

# Drinking-related lifestyles: exploring the role of alcohol in Victorians' lives

Qualitative research report

© Copyright RMIT University

Published by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation  
September 2013

Publication number: K-058-ATUV

**Suggested citation**

VicHealth 2013, *Drinking-related lifestyles: exploring the role of alcohol in Victorians' lives*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne, Australia.

**Acknowledgements**

This report, prepared for VicHealth by RMIT University, presents findings from stage one of a two-stage research study. RMIT commissioned Latitude Insights to conduct the initial qualitative phase utilising online research community methodology.

# Drinking-related lifestyles: exploring the role of alcohol in Victorians' lives

Qualitative research report

Prepared for VicHealth

## Research team

Associate Professor Mike Reid, Professor Francis Farrelly,  
Professor Lisa Farrell and Professor Tim Fry  
(RMIT University School of Economics, Finance and Marketing)  
and Professor Tony Worsley (Deakin University School of Exercise and Nutrition Sciences)  
in conjunction with Latitude Insights.



# Contents

<b>1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>2 INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>5</b>
2.1 Background.....	5
2.2 Research objectives .....	6
2.3 Research methodology .....	6
2.4 Profile of the online community sample.....	11
<b>3 OUR DRINKING CULTURE</b> .....	<b>13</b>
3.1 Social acceptability of drinking.....	13
3.2 Social contexts for drinking .....	14
3.3 Role of alcohol in our lives .....	16
3.4 Drinking rituals .....	19
3.5 Influence of family and friends .....	23
3.6 Our drinking language .....	26
<b>4 CONSEQUENCES OF DRINKING</b> .....	<b>28</b>
4.1 Drinking risks and deterrents .....	28
4.2 Incentives to drink less .....	30
<b>5 SEGMENTATION OF DRINKING IDENTITIES</b> .....	<b>33</b>
5.1 The follower.....	34
5.2 The initiator .....	38
5.3 The moderator .....	43
5.4 The protector.....	47
<b>6 CURRENT COMMUNICATIONS</b> .....	<b>52</b>
6.1 The 'drink less' message.....	52
6.2 Definitions of 'problem' drinking and associations with binge drinking.....	58
6.3 Social acceptability of drunken behaviour.....	60
6.4 Looking after your friends when they have had too much .....	61
6.5 Overall alcohol communications landscape.....	62
<b>7 STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS</b> .....	<b>65</b>
7.1 Multipronged approach needed .....	65
7.2 Social is key .....	65
7.3 Focus on enabling behaviour change .....	66
7.4 Work alongside alcohol industry messages.....	67
7.5 Long-term commitment needed.....	68
<b>8 FUTURE DIRECTIONS</b> .....	<b>69</b>
8.1 Followers and initiators are key targets.....	69
8.2 Key messages .....	71
8.3 Summary .....	71
<b>9 APPENDICES</b> .....	<b>72</b>
Appendix 1 – Discussion guide .....	73
Appendix 2 – Profile of The Lounge online community sample.....	92

# 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 1.1 Our drinking culture

Australian culture has a high tolerance for alcohol consumption and an acceptance for heavy drinking across an extensive range of social contexts. Drinking is embedded in Australian culture; it is multifaceted and entrenched in many aspects of our lives, with rituals and habits providing structure, comfort and generating a sense of belonging. Our drinking culture is even manifest in established drinking language, in which those who drink to excess are celebrated and moderate or non-drinkers are negatively labelled. Our drinking behaviour is continually reinforced by our culture and, in turn, our culture is reinforced by our drinking behaviour.

Whether we're celebrating, socialising, networking, relaxing, commiserating or rewarding ourselves, alcohol plays an integral role. Drinking is expected to be part of almost all social events, but more concerning is the acceptance of excessive drinking at many of these occasions.

Both family and friends influence our drinking behaviour. It is when socialising with others that our drinking is most likely to become excessive. The encouragement and pressure (both subtle and overt) from others to 'join in the drinking' is powerful. To join in is to join the group, join the fun, join the ritual and join the tribe. The power of this pressure is extraordinary.

While the risks of heavy drinking are readily recognised, few people are willing to accept that this drinking behaviour is problematic. There are few effective incentives to encourage a more moderate approach and even fewer socially acceptable 'excuses' to drink less. Social benefits of drinking (to excess) far outweigh any perceived likely negative outcomes.

Given the highly positive, habitual and social nature of our attitudes, changing behaviours will be particularly challenging.

## 1.2 Background to the study

The broad range of social and health problems associated with excessive alcohol consumption have become a focus of our government, as Australians are renowned as a nation of drinkers. Drinking alcohol is a significant part of our lifestyle and the social norms that are part of one's lifestyle are likely to influence drinking behaviour.

With the aim of developing a 'drinking-related lifestyles' segmentation, RMIT University is undertaking a two-stage research study. This report presents findings from stage 1 of the study. Latitude Insights was commissioned by RMIT to host a qualitative discussion phase utilising an innovative and powerful online research community methodology. The aim of the qualitative research was to gain rich insight into the nature of drinking and how it fits into the lifestyle of Victorians, identify key segments, and explore the impact of various media and messages. Under the direction of RMIT, Latitude Insights hosted two private online research communities across a three-month period from late 2010 to early 2011. A total of 187 Victorians, recruited from an online research panel, participated.

### 1.3 Segmentation of drinking identities

Four key 'drinking identities' emerged from the research, defined according to tolerance for alcohol consumption as well as the source of influence that determines drinking behaviour.

**The initiator:** Has the most entrenched drinking behaviour. Initiators have a high tolerance for and consume large amounts of alcohol. The initiator's decision when to drink, and how much to drink, is mostly independent and internally driven.

**The follower:** Has a high tolerance for and generally consume large amounts of alcohol. Their alcohol consumption is strongly influenced by social pressure.

**The moderator:** Has the most balanced drinking lifestyle; they are moderate in the frequency and volume of their alcohol consumption. Alcohol does not play a significant role in their lives. Their views are formed by internal consideration and independent direction.

**The protector:** Has the most restrictive attitude towards drinking. Protectors have a low tolerance for the consumption of alcohol. Observing the 'out of control' drinking culture in Australia fuels their belief that government needs to intervene to protect society.

### 1.4 Current communications

Currently, government and health organisation communications seem to have the same overarching message: drink less. A popular style of communication focuses on the negative outcomes of drinking. However, focusing on consequences has little impact on the segments most at risk, namely Followers and Initiators. These drinking identities see this style of message as irrelevant and/or have become desensitised to it.

Underlying current communications are definitions of 'problem' drinking and 'unhealthy' drinking behaviour. Many drinkers view current definitions as simply inaccurate or unrealistic, so they do not buy into the 'drink less' message and distance themselves from these communications.

Overall, current communication strategies around alcohol appear to have limited impact and effectiveness in creating real behavioural change amongst at-risk groups. A different strategy is required to create a real cultural shift and effectively challenge the social acceptability of drinking to excess.

## 1.5 Strategic implications and future directions

Alcohol plays a key part in shaping our social identities, and thus communications should be based on the role that alcohol plays in our social lives. A successful communication strategy must be broad, targeting multiple segments, a range of ages, occasions and drinking behaviours.

To empower responsible drinking, communications need to chip away at the social acceptance of drinking to excess. Using a social focus will also erode the hardest behaviour to address: long-entrenched habitual, ritualistic behaviour.

Currently, there is a notable absence of tools and resources to enable individuals to partake in responsible drinking and retain their social standing. Individuals need to be provided with a way of drinking that is still culturally relevant but does not require drinking to excess. This will require a multi-faceted campaign that is holistic in its representation of the alcohol culture.

For health and government communications to have any success in reducing Australians' high-risk drinking, they need to acknowledge and not directly challenge current attitudes that drinking is fun, socially acceptable and something people want to do. Effective messages need to be engaging, enabling and supportive, providing practical ways to still be part of the social group, and maintain 'credibility' in the tribe, while drinking moderately.

Followers and Initiators should be key targets of future communications, although strategies should address all four drinking identities.

Challenging the Australian drinking culture will be difficult, and change will take time. Long-term commitment of the kind given to anti-smoking programs and drink driving campaigns will need to be applied in order to change Victorians' drinking lifestyles.

## 1.6 Conclusion

This research clearly illustrates the pervasiveness of drinking in our society and that drinking may well be more culturally embedded than previously acknowledged. The research indicates that communication strategies focusing on negative consequences as a deterrent will have little impact on behaviour of at-risk groups. Instead, the social acceptability of drinking to excess needs to be challenged and responsible drinking needs to be enabled. Effective change requires providing people with socially permissible alternatives to participate in our culture without drinking to excess.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

### 2.1 Background

Alcohol is an intrinsic part of Australian culture and plays an integral role in people's social lives. The broad range of social and health problems associated with excessive alcohol consumption, both at a personal and societal level, have become a central focus of governments.

While many Australians drink in moderation, statistics from the National Health Survey 2004–2005 show that, among the general population over 18, 88% of males and 60% of females engaged in binge drinking at least once in the previous year, with a significant number doing so at least once a week. While understanding single-act behaviours such as binge drinking is important, arguably more important is understanding the deeper lifestyle-related connections to alcohol consumption and how lifestyle shapes problem drinking and associated behaviours.

To reduce harmful consumption of alcohol there needs to be a focus on alcohol consumption and problem drinking amongst the broader population as well as an understanding of specific sub-cultures and population groups such as youth. A clearer picture of the varied uses of alcohol and cultures of drinking, including controlled intoxication among young and older people, would enhance understanding of alcohol consumption, its perceived risks and pleasures, and facilitate ways of modifying such behaviour.

Drinking alcohol is a significant part of Victorians' lifestyles and the nature of one's lifestyle and indeed the social norms that are part of one's lifestyle are likely to influence drinking behaviour. Changing the way that alcohol fits into people's lifestyles is likely to offer the most realistic means of reducing excessive drinking. People often do not recognise that they are consuming alcohol in quantities that are damaging to their health, leading them to disassociate themselves with those they perceive as 'problem drinkers'. The social norm of high alcohol consumption may lie in consumer culture and lifestyle.

*Victoria's Alcohol Action Plan 2008–2013* (<http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs>) highlights the need to promote a change of the attitudes and behaviours towards alcohol consumption; to change the acceptance of intoxication and drunkenness; and to reduce risky drinking in the community. This change is to be achieved through a sustained awareness campaign across a wide range of community and other settings. The development and success of such campaigns rests heavily on understanding consumer (drinking) segments in the Victorian marketplace, including attachments and associations with alcohol, how alcohol fits into people's lives, and how messages regarding alcohol consumption can be targeted to specific at-risk groups and the general community.



With the aim of developing 'drinking-related lifestyles' segmentation, RMIT University is undertaking a two-stage research study in the form of a qualitative research phase (stage 1) followed by a quantitative research phase (stage 2). RMIT University engaged Latitude Insights to host the qualitative phase using an innovative online qualitative research approach. This report addresses the findings of stage 1.

## 2.2 Research objectives

The primary objectives of the qualitative research phase were as follows:

- Gain rich insight into the nature of drinking and how it fits into the lifestyle of Victorians.
- Identify key segments differentiated by values, attitudes, motivations, usage occasions, and other lifestyle and behavioural factors.
- Explore the impact of various media and messages.

## 2.3 Research methodology

The approach to data collection for the qualitative research phase involved the use of a creative and powerful online research community methodology. This methodology provided an excellent means to unearth participants' social and cultural assumptions about alcohol and consequently provided the foundation to map and segment Victorians' drinking attitudes.

Online research communities are a tool for generating rich insights that have the capacity to go beyond the capabilities of traditional market research approaches such as focus groups and face-to-face interviews. Online communities provide a private forum where invited participants are able to share their thoughts and opinions over a period of time without judgement from others.

A major benefit of an online research community approach is that it is ethnographic in nature, and as such allows researchers to understand the cultural nature of community dialogue. In turn, this allows insights into participants' values, assumptions, beliefs, rituals, language and identity, in relation to the role of alcohol in their lives. In an online community the moderator has to stimulate conversations and demonstrate authenticity to engage members effectively. In doing so the researcher becomes part of the tribe in order to understand it. Furthermore, relative to data extracted from some of the more conventional research methods, online communities are a source of naturally occurring data and are more suited to uncovering cultural influences and insights that are not biased either in their generation or reporting.

An online community methodology has fewer time constraints: participants do not get cut off, redirected or told to wind up their thoughts. The result is greater depth, richness and insight into the issue of interest. One of the other important aspects of the online community is the degree of anonymity for research participants. The pseudonymity–anonymity of an online community allows participants to be more uninhibited than face-to-face methods while still allowing them to build relationships with other members of the community. In the ‘safety’ of the online community members share thoughts, feelings and memories that they may not normally share with strangers or even friends or family. This enables a higher level of disclosure than would be evidenced in face-to-face research methodologies.

For this study, two private online research communities were established and active for a period of more than 3 months from 26 October 2010 to 4 February 2011. Each community consisted of approximately 100 invited participants who engaged in ongoing conversations and activities. The communities were actively moderated for a total of 9 weeks from November 2010 to early February 2011, with a 3-week break in community activity for the Christmas to New Year period.

Both online communities were called The Lounge (Figure 1) but each had a bespoke design to match its unique membership base:

- Community 1 included active drinkers aged 18–35 (‘younger’),  $n = 64$ .
- Community 2 included active drinkers aged 31–60 (‘older’),  $n = 123$ .



Figure 1. Online research communities – The Lounge homepages (younger and older)

## Recruitment process

Participants in the online research communities were recruited from an online research panel and asked to complete a screening questionnaire to profile their current values, lifestyle and drinking behaviour. Those who qualified as active drinkers (defined as those who consume a minimum of three standard alcoholic drinks per week) were then invited to participate in one of the two online research communities. Further details of the composition of the research sample can be found in section 2.4. Invited participants committed to being involved in the online community each week for a total of 9 weeks. Recruitment ensured a cross-section of light, moderate and heavy drinkers. Categories of drinkers (light/moderate/heavy), were not rigid in their definition and participants could 'cross' multiple categories, depending on the volume and frequency of their alcohol consumption.

- Light drinkers:
  - Consume alcohol 1–3 times per week:  $n = 95$  (42%)
  - Consume 3–4 standard drinks per week:  $n = 79$  (35%)
- Moderate drinkers:
  - Consume alcohol 4–6 times per week:  $n = 64$  (28%)
  - Consume 5–6 standard drinks per week:  $n = 55$  (25%)
- Heavy drinkers:
  - Consume alcohol 7 or more times per week:  $n = 66$  (30%)
  - Consume 7 or more standard drinks per week:  $n = 91$  (40%)

Participants were recruited from a specialist online market research panel. Once initially screened, to collect demographic and other information including level of drinking, participants were invited to take part in the 9-week online community study for which they would receive a \$20 gift voucher for their active participation for the duration of the study. To enhance ongoing participation each week moderators awarded ten \$10 gift vouchers (for each community) to recognise valued contributors. The group/community moderators (based at Latitude Insights) were responsible for this. Incentives were awarded based on consistent, considered contributions to community discussion. Typically these rewards were given to a variety of community members to ensure no bias or favouritism and encourage all members to participate. Every member that regularly participated in the community received an incentive.

In terms of participation in qualitative research, these levels of incentives are much lower than those paid in traditional focus groups or in-depth interviews (typically \$80–100) and are therefore considered to have much less influence on the motivation of participants to be involved in the study. For online communities, the intrinsic motivations of interest, intrigue, being part of a study and seeing what others think often drive participation more so than the small monetary incentives. The continued participation in discussions on alcohol and drinking over a 9-week period means that biases are less than would be encountered in short-term studies using focus groups.

## **Online research community dialogue**

The questioning strategy was designed by the RMIT research team. Discussions regarding the unfolding of questions and the sequencing of discussions over the 9-week period were held with Latitude Insights and modifications made based on their experience in hosting online communities. The discussion guide, outlining questions posed to both communities throughout the course of the research, can be seen in Appendix 1.

Once invited into the community, participants conversed over a period of 3 months, responding to lines of questioning and various stimuli and engaging in conversations about particular issues such as socialising activities, alcohol use, perceptions of alcohol messages and consequences of excessive alcohol consumption.

The Lounge online communities are based on an interactive forum that provided participants with the opportunity to respond to moderator conversations designed to answer the research objectives, as well as allowing participants to create their own conversations. Moderators posted new questions or activities three times each week. In addition to these, participants were encouraged to post their own discussions and blogs to which others could comment. A total of 60 moderator discussions and 195 participant discussions took place across The Lounge communities over the 3 months.

While the research focus was 'the role of alcohol in participants lives' participants were not made aware of this focus at the beginning of the study; it was important to ascertain the role and prominence of alcohol in lives, in an unbiased and uncensored manner. As such, The Lounge communities initially focused on socialising, in a broad sense, exploring the roles of food, drink, family and friends within this context. Over time, the focus on alcohol became clear, but by this time the moderators had built a sense of trust and had demonstrated that participants would not be judged based on their behaviour and comments. Discussions covered such things as their social events, typical and special occasions, how drinking habits have changed over time, how family and friends influence drinking habits, drinking alone, choosing to go without and when to intervene when others have drunk too much.

Community members were asked to complete a short survey, as well as undertake some personal challenges including an alcohol consumption diary and a deprivation challenge (i.e. abstain from drinking at their next social occasion). A mix of stimuli was also presented including print and TV advertising to ascertain responses to recent drinking moderation commercials and messages, as well as articles to stimulate thought and test assumptions.

## **Analysis**

Given the extensive nature and coverage of the qualitative online communities a number of analytic techniques were used throughout the study; the two key qualitative analysis techniques used to identify the segments were thematic analysis and comparative analysis. These were undertaken by both RMIT University and Latitude researchers/moderators through a process of iteration and discussion.

Using thematic analysis researchers examined the data collected from participants' discussions and responses, and identified key themes. This was aided initially by the questions that were posed each week to the communities and examined on a weekly rolling basis. For each group, common themes associated with drinking behaviour, attitudes and motivations were drawn out and used as a basis for considering likely drinker segments. Comparative analysis was used on a continual basis to compare people and each group/community to check that the drinker types were appropriately represented by the data. This is a usual approach in the analysis of qualitative data.

As well, basic analysis was conducted as an emergent process throughout the 9 weeks with responses of participants reviewed and subsequent questioning additions or modifications made to probe areas of interest. This approach to the management of the communities enabled the researchers to inform future areas of questioning, and to form propositions about behaviour and likely drinker segments.

### **Limitations**

Qualitative research involves the collection, analysis and interpretation of data that are not easily reduced to numbers. Qualitative research is useful to policymakers because it often describes the settings and contexts in which policies will be designed and implemented. Nonetheless qualitative research does have limitations, including the following:

- Research quality is often dependent on the skills of the research team and moderators and more easily influenced by personal biases and idiosyncrasies.
- The volume of data generated by online communities makes analysis and interpretation time consuming.
- It is sometimes not as well understood and accepted as quantitative research within the scientific community.
- The moderator or researcher presence during online data gathering, which is often unavoidable in qualitative research, can affect the participants' responses.
- Issues of anonymity and confidentiality can present problems when presenting findings.
- Findings can be more difficult and time-consuming to characterise in a visual way.

Although the terms *reliability* and *validity* are traditionally associated with quantitative research they are increasingly being seen as important concepts in qualitative research as well. In qualitative research validity relates to the honesty and genuineness of the research data, while reliability relates to the reproducibility and stability of the data. The validity of this research is developed through the extended dialogue with participants, ensuring that the research team was able to capture over an extended timeframe their daily drinking behaviour as well as those situations where excessive consumption may have occurred and also their thoughts and perceptions. The ongoing dialogue between participants, and the relatively minimal involvement of moderators, meant that bias was reduced compared with short-term approaches such as focus groups and depth interviews. The adoption of a formal discussion guide, albeit with the flexibility to probe, means that the research can be reproduced faithfully and themes and findings tested. The use of pseudonyms also meant that participants were not identified, and therefore free to post comments and behaviours with confidence.

