Youth, alcohol and the emergence of the post-modern alcohol order

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Abstract

This paper attempts to outline and provide an explanation for recent trends in the youth alcohol market. In doing so, it draws on some ethnographic research undertaken into youth drinking patterns for the report Drinking with Design: alcopops alcohol and youth culture (Brain and Parker 1997) and integrates this with some strands of contemporary social theory. The ethnographic research is based on underage (13-17) drinkers. However, this data is held to both reflect and be indicative of similar trends in the 18-30 youth market. First, I will outline the main trends in youth drinking and argue that there has been a switch from an industrial, modern alcohol order to a post-industrial, post-modern, consumer alcohol order. I will then go on to demonstrate young people's consumer approach to drinking in this post-modern order before mapping out two styles of contemporary consumer drinking; "bounded" and "unbounded" hedonistic consumption. I will then go on to suggest that, currently, young drinkers are caught between two of the processes which, as Zygmunt Bauman has argued, characterise post-modern consumer societies -"seduction and repression". The bounded and unbounded hedonistic drinkers are the seduced and the repressed of the post-modern alcohol order. Finally, I will conclude by briefly considering the implications of the arguments presented for future public policy.

The changing alcohol order

Throughout the seventies and eighties there were obvious signs that the alcohol market was changing. Beer consumption was falling as was that of spirits, whilst wine consumption was on the increase. At the same time the site of alcohol consumption was beginning to switch from the pub to the home (Alcohol Concern 1996). As Coffield and Gofton have argued (1994), traditionally, beer and pubs had been the preserve of the industrial working class man. The major social, cultural and economic transformations, that have affected all western societies in varying degrees over the past thirty or so years, have eliminated large swathes of heavy industry and completely transformed the class and gender base of the workforce. In effect, these changes have transformed the social and economic base that supported the dominant mode of alcohol consumption in industrial Britain. This was based on a stable, relatively culturally homogenous market of male, industrial working class, beer consumers, drinking in community pubs.

In the 1980s, the brewing industry began to grasp the fact that the stable patterns of alcohol consumption were being eroded. It started to target a new generation of youth drinkers, both male and female, who demanded a greater range of alcohol products and different kinds of drinking venue from the traditional pub (see Coffield and Gofton 1994). These young consumers lived out their lives in a post-industrial world and were developing new leisure patterns and identities in the sphere of consumption. Long before the introduction of alcopops, the brewing industry had begun to design new alcohol products, and transform the pub, in an effort to capture these new consumers.

However, such changes went largely unnoticed by most of the epidemiological research into young people's alcohol use. In 1992 Carl May, reviewing the literature on youth drinking, could conclude that little had changed in the previous twenty years. Yet, at the time this review was undertaken, a complete revolution was taking place in many young people's use of alcohol and psychoactive drugs. The arrival of the rave scene and the explosion in the use of recreational drugs, most notably Ecstasy, held out the possibility that an entire generation of youth would be lost to the brewing industry. Thus, at the same time as it was becoming obvious that the old alcohol order was collapsing, the brewing industry was confronted with the possibility of losing a new generation of alcohol consumers to a post-modern consumer leisure order of raves, clubs and illicit recreational drugs.

The extent of this transformation in the leisure order was not lost on the brewing industry who, as Mathew Collins notes, 'began to worry that the shift may be irrevocable, a nascent nation of teetotallers fuelled by pills, powders and puff, drinking only *Lucozade* and *Evian* water.' (1997 p271). To illustrate this, Collins quotes the comments of senior brewing industry figures. For example, Fraser Thompson then strategic development

director at Whitbread noted:

> Young people seem less prepared to sip beer for hours, culturally they like short sharp fixes…five years ago there were less alternatives to getting a buzz or getting high. The challenge for the industry is to make alcohol part of that choice. (quoted in Collins p271-272, 1997)

Whilst Richard Carr, chairman of Allied Leisure, the entertainment arm of Allied-Tetley-Lyons noted:

> Youngsters can get Ecstasy for £10 or £12 and get a much better buzz than they can from alcohol...it is a major threat to alcohol led business (quoted in Collins p 271 1997)

It is worth bearing in mind that, according to market analysts The Henley Centre, pub attendance had fallen by 11% between 1987 and 1992. This fall was projected to continue to 20% by 1997. The Centre estimated the rave market to be worth £1.8 billion per year. In the report *Leisure Futures* the Centre noted 'this of course poses a significant threat to spending for such sectors as licensed drinks, retailers and drink companies' (quoted in Collins p278 1997).

