ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Alcohol Consumption, Gender Identities and Women's Changing Social Positions

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Abstract Young adults in Western countries are drinking more alcohol than ever before, particularly young women. This study aimed to explore how women are (re)defining their gender identities in relation to men through consumption of alcohol. Eight friendship discussion groups were conducted in Auckland, New Zealand, with 16 women and 16 men aged 20–29 years. Participants viewed binge drinking as a routine, normal part of everyday life. Women's drinking was linked to pleasure and fun, with positive descriptions of female participants who were frequently intoxicated. However, other drunk women were positioned as deviant and breaking traditional codes of femininity. Findings are discussed in terms of women's changing social positions and the accomplishment of gender identities through local communities of practice.

Keywords Alcohol · Gender · Femininities · Masculinities · Communities of practice

Introduction

In recent years there has been a marked increase in alcohol consumption amongst young women in Western countries. Traditionally much lighter drinkers, they are now rapidly catching up with their male peers (e.g., Alcohol Concern

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2000; Motluk 2004). Over the 5-year period from 1995 to 2000, women in New Zealand (NZ) increased their overall alcohol consumption while men's drinking remained constant (MacPherson et al. 2004). Women, especially those aged between 18–29 years, now drink more alcohol in any one sitting than ever before, and are also now more likely to agree with the belief that 'it's OK to get drunk now and again' (Habgood et al. 2001). Such changes in drinking patterns have consequences for risky behaviours (such as unprotected sex) whilst under the influence of alcohol (Alcohol Concern 2000), and for longer term health as the morbidity and mortality effects of alcohol misuse extend to women (Wilsnack and Wilsnack 1997). These changes have led to a moral panic about women's drinking (Holmila and Raitasalo 2005) despite cross-cultural research showing that men continue to drink more often and more heavily than women internationally (Rahav et al. 2006).

At present we do not fully understand these changes in the drinking patterns of young adults. Little qualitative research has investigated the increase in binge drinking that has occurred, or explored the motivations and outcomes of such drinking among young adults (Coleman and Cater 2005). The present study drew on a critical psychological approach to explore and theorise contemporary constructions of gender and femininity in relation to alcohol and drinking behaviour. By drawing on the notion that gender is performative (Butler 1990), and that masculinities and femininities are continuously (re)created within local communities of practice (CoPs; Paechter 2003), this study explored gender, identity and drinking behaviour through friends' discussions with each other.

Previous research examining gender differences in drinking has tended to focus on 'problem' drinking and clinically diagnosed participants, which ignores the 'everyday' nature of most young people's drinking behaviour.

Structural and material factors such as the cost and opportunity of drinking, as well as women having been targeted as an alcohol market (Plant 1997; Waterson 2000), may tell us that women have the means to drink more alcohol, but not their motivations for doing so. Alcohol consumption has been linked to the construction of traditional masculine identities (e.g., Kaminer and Dixon 1995; Willott and Griffin 1997), and gender stereotypes link drinking to manliness (Lemle and Mishkind 1989). Increases in women's drinking may therefore be seen as reflecting changes in women's social positions. Women are increasingly entering public domains which have traditionally been dominated by men (e.g. employment) and have greater opportunities to engage in traditionally 'male' leisure activities such as frequent public drinking (Day et al. 2004; Wilsnack et al. 2000; Mőller-Leimkűhler et al. 2002). However, research questions which simply link gender roles with drinking have been said to be "overly restrictive" (McCreary et al. 1999, p. 2), and little research has investigated the contexts of women's drinking, their drinking patterns (Montemurro and McClure 2005), or the meanings women attach to their drinking (Day et al. 2004).

Drinking alcohol is a gendered activity. According to Ahlström and Österberg (2004/2005), young adult males drink more often than young adult females in almost every society. Drinking patterns are less differentiated by gender during adolescence, however once into adulthood "young women tend to consume less alcohol, drink less frequently, and get drunk less than young men" (Ahlström and Österberg 2004/2005, p. 625). A recent cross-cultural comparison of 29 countries reported men's drinking to be both heavier and more prevalent than women's, but that the gap between the genders depended on the modernization of the country and the position of women in society (Rahav et al. 2006). Evidence also suggests that the cultural meanings of women's social roles may have an important effect on the quantity of women's drinking (Gmel et al. 2000).

Theorising Gender

Rather than viewing and measuring gender in terms of static roles and personality traits, a more fruitful approach is provided by social constructionist theory. This posits that women and men think and act how they do because of concepts about femininity and masculinity that they adopt from their culture (Courtenay 2000). Thus, gender resides not in the person but in social transactions and daily activities defined as gendered (Crawford 1995). As Measham (2002) has stated, "masculinities and femininities are not something imposed upon men and women, but something men and women accomplish themselves on an ongoing basis, constructed in specific social situations in which people find themselves" (p. 351). Conceiving of gender as a continually

negotiated and tenuous identity achieved through repeated (and shared) practices (Paechter 2003) may advance our knowledge in this field.

For example, Campbell (2000) has employed the ideas of hegemonic masculinity and gender performativity to investigate pub drinking practices in rural New Zealand. His findings demonstrate that male drinking practices in rural pubs persist because they are a site of male power and legitimacy in rural community life. Through this public performance of masculinity, dominant understandings of legitimate masculine behaviour are reinforced and defended. Importantly, this was always *in relation to* femininity, such that "pub(lic) masculinity involved not so much a striving towards some defined ideal of masculinity as a desperate struggle to avoid and negate any accusation or appearance of femininity" (Campbell 2000, p. 576). Investigating gender identities in this way requires entry to those places inhabited by men or women to discover how masculinities/femininities are acted out and understood in particular localized settings (Whitehead 2002). It also requires us to view gender as relative and constructed in relation to 'the other'. This resonates strongly with Paechter's (2003) recent ideas about CoPs.

The notion of a 'community of practice' was put forward in an education context by Wenger to more fully understand learning as situated in social contexts. Put simply, a CoP is a group who has shared histories of learning which provides a source of local coherence (Wenger 1998). Such collective learning "results in practices that reflect both the pursuit of our enterprises and the attendant social relations" (Wenger 1998, p. 45). Paechter (2003) has applied this notion of CoPs to understanding gender identities, viewing gender as performative (Butler 1990), and masculinities and femininities as many and various (but fully implicated in power relations making some easier to take up and enact than others). She engagingly argues that masculinities and femininities can be treated as CoPs in which people learn what it is to be male and female within particular localised communities (see also Connell 1995), and in this way emphasises the importance of specific local contexts (Paechter 2006).

Our concepts of maleness and femaleness are constructed in opposition to one another and tied to dichotomous structure (Jay 1981). Hidden in this structure are hierarchical assumptions about what it is to be male and female. Jay (1981) argues that taken-for-granted dichotomies are important to recognise when theorising gender, as they are all-encompassing: if male is one thing, female is the opposite (e.g. hard/soft; light/dark; public/private; nature/nurture). Therefore there is a relativity between masculinities and femininities which cannot be ignored, and power is centrally involved in this relationship (Kraack 1999). As Connell (1995) has argued, gender is relational and power-based, and
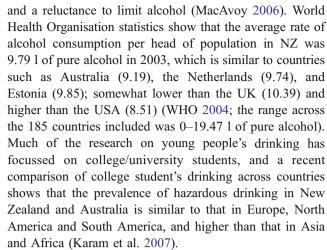
constructed through everyday social interactions. Particular versions of masculinities and femininities arise out of, but are also enacted in, local CoPs (Paechter 2003). Individuals belong to a wide range of communities, which have different norms and in which they hold different positions. Therefore they have a range of gendered identities which are available to draw upon and use strategically in various situations (Mills 2002).

