural norms, of course, are established by the majority or those in power. Individuals from minority or marginalized groups who are behaving in accordance with their own social norms may be found 'offensive', threatening or annoying by majority groups.

Sleeping on the street, drinking in a park, skateboarding in a parking lot, urinating in a public place, lighting fires on the street, dancing on a table, going topless, going barefoot, congregating with teenagers, wearing a 'hoodie', playing loud music, shouting – all of these actions might be considered normal and social in one group yet be labelled as deviant or anti-social by another.

155. Millie, A. (2008). Anti-social behaviour. McGraw-Hill International.

Anti-social behaviour is also temporally defined: boisterous, rowdy behaviour on a shopping street during the day is anti-social, yet the same behaviour in the drinking precinct at night is tolerated, even expected.

Imagine you are kept awake by a family in your street celebrating a marriage. Disruptive noise, that seriously affects the quality of life of others is, in most countries, classed as anti-social behaviour and worthy of police intervention. But are the celebrating family doing anything wrong? Clearly they are engaging in one of the most socially binding rituals, as humans have done for millennia. The problem we have is that most of us no longer live as distinct tribes, separated by some distance from other tribes. Our ‘tribes’, like the suits in a deck of cards, have become shuffled together and we rub shoulders daily with strangers.

According to a 2004 study by AIC, in Australia approximately half of all adolescents have committed an act of anti-social behaviour in the past 12 months.¹⁵⁶ If this is true, then surely, something is either wrong with the definition, with the young people, or with society.

Teenage behaviours that we in Western industrialised nations find problematic – risk-taking, staying up all night, intense focus on group bonding, etc. – prove to be extremely useful and valued in traditional hunter-gatherer societies, indicating that, once again, the structure of modern life is at odds with our evolutionary inheritance.

There are individuals thought to have an ‘anti-social personality’, the features of which include reckless disregard for self and others, lack of remorse, lack of empathy, and aggression.¹⁵⁷ As we have suggested above, such individuals may be disproportionately represented among the perpetrators of NTE violent incidents. Further research would be necessary to substantiate this.

A police sergeant echoed the views of many when he said that Australia was “the most heavily regulated country I’ve ever been in.” Yet the street in the NTE, on a weekend night, can become a liminal space, a ‘carousing zone’ in which the normal, daytime rules of social behaviour are suspended.

Some anthropologists consider this freedom to rebel as essential to social order. Most cultures have acceptable and sanctioned forms of rebellion or ritual protest against social rules. Anthropologists call this “cultural remission” – a ritualised relaxation of social controls over behaviour which would normally be forbidden or discouraged.¹⁵⁸ – also known as “rituals of rebellion” (a phrase used first by Max Gluckman in 1955),¹⁵⁹ “rules of disorder” or “inversion rituals,” which as Spencer (1988) writes, while purporting to undermine it, are “conducted in the spirit of a protest that is felt to invigorate the established order.”¹⁶⁰

Among the Zulu and Swazi, there were prescribed days when the women could gather and sing lewd and insulting songs to the assembled men, including the king and nobles. Most notable in ancient Europe were the days of Saturnalia at the New Year, when the whole feudal hierarchy was suspended, and a lowly “Lord of Misrule” or Beggar King was appointed to preside

156. Vassallo, S., Sanson, A., & Dussuyer, I. (2004). *Patterns of antisocial behaviour from early to late adolescence* (Vol. 290). Australian Institute of Criminology.

157. Raine, A. (2013). *The anatomy of violence: the biological roots of crime*. Random House LLC.

158. MacAndrew, C., & Edgerton, R. B. (1969). *Drunken comportment: A social explanation*.

. Gusfield, J. (1987). Passage to play: rituals of drinking time in American society. *Constructive Drinking*, Douglas, M. (Ed), 73-90.

159. Gluckman, M. (1955) *Custom and Conflict in Africa*. Basil Blackwell.

160. Spencer, Paul (1988) *The Maasai of Matapato: a study of rituals of rebellion*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. Reprinted with a new preface, 2004, London: Routledge.

over the orgiastic festivities. More familiar is the annual Christmas office party, where formal behaviour is abandoned and cross-status flirting *de rigueur*. As the anthropologists make clear, these inversions only serve to emphasize the reality of the official status system. These are ritual, not real rebellions that provide psychological relief, after which it is back to business as usual. An orderly, lawful society depends on the allowance of periodic deviation from the stricter rules of everyday life.

Cultural remission has also been called a ‘moral holiday’, as Collins describes:

Often there is an atmosphere of celebration, or at least exhilaration; it is a heady feeling of entering a special reality, separate and extraordinary, where there is little thought for the future and no concern for being called to account.¹⁶¹

Other anthropologists caution that “Cultural remission is not just a fancy academic way of saying ‘letting rip’ or ‘anything goes’, this is an orderly form of disorder with its own rules and regulations”.¹⁶² In the NTE areas that the Galahad research team visited, the presence of police sent a strong signal that the ‘moral holiday’ must stay within bounds. In cities where police were less visible, the ‘lords of misrule’ saw to it that the carousing was louder, and more chaotic, and went further beyond the boundaries of propriety.

Inebriation and self-control

Key Points

- Scientific experiments demonstrate that control of behaviour and good judgment is possible even among heavily intoxicated subjects.
- The majority of drinkers in this study confessed that they could control themselves perfectly well if they wanted to, even when heavily intoxicated.
- Cross-cultural examples also make clear that control of behaviour and judgment are possible if the cultural incentives are present.

It was a deeply held belief among the majority of Australians and New Zealanders we spoke with that alcohol causes one to lose control of one’s behaviour. This is in part due to the ‘disinhibition’ beliefs, described earlier, but also a hangover from nearly three decades of skewed messages regarding addiction.

So how much self-control do inebriated people really have? Some experiments testing this have had surprising results.

In 1998, a cunning variation on the classic alcohol-aggression experiments was added by Hoaken and colleagues, who realised that in none of these tests were subjects given an alternative to the aggressive response.

Hoaken decided to test subjects’ ability to ‘control’ or inhibit their aggressive response when under the influence of alcohol. This team of scientists first replicated an experiment that invariably results in increased aggression by intoxicated subjects, but then added an alternative to the aggressive response, and an incentive (money) to choose the non-aggressive

161. Collins, R. (2008) *Violence. A micro-sociological Theory*. Princeton University Press.

162. Kate Fox (2004). *Watching the English: the hidden rules of English behaviour*. Hodder & Stoughton

option. They found that the majority of subjects could control their responses fairly well, and that the subjects with “above-average cognitive abilities” (i.e. more intelligent) had near-perfect control of their aggression, even when severely intoxicated.¹⁶³

In another experiment, scientists found that while intoxicated men tend to display greater aggression towards other men, they can remain perfectly controlled in their behaviour towards women, indicating a significant degree of control over their aggressive response.¹⁶⁴

Bailey et al (1983) also found that intoxicated subjects could easily control their aggressive responses if they knew that they were being filmed.¹⁶⁵

Young and Pihl (1980) found that the experimenter could improve intoxicated subjects’ responses on memory and hand-coordination tests merely by asking them to “try to stay sober.” They also found that in group settings, the subjects who believed they had ingested more alcohol than others around them would be more self-controlled and ‘sober’ than those who thought they were drinking the same amounts as others in the group.¹⁶⁶

One researcher found that when intoxicated subjects, taking part in an experiment designed to provoke aggressive behaviour, were given ‘cues’ to good behaviour, they subsequently behaved in a self-aware and non-aggressive way.¹⁶⁷ Similar findings on the ability of intoxicated subjects to exert high levels of self-control have been reported by Jeavons and Taylor (1985), who found that displays of aggression can be significantly reduced if bar owners make explicit that they expect drinkers to behave in a non-aggressive manner, and also provide explicit non-aggressive ‘norms’ of behaviour, to re-direct the inebriated person’s attention to the socially-approved conduct. An unexpected finding of this experiment was the discovery that inebriated subjects could conform to these explicit rules of good behaviour even when the rules were broken by their sober partners.¹⁶⁸

163. Hoaken, P. N. S., Giancola, P. R., and Pihl, R. O. (1998). Executive cognitive functions as mediators of alcohol-related aggression. *Alcohol and alcoholism* Vol 33, 47-54

164. Giancola, P. R. and Zeichner, A. (1995). Alcohol-related aggression in males and females: Effects of blood alcohol concentration, subjective intoxication, personality, and provocation. *Alcohol Clin Exp Res.* Vol 19, 130-134.

165. Bailey, D. S., Leonard, K. E., Cranston, J. W., and Taylor, S. P. (1983). Effects of alcohol and self-awareness on human physical aggression. *Pers.Social Psychol.Bull.* Vol. 9, 289-295

166. Young, R. A. and Pihl, R. O. (1980). Self-control and the effects of alcohol intoxication. *J Stud Alcohol.* 41, 567-571.

167. Taylor, S. P. (1986). ‘The regulation of aggressive behavior’. In *Advances in the study of aggression* Vol 2. R. J. Blanchard and D. C. Blanchard (Eds). San Diego CA: Academic Press.

168. Jeavons & Taylor (1985) Op Cit.

The 'sober act'

Key Points

- Sobriety is as much about performance as about consumption.
- Most young people we spoke with knew how to control their drunken comportment as needed to suit the situation.
- The aim of cultural change should be to link male status to pro-social behaviours and, particularly, to effective control of drunkenness and violence.

Nearly all young people we spoke with knew how to control their drunken comportment in certain situations to be able to 'pass' as sober. For example, while waiting in queues to get into nightclubs, while at the bar in order to get served, at the taxi rank, etc... This is highly significant as it indicates that young drinkers know that they can perfectly well control themselves if they want to, even when heavily intoxicated.

"Yeah, you have to put on your sober act a lot. Sometimes you have to keep it up for up to an hour to get into a club. And while you're standing there all the wine you had at home kicks in! [Laughs]" – Female, 23.

"And to get served. Everybody does the sober thing to get served." – Female, 20.

"A lot of taxi drivers won't take you if you act too drunk so you have to do the sober act." – Male, 25.

In other countries, it is acknowledged that drinkers can control their behaviour, even when severely inebriated. In Japan, for example, even though heavy consumption is widely tolerated, overtly drunken or anti-social behaviour is not, and drinkers seem to be quite capable of conforming to these prevalent norms.¹⁶⁹ Likewise, Cuban men generally pride themselves on control when drinking, as Bryan Page et al (1985) noted:

"Slurred speech or speech more slurred than one's drinking mates' and loss of muscle motor control endangered a man's ability to assert himself in the heated debates and fast-flowing conversations and interactions characteristic of Cuban settings for public drinking. The need for control of one's physical and mental capacities did not prevent all Cuban men from drinking past the point of control, but it set behavioural limits within which most Cuban men remained when drinking." ¹⁷⁰

Peace (1992) reports a similar example among Irish fishermen who, despite becoming inebriated:

"...do not thereby lose control over their immediate circumstances or indeed abandon their sense of judgement." ¹⁷¹

169. Wada K., Price R. K., Fukui S. (1998) Reflecting adult drinking culture: prevalence of alcohol use and drinking situations among Japanese junior high school students in Japan. *J Stud Alcohol.* 59: 381–6.

170. J. Bryan Page et al (1985) Alcohol and Adaptation to Exile in Miami's Cuban Population. In: *The American Experience with Alcohol.* L.A. Bennett et al (Eds) pp 315-332. Springer Science.

171. Peace, A. (1992). No fishing without drinking: The construction of social identity in rural Ireland. In D. Gefou-Madianou (ed.), *Alcohol, Gender and Culture.* London: Routledge.

In Nigeria, Oshodin (1995) observes that:

*“ ... the more a man consumes alcohol and remains sober, the more respect he gains... among Nigerian students, being able to drink and remain sober makes one a hero.”*¹⁷²

The aim of cultural change should be to link male status to pro-social behaviours and, particularly, to effective control of drunkenness and violence.

In the course of Galahad's research into drinking and drug use among British soldiers, several trips to Gibraltar have been undertaken in the past 20 years. Gibraltar is a small British enclave at the very Southern tip of Spain. Although Gibraltarians are under British rule, the culture is a unique Anglo-Mediterranean hybrid – the perfect petri dish for studying cultural blending. There are pubs and fish-and-chip shops, red pillar post boxes and ‘bobbies’ with traditional bell helmets on the beat, but the drinking culture revolves around wine, food and good-natured sociability rather than drunken excess. All forms of inebriated extroversion are contained by strict enforcement, harsh penalties and social disapproval. Staggering about drunk, urinating in the streets, swearing, shouting, even falling asleep in a pub will most likely result in a fine and a night in the cells. On arrival in Gibraltar, soldiers are well briefed on the rules and expectations of behavioural standards.

The ‘Gibraltar Regiment’ of the British army recruits from both the UK and from among native Gibraltarians, many of whom are, culturally and linguistically, more Spanish than English. My interest was in the ways the UK-born soldiers could or could not modify their ‘drunken comportment’ to comply with the different social rules of the ‘Rock’ (local nickname for Gibraltar). British soldiers of the Gibraltar Regiment, when interviewed in the UK, assured me that alcohol causes them to lose control of behaviour; in Gibraltar, however, these same soldiers had no problem whatsoever in conforming to the local social rules, once these had been made clear to them. Although soldiers on leave on the ‘Rock’ still drink vast quantities of alcohol, they manage to remain self-controlled and were well mannered. One Army wife from Glasgow told me that she loved taking her children to Gibraltar pubs for the educational value:

*“They get to see grown-ups drinking and enjoying themselves in a pub all afternoon, and then walking home sober. They never get to see that back home.”*¹⁷³

The success of the controlling measures on Gibraltar was in the focus on behaviour. The Rock could well be described as being awash with cheap – almost ‘duty free’ – alcohol and a plethora of bars, pubs, restaurants, casinos and clubs all crammed into 3 square miles of space. And yet the alcohol-related problems are very few and far between.