The brewing industry was faced with the double whammy of losing its traditional market and losing out in the new psychoactive youth consumer market. The industry's response was to accelerate the process of re-commodifying alcohol products that it had begun in the eighties. The term re-commodification is deliberately chosen to capture the fact that alcohol was being redeveloped as a 'new' consumer product. In effect, the brewing industry created a post-modern alcohol market. The key transformations here have been as follows:

- A whole new range of alcohol products (ice lagers, spirit mixers, white ciders, alcopops and buzz drinks) has been released, aimed at a new generation of young alcohol consumers who are demographically and culturally much more varied than the traditional male, industrial working class alcohol consumers. Collectively these have become known as designer drinks;

- The strength of alcohol products has been increased in a direct attempt to compete in the psychoactive market and appeal to the new generation of psychoactive consumers;

- Alcohol products have been increasingly advertised as lifestyle markers in sophisticated campaigns to appeal to and develop market niches in an increasingly fragmented alcohol market;

- A whole new range of café bars, theme pubs, and club bars have been opened in an attempt to capture young consumers whose leisure sites were to be found in clubs, cyberspace, and shopping centres.

The brewing industry's attempt to recapture the youth drugs market has been referred to as a recreational drugs war by the journalist Jim Carey (1997). The marketing of alcohol products as recreational drugs, complete with the motifs of youth clubbing culture, became a staple of brewing industry advertising campaigns in the early to mid nineties and has continued as one of a range of market targeting strategies.

The ways in which the brewing industry has embraced youth drugs culture is obvious from the design and naming of a whole new set of alcohol products most notably represented by alcopops. Early products in the alcopops range bore names such as '*raver', 'blastaway', DNA,* (a play on the initials MDMA which denote the drug ecstasy). The form of alcopops as 'soft drinks', the design of labels with sleek graphics and characters (*DNA* had a glow in the dark label which its manufactures claimed was to enhance its fun value in nightclubs – see Collins 1997) all helped to secure the appeal of the drinks to a sophisticated youth consumer market steeped in contemporary club culture. More broadly, the marketing of such products also appealed to consumer sensibilities with its emphasis on the production of new and novel products that could be taken up as part of the changing fashion and lifestyle choices of postindustrial consumers.
The merging of alcohol and illicit drug culture codes in advertising took on a further dimension with the production of buzz drinks. Such drinks combine alcohol with legal stimulants such as caffeine and are a result of the attempt to capture the illegal drugs market. They complete the move from alcohol drinks mimicking the names and argot of the illicit drug culture to directly selling alcohol products as drugs. There is an irony in selling a legal drugs product which mixes depressants and stimulants whilst warning consumers on the label

not to use the product with other stimulants. For example, a buzz drink such as *Virgin High Flyer* – a title suggestive of the state of mind consuming the product is supposed to induce (both 'high' and 'flying' can be drug states) -kindly tells us not to use the product with other stimulants. This apparent regard for the consumer's health seems not to extend to the wisdom of mixing stimulants and depressants. Health education workers could do without this kind of touching concern.

The brewing industry has been spectacularly successful in recapturing the 'rave' market. Alcohol companies have sponsored clubs, blitzed youth magazines, developed pre-club feeder bars, and after clubbing chill out bars, whilst clubs which in their early rave days were largely alcohol free, such as the Ministry of Sound, soon acquired drinks licences.

As the alcohol market was transformed, two key changes have been noted:

- young people now drink a whole range of new alcohol products and the alcohol market is diverse. The brewing industry sees contemporary young drinkers as repertoire drinkers, using more than one product and changing them according to fashion.

- young people appear to be drinking more alcohol per drinking session. This is true of both under age and legal young drinkers.

There now exists a wide range of surveys at both national (Balding 1997, HEA 1996, McKegany 1997) and regional level (Brain and Parker 1997, Hughes et al 1997, Measham 1996) which demonstrates that the alcohol products young people drink have changed dramatically since the late 1980s. For example, a national HEA study of young people in 1996 found that the most popular brand name drinks with young drinkers were premium lagers such as Budweiser, white ciders, and fruit wines such as *Mad Dog 20/20*. Recent Health Education Unit research (Balding 1997), although failing to differentiate adequately between different types of lager and cider, demonstrates the appeal of alcopops to young people. 30% of 2,057 year ten girls (age 14/15) and 31.4% of 2,020 year ten boys had consumed an alcopop in the week prior to the survey. Hughes et al (1997) in a survey of 824 12-17 year olds found that premium lagers, white ciders, and fortified fruit wines were the most popular drinks with young drinkers. McKegany et al (1996), in a survey of 758 12-15 year olds in Dundee found that white ciders and premium lagers were the drinks most recently consumed.

