

New Zealand Culture of Intoxication: Local and Global Influences

Brett McEwan, Maxine Campbell, David Swain

Abstract

This article shows that attitudes towards and behaviours involving the consumption of alcohol in New Zealand have long been problematic. It provides an historical account of social, economic and legislative factors which have influenced the development of the New Zealand drinking culture. Accordingly, it tracks a combination of local and global alcohol-related influences and documents the inter-relationships amongst these factors. In particular, it proposes that the liberalisation of alcohol licensing laws and advertising/sponsorship regulations, alongside the growth of the alcohol-based hospitality industry have promoted the normalisation of an alcohol-based leisure lifestyle. Against this backdrop, the growth of consumer culture, tertiary student culture and the New Zealand drug culture, along with the development of new alcohol products and the establishment of commercial and social-networking websites have conjointly enabled the growth of a culture of intoxication, which is characterised by drinkers intentionally drinking to intoxication and viewing this behaviour as socially acceptable.

Introduction

The New Zealand Law Commission (2009) in their recent report *Alcohol In Our Lives: An Issues Paper* have comprehensively documented the significant social, economic, and health costs associated with the misuse of alcohol within New Zealand society. The high level of concern that many New Zealanders – including health, social, education and justice professionals – hold towards the current New Zealand drinking culture is detailed in the Law Commission's (2010) follow-up report *Alcohol In Our Lives: Curbing the Harm*. Readers who hold any doubts regarding the impact of alcohol within New Zealand society are referred to these two comprehensive documents. This paper seeks to explore the development of the prevailing culture of intoxication amongst a significant minority of New Zealand society, and does so by exploring local and global influences that have shaped the New Zealand drinking culture over the past fifty years. (Sections of this paper originate from a recent PhD thesis that evaluated the drinking attitudes and behaviour of a tertiary student population based at a medium-sized New Zealand university: McEwan, 2009.)

New Zealand society has a long history of alcohol misuse. As early as the 1830s, the fledgling colonial community living in the Bay of Islands developed an international reputation for drunkenness and lawlessness (Hargreaves, 2000).

This situation became so problematic that one of the first legislative acts of Governor Captain Hobson and his Legislative Council in 1842 was to prohibit the distillation of spirits for drinking (De La Mare, 1981). Despite this, during the second half of the 18th century drunkenness continued to be a significant problem in New Zealand society and consequently a strong New Zealand temperance movement developed (Stewart, 1997). In 1917, the New Zealand government introduced a six o'clock closing time for on-licence premises as a war-time measure, and also as a response to the temperance and prohibition movements. As a consequence the tradition of the 'six o'clock swill' developed as increasing numbers of men crowded into bars to consume as many drinks as possible before closing time. At the same time some hotels began to remove in-house furniture as a means of accommodating extra drinkers. Bollinger (1967) notes in his review of the 1945 New Zealand Royal Commission investigation into the sale of alcohol in New Zealand, that "the first target [of the Commission] was the 'vertical swill' type bar. Even the official report from the Justice Department condemned this institution, and blamed it jointly with six o'clock closing for much excessive drinking. Witness after witness urged the need for tables and chairs in bars" (p. 97). Other submissions were made to the Royal Commission recommending the provision of food with alcohol as a civilising and moderating influence.

In 1967, changes to the national liquor laws allowing an extension of liquor licensing hours to 10.00 pm "marked the beginning of greater access to alcohol.... [and] the growth in other licensed venues such as restaurants, sports-clubs, and night-clubs" (Stewart, 1997, p.392). Up until the 1960s, New Zealand males were the primary consumers of alcohol and locally produced beer was the dominant alcohol of choice (Hutchins, 2009). Hotels were the major drinking location and these establishments were not considered appropriate venues for respectable women (Stewart, 1997). New Zealand was typically characterised as a country of rugby, racing, and beer – all male-dominated activities, with beer consumption as a common denominator. During this time male drinkers consumed large amounts of alcohol but, notably, there was an overall social expectation that drinkers would not display overt drunken behaviour. Hutchins (2009) commented "holding your beer, [was] the mark of a mature drinker.... [drinkers] were often expected to drink a lot but not get

drunk” (p. 186-187). Drinking up until this period was characterised by a strong social stigma associated with the public exhibition of intoxicated behaviour.