Such an account of gender identities may be useful when applied to understanding young adults' drinking patterns. By focusing on the notion of particular localised masculine and feminine identities which are learned and enacted within familiar and local drinking contexts (or CoPs), we may gain further insight into the meanings of drinking in young adults, particularly women. One major advantage of this approach is that it can capture dynamics, complexity and change: while CoPs may work to sustain particular masculinities and femininities, practice itself is "not fixed, but fluid; the practices of a particular community are constantly being shifted renegotiated and reinvented" (Paechter 2003, p. 71). Masculinities and femininities can be examined for their local, shifting and fluid practices, but by drawing on concepts around binary oppositions (Jay 1981), it can be argued that these are always *in relation to one another*. This approach reinforces the postmodern view of the subject as shifting, complex, diverse, localised and historically dependent (Hird 1998), with individuals engaging in various and multiple masculinities and femininities which change based on time, location and social context (Paechter 2003). Thus while gender may influence drinking alcohol, drinking alcohol may also be seen as a way of 'doing gender' and accomplishing both traditional and non-traditional gender identities (e.g. Measham 2002; Peralta 2007).

Alcohol in Aoteoroa/New Zealand

Alcohol was introduced to New Zealand (NZ) by Europeans during the nineteenth century. The Māori (the indigenous population of NZ) response to alcohol was diverse, and during the early decades of colonisation alcohol was non-problematic for many Māori (Mancall et al. 2000). Now Māori drink as often as Pākehā (NZer of European descent) but have higher levels of hazardous drinking and a higher prevalence of alcohol disorders than Pākehā or Pacific Islanders in NZ (Wells et al. 2007).

Contemporary New Zealand has a liberal alcohol environment with a wide availability of alcohol (Habgood et al. 2001). The legal purchasing age was lowered in 1999 from 20 to 18 years of age. The drinking culture in NZ has been said to be very similar to that in the UK, where there is a general tolerance of drunkenness, a lack of concern about physical and mental well-being in relation to alcohol

and a reluctance to limit alcohol (MacAvoy 2006). World Health Organisation statistics show that the average rate of alcohol consumption per head of population in NZ was 9.79 l of pure alcohol in 2003, which is similar to countries such as Australia (9.19), the Netherlands (9.74), and Estonia (9.85); somewhat lower than the UK (10.39) and higher than the USA (8.51) (WHO 2004; the range across the 185 countries included was 0–19.47 l of pure alcohol). Much of the research on young people's drinking has focussed on college/university students, and a recent comparison of college student's drinking across countries shows that the prevalence of hazardous drinking in New Zealand and Australia is similar to that in Europe, North America and South America, and higher than that in Asia and Africa (Karam et al. 2007).

In terms of identity, the traditionally masculine sphere of the pub has been a significant part of Pākehā male identity since colonisation (Phillips 1987). The pub was viewed in opposition to the domestic spheres of women (Guyatt 2005), although NZ women's drinking patterns changed following World War Two and their consumption has continued to rise ever since (Kraack 1999). Over this time women's involvement in public drinking has increased and become more acceptable, thereby contesting the dominant masculine currency of the pub (Kraack 1999).

The Current Study

These conceptualisations of gender and identity may assist in progressing our understandings of firstly, the increase in young women's drinking behaviour; secondly, the relationship between alcohol consumption and the construction and projection of identities; and thirdly, how this intersects with gender and gender relations. The current study views gender and identity as performative (Butler 1990), negotiated (Courtenay 2000) and tied to local CoPs (Paechter 2003). Relating these conceptualisations of the person to drinking practices in a localised manner provides a solid starting point to investigate changes in young adults' drinking behaviour. Specifically, this study aimed to explore contemporary constructions of femininity, and how young women are (re) defining their gender identities in relation to men and the traditional masculine ethos of consuming alcohol in public. In order to do this, current ways in which groups of male and female friends talk about alcohol and their drinking were examined. We focussed on the following specific research questions:

1. How do groups of friends of young men and women talk about their alcohol consumption?
2. What reasons do participants give for their alcohol consumption and drinking behaviour in discussions with friends?

3. Is women's drinking discussed in different ways to men's drinking within the friendship groups?
4. How is alcohol, and women's drinking more generally, discussed within the friendship groups?
5. Are discussions about drinking alcohol among a group of friends related to gender identity, and if so, how?

Method

Procedure

The study was conducted in Auckland, NZ. This is the largest city in NZ, with a population of over 1.3 million (Tourism Auckland 2007). An ethnically diverse city with over 180 ethnic groups, Auckland's main inhabitants in 2001 consisted of Europeans (65.7% of the population), Māori (8.4%), Pacific Islanders (13.7%) and Asian peoples (18%) (Auckland City 2007).

Potential participants were approached via worksites in the city centre (e.g., banks, department stores, law firms, insurance companies), through word-of-mouth and other snowballing techniques. People were asked if they and their friends would be willing to talk to a researcher about their experiences of going out drinking together. Those who were interested had the opportunity to ask questions about the research, and were reassured of confidentiality and anonymity of quotes. Groups of friends who agreed to participate were contacted to arrange a mutually convenient time and place for the group discussion (usually a workplace or somebody's home). The semi-structured group discussions lasted between one and two hours, and were tape-recorded with the permission of the participants. Food (pizza and snacks) and (non-alcoholic) drinks were provided. The discussions began with questions about typical drinking behaviour (where, who with, how much, how often, what), and went on to cover other topics around drinking alcohol, including: ideal night out, behaviour while drinking, other drugs, women's drinking, and the drinking culture in NZ.

Friendship Groups

The use of focus group discussions with participants who are already acquainted has a number of benefits. It enhances credibility in terms of approximating naturally occurring social environments in which discussions take place (Barbour and Kitzinger 1999; Kitzinger 1994). They can be seen as "peer group conversations" (Gamson 1992, cited in Suter 2000), indexing pre-existing relationships (Suter 2000). Thus participants will have already developed

a sense of rapport as a group, and may find it easier to share personal opinions and experiences, and draw on shared experiences and events. Further, familiarity is linked with informality, resulting in freer debate and enabling researchers to see how topics were talked about in everyday social settings (Crossley 2002). The use of friendship groups is useful for exploring young adults' views and experiences of drinking, as they are local CoPs in and of themselves, given that the research participants form the group who goes out drinking together. By engaging young male and female friends in conversations about their drinking practices it was hoped that the discussions around drinking would be open, honest and relaxed, and would enable an analysis of the negotiation, construction and accomplishment of identities.

Participants and Groups

Eight friendship group discussions were conducted, with a total of 32 participants (16 females; mean age 24.6 years). There was one interviewer in each group (two interviewers across groups); both were female and older than the participants. Each group was given a name loosely based on participants' employment within the group (group participants did not all work in the same workplace but did tend to have similar types of employment). Details of the groups and individual participants are provided in Table 1. No specific mix of gender was requested; by chance seven groups were mixed sex while one group consisted of all female participants.

Table 1 Details of discussion groups and participants (N=32).

Group	Number	Ages	Gender and ethnicity
IT	5	21–25	2 females (1 Asian NZ, 1 Pakeha)
			3 males (all Pakeha)
Media	4	24–26	3 females (2 Pakeha, 1 Pakeha/Tongan)
			1 male (Māori)
Professional	5	25–29	1 female (Māori)
			3 males (1 Pakeha, 1 Pakeha/ Samoan, 2 Asian NZ)
Creative	4	25–27	2 females (both Pakeha)
			2 males (both Pakeha)
Retail	3	20–25	1 female (Māori/Austria)
			2 males (both Pakeha)
Film and beauty	3	25–27	2 females (both Pakeha)
			1 male (Pakeha)
Sales and trade	4	22–26	2 females (both Pakeha)
			2 males (both Pakeha)
Administrative	4	22–23	4 females (all Pakeha)

Analytic Approach

This was an inductive study which emphasised exploration and theory building (Morse 1992). The group discussions were transcribed verbatim and transcripts analysed initially using thematic decomposition. This involves close readings whereby text is separated into coherent themes or stories (Stenner 1993), enabling an examination of shared understandings and constructions of specific themes and issues. A Foucauldian style of discourse analysis was then employed.