Ultimately, to make any fundamental change in the culture of behaviour, we need to focus on the behaviour, not the drinking. The Australian Army has had some success in changing behaviour whilst drinking by using this strategy. An Australian liaison officer in the UK explained that positive improvement had come about not as a result of a strategic effort to alter the drinking culture directly, but by addressing the behaviours that were associated with heavy drinking:

172. Oshodin, O. G. (1995). Nigeria. In B. D. Heath (Ed.), *International handbook on alcohol and culture* (First ed., pp. 213-223). Westport: Greenwood Press. See also: Emeka Dumbili (2013) *Changing Patterns of Alcohol Consumption in Nigeria: An Exploration of Responsible factors and Consequences*. *Medical Sociology Online*. Volume 7, Issue 1. www.medicalsociologyonline.org

173. Although the legal drinking age in Gibraltar has only recently been raised from 16 to 18, the law allows for supervised drinking of wine, beer and cider by underage children – allowing parents to teach their children how to drink and how to behave according to the social rules.

harassment, bullying, violence, etc.¹⁷⁴ The focus of responsibility for behaviour was shifted back to the individual. Alcohol was eliminated as an excuse. The expected standards of behaviour were made clear, as was the list of “unacceptable behaviours”. The policy on “unacceptable behaviour” that I was shown at the time was 106 pages long.¹⁷⁵

Deterring bad behaviour

From an anthropological/sociological perspective, apart from extreme fear of dire consequences what makes people ‘behave’? Or more precisely, what makes people conform to a desired standard of behaviour or set of rules? Several possibilities emerge from the literature. People ‘behave’ themselves:

- When social rules of behaviour are accepted and internalised – unfortunately, night-time drinkers have accepted a set of social rules of drunken comportment that others in society find unacceptable or anti-social.
- When they feel a sense of ownership and believe that obeying the rules is in their own best interest. From this research it would appear that, under certain conditions, drinkers can easily adapt and moderate their behaviour when doing so is perceived to be in their own interest (see ‘the sober act’ above).
- Being known– known identity makes people want to enhance reputation.
- Being subjected to ‘moralistic aggression’ from others – i.e. peers enforcing the standards through strong social signalling.
- Being subjected to unpleasant consequences of breaking the rules.
- Being watched.

Distilling all we have learned from this review, the measures that appear to have some effectiveness in deterring anti-social and violent behaviour in the NTE are those that align with the above principles and that target the frustration ‘hotspots’ that generate tension and hostility among night-time revellers.

Environmental and venue considerations

Within drinking venues and on the streets outside, bad behaviour can be deterred, contained or deflected by:

Within drinking venues

Drinking environments designed with ‘calming’ and ‘conflict-reducing’ features; e.g. small, separated seating areas; comfortable seating such as low couches; wide, easy access to public areas such as toilets and the bar to reduce ‘bottlenecks’; clear indications/messages that violence and bad behaviour will not be tolerated; friendly, mature and well-trained staff in drinking venues; provision of food and other entertainment as well as alcohol (this distracts focus from drinking alone); ‘active’ management of premises (e.g. swift clearing of tables, talking with patrons and early spotting of trouble signs); clear and well-publicised expectations of standards of behaviour,¹⁷⁶ higher proportion of females (staff and patrons) and significant presence of

174. Personal communication

175. DI(G) PERS 35-3 [25 March 1999]

176. In France, for example, posters are displayed in every drinking venue reminding patrons of the law regarding the prohibition of public drunkenness. In French law, anyone exhibiting “manifest drunkenness” can be removed from the streets by police and held until such time as they have recovered all capabilities. SEE: L. 3341-1 du Code la santé publique sur Légifrance

older people. In all societies, violence is reduced in mixed age groups. The presence of people above the 18-24 age bracket can have a stabilising effect on behaviour, as can good face-to-face cooperative relationships between police and venue owners.

Scientific evidence reviewed in this paper is unequivocal: environment matters. The importance of a good environment for late-night drinking cannot be overemphasised. Research into ‘designing out violence’ has been ongoing since the 1980s and many bar owners, police and venue managers we spoke with were already aware of the key elements of best practice. What was not universal was their mandatory adoption for, at the very least, newly opened establishments.

In light of the parameters cited above that encourage pro-social behaviour, the trend, in some cities (Melbourne, for example), towards smaller drinking establishment is particularly welcome. In particular, smaller bars seemed to foster a more intimate relationship between staff and patrons (drinkers are ‘known’), to reduce anonymity and anxiety inherent in a bigger crowd of strangers.

Consistent, intelligent, fair and friendly enforcement of ‘Responsible Service of Alcohol’ (RSA) or ‘Host Responsibility’ (HR). Most venues that researchers visited abided strictly by the RSA or HR codes. For example, at one small-town club, we were told:

“If you look even the tiniest but tipsy, you won’t get in here. And they will toss you out and ban you for the slightest thing. But that’s OK. It’s a family place and we want it that way.” – Female, 40s.

However, the number of bars and pubs in which it was possible for an overtly drunken person to get served was still alarming. Inconsistent practice caused resentment among drinkers. RSA/ HR training and experience varied widely: many seemed to have had good instruction in how to deal appropriately with drunken patrons without inciting anger; others told us they had completed a short online course and could not recall even one element of good practice in this regard. Many simply shrugged off the issue, saying, for example: “If people want to get drunk, that’s not my problem.” Several informants complained that it was near impossible to determine, in some cases, the extent of inebriation as patrons regularly put on the ‘sober act’ while waiting to get served at the bar.

There seemed to be some reluctance among many police officers we interviewed in some Australian states to actively pursue violators of RSA as it was felt to be too difficult to determine where an offender had purchased their last drink and how drunk he or she had appeared when doing so. The tactic of ‘test purchasing’ by using ‘drunken’ actors did not seem to be favoured or widespread.

On the streets

Consistent and visible, but not heavy-handed, police presence on the streets. There appeared to be a strong correlation between anti-social behaviour and policing styles: foot patrols around the NTE seemed to have better results than ‘drive by’ patrols. A police car cruising by at regular intervals, in some places, seemed to act as a ‘taunt’ to young men looking for excitement. Young men reasoned (obviously falsely) that the officers were too afraid to get out of their cars. This led to feelings of ‘ownership’ of the street and increased territorial behaviour. Some tried to get away with as much as they could before the next pass of the patrol car. Some even treated the police car as a target. The physical presence of officers on the street however, engendered a greater respect and eliminated much of the ‘us against them’ posturing.

Clear expectations of standards of behaviour (e.g. no urinating, fighting, etc.) and consistent penalties for infringement of these standards. In Newcastle, for example, the method of ‘consequence policing’ described to us would seem to have had an effect on anti-social behaviour. Young people seemed well aware that infringements of good public order (e.g. not moving on when asked, violence, sexual harassment, urinating, etc.) would earn them a heavy and immediate fine. In the past, we were told that such behaviour usually resulted in being taken away in a police car which young men treated as a ‘badge of honour’.

Good availability of clean and safe public toilets. It seemed perverse that, in some towns, heavy fines could be imposed for urinating in the streets yet no alternative provision existed. Many drinkers expressed their frustration at having to wait sometimes for hours in a taxi rank to get home with nowhere to relieve themselves.

Good availability of 24-hour food service with clean and well-managed premises. It is inevitable that a large percentage of night-time drinkers will end up hungry. Most of the young people we spoke with who regularly stayed out all night at the weekend said their final destination was a 24-hour food establishment. Unfortunately, many of the existing food chains in cities are impersonal and managed at night by young and inexperienced staff. Although dealing with tired, hungry and inebriated patrons is not easy, the practices of many of these establishments seemed designed to bring out aggression in even the most patient punters, as our researchers were witness to time and time again. Despite increasing security, these venues are often the site of late-night scuffles, brawls and other incidents. As this is where many drinkers end up between 3 and 5 am, reforming this situation should be part of any long-term management plan for the NTE.

There were places, however, across Australia and New Zealand, where we found establishments open late that served food and non-alcoholic drinks that were attractive, comfortable, clean and safe. Young people described them as places to ‘chill out’ and ‘wind down’ on comfortable couches while they waited for public transport to become available or simply until they felt sober enough to walk home safely. The growth of this potentially lucrative niche market should be encouraged. In major capitals around the world, all kinds of retail and food venues are open all night – all-night ‘bookshop cafés’, for example, are becoming increasingly popular.

Adequate transport out of the entertainment districts in major cities. This requires cooperation and coordination between city transport authorities and independent companies and police. In some cities, huge crowds of late-night drinkers accrue on the streets simply because the taxi companies had not coordinated their shift changes with venue closing times. How do other cities around the world deal with NTE transport issues?

- In London, buses run all night. Most trains to outlying suburbs and towns run until around midnight and then resume at 4:30am.
- In Paris, the Metro operates until 2:15am on weekends. After that, a network of night buses called ‘Noctiliens’ operate until around 5:30am when the Metro reopens.
- In New York, the MTA, the rail and bus system, operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Engineered cultural change: a cautionary note

Culture is like a balloon: if you squeeze one end, the other will bulge out. Behaviours that are driven by very basic underlying human needs will not be eliminated, only distorted or displaced. This is not to say that nothing can be done to redirect or redefine maladaptive cultural norms, just that we must be vigilant and constantly on the lookout for unintended side-effects of regulations, reforms, or even health-promotion campaigns.

What do I mean by unintended outcomes? Let's look at a different culture for an example first, then return to the Australian and New Zealand drinking cultures.

An illustrative example Naylor (1996) gives of a behaviour that develops to “off set .. an unacceptable solution” is the Dani tribe of New Guinea who would not voluntarily send their children to the local schools set up by the state because young people's work was vital to their subsistence economy. When the government decreed that all unmarried children under a certain age must attend school, the Dani felt forced to respond by marrying the girls at a much earlier age, even before the onset of puberty, which resulted in a drastic cultural change in their community.¹⁷⁷

To use an alcohol-related example, drink driving in the UK, as in many other countries worldwide, has been successfully reduced through both legislation and a concerted ‘cultural change’ campaign that made the practice a social taboo. Although a direct causal connection has not (and probably can not) be proven, 20 years of collected anecdotal evidence would suggest that this has had a negative impact on binge drinking. Some people who normally would have moderated their consumption because they were driving home now feel free to ‘binge’ because they have been responsible and safe in planning alternative transport. So, in this case, a desirable cultural change in one area may have contributed to the worsening of a practice in another. Some scientists call this phenomenon ‘risk homeostasis’ or ‘risk compensation’.¹⁷⁸ That is, the theory that most people have a level of risk that they feel is acceptable and may reduce their risk behaviour in one area only to increase it in another. Seat belts and safe cars is another example: it has been documented that people driving in cars with multiple safety features (seat belts, air bags, etc.) feel confident driving at higher speeds than in other cars and making riskier manoeuvres in passing, for example.¹⁷⁹

To return to drinking cultures, during this fieldwork we collected numerous accounts of shifts in drinking practices that have occurred seemingly in response to the high price of drinks in the NTE. Nearly all young people we spoke with in focus groups and in drinking venues adhered to the pattern of ‘preloading’ at home before going out. Nearly all indicated that this was, in part due to the need to be intoxicated before venturing out (as discussed earlier), but also driven by price. Many young people simply could not afford the price of drinks in bars, hotels and clubs. Some also engaged in ‘side-loading’ – leaving a club to buy a cheap six-pack of beer, for example, and quickly drinking it in a parked car or alleyway before returning to the club. Some young people even implied that their choice to use drugs was a direct result of the high price of club drinks, leading one young man to conclude:

177. Naylor, L. L. (1996). *Culture and change: An introduction*. Greenwood Publishing Group.

178. Filley D. (1999) Risk Homeostasis and the Futility of Protecting People from Themselves. Independence Issue Paper No.1-99; For a comprehensive review of the debate see: Trimpop, R. M. (1996). Risk homeostasis theory: Problems of the past and promises for the future. *Safety Science*, 22(1), 119-130.

179. Peltzman, S. (1975). The effects of automobile safety regulation. *The Journal of Political Economy*, 677-725.

“Alcohol is the new Cocaine: just for the rich and famous!”

Again, none of this means that we should not attempt to educate, legislate or campaign for safer drinking behaviour, only that for too long we have been doing so blindly, without proper consideration or evaluation of unintended behaviour adaptations. As Naylor (1996) concludes:

*“It is never the case that a proposed change is simply something new, perhaps a shift, alteration or modification in some part or aspect of culture. The parts of culture are integrated ... History has demonstrated over and over again that change in one part of culture is followed by change in other parts.”*¹⁸⁰

Intoxication as a defence

If, as we have seen above, the majority of people are capable of self-control despite intoxication, how does intoxication affect sentencing in criminal cases such as assault? Many people we spoke with were under the impression that the legal systems in Australia and New Zealand still allowed intoxication to be used as a defence and to mitigate against responsibility for crimes. The truth, as I found out after a long trawl through documents and articles relating to the law, is slightly more complicated. Intoxication can be either a mitigating factor, an aggravating factor, or of no consequence at all, depending on the crime, the circumstances of the case and the state in which the person is tried.

Self-induced intoxication is not taken into account in the case of rape. No matter how drunk you are, you cannot claim you did not know what you were doing or whether the victim was or was not consenting. But, when it comes to other crimes of violence, such as assault, things get murkier. Put simply, criminal liability depends not only on what act a person has committed, but their state of mind before and during the act and their intent. Presumably, in the case of rape, a perpetrator is assumed to have a greater degree of ‘malice aforethought’ than in an impulsive strike with a fist and cannot be said to be acting under the influence.

The main question for assault cases is: does intoxication affect a person’s mental state to the extent that they can be said to be acting involuntarily and therefore without criminal intent? Based on interviews with experts and a review of cases and literature, it would appear that a firm majority in the legal system are making the unequivocal assumption that intoxication does affect moral judgment and self-control and that these faculties are incapacitated in direct proportion to the volume of alcohol consumed. So a man who drinks 20 pints and then assaults someone is thought to have less culpability than a man who drinks five pints before committing the same offence. As new cases refer not to science but to previous cases, the advancement of law and science are not on parallel tracks. The following quote from “Sentencing for alcohol-related violence” illustrates the perpetuation of all the conventional beliefs about alcohol:

*“...[alcohol’s] effect is to reduce inhibition, impulse control and judgment. It may also affect an individual’s understanding of the position in which he finds himself. On occasions it might excite feelings of bravado or bravery which lead the person to carry out some act which they would not contemplate when sober.”*¹⁸¹

180. Naylor (1996) Op Cit

181. *Sentencing for Alcohol-Related Violence*. NSW Sentencing Council, 2009.

There is a need, however, for judges to incorporate the findings of science into their deliberations. As Stephen Odgers OC stresses:

“...reference should be made to the potential of neuro-science to radically transform sentencing practice. It is increasingly clear that developments in that field are likely to provide clear links between neurobiological detriment and certain types of offending.”

The socio-cultural evidence also supports a thorough examination of assumptions made by many in the legal community that intoxication removes self-control and the extent to which it makes intent or pre-meditation impossible.

It is my strong belief that the strange phenomenon of memory loss experienced by some individuals after a drinking bout has added – via a kind of faulty reverse logic – to the myth of the drunken automaton – the drunk who is not in control of themselves; fully under the influence of the demon drink.