Since the late 1960s, significant changes have occurred in the way New Zealanders have consumed alcohol. Although there are difficulties in tracking these changes accurately - due to inconsistencies in the way alcohol consumption has been assessed by different research surveys - it is clear that New Zealand males continue to remain the dominant drinkers, consuming the largest volumes of alcohol and drinking most frequently; however during this period female rates of alcohol consumption have been steadily increasing (Casswell, 1980; Habgood et al., 2001; Ministry of Health [MOH], 2009; Wyllie et al., 1996). The major contemporary concern regarding alcohol use in New Zealand relates to the growth of binge drinking behaviour (Alcohol Liquor Advisory Council of New Zealand [ALAC], 2004a) characterised by short-term heavy-drinking behaviour and associated with intoxication and an increased risk of alcohol-related harm (Carey, 2001). Comparison between the 1995 and 2000 *National Alcohol Survey* data reveals that the proportion of female drinkers intoxicated on a weekly basis increased from 4% in 1995 to 6% in 2000 (Habgood et al., 2001). The most recent national survey reported a further increase to 8% (MOH, 2009). Amongst male drinkers, weekly drunkenness also increased from 13% in 1995 and 2000 (Habgood et al., 2001), to 16% in 2007/08 (MOH, 2009). Weekly drunkenness is most prevalent amongst 18-24 year olds (33% of males and 16% of females), followed by 16-17 year olds (15% of males and 8% of females), and 25-34 year olds (14% of males and 9% of females) (MOH, 2009).

Recent British research describes similar patterns of behaviour to those found here and while not advocating that UK research be used to address the New Zealand situation, there is much to be gained from engaging with this body of knowledge. Measham and Brain (2005) have argued that the late 20th century surge in binge drinking behaviour in the United Kingdom was not a ‘repackaging’ of historical/traditional male drinking behaviour but a new and distinct post-industrial pattern of drinking characterised by a culture of intoxication. Similarly New Zealand now has a culture of intoxication amongst a segment of both male and female drinkers. The Alcohol Advisory Council’s 2005 national survey assessing drinking behaviour and attitudes found that amongst New Zealanders aged 18+ years, one-quarter agreed with the statement

‘it was okay to get drunk as long as it was not every day’ (nearly half of 12-17 year olds agreed) and one in ten reported that they ‘consumed alcohol with the intention to get drunk’ (ALAC, 2005a). This culture of intoxication privileges drunkenness as the goal of a good night out – with minimal social shame associated with the effects of intoxication (McEwan, 2009). How then, did the New Zealand drinking culture reach this position in the early 21st century despite governmental and non-governmental agencies, individuals, and community groups actively working to develop a less harmful New Zealand drinking culture? Amongst the local influences argued here to have shaped the current culture are the changing role of women, the steady increase in later-life parenthood, the liberalisation of liquor licensing/advertising laws, the development of the night-time alcohol-based hospitality industry, the increase in tertiary student numbers, and the impact of the New Zealand drug culture. Relevant global influences include the industrialisation of alcohol production and growth of multinational alcohol producers, the development of new alcohol products, the international/national marketing of alcohol products, the establishment of electronic social-networking, and the growth of consumerism. The discussion that follows describes how these influences overlap and have conjointly assisted the growth of the contemporary culture of intoxication.

Local Influences

New births peaked in New Zealand between 1946 and 1965 (Statistics New Zealand, 2000) and this burgeoning ‘baby-boomers’ generation began entering licensed premises from the mid-1960s. This exponential growth in young-adult drinkers coincided with the many social changes that were occurring in New Zealand during this time. Hutchins (2009) has commented that by the 1970s this generation began to make its presence felt throughout the country as “swathes of younger drinkers had taken to the bars, swelling patronage.... The unholy vocal cacophony of the [traditional male] swilleries was replaced by noisy young bands who pumped out their head-splitting, conversation-killing rock ‘n’ roll” (p.102). For the first time in New Zealand’s history, young women were joining young men in licensed premises.

Since the 1960s, the role of New Zealand women has changed considerably with increases in the number of women working and financially independent (Statistics New Zealand, 2005), enrolled in tertiary education

(Education Counts, 2008), and consuming alcohol (MOH, 2007). Indeed, Stewart (1997) noted that the “changing roles and expectations for [New Zealand] women who were moving increasingly into the paid work-force and out of the domestic sphere, also marked a shift in their drinking” (p.392). Historically, female drinking behaviour had been restricted by a set of social norms which incorporated the notion that the excessive use of alcohol by women would adversely affect their social and family responsibilities (Wilsnack & Wilsnack, 2002). As the role of women in Western society has expanded to allow for greater freedoms, women have increasingly joined men in becoming consumers of the alcohol-based leisure economy (Hayward & Hobbs, 2007). Within many Western countries, a significant feature of increasing female engagement with alcohol use has been the steady reduction in the stigmatisation associated with female intoxication (Wilsnack & Wilsnack, 2002) and these changes are demonstrated in the portrayal of female drinking in the media (Lyons, Dalton, & Hoy, 2006). Lyons and Willott (2008) interviewed New Zealand women aged 20-29 years and reported that “binge drinking was a normalised and social activity that participants viewed as unproblematic” (p.712).

Over the past 50 years the median age of first time mothers in New Zealand has been steadily increasing from 22 years in the 1960s, through to 24 years in the 1970s, 27 years in the 1980s, 29 years in the 1990s, and 30 years in the 2000s (Statistics New Zealand, 2010). During this period, female - and male - New Zealanders in their twenties have increasingly been able to engage with the alcohol-based leisure economy in a way that was not available to previous generations of young parents.