Discourse analysis is a methodological approach which is now well-established in critical social psychology (Parker 1992; Wetherell et al. 2001), having been introduced into Anglo-American psychology in the late 1970s (Willig 2001). It has been usefully applied to many social issues, including the construction of masculine identities (Edley and Wetherell 1997) class identities (Holt and Griffin 2005), asylum seeking and immigration (Capdevila and Callaghan 2008), men's emotion talk (Walton et al. 2004), pro-eating disorder websites (Day and Keys 2008); as well as media accounts of women's drinking (Day et al. 2004), portrayals of alcohol in women's magazines (Lyons et al. 2006), young adults' drinking (Szmigin et al. 2008) and teenagers who choose *not* to drink alcohol (Nairn et al. 2006). In broad terms, discourse analysis is concerned with how meanings are produced and reproduced in talk and text (Parker 1994). It is particularly attuned to how discourse is produced through, and produces, categories such as social class and gender (Hird 1998). It views discourse as constructive, and relations of power and structure as an inherent part of that discourse (Parker 1999). It also acknowledges the sociopolitical and historical context of the discourse (Lupton 1992). While the two approaches to discourse analysis (the 'bottom-up' inductive approach and the 'top-down' discursive perspective) are sometimes viewed as antagonistic, they can be used effectively and beneficially to produce a grounded analysis which includes consideration of more abstract patterns of historically contextualised discourse (see Willott and Griffin 1997).

In conducting the analysis, all names were changed to ensure anonymity. The interviews were transcribed, read, re-read, and the tapes re-listened to. A two-stage analytic process followed: first, a thematic analysis was undertaken, and second, identified themes were subject to a discursive analysis. Six main themes in the eight transcripts were identified by AL with full agreement from SW (namely: amount of alcohol consumed, frequency of drinking, choice of drinks, reasons for drinking, negative aspects of drinking, and locations of drinking). A paid research assistant examined the transcripts independently, and also identified six main themes. Five of these were consistent with those identified earlier, giving an inter-rater agreement of 83.3%. The research assistant identified one additional theme (alcohol and other drugs) and did not identify one previous theme (locations of drinking). All of the seven themes identified by the researchers were included for the next step of the analysis.

AL examined the themes with a focus on gender, and identified inconsistencies apparent in the participants' talk about gender issues and women's drinking. For example, male and female participants talked about women's drinking as a sign of 'equality', but at different times they also commented that they perceived women's drinking much more negatively than men's drinking. These inconsistencies were documented as 'discourses', or ways of talking about an issue whereby the inconsistencies were not so obvious (e.g. 'equality' discourse, 'double standards' discourse), and justified with the use of participants' quotes by AL. This documentation was then sent to SW who listened to the audiotapes and re-read the transcripts with the identified inconsistencies and discourses in mind. SW agreed with all of the inconsistencies identified, added further quotes as exemplars of specific discourses, and made suggestions as to theoretical meanings of specific findings. Our different backgrounds provide some reassurance that this stage of the data analysis was robust; while we are both women of white European ethnicity, in our late 30s and early 40s, we come from different countries, cultures and working environments (AL is a NZer employed as an academic in NZ; SW is British and employed as a clinical psychologist in England). We conducted this analysis while working at a distance from one another, with only the audiotapes and transcripts shared. Thus, despite our different cultural and employment backgrounds and our geographical independence, we were in agreement regarding the discourses and their theoretical implications, suggesting robustness and credibility in this analytic process.

Results

The four sections below address the first four research questions, with a description of the data and results of the analysis, using quotes as exemplars of particular points. The final research question (are discussions about drinking alcohol among a group of friends related to gender identity, and if so, how?) is examined throughout all of the analysis, as it is embedded in the groups' talk as they discussed a range of different topics around drinking and alcohol.

How Do Groups of Friends of Young Men and Women Talk About Their Alcohol Consumption?

Overall, male and female participants described going out with their friends and drinking large amounts of alcohol regularly (two to four times a week). All of the participants took part in this behaviour except two (as discussed below).

The administration group drank less often than the other groups, although still talked about 'big nights' out. A 'big night' out was usually on the weekend and all of the participants who did drink said they could estimate quite clearly how much drinking such a night out would involve ('Int' refers to Interviewer):

IT group

Richard: Aw, 2 bottles of wine, maybe 14, 15 beers

John: Yeah, probably a little bit less for me

✂<(small portion of transcript cut here)

Patricia: I'd be about 2 bottles of wine as well. That's probably my limit in a space of 4 hours or so.

In the extract above, Patricia estimates that the amount she would drink on a 'big night' out is the same as Richard's and John's (two bottles of wine). This demonstrates their CoP in operation: participants draw on each other's answers and say they drink similar amounts, establishing group norms. However although the males answer first, Patricia bolsters her similar response by drawing on a time limit (in 4 h or so), suggesting she knows how much she would drink, in what amount of time, and that that is her 'limit'. Limits were particularly important within the retail group's descriptions of how much they drank, with all of the participants stating they drank simply until they could not physically drink anymore:

Retail group

Jeremy: I ( ), I don't know, I haven't, just trying to think. I think the maximum's usually when you get sick (...)

✂<

Don: (...) If it's just beers, I'm like Jeremy, I probably could just drink beers all night, like, providing I do it at a normal rate, I'm not like skulling them back as fast as I can {laughs}. Which has happened and then I spew.

✂<

Int: Yeah. {to Alice} So what about your maximum?

Alice: Ummm, Jesus. Probably till I can't really stand anymore. I dunno, and like, again, that depends what I'm drinking.

In this excerpt the males respond initially, and when Alice is asked directly about her maximum amount of drinking she responds that she also drinks until she has reached a physical limit. However, rather than being sick, she drinks until she cannot stand up anymore. Alice

qualifies her answer by saying that it depends on what she is drinking, but as with the IT group, this shows group norms for these CoPs.

One male and one female participant from different groups commented that they did not drink very much. James (from the professional group) said he doesn't often drink, and doesn't go out for the purpose of having a drink. Despite this initial claim, this group later tell a story in which they were out and James drank many cocktails (his own and others). James responds to this story by stating that "I rarely drink but I *can* drink a lot" to which everyone responds by laughing and agreeing. Thus he establishes his identity as someone who can drink a lot, which conforms to the group norm, namely that being able to drink a lot is a positive skill to possess. A very similar pattern was seen with Tania in the IT group.

IT group

Tania: So it is kind of like, I get a lot of people who are really surprised when I tell them I hardly ever drink, I just don't drink.

Int: Mm

Patricia: But it's not like from like a moral standpoint or anything

Tania: Mm, *no way*, it's not a *moral* thing. I mean, if I could drink, I would drink a *shitload*, if I could.

Patricia: {laughs}

Tania: That's coz I *want* to, but because I can't, I don't. That's the only reason, that's the only thing holding me back from drinking like a fish {laughs} because I can't handle it.

Here Tania's detailed justification for why she does not drink demonstrates that it is normative for a woman in this CoP to drink alcohol (people are 'really surprised' she doesn't drink), and also highlights how much importance is attached to excessive drinking. Patricia emphatically rejects any notion that Tania's choice not to drink is a 'moral' one, and Tania reinforces this by emphasising that she would drink 'a shitload' if she could. Within this CoP members work together to successfully provide Tania with an identity that is aligned with 'heavy drinker' despite the fact she does not drink. This is inconsistent with traditional stereotypes that heavy alcohol consumption is a masculine activity (Montemurro and McClure 2005). It also does not fit with current negative and condemnatory media representations of women's excessive drinking (Day et al. 2004). The female participants in this study reported that they did not drink as much as the males overall, but did engage in heavy drinking nevertheless. Their binge drinking and drunkenness was part of having fun

with friends and enjoying a night out, and having shared experiences and stories to tell later. Indeed stories were jointly told by participants in the group, highlighting their shared histories and demonstrating CoPs in operation.