Alcohol can disrupt the process by which the brain transfers information from short-term or working memory into long-term memory. But this process happens after the events, largely during sleep. The next day, the individual can have no recollection of what he or she did the evening before. But this does not mean that the drunken person was not fully conscious of their actions at *the time*. All that has happened is that the brain did not hit the ‘record’ button.

If I give a lecture and don’t record it onto my tape machine, it does not mean that I didn’t know what I was saying at the time. Because non-recollection of the event means that a person cannot legally defend themselves it seems that the interpretation of this phenomenon has now influenced the understanding of moral culpability during drunken episodes. The myth of the drunken automaton has thus arisen and many people, including, apparently some well-educated professionals, truly believe that the drink controls the person. As long as this myth persists, we are pretty well doomed as far as changing the drinking culture is concerned.

There is also a case to explore the cultural signalling arising from media reporting on legal cases, where perpetrators routinely point to intoxication as an excuse for their behaviours. No doubt social embarrassment often leads them to seek to blame the alcohol, but they are likely to also be encouraged in many cases by the possibility of being charged with a lesser grade of crime or, in the case of some crimes, the possibility of experiencing more lenient sentencing. If this public commentary reinforces perceptions that intoxication is an acceptable excuse for poor behaviour, this may simply play into a perceived license to transgress.

Mandatory sentencing is currently a hot topic in Australia with recently announced changes in New South Wales. In a recent review of the issue, after a comprehensive review of cases, the conclusion of the New South Wales Sentencing Council was that:

*the Council does not make any formal recommendation for the alteration of current sentencing laws and practices, or for the creation of any new offences to deal with alcohol-related violence. It observes that for many offenders, whose immaturity and poor anger control contribute to their involvement in incidents occurring spontaneously at licensed premises, and who have no prior record of criminality, it is appropriate to preserve the existing wide sentencing discretion that will allow each case to be dealt with on its merits. It is otherwise satisfied that, for repeat offenders who have a record for violence while intoxicated, the existing sentencing laws and practice permit the imposition of appropriately condign sentences.*¹⁸²

While Stephen Odgers and many others in the legal community have cautioned against using mandatory sentencing to try to change culture by making examples of individuals, it's clear that the NSW Premier (at the time) Barry O'Farrell believes the community has a right to expect 'punishments to fit the crime':

"If the judiciary doesn't start to reflect community concerns in the sentences it hands out, don't be surprised if governments go down this path. We probably wouldn't be having this discussion about minimum mandatories if the judges, the magistrates and others were handing out the sentences that the public wanted."

He said he hoped the measure would serve as a "wake-up call to members of the judiciary to frankly stick their heads over the bench and have a look at what is ... happening, reflect community concerns and send a message."¹⁸³

This is a live debate and the NSW government has indicated elements of the NSW program are amendable if it does not achieve the desired results or delivers perverse outcomes. As this discussion continues in NSW and other Australian states, there is surely a more prominent role for socio-cultural experts and neuro-scientists in a balanced debate.

182. New South Wales Sentencing Council, Sydney, 2009. Sentencing for alcohol-related violence

183. Macquarie Radio, 22 January 2013

PART THREE: ALCOHOL EDUCATION

Key Points

- Australasians appear to know very little of the basic facts about alcohol. What they do know is generally learned drinking behaviour from observing older siblings and older pupils.
- The growth of 'youth culture' has, in many places, afforded freedom and independence to young people who, in past times, would have been socialised into drinking gradually and naturally. In some societies alcohol education in the family still happens.
- In their efforts to protect children, government-mandated drinking-age laws may inadvertently create a "vacuum of experience" discouraging parents from allowing their children to drink at all.
- Scare campaigns are ineffective – most young people either view the outcomes presented as farfetched and out of touch with their experience or they merely serve to reinforce the very cultural norms they are trying to change.
- Effective programs focus on increasing social ability and life-skills; offer a balanced portrayal of both negative and positive consequences of drinking; change normative beliefs; deliver unbiased information about alcohol's real effects; demonstrate that self-control over behaviour is always possible, even when very drunk; and deliver alcohol education via credible presenters.
- The influence of advertising on the drinking culture is highly debated.
- When compared to the influence of parents, peers and the wider culture, advertising's influence is minimised.
- Alcohol advertising can, however, reinforce or glamorise pre-existing maladaptive cultural norms around drinking.

Focus group participants and other informants in this research exhibited very little understanding of the basic facts about alcohol concerning: the law, short and long-term dangers of abuse, metabolism, addiction, first-aid, tolerance, etc. Although this research did not include a comprehensive survey of alcohol education on offer to young people, it was quite evident from the focus groups and ad-hoc questions to drinkers that the alcohol education currently provided could be greatly improved. The 'average Australian' or New Zealander knows next to nothing about the way the body processes alcohol, what levels of drinking are harmful, how tolerance and dependence can develop, what the signs are of alcohol poisoning, etc.

Almost all of the participants in focus groups had started drinking well before the age of 18. What they said they would have wanted at school was practical information on how to drink, how to stay safe, how to cope with emergencies and problems. Informants generally learned drinking behaviour from observing older siblings and older pupils. After participating in focus group discussion, most participants were curious about alcohol's effects and eager to learn 'the facts.' There was also a universal fascination with the use of alcohol by peer groups in other cultures. In future alcohol-education packages, a wider, cross-cultural perspective on underage drinking would be beneficial, particularly research comparing patterns and expectations in Australia and New Zealand with those of other cultures in which underage drinking is not associated with alcohol misuse/abuse or anti-social behaviour. Research focusing on the specific processes by which young people 'learn to drink' in these cultures would be of value in the development of more effective alcohol-education strategies in Australia and New Zealand.

The growth of ‘youth culture’ has, in many places, afforded freedom and independence to young people who, in past times, would have been socialised into drinking gradually and naturally. In some societies alcohol education in the family still happens. But in their efforts to protect children, government-mandated drinking-age laws may inadvertently create a “vacuum of experience” discouraging parents from allowing their children to drink at all. When they arrive at the legal drinking age young people are expected to be instant sensible drinkers. Unfortunately, many adopt binge-drinking patterns.

As alcohol is present in many aspects of our lives, so alcohol education should ‘access all areas’. There is a place for targeted, specialised alcohol education in, for example, every workplace, in all uniformed services, in schools, universities, prisons, parent groups, maternity wards, hospitals, doctor’s offices, health clubs, sports organisations and, of course, drinking venues.

Unfortunately, what works in alcohol education is often counterintuitive. With the 18 – 24 age group, the knee-jerk reaction is to “scare the living daylights” out of young drinkers as Kevin Rudd’s 2008 campaign against binge drinking aimed to do. The message was broadcast through a series of “Shock drink ads” on television showing all the various forms of violence and mayhem that can result from binge drinking. The tagline for the TV ads stated that one in two Australians aged 15 to 17 will do something they regret when they are drunk. In our research, it was clear that, from the youngest to the oldest, most Australians do indeed believe that alcohol has the power to transform them into out-of-control monsters. If any lasting change is to be achieved in the drinking culture, it is primarily these beliefs that must be targeted. All of the ‘shock-horror’ campaigns merely perpetuate this belief in the malevolent magic of alcohol. Good education must turn this trend on its head and return the control over behaviour back to young people themselves.

Why current alcohol education doesn’t work and what will

Much substance-misuse education (especially that directed at young people) focuses exclusively on risks, dangers and consequences. Educators are often surprised that this information does not result in behaviour change. Why have we been playing the same broken record for decades? Largely it is a legacy of one model.

The legacy of the broken record

The Health Belief Model (HBM) is one of the oldest theories designed to explain health-related behaviour. It was first devised by social psychologists to explain why many people did not participate in free health screening or prevention programmes. It has since been used to understand sexual risk behaviours. According to the HBM, an individual will change their health-related behaviour (for example, smoking, drinking, healthy eating, exercising, sexual practice, etc.) if they perceive:

1. the threat to health to be great enough
2. that they themselves are susceptible to the threat
3. that there are tangible benefits to changing
4. the barriers, or obstacles to making a change are not too great
5. that they are capable of changing

Unfortunately, educators have focussed almost exclusively on the first two. In theory, if we can convince people that the threats are real and that they are susceptible to them, they will change their evil ways. This is the origin of the ‘scare the living daylight out of them’ method of alcohol education. Unfortunately, it does not work, no matter how horrendous we make drinking out to be. Why? Because many people perceive the benefits of drinking to outweigh the harms.¹⁸⁴ Alcohol education therefore must refocus on what people perceive to be the benefits and assist them to achieve these (largely social) goals without harming themselves in the process. Young people in particular are focussed on appearing attractive, desirable, socially accepted, confident. They also want to experience pleasure, fun, novelty and excitement in their lives. For many, alcohol provides all this. The alcohol educator has quite a job to convince them that all this can be had without draining the bottle.

Like adults, teenagers have their own reasons, rules and customs for drinking. Alcohol serves a positive function in the personal and social worlds of many young people. To be effective, alcohol education must acknowledge the positive function that alcohol plays in the young person’s social matrix. Studies have shown that experience of the negative effects of alcohol have little influence on future patterns of use.¹⁸⁵ To focus solely on the negative effects and consequences of drinking, therefore, could be a dead-on-arrival strategy for alcohol education to adopt. The social or cultural meaning of drinking is far more important and influential to young people than its potential danger.

The second point of the HBM has also caused decades of misguided attempts to increase people’s perception of the threat posed by alcohol. Many studies have shown that increasing awareness of *personal susceptibility* to risk does decrease the motivation to use drugs and alcohol. These realisations are crucial to information-based interventions designed to reduce the use of harmful substances.¹⁸⁶ This may seem obvious: make someone believe that a substance is harmful to them and they will be less inclined to ingest it. Unfortunately, the educational process is not that simple. Most young people tend to be overly optimistic about the probability of being harmed by drugs, or anything else for that matter.¹⁸⁷ Telling a 15-year-old that consuming 10 schooners of beer in a 4-hour session could put him at serious risk of death is a surprisingly *ineffective* way of preventing him from binge drinking. Similarly, the element of risk is, for many young people, an added *attraction* to drug-taking or binge-drinking. So are we wasting our time?

Not entirely. In challenging the “conventional wisdom” about the inability of information to affect behaviour, Bachman et al. (1988) concluded that “information about risks and consequences of drug use, communicated by a *credible source*, can be persuasive and can play an important role in reducing demand, which ultimately must be the most effective means of reducing drug use.”¹⁸⁸ For teenagers, a ‘credible source’ is most often their own peers. Peer education therefore can be a powerful vehicle for key messages regarding the dangers of misuse.

184. Goldberg, J. H., Halpern-Felsher, B. L., & Millstein, S. G. (2002). Beyond invulnerability: the importance of benefits in adolescents’ decision to drink alcohol. *Health Psychology*, 21(5), 477.

185. Boys, A; Marsden J; Griffiths P; Fountain J; Stillwell G; Strang J. (1999) Substance use among young people: the relationship between perceived functions and intentions. *Addiction* 94(7): 1043-1050.

186. Cvetkov ich, G., Earle, T.C., Schinke, S.P., Gilchrist, L.D., & Trimble, J.E. (1987). Child and adolescent drug use: A judgment and information processing perspective to health-behavior interventions. *Journal of Drug Education*, 17, 295-313.

187. Gonzalez, G.M., & Haney, M.L. (1990). Perceptions of risk as predictors of alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine use among college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 31, 313-318

188. Bachman, J.G., Johnston, L.D., O’Malley, P.M., & Humphreys, R.N. (1988, March). Explaining the recent decline in marijuana use: differentiating the effects of perceived risks, disapproval, and general lifestyle factors. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 29, 92-112.

It is tempting to view young binge-drinkers or drug users as simple, misguided individuals who just don't understand the risks involved. Many deterrence programmes that rely solely on 'shock' or 'scare' tactics use this as their basic premise. Unfortunately, there is no one simple explanation for drug use or excessive alcohol use. Each individual's choice is based on a complex interplay of physical, psychological, social, and personal reasons. The individual's knowledge about the risks associated with use of the substance may influence their decision, so increasing knowledge of the risks may play a part in deterring use, but only a small part. The gut-instinct to resort to shock tactics is understandable. We use these tactics all the time to prevent our children from coming to harm; in fact, this is the psychological basis for scary fairy tales and instinctive good parenting skills. If your five-year-old runs out into the street and narrowly avoids getting hit by a car, you grab him by the shoulders and tell him exactly and in graphic detail what would have happened had the car hit him: in other words, scare the living daylight out of him so he won't do it again.

So the scare-tactic method works particularly well with very young children for risky behaviours that result in a natural fear-response *anyway*: dodging cars, teasing angry dogs, walking in dark alleys at night, etc. All these activities naturally provoke the 'fight or flight' response. The child's natural instincts confirm the parent or teacher's warning: it must be dangerous because it *feels* scary. Unfortunately, this is not so with most drugs, legal or illegal, or with alcohol. However scary we make cancer, alcohol poisoning, flashbacks, or a heroin overdose sound, as soon as the child tries the drug, he or she most likely experiences a completely new, exciting and pleasurable sensation. At this point, the dire warnings and parental predictions of immediate and gruesome consequences are relegated to the realm of fairy tale. The child now places alcohol in the category of 'cool things adults don't want us to enjoy' along with sex, drugs, loud music, credit cards, motorbikes, etc.; and the substance becomes immediately desirable. This is why appropriate alcohol and drug education must begin before children start experimenting with the substances and must focus on accurate, not overly-exaggerated, information, as well as social and personal skills training. The child with high self-esteem, good reasoning skills, personal ambition, self-awareness and sound knowledge of drugs and alcohol will be more resistant to peer pressure and the lure of risk-laden thrills.¹⁸⁹ If he/she experiments once or twice anyway, which most teenagers are likely to do, he/she is, at least, able to make a rational, well-informed decision about repeating the experience.

The answer really lies in striking a delicate balance. On the one hand, children must be aware of the very real and potentially fatal dangers of drinking too much, and they must have a clear idea of what 'too much' is. On the other hand, alcohol education must seek to normalise and temper children's expectations about the effects of alcohol. If they perceive drinking to be a normal, mundane, non-glamorous or non-risky aspect of daily human life, they have a much greater chance of becoming sensible, controlled adult drinkers. They may well have seen such sensible drinking at their family table or in a pub garden, for example. If they are encouraged to think of drinking as an exciting rite of passage that separates the child from the adult and of alcohol as a terrifying elixir with near-magic qualities, they will seek to steal the privilege prematurely.