Given the seemingly constant release of new alcohol products, the increasingly sophisticated attempts to re-brand and reposition all alcohol products, and the constant search for new and innovative alcohol leisure sites, it seems that youth drinking patterns are likely to continue to change. The brewing industry's own analysis of the youth alcohol market confirms that the appeal of designer drinks to under age drinkers is mirrored by changing patterns in the 18-30 group. In a report in 1997 by the Whitbread Brewing Company, the profiles of the new designer drinkers were mapped out. 41% of Alcopops drinkers were aged 18-24; a similar profile existed for buzz drinkers, spirit mixer drinkers had a slightly older profile with 42% being aged 21-29; and the profile of cider and beer drinkers varied according to the product.

In addition, both national and regional surveys have begun to chart an increase in the amount of alcohol consumed per drinking session by young people. For example, three large-scale surveys have reported this finding. Firstly, national surveys of young people's alcohol consumption have charted a doubling of the average alcohol consumption for 11-15 year olds between 1990 and 1996 (see OPCS 1996). In 1990 the average number of units consumed in a week was 0.8 which by 1996 had risen to 1.8 units. If non-drinkers are excluded from this 1115 year old group then average weekly consumption rose from 5.4 units a week in 1990 to 8.4 units in 1996. Secondly, a similar trend has been identified in the annual Exeter University studies carried out by Balding et al. Examining the data from six years of the survey, Balding noted that although the evidence did not suggest that more young people were drinking frequently than before, those who were drinking frequently were consuming more alcohol per week. This situation Balding characterised as being one of 'more alcohol down fewer throats'. Thirdly, Miller and Plant's recent UK survey (1996) found that the average number of units consumed in the week prior to the survey was 6.6 for girls and 8.7 for boys. In the 1980's typical findings would place average consumption for girls around 4-5 units and for boys around 5-7 units. (See Brain and Parker 1997 for a fuller review).

These changes reflect the emergence of a new kind of alcohol market and style of consumption. It is to the description of this new kind of drinker that we now turn.

The research

The qualitative data used in the following sections is taken from an ethnographic study of young street drinkers undertaken as part of a yearlong project investigating young people's use of alcohol. The methodology has been described in greater length elsewhere (Brain and Parker 1997) and may be critically reviewed there.

The fieldwork was conducted from May to October 1996 in three socio-economically deprived areas of Greater Manchester. These sites were selected because of the perceived prevalence of youth drinking and because they were precisely the kinds of areas that, if any, should have given rise to the 'drinking delinquents' much loved by the popular media. In each area, groups of young people were befriended, after first being contacted through a trusted youth worker or through the researcher's hanging round an area, becoming known, and then cold contacting young people. Once initial contacts had been made it was possible to extend these to other young people.

Non-participatory observation was carried out in two of the three areas with groups of young drinkers in a range of settings -home, parks, canal banks, bus shelters, and house parties. In addition, time was spent with these young people during the days and evenings when they were not drinking so that a rounded picture of their leisure time could be built up.

Once relationships had been developed, in-depth interviews were carried out with the young people based on a pre-designed semi-structured interview. This interview covered a number of themes: leisure practices, drinking and drug taking behaviour, reasons for such behaviour and experiences of being drunk. In total 55 in-depth interviews were carried out. This sample consisted of 35 male and 20 female respondents. The age distribution and frequency of drinking for the group are laid out below in tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 Age distribution of the 55 in-depth interviewees

Age	12	13	14	15	16	17
Number	2	7	15	18	9	4
Percent 4	13	27	33	16	7	

Table 2 Frequency of drinking distribution of the 55 in-depth interviewees

Frequency	more than once a week	once a week	two to three times a month	once a month or less often
Number	37	6	10	2
Percent	67	11	18	4

The in depth interviews contained a number of repeat questions and a couple of dummy questions in relation to drug taking and drinking so that reliability and validity could be tested. Responses to the questions did not indicate any problems as far as these were concerned. In addition, forty of the 55 young people also completed a questionnaire covering their alcohol and drug use. The questionnaire was completed at different times and settings to the in-depth interview and was used purely as a way of checking the validity of the in-depth interviews. No substantive differences were found between the responses to similar questions on the two research tools.

It was not through such checks, however, that confidence in the veracity of the data was achieved. Rather, it was through the intense period of relationship building that preceded the interviews and the non-participant observation that allowed the researcher to record the young people's behaviour and conversations in 'naturalistic' settings that such confidence was achieved.

The new alcohol consumers

As suggested above, the brewing industry had clearly grasped that the traditional alcohol order of industrial Britain was fast disappearing. As the old order was slipping away so the brewing industry was in danger of losing a youth market to a new order of leisure and drug consumption patterns. In diversifying the alcohol market, increasing the strength of alcoholic drinks, and marketing alcohol products as lifestyle markers, the brewing industry had understood and sought to exploit and encourage the fact that young people were drinking alcohol in more consumerist ways than their predecessors.