Engaging in heavy drinking (or aligning oneself with this behaviour, as Tania does) could be viewed as subverting hegemonic versions of masculinity through appropriation of such traditional masculine behaviour. Kraack's (1999) ethnographic study of a student pub in Dunedin, NZ, has similarly found that women drinkers gained some credibility by acting like their male counterparts. Kraack argues that this appropriation of hegemonic practices does not directly challenge them, but does "legitimise a form of femininity that is complicit with rather than subordinate to men" (p. 161). In the current study, a woman may drink heavily to take on an identity that more closely aligns her as 'one of the boys', gaining her approval and acceptance from within her CoP. She is rewarded by being a 'legitimate' and competent member of the community, and can be viewed as appropriating hegemonic masculine behaviours and legitimising alternative forms of femininity which functions to gain her some of the power of the dominant position. However, the hierarchical structuring of gender remains, with behaviours aligned to hegemonic masculinity being valued.

What Reasons Do Participants Give for Their Alcohol Consumption and Drinking Behaviour in Discussions with Friends?

Participants talked about drinking primarily for enjoyment and for sociability, discussing how drinking was fun and pleasurable for relaxation, for taste, and as a stress release. Patricia highlights the fundamentally pleasurable aspect of alcohol for 'making fun times more fun' in the following quote:

IT group

Patricia: you know how soap, I don't know if you ever used to watch like um Sesame Street or those kids' science programmes. They explained soap as working so well because it makes water wetter. Like it, I dunno, it gets between the molecules and the weave of fabric and crap like that and works better. It [alcohol] kind of makes fun times more fun, if that makes sense. Like it makes you happier, it makes you more personable, you're less worried about things that you might have been worried about, even though it's a depressive. I don't understand how that works.

The widespread and well-established cultural discourses of alcohol as a social lubricant and as 'fun' were drawn on

by all participants, consistent with previous research (e.g. Kuntsche et al. 2005). Abel and Plumridge (2004) found that NZ teenage girls saw alcohol primarily as a means to increase sociability and ease relations between the genders. Enjoyment of being drunk was mentioned in all the groups, as shown in the extract below:

Creative group

Tracy: It gives you confidence, like, especially to talk to other people that you're not that comfortable with, I think

Simon: (Um) confidence, yeah. It's enjoyable being drunk. Um, um, things are funnier. Ah ..it's just an enjoyable, it's an enjoyable experience to be drunk.

The deliberate effort that the participants put into being drunk to experience enjoyment is very similar to recent UK findings which showed that young adults actively managed their drinking in specific ways as a potential source of pleasure (Szmigin et al. 2008). These researchers used the term 'calculated hedonism' to capture how young adults saw their drinking almost entirely positively as a form of pleasure.

The act of drinking alcohol was also described by half of the groups (4/8) as 'what you do' as a New Zealander:

Professional group

Mark: it's, it's a, I don't know, it's a social thing, it's a, what a lot of New Zealanders do, we go out, have a few drinks. And I would go out with people I work with, people that I knew from varsity, people that I used to work with, um, these guys and, um, whoever's out, whoever's ready. {laughter}

Jack: Well it's the truth, man

Mark's statement, the laughter, and then Jack's reinforcement of Mark's position as 'the truth', highlights the performative nature of drinking behaviour. To be a 'New Zealander' you engage in the behaviour that NZers engage in, which is to go out and have a few drinks (with whomever). Participants in the IT group described drinking as 'natural' behaviour for NZers:

IT group

Patricia: =It's a really natural thing to have...beer around or wine around, or to have a drink, to go to the pub and have a drink.

Tania: Mm

Patricia: If you had a barbecue, it would be, I think, considered...more odd to *not* have alcohol there than to have alcohol there

✄

Patricia: It's just part of our culture, eh?

Tania: Yeah, it's just part of it, it's just what you do

Peter: Even get foreigners coming in saying "oh, so I hear Kiwis can drink pretty well."

Here there is a NZ cultural understanding that drinking is 'what you do as a Kiwi', and this is drawn on explicitly in these localised friendship groups to help explain the drinking of the group. The 'naturalness' of drinking in Kiwis works to overshadow any difference in subgroup drinking, such as in women or in specific age groups, and aligns 'being a Kiwi' with traditional masculine behaviours. Wilson (2005) has highlighted the strong impact drinking alcohol has on national identity throughout cultures around the world.

Is Women's Drinking Discussed in Different Ways to Men's Drinking within the Friendship Groups?

The performative nature of drinking was also seen with *what* participants drank. Drinking beer was a gendered performance: Males primarily drank beer (14 out of 16 said this was what they tended to drink), and females primarily did not drink beer (four out of 16 said they did drink beer). Participants also said they drank wine (nine males, eight females) and spirits (eight males, ten females). In the following excerpt Tania and John both work together to point out that men drink beer even if they do not like it ('that's what guys do'), and Mark says the same thing in the professional group:

IT group

Patricia: Like I know some people who *don't* like it but drink it coz they're expected=

John: = And I kind of agree with that coz when the first like, the first like year or couple of years of drinking beer I really didn't like the taste of it

Patricia: See, there you go

John: So I was like, that's what I did coz like I knew

Tania: [that's what guys do

John: [that's what guys do, so it's like, I will drink beer, and now I actually do like it. I've like, come around to it.

Professional group

Mark: Beer, beer for social situations. I don't actually like beer but you gotta drink it.

Some male participants drank beer not for the taste or the pleasure, but because it is simply 'what you do' as a man. Beer

is integral to masculinity and power in NZ (Hardy 2007) and drinking beer "is understood as a gendered and embodied activity" (Campbell et al. 1999, p. 167). Campbell and colleagues note that historically drinking beer in pubs and other locations was associated with a particular form of hegemonic masculinity in NZ which involved the subordination of women, as well as other versions of masculinity. Changes in social life and economic liberalisation throughout the 1970s and 1980s have made the beer/masculinity project more complex, and beer now has more than one image to appeal to different consumers (Campbell et al. 1999). Nevertheless, advertisers still draw heavily on the association between beer and 'hard man' masculinity in NZ. Participants drew on these notions in their CoPs, where everyone shares the understanding that 'that's what guys do'. Both males and females worked together in their groups to establish and justify this.

The link between beer and strong versions of masculinity was also reinforced in the professional group, where women drinking beer was linked to a lower social 'class' of woman:

Professional group

James: (...) for example, when, like, women drink *beer* coz when I was growing up women just didn't drink beer

Int: Mm-hm

James: you know, they might drink, say, wine, or they might, if they had spirits or something like, just rum and Coke, but *beer* was the, the '*man's* drink' type thing

✄

James: Yeah, not something a *well* brought up lass would do.

James derides women who drink beer by stating that such women are not "well brought up". No-one in this group challenged James' derogatory views on women drinking beer. Newspapers in the UK also portray women who drink in traditionally masculine ways, such as 'downing a pint', negatively, reinforcing the view that this sort of drinking is not normative (Day et al. 2004). In magazines, women's drinks are shown to be cocktails, spirits, wine, and champagne and described as glamorous and sparkling, while men's drink is shown quite simply as beer (Lyons et al. 2006).

In the retail group, however, Don described women drinking pints (of beer) as 'cool', as shown below:

Don: (...)= I reckon that's actually (cooler) like, if I, if I was in a bar and like, there's kind of like the girls you were describing before, like all tarted up and stuff and they were all drinking their cocktails and whatever, and then there's another girl and she's drinking like, a pint of beer,

(you'd be like) "Aw, yeah, that's cool, man. I'm gonna go talk to her" {laughter}

✂

Don: Yeah, if they're drinking pints as well, there's kind of a chance that they're kind of more similar to you, if you know what I mean. Like, they might be easier to get on with because they're less hung up on other, like, real girly, hyper girly kind of stuff

Jeremy: Depends what's hanging off the other end of the handle, though, eh.