At the same time many young-adult New Zealanders were increasingly enrolled in tertiary education. The number of students enrolled in tertiary education has increased significantly as the New Zealand tertiary system has moved from an ‘elite’ to a ‘mass’ provider of education (McLaughlin, 2003). In 1965, just over 50,000 New Zealanders were enrolled in public tertiary education. By 1976 this number had doubled to just over 100,000 and doubled again by 1993 to just under 200,000. By 2002 over 300,000 students were engaged in tertiary study, rising to a peak of just under 400,000 in 2005 (Education Counts, 2010). Between 2001 and 2008 approximately 45% of New Zealanders aged 18-19 years and 33% of New Zealanders aged 20-24 years

were enrolled in tertiary education (Education Counts, 2010). For many students, tertiary education represents a developmental milestone of moving away from dependence upon family into growing adulthood and independence (Baer, 2002), and for many young New Zealanders this process has involved integrating themselves into a student culture that has long been associated with excessive alcohol use (ALAC, 2004b).

The misuse of alcohol amongst students is not a recent phenomenon. As early as the 1890s graduation ceremonies at the University of Otago were banned due to ‘riotous student behaviour’ (Elworthy, 1990). Similarly, at the University of Auckland, during the 1960s and 1970s “students who simply wanted a good time asserted their place in the city with pub crawls and mass motorbike rides.... Bar patrons resented the annual takeover of their regular haunts by students, and publicans complained of the mess and breakages” (Hercock, 1994, p.87). Arguably, excessive alcohol use by students has been a common theme at all New Zealand universities. Contemporary media images of student culture include the infamous ‘Undie 500’ student car race¹ (New Zealand Herald, 2008, April 14th), students burning couches during street parties (Otago Daily Times, 2008, September 15th), and students binge drinking and vandalising property during ‘Easter Tournament’ university-games. These events typically associate student culture with a culture of intoxication. It is only in recent years that systematic research of New Zealand student drinking behaviour has been initiated – primarily by the Injury Prevention Unit at the University of Otago – and shown that a portion of New Zealand tertiary students regularly binge drink (Kypri et al., 2002; Kypri, Langley, & Stephenson, 2005), experience a wide range of alcohol-related harms (Kypri et al., 2009; Langley et al., 2003; McGee & Kypri, 2004), and that some tertiary students consume alcohol more hazardously than their non-student peers (Kypri, Cronin, & Wright, 2005). It is evident that over the past thirty years an increasing number of young New Zealanders have been introduced to a culture of intoxication as a component of student culture.

¹ The Undie 500 is an annual student car race, where students travel in old cars purchased for \$500 or less. Although the race rules strictly prohibit the driver of the vehicle from drinking and driving, it is common for car passengers to drink heavily.

Liquor Laws and Alcohol

Measham (2006) argued that the contemporary increase in binge drinking behaviour in the United Kingdom was supported by the liberalisation of liquor laws regulating the sale and supply of alcohol, and the resulting growth of an alcohol-based leisure industry. In New Zealand a similar liberalisation of the sale and supply of alcohol was undertaken “in response to changing societal expectations, including increases in leisure options, overseas travel and domestic tourism” (Stewart, 1997, p.392). In 1967, on-licence opening hours were extended from 6.00 pm to 10.00 pm, and in 1977 further law amendments allowed approved taverns to close at 11.00 pm (on Friday and Saturday nights) as well as allowing liquor licences to be issued to clubs (Casswell & Stewart, 1986). Throughout the 1970s – largely in response to the commercial opportunities provided by the extension of on-licensed opening hours, the changing role of women in society, and the growing number of ‘baby-boomers’ entering their twenties – the New Zealand breweries (with approval from the Liquor Licensing Authority) erected large taverns in the suburbs.

During this period New Zealanders, and particularly female New Zealanders, began to develop a taste for wine. In 1961, wine was allowed to be sold in restaurants (Casswell & Stewart, 1986) and during the 1970s, home-based wine and cheese evenings – typically offering cask wine and a range of cheddar cheeses – became increasingly popular (Hutchings, 2009). In 1977, liquor law changes allowed restaurants to obtain BYO licences and eating out with a bottle of wine become an increasingly popular and affordable leisure activity.

In 1989, the New Zealand government implemented a new Sale of Liquor Act with the aim of liberalising and improving the New Zealand drinking environment. The object of the Sale of Liquor Act 1989 was "to establish a reasonable system of control over the sale and supply of liquor to the public with the aim of contributing to the reduction in liquor abuse, so far as that can be achieved by legislative means". This new Act expanded the number and types of outlets allowed to sell beer and wine to include cafes and small bars (alongside the traditional hotels and restaurants) and for supermarkets and corner-stores to sell wine (Ministry of Justice [MOJ], 2007). The 1989 Act is often discussed as an attempt to impose a ‘Southern European wet’ style of frequent moderate drinking (associated with food, socialising, and