## 2.4 Profile of the online community sample

A total of 187 Victorians actively participated in The Lounge online research communities, providing a robust qualitative research sample.

The Lounge online research communities comprised participants representative of active drinkers within the Victorian population, with 74% of members from metropolitan Melbourne and 26% from regional Victoria. Within this sample, 54% ( $n = 101$ ) were women and 46% ( $n = 86$ ) were men.

The two communities were split by age (under or over 35) and life stage (non-parents or parents) but across the communities there was even spread of ages from 18 through to 65 years (Table 1). Other demographic details of the community are outlined in Appendix 2.

**Table 1. Age of online research community participants**

Age (years)	Percentage	<i>n</i>
18–25	15%	29
26–30	14%	26
31–35	15%	29
36–40	12%	22
41–45	9%	16
46–50	12%	22
51–55	11%	21
56–60	12%	22
Total	100%	187

Participants were also profiled according to the amount of alcohol they consumed on average each

week, the type of alcohol they preferred, as well as where they mostly consumed alcohol (Tables 2–4).

Nearly one-fifth of community participants claimed to consume only three standard drinks per week (19%); the largest proportion of participants stated they consumed more than eight standard drinks per week (29%). Interestingly, the reported consumption behaviour was higher for the older community than the younger community (35% versus 23% respectively consuming 8 or more drinks per week).

Wine was the most preferred alcoholic beverage of participants and most alcohol was consumed at home or in the homes of family and friends.

**Table 2. Number of standard alcoholic drinks consumed per week**

Number of standard alcoholic drinks per week	Percentage	<i>n</i>
3	19%	35
4	17%	31
5	16%	29
6–7	19%	35
8+	29%	57
Total	100%	187

**Table 3. Preferred alcoholic beverage**

Preferred alcoholic beverage	Percentage	<i>n</i>
Wine	50%	94
Spirits	27%	50
Beer	23%	43
Total	100%	187

**Table 4. Where alcohol was most often consumed**

Where alcohol most often consumed	Ranking
At home	1st
Friend or family member's home	2nd
Restaurant or cafe	4th
Pub, club or bar	3rd

### 3 OUR DRINKING CULTURE

#### 3.1 Social acceptability of drinking

As Australians we are renowned for being a nation of drinkers. The regular consumption of alcohol is deeply ingrained within our national culture. For most, the prevalence of alcohol in our community is seen as an acceptable part of our lifestyle, with little cause for concern. The source of this acceptance is challenging to pinpoint – our attitudes and behaviours as they pertain to alcohol have deep historical roots. In many ways Australians’ attitudes towards alcohol have not been consciously developed, but rather subtly socialised from a very early age. Drinking is a learned behaviour for most Australians: as we learn to become adults, we learn to drink.

For most Australians the range of ‘acceptable drinking’ is significant and can be understood as anything from a few drinks (typical drinking) all the way through to considerable intoxication (getting drunk). To the active drinker, abstinence and binge drinking is considered outside of the norm.

Figure 2 illustrates the spectrum of acceptable and ‘normal’ drinking behaviour amongst active drinkers.



Figure 2. Spectrum of acceptable and ‘normal’ drinking behaviour amongst active drinkers



### 3.2 Social contexts for drinking

As with the spectrum of acceptable drinking, the social contexts in which drinking are accepted in Australia are extensive. This is evidenced by the conversations within The Lounge, and reinforced by a survey amongst members.

Members of The Lounge online communities were provided with a list of 26 social events (Figure 3) and were asked to indicate which were acceptable drinking occasions. Of the 26 events, more than 50% of members suggested almost all were acceptable drinking occasions; at only three occasions did members think that alcohol would not be tolerated: a child's birthday party, a church/religious group and a study group.

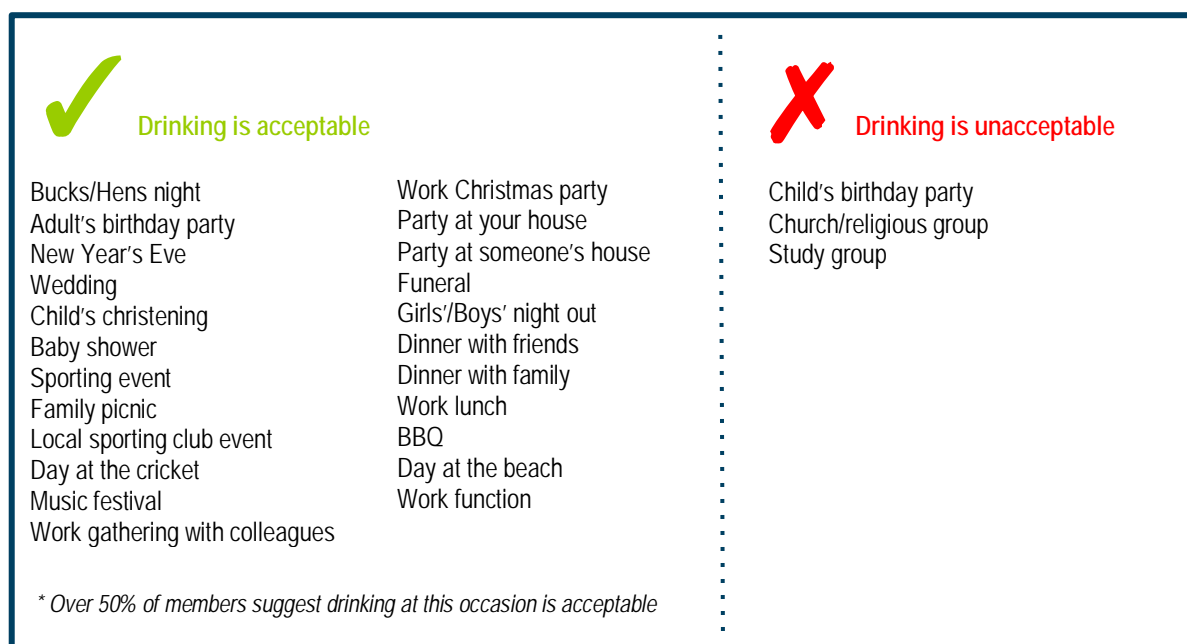
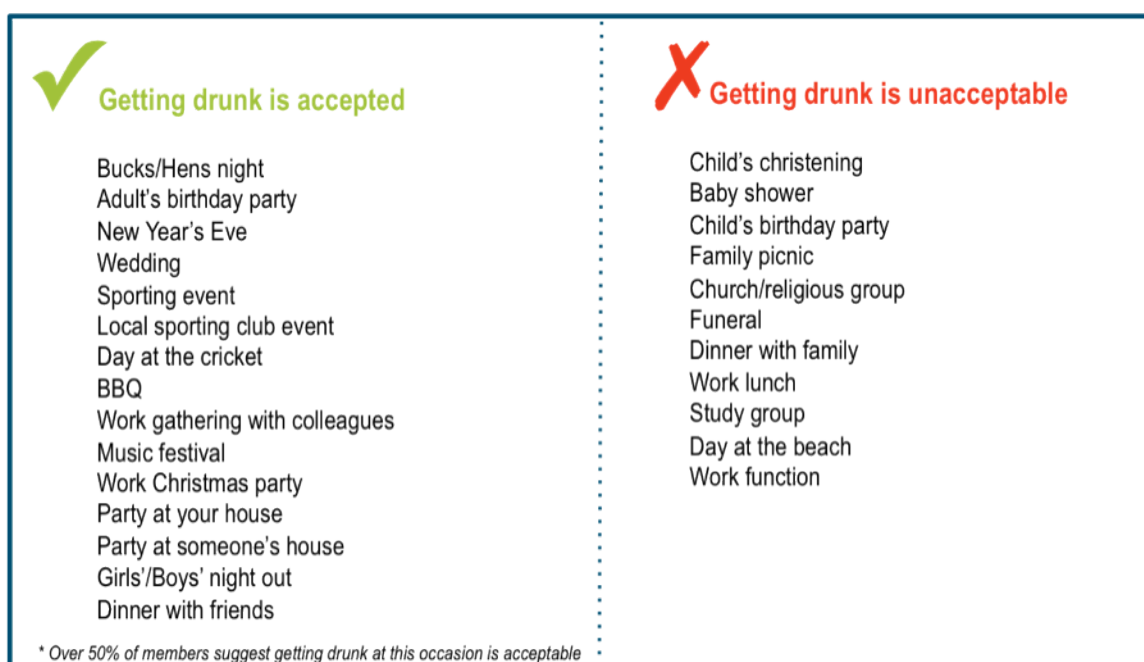


Figure 3. Occasions at which drinking is considered acceptable

To further understand the level of alcohol consumption that Australian society tolerates, members were asked to indicate at which occasions getting drunk was accepted. The results revealed that a majority of members felt that not just drinking but getting drunk was acceptable behaviour at more than half of these events (Figure 4).



**Figure 4. Occasions at which getting drunk is considered acceptable**

This component of the study further reinforces that Australian culture has a high tolerance for the consumption of alcohol. Moreover, it supports the notion that our culture of drinking goes beyond the general acceptance of alcohol, and extends to incorporate an acceptance of heavy drinking and getting drunk. Essentially, to be a 'true Australian' is to be a drinker. Not only does society accept alcohol's role across an extensive range of social contexts, it embraces heavy drinking as part of the Australian way of life.

### 3.3 Role of alcohol in our lives

Drinking is entrenched in nearly every facet of our lives. Alcohol is used as a way to relax, a way to connect with people, a way to celebrate our achievements and a way to enjoy life. Whether we're celebrating, socialising, networking, relaxing, commiserating or rewarding ourselves, alcohol plays an integral role. Our drinking behaviour is continually reinforced by our culture, and in turn our culture is reinforced by our drinking behaviour.

When considering our day-to-day lives, and the typical working week, many people use alcohol as a way to symbolise the end of the working day, and mark a switch in shifts from 'work time' to 'rest time'. With the arrival of the weekend and its associated leisure time, many look forward to the opportunity to relax and catch up with friends and family in a social environment. In these situations, alcohol acts as a social lubricant; it softens our inhibitions and is seen to help stimulate easy conversation.



*"Last Saturday night, I had dinner and we shared a few nice bottles of white wine with friends that I have just recently caught up with after approximately 20 years. It was a relaxing, enjoyable night."*

Michelle, 43

Drinking, however, is not solely restricted to our personal time; it regularly extends into the workplace. Drinking plays an important role in networking and relationship development within the workplace. Whether it is a 'boozy lunch', Friday night drinks with the team, a work function or an office celebration, drinking is seen to provide a great opportunity to socialise and connect with work colleagues on a variety of different levels.



*"I just started a new job and the office went out for Friday night drinks ... however on this particular occasion they decided to finish work at 3 pm. So I thought this would be fun and we went out and the manager puts his credit card behind the bar and started buying rounds. Now I don't mind the odd drink but on the same note because I'm still getting to know the people in the office I didn't want to be the grump who didn't want to have fun. So we started drinking, and drinking. It gets to about 6 pm and by this time most of us are toasted. I had to get my girlfriend to pick me up from the station but I feel that it was a good chance to get to know my new work colleagues on a personal level and for them to get to know me better."*

Chris, 23

During special occasions, whether heading out or hosting an occasion within the home, alcohol is generally one of the first considerations. Drinking is seen to enhance these special events and for some offers an opportunity to over-indulge and drink more than they would on a typical day. Many expressed a strong sentiment that a special occasion would not be 'special' without the presence and (often heavy) consumption of alcohol.



*"The best event for me was NYE. We hired an apartment in the city with another couple, got the kids babysat and had a ball. We spent the afternoon in the pool then had a yummy dinner ... along with a few glasses of wine. We then strolled over to watch the 9 pm fireworks then back to the room for more drinks (this time vodka). We then walked to Birrarung Marr to watch the most beautiful fireworks Melbourne has ever seen ... Then we strolled back to our hotel for more drinks until we fell asleep as the sun was coming up! It took 2 days to recover but was worth every minute of headache."*

Sharron, 34



*"The event was a catch up celebration with people we met on our holiday in Europe. The celebration took place at home where I cooked up a storm of dips, lamb and desserts. Wine, beer and spirits were consumed whilst watching our holiday DVD/movie. An awesome night."*

Poppy, 34

While alcohol is an important part of some occasions, it can be *the occasion* in and of itself. Drinking for the sake of drinking is widely accepted and practised, especially for young people. In these instances, drinking may be the only activity that is planned for the day/evening; getting drunk is the specific intention rather than an unexpected outcome.

These occasions of heavy drinking are often seen as a rite of passage amongst the younger generation, who express a belief that 'we should do it while we're young, before we get older and have to become more responsible'. In addition, the social status associated with a big night of drinking is notable, and especially attractive to the younger generation (though not exclusively). People will often boast of a 'big night' of drinking and the subsequent hangover with a feeling of pride, which is almost always positively reinforced by their peers. To have a big night of drinking enhances the individual's social status and implies they are fun, free-spirited and have a wealth of friends.



*"In my experience within my peer group at age 25, it still is very acceptable to go out and get drunk. I've found more so lately that my friends will often discuss before we head out what they want to drink that night, what will get them the most drunk without getting sick, etc."*

Laura, 25



*"Big nights are usually on a Friday, start around 7 pm and consist of the 'Gang' getting together at some cafe/bar/pub and chatting about the usual kind of thing. There are usually around 8 of us. Before we have too many, we decide who's house we are going to completely demolish (just kidding), and grab some drinks from the bottle shop on the way. I'm not sure why but when we buy them, we think yeah, this it heaps, probably more than enough. It NEVER is ... Of course everyone feels like crap the next day and wish we could all just grow up :). On second thoughts, how long will we do this for? Maybe we should have nights like these while we all can."*

Louise, 28

As we get older our habits often begin to shift and our drinking manifests in a different way. The focus of drinking can become less about social interaction and the softening of our inhibitions and more readily associated with relaxing and de-stressing. In fact for many, as we mature social interaction is no longer needed to justify having a drink, with many regularly enjoying alcohol as a solitary activity.

Furthermore, as our experiences with alcohol develop, and we begin to more independently manage our drinking, our behaviour is likely to become increasingly entrenched. Established and ritualistic behaviours where alcohol is regularly used as a way to relax and reward are likely to emerge. In these instances, people associate alcohol with taking some well-deserved time out and an opportunity to reflect on the day that has passed. Importantly, this type of entrenched drinking is generally more moderate rather than excessive (viewing each occasion in isolation), and usually occurs in the privacy of the home, which leads most to view it as normal and even positive behaviour.

Given the highly positive, habitual and social nature of our attitudes towards drinking, influencing these behaviours will be particularly challenging.



*"I will often have a drink alone, it's a great way to relax, and if you have to wait for someone to have a drink with, you could be waiting a long time if you live alone."*

Jenny, 32



*"I spent time cleaning up the house, cooking dinner (beef strog) and then settling down with a bottle of red and some episodes of Frasier. It may sound dull to some, but I gotta say ... I loved the 'me' time, the glass of red and some great TV."*

Mary, 45

### 3.4 Drinking rituals

Australian culture carries with it an extensive range of ingrained cultural rituals. A number of these cultural rituals focus specifically on the expected behaviours that surround alcohol consumption. These 'drinking rituals' often involve complex, learned behaviours that involve a number of processes or rules, learned over time via observation, instruction and social reinforcement.

Over time, these drinking rituals become part of our lives; they provide structure and comfort and through repetition help to anchor and reinforce drinking behaviours. They generate a sense of belonging and a way of identifying ourselves as 'one of the group'. They are evidence of how socially integrated alcohol is in our lives.

Throughout the course of The Lounge online communities, members referred to a range of well-known Australian drinking rituals, such as: the 'shout', a 'round', making a toast, Friday night drinks, 'beer o'clock', the work party and the dinner party.



*"Usually when you're with a group of friends or work colleagues, it seems that everyone must keep up with each other ... Don't dare to knock back a shout whether it's paid for or just 'your turn to get the beers from the fridge', otherwise there's hell to pay."*

Steve, 43



*"My big problem was my manager at work. I was an assistant manager and we would go out for a 'work lunch' which was always meeting with service providers who would head off after about an hour and a half, but then my manager would get another bottle of wine, and then another, and then another. Next thing I know it's actually past knock off and I'm ringing my hubby to come get me (obviously because I can't drive home)."*

Jane, 29

While these cultural rituals are easily identified and clearly articulated, a range of behavioural rituals specific to an individual or social group are often more deeply ingrained, and can subsequently be more challenging to unearth. For example, the ritual of a 'big night' can become manifest in a number of ways (Figures 5 and 6).



### Meet James (aged 34)

James says, "For some strange reason, we never seem to plan a big night, they just happen". Yet James is able to provide a clear description of the pattern of behaviour he associates with 'big nights out' ...

*"Get home from work on a Friday night about 6ish, decide to go out with partner – all well and good – here's the timeline:*

*6:00: Decision made, we're going out*

*6:05: Where is decided – somewhere in the city, probably Casino to start with*

*6:10: Turn on TV – I start watching time shifted news while the finance minister gets ready*

*6:30: News done – enquire as to whether eye liner is the same as mascara*

*6:35: Finish listening to the differences between eye liner and mascara*

*7:00: Make-up done – now what to wear. I start watching ABC news*

*7:00 – 7:30: 14 different outfits get paraded in front of the telly, roughly one every 2 minutes*

*7:30: Maybe ready to leave*

*7:45: Almost ready*

*7:50: I go get changed*

*7:51: Out the door, drive to Crown, use voucher for free parking*

*8:15: Facebook update – "we're at Crown, where are you?"*

*8:17: Read 20 updates, SMSs etc, find out what, who, where and when*

*8:30: Dinner ate wherever with 6 people who also happened to be at Crown*

*9:00: Now have people waiting for us for after dinner drinks, party of 8 becomes party of 20*

*10:00: Venue change, decide to go traditional so off to Y&J – long walk, lots of stops, lots of carry on as nobody sells Band-aids for heels along Southbank*

*10:30: Arrive at Y&J and faced with line at door – ridiculous – wait*

*10:45: In – beer, conversation, who's who and what etc*

*11:00: More beer*

*11:30: More beer*

*12:00: Venue change, someone suggests Fed Square, but not Taxi*

*12:05: Nothing at Fed Square beside Taxi*

*12:10: Flurry of SMSs/Tweets causes tram ride to Richmond, Bridge Rd*

*12:30: Eventually find the place, not on Bridge Rd, private house blocks away*

12:45: Decide not enough to drink, and need more ice – borrow car and drive to shops

1:00: Shop

1:10: Realise haven't used up all the money in the pile

1:15: Maccas drive through

1:18 – 1:45: Drive around to get Maccas smell out of Audi

1:45: Arrive to boos and jeers

1:50: Eat, drink and be merry

xxx: Sleep on smallest couch in the universe, then find out it's a fold out bed. Curse. Curse some more. Wake people up. Get cursed at.

Undetermined time: Wake-up. Huge brekky, tram back to Casino, collect car, drive home.

The end!"

Figure 5. A 'big night' – excerpt from The Lounge online research community



#### Meet Patricia (aged 34)

Patricia loves big nights out with her friends and colleagues, and describes here a recent great night out.