Here Don comments that a woman drinking a pint is appealing, and contrasts such women with 'hyper girly' women who are dressed up drinking cocktails. Don appears to be inverting the class distinction James made in the professional group. However, Jeremy points out that even if a woman is drinking a pint, it still depends on "what's hanging off the other end of the handle": in other words, what she is drinking is irrelevant if she is not attractive. Here women are objectified and subordinated by continuing to be defined by their appearance and appeal to men.

Two of the 16 female participants said they tended to drink *only* beer. In describing their beer drinking, female participants engaged in much justification and discursive 'work':

Media group

Nadia: I drink, I *really* like beer. No that's a lie, I *love* beer, like I love, I really, really love it, really really {some laughter}

Christine: Whenever I think of Nadia and drinks, it's always beer.

Nadia's emphatic insistence on liking beer in this extract, and Christine's reinforcement of Nadia's claim, works to highlight the uniqueness of women drinking beer. Nadia's claim that she "really loves" beer is difficult to make as a woman, as this is a gender performance that does not fit into dominant gender constructions. Nadia's beer drinking can be seen as a performance which acts as a site of resistance (Guyatt 2005), subverting hegemonic constructions of gender. This behaviour is supported in her friendship group, giving it local positive meaning.

The way in which women drink, and what they drink, was described in traditionally feminine ways and tended to focus on notions of impressions and appearances:

Creative group

Carla: I know, I know girls that, that won't drink beer because, um—well, they've never, it's never really spoken about, but you know, of you're gonna get glammed up and do your hair and put your high heels on, it's, it's more likely to see girls like that drinking a glass of wine

[or bubbly

Matthew: [Yeah, which is again circumstance. Where you're going out, isn't it? Like ( )=

Simon: = I guess it's also part of, like, the overall impression ( )

Matthew: [Well, that's right, yeah

Carla: [Yeah

Int: So what sort of impression is that?

Carla: That, I guess that beer is a more masculine drink and girls tend to probably drink beer more out of a glass if they're like that as well rather than out of a bottle

Tracy: But out of a can it, like, smudges your lipstick too.

In the above extract, participants described the appearance of the drink matching the appearance of the woman. Carla points out that beer is a 'more masculine drink' and therefore when women drink it they do so in more traditionally feminine ways: out of a glass rather than a bottle or a can. In this way women are subverting the beer/masculinity association by engaging in the behaviour but performing it in feminine ways: that is, they are thinking about how drinking the beer will look and how it will affect their makeup.

The types of beverages that people drink and the meanings they hold is tied into both local and broader CoPs. Cultural contexts influence what men and women drink, as do changes in cultures. For example, women in a small Greek town were found to drink a much more varied range of alcoholic drinks following a period of increased tourism in the town, including beer, while men in the town increased their consumption of imported spirits (Moore 1995). Across 12 countries in Europe, men primarily drink beer and women wine, although there are cultural exceptions: women drink more beer than wine in Finland, and drink equal amounts of beer and wine in Iceland and the Czech Republic (Mäkelä et al. 2006). In NZ, beer is the most popular type of alcoholic beverage (Statistics New Zealand 2007). In the current study the associations made between women and beer varied across the groups, demonstrating how local meanings are attached to gender performances in different CoPs.

How is Alcohol, and Women's Drinking More Generally, Discussed Within the Friendship Groups?

The friendship groups discussed changes in women's drinking behaviour, the increase in (particularly young) women drinking and the number of young women being drunk in public. Participants talked about how women's

social roles have been changing, and groups frequently mentioned that women are delaying childbearing or choosing not to have children which gives them more 'freedom' to go out and drink. They also mentioned women having more money, being financially independent, and the change in environments in which women can drink. Traditionally the spaces in which women consumed alcohol were much more private and domestic (drinking at home). However in recent years a whole new range of cafes, bars and clubs have been opened to capture young adults (Brain 2002), particularly young women, creating 'feminised' public arenas in which women can drink, as participants discussed:

Sales and trade

Gary: in New Zealand, um, there's more places for women to go and drink. You know what I mean? They don't have to go to the pub, they can go to a nice café and have a couple of glasses of wine.

In this excerpt alternatives to the traditional masculine domain of the pub are put forward by Gary as one reason for increases in women's drinking. Here women's drinking is constructed in opposition to men's traditional drinking in NZ: women drink moderately ("couple of glasses of wine") in 'nice' places compared to men's traditional excessive beer drinking at the pub (the 6 o'clock swill; Campbell et al. 1999). In discussing other changes in patterns of women's drinking, male and female participants drew on four main discourses: equality; double standards; control and responsibility; and vulnerability. Each of these discourses is described below.

Equality Discourse

Participants often drew on notions of gender 'equality' to explain increases in women's drinking. As the quote below demonstrates, women going out and drinking excessively is viewed by the IT group as simply doing 'equal stuff' to men, and being considered as 'equals':

IT group

Tania: = Yeah, but these days because of the whole

Richard: [Yeah

Tania: [independent thing, and don't have a family until you're 30 or 40

Richard: Yeah, and it's just more and more common

Tania: [More common

Richard: [for women to be like in powerful employment

Tania: Yeah

Patricia: Yeah, and be considered equals

Richard: Yeah, and so why not be out doing equal stuff?=

Patricia: = Yeah, absolutely.

Here Richard, Tania and Patricia are working together (to such an extent that they are finishing off each others' sentences) to provide a reason for women's increased drinking. They all hold a similar view and it is (literally) jointly constructed in the group. This demonstrates how meanings and understandings are shared, reinforced and perpetuated in a local CoP. A similar example of shared answering also occurred in the media group, as demonstrated below:

Media group

Christine: It probably *is* the case, I mean, in terms of, yeah, society now, society's changing, and that, yeah, I dunno whether like women, it sounds wrong, but whether it's, it's not because we're becoming more *equal*, but it's just a difference in, in

Nadia: Careers

Christine: {unsure sounding} Yeah

Jake: Just more acceptable for chicks like you guys=

Christine: [To do

Jake: [being single and you

Christine: [Yeah

Jake: just want to go out and have a good time

Christine: And to do everything that a *guy* should do

Nadia: [And working hard

Christine: [I guess. And which, which is *drinking* as well.

In this extract Jake supports his female friends' responses, but while doing so calls them "chicks" (subordinating them) but almost immediately afterwards "guys" (including them in the CoP). Jake also comments on the status of his friends "being single", implying that only under these circumstances it is acceptable for them to be going out and having a good time.

More generally, women's drinking in public is constructed as both a *consequence* of women's equality, but simultaneously as a *sign* of greater equality. The 'equality' issue is seen to be driven by women themselves, as they try to 'prove' that they are equal to men. However the young women are reticent to directly position themselves as advocating outright 'equality'. Possibly such positioning

is too close to being labelled 'feminist', as the backlash against feminism would suggest (Faludi 1991).

IT Group

Tania: I think it's part of the whole equality thing

Patricia: [Definitely

Tania: [It's like women are trying to prove they can drink just as much as guys

Patricia: And it's not=

Tania: = Not consciously but it's sort of like it is in there, part of it I think.