189. Botvin, G.J. (1983). Prevention of adolescent substance abuse through the development of personal and social competence. In T.J. Glynn, C.G. Leukefeld & J.P. Ludford (Eds.), *Preventing adolescent drug abuse* (Research Monograph No. 47, pp. 115-140). Rockville, MD: National Institute on Drug Abuse; Botvin, G.J., & Wills, T.A. (1985). Personal and social skills training: cognitive-behavioral approaches to substance abuse prevention. In C.S. Bell and R. Battjes (Eds.), *Prevention research: Detering drug abuse among children and adolescents* (Research Monograph No. 63, pp. 8- 49). Rockville, MD: National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Previous research has shown that behavioural consequences of drinking are largely determined by cultural expectations.¹⁹⁰ On the research evidence available, it is clear that changes in beliefs and expectancies about the effects of alcohol can and do lead to changes in behaviour associated with drinking. Educational programmes which reinforce existing beliefs and expectations about disinhibition, intoxication and aggression will increase the prevalence of these anti-social behavioural effects. If young people view alcohol misuse and problem drinking as ‘the norm’, they are less likely to become responsible, sensible drinkers themselves.

Elements of effective programmes

What educational counter-measures can we take to reduce the prevalence of these risky drinkers? We can design programmes that:

1. Increase social ability / life-skills training
2. Offer a balanced portrayal of both negative and positive consequences of drinking
3. Change normative beliefs
4. Deliver unbiased information about alcohol’s real effects`
5. Demonstrate that self-control over behaviour is always possible, even when very drunk
6. Deliver alcohol education via credible presenters

Alcohol education should aim only to *inform*, explicitly allowing people to make their own decisions about how they use the information. The information, however, must be deadly accurate and ‘teacher-proof’, i.e. presented clearly enough that teachers cannot overturn information based on their own experience or attitude.

Changing beliefs

It is not necessarily how much a society drinks that determines what problems it has, but what it believes alcohol does. Educational and preventive efforts need to acknowledge the perceived positive personal and social functions that alcohol fulfils for young people. The continuing focus on the negative consequences of alcohol use may be having very little effect in changing drinking behaviour. Educational programmes which reinforce existing beliefs and expectations about disinhibition, intoxication and aggression will increase the prevalence of these anti-social behavioural effects. ‘Ad hoc’ educational messages focusing on the dangers and evils of alcohol misuse, without a balancing perspective on positive aspects of sensible drinking, can result in young people seeing alcohol misuse and ‘problem drinking’ as the norm, rather than as an aberration.

Many leading educators and scientists agree that a change in drinking culture is possible if entrenched beliefs about alcohol’s effects can be shifted to a greater emphasis on social harmony and relaxation rather than aggression and anti-social behaviour.

190. Bacon, M.K. (1973). Cross-cultural studies of drinking. In Bourne, P. and Fox R. (eds.), *Alcoholism: progress in research and treatment*. New York: Academic Press; Heath, Dwight B (2000). *Drinking Occasions: Comparative Perspectives on Alcohol and Culture*. Philadelphia, PA: Taylor and Francis, (1995); Heath, Dwight B. (Ed.) *International Handbook on Alcohol and Culture*. Westport, CT: Greenwood; Douglas, M. (Ed.) (1987) *Constructive Drinking: Perspectives on Drink from Anthropology*. Cambridge University Press; MacAndrew, C., and Edgerton, R.B., *Drunken Comportment*, Aldine, Chicago, 1969, p. 165; Marshall. M. (1979) *Weekend Warriors: Alcohol in a Micronesian Culture*. Mayfield Publishing Company: Mountain View, CA.

Several studies support expectancy theories of alcohol's effects on behaviour. For example, providing simplistic warnings that "alcohol leads to risky sex" may paradoxically increase the likelihood that individuals will fail to act prudently when intoxicated. Educational interventions should focus on weakening, rather than strengthening, individuals' expectancies with regard to the impact of alcohol on behaviour, so that safer or self-protective behaviour will be more likely to occur, even during intoxication.¹⁹¹ Raising awareness of the 'placebo effect' can dramatically alter the young person's perception of the power of alcohol and help them to understand that drunken comportment is a voluntary state that is largely under the control of the individual.

Social/Life skills

The trend in drug and alcohol education towards greater emphasis on 'Life Skills' or decision-making (cognitive) skills training is to be welcomed. Studies have shown that this method achieves greater results in reducing consumption than fact-based education alone.¹⁹² Alcohol education should openly acknowledge that everybody wants to change the way they feel, the way they look, the way they act, at some point or another. 'Life-skills' lessons should encourage children to think about ways of doing this other than through alcohol or other drugs. If we allow children to develop the concept of, for example, 'Dutch courage', we are leading them on to a path of medicated mood; chemical alteration of themselves.

It should be obvious that people do not make decisions based on fact alone. If this were true, no one would smoke. We must not, however, throw out the baby with the bathwater. Some alcohol education programmes we have reviewed are completely devoid of factual information, and focus completely on discussion, ideas, and feelings to guide children towards sensible decisions.

Research in the field of drinking behaviour has shown strong relationships between both social skills and drinking, and alcohol expectancies and drinking among young people. In a recent study, adolescent alcohol involvement was associated with deficits in social skills, positive alcohol expectancies, and negative cognitive structures concerning parents and teachers.¹⁹³

But we must sound a warning note: increasing a child's 'social skills' will not necessarily protect them from alcohol misuse. In a fascinating report entitled 'confident kids like to party', Mike Ashton demonstrated that the more social confidence teenagers gained, the more likely it was that they would join risky-drinking groups.¹⁹⁴ Increasing confidence merely enables the young person to participate more readily in the dominant mainstream cultural practice, even if this happens to be heavy drinking. Again, the 'just say no' method doesn't really take into account what we are telling young people to say no to: drinking, or group acceptance and membership?

But equally, it is not true that young people make decisions about the substances they use based solely on social factors such as status, image and peer pressure. Factual information about the substance has a strong influence. The facts they cling to, however, are not necessarily the ones we teach. For example, young women in one focus group knew very well that excessive drinking could lead to liver disease, accidents, etc. This information had no impact at all on their choice to drink. But when they were told that a rum and coke has as many calories as a bar of chocolate,

191. Dermen, K. H., Cooper, M. L., & Agocha, V. B. (1998). Sex-related alcohol expectancies as moderators of the relationship between alcohol use and risky sex in adolescents. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 59(1), 71

192. Botvin, G. J., & Wills, T. A. (1985). Personal and social skills training: Cognitive-behavioral approaches to substance abuse prevention. *Prevention research: Deterring drug abuse among children and adolescents*, 8-49; Coggans, N., & Watson, J. (1995). Drug education: approaches, effectiveness and delivery. *Drugs: Education, Prevention, and Policy*, 2(3), 211-224.

193. Gaffney, L. R., Thorpe, K., Young, R., Collett, R., & Occhipinti, S. (1998). Social skills, expectancies, and drinking in adolescents. *Addictive behaviors*, 23(5), 587-599.

194. Ashton M. 2004 Confident kids like to party. *Drug and Alcohol Findings* (11):22-23.

and three pints of beer have the same calorific content as a hamburger, they were horrified and immediately began discussing ways of reducing their intake while still having fun and ‘looking good’. Such tactics are useful to initially ‘hook’ young people’s attentions, but good education should aim for a much broader perspective rather than one small aspect of drinking.

In most education programmes, there is a noticeable absence of positive images of drinking – the idea being that full exposure to as many negative consequences of drinking as possible will help young people to avoid putting themselves in danger. Such an approach, while it may seem instinctively logical, has limited long-term success. Increasing the perception that “negative consequences are likely if one drinks” may appear to have some inhibitive effect on behaviour, but studies have shown that social factors override this sense of precaution. Even those adolescents who have already experienced negative consequences of drinking are still more influenced by their social ambitions and by their perceptions of their peers’ drinking levels and behaviour than they are by their own experiences of sickness, accidents, unwanted pregnancies, etc.

Many alcohol and drug education packages are based on false and outdated assumptions about the nature of peer pressure. Several studies have concluded that the influence of peers is not necessarily a factor in the adoption of unsafe or reckless drinking habits and that, in fact, the very opposite can occur: peers can exert a stabilizing and controlling influence on the drinking behaviour.¹⁹⁵ Other studies have stressed the greater influence of siblings on instilling both positive and negative habits and attitudes in younger children.¹⁹⁶

Unbiased information: use & misuse

There is a problem with most education programmes in the way drinking is divided into clearly defined camps: safe and unsafe; use and misuse; positive and negative. If the concepts of use and misuse are presented as stark blacks and whites, then the young people who are binge drinkers feel they have no choice but to place themselves into the ‘misuse and dangerous’ category.

A more practical and understandable approach would be to illustrate a *continuum* between sober and intoxicated, safe and unsafe. This could be aided by perhaps by a Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) chart showing progressively more dangerous effects; by profiles of drinkers with increasingly dangerous habits; etc.

On the face of it, it may seem sensible to teach young people that getting drunk is a misuse of alcohol. But, given that getting drunk is an activity that many of them already engage in and enjoy, it is unlikely that, simply by redefining this as ‘alcohol misuse’, the behaviour will change. It is far more likely that the perception of danger, rebelliousness, and guilt about getting drunk will be enhanced – all of which have been shown to *increase* binge-drinking behaviour. What is usually missing in education is an explanation of the stages of drunkenness, the levels that are safe and the ways of enjoying the effects of alcohol at lower BAC levels.

There needs to be an acknowledgment that most people use alcohol, however sensibly and safely, in order to change the way they feel – even if that change is very slight (just to ‘take the edge off’, for example). But also that there is a continuum, a slippery slope in this game.

195. See, for example: Plant, M. A., Peck, D. F., Samuel, E., & Stuart, R. (1985). *Alcohol, drugs, and school-leavers*. London: Tavistock.

196. Whiteman, S. D., Jensen, A. C., & Maggs, J. L. (2013). Similarities in adolescent siblings’ substance use: Testing competing pathways of influence. *Journal of studies on alcohol and drugs*, 74(1), 104.; Windle, M. (2000). Parental, sibling, and peer influences on adolescent substance use and alcohol problems. *Applied Developmental Science*, 4(2), 98-110; Low, S., Shortt, J. W., & Snyder, J. (2012). Sibling influences on adolescent substance use: The role of modeling, collusion, and conflict. *Development and psychopathology*, 24(01), 287-300.

Sliding down is fun, but you can quickly get drunker than you intended. If this lesson were to emphasise the fun, the slide, but also the safety precautions one must take when having fun, (the same as one would take when skiing, bungee jumping, etc.) then pupils would get the message. As it stands, most alcohol education gives them only two choices: have only two drinks and be good and sensible, or get drunk, be bad, and risk all these horrible consequences. What the pupils want are instructions, speed limits, warning signs. All they are getting out of most alcohol education is: either stay on the boring baby slopes or don't ski.

The danger inherent in simply listing alcohol's possible effects, without relating this to amounts of alcohol consumed, is that the child internalizes the message that luck or chance determines whether alcohol will make you aggressive or happy; confident or depressed; sick or energetic; relaxed or comatose. Hundreds of schoolchildren I have spoken to assume that these effects have to do only with some property inherent in alcohol itself and their individual reaction to it. In their minds, one's response to alcohol has little to do with the way one drinks and the amount one drinks. Speed of drinking, or the amount of alcohol consumed is seen as secondary to "the way a person handles it."

How to drink effectively: education for all consumers

Thanks to our frugivorous ancestors, evolution has primed our brains to be rewarded for finding and ingesting small amounts of alcohol. Ethanol is highly volatile and can be detected in the air. Following such scent trails would have led our primate ancestors to the location of the ripest (slightly fermenting) fruits.¹⁹⁷ Consequently, the most pleasurable feelings that we derive from the substance, when the reward chemicals (endorphins) are triggered in the brain, occur shortly after ingestion and on the ascending curve of BAC – as levels of alcohol in the blood rise – and not on the descending curve (as blood levels fall). The euphoric and bonding sensations that are so close to those that accompany ritual are also induced by very small amounts of alcohol (half a standard drink or less) as BAC rises.¹⁹⁸

In my opinion, alcohol education should use the science to help all drinkers understand how to use this substance to achieve the pleasurable effects they want while minimising the harm. Drinkers often do not respond well to enticements to drink more 'responsibly'; this alternative strategy is to get them to drink more 'effectively' which has the same end result of reducing harmful drinking levels and patterns, but without provoking rebellious resistance.

At the moment, the general consensus among most drinkers we spoke with in Australia and New Zealand is that, if one is nice, more must be nicer. In focus groups, many described the wonderful sensation that suffuses the body and mind after that first, much anticipated drink. Nearly all admitted to 'chasing' that feeling all evening, drink after drink, but never quite getting it back. This is because very few of us drink in harmony with our brain chemistry.

It is possible to sustain and even enhance the brain's natural rewarding mechanism that occurs after that first small drink, but it involves careful timing and dosage of drinks, and allowing BAC to fall to nearly zero in between drinks. Pouring more alcohol on top of the initial burst of reward merely sedates the brain. Many people derive some pleasure from these feelings as

197. Dudley, R. 2000. Evolutionary origins of human alcoholism in primate frugivory. *Q. Rev. Biol.* 75:3-15; see also: Dudley, R. 2002. Fermenting fruit and the historical ecology of ethanol ingestion: Is alcoholism in modern humans an evolutionary hangover? *Addiction*, 97:381-388.

198. Lukas et al. (1991) Op Cit.

well, and many actively seek a state of complete numbness. But, for the most part, all drinkers we spoke with were keenly interested to learn the secret to sustaining the euphoric high of that ‘first-drink feeling’ throughout an evening, especially when told that it would reduce the amount they needed to drink by at least half (saving vast amounts of money), and probably eliminate morning hangovers as well. The sincere and avid enthusiasm with which they soaked up this information was a world away from the response to the traditional alcohol education template that usually begins: “I am going to teach you how to drink safely and responsibly, stay in control, and not get drunk.”

Young people thrive on risk. They want to lose some degree of ‘control’ and they enjoy getting drunk. Many of them, however, do not enjoy the harmful consequences of drunkenness any more than towns and cities enjoy paying for the aftermath in health, policing and cleaning. But we must face the reality that traditional alcohol educational methods are not working. They are falling on deaf ears because they run counter to the desires, needs and the rituals young people have developed. They believe that adhering to the principles of safe and sensible drinking means sacrificing the pleasures of alcohol and what they perceive to be the benefits (confidence, courage, relaxation, etc.)

