Development of the VicHealth Alcohol Cultures Framework

Drinking culture

Tabloids

Melbourne needs to change its culture of drinking to excess news.com.au 2011

Opinion: Lockout laws won't work due to Australian drinking culture The Herald Sun 2016

We need to wake up and stop celebrating Australia's drinking culture news.com.au 2012

Which countries have the worst drinking cultures? The Guardian 2016

Australia's binge drinking culture puts mental health at risk, experts warn Nine News 2016

Drinking culture unacceptable, says NSW Premier Barry O'Farrell The Age 2013

James Horwill denies there is a drinking culture within Wallabies camp The Age 2013
Drinking culture
‘Big Alcohol’

Understanding Behaviour in the Australian and New Zealand Night Time Economies: An anthropological study – Anne Fox

“it is the wider culture that determines the drinking behaviour, not the drinking”

Claim: alcohol-related harm is individual and/or cultural. 
It is therefore largely immune to legal reform

Drinking culture? What do we really mean?
↑ interest in ‘drinking cultures’

Peer-reviewed publications containing the term “drinking culture”

A working definition?

Drinking cultures are generally described in terms of the norms around patterns, practices, use-values, settings and occasions in relation to alcohol and alcohol problems that operate and are enforced (to varying degrees) in a society (macro-level) or in a subgroup within society (micro-level). Drinking culture also refers to the modes of social control that are employed to enforce norms and practices. Drinking culture may refer to the aspects concerned with drinking of a cultural entity primarily defined in terms of other aspects, or may refer to a cultural entity primarily defined around drinking. Drinking cultures are not homogeneous or static but are multiple and moving. As part of a network of other interacting factors (e.g. gender, age, social class, social networks, individual factors, masculinity, policy, marketing, global forces, place, etc.), drinking culture is thought to influence when, where, why and how people drink, how much they drink, their expectations about the effects of different amounts of alcohol, and the behaviours they engage in before, during and after drinking. The degree and nature of the influence that drinking cultures have on individuals is not inevitable but will depend on the configuration of factors in play in any given situation, and the nature of the relationships between the culture as a whole and smaller cultural entities as they affect the individual.

It’s about all this

Norms (not just consumption levels)

Informal sanctions

Formal sanctions

Multiple and moving
Here’s a practical definition of alcohol culture:

“the way people drink including the formal rules, social norms, attitudes and beliefs around what is and what is not socially acceptable for a group of people before, during and after drinking.”
What might a culture that prevents harm from alcohol look like?

- A supportive policy, physical and social environment where people do not feel pressure to drink
- When alcohol is consumed, it is done at levels of low risk
- Social pressure supports low-risk drinking and discourages high-risk drinking
- Occurrences of drinking are reduced
- Intoxication is socially rejected

Frames for intervention

- **Societal**
  - Whole of population drivers at a state, national or global level around alcohol.

- **Setting**
  - The physical and social environment where alcohol is consumed and the context of the occasion.

- **Subculture**
  - Social groups with established boundaries and connections from members who share identity, values, beliefs and social norms. Identifying as a member of a subculture can extend beyond face-to-face interactions. They can sometimes be recognizable to those inside and outside of the group.

- **Family and Individual**
  - Individuals have a unique combination of genetic and personal characteristics which interact with the configuration of structural, cultural, contextual and interpersonal factors to play in any given situation.
Examples of factors that influence drinking

Disrupting the way groups of people drink


Address unhelpful masculine norms around drinking (Hepworth et al. 2016, Lindsay, 2012, Lindsay, 2006)

Provide/encourage alternative activities or practices (Supski & Lindsay 2016, Supski et al. 2016, Advocat & Lindsay 2015)

Make it socially & culturally acceptable for young people to adopt diverse subject positions/identities that don’t centre on alcohol (Supski & Lindsay 2016, Advocat & Lindsay 2015)

Use young peoples stories and own accounts to facilitate culture change (Zajdow & Maclean 2014)
Alcohol Culture Change Initiative projects

Subculture/setting:
- Young people in late night inner city precincts
- Young people disengaged from education, training or employment in Melbourne’s fringe
- Rural teenagers and their parents
- Rural male blue collar workers
- Rural LBQ Women
- University students
- Male construction workers
- Peers of heavy drinkers in Western VIC
Practical implications
• New approach to alcohol harm reduction to complement legislative reform
• Definition of alcohol culture
• New planning tool to influence alcohol cultures

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