*"My big nights differ according to who I go out with! So, here's one example ...*

*It's late Friday afternoon at work. A buzz is in the air with everyone knowing the weekend is near. The words, 'Beer o'clock' ring through the office. I get everyone to shut down their computers and pack up, because we're going out for drinks to celebrate the end of the working week. 'Time to beer' is important, so we walk to the closest pub/bar which is only about 20 metres away.*

*I get a round of drinks – anything from beer to wine to spirits, but usually beer to start off. If it's sunny, we sit outside and bask in the sun. We have to make the most of sunshine in Melbourne! We talk about the week we've had and what everyone's doing over the weekend. A few more drink shouts happen. Beer is still the drink of choice at the moment. A few bowls of hot chips appear. However, I say at this stage, 'Not for me, eating's cheating!' The crowd begins to dwindle after a couple of hours – quite a few have to go home to their families. It's usually the younger, singles or those with no commitments that stay out, or those who think they're made of steel.*

*We then walk to the next place about 5 minutes away. When we arrive it's Happy Hour on beer, wine, champagne and spirits!!! So, after a number of beers I turn to spirits – vodka, lemon and lime. After a few beers, spirits is much easier to drink. The talk and laughter gets louder, and the number of jokes increases. A bit of 80's music starts playing and I get up on the dance floor. I try and get everyone else up too! We're singing the songs of the older days and some of us are dancing like that too! Funny how when it's happy hour everyone tends to drink more quickly ...*

*After so much dancing and drinking, it's time to eat. It usually ends up being McDonalds, KFC*



*or a kebab. After filling our bellies, all bleary eyed we walk to catch the last train home. Can't over do it on a Friday night, otherwise the whole weekend is gone. The older I get, the harder it is to recover!"*

**Figure 6. My 'big night' – excerpt from 'The Lounge' online research community**

It is essential to understand the rituals related to alcohol consumption as they help to reaffirm the current drinking practices within our culture. Essentially these rituals have become second nature and are therefore rarely scrutinised. These rituals essentially reinforce our social connectedness, so they can be very difficult to break. Many will be reluctant to decline ritual participation for a range of reasons including a fear of missing out, of being different, of offending others, and of 'rocking the boat' generally. Again this reinforces the entrenched nature of our drinking behaviour and the resulting challenge in changing these behaviours.

### 3.5 Influence of family and friends

Family and friends have a significant impact on attitudes towards alcohol and on drinking behaviour. For many, it is with family that they are first exposed to drinking and its effects, and for some it is within the family context they themselves first consume alcohol.

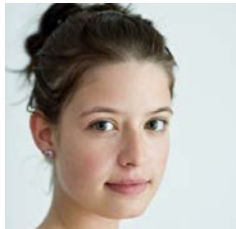
The consumption of alcohol within a family context is strongly related to 'coming of age'. Being permitted to drink alcohol is viewed as a sign of adulthood within our culture and is positively reinforced. Children in the family are no longer seen as 'just kids' when they are allowed an alcoholic drink of their own.



*"My first drink was at my dad's 40th birthday. We had a gazebo with walls which was set up in the back yard, and my auntie (who is only 8 years older) would slip me and my two sisters a beer under the gazebo wall every now and then, and we'd sit on the side lawn and pass it around! We didn't drink enough to get drunk, but gee we felt like adults! I was about 13 at the time."*

Kim, 29

Whether an individual's family has a moderate or heavy approach to alcohol consumption can influence the parameters by which they view acceptable drinking behaviour. Growing up in an environment of moderation can lend itself to individuals viewing moderation as the norm, whereas early exposure to an environment of more excessive drinking can lead to a higher tolerance for heavy consumption. That said, exposure to extreme cases of heavy drinking could produce varying individual reactions. Growing up with a problem drinker can either discourage individuals from drinking themselves or it can lead them to similar behaviours.



*"Mum and Dad would give me sips of their wine or beer since I was a child. Alcohol was associated with food, and I think the way responsible drinking was normalised in my home helped when I got older and began drinking socially – I rarely went overboard and didn't seem to feel the need to experiment with alcohol as recklessly as some other teenagers I knew."*

Beck, 20

While family is influential in the very early stages of drinking, this quickly shifts as individuals reach their teen years. In adolescence, they become very susceptible to the influence of friends. Because drinking among younger people almost always occurs in a social setting, the attitudes and behaviours of social peer groups has the most impact on their drinking behaviour.

As individuals mature, their behaviours become increasingly entrenched. As their sense of self strengthens with age, the influence of others lessens. Drinking becomes more of an independent decision often led by habits formed in the past. Our attitudes towards alcohol become more firmly established and are continually reinforced over time.

This process can best be described by referring to a shift in the 'circles of influence'. While there are differences between individuals, as a general rule, as individuals mature the levels of influence others have on their drinking changes dramatically. When they are younger, their peer group represents the largest circle of influence; as they age and become increasingly individualistic, the self becomes the largest circle of influence (Figure 7).

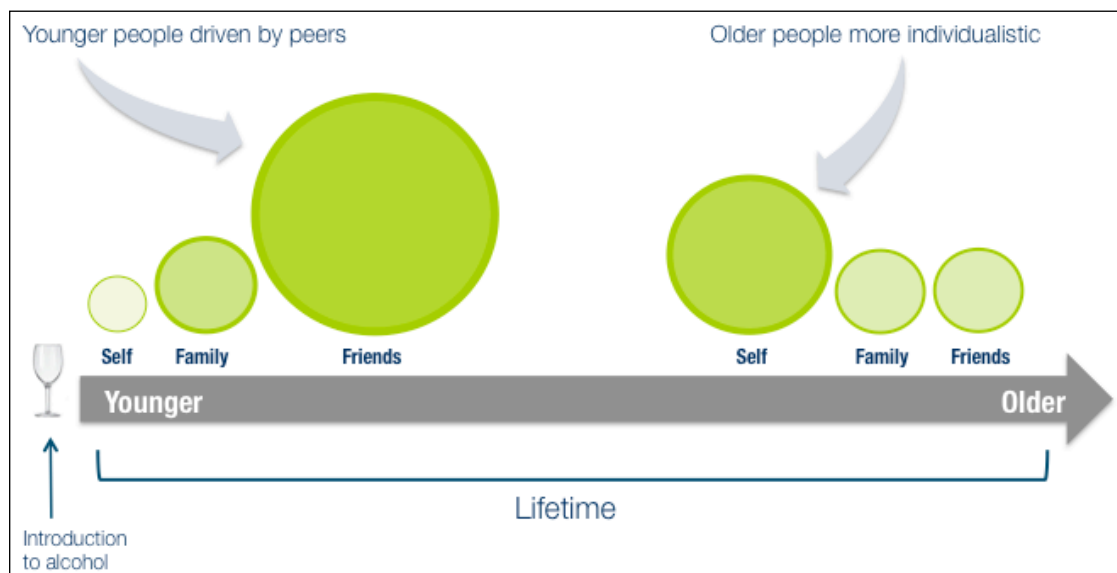


Figure 7. The 'circles of influence' on drinking behaviour over time

Despite becoming more individualistic over time, the company of others, whether that is family or friends, has a significant impact on our drinking and should not be underestimated. Importantly, it is when we are socialising with others, irrespective of age, that our drinking is most likely to become excessive.



*"I very rarely get any time to myself and the thought of curling up on the couch in front of the TV or with a good book with a nice glass of wine sounds like heaven!! I think if you are out with friends having a drink you tend to drink more. You lose track of what you consume, you keep up with others and you get distracted. Where as on your own you know how much you have and what's more you are taking the time to enjoy it!"*

Beth, 34

Australia has a deeply entrenched culture of drinking that spans across a variety of situations and circumstances. It often defines how we interact and respond to each other. Our culture is rich with drinking rituals that help reinforce and support this behaviour. As a community we share an underlying assumption that drinking alcohol is what it means to be a normal, everyday Australian. Furthermore, this sense of belonging to the 'tribe' carries with it a strong sense of pride; pride in being 'an Aussie'. Essentially, drinking alcohol is interchangeable with Australian culture; it is multifaceted and ubiquitous.

### 3.6 Our drinking language

The pervasiveness of our drinking culture is demonstrated further by examining the language young people use to describe the drinking behaviour of others.

Figures 8 and 9 show word clouds of the language used to describe heavy drinkers in contrast to non-drinkers.

The first point to be made is the number of different descriptors young people use to describe a heavy drinker; more than 50 different descriptors were volunteered by members. Our drinking culture includes a language of its own.

Much of the language used to describe heavy drinkers has positive connotations, attaching 'hero' or 'champion' status to those that drink to excess. While some terms such as *alco*, *piss-head* and *piss-pot* could be argued to be either insults or endearing terms, *tank*, *machine*, *party-animal*, *entertainment-minister*, *entertainer*, *entertaining*, *gun*, *fun*, *funny man*, *party-er*, *bubbly*, *sociable* all carry positive connotations.

Even more enlightening is how this contrasts with the terminology used to describe non-drinkers (Figure 9). While *designated driver* stands out as common and a socially acceptable non-drinker descriptor, many other descriptors carry negative connotations about the individual's sociability. *Boring*, *soft*, *nanna*, *straight*, *wowser*, *teetotaler*, *mood killer*, *wet blanket*, *weirdo*, *piss-weak*, *lame*, *matron*, *nuns*, *straight edge*, *piker*, *weirdo* and *granny* clearly do not suggest the individual's social status is enhanced by the decision not to drink.

This established language that we as a culture have developed to refer to our drinking behaviour is evidence of the entrenched nature of alcohol consumption across our community. The cultural value this language attaches to drinking is highly effective at promoting heavy drinking and discouraging moderate drinking. This research clearly illustrates the pervasiveness of drinking in our society and that drinking may well be more culturally embedded than previously acknowledged.



## 4 CONSEQUENCES OF DRINKING

In addition to understanding the role drinking plays in society today, the research sought to understand individual's attitudes and beliefs with regard to the consequences of drinking (to excess). These included physical, social, personal and financial consequences. Both the short- and long-term consequences of drinking were explored.

### 4.1 Drinking risks and deterrents

During The Lounge online communities it became clear that many people viewed the overall drinking behaviour of Australians as not only acceptable but also to be expected, and non-detrimental.

Despite this, community members were able to readily recognise the risks of heavy drinking, freely acknowledging that over-indulgence in alcohol can have some unpleasant outcomes, including:

- physical illness (vomiting, hangovers, dehydration)
- psychological impact (anxiety, regret, memory loss etc.)
- danger (compromising situations, violence, promiscuity, injury)
- financial strain (over-spending)
- relationship strain (fighting with friends/partners/family).

Somewhat alarmingly, a large proportion of community members stated they only consider their drinking to be heavy if they experience one or more of these outcomes. Of even greater concern is the attitude common amongst members that even if their drinking was to result in one or a number of these outcomes, this was acceptable and even excusable, both to themselves and to others, because everyone does it. Within our culture it is okay to simply acknowledge when one has over-indulged, or 'had a bit too much'.

When surveyed specifically about detriment suffered as a result of drinking behaviour, many of The Lounge community members ( $n = 145$ ) reported having experienced or observed negative behaviour due to drinking within the previous 12 months. These were:

- unwanted attempts at conversations (66%)
- anger and arguing (52%)
- nuisance behaviour such as public urination and vomiting (40%)
- unwanted sexual advances (31%)
- criminal or property damage (15%)
- theft of property (14%).

Perhaps not surprisingly, these findings were consistently higher amongst younger members. Furthermore, many ( $n = 145$ ) reported having personally experienced negative impacts upon their:

- finances (43%)
- health (27%)
- housework or chores (25%)
- friendships or social life (14%)
- work, studies or employment opportunities (13%)
- relationships with other family members including children (4%).

Once again these results were consistently higher amongst the younger members.

Despite clear evidence that negative outcomes are being experienced, few were willing to accept that their drinking behaviour, or that of others, was overly problematic. Many find they are able to excuse or accept these negative consequences by convincing themselves that 'it won't happen again', and that 'next time will be different'.

Overall it is clear that Australian culture displays a persistent willingness to downplay the bad behaviour that can result from excessive drinking. While in some instances drunken behaviour can be seen as unattractive and undesirable, in most cases negative consequences and bad behaviour are quickly forgotten, dismissed, excused or ignored by both the individual and society in general. So while there is a 'price to pay' for drinking to excess, as it stands the negative outcomes individuals can experience as a result of drinking do not act as deterrents.

Short-term negative outcomes, such as physical illness, are considered superficial, 'not that bad' and even 'worth it' compared to the social benefits gained through drinking. Experiencing the negative outcome personally, or witnessing it in others, is not considered serious enough to have any impact on the decision to drink. Rather the social benefits associated with drinking to excess are seen to far outweigh any possible short-term negative outcome.

When considering the more long-term negative outcomes of drinking such as the impact on physical health later in life, it is relatively easy for individuals to convince themselves that the chance of them experiencing this is minimal, or that the risk is so far away it is not yet 'real'.

In essence negative short-term behaviours associated with excessive drinking are readily excused and long-term outcomes are seen as either unlikely or irrelevant. As it stands, within the cultural context of drinking in Australia today, where drinking to excess is revered, there are no short-term consequences that are negative enough, and no long-term consequences that feel 'real' enough to limit drinking behaviour. Ultimately, it is these attitudes that are embedded in culture that create the biggest challenge to changing drinking behaviour among Australians today.



## 4.2 Incentives to drink less

In addition to exploring the negative consequences of drinking and their impact on behaviour, possible incentives and motivations to drink less were also explored.

Within the current cultural context, drinking less is a very difficult thing for most people to do. Very few effective incentives are available to encourage individuals to opt for a more moderate approach toward alcohol. Rationally many are able to see the benefits that come with drinking less such as improved health, stronger financial position and higher productivity levels. Yet these benefits do little to actually reduce drinking.

It appears that these benefits lack effectiveness because the benefit is often too deferred. The benefits of drinking less are simply not immediate enough to have any real impact on behaviour. Generally we do not experience any immediate benefit from drinking less at the time the decision is made. In contrast, the benefits of drinking (social acceptability, social status, loss of inhibitions, etc.) are experienced immediately.

A key factor undermining the power of these incentives to drink less is that there are few socially acceptable 'excuses' to drink less.

Personal circumstances may create motivating factors to drink less, such as pregnancy or other medical reasons, family responsibility, work, study and sporting commitments or simply having to drive. At times these reasons may motivate individuals to modify their drinking behaviour. But it is clear from the research that the social pressure to drink is significant and often undermines decisions to drink less.

Within the current cultural context, alcohol is ubiquitous and is often inescapable. It is seemingly constantly available and constantly offered. The encouragement and pressure (both subtle and overt) from friends, family and colleagues to 'join in the drinking' is powerful. To join in the drinking is to join the group, join the fun, join the ritual and join the tribe. The power of this pressure is extraordinary (Figure 10).

### The pressure to drink

*"If a female who generally drinks when out socially says no to an alcoholic drink, there are speculations of pregnancy or impending pregnancy rather than they would prefer not to drink. I have also been asked multiple times by the same person if I would like a drink of wine, beer or other alcoholic beverage even after saying no the first and second time."*

Diane, 32

*I remember when I wasn't drinking that so many people would feel uncomfortable about it even though I never made a big deal about it. I would just ask for a mineral water & everyone took it as their life mission to convince me to drink. They would keep offering to buy me drinks & asking what was wrong with me."*

Phillipa, 33

*"You feel like a party pooper by not having another drink. I remember one night we went out to dinner as a group of friends and we decided to have a couple of more drinks but unfortunately it turned into a trip down to a little bar. The night seemed to go on forever!! And my wallet was severely damaged afterwards. Work the next day wasn't the most desirable thing but was a really fun night."*

Jen, 20

*"I was once with a friend who purchased an entire slab of VB (which I actually dislike). He then invited me to have a drink. However, when we got to his house he told me that he intended to finish the entire carton and asked me if I wanted to help him finish it. Not wanting to be rude, I agreed and became quite ill as a result."*

Tay, 31

*"I'll be at a party or out somewhere with friends and even if I've promised myself beforehand that I'll have an early one and go home I never seem to do it. I think it might be that once I'm there I have a good time and say to myself 'oh just one more hour' and then that one more hour turns into 3 or 4. I'm not very good at saying no either in that situation. All anyone has to do is ask me over and over or put a guilt trip on me and I stay."*

Mel, 22

Figure 10. 'The pressure to drink' – excerpts from The Lounge online research communities

Seldom will individuals choose not to drink in a social setting for 'no particular reason'. For many there is a fear of missing out, of being different, of offending others, and consequently of not having a good time. In addition, without the social lubricant of alcohol, individuals can feel they are on a different level, have less confidence, and find social interactions more challenging.

Due to the inherent and deeply embedded drinking culture within our society most people feel they need a specific reason *not* to drink, rather than a reason *to* drink. Unlike drinking, which rarely if ever has to be justified, people have to justify their non-drinking behaviour in order to feel socially accepted. They need to be armed with a specific reason why they are not drinking or drinking less when in a social setting. Further, only a few reasons – such as a medical condition, pregnancy and/or driving – are socially acceptable (Figure 11).

### Feeling an outcast

*"There was this one time I drove to a friend's house party, and had just 1 beer while everyone just went nuts drinking, I was seen as an outcast and spoilsport. I understand that people start getting insensitive after much alcohol and ignored all the insults my friends threw at me."*

Tim, 22

*"The reason I chose not to drink at the last event was because I was driving and there weren't many options to find a way home late at night. It was at a house party where I didn't know very many people and it seemed that everyone there was drinking. I came on my own so I already felt a little out of place and honestly without a few drinks I didn't have the confidence to introduce myself to people."*

Steph, 22

*"I'm actually known within my group of workmates as the one who drinks only at Christmas, and to be purely honest with myself its due to the peer pressure on the social scene to be seen drinking at festive occasions – to not feel left out of social gatherings due to non consumption of alcohol and feel part of the group."*

Sophie, 30

**Figure 11. 'Feeling an outcast' – excerpts from The Lounge online research communities**

Currently little or no positive reinforcement (or culturally accepted alternative) exists for those who do decide not to drink or want to drink less. Modifying drinking behaviour is hard to do because our society and culture does not support or provide individuals with tools and strategies to enable this behavioural change. The research suggests an opportunity to develop culturally sanctioned alternatives to drinking that are relevant, realistic and acknowledge the current culture of drinking within Australia.

## 5 SEGMENTATION OF DRINKING IDENTITIES

Throughout the course of the The Lounge online research communities it became apparent that alcohol plays a significant role in the way we define our individual identities, as well as the identities of others. Drinking is such an entrenched element of our culture that we regularly use it as a way of expressing our values and beliefs. Our assessment of the frequency and volume of alcohol consumption becomes an assessment of an individual's social identity and their underlying attitudes.

With this in mind, specific analysis was conducted to identify key 'drinking identities' that individuals express throughout their day-to-day lives. This analysis uncovered four key segments as shown in Figure 12. Each segment can be identified according to their tolerance for alcohol consumption (that is, whether they express high or low levels of acceptance towards the prevalence of alcohol across our society), as well as by the source of influence that determines drinking behaviour (internally influenced versus externally influenced).