Alcohol education for young people must focus on their world, their terms, their needs and goals. It should begin by focusing on non-judgmental descriptions of their drinking rituals and all the attendant expectations, anxieties, fears and desires that precede and accompany them. The educator must listen and learn and only then guide them to a scientific understanding of the way alcohol works in the brain and how they might use this alchemy to suit their needs. Accompanying this should be guidance on managing social anxiety and negotiating the stress inherent in interpersonal and group relations. How can young men reconcile their competing desires to bond with their mates and to ‘hook up’ with a female? What are the signs a girl, or a bloke, is interested? Can you recognise these if you are too drunk? Research by Bagnall (1990) confirms that alcohol education is more effective if it focuses on young people’s social concerns.¹⁹⁹

It is, of course, worth pointing out to drinkers that reducing total consumption levels will have many added health benefits and lessen their risk of numerous diseases, but to use this as a starting point for education is emphasising the stick over the carrot.

Parent education

Attitudes towards alcohol begin to form at an early age, largely influenced by parental or older sibling drinking, and it is these attitudes that will play a strong role in future drinking behaviour and the age of onset of experimentation. In primary school, most children develop negative and moralistic attitudes towards alcohol: alcohol is seen as ‘stupid’, and ‘disgusting’. In secondary school they begin to associate drinking with increasingly desirable aspects of the adult world: sexuality, sociability, excitement, etc²⁰⁰. The realisation then emerges that their former condemnation of alcohol was childish. Many then make great efforts to prove their maturity by drinking.

Paradoxically, reinforcing the negative and moralistic attitudes of primary-school-aged children may result in an even greater ‘backlash’ and higher level of consumption when these children reach secondary school. With older students, as we have seen, overstressing the risks and dangers of alcohol may serve only to heighten its appeal.

199. Bagnall, G. (1990), Alcohol education for 13 year olds-does it work? Results from a controlled evaluation. *British Journal of Addiction*, 85: 89–96

200. Parker, H. et al (1998) *Illegal Leisure: the normalization of adolescent recreational drug use*. London. Routledge

Parents need reliable, non-judgmental, unbiased and scientifically accurate information about:

- how, first of all, to assess their own drinking patterns
- how then to evaluate for themselves what effect their own drinking has on their children
- what effect alcohol has on a child's developing brain
- how to talk to children about alcohol at each stage of their development
- how best to safely manage their child's initiation into drinking
- how to spot signs of alcohol misuse in children

When we spoke to parents in the course of our study, we asked them to recall which public messages, adverts and other media sources had influenced them or were particularly memorable. Nearly all parents in Australia that we interviewed or chatted with informally could remember seeing the 'Grab me another beer son' TV advert which was part of the Drinkwise Australia campaign called 'Kids Absorb Your Drinking'. In terms of behaviour change, for many parents researchers spoke to, who had never been overtly drunk in front of their children, the campaign made them feel guilty and this translated into them stopping drinking in front of their children altogether. Their abstinence thereby deprived the youngsters of the only model of sensible drinking they were likely to see. A campaign like this, which caused parents to assess their behaviour generally and recognise that kids do model drinking behaviour on them, is good from an awareness perspective, but needs to be supported by a range of equally powerful messages that champion positive, pro-social behaviour in the presence of children. It is important to remember that kids absorb models of *good* drinking as well as bad.

We strongly recommend that future messages from all organisations and governments targeting cultural change should be reviewed before broadcast by broader teams of social scientists and cultural anthropologists to ensure that the cultural message and impact is properly evaluated.

Influence of advertising

Conclusions from the body of evidence on the influence of advertising and its impact on young people are decidedly equivocal. Many studies have not been able to find any measurable influence at all.

Other studies have used self-report questionnaires and followed young people over a number of years in an attempt to determine the effect of advertising on increases in consumption and problematic use. One recent study concluded that exposure to and 'liking' of alcohol advertising were somewhat predictive of alcohol-related problems (among American public schoolchildren in the Los Angeles area). These studies purport to 'control for' confounding factors, but they still leave us with a chicken-and-egg dilemma. Even the authors of this most recent study confess that "causality can not be verified".²⁰¹

When compared to the influence of parents, peers and the wider culture, advertising's influence is minimised. Cross-cultural comparisons are helpful here. In many countries, alcohol advertising has been banned or severely restricted. In Finland, despite comprehensive regulations on alcohol advertising / product placement, alcohol consumption has risen steadily since the 1960's. In France, consumption levels went into sharp decline around 1977, several years

201. Grenard, J. L., Dent, C. W., & Stacy, A. W. (2013). Exposure to alcohol advertisements and teenage alcohol-related problems. *Pediatrics*, 131(2), e369-e379.

before the ‘Loi Evin’ advertising bans. The downward trend has continued. In the Netherlands, Germany and the United Kingdom, alcohol consumption actually declined during periods of increased advertising expenditure.²⁰² The Department of Economics and Pennsylvania State University conducted a review of broadcast advertising bans in seventeen countries and found no relationship with decrease in consumption, liver cirrhosis mortality, and motor vehicle fatalities.²⁰³

Yet the influence of advertising on the drinking culture remains a contentious issue. In light of the evidence presented in this paper, I would have to infer that any alcohol-related ‘cue’ can have a moderate influence on a drinker’s behaviour and choices, but that these cues (images, TV adverts, alcohol in films, etc.) are themselves icons or symbolic representations of cultural myths, beliefs, values and norms. It is here that the real influence lies. Broadcast alcohol advertising did not create the Australian and New Zealand culture of hypermasculinity. Nor did it magically associate manliness with beer. These cultural attributes run far deeper. The worst that can be said about advertising is that it can reinforce or glamorise existing maladaptive cultural norms.

In over 20 years of research I have collected substantial evidence that the influence of advertising is not as great as many would believe. For example: in the UK some years ago, while conducting an evaluation of a school-based alcohol education programme, I asked school pupils what they would drink if they were allowed to. I expected them to rattle off well-known and well-advertised brand names. But they didn’t. A large percentage mentioned a bottled mixed drink I had never heard of. At first I thought they were making it up, but time after time, in schools across England, Scotland and Wales I heard about the same drink. Pupils said they liked it because it was high in alcohol, looked and sounded “posh,” but was cheap and tasted nice. I went to my local supermarket to check and, there it was! A drink that was not advertised on television, in magazines or anywhere else was, nonetheless, the number one brand among underage drinkers in my survey. I have since found out that several well-known rap singers have mentioned the drink in songs, but this was after I had conducted my research so it was already popular before the bards sang about it.

In the 1980’s I spent three months in Russia (then the Soviet Union under Gorbachev). During this time there was a ban on all alcohol advertising. Nonetheless, all the Russian friends I had knew exactly where to get alcohol and what to buy. The main problem was that, for many of them, a bottle of vodka was the equivalent of a month’s salary. On one occasion I was invited to dinner by some friends who lived in a large apartment block outside of St Petersburg. As I climbed the stairs to the 15th floor (the lifts hadn’t worked for decades) I noticed odd pictures on the doors of many apartments – hand-drawn cartoons, or cut-outs from magazines. I asked my friend what they meant and he explained that they were a form of advertising for home-brewed alcohol. One meant the occupant made Kvass, a bread-based beer; another meant wine, another potato vodka, and so on.

These, and other experiences around the world (not least of which, the famously abject failure of prohibition in the USA) have clearly shown that not only will a drinking culture survive despite all attempts at prohibition, but that advertising has less of an effect than we might think. In a

202. Calfee, J. E., & Scheraga, C. (1994). The influence of advertising on alcohol consumption: a literature review and an econometric analysis of four European nations. *International Journal of Advertising*, 13, 287-287.

203. Nelson, J.P and Young, D.J. (2001) Do advertising bans work? An international comparison. *International Review of Advertising*, 20(3), 2001

previous trip to Australia some years ago, a Government Minister boldly confessed that banning advertisements had no effect on drinking but that the government had to be seen to be doing something and they were an easy target.

If the manufacturers of alcohol could be convinced of this, perhaps they could be persuaded to divert some of the billions they spend on advertising into alcohol education and treatment programmes instead.

Lessons from Drink Driving campaigns

In the past decade, drink driving campaigns in Australia and New Zealand have been highly successful. This begs the question: why can we not use the same methods to achieve change in the drinking culture in general?

Let's look in more detail at some reasons why anti-drink-driving campaigns worked so well, for whom, and which aspects could be applicable to campaigns targeting anti-social behaviour more generally.

First, changing drink driving behaviour was (relatively) simple due to its 'all-or-nothing' basis: simply put, you can't safely drink anything but a very small quantity of alcohol and still drive. Once social life in most major metropolitan areas had adapted to this (using public transport/ designated drivers/taxis etc.) it was fairly easy to comply. Second, the legal and financial consequences and penalties of non-compliance are immediate and severe for the drinker (loss of driving license, fines, imprisonment). Third, the chances of getting caught are high and in countries where people rely on cars for a job and a social life, losing the right to drive is life-changing and devastating, and consequently the social disapproval of such behaviour became severe. The message that your actions will do harm to weak, innocent and vulnerable members of society is also a very strong and credible one. Drink drivers were equated, in the early days of campaigning, with baby killers. The early anti-drink-drive posters in the US at least portrayed cherubic golden haired children who had been killed, or very young pretty women. Fourth, and finally, because drinking and driving is an activity that *feels* risky. Demonstrating the consequences of this risk is easy and obvious and therefore well understood.

So why can all of the above not be easily applied to anti-social behaviour in general, or to binge drinking in general?

1. It is not all or nothing. Most sensible drinking campaigns aim to get drinkers to reduce consumption or think about their drinking behaviour, not stop altogether. This is much harder to do.
2. The consequences of binge drinking are not immediate or (usually) life changing. Bad things can happen to drunken people, but so can very good things, as most drinkers see it. There are almost no financial or legal penalties (apart from the cost of the drink) to binge drinking.
3. Social disapproval for binge drinking is virtually non-existent. Rather, there is widespread approval, especially among young people. Binge drinking is not seen as causing harm to others.
4. Binge drinking does not feel immediately risky. Neither the short- nor long-term risks are particularly self-evident.

Campaigners would like to believe that their efforts have resulted in a moral change of heart in the nation. While this may be true for some, many more pragmatic critics acknowledge that it is mainly the fear of getting caught and banned, fined or imprisoned that deters people.

The problem is, it doesn't deter all people. In a pattern that seems to repeat itself – smoking, binge drinking, drink driving – any form of sanction, campaign or message appears to have a maximum level of effectiveness beyond which there remains an undeterred hard core of the population. As Smith (2003) found:

*There appears to be an irreducible minimum of hard core recidivist drink drivers who have clearly not responded to current deterrents.*²⁰⁴

Smith notes that the profile of the typical recidivist drink driver is:

*male, young, single, separated or divorced, unemployed or in a blue collar profession, with a history of other traffic or criminal offences and have personality problems such as anti-social attitudes and poor impulse control.*²⁰⁵

Remarkably consistent with the profile of the typical violent offender in the NTE.

“Not drink driving is deviant for this group” Smith concludes. “Drink driving is the default behaviour.”

In focus groups with British soldiers conducted by the author, the vast majority reported that they would not drink and drive because it is morally wrong and because of the penalties. But these same soldiers, when stationed in Cyprus, had no qualms about drinking and driving as there were only minor consequences and small fines if caught.

It is true that drink drive campaigns have successfully married expectations and consequences, but the expectations were simple (don't), the detection was comprehensive and the consequences severe. A transport expert in Wellington, NZ agreed that a hard core group with little to lose remained unmoved neither by the change in social attitudes, nor the consequences:

“Has there been a change in social attitudes to drink driving? We say it, and we sort of believe it. The total number of accidents [on the road] is down but the proportion that are alcohol related remains the same. We have succeeded, but we have also moved the problem down the scale. It is really easy to persuade ‘nice people’ not to go out and kill other people. Different groups see different consequences of drink driving. One group, at the lower end of the socio-economic scale, will just go and nick another car if theirs is taken away. And then there are the ‘Hooray Henrys’ who have the financial means to organise alternative transport.”

As we reported earlier with regards to heavy drinkers, however, there remains a ‘hard core’ of drink driving offenders that persists in drinking and driving despite all efforts. In all focus groups in which the question was asked, approximately a third of young people admitted to drinking and driving at least once in situations where they felt they had no other option or they were fairly sure they would not be caught.

We CAN change anti-social behaviour in the NTE by the same methods. This has, to a certain extent been trialled in Newcastle with ‘consequence policing’ involving heavy fines and penalties for even minor public order offences. The key question is whether a society is prepared to adopt a New York style zero tolerance approach to less harmful aspects of anti-social behaviour more broadly, given that some will view it as an unwelcome intrusion into civil liberties.

204. Smith, K.P. (2003) A qualitative study of deterrence and deviance in a group of recidivist drink drivers. A thesis submitted for the masters of corporate law degree, University of Canberra, ACT.

205. Smith, K.P. (2003) Op Cit.

To apply this method to *violent* behaviour, however, would perhaps receive more widespread support. Standards for interpersonal conduct in the NTE should be set as high as possible; consequences for any type of assault should be clear, swift and severe. Drunkenness should not be an excuse.

Another key lesson from drink driving is that, to achieve cultural change, no one single measure will suffice. Entrenched social customs and norms present a formidable force. Drink driving campaigns combined changes in the law with police enforcement, education, and mass media campaigns over a long period of time. Together, these efforts spurred a change in social norms from 'one for the road' being acceptable to drinking and driving being a widespread social taboo.

There are significant parallels to be drawn between approaches to addressing drink driving and violence and anti-social behaviour in the NTE. And we can be unequivocal that both are undesirable and would ideally be extinguished. Both can be tackled by first establishing clear standards of community behaviour and then reinforcing these standards with clear and believable consequences, the enforcement and education of those consequences, and influencing cultural and peer norms. But, as with all engineered cultural change, we must be on the alert for unintended consequences. As the New Zealand transport expert quoted above explained:

"We have halved youth drink driving but we have shifted behaviour away from driving and possibly contributed to binge drinking. We get accused of 'we don't care how much you drink; just don't drive.'"

This appears to be the unfortunate flip-side of the drink driving campaign success. Most young informants in this research associated dangers and harm only with driving, not as a side effect of alcohol itself. Most felt that, so long as they did not drive, they were being responsible and safe no matter how much they drank. The fault here lies not so much with the drink drive campaign, but with the lack of alcohol education elsewhere. Very few informants in this research had any idea that alcohol, in and of itself, could kill. Young people in focus groups repeatedly described, to my horror, drinking occasions at which they had ingested lethal amounts of spirits. They regarded these as heroic feats. They had no understanding whatsoever of the possibility of brain stem death through alcohol poisoning. An A&E director in Australia who works closely with the coroner described several cases in which young people had died after accepting a dare to drink a bottle of spirits. In one case, a young man died quietly in an armchair, surrounded by his friends who carried on partying. In another, a young man "fell asleep" on the floor behind a couch. His body was not detected for several days.