Here Tania and Patricia work together to produce an account of women drinking in which they see women as active agents in their drinking. This suggests positive and alternative femininities in which women's drinking is embedded within changing social situations and positions. Participants are drawing on a discourse of 'equality' to explain the increase in women's drinking, and using positive terminology to describe women's changing social roles in the workforce ('powerful employment') and what they do in their leisure time ('having a good time'). Through excessive drinking performances, women are again appropriating dominant versions of masculinity and subverting hegemonic gender constructions. Yet women's drinking remains defined and measured according to men's drinking, and functions to reinforce the 'male gaze' on women's behaviour (women internalise this gaze in attributing their own meanings to their behaviour). Rather than drinking excessively *per se*, women are drinking excessively to 'drink guys under the table' or 'match guys drink for drink'. The amount women are drinking is fully dependent upon the amount men are drinking, and the value attached to male and female drinking performances remains hierarchical; thus gender and power relations remain unchanged.

The positive attributes given to excessive drinking, and guys being impressed by such behaviour, is similar to findings with undergraduate women in the USA who were able to "drink like a guy" (Young et al. 2004). In this study women reported that being able to drink like a guy generated a sense of equality, although analysis revealed that this was more to do with emphasizing women's (hetero)sexuality, such that by acting like 'one of the guys' the women appeared more attractive to their male drinking partners.

Double Standard Discourse

There are specific exceptions to the positive and encouraging descriptions of women's drinking. Notably, older women, attractive women and women who are out in public very drunk

(and combinations of these groups) are condemned for their drinking. For example, the three males in the professional group discuss how bad these women look when they are out at bars and pubs, although in the other groups the female as well as the male participants derided other women drinking in public. In the extract below, James' initial use of hedging and qualifying statements suggests that expressing these views might be somewhat controversial. However, once Mark also admits being annoyed by (good-looking) drunk women, James becomes bolder in his assertions that he finds (all) drunk women irritating:

Professional group

Int: So when you guys are out drinking, do you see, sort of, groups of women drinking when you're at bars and things?

James: Yeah, they generally tend to be I find, tend to be like *older* women, and I always think "*God*!"

Jack: Yeah

James: "get a *hold* of yourselves", you know, I mean, that's just me, I just think "Jeepers!" but I don't know if it's a stereotype or=

✂

Mark: Good looking women who are (drunk who) annoy me {some laughter}

James: Well, yeah, *exactly*, man. I mean, I get *irritated* by women who are drunk, I mean.

Thus, while women's drinking in public is acceptable, an older woman or a woman who is drunk in public is definitely not acceptable to the three males in this group. Their comments highlight how they view drunk and/or older women drinking as having 'lost control' ("get a hold of yourselves") and state that this is possibly a widely held view ("it might be a stereotype"). In both the professional and the retail groups, the female participants did not resist or counter their male friends' views on women being drunk. In the retail group Alice reinforces such views:

Retail group

Jeremy: I think it's different scenes as well. Like, I don't know, I'm a bit of snob, but when you see like a, a group of girls all tarted up in their crop tops and long pants and stuff, they're obviously downtown for a dance and that {Alice laughs} And they're all drunk, it's just like "Aw." It's like, it (just) looks like a real bad look to me.

Alice: Yeah

Jeremy: And like that, chicks like that are usually

[(quite)

Alice: [Girls feel that way, exactly the same way when they see, you know, other girls, it's like "Aw, yeah", you can tell, you know what they're out for.

As Alice's comment demonstrates, women's derogation of other women out drinking focuses on promiscuousness and sexual waywardness. Alice agrees with her male friend's sexist comments about particular groups of women out drinking. These women are defined by their appearance ("all tarted up, crop tops") which in itself is a performance of femininity, but also by their non-respectability. If you can tell that women are out looking for sex ("you know what they're out for") they are automatically positioned as unrespectable (although men who are out looking for sex are not!). This reinforces traditional sexual double standards, and also retains traditional meanings around drinking and gender. Within these local CoPs, women are buying into the notions that going out in public and drinking heavily is associated with men and masculinity and that it is difficult for women to engage in this behaviour whilst retaining a respectable femininity (see Skeggs 1997).

Four of the discussion groups explicitly mentioned the double standards that exist between perceptions of men and women being drunk in public, with women's drinking being acceptable up to a certain point. Once very drunk, however, women are looked down upon, considered embarrassing and also 'slutty', as the following quotes demonstrate. These quotes also show that participants know they hold this double standard themselves, and that women see themselves as holding it even more than men.

Creative group

Simon: We're still, I think as Matthew was saying before, it's, I think we're still, we're adjusting to, to different, um, gender roles basically. Like, that it's OK for women to be getting drunk but I think

[I mean

Tracy: [To a level of drunkenness

Simon: Yeah, but, but I don't, I think probably there'd be people who would look down more on the young girls stumbling around the Viaduct, than the young guys stumbling out of the pub, do you know what I mean, after watching the rugby. Like, there's still some disparity there.

In the above excerpt, Simon draws on well-established discourses in NZ society regarding men's drinking, which

is strongly tied to place (the pub) and sport (rugby). Tracy qualifies Simon's claim that "it's okay for women to be getting drunk" by saying that this is only "to a level of drunkenness". Despite the women in the friendship groups drinking excessively, it appears they feel that they only reach a certain level of drunkenness and are not as drunk as the *other* unknown women who are out drunk in public. Here respectability remains an issue for women (Skeggs 1997). On the other hand, in the sales and trade group, Lydia and Gretchen are explicit in pointing out that the double standards of drunk men and women are held by the males in the group:

Sales and trade

Lydia: And it's *funny*. Like if a guy's drunk, you guys'll all be like "ha, ha, you're classic, skull another beer." But if a girl's really drunk and falling over and being disgusting

Gretchen: [You're like "Take her home" or

Lydia: [you'd be like "Take her home".

In terms of CoPs in operation, this excerpt suggests that particular embodied practices by women (being drunk and falling over) mean that men can legitimately send them home and exclude them from further participation in the group. Thus, gender and gender relations act as a form of control whereby women are (legitimately) sent out of the public realm. This excerpt also reinforces those locations seen as appropriate for men and women when they are drunk. Drunk women are aligned with domestic/private spaces ("take her home") whereas drunk men are aligned with public spaces ("haha skull another beer"). Expectations for women's behaviour in public revolve around discourses of control and responsibility, as shown in the next section.

Control and Responsibility Discourse

In the media group Nadia explicitly raises the issue about women and expectations of control, noting that 'maybe we're meant to keep control all the time'.

Media group

Christine: Yeah, I think maybe people, yeah, perhaps women might get a harder time in terms of being, like, looking like they fuckin' look really messy and too drunk and=

Nadia: = From other women as well

Christine: [Yeah, yeah

Nadia: [I reckon, I think quite prominently from other women

Christine: Yeah, and maybe it's coz we're used to accepting that guys will just be drunk and look messy but, I don't know

Nadia: But if a girl does it, she's lost control

Christine: Yeah, yeah

Int: Mm

Nadia: Well, obviously she has but {some laughter} maybe we're meant to keep control all the time. But, but, but *really* though, if I see a girl and she's, and she's like, *wayward* and dancing around, you know, and being *slutty*, like if I think that she's being slutty, I mean, maybe I would interpret her as being slutty if she *was* really drunk.

Int: Yeah

Nadia: You know? Like I freely admit that, but maybe I'm being unfair.

Here participants use discourses of control and responsibility to position others as legitimate or illegitimate members of a particular CoP, and they note that this is frequently done by women about women. This demonstrates that gender does not create a CoP in itself; rather women appear to be guarding the boundaries of their own CoPs via the use of traditional discourses of femininity. Notions of responsibility were aligned closely to talk about control. Comments about the civilising influence of women also came from women themselves, and participants talked about how they have been conditioned to be responsible and in control, making it difficult for them to 'go out and get plastered with the girls'. In the UK, Measham (2002) has also found that young women avoid getting into a state in which they lose total control due to alcohol consumption because this risks social disapproval and embarrassment, and they also showed self-policing and self-restraint in terms of intoxication "in order to stay within the boundaries of traditional femininity" (p. 358).