entertainment) upon a traditional ‘dry’ weekend heavy-drinking culture (Research New Zealand, 2006). This liberalisation of the liquor laws saw significant changes occur in the New Zealand night-time alcohol-hospitality industry - with the number of on-licence liquor licences increasing by one-half from 5067 in 1995 to 7918 in 2004 (MOJ, 2005). In 1999, further changes allowed supermarkets to sell beer, permitted alcohol sales on Sundays, lifted on-licence restrictions regarding 24 hour trading, and reduced the age of legally purchasing alcohol from 20 to 18 years. The liberalisation of the New Zealand on-licence liquor laws has been credited with creating vibrant night-time alcohol-based leisure economies in all major New Zealand cities - which many New Zealanders and numerous overseas tourists now enjoy. With the apparent ‘civilising’ of on-licensed premises over the past forty years, why then has a culture of intoxication entrenched itself so strongly within the New Zealand drinking culture?

A number of significant ‘unintended consequences’ arose from the liberalisation of the New Zealand liquor laws. For example, the 1989 Sale of Liquor Act ushered in a dramatic increase in the number of off-licences - from 1,675 in 1995 to 4,199 in 2009 – and now includes a plethora of small suburban liquor outlets and grocery store outlets (NZ Law Commission, 2009). The Law Commission (2010 p.14) commented that “because of the manner in which parliament dealt with the legislation in 1989 there are serious problems with the law relating to off-licences. There have been confusing, changing interpretations, coupled with a proliferation of small liquor outlets that was never the intention of Parliament”. High off-licence density has been found to be associated with lower alcohol prices, longer operating hours, and a range of social harms (Cameron et al., 2010). In some New Zealand communities it is now easier to locate a liquor outlet, than it is to find a fruit and vegetable store.

The 1999 liquor law change that reduced the legal purchasing age from 20 to 18 years saw an increase in off-licence alcohol misuse amongst New Zealand youth. The New Zealand Police in their submission to the Law Commission (2010 p.255) noted that “a number of negative outcomes have been detected in youth drinking patterns since the law change in 1999. Specifically... an increase in youth binge drinking and subsequent alcohol-related offending”. The latest national survey (MOH, 2009) showed that amongst 16-17 year old

drinkers, 15% of males and 9% of females typically drank to intoxication on a weekly basis.

The consequence of allowing supermarkets and grocery stores to sell wine and beer has meant that 30% of off-licence beer sales and 60% of wine sales now occur through these outlets. The purchasing power of the two primary supermarket chains (Foodstuffs Ltd and Progressive Enterprises Ltd) has led to very competitive retail alcohol pricing, with Supermarkets selling beer and wine 5-10% cheaper on average than traditional bottle stores (NZ Law Commission, 2010). It is also alleged that supermarkets periodically sell alcohol products at 'loss-leading' prices as a marketing strategy to attract consumers (New Zealand Herald, 2009, May 6th). This competitive off-licence pricing for wine and beer has resulted in an increasing imbalance in the 'off-licence price' and 'on-licence price' of these two products. Since 1999 there has been a 47% increase in prices for alcohol consumed at on-licence premises, in contrast to a 20% increase in off-licence alcohol prices (NZ Law Commission, 2009). Babor et al. (2003)² have argued that alcohol - as a mind-altering drug that negatively affects society - is not an ordinary consumer commodity and that the retail price of alcohol products cannot be left to the market-place to decide. The growing imbalance between the cost of alcohol at off-licence and on-licence premises has encouraged a trend of drinkers pre-loading³ with cheaper off-licence alcohol prior to arriving at on-licence bars (NZ Law Commission, 2010). This behaviour is consistent with a culture of intoxication where drinkers aim to achieve a level of intoxication at the commencement of their drinking and then seek to maintain an intoxication threshold throughout the course of the evening (Measham & Brain, 2005; McEwan, 2009).

Hospitality Industry and Alcohol

As stated previously, in the 1970s the New Zealand breweries erected large taverns throughout the New Zealand suburbs to cater for both the traditional older male drinkers (who were typically housed in separate public

² At the time of writing Babor et al., were due to release a (2010) edition of their book *Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity*.

³ Pre-loading (or sometimes called front-loading) occurs when drinkers consume cheaper off-licence alcohol at home prior to their arrival at on-licensed premises.

bars) and the increasing number of younger male and female drinkers. With the liberalisation of the 1989 liquor laws, the hotels and taverns of the 1970s and 1980s progressively gave way to a wide range of smaller pubs, bars, cafes, restaurants, and clubs that were all part of an expanding hospitality industry. During this time not only were new hospitality premises developed and old pubs renovated, but whole inner-city districts were transformed into popular areas of food, entertainment, and socialising - all supporting an alcohol-based hospitality industry that is estimated to employ over 70,000 workers, many of them part-time (NZ Law Commission, 2009).