Young people are dying through ignorance. That's the tragedy. Alcohol education could so easily be re-fashioned to make 'looking after your mates' a social norm. To let a mate who has been drinking drive a car is a social taboo. To let a mate who is already drunk down a bottle of spirits should be viewed as equally repugnant. Drinking is a social act. We are all in this together.

PART FOUR: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

You can't change drinking culture by simply changing drinking

In a nutshell, the central point of this whitepaper is: it is the wider culture that determines the drinking behaviour, not the drinking. You can't change a culture by simply changing drinking.

It is, of course, justifiable to explore the effectiveness of small measures such as advertising restrictions, increases or decreases in price, relaxation or restriction of hours, but such things tinker at the margins of culture and it is doubtful that they will alter the culture of violence and anti-social behaviour in any meaningful way.

That must be faced head on with a strong collective will for genuine, lasting whole of community cultural change. If Australia and New Zealand wish to tackle the true, underlying cultural causes of violence and anti-social behaviour, they must:

- **Recommendation 1:** Stop focussing on 'alcohol-fuelled' violence and concentrate instead on violence, its causes and triggers. Address the cultural reinforcers of violence, misogyny, and aggressive masculinity in all its cultural expressions from schoolyards to sports fields, politics and pubs, movies and media.
- **Recommendation 2:** Empower the community: where successes in reducing NTE trouble have been observed during the fieldwork, these were largely in places where residents had a strong sense of and commitment to their community and where multiple measures and interventions were employed – not just a single solution such as restrictions on opening hours. Unifying and empowering local residents through mechanisms like accords may, in the long run, be as effective as tackling the perpetrators head on.

We must debunk the myths of alcohol's magical powers

One of the strongest and most universal beliefs encountered in the research among Australians and New Zealanders was in alcohol's 'transformational powers'. Although conclusive evidence debunks this, most people still believe that alcohol has the power to hijack their better natures, control their thinking and make them do "crazy and stupid things."

Certainly alcohol carries very definite physiological effects. At high doses, the point at which alcohol enters the brain stem, it is easy to see that the physical effects of alcohol can incapacitate all drinkers equally, regardless of cultural differences. At this point it is useless to debate whether or not reasoning is affected as the drinker is incapable of movement or speech. Many drinkers do report, however, that although they are aware of their inability to move or talk, their thinking process remained astonishingly clear. For any amount below lethal intake, the behaviour of drinkers can be explained as the unconscious delivery of a culturally scripted 'pretence' of drunkenness. Alcohol does not cause disinhibition, but is a *symbol* that gives people a social licence to behave in an uninhibited way. The proof of this lies in the placebo experiments described earlier.

As long as we continue to imply, directly or indirectly, that alcohol causes people to behave badly, we let the means of control slip through our fingers and we can expect to see undesirable conduct in and around drinking venues. It may be that we can never control how much people drink, but we can influence how they behave. We can change the script.

Therefore, to successfully reduce violence and anti-social behaviour in the night-time economy, Australia and New Zealand must:

- **Recommendation 3:** Take the genie, the magic, out of the bottle and return the responsibility for conduct to the individual. We must take away the excuses. The only effective message that might control negative or extremely anti-social or violent drinking behaviour is: “You are in control of your behaviour at all times. Drunkenness is no excuse.”

Consequences must be real and believable and we have to be realistic about the public’s assessment of risk and reward

To achieve cultural shift, an understanding that individuals are in control and responsible must be followed by realistic consequences such as social stigma, fines and penalties for bad behaviour. The ‘consequence policing’ in Newcastle appears to have had some effect in this regard, but more research needs to be done to determine whether the policing of known offenders was a more critical factor.

These measures have to be perceived as reasonable and proportionate to the problem. Cultural change will come when drinking is no longer the issue but bad behaviour is and when that bad behaviour brings with it social disgrace, as has occurred with drink driving.

Further, we must be realistic about the perceived benefits of drinking and nightlife and how individuals will weigh them against the perceived risks of both going out at night and transgression. People will likely always want to go out at night – the evidence suggests it’s in our evolutionary coding. Societies through history have relied on some form of social lubricant or ‘signal’ as a tool to loosen social rules in socially sanctioned situations.

We must remain vigilant to the unintended consequences of artificial ‘cultural engineering’

Culture is like a balloon: if you squeeze one end, the other will bulge out. Behaviours that are driven by very basic underlying human needs will not be eliminated, only distorted or displaced. This does not imply that nothing can be done about cultural problems – it is to merely tender into the debate a quiet note of caution that engineered social change, like any artificial change into an ecosystem, always comes at a cost which is sometimes not apparent for many years. Awareness of this, however, can make us better at anticipating and spotting unintended consequences.

- **Recommendation 4:** Change perceptions of what’s socially acceptable while intoxicated – create clear social and legislated rules and then genuine social stigma and practical consequences for breaking them. The risks and consequences must be clearly seen to outweigh the benefits. The socially sanctioned ‘license to transgress’ must evolve to encourage only pro-social, positive behaviours. The rules must be seen as reasonable and proportionate by the community.
- **Recommendation 5:** With concerted, coordinated effort, culture change is a realistic goal. However, any campaign must remain adaptable and mindful of unintended consequences.

To reduce violence, we need a whole of community effort to tackle the three triggers of violence – violent individuals, violent situations and violence reinforcing cultures

We could become totalitarian and try to stop public festive drinking completely, but it would most likely just move into homes. Or we can live with it and try to determine what the worst outcomes are (police overtime, all night transport cost, lost work hours and productivity, accidents and injuries, street clean-up, etc.), and work to minimise and deal with them sensibly. We would do better to work cooperatively with all stakeholders to engineer conditions for festive drinking that are the least conducive to violence and anti-social behaviour.

The triggers of violence are, broadly, violent individuals, violent situations and violence-reinforcing cultures. Action needs to be taken on all three to successfully reduce violence.

Violent individuals

While further research is needed, there is some evidence to suggest that a small proportion of violent men in the population are responsible for a significant portion of the violence. A significant portion of the prison population comprises repeat offenders and police report the challenges of dealing with a hard core of ‘regular customers’. Studies demonstrate that anger among men is a predictor of heavy drinking. What this tells us is clearly not that drinking causes aggression, but that highly aggressive, angry men choose to drink heavily and frequently, quite possibly to excuse violent behaviour.

Australasians do have a right and a duty to protect themselves from violence and violent people. This duty should extend to better and earlier identification of those prone to violence, a commitment to more active intervention, treatment and monitoring of those already identified as perpetrators of violence.

- **Recommendation 6:** Continue and enhance social and family support mechanisms to reduce the cycle of abusive parenting and poor socio-economic conditions which lead to the creation of a cohort of violent and often disempowered individuals
- **Recommendation 7:** Identify and proactively manage the hard core of inherently violent individuals.
- **Recommendation 8:** Comprehensive research is needed into the profiles, motivations and toxicology involved in violent offences. This should include interviews (with perpetrators as well as surviving victims), necessary toxicology testing, surveys and data analysis of all available information.
- **Recommendation 9:** Rehabilitative courses should be mandatory for even first-time perpetrators of assault, and voluntary for those who violate alcohol-related public-order offences. For non-violent offences, participation in such courses could be tied to a reduction in fines.
- **Recommendation 10:** The ‘consequence policing’ in Newcastle appears to have been effective, but more research needs to be done to determine whether the policing of known offenders was a more critical factor. If this is the case, law enforcement efforts should be concentrated on repeat offenders, including reviews of bail compliance checks and parolee monitoring.

Cultures that reinforce violence

In addressing the cultural reinforcers of violence, misogyny, and aggressive masculinity in all its cultural expressions, culture-change media campaigns must champion pro-social behaviours and take care not to further ingrain, or inversely increase the appeal of, poor behaviours.

Fighting in the NTE can be subdivided into four main types:

1. An attack on a weaker victim – for status, or power
2. Fighting in front of an audience for effect
3. Fighting as a form of fun / thrills
4. Fighting in defence of honour or status

Only by fully understanding these cultural triggers for violence, and developing ways to discourage or diffuse them, will we truly affect the incidence of public assault and the well-publicised ‘king hit’ or ‘coward punch’ phenomenon.

- **Recommendation 11:** Drinkers in the NTE are capable of controlling their behaviour. All that is needed is enough incentive to do so. The standards of behaviour that are expected of drinkers need to be clear, as noted above. A commitment to consistent enforcement of these standards, however, is necessary for cultural change to occur.
- **Recommendation 12:** Young boys need to be taught not to react aggressively to every perceived slight, taunt or jest. This can be achieved through education focussed on non-violent conflict resolution and face-saving calming and avoidance techniques during developmental years.
- **Recommendation 13:** The aim of cultural change should be to link male status to pro-social behaviours, and, particularly, to link male status with effective control of drunkenness and violence. Over-reaction and loss of control need to be stigmatised.

Young people are exposed to a wide variety of cultural influences, most importantly parental and peer role models. Much of the education we see either focuses on consequences that the vast majority of young people see as unrealistic, or it actively reinforces perceptions of how they should behave while drunk. In trying to change binge drinking, the messages that revolve around the amorphous and vague consequences of “something bad might happen” or “you might do something stupid” are largely ineffective. The reality is that for most there are no real and immediate consequences for binge drinking. The “just say no” drugs campaigns have largely been discredited and dropped – even in America. Yet alcohol campaigns continue in the same vein in the hope that saturation will cause change. (Einstein defined insanity as “doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”)

- **Recommendation 14:** A serious and dispassionate review of the way in which young people become part of adult culture is most definitely called for, including the best way to prepare them to be part of a society in which drinking and nightlife is prevalent. Consideration should be given to how parents are educated about alcohol, to help guide them how best to manage their child’s initiation into drinking, if they choose to drink.

- **Recommendation 15:** We must also address the ways in which we educate young people about alcohol. To prepare young adults to drink intelligently when they reach legal drinking age, education should include realistic and relevant social-skills instruction and brain science, so that pupils are empowered to make intelligent decisions about alcohol consumption. Programs should be developed for high-school and first-year university students.
- **Recommendation 16:** Any attempt to shift cultural attitudes towards anti-social behaviour will need to be multi-faceted, and combine law enforcement, education and awareness campaigns, so that peer pressure becomes effective self-policing.
- **Recommendation 17:** Cultural-change advertising programs should be reviewed before broadcast by broader teams of social scientists and anthropologists, to ensure that the cultural impact is properly evaluated.

Violence rituals and situations

Communities need to be empowered to employ a relevant, tailored, blend of the following mitigations to situational triggers in the night-time economy, including poor venue design and public transport.

- **Recommendation 18:** Drinking environments should be devoid of obvious aggression-inducing cues or images and designed with ‘calming’ and ‘conflict-reducing’ features. Educational materials on designing drinking environments should be developed to support hospitality operators in improving their establishments.
- **Recommendation 19:** There should be a de-emphasis on the consumption of alcohol for its own sake and a refocus on entertainment and group conviviality. We need to encourage the establishment of night-time venues where alcohol is ancillary to the entertainment, not the centre of it.
- **Recommendation 20:** Consistent, intelligent, fair and friendly enforcement of ‘Responsible Service of Alcohol’ or ‘Host Responsibility’ – both by venues and police.
- **Recommendation 21:** There should be coordination between publicans, police, government and the broader community to defuse fights at the source, rather than simply moving the issue from one space to another.
- **Recommendation 22:** Good availability of clean and safe public toilets.
- **Recommendation 23:** Good availability of 24-hour food service with clean and well-managed premises.
- **Recommendation 24:** Adequate transport out of the entertainment district.
- **Recommendation 25:** The existence of a separate youth culture, and the alienation of ‘malfunctioning’ teenagers, is a social abnormality particularly prevalent in the industrialised western world. The inclusion of a broader cross-section of society in the night-time environment will add social pressure to conform to positive societal norms, and can play a role in diffusing machismo among young men. Fostering urban night-time entertainment environments that welcome people across the age spectrum will alter the social dynamic, and reduce the incidence of violence.

The Minimal Evidence for Minimum Pricing

The fatal flaws in the Sheffield
Alcohol Policy Model

John C. Duffy and
Christopher Snowdon



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About the authors

John C. Duffy is a Statistical Consultant who has had over 60 articles published in peer-reviewed scientific journals. He is a former senior lecturer and research scientist at the University of Edinburgh's Department of Statistics. He has also been Head of Statistics at the University of Birmingham's Department of Primary Care and Director of Statistics for the Alcohol Research Group at the University of Edinburgh, where he was also the Director of STATLAB. In March 2012, he retired as Deputy Director in charge of Knowledge Management at the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council. He is the author of *Trends in Alcohol Consumption Patterns 1978-89* (1991) and *Alcohol and Illness: the Epidemiological Viewpoint* (1992). Amongst his other publications are 'Single Distribution Theory of Consumption' in *Encyclopedia of Drug Policy* (2011), 'Research design, measurement and statistics' in *Companion to Psychiatric Studies* (1998), 'Scottish licensing changes' in *Alcohol and Drugs: the Scottish Experience* (1992), 'Data Collection: a methodological response' in *Alcohol and Drugs: Research and Policy* and 'Total alcohol consumption in a population and alcohol-related problems' in *Drinking to Your Health* (1989).

Christopher Snowdon is a fellow of the Adam Smith Institute and the author of *The Art of Suppression: Pleasure, Panic and Prohibition since 1800*. His research focuses on lifestyle freedoms, prohibition and dodgy statistics. He occasionally writes for *City AM* and *Spiked*, and regularly appears on TV and radio discussing social and economic issues. Recent think tank publications include reports on a diverse range of topics including 'sin taxes', state funding of charities, happiness economics, tobacco regulation, casinos and the black market. He is also the author of *The Spirit Level Delusion* (2010) and *Velvet Glove, Iron Fist: A History of Anti-Smoking* (2009).