As a number of social theorists have pointed out, contemporary societies are consumer societies (see for example Bauman 1998, 1988, Featherstone 1991, Rose 1989). This is now being reflected in the increasing importance given to processes of consumption in explaining contemporary drug use by a number of authors (e.g. Jupp et al 1997, Measham 1996, Coffield and Gofton 1994, Collison 1994). Particularly for youth, identity is formed in the sphere of consumption. Consumer societies depend upon constantly stimulating wants and needs, generating a constant search for sensation and excitement, and producing a proliferation of styles, fashions, and consumer identities. This gives consumer societies their defining parameters. They are societies whose justification rests on the individual right to consume and the promotion of the notion that the good life is to be gained through these goods and services we consume. They encourage societies of instant gratification in which the pleasures of consumption are both material and symbolic.

The young street drinkers interviewed in the research for *Drinking with Design* displayed the consumer culture of instant gratification and sought both material and symbolic pleasures in their drinking. 45 of these young drinkers drank at least once a week and, of these, 30 drank two to three times a week, with 7 drinking everyday. Consuming alcohol was central to the weekly drinkers idea of having a good time, not because it was a social facilitator but because of its psychoactive properties. Amongst these frequent drinkers the principal reason for drinking was to get drunk or, in the language of the young people themselves, to get a 'buzz'. 70% of the weekly drinkers stated that this was the sole reason that they drank alcohol. Typically they would say:

> "Drinking gives me a high" (Des, male, 15)
>
> "I'd drink everyday if I had the money, it's just a buzz, I love it, the buzz when you get pissed" (Bill, male, 16)
>
> "It's very important to get drunk cos I'm spending money and I want to get drunk, so if I don't it's just a waste of money" (FB, male, 15)
>
> "It's very important to get drunk otherwise there's no point in buying it" (Gail, female, 14)
>
> "Strength is important, everyone gets it for the strength, cider is nasty it gives you a bad hangover. The best way to drink it is through a straw -you can't walk" (Lee, male, age 16)

In talking in these ways, these young drinkers were taking the logic of the consumer search for pleasurable consumption and instant gratification into the realms of psychoactive management of the self. They were deliberately engaging in hedonistic drinking. In this style of drinking the utility of alcohol becomes increasingly centred on its hit value.

It is important to realise how this search for a big hit is part of a more general psychoactive culture amongst contemporary youth. Young people inhabit social spaces in which the availability and consumption of recreational drugs is part of the normal leisure landscape (Parker et al 1998). Particularly as we move into the 18 to 30 age group alcohol takes its place as the dominant drug in a psychoactive repertoire. The early fears of the brewing industry proved unfounded. As Collins puts it,

> "Brewers had not lost a generation after all. The difference was that many clubbers now regarded beer and spirits as they would Ecstasy and cannabis, as another option in the polydrug pharmacopoeia, one buzz among many." (1998 p279)

The 'polydrug pharmacopoeia' was readily available to our 55 young drinkers. Only two of all the young drinkers we interviewed had not tried an illegal drug. By far the most frequently tried drug was cannabis. 44 of the 55 young drinkers had tried this. Of these, 16 had tried cannabis in the month prior to the interview, a useful indicator of regular use. 19 had tried speed at least once with 2 being past month users, and a further twelve had used LSD at least once.

Some of the young drinkers talked freely of having drink and drug repertoires.

> "When I've got money I'll buy a drink. If I've got the money for drugs I'll buy them, drink is cheaper than drugs. I took trips every night last summer and I take whizz if I've got no energy" (Chaz, female, 14)

> "In the past six months I've had about six trips and loads a weed. Trips make you happier, they're better than drink, they don't make you feel sick but I'd rather drink cos there's not more risk" (Sal, female, 16)

However, the pleasures of consumption in consumer societies are not just material but symbolic. Consumer approaches to the consumption of alcohol are not just about the search for psychoactive pleasure but also the search for the symbolic pleasure of consumption. Consuming products is a way of symbolically marking out lifestyle, status, and identity. This is, of course, the central concern of advertisers who not only divide and target groups within the population based on sets of lifestyle characteristics, but also actively attempt to sell products on the basis of their signifying potential.

So, the 55 young people we interviewed were all aware of the signifying potential of certain alcohol products. They could all, for instance, identify images associated with certain drinks that revolved around gender, age, wealth, and social status. For example, premium lagers could convey multiple images of masculinity, wealth, and standing:

> "Lager I used to hate it, didn't drink it…used to drink like women's drinks like 20/20, but then I wanted to be a lager lout, a c**t with a skinhead strolling into Heathrow with 4 cans a Carling" (Des, male, 15)

> "Budweiser is a rich man's beer, it's pretty dear and Stella is a rich man's beer" (Bill, male, 16)

and perhaps even convey a certain sexual marketability:

> "Wouldn't like to be seen with a cheap cider. If you've got Budweiser you are loaded. It's like the girls will say I'll go out with him. Now I buy it and they will come up and 'all right buy me this'." (Gaz, male, 15).