In all of the groups, male and female participants commented on men being independent and women 'looking after' female friends when they were out drinking:

IT group

John: I think they [women] look out for each other more than guys do sometimes

✂

John: Coz we can like fend for ourselves. It's like

Tania: [Yeah

John: [one of us gets really pissed and like, you lose them at some place, it's like, well they can look after themselves.

✂

Tania: Yeah, I notice when I go out with my girlfriends, we, we make sure we look after each other. We say "OK, where's this person, where's this person?"

In this extract John draws on notions of hard masculinity ('fend for ourselves') to describe the independence of men when they are out drinking, while Tania points out how much women 'make sure' everyone is present. The binary oppositions drawn on here (independent/dependent) reinforce hierarchical gender dichotomies where men "fend for themselves" (invoking the notion of 'man as hunter') while women "make sure they look after each other" (invoking the notion of 'woman as carer').

Although the female participants position themselves as being 'equal' to men in the world of work and play, enjoying drinking excessively with their friends, they are simultaneously aware of the contradictions that traditional feminine 'being in control' discourses provide. While these discourses are not used to problematise their own behaviour, or the behaviour of women within their own local CoPs, they are used to explain their derogatory comments about other drunk women and the double standards that exist between men and women who are drunk in public.

Vulnerability Discourse

Participants in all of the groups drew on a discourse of women being in danger and being vulnerable when they are drunk. This is consistent with media portrayals in which drinking alcohol is often represented as potentially dangerous for women (Day et al. 2004). The vulnerability discourse functioned to rationalise the double standard between perceptions of drunk men and women. The worry that both men and women have about drunk 'girls' was noted in all of the discussions, and situated in opposition to the lack of worry people have about 'guys' being drunk, as the following quotes demonstrate:

Retail group

Tracy: I think there's also a danger thing as well. Like I look at young guys=

Carla: = Mm=

Tracy: = and I'm, who are drunk and I'm like "Aw, they'll be fine." Young girls, I think "Oh god" you know "Please somebody just get them home."

The above extract provides a useful example of how gender distinctions are made in relation to one another. Tracy contrasts young guys ("they'll be fine") with the extreme concern ("oh god") about young girls ("please somebody just get them home"). Similar contrasts were observed in the film and beauty group:

Film and beauty group

Aaron: No, I was just making the point that, um, that a lot of the time when I'm down there, ( ) I'm down there 6 o'clock in the morning sometimes and there's a *lot* of people around, a *lot* of them *are* women. Or young girls ( ) (chicks).

Int: Mm

Aaron: You know, they're like 18 to 21, 22 or something like that, *maximum*. And um, a lot of them are quite pissed.

Int: So they're still=

Aaron: = You kind of notice them more coz they're quite pissed and you think "Fuck, they're vulnerable."

Int: Mm

Aaron: You know, you don't really think about it with guys.

Here (pissed) women are described in extreme terms ("fuck they're vulnerable") whereas 'pissed' men are not even registered in awareness ("you don't really think about it"). The vulnerability discourse was frequently applied to *other* women out drinking rather than the participants themselves, with one notable exception in the all-female administrative group. In this group one of the female participants described feeling vulnerable while on a dance floor. Interestingly, her worry stemmed not from her own drinking; in fact she notes that she hadn't been drinking. Rather her comments suggest her feeling of vulnerability stemmed from being out without any male friends:

Administrative group

Melinda: and we were dancing and I hadn't even been drinking but um, we were just dancing and this other guy who *had* been drinking, well, I assumed he had been, just came from nowhere, just grabbed my boobs and I was like {takes in breath sharply}, you know, and, but we weren't with any guys so, you know, I felt like "I can't slap him", I felt like it, but I was just like "Oh my god, what am I gonna

do?" (It feels like), you know, your friends, coz if you do slap them then what are they gonna do *next* sort of thing, you know?

All: Yeah

Melinda: You feel really vulnerable, really sort of quite, yeah.

This excerpt demonstrates that the female participants felt vulnerable without a male in their group when they were out. This reinforces the dependent/independent dichotomy mentioned earlier, but here women are positioning themselves as dependent *on men* to keep them safe, rather than dependent on each other. Why this was observed only in the all-female group is unclear: perhaps these women were comfortable talking about men being 'protectors' because no men were present. The predatory behaviour of men around drunk women also affected men's behaviour, as Don describes below:

Retail group

Don: I always get real paranoid if they, if they're obviously drunk it kind of puts me off coz I know I'll probably get shit for coming onto them *because* they're drunk, you know? You kinda wanna, you don't wanna get into that. Coz then also later on they can be like "Aw, he's such an asshole, I was real drunk." {laughs} And you're like "Aw, sorry" {laughs} You know? Like

Alice: Yeah

Don: It's almost like, the way things are going, like, it's almost like, not worth going after the drunk girls. You gotta go after the ones that aren't drunk {laughs}. Coz otherwise you're gonna get in the shit. {Alice laughs} Like, aw, not, not extremely, like, you know, it's not like, clear cut.

Here Don complains that by sexually pursuing a drunk women he may get "into shit" for it, and then tends to trivialise the matter by saying "aw sorry" and laughing. Yet he carries on by stating that "the way things are going" it's not worth going after the drunk girls. What he means by this is unclear: perhaps gender relations and social roles have changed such that previously men didn't "get in the shit" for pursuing drunk girls. It is also not clear who he is going to "get in the shit" with. We may assume it is the woman he "went after", and perhaps this is also a change—perhaps previously there would have been little resistance to such behaviour. These are all speculations, however, as very little research has examined men's discourses around alcohol and sexual consent (with a few exceptions, e.g. Day 2003).

The vulnerability discourse was implicitly about women being attacked sexually by men. While drunk women out in public were seen as vulnerable by outsiders, one group suggested that women who were out around drunk men without any male friends felt vulnerable themselves. Feelings of vulnerability were also apparent when female participants discussed looking after each other on girls' nights out. In the vulnerability discourse women and men who drink are positioned in relation to each other: women as weak, dependent and at-risk and men as strong, independent and aggressive. Day and colleagues (2004) have previously noted that the dominant representations of gender and alcohol "clearly work to consolidate drinking as a male endeavour, as women who attempt to enter this domain are cast as likely victims either of their own alcohol abuse or of drunken men intent on damage" (p. 166). In the discussion groups women who were out drinking were positioned as potential victims of drunken men, and this worked to rationalise the double standard between perceptions of drunk men and women, and also afforded a reason for condemning women being drunk in public. In summary, negotiating a successful and legitimate feminine gender identity in local CoPs is a complex and difficult task, one that is clearly constructed as age specific, and one which often involves the derision and criticism of other groups of women through the use of traditional femininity discourses.

Discussion

The results from this inductive, exploratory study highlight that in these self-selected groups of young adult friends, men and women are drinking large amounts of alcohol over a night out together. These results are consistent with previous research which shows that one-quarter of all adults in NZ (drinkers and non-drinkers) engage in risky drinking frequently (greater than five drinks) (ALAC 2004). However, in contrast to academic and public health discourses around excessive drinking, the participants did not view their drinking as risky or even as binge-drinking (although they did view other people's excessive drinking as potentially risky). Rather they saw their drinking as a pleasurable activity which was enjoyed for many reasons, suggesting they were engaging in 'calculated hedonism' (Szmigin et al. 2008). Other research has similarly found that young adults in the UK described nights out drinking as positive and worthwhile for socializing, having fun and relaxing, and intoxicated weekends were related to successfully maintaining work-hard, play-hard lifestyles (Parker and Williams 2003).

Communities of practice were seen in operation as the groups jointly told stories about specific nights out involving those in the group. 'Good' nights out were

particularly remembered as those in which at least one member was especially drunk. Telling (and re-telling) narratives about nights out drinking is an activity that draws groups of friends together, provides shared social experiences, and enables happy memories to be shared among friends (Sheehan and Ridge 2001). Telling stories about drinking is important for identity construction (Giles 1999). Young men and women purchase different forms of identity through consuming alcoholic drinks with their friends (Brain et al. 2000) and continue to create gender identities through the subsequent telling of these stories (Peralta 2007).