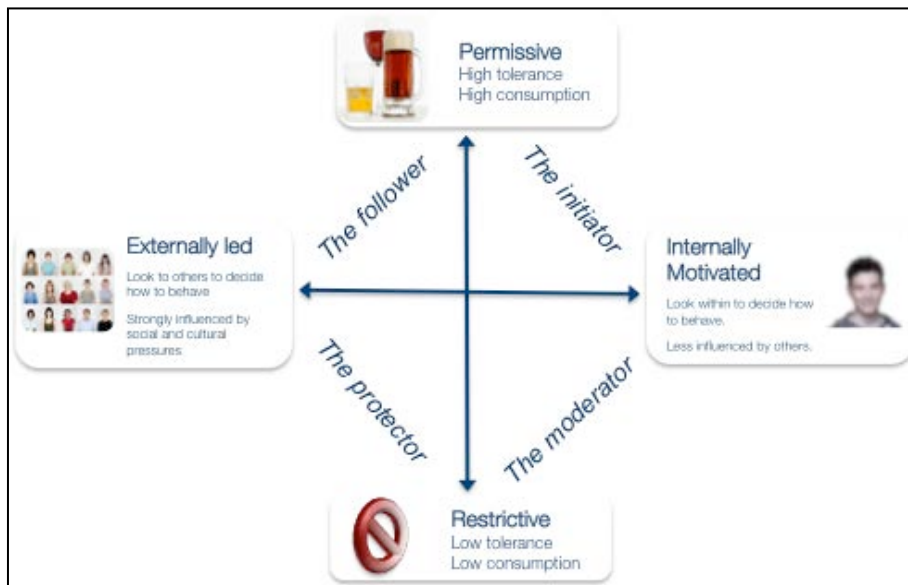


Figure 12. Four key drinking identities: follower, initiator, moderator and protector

It is important to note that an individual can transition between these segments. That is, an individual may be placed at different points over time based on the occasion, current circumstances, their role (e.g. parent or child), and so forth. This said, individuals will predominantly belong to one particular segment, and will often demonstrate consistent, ingrained attitudes and behaviours in terms of their drinking lifestyle.

The following sections examine these four identities in detail.

## **5.1 The follower**

Individuals associated with this segment (Figures 13 and 14) can be classified as expressing a high tolerance for the consumption of alcohol. Typically, the high level of acceptance of alcohol consumption goes hand in hand with a relatively high volume of alcohol consumption.

The follower is characterised by generally looking to others to direct their drinking behaviour. They are strongly influenced by social and cultural pressures to drink, and will follow cultural norms to ensure acceptance from those around them. Fitting in and replicating the behaviour of others provides comfort and a feeling of belonging. As a result, this group is strongly influenced by other individuals and wider cultural expectations.

Followers are often identified as having 'fun', 'social' and 'easy-going' personalities. This can be mainly attributed to their willingness to 'go with the flow'. They will rarely or never challenge the drinking behaviours of others and will allow their own level of drinking (which can be considerable) to be guided by others. While this group is capable of responsible drinking behaviours, when in social settings and encouraged by others they will rarely decline an offer to drink and will often over-indulge.

### **Role of alcohol in the follower's life**

For the follower, alcohol is essentially a means of connecting with others. While the follower may occasionally engage in solitary drinking, this is more the exception than the norm. Without the accompanying social interaction, the benefits of alcohol are greatly diminished.

Overall, the follower is less likely to initiate social drinking occasions themselves. Rather they will look to others to provide the cue to commence drinking. The follower needs to feel that others are committing to drinking before they themselves commence.

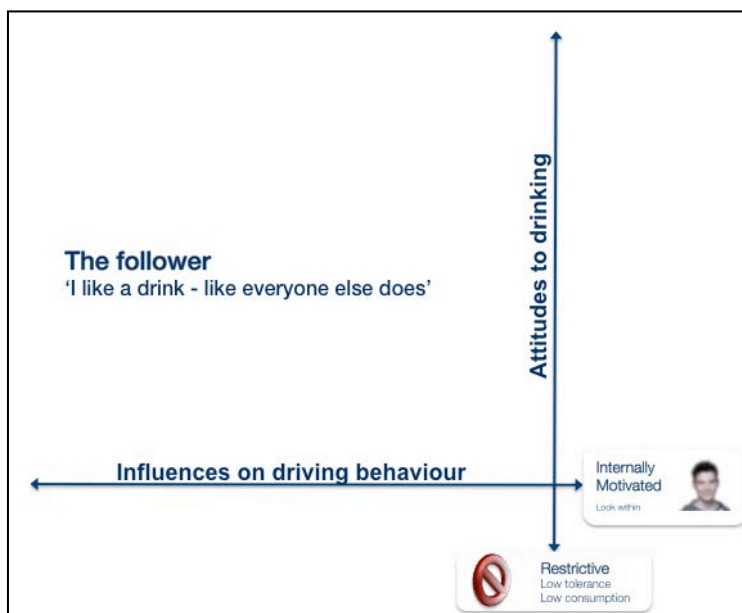


Figure 13. The follower – one of four key drinking identities

### The follower's participation in drinking rituals

The follower is the segment that is most responsive to the cultural expectations associated with drinking rituals. Because the follower uses alcohol as a means of connecting with others, opting out of ritualistic behaviour is most difficult for them. Participating in 'shouts', 'rounds' and 'Friday night drinks', for example, allows the follower to feel they are an important part of the group. By declining involvement in these types of rituals, the follower believes they will not experience the group connection they so highly value.

### The follower's view on barriers and motivators for drinking less

Within social settings, very few (if any) factors are capable of motivating followers to drink less. Followers attach a lot of weight to the benefits of drinking. The lowering of inhibitions and heightened confidence that alcohol provides allow followers to relax and form easy connections with others.

Followers demonstrate a strong drive to 'belong to the group', so they will avoid any behaviours that have the potential to ostracise them. Given that there is a strong cultural expectation to drink and that this is felt across the majority of social settings, followers believe that a decision to not drink, or drink less, may result in their exclusion from the group. The opportunities for followers to involve themselves in social groups, without the consumption of alcohol, are limited.

The pressure felt by followers to join in the drinking as an expression of joining the group is incredibly powerful.

### **Understanding follower interaction**

The follower is most strongly influenced by the initiators when in social settings. Because initiators are seen to initiate fun and entertaining social occasions, the follower will often be responsive to their direction, which can often result in over-indulgence.

Followers are content in the company of moderators. However, because moderators are more controlled in their consumption of alcohol, followers may view them as 'quieter', mellower and possibly even 'dull', when compared to initiators. That said moderators do have the potential to influence followers. When in the company of moderators, followers will limit their drinking behaviour, expressing some reluctance to over-indulge for fear of having their behaviour negatively interpreted.

Protectors tend to be viewed as judgemental by the followers. The protector will often challenge the follower's willingness to drink at the direction of others, and challenge their need to conform to the drinking culture, so they can be seen as undesirable company.

### **Other segments' views of the follower**

**The initiator** sees a follower as desirable company; they are 'great people to be around' because they validate and join in with the initiator's drinking. When the follower behaves badly due to intoxication, the initiator will reassure them with phrases such as 'it's okay, you had a big night'. The initiator reinforces the follower's mantra: 'I like a drink, like everyone else does'.

**The moderator** views the follower as someone who is easy going and enjoys a drink but can go overboard at times. Moderators are often happy in the company of followers as they are seen to be pleasant to socialise and interact with. That said, when the follower over-indulges, and begins to express signs of intoxication, the moderator may feel uncomfortable and attempt to distance him or herself from the situation.

**The protector** views the follower as someone that practices very limited self-control. They are likely to vocalise their concern with the follower's excessive drinking behaviours and the extent to which they are so easily influenced by others. Protectors believe that government intervention is required to protect followers from a drinking culture that is 'out of control'.

## The follower



### Meet Sarah (aged 23)

Sarah is a single student living in the outer suburbs of Melbourne.

She exercises regularly and enjoys cooking and hanging out with her friends.

### Sarah describes her ideal way to spend an evening as ...

*"... Having some drinks at the pub with some close friends, listening to live music or curling up with someone special".*

### She has a diverse group of friends ...

*"I have particular friends I refer to as 'good time friends' ... they are those people that are always up for a big night, have countless energy and are barrels of fun. My closest friends are there for all the down times; they will meet up for a coffee and don't always need to be heading out..."*

### Some of her friends can lead her astray ...

*"Whenever I say the words 'I don't want a big night' it seems my friends will guarantee I have a massive one ... I always seem to have drinks shouted and everyone saying 'one more song!'"*

### And she struggles to say 'no' ...

*"A few months ago ... my friends rang and asked me to stop by the restaurant/bar/cafe they were at. I hadn't seen them in a little while so I stopped by only to be greeted with an intervention about my 'boringness', how I study too much and they never get to see me. They then bought me a glass of wine which I was happy to enjoy before I went to study but when I arrived back from the toilet they had bought me another and insisted I drink it ... it turned into them buying shots and bottles of wine vodka etc. ... I refused for the first few then they made me feel so guilty like I had been a bad neglectful friend that I just did what I was told after that. We ended up moving to the pub where we all got absolutely hammered. I don't actually remember the night however I do remember both of my friends left me at the pub by myself ... in a really vulnerable position."*

*"I was invited to a new friend's place recently ... We had a bottle of wine which quickly turned into three more ... this was a Tuesday night I may add. I used to drink a lot but this year I have really cut back and those wines hit me like a ton of bricks! I get the feeling that is her normal behaviour and as we are still getting to know each other I would have felt rude if I refused ..."*

Figure 14. A follower – excerpts from The Lounge online research community



### **Underlying attitudes of the follower**

A follower will feel most comfortable when conforming to the cultural norms of our society, which means to socialise is to have a drink.

A number of deeply held assumptions influence the drinking behaviour of the follower. They believe that 'if everyone else is doing it, it must be ok' and this attitude is consistently reinforced and legitimised by Australian society. At times, followers may be concerned by their level of drinking, yet they will tend to rationalise it as 'others overdo it too'. In situations of over-indulgence, followers will often deflect responsibility for their actions, instead attributing the source of their bad behaviour to social pressure or the influence of others. The follower will also find esteem and feel self-assured when meeting group expectations to drink.

This quadrant cannot see any cultural pathway to drink less; without alcohol, they are unsure how to from a connection with their social group. This segment is a main group to target, because behavioural change is possible by offering them a culturally realistic and sanctioned alternative to drinking.

## **5.2 The initiator**

The initiator identity exhibits the most entrenched drinking behaviour of the four segments (Figures 15 and 16). Individuals associated with the initiator segment can be classified as expressing a high tolerance for the consumption of alcohol. However, unlike the follower segment, the frequency and volume of the initiator's alcohol consumption, which is considerable, is not influenced by others. Rather, the initiator's decision when to drink, and how much to drink, is much more independent and internally driven.

For the initiator, nearly every social event will involve alcohol, as they 'love to have a drink and let loose'. They can often be identified as having 'outgoing personalities' and are seen as 'the life of the party'. Initiators will generally drink to soften their inhibitions, over-indulge and 'have fun', and they expect others to do the same. By encouraging others to join in the drinking, initiators are able to validate their own behaviour and ensure that a social event becomes a big drinking occasion.

The initiator's drinking attitudes and behaviours define who they are; they are the person that can 'handle their grog' and 'have a good time'. They enjoy drinking a lot of alcohol, a lot of the time and are seldom concerned with how others perceive their drinking. Initiators love to push the boundaries and discard their inhibitions and will seldom stop at one or two drinks; they are more likely to commit to a 'drinking session' and over-indulge.

Initiators aren't drinking to fit in with others; they are drinking because they enjoy how it makes them feel. They are not drinking as a result of pressure from others; they are drinking because of their own desire to drink.

This group struggles to understand the behaviour of those that practice a more moderate approach, as their view supports the claim that 'if there's no alcohol, there's no fun to be had'.

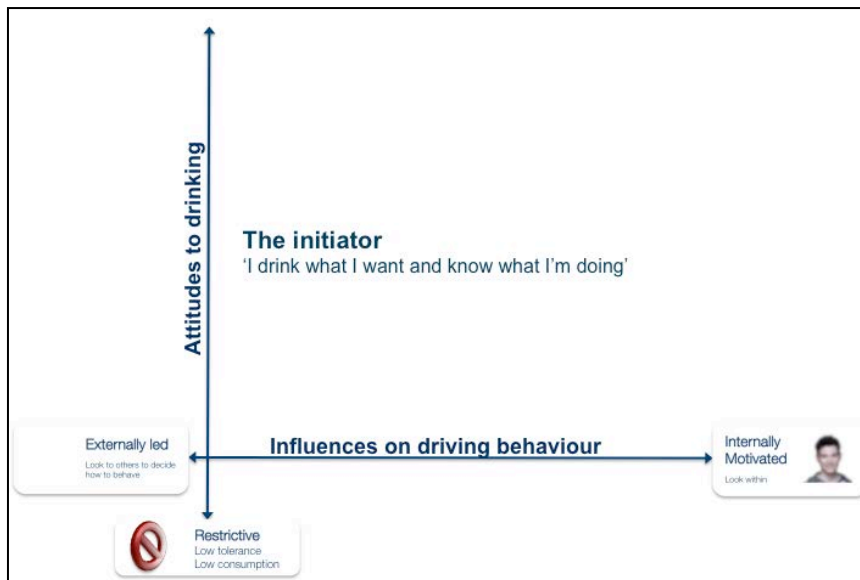


Figure 15. The initiator – one of four key drinking identities

### Role of alcohol in the initiator's life

For the initiator, alcohol is a way to relax, to feel confident and have fun. Therefore the initiator sees alcohol as an absolute must, at all social occasions. In addition, alcohol is also likely to feature strongly in the initiator's day-to-day life, whether it is a few 'quiet drinks' with mates, or solitary drinking at home. While the initiator enjoys the company of others while drinking, it is not essential.

Seldom will the initiator look to others to 'kick off' the drinking session, they see this as their role to do so and will actively encourage others to get involved. The initiator feels confident that their drinking is within their control – whether they choose to drink a lot or a little, it is up to them and should not be the concern of anyone else.

### **The initiator's participation in drinking rituals**

While the initiator will regularly participate in ritualistic drinking behaviour, rituals are not the primary drivers of their drinking. The initiator is more likely to use rituals as a way of encouraging others to join in the drinking. They provide a means of pressuring other groups to participate in the drinking they themselves initiate.

### **The initiator's view on barriers and motivators for drinking less**

As with the follower group, motivators for the initiator to drink less are minimal. Alcohol is their way to enjoy themselves within social settings. Without alcohol, the initiator is unable to truly relax, have fun and express themselves.

It is not a fear of being ostracised, or excluded from the group that prevents the initiator from drinking less. Their internal drive to drink establishes the role that alcohol plays in their life.

Australian drinking culture supports the initiator's relationship with alcohol. It motivates and legitimises them to drink frequently and heavily without a negative response from others. It supports their self-concept as the 'fun-loving Aussie' and encourages them to continue their drinking without hesitation.

### **Understanding initiator interaction**

Initiators are content in the company of other initiators; being in their company will tend to ensure that the volume and frequency of drinking remains high. They will also enjoy the company of the follower group as they are 'easy going' and can often be encouraged to join in the drinking, which in turn validates the initiator's behaviour.

The moderator, however, is often perceived as boring and predictable; someone who doesn't know how to 'let go' and have a good time. As the moderator will seldom join in the drinking at the pace that the initiator maintains, they can potentially be viewed as a 'stick in the mud'. Where possible, initiators will attempt to avoid moderators, instead gravitating toward followers and other initiators.

In contrast, the protector is viewed as controlling and judgemental. The initiator completely disregards the protector's attitudes towards alcohol. Because the initiator believes their alcohol consumption is under control, the protector's views are irrelevant to them. An initiator will often ignore a protector in a social setting and view them in disdainful terms.

### **Other segments' views of the initiator**

The **follower** will often attach high status to the initiator, viewing them as a group that know how to have a good time. The initiator's strong presence in social situations appeals to the follower, and prompts their desire to 'fit in' with this group and emulate their drinking. However, there are times the follower will acknowledge that the initiator can become a bad influence, leading them to drink more than they had planned. Yet the follower will rarely challenge an initiator's drinking habits for fear that the confident group may backlash and subsequently exclude them from activities.

The **moderator** views the initiator as someone who is the life of the party and loves to lose their inhibitions. They believe that the initiator knows how to handle their alcohol most of the time; however, their drinking can be extreme. If the initiator becomes intoxicated and their behaviour deteriorates, the moderator will remove himself or herself from the situation, viewing the initiator as obnoxious or 'over the top'.

The **protector** sees the initiator as an unambiguous example of a drinking culture that is 'out of control'. Protectors are likely to view the initiator's drinking lifestyle as excessive and highly detrimental, supporting their view that there is a strong need for government intervention. Because the protector is likely to openly verbalise their dismay with the initiator's heavy drinking, the two segments very rarely socialise in an amicable manner.

### **Underlying attitudes of the initiator**

Similar to the follower, the initiator operates under a number of deeply ingrained assumptions in relation to their drinking attitudes. Primarily they believe (often falsely) that they are in control of their drinking: 'I drink what I want and know what I'm doing'. Because the Australian culture of drinking supports the initiator's drinking lifestyle, initiators will view their own drinking as perfectly acceptable. They will rarely question their relationship with alcohol, and as such this relationship becomes increasingly fixed as time progresses.

Unsurprisingly, initiators do not appear to be affected by situations where detriment occurs as a result of their excessive drinking. Instead, they laugh it off as 'a great night' and use it as an opportunity to tell others 'a great drinking story' or 'drinking tradition', which they can recall with pride.

While not impossible, shifting the very entrenched, internally controlled nature of the initiator's drinking will be difficult.

## The initiator



### Meet Tom (aged 29)

Tom is a single warehouse worker living in regional Victoria.  
He loves travelling and catching up with friends at the local pub.

### Tom describes his ideal way to spend an evening as ...

*"... Having a few drinks with my good mates ... Talking about nothing in particular, a BBQ or the like."*

### Tom regularly enjoys a drink at the end of the day ...

*"As for drinking, I love having a beer. I don't seem to stress out much so I'm kind of thinking that a beer or five at the end of a hard days work is probably a good way to reduce any stress and unwind. There's no doubt that having a beer makes me relax and I feel that if I am relaxed I can deal with any issues."*

### He loves to head out and 'let his hair down' ...

*"I was at Buxton pub last weekend, it was a birthday celebration for someone I didn't know but other friends were going to be there so I dragged my best mate and his girlfriend along ... Had a few drinks with the meal and then a lot more drinks after the meal ... I was drinking Bundaberg rum red. Love that stuff, so easy to drink. In cans ... they didn't have it by the glass there :( . Had a couple of Jaeger bombs and a couple of shots. All was really good catching up with friends and having a merry time ... so that led to more drinking ... hung round till the bar shut and then rolled out the swag and slept."*

### Tom thinks it's okay to overdo it, in fact it happens all the time ...

*"My mates will rib me for having a spew. But that's ok. It's usually how are 'you' feeling today ... And the usual reply is 'a bit ordinary'. Then everyone will have a bit of a laugh ... You had a good spew ... we couldn't find you for a bit ... LOL. I don't really find it embarrassing. Everyone's done it. People are going to keep doing it now and again. My time comes around here and there. It's not disappointment in letting anyone down ... just in thinking that I could handle more alcohol. Hahahaha ... Most times look at the how it came about ... ahh you just didn't eat enough; it was cos you mixed your drinks; or those shots did not help. Something along those lines."*

Figure 16. An initiator – excerpts from The Lounge online research community

### 5.3 The moderator

The moderator identity represents the most balanced drinking lifestyle of the four segments identified in this study. Individuals associated with the moderator segment (Figures 17 and 18) can be classified as expressing a lower tolerance for the consumption of alcohol; that is, they express lower levels of acceptance towards the prevalence of alcohol across our society. As the segment name suggests, this group is more moderate in the frequency and volume of their alcohol consumption.

For the moderator, alcohol does not play a significant role in their life; they have made a personal choice to drink less than many of their peers. This decision has not been shaped by the influence of others; rather, the moderator's drinking lifestyle has been formed by internal consideration and independent direction.