Some alcopops however conveyed femininity and were definitely not drinks for the boys:

> "More girls than boys drink them (alcopops), you wouldn't see boys walking round with a Hooch cos it's a girl's drink innit?" (Sue, female, 16)

As the quotations show, these young drinkers displayed a markedly consumerist approach in selecting products that would provide them with a good hit at a reasonable price (psychoactive consumption) and products that conveyed the appropriate image and lifestyle (symbolic consumption).

Bounded hedonistic consumption

Contrary to popular media images of young drinkers being out of control, the young drinkers in this study carefully managed their bodies for the purposes of pleasure and display. As Featherstone has noted (1991) modern consumers are calculating hedonists. Drawing on the work of the Dutch sociologist Cas Wouters, he

argues that modern consumers engage in the controlled decontrolling of emotions (see Featherstone 1991). Basically, consumers allow themselves the sensuous indulgence of consuming but always in planned, carefully controlled ways. Likewise, the hedonism of young drinkers is not simply one of uncontrolled abandon to the sensuous pleasures of indulgence, but rather a calculated and planned, rational hedonism. Here, contemporary young drinkers mark out pleasure spaces in which they can plan to 'let loose' and engage in less restrained behaviour than they would have to in the formal, complex structures of institutional interdependence such as school, work or organised leisure or the networks of interdependence in families. This leads to a form of hedonistic but bounded consumption. Here, the structuring effects of these sets of interdependence provide the boundaries and the consumer imperative to search for instant gratification the hedonism.

School obviously provides one set of boundaries:

> "Midweek do my homework, course work projects, then go out or watch T.V... Drinking on a weekend usually on a Friday and Saturday. Drinking is a 'Buzz'. wouldn't drink on my own. It's like a little party after school on a Friday night. I wouldn't drink midweek. Except holidays, during holidays I might drink during the week, only one day -Tuesday or Wednesday. On Friday night it's a bit of a ritual. I go to school in X and then see my mates on a Friday night, catch up on things" (Mike, male 15)
>
> Midweek you don't drink cos of school ... you can't get up in the morning." (Lucy, female 15)
>
> "You just don't drink on school days really, you just feel tired and that" (Hatti, female 14)

The limits are also seen in the tie in with family:

> "We go down to the canal usually about two to three weekends a month cos of babysitting" (Jane, female 14).

or work:

> "I've got to go to work on weekdays so I only drink at weekends" (Jack, male 17)

The pleasure of consumption and the search within leisure for instant gratification are, arguably, the rewards for the self-control, restraint and management of self required to steer their individual biographies through the complex lifeworlds of modern societies. I shall return to this later.

Such bounded hedonistic consumption is the ideal form of behaviour in consumer societies. It represents the essence of post-modern consumer drinking. Here a sophisticated consumer engages in a search for hedonistic experiences, in this case by pharmacologically altering their mood and engaging in symbolic display through the process of consumption, but always in planned structured ways. Drinking occurs at specific times and in specific places. The consumer drinker is able to separate one life-world from another and carefully control his or her own behaviour in each of these life-worlds. In the leisure sphere this behaviour is increasingly organised around the pleasures of instant gratification.

Unbounded hedonistic consumption

For some, however, there are no such structuring sets of interdependencies to be found in the world of work, family, and education. These young people are still constructed as consumers; the market constantly stimulates their desires and fantasies. They too have aspirations of hedonistic consumption yet they lack the means to achieve this consumer good life and the integrating structures that would encourage calculated hedonism. For such young drinkers leisure time is often all there is -an endless cycle of days without meaning of aspirations unmet, and stimulated desires left burning.

Arguably, in such circumstances, there is a looser degree of control and a greater degree of decontrol. What do such young drinkers need to control for? What structures of interdependence offer them rewards for

limiting their consumer excesses? Less integrated into the complex structures of interdependence than their more successful counterparts, they consume in an increasingly unbounded way. That is to say, their drinking episodes increasingly stretch out across time and space; they become more of a lifestyle rather than a leisure lifestyle. Their ability to steer their own individual biographies through the complex life-worlds of contemporary society is limited. Lacking educational success, careers, and ways of constructing meaningful identities, they play around in the margins of society. Here drinking, drug taking and other risk behaviours all merge in styles of spectacular consumption (see Collison 1996).

Within the group of 55 young drinkers, there was a group of 8 young men who drank between 5 and 7 days a week. They had all, except one, been excluded from school and all were unemployed and saw themselves as having few prospects. They spent most of their time hanging around and drinking.

