



Research Paper

I like to go out and have a good time: An ethnography of a group of young middle class urban Indian women participating in a new drinking culture

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ABSTRACT

Background: Urban, middle-class Indians are a market demographic target of transnational alcohol companies seeking to exploit neoliberal-informed deregulation policies. Against this backdrop is an emerging drinking culture in Mumbai, in which women participate.

Method: An ethnography with a friendship group of five middle-class, heterosexually-identified women aged between 22–24 years living in Mumbai. Poststructuralist informed analysis was performed on data from market mapping and venue mapping activities, interviews and participant observations.

Results: A range of on and offline corporate marketing practices facilitated an understanding of drinking as a cool practice of freedom, individualism and equality. Participants' echoed this sense making, but they also described their drinking as occurring in a wider context of gendered inequality and national identities that made them vulnerable to sexual harassment and being 'against Indian culture'.

Conclusions: This paper is the first to examine how a group of women make sense of their participation in an emerging Indian drinking culture, the wider material and discursive contexts enabling this sense-making, and the consequences for who and how such women can be in the world. The study highlights important similarities between this emerging drinking culture and the culture of intoxication documented in countries with a drinking culture norm. It also highlights the potential impact of the deregulation of alcohol sales and new marketing policies on groups of Indian women; and shows the importance of taking an intersectional approach that considers the interplay of gendered and national identities when analysing the impact of alcohol marketing policies.

Introduction

This article presents findings of an ethnographic study on young urban Indian women's participation in a new drinking culture. It is the first study to offer a gendered analysis of this drinking culture, which emerged against a backdrop of international-brand alcohol marketing in India. Drawing on [Savic, Room, Mugavin, Pennay, and Livingston \(2016\)](#), we conceptualise this drinking culture as a micro-level drinking culture, defined multidimensionally in relation to its norms of who can drink, and the practices, settings, meanings, values, problems and pleasures of drinking. These are contextualised within a dynamic network of factors including policy, marketing, gender, age, class and the macro-level (national) drinking culture, factors we discuss below.

Since 1991, successive Indian governments legislated for economic reforms designed to increase trade. These reforms align with neoliberal market-led economics linked to deregulation and policies designed to increase the size of the urban middle class to create a market of consumers estimated at 100–300 million people ([Chowdhury, 2011](#); [Oza,](#)

[2006](#); [Varma, 1998](#)). Creating a consumer culture required not just an increase in trade and consumption, but also a psychological shift, whereby the new middle classes were encouraged to understand that they could create their own identities through consumption. This is because neoliberal economies constitute ideal citizens as individuals who are able to make autonomous choices in order to move flexibly with market-forces, and who understand consumption as a practice of freedom that demonstrates the kind of person they are ([Evans and Riley, \(2014\)](#); [Riley, Thompson, & Griffin, 2010](#)).

Neoliberal policies are combined with local values to make them palatable ([Ong, 2007](#)). This is problematic in India, since constituting citizenship in terms of individualism, autonomy and consumerism creates tensions in relation to the Hindu values of collectivist identities, non-materialism and spirituality on which the Indian state was built ([Nanda, 2011](#)). One way in which contemporary Indian governments manage such tensions is by promoting traditional Hindu values as emblematic of nationalist pride, while simultaneously using that nationalist pride to mobilise efforts to promote foreign investment and

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middle class consumption (Chowdhury, 2011; Srivastava, 2015). However, such government rhetoric makes Indians participating in consumer culture vulnerable to being understood as against Indian culture. A vulnerability that may be particularly felt by women, given their cultural role of preserving ‘traditional’ Indian values, associations strengthened by images of the country depicted as the Hindu goddess Bharat Mata (Mother India) (Srivastava, 2015; Vaid & Sangari, 1990). This means that women in India may draw on what are considered ‘modern’ discourses of choice and autonomy, but must also align those choices with traditional female Indian roles and values (De, 2012). The vulnerability of being considered against Indian culture is further intensified for women consuming alcohol since drinking is devalued at the macro-level. Alcohol advertising is banned on mainstream media, considered as a practice of working class men (Benegal, 2005; Gupta et al., 2003), and as contradicting spiritual values underpinning the foundation of the Indian state (Benegal, 2005, p. 1051).