Others often perceive the moderator as having a 'quieter' personality due to their decision to drink less than the cultural norm. Moderators are generally happy to have a few drinks but definitely know when to say 'no' and stop. This group feels comfortable with themselves socially and does not feel the need to over-indulge in alcohol to enhance their social interactions.

Unlike initiators, moderators do not use alcohol to reduce their inhibitions; rather, they tend to associate feelings of intoxication with being out of control, and subsequently with being vulnerable. For moderators, the negative aspects of drinking such as physical illness, loss of control or financial strain outweigh the social benefits of drinking. They are able to look at the established rituals and norms of drinking and reject them. The benefits of joining the group in ritualistic behaviour are not as powerful for them, whereas the deterrents linked to drinking alcohol are.

When moderators choose to drink, they will consciously limit the volume of alcohol they consume, and are often satisfied with 'just a glass, maybe two'. Very rarely if ever will they drink enough to become intoxicated. While the moderator is happy to enjoy the occasional drink, their drinking is not driven by a desire to get drunk. In fact, on many occasions, this group is content to go without alcohol. They may enjoy a solitary drink during the week, but again, this is more likely to be a glass of wine to enhance their meal, not a bottle.

#### **Role of alcohol in the moderator's life**

For the moderator, alcohol is something to enjoy now and again. It is used as a way to enhance a good meal, or celebrate with friends and family. The moderator can appreciate the benefits of alcohol; however, these are best delivered via a balanced approach to drinking. Intoxication is not an appealing outcome for this group, and they will control their drinking to ensure this does not occur.

While in most instances the moderator's drinking will occur in the company of others, this is not always the case. This group may engage in solitary drinking as well, but again only in moderate amounts. At no point does the moderator feel the need to encourage others to drink. In fact, the opposite is true. As moderators appreciate the benefits of a controlled, balanced approach to drinking they may, either directly or indirectly, encourage others to practice the same self-control.

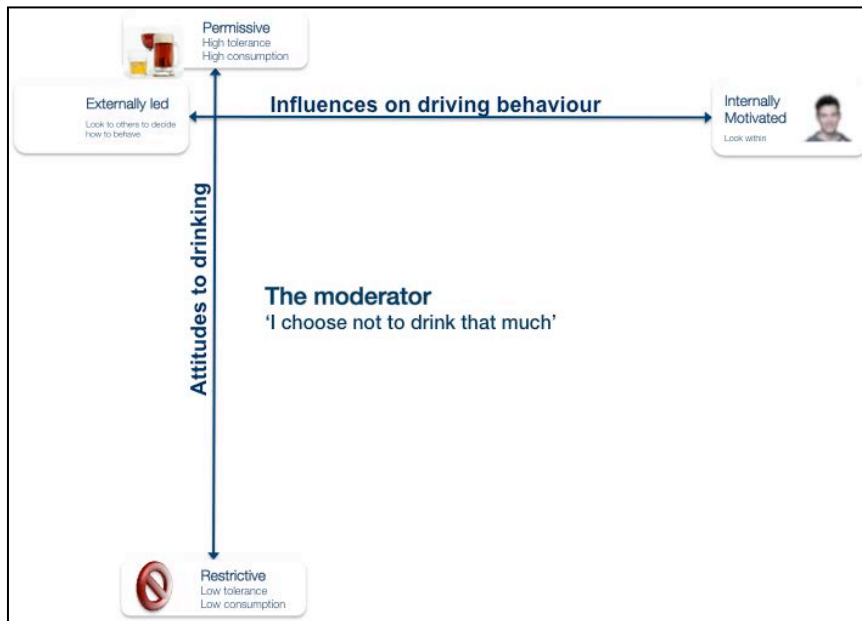


Figure 17. The moderator – one of four key drinking identities

### The moderator's participation in drinking rituals

In many ways, the moderator struggles to understand the weight others attach to drinking rituals. As the moderator internally regulates their own drinking, the notion of cultural norms or peer groups determining when to drink and how much to drink makes little sense to them.

As a result, the moderator will rarely participate in drinking rituals that encourage over-indulgence. While they may participate in a 'toast' or meet the cultural expectation of offering a bottle of wine when dining at someone's home, rarely if ever will this group participate in ritualistic behaviour that results in them drinking more than they intended.

### The moderator's view on barriers and motivators for drinking less

The moderator understands and responds to the benefits of drinking less. Unlike the follower and initiator segments, the moderator does not feel they are 'missing out' if they choose to drink less. Rather, drinking less allows them to enjoy themselves, without experiencing any of the negative outcomes of drinking.

That said, the moderator's more balanced approach to drinking prompts challenging responses from other groups. As the cultural expectation is to drink, and often to drink heavily, the moderator does experience pressure from others to participate and 'let loose' in social situations. However, the moderator is largely able to dismiss this pressure and ensure they do not drink more than they originally intended. They are able to dismiss the attempted influence of others and maintain their balanced approach.

## The moderator



### Meet Kate (aged 32)

Kate is an accountant living with her partner in the inner suburbs of Melbourne.

She loves food, whether cooking at home or eating out; it's her favourite way to spoil herself.

### Kate describes her ideal way to spend an evening as ...

*"... Dinner and drinks with good friends, then home with my partner."*

### Drinking in moderation allows her to feel in control of her life ...

*"I have always been responsible when it comes to drinking, and I know my limit and when to stop. I sometimes would like to 'let go' more often and not be so responsible, but those days are long gone when you are in your 30's. A sense of being a responsible adult, to look after those around me and to look after myself makes me not drink as much. Yes that is a good thing because I have saved myself, those around me and not to say the least money for being such a responsible old fart!"*

### While she does drink, she also practises self-control ...

*"Yeah it's great to catch up with friends and the time somehow quickly whizzes by, but you can always drink in moderation, and yes, people may think you're strange for only drinking to YOUR limit of alcohol (whether that be a couple of shots, 2 pints of beer or a bottle of wine), but you can stop and drink other non-alcoholic things after hitting your limit for that occasion. It's all right to say no, and drink in moderation. It's all right to take the lead and show discipline when it comes to over-indulging in whatever is your vice. You can and will still have fun, and most of the time it will end up being beneficial in some ways. You don't have to stop others from drinking (though you can make the suggestion that maybe it's enough), but you can stop yourself. It's all about self-control when it's needed. Don't get me wrong, I do drink, but I know which situation, where and with whom I can totally drink past my moderation limit."*

### Drinking less doesn't spoil the fun; she enjoys herself with or without alcohol ...

*"I rarely ever make a conscious decision to not drink. Last night I went out and didn't particularly feel like drinking, so I just had water for most of the night. I'd had a few glasses of wine with some friends before we went out, and I had some sips of my friend's drinks, but didn't actually buy one myself at the party. It wasn't that different from when I was drinking ... it didn't affect the way I socialised. It also didn't alter my confidence when it came to dancing or talking to new people."*

Figure 18. A moderator – excerpts from The Lounge online research community



## Understanding moderator interaction

The moderator is seen as the sensible, quiet and predictable person who exercises self-control and discipline in relation to drinking. They believe they function well without alcohol. They do not have any expectations regarding the drinking of others; they are not fazed by their peer's decision to drink or not drink.

A moderator will see the initiator as the 'life of the party' and great fun to be around. However, should the initiator drink too much, and begin to behave accordingly, the moderator will likely distance themselves from the situation. They believe that the initiator's relationship with alcohol can be problematic, but it is unlikely that they will vocalise these views publicly, seeing it as 'none of their business'.

The follower is viewed by the moderator as a 'fun, easy-going' individual who is good to socialise with but can be easily influenced to over-indulge in alcohol. They see the protector as being responsible in relation to alcohol but very opinionated. They disagree with the protector's perspective that society is to blame for an excessive drinking culture, as they believe it is more about self-control.

## Other segments' views of the moderator

**The follower** believes the moderator is a reliable, stable individual who is non-judgemental in relation to their drinking, but can perceive them to be 'dull' in a drinking environment. While the follower can be found interacting and socialising with the moderator, they often find that their alcohol consumption will be restrained to fit in with the consumption of the moderator. As such, they will rarely get intoxicated and lose their inhibitions when drinking with the moderator. They recognise that they can have a good time with a moderator, but it is not as much fun as when drinking with an initiator or other followers.

**The initiator** views a moderator as responsible, boring and not much fun to be around. The initiator believes this segment does not know how to have a good time as they exercise too much self-control. An initiator never or rarely feels judged by a moderator but naturally gravitates to others who are drinking, because it is never as much fun when others don't join in.

**The protector** sees the moderator as a sensible person who practises an appropriate drinking lifestyle and is not easily influenced by Australia's drinking culture. However, the protector does not understand why the moderator tolerates drunken behaviour and does not vocalise their discontent. For the protector, this behaviour is perplexing and they believe it supports excessive alcohol consumption. Nevertheless, the protector is happy to socialise with the moderator, because they too do not over-indulge in alcohol.

## **Underlying attitudes of the moderator**

The moderator, like the other three segments, operates from a number of deeply embedded assumptions that guide their behaviour towards drinking. First and foremost, they believe that they socialise and interact well without alcohol. They challenge the assumption that you cannot have a good time without alcohol and will vehemently defend this position.

For the moderator, drinking is all about self-control. They assume drinking is a choice for people and believe those who drink to excess do so out of choice and they fail to recognise outside external influences such as social pressure. Because alcohol consumption for the moderator is all about choice they believe they should not judge others who drink to excess, as this is their choice and 'who are they to judge'. Because moderators take a non-judgemental stance, they are often perceived as indirectly supporting excessive alcohol consumption.

It can be hard to exist in this segment without a 'legitimate' reason to not drink because current social attitudes consider non-drinkers negatively, suspiciously and as a threat. Because this segment is internally directed and motivated, the current negativity that surrounds non-drinkers does little to faze them.

The moderator is the most realistic and reasonable drinking segment of this study and because of this their drinking lifestyles need to be reinforced and encouraged throughout the community. The moderator offers a pragmatic, realistic and optimal cultural benchmark for Australian drinking culture to aspire to.

## **5.4 The protector**

The protector identity (Figures 19 and 20) exhibits the most restrictive attitudes towards drinking of all the segments identified. Individuals associated with this group can be classified by their low tolerance for the consumption of alcohol; that is, they express low levels of acceptance towards the prevalence of alcohol across our society. As such, the volume and frequency of their drinking tends also to be low, and they struggle to understand the excessive drinking of others.

The protector's attitude towards alcohol is strongly influenced by their own self-beliefs as well as current Australian culture. However, as opposed to the follower group, Australian culture does not encourage the protector to drink; rather, it has the opposite effect. Observing the 'out of control' drinking culture in Australia fuels their belief the government needs to intervene to protect society from this excessive drinking lifestyle.

The protector segment is often viewed in negative terms by wider society as they are seen to express unreasonable views about alcohol consumption and related lifestyles. They believe government laws and regulations need to be revised to address the problematic drinking they feel is currently occurring. They believe there should be age restrictions on serving alcohol, stronger liquor licensing laws, bans on alcohol advertising and campaigns targeting binge drinking.

Similar to the moderator in their alcohol consumption, the protector either does not drink or drinks minimally. This segment does not see excessive drinking so much as an individual problem, but a result of a society that is far too flexible in regulating alcohol. They want to draw attention to problem drinking, and expect government and appropriate authorities to strive towards modifying societal behaviour.

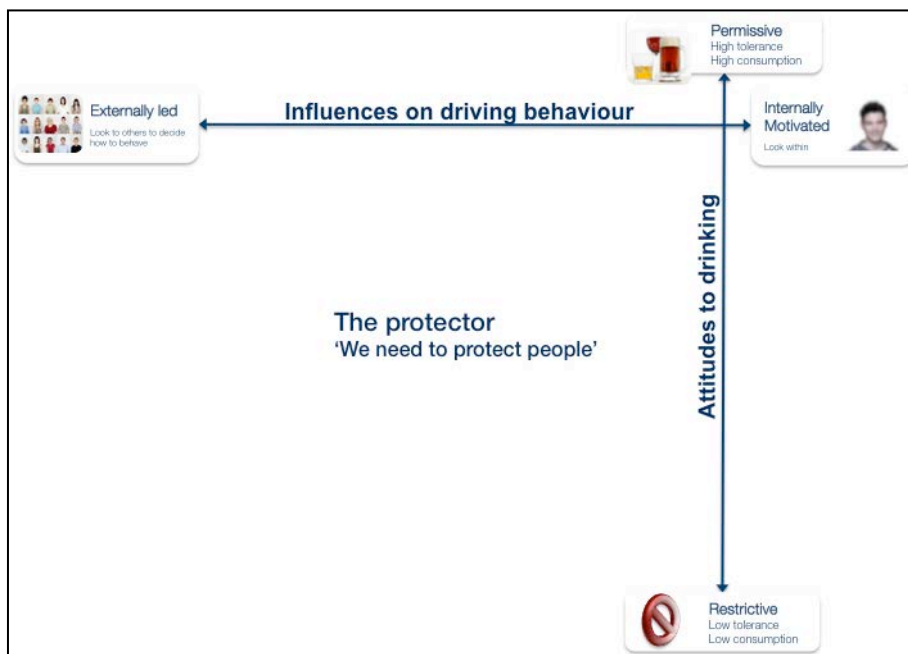


Figure 19. The protector – one of four key drinking identities

## The protector



### Meet Chris (aged 59)

Chris is retired and lives with his partner in regional Victoria.

Chris enjoys entertaining at home and the company of his close friends and family.

### Chris describes his ideal way to spend an evening as ...

*"An intimate dinner at my house with my two favourite couples where we eat, drink and have a few good laughs."*

### Chris doesn't feel the need to drink just because others do ...

*"It doesn't bother me not having a drink when others are having a drink. I carry on the same, but avoid anyone who has had a few too many. I can't cope with drunks, never have been good with them."*

### In fact, he often chooses to go without alcohol and thinks more people should do the same ...

*"I normally don't drink when I go out with my partner, as I'm always driving and I always have a great time, why do we need to drink alcohol to have fun! This is where we need to show our children you don't need to drink to have a good time."*

### Chris believes that moderate drinking can be social, but drinking alone is a problem ...

*"I think having a drink on your own is different to having one with others, and cannot understand why so many people do it ... Occasionally my wife will have a wine when I am not home and it worries me. I wonder why she needs to drink on her own and hope that it is not the start of a drinking problem (probably an overreaction I know!)."*

### Overall, Chris thinks the culture of drinking in Australia needs to be addressed, and corrected...

*"I do think as Australians we think we need to celebrate every occasion with alcohol ... Until drunkenness is seen as socially unacceptable thing to do, we won't change our habits. It needs to be discouraged the same way as cigarettes, they are now seen as socially unacceptable."*

Figure 20. A protector – excerpts from The Lounge online research community

## Understanding protector interaction

The protector can be often quite vocal about their views towards alcohol, tending to endorse a 'nanny state' where people should be regulated in terms of their access to and consumption of alcohol.

The protector sees the follower as someone who typifies the need for government intervention because followers are easily influenced and need a higher authority to redirect them towards more moderate behaviour.

The initiator is viewed as the unequivocal example of the problem behaviour that results from our culture's relaxed attitude toward heavy drinking.

The moderator is viewed as a healthy example of how we as a nation should be drinking.

The protector endorses the moderator's controlled, balanced approach to alcohol and believes these behaviours should be promoted to wider society. The protector is most content in the company of the moderator because they too do not over-indulge in alcohol and behave in a manner that is deemed as acceptable by the protector.

## Other segments' views of the protector

The other three segments primarily view the protector as judgemental.

**The follower** perceives the protector to be judgemental and controlling, especially in situations where the protector overtly questions the follower's willingness to drink at the encouragement of others.

While the follower is able to acknowledge that the current drinking culture does encourage excessive drinking, unlike the protector the follower prefers the social gratification received from our drinking lifestyle and therefore has a more tolerant view of our drinking culture.

**The initiator** completely dismisses the protector's position towards alcohol. As the initiator believes their alcohol consumption is under control, they reject the protector's stance that there is a need for governmental intervention. An initiator is more likely to challenge the views of a protector when in social settings, or ignore them completely. The protector has little or no impact on an initiator's drinking lifestyle.

**The moderator** sees the protector as being responsible in relation to alcohol intake but very opinionated. The moderator believes drinking is about self-control and therefore disagrees with the protector's belief that society is to blame for an excessive drinking culture.

### **Underlying attitudes of the protector**

The protector has a number of well-established patterns of thinking and behaving that form the basis of their views towards alcohol. Chiefly, the protector looks to others to correct the current situation. They believe that the way to manage the problem of excessive drinking is through regulation and control. They assume that by managing and/or removing the temptation of alcohol the problem will cease to exist.

The protector believes that restriction and control are effective. They will endorse messages that 'wag the finger' and tell people not to drink. The problem with this attitude is that by doing this they are preventing people from forming their own balanced attitude toward alcohol. This segment needs to acknowledge the significance alcohol plays in people's lives and understand that a more balanced approach, which encourages people to not stop drinking alcohol but instead to consume alcohol in a sensible manner, is more likely to be effective.

## 6 CURRENT COMMUNICATIONS

This section examines current communications relating to alcohol including communications from government and health organisations as well as from the commercial sector. In particular, this section discusses the strengths and weaknesses of various communication styles and messages and their effectiveness in engaging the drinking identities, with particular emphasis on the follower and the initiator identities, and their likely impact on drinking behaviour.

### 6.1 The 'drink less' message

Nearly all government and health organisation communications are seen to have the same overarching message: drink less. While not directly promoting abstinence, the underlying message is that some people drink too much and that this is a problem a responsible government needs to address.

At an overall level, **initiators** simply do not see themselves as the target audience for these sorts of messages. They believe they are in control of their drinking and their drinking is not a problem. This immediately creates a disconnect from health and government communications aiming to reduce their amount of drinking.

For **followers**, these messages will be more readily received. Followers do not necessarily want to drink as much as they do, and do feel the influence of social pressure to drink more than they otherwise should.

#### **Message: Drink less to avoid negative consequences**

One popular style of health and government communications focuses on the negative outcomes of drinking in an attempt to discourage unhealthy drinking behaviour.

However, this research has clearly established that talking about consequences has little real impact on drinking among the at-risk segments. These consequences are not seen as real enough, immediate enough or negative enough. In addition, given the popularity of shock advertising and scare tactics for smoking and driving, for example, many people are simply desensitised to these sorts of messages.

An example of this style of communication is the 'When to say when' campaign from the NSW Department of Health (Figure 21).



Figure 21. 'When to say when' – NSW Department of Health campaign

In this advertisement a series of scenarios are depicted where negative consequences have occurred as a result of drinking too much: being too loud at the pub, falling over at a work function, knocking over a glass, having a fight with a friend, vomiting in a cab, missing a child's birthday dinner, waking neighbours by being too loud walking home, waking the children by being too loud at a dinner party, getting caught drink driving, having your wife and son disappointed with finding you passed out on the couch.

A similar style of communication, targeting younger drinkers, is the 'Every drink counts' binge drinking advertisement from the Queensland Government (Figure 22).

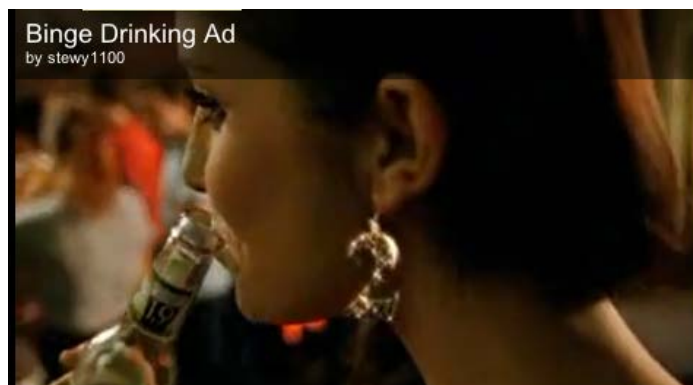


Figure 22. 'Every drink counts' – Queensland Government campaign

This execution depicts a young woman going out to a nightclub/bar with friends. As the evening progresses, she drinks more and more and the scene becomes more disjointed and blurry. She ends up being assaulted and left lying on the road. The voiceover states, 'Excessive drinking adds to your chances of being abused, injured, or assaulted. Don't go too far. Every drink counts.'