> "Daytime consists of getting money to have a drink...spend about £4 a night" (Gar, male, 16 excluded from school)

> "A typical day is to get up come down here have a few beers, a bet, a game of footie and get pissed. Get pissed and play footie that's about all there is to do. If I've got the money I drink, whenever I've got the money to do so" (Dan, male, 17 unemployed)

For such young drinkers, the drinking event becomes inseparable from a general lifestyle of street consumption and a quest for excitement. A good time consisted of:

> "Getting wrecked, getting some slag and having a fight without the police finding out" (Dan, male, 17 unemployed)

> "Battering heads and nicking cars...drink makes you madder" (Joe, male, 13 excluded from school)

These unbounded consumers are the flawed consumers of the post-modern, consumer alcohol order. They engage in unregulated and often illegitimate forms of consumption.

Post-modern drinkers - the seduced and the repressed

The contemporary alcohol market, current youth drinking patterns, and the state's response to such patterns display the characteristic features of the twin processes of seduction and repression, which Zygmunt Bauman (1988) has argued characterise post-modern consumer societies. Young drinkers are increasingly caught between these processes. Bauman's use of the terms is complex but here I am drawing on his argument that in modern consumer societies 'the fashion in which people are groomed or trained to meet their social identities'(p24 1998) takes place through the act of consumption. For those who cannot (or will not) become consumers there is the traditional social control apparatus of the state ready to repress them.

It has already been suggested that contemporary societies are consumer societies. In such societies individuals are increasingly addressed and constructed as consumers and in the workings of consumer seduction are to be found the blueprints for life and the mechanisms that increasingly produce the modern subject and modern society. It is as hedonistic consumers that we must now see young drinkers.
The alcohol industry is a good example of how the process of consumer seduction works. In supplying a varied range of high strength psychoactive products it provides the conditions for consumer hedonism to flourish. By increasing the strength of alcohol products and deliberately breaking down the barriers between the licit and illicit drugs markets, producing drinks that trade on dance club/drug culture, it has sought to exploit and reproduce the drinking of alcohol for psychoactive hit. Drinks like *Raver* and *DNA* trade on dance club/drug culture, whilst 'buzz drinks' -drinks that contain legal stimulants -are a direct attempt to produce legal dance drugs. Dance/drugs culture has become one of a range of lifestyle groupings that alcohol products now symbolise. This is linked to the transformation of alcohol products into lifestyle markers. This, coupled with the constant innovation and production of new products, encourages the production and consumption of alcohol as a fashion accessory.

This process of consumer seduction can only take place because of the profound economic, social, and cultural changes which underpin the move away from the industrial to the postindustrial, post-modern consumer alcohol order. For today's young consumers the traditional structuring of identity that the industrial system of modernity provided rooted in lifelong occupations, class based communities, patriarchal nuclear family, and an interventionist welfare state no longer exists. They live in a global post-industrial economy based on service industries and the production of information and knowledge utilising new technologies. This has eroded old industrial communities and their forms of life. There has been a transformation in the structure of the nuclear family as women increasingly enter all spheres of the labour market and traditional masculine jobs disappear. The relationship between citizens and the state has changed as the welfare state has been restructured into a regulative state. Rather than guaranteeing collective provision, the state has now abandoned provision of most goods and services to the market and contents itself with regulating and policing functions. In such circumstances society becomes increasingly fragmented and individualised. Collective sources of identity fade and are replaced by identities formed in the market, particularly the sphere of consumption. Furlong and Cartmel neatly capture this (1998 p 9):

> "As subjective class affiliations, family ties and traditional expectations weaken, consumption and lifestyle become central to the process of identity construction"

Cut adrift from many of the structuring influences of previous generations, individuals are forced increasingly to rely on their own choices to steer their lives in situations of uncertainty through options presented to them by the seductions of the consumer market. (see Bauman 1988, Furlong and Cartmel 1997, Beck 1992, Rose 1994). It is in this context that we need to understand why it is that young drinkers increasingly drink for psychoactive effect and why the alcohol market itself has become more fragmented and volatile. Consuming for pleasure both materially and symbolically is all there is: it is the good life in post-modern consumer societies.

Bounded drinking patterns emerge out of these processes. Daniel Bell's dictum that capitalist societies require us to be puritans by day and hedonists by night is taken to its logical conclusion in bounded hedonistic consumption. Here, the ability to parcel off one stretch of time and space and 'let go' in a period of controlled hedonism is the natural counterpart to the need to strictly control and plan one's own biography in the world of work, education, and family, in societies where competition is tough and there is no guarantee of employment or security (Furlong and Carmel 1998, Beck 1982, Rose 1994). The responsibility for success in contemporary societies is placed squarely on the individual rather than being the responsibility of state or society. The pressure such responsibility creates is offset during bounded hedonistic consumption by the rewards of such consumption. Bounded hedonistic consumers are the seduced of the new alcohol order.