Results showed that the male and female participants were enacting particular versions of masculinities and femininities within their social groups, and these versions were understood and reinforced by each other. Gender identities within a CoP need to be recognised by both insiders and outsiders, and require that participants ensure their behaviour is conformable to group norms (Paechter 2006). While the females in this study engaged in regular binge drinking, a traditionally masculine behaviour, they did this in their own ways amongst a group of friends who encouraged and supported this behaviour (see also Sheehan and Ridge 2001; Montemurro and McClure 2005). In this sense there was a feminization of binge drinking, as women were actively involved in producing their own identities through challenging notions of traditional femininity (Measham 2004).

By engaging in gender performances which are non-traditional but upheld within the CoP, women are contesting their hegemonic subordination to men (Kraack 1999). Women appropriated traditionally dominant masculine gender performances such as drinking (and liking) beer, drinking excessively for enjoyment, and drinking in public with friends, and participants all drew on discourses of 'equality' to explain these behaviours. Through these performances women gained some of the credibility and power associated with hegemonic masculinity. However, female participants also maintained gender boundaries by feminising these behaviours (drinking out of a glass, matching drinks with appearance, 'looking after' their friends when out drinking). Thus, in these CoPs young adult women were creating versions of femininity that were complicit with, rather than subordinate to, men (see also Kraack 1999).

Participants also drew on traditional femininity discourses to describe women's drinking in public (being in control and responsible, double standards, vulnerability). These discourses all invoke the binary oppositions of male–female dichotomies, reinforcing opposing and hierarchical meanings and values (Jay 1981), for example: being in control and responsible versus out of control and irresponsible; able to be legitimately drunk in public versus unable

to be legitimately drunk in public; being independent versus dependent; being strong and invulnerable versus being weak and vulnerable. The female side of these dichotomies is sharply contradicted by the positioning provided by the 'equality' discourse, in which women constructed themselves as active pleasure-seekers working hard and playing hard in the same manner as their male counterparts. By being 'one of the guys' and going out and drinking excessively, the female participants are subverting hegemonic masculinity but are also simultaneously reinforcing its value. The groups did not directly resist or challenge the traditional associations between drinking, men and masculinity that are strong in NZ (Campbell et al. 1999). Further, by being drunk in public women are engaging in 'unrespectable' behaviour (that irritates some men); by losing control they are in breach of highly regarded notions of femininity; and by being both drunk and out of control they are vulnerable and at-risk of attack by men. These meanings were used in the CoPs to justify excluding women from the groups ('other drunk women are not like our women drinkers') and sending women home (men can be drunk in public, but women need to be sent home).

Specific groups of *other* women were targeted as deviant and breaking moral codes; namely older women and women who were excessively drunk. Scholars note that femininity continues to be equated with motherhood, and this is why women's drinking continues to be subject to scrutiny and moral panic (Day et al. 2004). Older women (defined by these participants as older than either 30 or 40) presumably should be at home (caring for families). The pleasurable, fun nature of drinking was aligned with young women's own drinking, which is understood as acceptable within the CoPs because they do not have children, are working in (powerful) employment, and deserve to have fun (=drink a lot) in the same manner as men do. Other research shows that when conventional femininity discourses are employed (such as motherhood and appearance) in UK newspaper accounts of women's drinking, women who drink in public are problematised (Day et al. 2004). Such findings tap into broader social attitudes around gender (Measham 2002) and gender relations. Holmila and Raitasalo (2005) note that a large amount of worry is generated by increases in women's drinking because it is viewed as leading to increased problems for children, homes and indeed, "society's traditional moral order" (p. 1764). This may be one reason why strong double standards continue to exist which state that women should not be drinking, particularly drinking large amounts or in public places (Montemurro and McClure 2005). Interestingly, recent ethnographic research in Australia suggests that while alcohol played a role in creating young (child-free) women's feminine identities, when these women

became mothers the use of alcohol was again important in establishing positive identities as both women *and* mothers (Killingsworth 2006).

The moral panic around women's drinking has been shown to be nothing new: in an historical analysis of 'troublesome' young women in the UK, Jackson and Tinkler (2007) demonstrate how the 'modern girl' of 1918–1928 was represented in popular media in very similar ways to the 'ladettes' of the past decade (young women who drink excessively in public, engage in casual sex and behave boisterously). Their analysis highlights continuities in the dominant constructions (hedonistic, financial independence, social independence, unrespectable, undesirable, brazen, immoral) and discourses (health, social dis/order, gender dis/order) employed to describe troublesome young women across both time periods. Jackson and Tinkler (2007) argue that the most threatening aspect of the contemporary ladette, and that which causes most concern and panic, is "her disruption of dominant discourses on gender and on women as carer" (p. 264). In the current study, participants regularly drew on discourses of women as responsible and caring for others, explicitly when describing their own behaviours (e.g. females looking out for one another when out drinking) and implicitly when criticising other women out drinking (e.g. 'she's too old to be out drinking'). In this way participants negotiated feminine identities that allowed them to drink in public within their CoPs without being positioned as immoral or unfeminine.

More generally, the discourses people employ when discussing their drinking behaviour inform us about wider cultural constructions of femininity and drinking. Holmila and Raitasalo (2005) point out that "in many cultures alcohol is one of the more powerful symbols of gender roles and identities" (p. 1767). The females in this study engaged in behaviours and constructions of femininities that are active and positive, seeking pleasures and staking claims for fun and space within their friendship groups, justified with a discourse of 'equality'. In a similar manner, Jackson and Tinkler (2007) claimed that the earlier 'modern girl' and the more recent 'ladette' have both been represented as "asserting her right to use public space, to be heard and seen, and to engage in pleasures that are considered relatively unproblematic for boys and men" (p. 276). Identifying young women as empowered pleasure-seeking social beings links their use of alcohol to their changing position in society, "in terms of indicators such as educational and employment opportunities and achievements" (Measham 2002, p. 347). However linking the pursuit of pleasure with female empowerment is a difficult place for women to occupy, given that it seems to empower but also simultaneously borders on 'unrespectability'. The meanings within traditional feminine discourses (e.g.

control, responsibility, vulnerability) include hierarchical gendered dichotomies (e.g. dependent/independent) in which the male is valued above the female, making it difficult for women to position themselves as a heavy drinker *and* feminine.

In summary, binge drinking was a normalised and social activity that participants viewed as unproblematic. These were self-selected, employed, urban-dwelling young New Zealanders. Their meanings of drinking are likely to be different than those of young adults from other backgrounds and locations. Age, ethnicity, place of residence, sexuality, social class and religion all contribute to the variation of alcohol use within genders both within and across cultures (Holmila and Raitasalo 2005) and in other contexts and locations more direct resistance to dominant gender systems might be apparent. Rather than aiming to be representative in terms of participants, this small study aimed to generate theoretical insight which if successful may be generalised to other issues and contexts. It suggests that dominant hierarchical gender systems can be reinforced, challenged and resisted via drinking behaviours (Peralta 2007), and that drinking alcohol is one way of accomplishing a gendered identity within local settings (Measham 2002).

Further work is required to examine lived experiences of drinking among diverse groups of young adults, including those from different social classes, ethnic groups, religions and geographic locations in order to gain further understanding into their drinking behaviour and the meanings it has for both men and women. Nevertheless, this study shows that young adult men and women are jointly creating particular local settings and groups in which alcohol consumption is employed in particular ways to perform primarily traditional, but sometimes non-traditional, versions of masculinities and femininities. It also shows that traditional versions of femininity remain solidly in place and these function to reinforce traditional gender roles and expectations about women's place in society. Moreover this study highlights that gender is crucially important to our understanding of alcohol consumption.

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