In both campaigns the audience is asked to consider these negative consequences the next time they drink. The success of this style of communication relies on the message being internalised, recalled when drinking and powerful enough to curb over-indulgence. Successful behaviour change here also relies on the individual to control his or her own drinking behaviour regardless of external influences. For many drinkers, especially followers, this would be hard to achieve.



In addition, while both of these campaigns illustrate everyday and extreme consequences, many drinkers simply disassociate from the extreme and dismiss the everyday as an acceptable negative outcome.

Extreme consequences cause many in the at-risk segments to respond that these advertisements are not talking to me, and these consequences are unlikely to happen. This undermines any connection with the message.

*"Typical alcohol or drug abuse video. I find it too boring, as there are many ads like it that carries similar messages. So once the ad comes on, you get the 'oh I know what's this all about' feeling and just ignore the ad consciously or sub-consciously."*

Eddie 23, follower

*"Since the ad is targeted to young females, show the other stuff like puking on your favourite shoes or having your skirt caught in your stockings or kissing your best friend's boyfriend – the stuff girls would think about rather than trying to break through the 'it won't happen to me' mindset."*

Sian, 32, follower

Focusing on more typical consequences can also be ineffective in reaching the key target audience, as the consequences are unimportant in comparison to the positive motivators to drink. An example of this can be seen in the New Zealand Government's 'Was last night really worth it?' campaign (Figure 23). This campaign consists of a series of billboard and print advertisements in which individuals are depicted isolated under upturned glasses while trying to go about their daily activities.

While many considered it an accurate depiction of how a hangover can feel, for the key target segments it fails to strike a chord of relevance unless you are hung over at the time of viewing the message. Furthermore, many in the key target audience are likely to ask 'why change?' because the consequences depicted are short-lived and manageable. Even moderators question the impact of such messages.

*"For many, the effects the next day, even after a big one, are something that you can bounce back from."*

Jo, 27, follower

*"We all know the consequence of drinking too much and still do it. This does not make me stop and think before I drink too much."*

Sally, 38, initiator

*"I don't know anyone who hasn't had at least one bad hangover in their past and most people survived it so I don't see these ads as having a very big impact on people's drinking habits."*

Catherine, 41, moderator



Figure 23. 'Was last night really worth it?' – New Zealand Government campaign

The likely impacts of consequence-based messages on key segments are:

- **Protectors** would likely applaud these communications as evidence that the government is 'doing something' about drinking behaviour. However, protectors are not the target audience of these communications.
- Similarly, **moderators** may agree with these kinds of messages, although they may question if they will have impact on others; but again, they are not the intended audience.
- For the intended target audience of followers and initiators, this style of message in isolation would likely have very little or no impact on their behaviour.
  - **Followers** look to others to guide their drinking behaviour and are very driven by the particular situation that they find themselves in and the social group they are with on any particular drinking occasion. While they may agree with, recognise and even fear these negative consequences, the need to follow what others are doing and the need for social acceptance will trump these concerns almost every time.
  - Similarly, for **initiators**, this style of communication would be dismissed as not applying to them. They are in control of their own drinking and would probably easily convince themselves that these consequences simply would not apply to them.

#### Message: Drink less to reduce negative influence on others

Another style of communication focuses on the influence individual drinking behaviour has on others, particularly on children as a means of reducing problem drinking.

An example of this is the 'Drink cycle' campaign from Drinkwise Australia (Figure 24).



Figure 24. 'Drink cycle' – Drinkwise Australia campaign

This execution depicts a barbecue at home in the 1970's where a father chats with his mates about whether they are hung over from a previous drinking session and then asks his son to get him another beer. The son is then shown as an adult in the identical scenario some years later asking his child to get him a beer, and the cycle is then repeated a third time with that child shown as an adult. A voiceover then says 'Kids form their attitudes to alcohol long before they ever have a drink themselves. From their most important role model. You.'

It is clear that the audience for this communication is parents. So while this campaign could possibly have an impact on drinking, especially in terms of socialisation, it is limited to talking to adults in parental roles.

However, the research highlights that while this campaign makes some think a little more about their drinking behaviour, others cannot see anything wrong with what is depicted in the ad: the culture of drinking depicted is not viewed negatively.

**Initiators** are unlikely to think that there is anything wrong with the cycle depicted. In fact, for many, this campaign simply shows the culture of Aussie mateship and drinking that they embrace and espouse. Further, for initiators there is unlikely to be any conflict between being a responsible parent and sharing their own attitudes towards drinking with their child. Initiators see no problem with their attitudes and drinking behaviours, so would have no problem passing this on to their children. This further diminishes the intended impact of this message.

*"I feel that there's nothing wrong with your kids seeing you drink while you're talking with friends, hanging out. My parents drank like that and I don't feel it's wrong."*

Elle, 32, initiator

*"I see nothing wrong with this ad ... the adolescent sees his parents drinking responsibly in a safe environment. The children are observing good behaviour with alcohol."*

Sally, 38, initiator

Initiators feel that they are in control of their own drinking, so they are also likely to feel that they would be passing on this sense of control to their own children. So while they may not encourage under-age drinking for a range of reasons, they are likely to look forward to the time when they can include their child in drinking occasions; when their child 'comes of age'.

For **followers** who are also parents, this style of communication would be likely to have some impact on their attitudes towards drinking.

*"It makes me feel responsible for the way I act with alcohol around my children."*

Nick, 37, follower

*"Role modelling establishes cyclical behaviour! Makes me feel sad that it is so embedded in our male culture. Often it is seen as 'nothing serious' but the influence on kids is so profound and under rated ... yes it is effective, this is such a 'normal' family barbeque setting, I am sure we have all been there and can relate to it."*

Jan, 43, follower

However, followers, by their nature, do not look to their own beliefs and attitudes about drinking to guide their behaviour. As a result, this communication would be less effective in changing a follower's actual behaviour, despite having taken the message on board.

## 6.2 Definitions of 'problem' drinking and associations with binge drinking

Underlying the current communications encouraging people to drink less are definitions of 'problem' drinking and 'unhealthy' drinking behaviour. That is, the 'drink less' message is actually 'drink less *because current levels of drinking are problematic/unhealthy*'. Many, particularly in the high-risk groups, view the current definitions of problem drinking as simply inaccurate or unrealistic. The result is that these drinkers may not buy into the need for the 'drink less' message in the first place and distance themselves from these communications.

The term 'binge drinking', and associated messages in the media about the 'binge drinking problem' in particular, highlights the disconnect between many health and government messages and the views of their intended audience. Definitions of binge drinking are considered by many to be too extreme and not reflective of typical, everyday behaviour. The perception of binge drinking as behaviour at the far end of the drinking spectrum is exacerbated by its association with young, inexperienced, risk-taking drinkers. So the more adult, more mature, more 'in control' drinker (i.e. the adult initiator) is unlikely to see themselves fitting any aspect of this binge drinking definition.

Many **younger initiators**, who may well see themselves as of similar age to the hypothetical 'binge drinker', still disassociate themselves from this definition. Younger initiators see themselves as being in control of their drinking, at least in the broader sense, even though they may lose control on particular occasions.

Overall, while there was clear evidence that many initiators actually engaged in 'binge drinking', very few were likely to see themselves as a 'binge drinker'. For initiators, this behaviour is simply seen as 'getting drunk' and within the range of acceptable behaviour in our culture, or something that is a problem for the youth of today, but not for themselves.

*"But we (the nation) do have a terrible problem with binge drinking among our youth. It's because of the pressure we put on them these days at school and work, which I don't believe the last generation had."*

Dale, 51, protector

*"I think the older generation see young people as binge drinkers, however when it comes to their own drinking if they are binge drinkers themselves, they definitely would not see it as binge drinking, because they're in a different generation."*

Nicole, 24, follower

**Moderators and protectors** are more likely to agree with binge drinking definitions, but they are not the key target audience of these anti-binge-drinking messages.

Health-related messages and definitions of healthy drinking are also often dismissed as unrealistic and far too restrictive (e.g. men and women should not drink more than two standard drinks per day) or are simply too hard to reconcile (e.g. some wine is good, but only a certain amount). Current messages about the 'safe' or 'healthy' amount of drinking are considered to be promoting drinking significantly less than what the typical person consumes. Because the difference in consumption is often so great, many will not even try to achieve the 'healthy' targets because it would require too much of a behavioural shift. Rather than feeling like a failure for drinking more than is safe or healthy, drinkers are likely to decide instead that the target is unrealistic and overly conservative.

Exacerbating this issue, Australian media is saturated with messages about our health and wellbeing beyond just alcohol (e.g. diet, obesity, exercise, smoking). A plethora of other 'do and don't' messages and the difficulty in changing long-entrenched behaviours means that many in the high-risk segments almost automatically disregard these communications. Simply too much to deal with, it becomes ignored.

*"You can't believe everything you hear and we are constantly bombarded with 'studies' done on everything that just confuse me and make me feel like I don't do anything right!"*

Maria, 34, follower

*"I think that we get far too many messages about what is good/bad for us to the point that I now find it amusing, and don't take too much notice of it ... Drinking in moderation means stopping before you are dizzy and making a fool of yourself, and avoiding a hang over in the morning"*

Susan, 32, follower

### 6.3 Social acceptability of drunken behaviour

Another less prevalent style of communication focuses on social embarrassment as a deterrent to drinking too much. While still a consequence-based approach, this is one of the few consequences that is likely to have a real impact on the higher risk segments, most notably **followers**. An example of this style of communication can be seen in the 'Street dares' advertisement, part of the 'Know your limits' campaign from the UK Government (Figure 25).



Figure 25. 'Street dares' – UK Government 'Know your limits' campaign

This execution depicts a young man, in a shopping mall, in the middle of the day asking passers-by to behave in various seemingly bizarre ways, and then demonstrating these behaviours himself: singing a song at the top of his voice, yelling abuse at someone using a traffic cone as a megaphone, pouring a cup full of vomit in his hair and on the ground, smashing a window using a bin, urinating in public, falling asleep on the ground. It is clear that the young people (approximately 18–24) watching his behaviour are shocked, revolted, disdainful and embarrassed on his behalf. It is not until the end of the advertisement that it is made clear to the audience that he is behaving like someone who is drunk. The juxtaposition of the daytime scene and a clearly sober person behaving this way effectively highlights the socially unacceptable and embarrassing ways that drunken people behave. The tagline then reads "If you wouldn't do it sober ... alcohol: know your limits."

What this communication aims to do is to use social embarrassment and ridicule to act as a deterrent to excessive drinking. This communication challenges the social image of drunken behaviour and confronts the notion that getting drunk is to be revered. Importantly, it suggests the absurdity in excusing such behaviour. In addition, this communication tells the audience that the social censure would come from the drinker's peer group, making it far more relevant. Finally, the behaviour (for the most part) is not so extreme that it easily allows for drinkers to distance themselves from this communication and convince themselves that it is not talking to them (although in this particular execution his behaviour is taken a bit too far when he throws a bin through a window). Many felt that this advertisement was entertaining, humorous and memorable. For many at-risk segments this execution acts as a mirror to remind people what others could think of this sort of behaviour.

*"You wouldn't really do the things that he's doing sober. And the people thought he was an idiot doing the things he did!"*

Al, 32, follower

*"A welcome reminder of stupid loutish drunken behaviour. It's memorable and catches your attention. It's also different from traditional binge drinking ads, and shows a different aspect of drinking. I think it would be very effective for people my age, who are very concerned with their image and how they are perceived by their peers."*

Beth, 20, follower

This style of communication is likely to be particularly effective for **followers**, who are strongly driven by what others are thinking about them. That is, the fear of being embarrassed or ostracised because of drunken behaviour could outweigh the fear of not following others in drinking more. For **initiators**, this style of communication is likely to have less impact. However, although internally motivated, initiators will not be immune to the fear of social censure for their behaviour.

#### 6.4 Looking after your friends when they have had too much

Another style of communication demonstrates ways to intervene when someone else has had too much to drink. An example of this is the 'Championship moves' series of advertisements (Figure 26).



Figure 26. 'Championship moves' – Victorian Government campaign

This series of ads depicts various scenarios in which two or more friends are out drinking together. Each scenario illustrates the poor behaviour of one friend that has had too much to drink, and suggests a strategy that the more sober friend can employ to prevent their drunk mate from getting themselves into trouble. 'Championship Move #15, Receptionist', focuses on two friends: one has had too much to drink and is 'mouthing off' to a stranger at the bar; the other has had less to drink and is able to foresee that if his friend keeps harassing the man at the bar, a fight is likely to ensue. To 'save the day' and keep his mate out of harm's way, the more sober friend distracts him enough to be removed from the situation.



This style of communication is likely to work well to provide ways for (young) drinkers across segments to help look after their friends when they have drunk too much. As a secondary message, they communicate that drunken behaviour can be embarrassing and socially unacceptable. Importantly these executions illustrate situations many young people can relate to and focus on mateship, rather than drinking per se. This means that the target audience is less likely to view these advertisements as judgemental ‘finger wagging’, especially as looking after the friend provides a culturally acceptable alternative. As such, this campaign seems to avoid many of the pitfalls that could cause the audience to disconnect from the message.

*“They’re entertaining, memorable, and leave you with a message you can actually use. My friends and I have actually used ‘The Receptionist’ in a real life situation.”*

Beth, 20, follower

*“I believe this series of ads has been quite effective, particularly for me. Maybe it’s just my kind of crowd or the friends I keep, but our drunken stupidity normally doesn’t get much more serious than this kind of scenario. Fun, light-hearted, and a funny story to tell the next day, but never punch ups, or hospitalisations, or breaking any serious laws. I’ve also seen the street version of this campaign on campus at my uni, and they keep it fun, which I think is the best way to engage with myself anyway.”*

Steve, 21, follower

## 6.5 Overall alcohol communications landscape

While the research examined some different approaches to drinking moderation messages, it is important to acknowledge the broader context in which these operate and the conflicting message from the alcohol industry itself.

Currently in Australia, alcohol can be advertised in a number of mediums, most notably on television. Naturally advertising from the alcohol industry is ultimately aimed at encouraging consumers to buy and drink more, not less, alcohol. Tapping into Australian’s current drinking culture and showcasing the positive aspects of drinking are key ways that the industry communicates to consumers and promotes their product and brand.

The alcohol industry tells us that alcohol makes us sexier, makes us fit in with our mates, allows us to be like our heroes, and is an important part of having fun. These are all very compelling messages, culturally appealing messages, particularly to the **follower** segment. The following examples are illustrative of such messages.

In ‘The kiss’, an advertisement for Baileys (Figure 27), a woman is playing pool with three men. She is drinking Baileys and puts her glass down and walks away for a moment. When she returns her glass is empty. She then kisses all three men in turn to determine who stole her drink. The sexual overtones of the message are very clear. Alcohol is sexy and sensual and reduces our inhibitions, in a playful and positive way.



Figure 27. 'The kiss' – advertisement for Baileys

The 'Crying' execution for VB (Figure 28) contains a series of scenes where men are socialising with their mates. One man in each scene is behaving in a stereotypical feminine way; buying cocktails with fruit and umbrellas, getting advice on plastic surgery, putting on hand cream, etc. In each situation, his mates 'rescue' him with a VB. The message is that drinking VB with mates is a bonding experience, makes the drinker more of a 'man', and is a fundamental part of belonging to their tribe of men.



Figure 28. 'Crying' – advertisement for VB

In an execution for Bundaberg Rum (Figure 29) the Bundaberg Bear is having a hot bath before going out with his mates. As a prank, these mates put a red sock in his bath, turning him pink. He then arrives at the party/pub embarrassed and becomes the brunt of mockery. Again, the message is targeting men and making fun of men behaving in stereotypical female ways. In order for the Bundaberg Bear to be socially accepted, he should be drinking with his mates and not having a bath at home. It clearly shows alcohol being a fundamental part of having fun, bonding with friends and socialising.



**Figure 29. 'Red sock' – advertisement for Bundaberg Rum**

The 'Just keep walking' execution for Johnnie Walker (Figure 30) features famous cricketer and sporting personality Steve Waugh talking about how he has been told by the media he should get rid of his baggy green cap. It then shows Steve playing cricket wearing the cap and getting injured. The tagline then appears for Johnnie Walker with the line 'Just keep walking'. While this message is more subtle, it is telling drinkers that alcohol and drinking are a healthy and positive part of the Australian sporting lifestyle (and linked with achievement). Further, the message is that Steve Waugh, an idol for some, enjoys Johnnie Walker. This allows some people to feel that their drinking has been validated by someone they look up to and admire.



**Figure 30. 'Just keep walking' – advertisement for Johnnie Walker**

Currently, the only reference the alcohol industry makes to moderation is a subtle reference to 'enjoy responsibly'. This message is deliberately understated, and is likely to be completely missed.

Considered holistically, it is clear that current alcohol messages are contradictory, sometimes and confusing and of limited relevance. This allows people to distance themselves from messages they do not want to hear. Australians are currently exposed to the promotion of alcohol (which serves to reinforce current social attitudes), as well as health and government messages restricting alcohol consumption. Further, the majority of communications appear to focus on the negative consequences of drinking, which is likely to have limited effectiveness reaching high-risk segments.

## 7 STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

Current communication strategies around alcohol appear to have limited impact and effectiveness on creating real behavioural change amongst high-risk drinkers. A different strategic approach is required to effectively challenge the social acceptability of drinking amongst Australians and create a real cultural shift.

### 7.1 Multipronged approach needed

Different segments have different attitudes and are influenced by a multitude of factors to drink. A successful communication strategy must target multiple segments, a range of ages, occasions and drinking behaviours. This is important because not only each segment will respond differently, but also people can shift between segments (as alcohol consumption changes regularly and depends on a variety of circumstances). Consequently, a successful strategy needs to target individuals in a variety of roles, for example when they are the friend, the parent, the spouse, alone, the work colleague, the party guest, the host, at a celebration and at the pub.

### 7.2 Social is key

An opportunity exists to tip the balance of drinking lifestyles by addressing social perceptions. While negative outcomes are recognised, they are either too long term or simply not 'bad' enough to be effective deterrents. Our biggest opportunity is to modify certain behaviours by positioning them as socially (un)acceptable.

To empower responsible drinking, communications need to chip away at the current social acceptance of drinking to excess. Social interactions and acceptance by others are a source of self-esteem and self-identity. Alcohol currently plays a key part in shaping our social identity, so the role that alcohol plays in our social lives needs to be the target of communications.

Communications about the more extreme negative consequences of drinking that ask the individual to internalise and recall these messages to change their behaviour are likely to be ineffective for the high-risk segments. High-risk drinkers disassociate from these messages and are desensitised to shock tactics. Messages about what people view as extreme negative consequences of drinking are often immediately dismissed as unrealistic and unlikely to happen to them. In addition, some of the negative consequences (e.g. hangover) are outcomes that many drinkers are willing to accept.

That said, the consequence that appears to carry more weight is that of embarrassment or being ostracised from a social group. If the actions and reactions portrayed are realistic and typical, these sorts of messages are likely to be the most engaging, and resonate with the target audience.