But, as Zygmunt Bauman has pointed out, seduction demands repression. For as the state leaves the reproduction of society increasingly to the market, so then it must abandon its role as collective provider of welfare. Collective provision is replaced by private responsibility, social problems redefined as individual failings and welfare redefined as consumer burden. Yet the self-same market excludes as well as includes. Its universal invitation to consume meets with selective ability to reply.

The unbounded young drinkers are the excluded of consumer societies. Seduced without any means of legitimately buying into the consumer society, they follow the dictates of hedonism without the boundaries of the socially included. Their socially marginal position generates a looser form of control and a greater degree of decontrol when engaging in hedonistic consumption.

Having abandoned social reproduction and provision to the market the state is left with little option but to repress these drinkers, aided and abetted by a media which fuels public concern over the unruly hordes of out of control drunken youth. Stricter policing and changes in the law have helped to criminalise young street drinkers. This fits into a wider process of controlling young people and increasingly closing off public spaces to them e.g. by the use of curfews or barring entry to shopping centres unless accompanied by an adult.

This policy of repression is the natural counterpart to allowing the seductions of the market. Yet this self-same market produces the very forms of behaviour the repression is meant to curb.

We have then arrived at a new alcohol order. A post-industrial consumer alcohol order in which the market is left free to seduce youth and encourage the excesses of hedonistic consumption whilst the casualties of the broader free market, those who become the unbounded drinkers, are to be repressed, and hidden from public view.

Futures

This paper has attempted to provide an outline of and explanation for contemporary youth drinking patterns. In parts, it is clearly speculative. The two dominant styles of drinking that have been identified need further investigation and elaboration. For example, not all young drinkers will have such a 'big hit', consumerist approach to drinking as the hedonists described in this paper. Also, unbounded consumption styles can clearly develop for any individual if the particular bounding mechanisms that give their life meaning and direction are eroded and alcohol or any other drug is used to fill the gap. Perhaps nihilism rather than hedonism will fuel some people's descent into unbounded consumption.

However, this paper is an attempt to map out broad trends. It is plausible to suggest that when young people's use of alcohol and drugs are considered together then something distinctive has happened in the way they think about and consume these products. For a significant section of contemporary youth – and here is meant anyone up to the age of thirty this psychoactive repertoire provides the base for a pick and mix leisure culture which celebrates the search for hedonistic pleasure. Simon Reynolds captures the mood of this culture well when discussing the argot of the club scene of the nineties in his book *Energy Flash:*

> "One catchphrase seems to sum up house's work hard/play hard conservatism *having it*….the buzzphrase captures the voracious greediness of house culture, its spirit of pleasure-principled acquisitiveness, a sort of psychedelic materialism. Neck those pills, snort some lines of charlie, puff on a big fat spliff, guzzle down those import lagers, chase the lot down with a wrap of billy whizz, lets get fucked up good and proper" (Reynolds 1998 p424-5)

The 'spirit of pleasure-principled acquisitiveness' is no fleeting youth fashion but rather, as I have argued above, is a product of the transition to a post-industrial consumer society. In some ways we are all hedonistic consumers now!

The dominance of more individualised, consumption oriented, social relations changes the social forms of licit and illicit drug consumption. This is illustrated neatly by Coffield and Gofton in their paper *Drugs and Young People* (1994). Here they argue that in industrial society beer and work were integrally related. Learning how to take your beer, buy rounds, and drink in community pubs was a form of apprenticeship that mirrored that of the world of industrial work. Drinking celebrated community, masculinity, and work. In post-industrial societies drinking and drug taking become less of a male working class integrating mechanism and more of a consumerist search for time out.

> "Drinks, too, are now used differently. There is no talk of learning to take your drink – the restraint and control of the old pattern gives way to licence and time out in which learning and tradition have no place, and in which lack of inhibition is valued rather than restraint. Drinks are also used as fashion accessories…an essential element of the fantasy transformation which is central to consumption" (1994 p11).

The social consequences of these changes have led to new concerns and moral panics such as those over lager louts, lad and ladette culture, alcopops, and the criminality causally attributed to youth drinking whether this be underage street drinkers or the concerns over violence in town centres at the weekends. These panics are all based in the sphere of consumption.

The changes in forms of consumption that have been highlighted have important implications for public policy. The question of what, if anything, we should do about youth, alcohol and drug consumption cannot be answered unless the forms of production and consumption of alcohol (and other drugs) is understood as being an outcome of specific structural processes. In this paper it is argued that contemporary forms of young

people's alcohol and drug use have emerged out of wider social, economic and cultural changes. These processes are leading on the one hand to a more individualist and hedonistic form of alcohol consumption and on the other destroying for some the bounding mechanisms that help individuals limit their consumption forms so that they do not become harmful to themselves or the wider community.