Executive summary

1. The Conservative Party and the Scottish National Party have both stated their intention of introducing a minimum floor price for alcohol, levied at around 50p per unit. Advocates of minimum pricing claim that the policy will significantly reduce alcohol consumption and the problems associated with hazardous drinking.
2. Estimates of how minimum pricing will affect health outcomes have overwhelmingly come from a single computer model—the Sheffield Alcohol Policy Model. This paper argues that the model is based on unreasonable assumptions which render its figures meaningless.
3. Amongst the problems with the Sheffield model is its false assumption that heavy drinkers are more likely to reduce their consumption of alcohol as a result of a price rise. Its calculations are based on controversial beliefs about the relationship between per capita alcohol consumption and rates of alcohol-related harm. Its assumptions about the relationship between price and consumption have frequently been refuted by real world evidence.
4. The Sheffield model provides figures without estimates of error and ignores statistical error in the alcohol-harm relationship. Data is drawn from different populations and applied to England and Scotland as if patterns of consumption and harm are the same in all countries. When data is not available, the model

resorts to what is essentially numerology. Insufficient data is provided for the model to be recreated and tested by third parties.

5. The model ignores the likely effects of minimum pricing on the illicit alcohol trade, it disregards the health benefits of moderate drinking and fails to take account of the secondary poverty created by regressive price rises. The decline in alcohol consumption seen in Britain in recent years has not led to the outcomes predicted by the model.
6. We conclude that predictions based on the Sheffield Alcohol Policy Model are entirely speculative and do not deserve the exalted status they have been afforded in the policy debate.

Disposable statistics

by Christopher Snowden

We live in an age of disposable statistics which are often better suited to justifying predetermined policies than to informing rational debate. Few would argue with the need to bring evidence to the table when decisions are made, but in the search for ‘evidence-based policy’, it is easy to mistake social science for hard science and wild speculation for verifiable fact. Predicting the outcome of an untried policy is at the softest end of social science and yet educated guesses about what people might or might not do in certain circumstances are afforded the same respect as the laws of nature. Human behaviour is not as predictable as the orbit of Halley’s Comet and lazy sub-editors do their readers a disservice when they use the authoritative words “Scientists say...” to preface anything from the latest news from the Higgs boson project to the tentative results from a computer model designed by a junior sociologist at the University of East Rutland.

As anyone from ex-weatherman Michael Fish to the ex-directors of Northern Rock will tell you, a degree of humility is required if one is to forecast future events. Depending on where you get your news, you may have heard that minimum pricing will save 900, 3,393, “more than 1,000” or “nearly 10,000” lives a year in England. If you watch *Panorama*, you will have heard that the policy will save 50,000 lives in a decade amongst the over-65 age group alone, unless you watch the re-edited

iPlayer version in which the figure has been dropped to 11,150 (this sizeable discrepancy was attributed to ‘human error’ (Snowdon, 2012)). All these figures can be traced back to the Sheffield Alcohol Policy Model (SAPM) which has been used since 2008 to make predictions about what effect a minimum unit price for alcohol will have on everything from NHS expenditure to unemployment.

The most recent version of the SAPM model, as pertaining to England, predicts that a 50p unit price will lead to a 6.7 per cent reduction in alcohol consumption, which will lead to 521 fewer deaths in the first year and 3,060 fewer deaths per annum by the end of the first decade (Purshouse, 2009). At the heart of these projections is the ‘single distribution’ model, a theory first advanced by the French demographer Sully Ledermann in 1956, which assumes there to be a fixed relationship between the amount of alcohol consumed in a society and the amount of alcohol-related harm. According to this theory, “the top X% of consumers always consume Y% of the total alcohol market. Therefore, to reduce the consumption by the top X%, total alcohol consumption has to be reduced.” (Amber, 2009; p. 174) If true, the Ledermann hypothesis suggests that policies aimed at reducing alcohol consumption across the general population will affect heavy drinkers via a statistical *deus ex machina*, and so policies aimed at heavy drinkers themselves are not required. Lowering average consumption will be enough.

As John Duffy explains below, we should not be surprised to find a correlation between average consumption and alcohol-related harm because harmful drinkers consume a vastly disproportionate quantity of alcohol. In Britain, 40 per cent of all alcohol is consumed by 10 per cent of the population (Meier, 2009). The number of heavy drinkers in a society naturally has a profound impact on average consumption, but it does not follow from this that changes in average consumption produce concomitant changes in the number of heavy drinkers. Attributing high rates of harmful drinking to high per capita consumption is to put the cart before the horse.

But even if the Ledermann Hypothesis does not confuse cause with effect, the policy prescriptions it inspires do not necessarily make sense. Average consumption data cover a multitude of sins. There may be more harmful drinking in a country in which per capita consumption is 8 litres a year than in one in which the rate is 10 litres a year. Imagine, for example, if half the population of the former country is teetotal, but everybody drinks in the latter. A relatively low rate of per capita alcohol consumption is no guarantee of better health outcomes if the lion’s share is being

drunk by a handful of alcoholics. There is little to be gained by making moderate drinkers reduce their consumption from, say, seven beers a week to four, and yet, by the logic of the Ledermann Hypothesis, such an intervention would significantly reduce rates of liver cirrhosis, drink-driving, domestic violence and so forth.

The Ledermann Hypothesis appeals to temperance and public health campaigners because it offers a relatively simple solution to the problems of heavy drinking and alcoholism. If the answer lies in reducing alcohol consumption at the population level, campaigners need only to lobby for higher prices and restricted availability which, *ceteris paribus*, would be expected to lead to less alcohol being consumed per head of population. The complex psychological and societal factors which lead to alcoholism and alcohol-related violence can thus be side-stepped, and the responsibility for these problems can be passed to politicians and the drinks industry. But although the single distribution theory has been treated as an iron law by many alcohol control advocates since the 1970s, empirical tests have produced mixed results and there is ample real world evidence running counter to it. From the outset, as Grant notes, the “mathematical basis for Ledermann’s curve was weak” and “the rationale for the prevention theory inspired by it was poorly developed and, in fact, contrived” (Grant, 1997; p. 133). Ledermann offered little documentary evidence to support his theory and relied instead on “some rather peculiar statistical arguments of doubtful validity, to say the least.” (Skog, 2006)

Moreover, the belief that reducing the affordability of alcohol will inevitably reduce both alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harm has frequently been confounded. Alcohol consumption has fallen in most of Europe and the USA (though not the UK) in recent decades despite rising incomes which have made alcohol more affordable.* When the Institute of Alcohol Studies compared alcohol-related disease rates and alcohol prices across European countries, it found “no discernible relationship between affordability and harm” (Institute of Alcohol

* “Average alcohol consumption has gradually fallen in many OECD countries between 1980 and 2009 with an average overall decrease of 9%. The United Kingdom however, has seen an increase of 9% over these three decades.” (Office for National Statistics, *Statistics on Alcohol: England, 2012*, 2012; p. 23). It should be noted that greater affordability rarely means lower prices when it comes to alcohol. Although politicians, journalists and pressure groups often claim that alcohol has become cheaper in Britain, the Office for National Statistics has found that the real price of alcohol has increased by 24 per cent since 1980. During the same period, alcohol became 45 per cent more affordable. The greater affordability has therefore come about entirely as a result of higher average incomes in spite of above-inflation rises in alcohol duty.

Studies, n.d.). Dramatic reductions in the price of alcohol in Scandinavia in 2003-04 provided a natural experiment for price elasticity models to be put to the test, but the results were surprising. Denmark reduced the tax on spirits by 45 per cent in 2003 without experiencing any increase in alcohol consumption (Mäkelä, 2008; Grittner, 2009). Instead, there was a decline in alcohol-related problems (Bloomfield, 2010). Prior to the Danish tax cut, it was predicted that alcohol consumption would soar in southern Sweden because Swedes would cross the Danish border to buy cheap booze. Many did, and yet alcohol consumption in the south *fell* overall while consumption in the distant north rose (Gustafsson, 2010).

The story is the same when it comes to availability. Although temperance campaigners have long assumed that restrictive licensing laws reduce per capita consumption and therefore—by their logic—alcohol-related harm, real world evidence offers only equivocal support. France, for example, has seen a dramatic decline in alcohol consumption since the 1960s despite availability remaining unchanged (Romelsjö, 2010). In the UK, the implementation of so-called ‘24 hour drinking’ laws coincided with the start of a prolonged downturn in per capita alcohol consumption. Since the Licensing Act was introduced in 2005, average weekly alcohol consumption has fallen by nearly twenty per cent (Office for National Statistics, 2012).

There are, of course, examples of higher prices and restrictive licensing laws reducing alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harm. Wartime restrictions such as the 1914 Defence of the Realm Act had significant and lasting effects on drinking and drunkenness in Britain. Similarly, falling prices can lead to higher rates of consumption. Although Denmark and Sweden were strangely immune from the great Scandinavian price drop of 2003-04, Finland saw a rise in consumption after taxes on spirits were reduced by 44 per cent, albeit on a much smaller scale than the price elasticity models predicted (Room, 2004; Mäkelä, 2009). It would be quite wrong to assume that pricing has *no* effect on alcohol consumption, only that the effects of price interventions are highly unpredictable and the relationship between per capita consumption and harmful consumption is questionable.

For a price rise to reduce alcohol-related *harm*, we must be sure that (a) reducing average consumption will reduce harm (the Ledermann Hypothesis), and (b) higher prices will reduce average consumption. Both criteria must be fulfilled, but since there is a good likelihood that at least one of them will not be fulfilled, any claim to predict how a price rise will affect health outcomes can only be speculation. This poses a problem for those charged with forecasting the consequences of minimum

pricing, and yet the inherent uncertainty has not prevented such forecasts flowing out of Sheffield University with a confidence that borders on hubris.

Many of the flaws in the SAPM model will be discussed in the following section. I shall offer just one example which any non-statistician (like myself) will readily comprehend. The model assumes that minimum pricing will have more effect on the consumption patterns of heavy drinkers than on moderate drinkers because heavy drinkers are more price-sensitive. This is a convenient belief since it is heavy drinkers who cause and suffer the most alcohol-related harm, but can we really assume that someone with an alcohol dependency is more likely to be deterred by price rises than a more casual consumer? The SAPM model says that they are, and yet there is ample evidence to support the common sense view that heavy drinkers and alcoholics are *less* price-sensitive than the general population (eg. Gallet, 2007; Wagenaar, 2009). Indeed, research has shown that price elasticity for the heaviest drinkers is “not significantly different from zero”—they will, in other words, purchase alcohol at almost any cost (Purshouse, 2009; p. 76).

Heavy drinkers are more price-sensitive, but not in a way that is relevant to the minimum pricing debate. Research has shown that if the price of wine (for example) increases, heavy drinkers are more likely to stop buying it—or to buy less—than moderate consumers. This is not because they cut down their alcohol intake, but because they switch to cheaper drinks, such as whisky. And if the price of whisky increases, they are more likely to shift to vodka than is a whisky connoisseur. However, none of this is germane to the issue of minimum pricing because the minimum price will raise the cost of every type of drink. As economist Eric Crampton notes, a price elasticity estimate for a particular *type* of alcohol product “tells us *zilch* about what harmful drinkers do in response to a price increase for the entire product category; it would be misleading to use this kind of data to claim that harmful drinkers are the most price responsive. They’re *most* price responsive when their preferred brand or product changes in price but they’re also *least* responsive to aggregate changes in alcohol prices.” (Crampton, 2012; italics in the original.) By wrongly assuming that heavy drinkers are more sensitive than the general population to changes in the price of alcohol *as a product category*, the Sheffield model not only overestimates the putative health benefits to be derived from minimum pricing, but also overestimates the drop in overall consumption that is likely to take place (since heavier drinkers consume a disproportionate quantity of alcohol). Moreover, it underestimates how much poorer heavier drinkers will be as a result.

Upon such faulty assumptions is the SAPM based. Mention should also be made of what is *not* in the model. It does not, for example, factor in the possibility that raising the floor price of spirits will fuel the market for illegally produced alcohol; counterfeit alcohol is already a growing problem in the UK and unregulated spirits pose a greater risk to health than the legitimate product. Nor does the model take account of the effects of secondary poverty created by people on low incomes spending a greater share of their wages on drink. Minimum pricing could indirectly damage the health of drinkers who make cuts in other parts of the family budget, such as food and fuel. Also conspicuous by its absence in the SAPM is any acknowledgement of the mountain of evidence showing alcohol to have medicinal benefits and that teetotallers have, on average, shorter lifespans and higher rates of cardiovascular disease than moderate drinkers (eg. Doll, 1997; Rimm, 2007; Holahan, 2010, Ronksley, 2011).^{*} Is it possible that minimum pricing will turn some moderate drinkers into teetotallers? If so, what are the health implications of this? One searches the Sheffield research in vain for an answer.

In summary, the Sheffield research does not give a prediction of what will happen under a minimum pricing regime. At best, it offers a shaky guesstimate of what *might* occur under a minimum pricing regime *if* the Ledermann hypothesis is correct, *if* harmful drinkers are more price-sensitive than moderate drinkers, *if* there is no illicit alcohol market and *if* there are no health benefits to be derived from moderate alcohol consumption. Since the first two of these assumptions are highly questionable and the latter two assumptions are demonstrably false, the Sheffield research has no practical merit and does not deserve the exalted status it has been afforded in the policy debate.

In the era of evidence-based policy, it seems that speculative statistics are considered superior to no statistics and a wrong answer is better than no answer. We argue that this is a mistake. The aura of scientific certainty, or even mild confidence, in computer-generated numbers based on dubious assumptions is misplaced. Minimum pricing might reduce alcohol harm, or it might increase it, or it might bring about other unexpected consequences, good or bad (Donald Rumsfeld's 'unknown unknowns'). There is no shame in saying that we simply do not know. An admission that the evidence base is, to all intents and purposes, non-existent is less likely to mislead decision-makers than a spurious prediction.

^{*} The kernel of truth in the Ledermann Hypothesis is that if people never start drinking, they cannot become harmful drinkers or alcoholics. However, few hope or expect to see a teetotal society and taxes on alcohol are not intended to bring about total abstinence.

There is one further reason why the Sheffield research should not be seen as a prediction. In a real sense, we know what would happen to alcohol-related mortality if the SAPM's assumptions are correct. The data used in the model to calculate alcohol consumption come from 2006 and, as already noted, alcohol consumption has fallen by close to twenty percent since then. All the projections in the SAPM are based on a 50p minimum price reducing per capita alcohol consumption by 6.7 percent *from the 2006 level*. But we know exactly what would happen if alcohol consumption fell by 6.7 per cent from the 2006 level because we have lived through it. Indeed, the decline in per capita consumption since that year has been closer to what the SAPM predicts would happen under a 70p per unit regime (ie. a 17.5 per cent decline). According to the model, the kind of reduction in alcohol consumption that Britain *has already experienced* should have reduced the number of alcohol-related deaths by 1,273 (28.3 per cent) in the first year, rising every year until 7,263 deaths (62.4 per cent) are prevented each year by 2015 (Purshouse, 2009; pp. 109-111). None of this has happened. We are thus in the unusual position of being able to empirically disprove a prediction about a policy which has not yet been introduced.