The 1989 Sale of Alcohol Act Section 166 prohibits the sale and supply of alcohol to an intoxicated person, Section 167 prohibits a person being served alcohol to the point of intoxication, and Section 168 prohibits drunkenness or disorderly conduct on a licensed premise (ALAC, 2006). Although many (if not most) licensed premises have maintained good alcohol-serving practices, some licensed premises have tolerated and/or promoted a culture of intoxication amongst patrons. A review of the most recent Liquor Licensing Authority (LLA) Annual Report reveals that in the preceding 12-month period the Authority had cancelled 13 and suspended 257 liquor licences, and cancelled 25 and suspended 348 bar manager certificates (LLA, 2009). Tertiary student drinking behaviour has been particularly noteworthy for its culture of intoxication and its long association with the alcohol-hospitality industry. Well known student pubs have included the Fitzherbert Tavern in Palmerston North, The Foundry Bar in Christchurch, the Hillcrest Tavern in Hamilton, and the Captain Cook Tavern in Dunedin. Amongst the more disturbing demonstrations of the dysfunctional aspects of this relationship was a sign displayed outside the Fitzherbert Tavern in October 2005, stating “Why study for exams when you can get drunk with your mates?” (ALAC, 2005b).

Drugs and Alcohol

Over the past forty years drug use has also become popular in New Zealand and this has had ramifications for the New Zealand drinking culture. Measham & Brain (2005) propose that the timing and the antecedents of the current ‘culture of intoxication’ in the United Kingdom lie in the emergence of the British acid house and rave scene which developed into what has become known as the ‘decade of dance’ from the late 1980s through to the late 1990s. The frequent

use of stimulant drugs by participants in the United Kingdom dance culture during this time lead to the normalisation of drug use amongst many young adults. Measham and Brain argue that over time alcohol use was integrated with drug use to create a new social lifestyle based upon a culture of intoxication. This new culture of intoxication was accessible (and socially acceptable) to both male and female participants and characterised by altered states of consciousness - which became synonymous with having a 'good time'.

In New Zealand the drug culture, or to use the vernacular, the culture of 'getting-out-of-it', has had the same potential to influence the drinking culture. Cannabis usage became popular in New Zealand during the 1970s and continues to be easily available (Centre for Social and Health Outcomes Research & Evaluation [SHORE], 2008). The most recent national survey (found that 46% of New Zealanders aged 16-64 years had used cannabis in their lifetime (MOH, 2009). During the 1990s, New Zealand experienced an increase in amphetamine-based drug use that has remained high (Adamson et al., 2006; Wilkins & Sweetsur, 2008). At the beginning of the 2000s legal party pills (outlawed in 2007) also became increasingly popular, with a 2006 survey reporting that one in five New Zealanders aged 13-45 years had used them (SHORE, 2006). The 2007/08 national survey found that amongst drinkers aged 18-24 years, 26% had combined alcohol use with cannabis, 17% with BZP party pills, 15% with pain-killers/sedatives, and 10% with ecstasy-amphetamine-heroin-cocaine (MOH, 2009). Over the past forty years therefore, as large numbers of New Zealanders used cannabis and other drugs, a social lifestyle of getting-out-of-it has developed where an altered state of consciousness is viewed as a desirable and normative goal. As in Britain, this drug-based culture has blended with alcohol usage to support a culture of intoxication - which in turn has also transformed the range of alcohol products available for consumption.

Global Influences

Alcohol Industry and Alcohol

Room (1997) discussed the impact of the industrialisation of alcohol production within Western societies, from its origins as a specialised commodity produced for domestic markets, to its contemporary production in industrial factories and globally distributed (and marketed) through a network of national and multi-

national corporations. In New Zealand beer has historically been the dominant alcohol commodity and during the early 1900s beer production was undertaken by a multitude of local/regional breweries (Hutchings, 2009). In contemporary New Zealand, beer brewing is now dominated by two international companies, Lion Nathan and Dominion Breweries (NZ Law Commission, 2009). Since the 1970s, wine products have steadily grown in popularity, particularly amongst female drinkers, with wines like *Cold Duck*, *Cresta Dore*, *Marque Vue* and *Bakano* carrying many New Zealand wine drinkers through the 1970s (Hutchings, 2009). New Zealand now has a thriving and internationally recognised wine market, with wines produced by over 600 New Zealand wineries (NZ Law Commission, 2009).

The World Health Organization in its *Global Status Report on Alcohol* (WHO, 2001a) stated that as the total sale of alcohol products in developed countries reached a plateau, corporations began to intensify their efforts to establish new markets in developing countries and among constituencies such as women and young people who have traditionally abstained or consumed very little alcohol. In New Zealand the most recent development in alcohol products has been the introduction of sweet tasting spirit-based ready-to-drink (RTD) alcoholic drinks. Measham and Brain (2005) have argued that in Britain during the 1990's decade of dance, the alcohol industry was required to transform its range of alcohol products to engage with a new generation of young mixed-gender and drug-wise patrons. These changes were characterised by the development of RTDs that were presented in bright colours and marketed as youthful and sophisticated. At the same time 'buzz' alcoholic drinks containing legal stimulants such as caffeine and guarana were developed and 'shot' drinks for instant hits of alcohol. In New Zealand, RTD drinks have become increasingly popular, particularly amongst female and younger drinkers (MOH, 2007). Between 1998 and 2008, the volume of spirits-based drinks sold in New Zealand trebled to almost 60 million litres annually (MOH, 2007). Buzz and 'shot' drinks also became entrenched, and the alcohol content of some New Zealand RTD drinks has now increased to 12% (ALAC, 2008). The New Zealand RTD market is supplied predominately by Independent Liquor (an Australasian company), with support from Lion Nathan and Beam Global products (NZ Law Commission, 2009). Concerns, both nationally and internationally, have been raised about the growing popularity of RTDs

amongst female drinkers (Huckle et al., 2008) and youth drinkers (Ministry of Youth Development, 2004).