There is an evident tension between the promotion of free markets and individual rights to consume, and the need to deal with the social costs produced by forms of private consumption and unregulated markets. If, at the same time as moving to an increasingly individualised consumer society, forms of collective norms and social regulation are destroyed, then unbounded consumption patterns will develop. Further, even within bounded forms of consumption the consumption risks are raised as drinking becomes organised around the search for a big hit. This of course has particular dangers for young people first learning how to drink or take illicit drugs.

Public policy needs reorienting around the concept of sustainable consumption. Quite simply this means forms of consumption that do not undermine the ability of individuals, families, or groups to sustain the roles and functions that living in contemporary society requires.

Alcohol is a drug whose consumption brings with it many unintended consequences with which we are all now depressingly familiar. Yet the industry that produces, markets and sells this drug is left largely free to self regulate. Further, as I have tried to demonstrate, this is an industry which has proved itself adept at recommodifying alcohol products and in the process has not been afraid to trade on the appeal of alcohol as a youth drug. Any attempt to develop sensible policies towards alcohol consumption and distribution, particularly for youth, must recognise that alcohol is a drug and, along with tobacco, one that can be most socially harmful.

To promote a model of sustainable consumption would undoubtedly require public regulation of the alcohol industry. This regulation would work to ensure that sustainable consumption became the guiding ethos of alcohol production, marketing and distribution. For the brewing industry harm minimisation rather than simply profit maximisation would have to become a corporate goal. At the moment we have a situation where the industry has been able to effectively promote more individualist hedonistic consumer consumption styles through the recommodification of alcohol products. At the same time public policy has become increasingly about policing flawed or undesirable consumers fuelled by moral panics which link alcohol crime and troublesome youth. In this way genuine social problems become transformed into law and order problems. Difficult questions about how to balance individual consumer choice and unfettered markets with the equally important need to promote forms of production and consumption which promote the social good are side stepped by populist authoritarian rhetoric.

Sustainable consumption could also serve as a model for developing educational programmes. Such programmes would acknowledge that young people use alcohol and other drugs as sophisticated psychoactive consumers. However, the programmes would help young people explore how their consumer choices are formed and affect their own and others' lives. As consumers we do not float free from any social relationships. We live out our lives in complex networks of interdependence. Our consumption choices affect others as well as ourselves,. just as other people's choices affect us. Some forms of drug consumption lead to our inability to sustain our networks of interdependence. Others, of course, may well help us to sustain such networks. Sustainable consumption education programmes would aim to help young people understand how their individual consumer choices are formed and how their choices affect their ability to sustain themselves in the complex networks of interdependence in which they live.

However, the key importance of developing public policy around sustainable consumption lies in its impact on unbounded consumption. This is because it is difficult to develop sustainable forms of alcohol consumption in a context where the mechanisms which socially integrate individuals break down. In consumer societies the socially excluded live in exactly this condition. At the same time as society is increasingly constructing the good life in terms of individual consumption it is cutting off the means by which the consumer good life can be accessed for a significant section of society.

If the future is to look any brighter for the unbounded consumers depicted in this article then the processes

which produce unbounded consumption must be tackled. A few years ago Mike Collison (1995) noted that in order to replace drug culture you had to know what to put back. The point is just as valid now. If the future of the unbounded consumers is to be improved then public policy needs to develop structures of interdependence which provide the unbounded with the opportunities to move into bounded forms of consumption. This means addressing social exclusion, redeveloping the notion of the public realm and civic culture, and reasserting the fundamental importance of social rights.

The 'New Labour' Government has committed itself to tackling social exclusion. Whilst this is not the place to discuss the merits of the strategy it is questionable whether or not the Government will fundamentally reduce social exclusion without more active intervention in the market and a more robust redistributive strategy than is currently on offer. Much of current social inclusion policy is, arguably, about the compulsory reintegration of socially excluded groups into society rather than any attempt to change society so it does not generate social exclusion. Ironically, this approach generates new forms of exclusion. For example, one wonders what will happen to those 18-24 year olds who have been denied benefit as a result of New Deal. More unbounded consumers in the making? Moreover, on the issue of youth and crime the present government has shown that it can be just as pointlessly authoritarian as its predecessors. Since youth drinking is framed as a law and order problem the policy of repression is likely to continue. It seems we are not yet ready to develop a more enlightened and sustainable policy towards youth alcohol and drugs consumption or to really tackle the processes which would limit the extent to which unbounded consumption patterns will develop.

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