Effective change requires providing people with socially acceptable alternatives to participate in our culture without drinking to excess. Essentially, the aim should be to create a culture where people genuinely believe that they can have a good time and be part of the tribe regardless of whether or not they are drinking.

Social acceptance will be a particularly powerful angle to effectively reach young followers and initiators alike. Young people are the most likely to engage in risky drinking behaviour, and they are also the most likely to be affected by what their peer group thinks of them.

Older followers, by their very nature, will be most susceptible to a socially based message.

Importantly, despite their inner focus, initiators will still be affected by what other people think, even if they claim not to be. While the impact of embedding a culturally sanctioned (even attractive) alternative will take longer and be difficult to achieve, a social approach is likely to be the only way to have any real impact on initiators. Even if initiators don't want to hear the message, they will eventually be unable to avoid it if society no longer accepts their drinking behaviour.

Using a social focus will also chip away at the hardest behaviour to address: long-entrenched habitual, ritualistic behaviour. Targeting these behaviours directly is likely to have little effect. However, challenging the social acceptability of high-risk drinking or offering culturally relevant alternatives will have a flow-on effect in challenging long-entrenched attitudes that are embedded in our drinking culture.

### **7.3 Focus on enabling behaviour change**

Current communications generally fail to provide individuals with tools and methods for drinking less. The 'Championship moves' campaign is a good example of communications that provide practical tools and strategies to enable individuals to 'be part of the social tribe' in a responsible way. However, this campaign still does not speak to individuals facing the decision about whether to have another drink in the face of often overwhelming pressure to drink more.

So while communications focused on more realistic and meaningful negative outcomes such as social embarrassment are likely to be far more relevant, focusing on the consequences in isolation still require individuals to self-modify their behaviour. For many, particularly in the high-risk segments, this will be an extremely difficult thing to do.

Throughout all of the communication styles already discussed there is a notable absence of tools and resources to enable responsible drinking. As discussed, currently, the only socially acceptable reasons for not drinking (e.g. driving, pregnancy or other medical reasons, or protecting the youth or a mate) are very limited. For **followers** in particular, changing attitudes will not necessarily be enough to combat the pressures of their social group. To have a real impact on changing the behaviour of followers, followers need to be provided with ways to say no to another drink, ways to drink less when being encouraged to drink more, and still be accepted socially.

Messages need to be engaging, enabling and supportive, providing practical ways to still be part of the social group, maintain 'credibility' in the tribe, but only drink moderately.

At a broader level, Australians in general need to be provided with a way of drinking that is still culturally relevant but does not require drinking to excess. This will require a multi-faceted campaign that is both holistic in its representation of the alcohol culture and its positive and negative attributes and alternatives. It will also have to be long term in its objectives and strategy.

#### **7.4 Work alongside alcohol industry messages**

Alcohol industry messages reinforce what Australians want to hear: that alcohol makes us sexier, makes us fit in with our mates, allows us to be like our heroes, and is an important part of having fun. In contrast, health and government organisations show drinkers the negative outcomes of what is defined as unhealthy/problem drinking, and attempt to scare drinkers into drinking less or abstaining.

This disparity arguably allows drinkers to pick and choose the messages they hear and internalise. When given the choice between seeing alcohol as something that enhances your life, both personally and socially, versus thinking about negative consequences, it is not surprising that current health and government campaigns have had little apparent impact on changing attitudes and behaviours in relation to the consumption of alcohol.

So for health and government communications to have any success in reducing Australians' high-risk drinking, they need to acknowledge and not directly challenge current attitudes that drinking is fun, socially acceptable, and something people want to do. Communications about healthy and responsible drinking need to be presented within a socially relevant and realistic context to engage with drinkers, and allow drinkers to reconcile currently confusing messages.

## 7.5 Long-term commitment needed

Given the culturally embedded nature of our drinking lifestyles, it is imperative that key stakeholders recognise that change will take time. Challenging the Australian drinking culture will be difficult and change will occur over time. The same long-term commitment given to anti-smoking programs and drink driving campaigns will need to be given to changing Victorians' drinking lifestyles. Without this commitment there is little chance of altering the existing embedded culture of drinking.



### Meet Tanya (aged 30), follower

Tanya reflects on her drinking and the need to change but it's a challenge for her and so many like her.

*"I wish I didn't drink.*

*When I do drink, I wish I could stop at just one or two.*

*When I do stop at just one or two, I wish I could stop thinking about having one more...*

*It seems like the only time I don't think about drinking (in an evening or casual setting), is when I am sick or when I am hung over.*

*I really wish it wasn't like this and I hope that when I get pregnant shortly, that after 9mths + of no alcohol that I will be more responsible.*

*I am not an alcoholic, but I wish I didn't enjoy it so much.*

*Alcohol doesn't really affect my life too much, but it is a big part of my life.*

*I am not losing friends over it, I am not alienating family, I am not out of money because I have to buy booze.*

*I just simply don't feel good, and I know if the alcohol (and ciggies) weren't in my system poisoning my body that I would feel so much better."*

Figure 31. Excerpt from The Lounge online research community

## 8 FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This section outlines recommendations for the development of an effective cultural change program.

### 8.1 Followers and initiators are key targets

As stated in section 7, it is fundamental that all four segments are targeted within the communications strategy. This will enable some segments to influence other segments' behaviours. This can be achieved by the following:

**The follower** – This segment is the most critical target audience because it is suggested as the largest and the most influenced by social pressure. The best way to get followers to change is by changing the attitudes and behaviour of those influencing them (i.e. initiators). However, this is likely to take some time. So as an interim measure, followers need to be given tools and techniques for drinking less in the face of social pressure.

Followers could also be reached by providing them with role models that they can look to for influence beyond their immediate social group. Sporting personalities, celebrities could be shown as joining in on all the fun, having some drinks but not getting drunk. Measures targeting initiators will also have an eventual flow-on effect for followers by reinforcing that initiators need not be followed.

Targeting followers with messages that they can drink less and still be socially accepted would be effective. In addition, followers would be receptive to messages that if they drink to excess they will face social censure.

**The initiator** – As major proponents of Australia's drinking culture, this segment is also a critical target of communications. However, it is the hardest to reach and likely to take the longest to change. Messages targeting initiators will need to be more subtle and slowly erode the current attitudes that excessive drinking is socially and culturally acceptable. In addition, because initiators 'self-manage' their drinking, messages should encourage and promote responsible, healthy and culturally expected ways of doing this. Unlike current campaigns focusing on negative consequences, which initiators are likely to dismiss, the approach should be more educational and avoid scare tactics and 'finger wagging'.



Ultimately, even though this segment is motivated internally, they are still a part of society and will eventually be affected by social pressure to change their drinking habits, when that pressure is large enough. One strategy that targets the initiator but would also aid the follower, would be to hold the mirror up to initiator behaviour that pressures others to join in the drinking. Questioning 'why' they need others to drink with them to validate their behaviour holds the mirror up to this behaviour and gives the follower an 'out' – it is no longer about follower's actions; the focus becomes the initiator. A similar strategy would be to 'tap away at' the cultural tradition that allows us to pressure others to have 'just one more'.

**The moderator** – This segment represents the most reasonable and acceptable drinking lifestyles of the four segments identified in this study. This group's drinking attitudes needs to be encouraged and supported as the ideal drinking lifestyle. Currently, the moderator's drinking behaviour is undermined and belittled. Communications need to empower this segment, which are happy to say 'no' to excessive alcohol consumption. This can be achieved by challenging society's negative image of moderate drinking and empower not drinking or drinking less. Importantly, communications must challenge society's perceptions that people need to drink to have a 'good time' and to 'fit in'. Showcasing how individuals can have fun without (excessive) alcohol will help to modify our perceptions of the relationship between drinking and socialising.

**The protector** – This segment represents the most unrealistic and least tolerant attitudes towards drinking lifestyles identified in this study. However, there is merit in considering some of their positions. Serious consideration needs to be given to regulation on alcohol advertising as it continues to reinforce the social status of drinking, especially in its associations with sports and sporting personalities. Greater regulation of alcohol advertising would reinforce the messages to change drinking culture.

**The parent** – While not a drinking identity per se, across segments many drinkers also have a parental role. As such, some communications need to be targeted to this parental role specifically. As with other segments, parents need to be empowered to guide their children in the face of social pressure to behave in possibly unhealthy ways. Parents need to be given tools and resources to educate and guide their children. Discussions amongst community members in this study indicate that, for some parents, social attitudes that allow underage drinking need to be challenged. In particular, parents need to be given strategies and tools to help their children not to drink to excess, while still allowing them and their child to be socially accepted.

## 8.2 Key messages

A number of key messages relevant for future communications emerged from this study. For example:

- Recognise the many manifestations of our drinking culture (assumptions, language, rituals, social norms etc.).
- Challenge social acceptability of drinking to excess (e.g. 'No one likes you when you're messy').
- Question why we as a society revere drunkenness (e.g. 'Is that really something to be proud of?').
- Undermine the hero status of getting drunk and drinking to excess (e.g. 'What an idiot').
- Remove the excusability of drunkenness and related bad behaviour (e.g. 'That's no excuse').
- Strengthen social acceptability of not drinking/not getting drunk/drinking in moderation (e.g. 'Why do you need to drink to have a good time?').
- Challenge social pressure that makes others drink ('Why do *you* need *me* to have a drink?').
- Focus on the cultural positives of moderate drinking (e.g. enjoying every moment) rather than the negative (e.g. missing out)
- Showcase 'heroes' and celebrities who don't drink or who drink responsibly while retaining their social appeal.

While this list of messages is not exhaustive, these are recurring attitudes underpinning our current culture of drinking in Australia that would be a meaningful focus for future communications campaigns.

## 8.3 Summary

This research clearly illustrates the pervasiveness of drinking in our society and that it may well be more culturally embedded than previously acknowledged.

There is a need for a multipronged approach to messages, and addressing the social role of alcohol is critical to this. The social acceptability of drinking to excess needs to be challenged at both an individual and cultural level. Furthermore, drinkers need to be provided with tools and resources to enable them to drink responsibly and still remain socially accepted.

The research clearly indicates that communication strategies focusing on negative consequences as a deterrent will have little impact on behaviour of at-risk groups. These messages cause the at-risk segments, namely followers and initiators, to disconnect and distance themselves from the message. We need to move from a 'finger wagging' negative consequences focus to a focus of empowering responsible drinking and, in doing so, enable individuals to still be part of the social group, maintain 'credibility' in the tribe, but only drink moderately. Effective change requires providing people with socially permissible alternatives to participate in our culture without drinking to excess.

## 9 APPENDICES

## Appendix 1 – Discussion guide

The following discussion guide was used over the 9-week data collection period. Each group was probed on a number of similar issues. The framing of question may have sometimes varied for each group depending on the development of the preceding discussion. In some cases a particular question may have been asked of one group and not the other depending on the flow of interactions. Moderators were instructed early on to couch consumption both in terms of food and alcohol so as not to bias participants' focus.

<b>Date topic started</b>	<b>Discussion Topic: Younger Community</b>	<b>Discussion Topic: Older Community</b>
October 26 <sup>th</sup> 2010	<p><b>Title:</b> Introductions</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>To kick things off, tell us 5 things about you.</p> <p>There are no rules here, anything you like, so long as it's about you.</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Introductions</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>To kick things off, tell us 5 things about you.</p> <p>There are no rules here, anything you like, so long as it's about you.</p>
October 26 <sup>th</sup> 2010	<p><b>Title:</b> Your social events</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>We're interested to know how particular people, situations and environments influence our social lives. So to kick off our conversations, we want to talk about social events.</p> <p>Tell us about the last time you attended or hosted a 'special' event (e.g. celebration, birthday, party) with friends or family?</p> <p>What was the event? Where did you go? Where was the event held? Why did you hold the event or why was the event held?</p> <p>Who were you with? Why were you with them? What did you do? What did you eat/drink?</p> <p>What did you enjoy about the event? What, if anything, didn't you enjoy?</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Your social events</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>We're interested to know how particular people, situations and environments influence our social lives. So to kick off our conversations, we want to talk about social events.</p> <p>Tell us about the last time you attended or hosted a 'special' event (e.g. celebration, birthday, party) with friends or family?</p> <p>What was the event? Where did you go? Where was the event held? Why did you hold the event or why was the event held?</p> <p>Who were you with? Why were you with them? What did you do? What did you eat/drink?</p> <p>What did you enjoy about the event? What, if anything, didn't you enjoy?</p>

<p>October 29<sup>th</sup> 2010</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> A typical weeknight?</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>We've talked a bit about special events a little so now we're interested in understanding how people spend a typical weeknight.</p> <p>Tell us about what you did last Thursday night.</p> <p>Where were you? Who were you with, friends, family, workmates, your partner or on your own?</p> <p>What did you do? What did you eat/drink? What time did you go to bed?</p> <p>Was it a good night? Is this a typical way you spend most weeknights? If not, what made last night different?</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> What do you get up to on a weeknight?</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>We've talked a bit about special events a little so now we're interested in understanding how people spend a typical weeknight.</p> <p>Tell us about what you did last Thursday night.</p> <p>Where were you? Who were you with, friends, family, workmates, your partner or on your own?</p> <p>What did you do? What did you eat/drink? What time did you go to bed?</p> <p>Was it a good night? Is this a typical way you spend most weeknights? If not, what made last night different?</p>
<p>November 1<sup>st</sup> 2010</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> The weekend is over, but the fun is just beginning!</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>So the weekend is over, but for many of us the fun's still continuing. Hopefully all of you will have today off and making the most of a four day weekend. With that in mind tell me what you did over the weekend.</p> <p>Was your weekend different to other weekends because of the public holiday on Tuesday (cup day)?</p> <p>Who is having a long weekend?</p> <p>Are you at home or going away? With who and what are you doing?</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> The weekend's over, but the fun's just beginning!</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>So the weekend's over, but for many of us the fun's still continuing. Hopefully all of you will have today off and making the most of a four day weekend. With that in mind tell me what you did over the weekend.</p> <p>Was your weekend different to other weekends because of the public holiday on Tuesday (cup day)? Did the rain affect your plans?</p> <p>Who is having a long weekend? Are you at home or going away? With who and what are you doing? What did you eat/drink?</p>
	<p><b>Title:</b> Big race – big day?</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> The glory of Melbourne Cup</p>

<p>November 3<sup>rd</sup> 2010</p>	<p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>So now that it is Wednesday and the long weekend is over, I'd love to hear what you did on Cup day.</p> <p>Did you do anything different because it was Melbourne Cup? Was it a special event?</p> <p>How did you get ready for the big race?</p> <p>What did you eat and drink throughout the day?</p> <p>Did the weather change your plans or impact on your celebrations?</p> <p>How did you pull up after the day's activities?</p>	<p>day</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>So now that it is Wednesday and the long weekend is over, we would like you to share what you did on Cup day.</p> <p>Did you do anything different because it was Cup day? Was it a special event?</p> <p>How did you get ready for the big race?</p> <p>What did you eat and drink throughout the day?</p> <p>Did the weather change your plans or impact on your celebrations?</p> <p>How did you pull up (good, bad or ugly)?</p>
<p>November 5<sup>th</sup> 2010</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> It's going to be BIG</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>People sometimes refer to having a 'big night'.</p> <p>Let's imagine you're going to have a big night.</p> <p>Tell me what it would be like (what you would be doing, who you would be with etc.).</p> <p>Provide us with as much detail as you can.</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> It's going to be BIG</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>People sometimes refer to having a 'big night'.</p> <p>Let's imagine you're going to have a big night.</p> <p>Tell me what it would be like (what you would be doing, who you would be with etc.).</p> <p>Provide us with as much detail as you can.</p>
<p>November 8<sup>th</sup> 2010</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Help, how to get through the rest of the day?</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Help, how to get through the rest of the day?</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p>

	<p>It's my birthday – well tomorrow – but I overindulged a little too much last night, reliving my youth with too much to drink and smoke, and I didn't get to bed until the later hours of this morning and I am paying for it now.</p> <p>Any suggestions, or tips for getting through the rest of the day at work?</p>	<p>It's my birthday – well tomorrow – but I overindulged a little too much last night, reliving my youth with too much to drink and smoke, and I didn't get to bed until the later hours of this morning and I am paying for it now.</p> <p>Any suggestions, or tips for getting through the rest of the day at work?</p>
November 8 <sup>th</sup> 2010	<p><b>Title:</b> Tips for recovery</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>We have all been talking about our big nights, so I thought it would make sense to share our tips for recovering the next day. (I can do with all the help I can get!)</p> <p>What's worked for you?</p> <p>What's the most bizarre tip you've heard?</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Now that I'm older ...</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>When I was younger I could eat and drink anything I wanted. But as I have gotten older, when I over indulge in food or drink it is very different.</p> <p>How has over indulging in food and drink changed for you?</p> <p>Has the frequency changed or is what and how much you consume changed?</p>
November 8 <sup>th</sup> 2010	<p><b>Title:</b> How do you prepare?</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>Carrying on from Dianne's discussions around tips for recovery. I'd love know how you or your friends prepare yourselves for a big night.</p> <p>I have a friend who swears by a big glass of milk and buttered toast. Do you have any tricks or techniques to get you ready (physically or mentally) for a big one?</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> How do you prepare?</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>I'd love know how you or your friends prepare yourselves for a big night.</p> <p>I have a friend who swears by a big glass of milk and buttered toast. Do you have any tricks or techniques to get you ready (physically or mentally) for a big one?</p>
	<b>Title:</b> Party pals or chill-out	<b>Title:</b> Party pals or chill-out

<p>November 8<sup>th</sup> 2010</p>	<p>chums?</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>Are there particular friends you associate with a big night? That is, friends where you know when you meet up with them, it's going to be a big one?</p> <p>And maybe you have different friends that you tend to have a quieter, low-key time with when you see them?</p> <p>If so, what's the difference between them?</p>	<p>chums?</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>Are there particular friends you associate with a big night? That is, friends where you know when you meet up with them, it's going to be a big one?</p> <p>And maybe you have different friends that you tend to have a quieter, low-key time with when you see them?</p> <p>If so, what's the difference between them?</p>
<p>November 10<sup>th</sup> 2010</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> We can have the best intentions ...</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>But friends can sometimes steer us in a different direction?</p> <p>I have a friend whom I love dearly but generally should not catch up with on a weeknight. A mid week dinner with her will always turn boozy when she orders yet another bottle of wine (that I somehow feel obligated to stay and drink with her).</p> <p>Tell me about a time you stayed and drank with a friend longer than you intended to?</p> <p>What happened and why?</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Is it too much or not enough?</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>We are often told many things about what is and isn't so good for us. Often some of this advice seems contradictory, such as chocolate is good for you, then it is bad for you, a glass of wine is good for you and then Australians drink too much etc. And to top it off, we are often left with the advice, 'just do it in moderation'. So on that note, let's talk about ...</p> <p>What do you think about all the messages we get about doing things in moderation?</p> <p>What does moderation mean for you in relation to eating and drinking?</p>
<p>November 12<sup>th</sup> 2010</p>	<p>–</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Look out, Christmas is coming!</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>Since we are on the topic of</p>