The New Zealand alcohol industry is now a multi-billion dollar market, with New Zealanders spending an estimated 4-5 billion dollars on retail alcohol sales in 2008 (NZ Law Commission, 2009). The dominant national/international alcohol producers are corporate entities that are required to return a financial profit to their shareholders. Babor et al. (2003) have noted that the corporate imperative to increase alcohol sales in the interests of further profit is in direct conflict with the societal need to reduce the social, health, and economic costs associated with alcohol-related harm. Alongside the national/international development of alcohol products there has been a national/international growth in alcohol marketing as alcohol producers and suppliers have striven to maximise sales.

Marketing and Alcohol

The marketing of alcohol is now a global industry targeted at local markets through an integrated mix of strategies including television, internet, radio and print advertisements, and by the association of alcohol brands with sports, lifestyles, and consumer identities (Babor et al., 2003). The World Health Organization report *Alcohol and Young People* (WHO, 2001b p. 10). commented that “marketing plays a critical role in the globalisation of patterns of alcohol use among young people, and reflects the revolution that is occurring in marketing in general”. Over the past thirty years the regulations governing alcohol advertising in New Zealand have progressively been liberalised: in 1980, the advertising of outlets and services was approved; in 1987 major breweries began television commercials advertising the corporate body; in 1992, alcohol brand advertising was allowed on television and radio⁴; and in 1992, the advertising industry became self-regulatory (ALAC, 2004c). In 2008, the alcohol industry spent over 30 million dollars on alcohol advertising (Association of New Zealand Advertisers Inc, 2009) and it is estimated that 20 million dollars is spent annually on alcohol sponsorship (Foundation for

⁴ Alcohol brand advertising is limited to between 8.30pm – 6.00am on television. However, there are no such restrictions on sponsorship advertising on television or advertising in other media such as radio or the internet.

Advertising Research, 2006), amounting to a total of over 50 million dollars spent each year on alcohol marketing.

The dominant feature of contemporary alcohol marketing is the development of a ‘brand’ to represent an identity and/or lifestyle (Casswell and Maxwell, 2005). For example, the beer *Lion Red* (produced by Lion Nathan), has been advertised since 1987 with the message ‘The Measure of a Man’s Thirst’, and has been associated, through sponsorship, with a range of sporting codes and events including rugby league (1966), fishing (1988), music (2001), and surfing (2005) (Lion Red, 2010). The profile of alcohol brands in 21st century New Zealand is far-reaching – whether it be the brand of *Montana Wine* associated with the ‘World of Wearable Art’ show, the humour of the *Tui* beer ‘Yeah Right’ roadside billboard signs, or the RTD *Woodstock* television advertisement asking ‘is it okay to crack a woody for your friend’s mother?’

Alcohol promotion has had a long association with male-orientated sporting codes (Wenner & Jackson, 2009) and the relationship between sports-orientated alcohol marketing and the New Zealand alcohol-hospitality industry is illustrated in the impact of ‘pay-tv’ sports programming. In 1991, SKY-TV began broadcasting a three-channel subscription service into three New Zealand districts and by 1998 had upgraded to a digital service that was transmitting nationwide (SKY, 2010). Throughout the 1990s, SKY-TV progressively purchased the broadcasting rights to the three dominant male-oriented sports in New Zealand – rugby, rugby league, and cricket (NZTBC⁵, 2010). At the same time the New Zealand alcohol-hospitality industry was transforming itself and many bars installed televisions to showcase live SKY-TV sporting events. The viewing of alcohol-sponsored sporting codes/teams (e.g., the All Blacks and Steinlager) in alcohol-based entertainment venues (e.g. sports bars) is now a feature of the New Zealand alcohol-hospitality environment.

The liberalising of alcohol advertising and sponsorship regulations has afforded the alcohol industry the opportunity to further normalise an alcohol-based leisure lifestyle within New Zealand society. Alcohol Healthwatch (2003, p.10) have argued that in the context of New Zealand’s drinking history, alcohol advertising has played “a role in creating and maintaining a culture of drinking

⁵ New Zealand Television Broadcasters’ Council.

in New Zealand that is commonly accepting of intoxication as a normal drinking practice”.