The Sheffield Alcohol Policy Model

by John C. Duffy

For about 25 years since 1970 I worked as a research statistician in psychiatric epidemiology. In the mid-1970s I became involved in alcohol research and have remained active in that field on and off ever since. When I started, the ‘control of consumption’ or ‘single distribution model’ was being advanced by researchers in many countries, mostly those with alcohol control systems such as the Nordic countries, Canada and some states of the USA.

The idea was simple—average consumption correlated with rates of alcohol-related problems, so if average consumption could be controlled, the problems would be reduced in proportion to the reduction in per capita consumption. There is a tautology in this relationship which has never been properly addressed. If one area has more alcohol-related problems than another then it probably (almost certainly) has more people drinking heavily. Therefore it will have a higher average consumption. Seen this way, average consumption is a product of the drinking culture, and not a determining variable. Strenuous efforts were made to ignore this aspect, or to pretend that statistical models offered a way round the problem, and I made myself fairly unpopular by pointing out this fundamental flaw.

For the most part, the research community continues to insist that increased availability of alcohol leads to more drinking, which leads to more problems. Symmetry, however, implies that it works the other way around and despite the prophets of doom, experience in the UK with increases in availability (albeit limited), usually in terms of licensing and hours of sale did not have the effects predicted by the ‘researchers’, who were quick to develop *ad hoc* arguments to explain why not. My first experience of this was with my analysis of Scottish licensing liberalisation back in the 1980s. When a before and after comparison of Scottish liberalisation in 1976 (using England & Wales as a control) failed to show that increased availability led to increased consumption and problems (Duffy, 1986) the work was criticized on the grounds that Scotland had been adversely affected by economic recession (Eagles, 1986; Prichard, 1986). However, examination of unemployment rates and disposable income per capita showed no divergent trends between Scotland and England & Wales, so this ‘explanation’ or rescue attempt for the availability hypothesis failed (Duffy, 1992). Even if the availability hypothesis were true it does not follow that symmetry would apply—that is that decreased availability must lead to decreased consumption and problems.

While discussing this I think it is worth pointing out that while availability may in some instances be a correlate of consumption it is most definitely not a cause. It is a condition—in that if there is no availability there can be no consumption. This is not just a pedantic distinction, as it goes some way towards explaining why availability-based models always fail at some point or another and have to be rescued *ad hoc*.

Alcohol epidemiology suffers from a number of disadvantages. Most obviously, the survey method which is a basic tool of epidemiology isn’t very good for alcohol. We know that individuals under-report their consumption in surveys, which is a problem when we are trying to estimate the risk of some health or social outcome as a function of individual consumption. We also know that many individuals drink different amounts in different time periods. This is a problem because survey methods that try to be very accurate about recording amounts consumed have to be based on a relatively short period of time in order to (presumably) elicit more accurate information. Because of the variability in drinking behaviour, the shorter the time period, the more extreme behaviour (drinking a lot or drinking nothing or very little) is over-represented. So a survey doesn’t provide an accurate description of an individual’s long-term consumption habits. Per capita alcohol consumption figures based on the amount sold divided by the population, which are available for many countries, are in principle reasonable estimates of average consumption but

do not help in epidemiological studies which require individual level data.

In terms of alcohol-related harm, there are two types of harm that most researchers distinguish—harm related to high per-occasion consumption (e.g. accidents, crime, etc.) and harm related to longer-term consumption (liver damage for example). Most of the relationships that can be investigated with any degree of accuracy involve the second type of harm, but even here relationships are poorly estimated and imprecise because many of the studies used as source information are not mainly interested in alcohol-related harm, and measure alcohol consumption very crudely.

So I was surprised when I began to read in the press that, for example, banning supermarkets and shops from selling drinks for less than any duty and VAT owed on them would ‘only save 21 lives a year, according to an alcohol expert’ (Whitehead, 2011). Why 21? Why not 20? Or none? And anyway, how could you tell? In England & Wales the annual number of deaths is just under half a million, so the 95% error bars (for random variation in the number of deaths) are about 1,400 either side. So even if the expert’s prediction was correct it could never be demonstrated.

Similarly in Scotland the minister responsible, Nicola Sturgeon claimed that a minimum price of 50p per unit would save 60 lives a year (Scottish Government, 2012). Again, though, the standard error of the number of deaths per year in Scotland is considerably more than 60—and a prediction that cannot be tested is no prediction at all. Another way of expressing this is that the predicted effect is not statistically significantly different from zero and may actually be zero.

Looking more closely at the argument for minimum pricing and the associated predictions, it becomes clear that the forecasts are based on existing data, heroic assumptions and computer number-crunching in something called the Sheffield Alcohol Policy Model (SAPM). The results of the number-crunching are quoted without estimates of error, and in particular the model completely ignores statistical error in the alcohol-harm relationship. Far from being evidence based it would be more accurate to describe these predictions as assumption based.

As my background is in statistics and epidemiology I don’t propose to comment in detail on the economic aspect of the model, other than to point out that the calculations are based on elasticities and cross-elasticities which are local linear quantities (the derivative of the demand curve)—that is they apply to small changes,

not necessarily to large ones. These quantities are not eternal constants but change from time to time and from place to place. This makes the wholesale use of economic data from other time periods or other geographical areas inappropriate and the conclusions suspect. An example is the use of economic data for England in the Scottish version of the model, and in general where appropriate data (in terms of geography and time period) are not available the model is just run with whatever data the modellers can find. Since elasticity is an average phenomenon, there may be differences in elasticity between different subgroups. For example, if heavy drinkers are less price-sensitive than the rest of us then even the most basic model predictions will fail.

On the epidemiology side, it turns out that the risk relationships between consumption and harm used in the model are in general not known for the populations to which the model purports to predict. Most studies attempting to quantify risk and attributable risk of particular adverse health outcomes involve recording exposure to risk factors either in a healthy population followed over time for development of the health outcome (a cohort study), or in a sample of cases of the health outcome and a control sample (a case-control study), but for the vast majority of the outcomes considered there are no such studies. One way the SAPM deals with this for some conditions is to use estimates for other populations obtained 'from the literature' (and there is really no reason to believe these will apply to different populations). When there are no such estimates the model is based on what amounts to little more than numerology—making an assumption about the form of the risk, using survey data for consumption and then computing a risk function. There is no reason to think that the assumed form of any of these risk functions (for they are different for different conditions) is correct. So there is no reason to believe that the predictions of the model are correct.

The Sheffield team's approach to problems related to single instances of high consumption is even less convincing. A statistical model is used to estimate peak consumption from average consumption, for use in analyses relating adverse results of individual episodes of heavy drinking. From the available description of this model it appears to be a poor fit to such data as there is, and, as noted earlier, the drinking pattern in one week (or similar short time period) is not necessarily representative of longer periods. I am not going to go through the details, but it adds yet another imponderable into the mix.

“All models are wrong but some are useful” is a famous quotation in statistics attributed to George E.P. Box. So even if the SAPM is wrong it might still be useful. Certainly it is useful to those who want to lobby for control of alcohol consumption, but how useful is it as what it purports to do—predicting the impacts of prices on consumption and harm?

This is an empirical question, and since the model has been around for a good few years now, one might have expected the accretion of new data on price, consumption and harm to have led to testing of the model. So far the authors have preferred not to do this, instead they ‘update’ the model to fit the new data.

It’s rather like a racing tipster who claims to use an evidence-based weighted sum of form variables to predict that Likely Lad will win the 3.30 at Uttoxeter. When in fact Lively Lady wins, he tells you that he’s changed the weights (again, ‘evidence-based’) so that he would have predicted Lively Lady to win. He wants to sell you a tip for the next race. I wouldn’t buy it.

A strange aspect of the model publications is that they provide reams of data in appendices to show some of the model inputs and outputs, but oddly not enough information for a third party to rerun bits of the model. Whatever the reason for this, it also means that third parties can’t check if the model fits the changes that have occurred. Furthermore, the anomalous pattern of risk functions, and changes in these, which are noted in the following stats section pass without comment in the Sheffield publications. This and the supply of implausible estimates to *Panorama* suggest a lack of critical consideration of the model and its components by the Sheffield group.

The SAPM is certainly complex and takes many factors into account. However it is also full of unknowns, as it isn’t known how these factors actually relate to consumption and price, so dubious assumptions are used to construct the relationship. It seems unlikely that many people have read the whole description of the model critically, being content to be impressed by its apparent complexity and comprehensiveness.

Of course, a supporter of the model will ask me ‘If you’re so smart, what’s your model – what do you predict?’ My answer is that I don’t have a model and therefore I won’t make a prediction. There is not enough information around to produce a reliable model and I won’t invent one that is engineered (by undemonstrated assumptions)

to fit the prevailing facts and pretend that it is of any use for prediction. As Taleb says in *The Black Swan* about those who attempt to justify worthless predictions because ‘that’s their job’—get another job.

Appendix

This appendix lists some of the contentious issues related to application of the SAPM to Scotland in the publication *Model-based appraisal of alcohol minimum pricing and off-licensed trade discount bans in Scotland using the Sheffield alcohol policy model (v 2): Second update based on newly available data* (January 2012). Page and section numbers refer to that document.

Economic/consumption data

On-trade price data are not available for Scotland (p. 16). There is no reason to believe that 'adjustment' of the data for England will adequately represent the position in Scotland.

Price elasticities are not available for Scotland, so values for England are used (p. 99). Again there is no reason to expect these to be applicable to Scotland.

Various surveys are used to provide inputs to the model (Sections 2.1 and 2.2). The following aspects relating to validity of the survey data are in general ignored:

- Sampling variability (chance variation due to the individuals selected for sampling)

- Non-response—the response rate in the Living Costs and Food Survey is 53% (which may also lead to bias if, say, particular types of consumers are less likely to respond)
- Response bias (deliberate misreporting)
- Bias in estimated distributions arising from the length of the time period covered—the diary in the Living Costs and Food Survey covers two weeks, and it is known that where there is temporal variability (ie. respondents don't drink exactly the same amount each week) use of a short survey period leads to over-estimation of the proportion of low and high consumers and corresponding under-estimation of consumers in the middle of the range

Section 2.2.2 gives a brief description of the process used to estimate peak daily consumption from average consumption. This measure is used later, itself as a proxy for heavy episodic drinking, in analyses relating adverse results of individual episodes of heavy drinking. The regression models used require empirical verification, and the drinking pattern in one week (or similar short time period) is not necessarily representative of longer periods. The low values of R^2 obtained indicate that the regression model is not a good fit. Predictive R^2 which assesses the fit of a regression model in terms of predicting the y-value would be even lower, and it cannot be concluded that this aspect of the model is reliable.

Health risks and other forms of harm

Section 2.3 deals with the relationship between consumption and various forms of adverse health consequences. There are no direct estimates of the relationships between individual drinking habits and consequences in the population covered by the report. While there are summary statistics on harmful health outcomes 'wholly or partially attributable to alcohol' and estimated statistics on amounts drunk, the risk functions relating different amounts of consumption to different degrees of harm are not based on direct data where an individual's consumption and his/her health outcome is known. For some outcomes no relevant studies have ever been published in the literature, and as a result this crucial aspect of the model is based entirely upon assumptions.

Use of risk functions 'from the literature' (p. 33) for partially attributable chronic conditions implies an assumption that average risk functions derived from a range of

studies in various countries may appropriately be applied to the Scottish population. While the epidemiological evidence is in general strong for alcohol increasing the risk of the conditions considered, there is no evidence that the risk function values apply to the Scottish population. In fact there is strong evidence that risk functions relating alcohol to harm may differ between populations (heterogeneity in the jargon of meta-analysis), and there are obvious reasons why this should be the case. Patterns of drinking, beverage choice, varying levels of association with other risk factors and genetic aspects of the population studied are just a few reasons why apparent risk relationships might show statistically significant and meaningful differences between populations.

The methods used to estimate the risk functions between alcohol consumption and other forms of harm—crime and ‘workplace harms’ (sections 2.5 and 2.6) again do not relate to associations observed at the individual level, but are based on various forms of attribution including self-report attribution (which may of course be incorrect) and then modelling these in much the same way as for the acute conditions, but using peak consumption rather than mean consumption. There is thus no direct statistical evidence to support these estimates.

As an example of the problems of assuming the form of a risk function and then estimating its parameters from the attributable total, consider the estimated slope of the risk functions for mental and behavioural disorders due to alcohol. The estimates for mortality are in Table A4.1 and for morbidity in Table A4.2, and in Tables A5.1 and A5.2 of the previous version of the model (Purshouse *et al.*, 2009). The estimates do not appear to follow common sense patterns in relation to sex and age differences and trends over time. For example, for age 45-54 the mortality slope for females is about 30% greater than that for males, while for age 55-64 the mortality slope for females is 25% less than that for males. Again, in age group 45-54 the morbidity slope for females is nearly 40% less than that for males. And if we compare the 2009 and 2012 estimates we see that the mortality slope for males aged 45-54 decreased by 30%, while the mortality slope for females of this age increased by 30%.

Figure 3.10 illustrates the inadequacy of the modelling approach to attribution of criminal behaviour to alcohol consumption, the lines showing gross differences between the ‘results’ using different basic assumptions. Predictions cannot seriously be sustained when differences of factors of five result from different assumptions required to be made due to the lack of direct evidence.

Section 2.6 describes sensitivity analyses and adjustments of survey data. The sensitivity analyses should not be confused with allowing for sampling and other sources of statistical error. The basic assumptions that underpin the approach are not questioned in these analyses.

Limitations – admitted and not admitted

The authors of the report present a number of limitations in section 4.2. In the section on consumption they fail to mention sampling variation, variability of individual consumption over time and response issues related to the surveys used. They do not mention the assumptions required in constructing the relationship between the price distribution and the consumption values of the respondents to the surveys.

In the section on elasticities they acknowledge that there is no detailed longitudinal study of purchase and consumption of alcohol, and that the methodology may be inadequate (p. 99).

In section 4.2.2 they acknowledge considerable uncertainty regarding the relationship between alcohol and crime, but do not mention the difficulties associated with quantifying risk functions for the Scottish population for other consequences.

The above is not an exhaustive list of the difficulties associated with the SAPM, but demonstrate that the results of the model reflect speculation (or assumptions) made regarding the model components. No degree of statistical confidence can be placed in the values produced. The models relating health consequences to consumption cannot be considered reliable as they are based almost entirely on assumptions with no direct individual level data relating consumption and consequences. They are not fit for the purpose of estimating rates of consequences, far less changes in these following policy changes.

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