		<p>moderation, let's talk about if or how you plan to pace yourself over the festive season.</p> <p>How do you plan for pacing yourself during the upcoming festive season in terms of food and drink?</p> <p>What are some of the strategies you use to help you?</p> <p>If not, why not?</p>
<p>November 15<sup>th</sup> 2010</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> What do you call them?</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>I'm interested in all the different words and phrases we use to describe people according to their drinking behaviour.</p> <p>So tell me the words and phrases you use to describe...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Non-drinkers</li> <li>2. Heavy drinkers</li> <li>3. Someone that has drunk TOO much</li> </ol> <p>The words can be positive or negative, I'm interested in hearing them all. Let's see how many we can come up with. And don't worry if someone else has already listed your word, I'd like you to repeat it anyway, that way I can get a sense of which ones are most common.</p> <p>Here's an example of some words you have already used throughout our discussions ...</p> <p>party animal, soft, boring, messy, smashed, slaughtered, spastic, nanna</p> <p>Don't forget to tell me which words relate to which 'drinker'.</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Keeping sane</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>As we get older, we tend to have a lot more responsibilities such as running a house, raising children, managing a job and or a demanding career. Let's talk about some of the things you do to remain sane with all these responsibilities.</p> <p>What are some of the strategies you use to lower your stress levels?</p> <p>What role does food and drink play in reducing your stress?</p>

November 17 <sup>th</sup> 2010	<p><b>Title:</b> Choosing to go without</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>Today I'd like to talk a bit more about times when YOU may have been the non-drinker. So think of social event when you chose not to drink, i.e. an event where others were drinking, but you choose not to yourself. For example, you might have had an important event on the next day, or exercise scheduled for early the next morning, perhaps you had to catch an early flight, or had study to catch up on ...</p> <p>I'm interested in how it feels to be the one that wasn't drinking when the rest of the group was? How is it different from when you are drinking too?</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> 'Let's shout the nation'</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>I saw this article yesterday in the media and thought it was somewhat relevant to our discussions. So have a read and share your thoughts on the promotion. (I have also attached a larger version of this article at the end of this discussion.)</p> <p>Tell us your views and thoughts on this article.</p> <p>What does this article say to you about Australian culture?</p>
November 19 <sup>th</sup> 2010	<p><b>Title:</b> Let's step back in time</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>Can you remember the first time you had an alcoholic drink? If not, perhaps you can remember the first time you got drunk?</p> <p>How old were you? Where were you? What were you doing? Who were you with?</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> 'It's your shout'</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>We've been talking about the 'VB shout the nation' campaign and it has got me thinking about some of the activities we engage in when we have drinks with friends, family, co-workers etc.</p> <p>Tell me about the times that you have participated in 'shouting' or buying rounds of drinks with other people?</p> <p>What makes you do it?</p> <p>Do you ever feel like you have to keep the 'shout' going? Why?</p>
November 22 <sup>nd</sup> 2010	<p><b>Title:</b> Family vs. friends?</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Time alone</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p>

	<p>Following on from previous discussions about drinking and socialising, we want to explore more about drinking alcohol with your family.</p> <p>Is the way you drink alcohol different when you are with family (e.g. parents, etc.) vs. with friends?</p> <p>If it is different, how is it different? And what is it about being with friends vs. being with family that changes the way you drink alcohol?</p> <p>If your drinking behaviour is the same regardless of whether you are with friends or family, why do you think that is?</p>	<p>As we have been talking about drinking behaviours in the last week I want to get your thoughts about something I sometimes do. I had a really busy week last week and decided I wanted a quiet night at home with a glass of wine.</p> <p>Is there a difference between having a drink by yourself as opposed with other people?</p> <p>What do you think?</p>
<p>November 24<sup>th</sup> 2010</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Tell me about your family</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>Following on from our previous discussion about drinking with your family vs. your friends, and whether you ever drink too much in front of your folks, I'd like to shift the focus a little for today's discussion. Today let's look at it from the other perspective, have you ever seen your folks drunk, or perhaps having drunk a little too much?</p> <p>If you have, tell me about it ... How did you feel? How drunk did they get? Was it a one off or occasional occurrence?</p> <p>If you've never seen this ... Why do you think that is?</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Letting your hair down</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>Let's talk about the people that we tend to let our 'hair down' with and relax, socialise and have a drink with.</p> <p>What is it about these people that you like the most?</p> <p>What is that you dislike the most?</p>
<p>November 26<sup>th</sup> 2010</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> What's on the menu</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Choosing to go without</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p>

	<p>I'm interested in understanding the role food plays in our social lives.</p> <p>How does food feature in your social life?</p> <p>Does what you eat depend on who you are with?</p>	<p>I have noticed that some of you have been discussing times when you have stopped drinking and others around you are still drinking. I would like us to chat about this a bit more.</p> <p>So think of a social event when you chose not to drink, i.e. an event where others were drinking, but you choose not to yourself. For example, you might have had an important event on the next day, or had to get up early for kids and or work ...</p> <p>I'm interested in how it feels to be the one that wasn't drinking when the rest of the group was?</p> <p>How did you feel?</p> <p>Did you feel like you were part of the group that was drinking? Why/why not?</p>
<p>November 29<sup>th</sup> 2010</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> One without the other?</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>All our talk about food, and how it fits in with socialising has got me thinking ...</p> <p>Do food and alcohol always go together when socialising, or can you have one without the other?</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> What to bring to dinner</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>Following on from Friday's blog about catering for a BYO party I thought it might be interesting to talk about how we cater when people come over for dinner. So let's talk about when we invite someone over for dinner or when you are invited to dinner.</p> <p>What do you bring if invited? Why?</p> <p>If entertaining, do you have alcohol available for your guests? Why?</p>
<p>December 1<sup>st</sup> 2010</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Help me explain</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> What are the rules???</p>

	<p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>A friend of mine from the US has recently come over to Australia and we went down to my local pub with a few others to celebrate her arrival. When we were out and about my Aussie friends and I started buying rounds and I was really surprised that this wasn't a normal practice for my American buddy?</p> <p>When you're out with your friends, do you buy rounds of drinks? How would you explain the rules of buying rounds to my American friend? What happens if you want to bow out of a round, that is, what happens if you've had enough to drink and don't want to be in the round anymore?</p>	<p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>I was chatting with my sister and she was telling me about a party that her 16 year old went to on the weekend. It came up that apparently some of the kids parents were giving them drinks (i.e. alcohol) to bring, so my sister did the same thing. It left me wondering what I would do when my son gets to that age (as it's just around the corner!)</p> <p>Perfect question to put to you guys I thought.</p> <p>What do you think parents should do?</p> <p>And what sort of things should I be thinking about to help me with this decision?</p>
<p>December 3<sup>rd</sup> 2010</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Unintentionally over-doing it</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>It's been interesting reading about everyone's 'rules' for rounds. I guess while rounds might work for some, they don't always work for others.</p> <p>Which got me thinking about other social rituals which don't necessarily work for me, but I often end up involved in anyway.</p> <p>For example, I work in my friend's pub every now and again, and when we all knock off at the end of the night, rounds of shots are poured for us all. I'm happy to have the first shot, but when they keep coming, I end up drinking more than I planned, often leaving me feeling a bit worse for wear. I know I should just say no, but sometimes I don't want to be the</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Would you say something?</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>We've been talking a lot about drinking, which made me wonder about what people do when someone they're with has clearly had way too much. I know I've been in this situation before and am never sure what to do. If it's my husband, that's easy, but with other people it can be hard to know how to react. Or whether I should even react.</p> <p>Have you ever been in this sort of situation? What did you do?</p> <p>What do you think are the times when you would do/say something and times that you wouldn't?</p>

	<p>one 'piking' when everyone else is having fun.</p> <p>How about you? Are there any social rituals or scenarios in your life that sometimes lead you to over indulge a bit? Are there ever times where you'll continue to eat and drink past your limit because you don't want to miss out?</p>	
<p>December 8<sup>th</sup> 2010</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> When has a good night out turned bad?</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>Has a good night out ever turned bad for you? Tell us about it?</p> <p>How did the night start off? At what point did it 'turn bad'? What happened that made it 'turn bad'?</p> <p>How did the night finish up?</p> <p>I know I have a whole lot of stories I could post in reply here, but I'll let you take the lead, then I'll add mine later.</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Thoughts and reflections</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>This discussion is to provide you guys with the opportunity to say anything you might like in relation to the alcohol diary.</p> <p>For example, I have realised that at the moment I am drinking a wide variety of alcoholic drinks, such as red and white wine and champagne. This is because we have some excess alcohol left over from the party (half bottles) and I can't bear to see it go to waste.</p> <p>I also know I'm drinking more because it's the season when friends pop over and wish me a Merry Christmas and it seems wrong not to offer a drink and share one with them.</p>
<p>December 10<sup>th</sup> 2010</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> The day after</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>In our discussion about 'good nights turned bad', a lot of us mentioned times when we had too much to drink and suffered in various ways as a result.</p> <p>Today, I'd like to talk a bit more about how we feel the day after nights like these. I don't really</p>	<p>-</p>

	<p>want to focus too much on the physical bits (i.e. feeling nauseous, headaches etc.), but more on the mental stuff.</p> <p>Tell me about what's going on in your head the day after a 'good night turned bad'.</p>	
<p>January 10<sup>th</sup> 2011</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Christmas and New Year's post mortem!</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>I'd love to hear about how your Christmas and New Year's celebrations went. What were the highlights? Were there any particular 'lowlights'?</p> <p>Are you like me in feeling that you just ate and ate and drank and drank for about the last month??</p>	<p>-</p>
<p>January 13<sup>th</sup> 2011</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Going without – are you up for the challenge?</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>I'm going to propose a challenge, and I'd love for you to give it a go ...</p> <p>Over the past few weeks we've probably all been drinking quite a bit and having a good ole time. The challenge I've got for you guys (and for myself) is to see if we can go for a day/night without drinking.</p> <p>I don't just mean staying at home, or doing something where you wouldn't normally drink anyway. Rather, over the next few days, the challenge is to head along to an event/social gathering etc. where you would normally drink alcohol and for the course of the event/gathering avoid drinking any</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Best Christmas event!</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>Tell me about the/your best event over the Christmas season. What made it so special? What did you do?</p>

	<p>alcohol. Or, if you find that a bit too tough, have a go at drinking a lot less than you would normally.</p> <p>After you've completed your 'challenge' login to the community and tell us all about it. How did you feel, what did other people think?</p> <p>I'll be taking on the challenge as well, so I'll let you know how I go too!</p>	
<p>January 17<sup>th</sup> 2011</p>	<p>–</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Worst Christmas/holiday event</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>Unfortunately there are those Christmas/holiday events that for some reason or other you go to and it ends up being a disaster. For me this happened last Saturday when we were at a close family friend's house and my friend's 16-year-old daughter came home from a party and smelled suspiciously of cigarettes. My friends are very anti-smoking and they hit the roof. This ended the dinner pretty quickly.</p> <p>Tell us about your worst Christmas/holiday event? What happened and what did you do?</p>
<p>January 18<sup>th</sup> 2011</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> How do you feel about this definition?</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>There's been lots of media over the last couple of years about the level of binge drinking. Below are 2 definitions of binge drinking ...</p> <p><i>"The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines binge drinking as more than 7 drinks a night for</i></p>	<p>–</p>



	<p><i>men, and more than 5 for women. A newer definition of binge drinking, supported by the NHMRC Australian Alcohol Guidelines, is more than 4 standard drinks per night.”</i></p> <p>What do you feel about these definitions?</p> <p>How would you define binge drinking?</p>	
<p>January 19<sup>th</sup> 2011</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> How old is old enough?</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>Over the past few years there’s been a lot of discussion about binge drinking and younger people. This has led to some debate about at what age it’s OK for younger people to drink. Currently the legal age in Australia for buying and consuming alcohol in a licensed premise is 18 years old.</p> <p>What are your thoughts on this? Is there a case for increasing or decreasing the legal age for drinking?</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Thoughts and reflection (post Christmas)</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>This discussion is to provide you with the opportunity to say anything you might like in relation to the alcohol diary.</p> <p>For example, I have noticed that I am not drinking nearly as much as I was before Christmas but am still drinking more than I usually do (such as when the kids are back at school) as people seem to be dropping in and are still in holiday mode and want to have a drink with me.</p>
<p>January 21<sup>st</sup> 2011</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Is it a youth problem?</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>A lot of discussion relating to binge drinking suggests that it is a youth problem; that only young people drink like this.</p> <p>What do you think? Do you agree or disagree?</p> <p>What do you think the older generation thinks? Do you think they see binge drinking as a youth problem?</p>	<p>-</p>

<p>January 24<sup>th</sup> 2011</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> What do you think of this print campaign?</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>Have a look at the four images below.</p> <p>Once you've had a good squiz at the images, check out my discussion questions at the bottom.</p> <p>Tell me about your initial reactions to the ads?</p> <p>What do you think these images are saying (and don't say 'was last night really worth it?' ☺).What do you think the main message is?</p> <p>Do you think they are effective? What makes you say that?</p>	<p>-</p>
<p>January 25<sup>th</sup> 2011</p>	<p>–</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Have your say!</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>As you are all aware 'The Lounge' is a study on alcohol and because of this we are really interested in your opinions about a few ads and TV commercials. Many of you will remember seeing this ad at some stage. What I need you to do is watch the clip and respond to the questions below.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tell me the first thing that comes to your mind after viewing the ad.</li> <li>2. How does it make you feel? What makes you say that?</li> <li>3. What is the message(s) you get from this ad?</li> <li>4. Do you think it is effective? What makes you say that?</li> </ol>

<p>January 27<sup>th</sup> 2011</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Check out these ads</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>Below I've posted 3 different television commercials – each one takes quite a different approach to the issue of alcohol.</p> <p>Watch the videos then check out my questions at the end.</p> <p>If they all start playing at the same time, you'll have to hit pause on each one, then play them one at a time.</p> <p>What do you think of these ads? What do you think of the different approaches?</p> <p>Do you think any of them are effective for you? What makes you say that?</p>	<p>-</p>
<p>January 28<sup>th</sup> 2011</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Taking a different approach</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>Below I've posted another 2 ads. These ones take quite a different approach to those I posted yesterday.</p> <p>So check them out, then scroll to the bottom to answer my questions.</p> <p>What do you think of these ads? What do you think of the approach used?</p> <p>How do they contrast to the three we watched yesterday?</p> <p>Are either of them effective for you? What makes you say that?</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> What do you think?</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>Have a look at the four images below.</p> <p>Once you have had a good look at the images, tell me what you think by answering my discussion questions at the bottom.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tell me the first thing that comes to your mind after viewing the ad.</li> <li>2. How does it make you feel? What makes you say that?</li> <li>3. What is the message(s) you get from this ad?</li> <li>4. Do you think it is effective? What makes you say that?</li> </ol>

<p>January 31<sup>st</sup> 2011</p>	<p>-</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> What's your opinion?</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>Below is another TV commercial about alcohol, which we would love to hear your comments on. You may remember seeing this ad at some stage in the past twelve months. What I need you to do is watch the clip and respond to the questions below.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tell me the first thing that comes to your mind after viewing the ad.</li> <li>2. How does it make you feel? What makes you say that?</li> <li>3. What is the message(s) you get from this ad?</li> <li>4. Do you think it is effective? What makes you say that?</li> </ol>
<p>February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2011</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Ever feel like a change?</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>Following on from my Feb Fast reflections, I thought it would be interesting for us all to take a bit of an inward look at our drinking. I'm seriously not trying to be a nanna about this, I'm genuinely interested as I'm in the situation myself!</p> <p>Ok, so have look at these questions and let me know what you think.</p> <p>Do you sometimes feel like you're drinking more than you would like to be?</p> <p>Do you ever feel like you would like to change how much you're drinking?</p> <p>If you do want to drink less, what do you think is holding you back?</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Let's be honest</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>Today I want to talk about our drinking habits and I want us all to be honest and self-reflect for a moment.</p> <p>Do you think you drink more than you should sometimes?</p> <p>Would you like to sometimes change how much you drink and why?</p> <p>What would be something that might make you change your current intake of alcohol?</p> <p>I'll go first ...</p>

February 4<sup>th</sup>  
2011

**Title:** This got me thinking – how about you?

**Discussion Question:**

Mid 2010, The Age published an article written by a 19 year Australian guy named Joshua. It raises some really interesting ideas.

I've included some excerpts from the article below.

Title: *My name is Australia and I'm an alcoholic ...*

*"We have created a culture where young people who do not get drunk and party hard on a regular basis are considered abnormal. How do I know this? I'm a 19-year-old who regularly sees my peers getting drunk and viewing it as some sort of rite of passage. I see others my age who consider getting drunk the only means of having fun. I'm up against a social expectation that assumes I regularly partake in binge-drinking events ...*

*But I'm not revealing anything new here. What is surprising is the extent to which adults behave in a similar manner. Parents who happily buy alcohol for their children or condone its use. Adults who accept that children drink and that is it simply a part of growing up.*

*Because we accept drinking as an integral part of our national identity and culture, society has normalised and continues to legitimise binge drinking ..."*

I'd really recommend you read the full article (which I think you'll find

**Title:** Your feedback

**Discussion Question:**

Now, here's your chance to tell us what you really think :-)

To finish off, I'd love to hear your final thoughts about the 'The Lounge' community. If you have any feedback you'd like to share about how you found the community – things you liked or disliked, or anything you think could be changed to improve these communities – I'd love to hear it all ... the good, the bad and the ugly!

	<p>interesting), you can check it out here ...</p> <p><a href="http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/my-name-is-austra...">http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/my-name-is-austra...</a></p> <p>What do you think of the article and the points that Joshua raises?</p>	
<p>February 4<sup>th</sup> 2011</p>	<p>–</p>	<p><b>Title:</b> Aussie Aussie Aussie</p> <p><b>Discussion Question:</b></p> <p>For our last discussion, let's take a look at those around us and how we feel about our drinking behaviour as Australians. It seems to be an important part of our culture.</p> <p>What are the positives about this? And from the other angle – do you have any concerns about Australians' drinking behaviour and culture?</p>

## Appendix 2 – Profile of The Lounge online community sample

Table A1. Current employment status of participants in The Lounge

Current employment status	Percentage	<i>n</i>
Full-time employee	46%	86
Part-time employee	18%	33
Casual employee	5%	10
Self-employed	5%	9
Full-time home duties (not employed)	9%	16
Unemployed / looking for work	1%	1
Student	9%	17
Retired	6%	12
Pensioner	2%	3
Total	100%	187

Table A2. Household income of participants in The Lounge

Household income	Percentage	<i>n</i>
Less than \$29,999	7%	14
\$30,000 – \$39,999	5%	9
\$40,000 – \$59,999	18%	33
\$60,000 – \$79,999	15%	28
\$80,000 – \$99,999	18%	33
\$100,000 and over	28%	53
Prefer not to answer	9%	17
Total	100%	187

**Table A3. Marital status of participants in The Lounge**

Marital status	Percentage	<i>n</i>
Single	32%	59
Married/de facto/partner	68%	128
Total	100%	187

**Table A4. Proportion of participants in The Lounge with children**

Have children or not	Percentage	<i>n</i>
Yes, have children	41%	77
Do not have children	59%	110
Total	100%	187

**Table A5. Age of children of participants in The Lounge**

Ages of children (years) (Base: those who have children)	Percentage	<i>n</i>
Under 3	43%	33
3–5	31%	24
6–9	31%	24
10–12	23%	18
13–17	30%	23
Total	100%	77

**Table A6. Gender of participants in The Lounge**

Gender	Percentage	<i>n</i>
Female	54%	101
Male	46%	86
Total	100%	187



Table A7. Location of participants in The Lounge

Location	Percentage	<i>n</i>
Metro	74%	138
Regional	26%	49
Total	100%	187



**Victorian Health Promotion Foundation**  
PO Box 154 Carlton South, VIC 3053 Australia  
T +61 3 9667 1333 F +61 3 9667 1375  
[vichealth@vichealth.vic.gov.au](mailto:vichealth@vichealth.vic.gov.au)  
[www.vichealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au)

September 2013  
Publication number: K-058-ATUV

VicHealth acknowledges the support  
of the Victorian Government.