Electronic Media and Alcohol

Throughout the 2000s, the alcohol-hospitality industry and alcohol production industry increasingly created commercial websites to promote on-licensed premises and/or alcohol products. Bar websites typically display photos of bar patrons attending premises-based events and advertise future promotions. Student-pubs with their web-savvy consumers were some of the first licensed premises to utilise this media. For example, ‘The Outback Bar’ is a popular student-bar in Hamilton and a search of their webpage (<http://www.outback.co.nz>) provides links to a photo gallery dating back to 2005 displaying thousands of photos of patrons engaged in bar-events including ‘Miss Outback 05’, ‘Oktoberfest 07’, and ‘O-week 09’. A search of many New Zealand bar websites will reveal comparable images. The alcohol industry has similarly utilised the web to promote alcohol products. For example, the *Tui* beer website displays photos of Tui events and Tui consumers (users are invited to upload photos of themselves consuming Tui beer), and encourages consumers to enter competitions and view upcoming promotional events. The alcohol-hospitality industry and alcohol producers also utilise phone texting and electronic emailing to inform consumers about upcoming events, promotions and product launches. These websites promote an alcohol-based leisure lifestyle associated with a particular premises and/or alcohol product. Hearn (2008) has commented that these commercial websites often utilize ‘ambient marketing’ strategies, where the distinction between the product (or premise) and the consumer is blurred due to consumers engaging in high levels of interaction and identification (particularly through photo/video displays) with the product.

Against this backdrop, the development of social networking websites enabled the creation of the first websites promoting a culture of intoxication on a global level. For example, the US-based website ‘CollegeHumor.com’ was founded in 1999 and up until recently was the dominant social networking site for US tertiary-students to interact and display student culture (CollegeHumour.com, 2010). A search of the website for photos tagged with alcohol-related titles (e.g. shaming, puke, vomit, alcohol, binge, drunk, etc) will

yield hundreds of photos. Similarly in New Zealand, a search of the University of Auckland Engineering Society website will reveal photos showcasing a range of activities, including the 2009 ‘Annual Kegs in the Park’ event (see <http://www.aues.auckland.ac.nz/kegs.html>) - photos show students consuming alcohol from long tubes attached to beer kegs. Since 2001, the website ‘Befuddle’ (www.befuddled.co.uk) has combined the current globalised interest in celebrity culture with drunken behaviour and now hosts a substantial photo catalogue of drunken celebrities. These types of websites are distinctive by virtue of their privileging of alcohol use and celebration of a culture of intoxication.

As the 2000s progressed, the social networking sites MySpace, Bebo and Facebook became increasingly popular - particularly with adolescents and young-adults (Subrahmanyam and Greenfield, 2008). Social networking sites have now been found to be influencing many young people’s identity, relationships, and lifestyles (Livingstone, 2008). More recently, Facebook has become the dominant global social networking website with over 500 million active users (Fletcher, 2010) and many New Zealanders are now using this website to connect with others and display their life through narratives, photos, and videos. Hearn (2008) has described this public exhibition of self as an action of ‘self-branding’ – a process that is heavily influenced by local/global cultural meanings and contemporary consumer images. For some young adults (and some older adults) this self-branding involves the portrayal of an alcohol-based social lifestyle – representing fun, popularity and social connectedness – and, somewhat inevitably, a celebration of a culture of intoxication. Due to Facebook’s growing influence, numbers of commercial interests – including alcohol-related businesses – have begun to utilise the website to network with consumers. For example, in 2009, ‘The Outback Bar’ created a Facebook page that patrons now access to source photos and promotional activities. Recently the ‘Ferguson Bar’, a popular student-bar on Massey University’s North Shore campus, was cautioned by the New Zealand Police for using their Facebook page to publicise an inappropriate alcohol promotion (Van der Stoep & Robinson, 2010). Social networking sites also allow commercial businesses the opportunity to gather valuable information about targeted consumer groups (e.g. demographics and preferences) which is then utilized to formulate sophisticated marketing campaigns (Hearn, 2008). Logically, the further electronic websites

are from regulatory control, the more potential they have to celebrate a consumer culture of intoxication and normalise an alcohol-based social lifestyle.

Consumerism and Alcohol

Dittmar (2008 pp.1-2) has commented that in Western society:

...economic, socio-cultural, and psychological transformations, which have accelerated since the 1950s, have produced mass consumer societies characterised by ... a central role for consumption in everyday life... leisure activities increasingly involve consuming, and shopping itself has become a leisure and lifestyle activity. Indeed, arguably, shopping malls have become centres of both socialising and socialisation.

If shopping malls (with their combination of food, non-alcoholic drinks, products and services) have increasingly become the centre of Western society day-time socialising, then arguably the alcohol-based hospitality industry with its combination of food, drink and entertainment, has become the dominant night-time socialising venue. Within consumer culture, material goods have become the modern means of acquiring, expressing, and attempting to enhance identity - goods signify social status, express unique aspects of the person, and symbolise hoped-for identities (Dittmar, 2008). In the same way that teenagers and young adults engage with tobacco smoking not for its good taste and health-giving properties, but for the consumer image (and peer acceptance) it conveys, so do teenagers and young adults consume alcohol. Within the night-time economy this alcohol-based consumer identity is attained from identification with both the alcohol venues that consumers patronise, the alcohol products they consume, and for a non-trivial proportion of drinkers the level of alcohol intoxication they achieve.

McEwan (2009) interviewed a cohort of high risk drinkers - tertiary students - and found that some drinkers intentionally (and very willingly) consumed alcohol to a predetermined level of intoxication. This behaviour is mirrored nationally in the one-in-ten New Zealand drinkers who drink to get drunk (ALAC, 2005a). McEwan noted that intoxicated behaviour was viewed as acceptable, enjoyable, and an integral component of a good night out. Minimal social shame was associated with intoxicated behaviour - with heavy-drinkers

frequently sharing and celebrating stories of intoxication. Interestingly, drinkers who subscribed to a culture of intoxication typically practised ‘controlled-intoxication’ - also termed ‘controlled loss of control’ (Measham & Brain, 2005) - as a means of experiencing the pleasures of intoxicated consumerism, while at the same time minimising the associated risks to personal safety and health (McEwan, 2009). This culture of intoxication is a night-time consumer identity/lifestyle with which a growing proportion of New Zealanders – and particularly 18-24 year old New Zealanders – intentionally choose to engage.

Summary

This article has proposed that the contemporary New Zealand culture of intoxication is not a repackaging of 19th and 20th century male drinking conduct, but a new pattern of drinking behaviour characterised by drinkers - both male and female - intentionally drinking to intoxication and viewing this behaviour as desirable, celebratory and socially acceptable. It has been argued that a range of local and global influences have contributed to the early 21st century culture of intoxication. In particular, it has proposed that the liberalisation of alcohol licensing laws and advertising/sponsorship regulations, alongside the growth of the alcohol-based hospitality industry, have increasingly led to the normalisation of an alcohol-based leisure lifestyle. Against this backdrop, the expansion of tertiary student culture, the influence of the New Zealand drug culture, the establishment and marketing of new alcohol products (particularly products targeting women and youth), the development of commercial and social-networking websites, and the intensification of consumer culture have cumulatively enabled the growth of the culture of intoxication amongst a significant minority of New Zealand drinkers. Innovative legislative and social policy initiatives are required to combat the economic and social forces that promote and profit from the current culture of intoxication.

The New Zealand Law Commission has recently produced two significant New Zealand alcohol-related reports (Law Commission, 2009; 2010). The second of these reports, *Alcohol in Our Lives: Curbing the Harm – A report on the review of the regulatory framework for the sale and supply of liquor* has provided evidence-based legislative recommendations to the New Zealand government. The Law Commission (2010) have also stated that legislative change requires community support to be most effective in its

impact. In New Zealand, the Alcohol Advisory Council is charged with developing and supporting initiatives aimed at changing the national drinking culture. The Alcohol Advisory Council currently receives 12 million dollars a year in funding to support not only the organisation itself, but also to fund its 'changing the New Zealand drinking culture' campaigns (ALAC, 2009). These campaigns are excellent evidence-based initiatives; however they are in direct competition with the 50 million dollars spent annually on formal alcohol advertising and sponsorship and an incalculable amount of informal web/electronic-based alcohol promotion.

Submissions received by the Law Commission (2010) reveal high levels of dissatisfaction with the current New Zealand drinking culture. The process of changing attitudes, practices and cultures occurs at the nexus of a complex set of contributing factors, some of which are already being addressed by various agencies and strategies. Legislative change has been problematic and changes currently under consideration fall significantly short of those recommended by the Law Commission. While this paper accepts that legislation per se will not change attitudes and culture, it necessarily changes practices to some degree. Further, past experiences with campaigns around seat belts and cycle helmets suggest that real change does not occur until educational and publicity campaigns are backed by appropriate legislation. Only when the New Zealand government has the political will to implement legislative changes will it be possible for the next fifty years of New Zealand drinking history to be an improvement on the past fifty years. We will know that we have achieved this goal when New Zealanders no longer celebrate a culture of intoxication and a social stigma is again associated with the exhibition of intoxicated behaviour.

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Brett McEwan. School of Social Sciences (Sociology). University of Waikato. Brett has recently completed a PhD thesis investigating tertiary student drinking behaviour and attitudes. bjmcewan@waikato.ac.nz

Maxine Campbell. School of Social Sciences (Sociology). University of Waikato. Maxine lectures in sociology and social policy at the University of Waikato. She has a particular interest in family sociology and is secretary of the Sociological Association of Aotearoa (NZ). MAXINE@waikato.ac.nz

David Swain School of Social Sciences (Sociology). University of Waikato. David has recently retired as Associate Professor in Sociology at the University of Waikato. David now holds the title of Honorary Fellow of the University of Waikato and continues to write and supervise PhD students. David's areas of interest are family sociology, family law, child accident prevention and family history. dswain@paradise.net.nz