The above context contributes to the low prevalence of Indian women drinking (0.4% of urban women, Parasuraman, Kishor, Singh, & Vaidehi, 2009); and low levels of heavy drinking by Indian young people. For example, 4% of 18–24 year old Indians were classified ‘heavy drinkers’ (defined as consuming at least 50 g of pure alcohol in a single session at least once a month), in contrast to 42% of Australians of the same age (National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS, 2016); and to contemporary UK statistics which show that 16% of men and 17% of women this age report binge drinking (Office for National Statistics, 2017). However, significant increases in alcohol sales in India are forecast (Jiang, Livingston, Room, Chenhall, & English, 2018) amidst various media reports of new urban drinking cultures.¹

A rise in drinking prevalence would be in line with the marketing strategy of Diageo, one of the largest spirit corporations in the world, who identified young, middle class, urban people as a way of expanding their market in India (Esser & Jernigan, 2015). This is in the context of India having the highest number of under 25s in the world, representing a significant and relatively untapped alcohol market (Albella, 2011; Esser & Jernigan, 2015, 2018). Diageo’s strategy of increasing sales of existing and new products is operationalised on various levels and in diverse ways, including linking alcohol to women’s empowerment. For example, its corporate responsibility work in India focuses on women. To date, there are no academic analyses of the gendered marketing of alcohol in India, but it is important to note that despite bans on alcohol advertising in traditional media, online spaces are unregulated, affording unimpeded marketing opportunities (Esser & Jernigan, 2018). Brand presence is also created through event sponsorship (see analysis below).

Thus, it appears that multiple gendered discourses of alcohol circulate in India. Young women may be problematized if they drink, being considered multiply deviant by going against national, classed and gendered ideals. But, they may also be exposed to ideas that link drinking with women’s empowerment and being part of a global, consumerist, youth culture.

Women negotiating contradictory cultural norms when participating in youth drinking cultures is a robust finding across contemporary alcohol research in Anglo-American countries. Such research identifies a ‘culture of intoxication’ characterised by hedonistic, collective public drinking by both sexes, with the explicit intention of getting drunk (Hebden, Lyons, Goodwin, & McCreanor, 2015; Measham & Brain, 2005). The culture of intoxication is now a normalised practice

(Lyons et al., 2017), emerging in countries where high per capita consumption was the macro culture norm and now identified in European cultures with moderate drinking macro norms (Anderson & Baumberg, 2006; Pollard, 2010).²

The culture of intoxication emerged from a series of interacting factors. These included 1) wider neoliberal shifts relating to consumerism, the deregulation of alcohol licensing, and new patterns of female employment; 2) the intersection of neoliberalism with post-feminist discourses that interpellated young women through notions of empowerment through sexuality and consumption; and 3) increasingly complex alcohol marketing (Bailey, Griffin, & Shankar, 2015; Chatterton & Hollands, 2003; Goodwin, Griffin, Lyons, McCreanor, & Moewaka Barnes, 2016; Griffin, Bengry-Howell, Hackley, Mistral, & Szmigin, 2009; Griffin, Szmigin, Bengry-Howell, Hackley, & Mistral, 2013; Hastings, Anderson, Cooke, & Gordon, 2005; Lyons et al., 2014; Lyons & Willott, 2008; Measham & Brain, 2005).

Such marketing employed traditional and social media to normalise the culture of intoxication as a youth practice, employing the connections between consumption and identity to position alcohol brands as resonating with young people’s lives and aspirations (McCreanor, Greenaway, Moewaka Barnes, Borell, & Gregory, 2005; McCreanor, Barnes, Gregory, Kaiwai, & Borell, 2005; McCreanor et al., 2013). Much of this marketing was done through the affordances of social media where branded content was shared in young people’s online interactions, disseminating representations of drinking as positive, pleasurable and cool (Carah, Brodmerkel, & Hernandez, 2014; Lyons et al., 2014). This alcohol marketing was also gendered, articulating an ‘always up for it’ feminine subject (Griffin et al., 2013; McCreanor, Greenaway et al., 2005) and constructing drinking as a site of freedom and empowerment where a woman can “be who you want to be” (Bailey et al., 2015, p. 5). Notions of pleasure and fun were also part of young women’s rationale for drinking (Griffin et al., 2009; Hutton, Griffin, Lyons, Niland, & McCreanor, 2016; Niland, Lyons, Goodwin, & Hutton, 2013).

Yet women occupy a precarious position within the culture of intoxication, with their experiences of drinking constrained in contradictory ways along intersections of gendered, classed and racialised positionalities. Women are expected to drink to drunkenness yet stay in control or be ‘up for it’ sexually but not a slut; while Black and working class women are vulnerable to racist and classed discourses around ‘over sexualisation’ and ‘respectability’ (Mackiewicz, 2012; Evans and Riley, 2014). The outcome, Griffin et al. (2006, p.7) argued, was that drinking was an “impossible space” for young women. (For similar arguments see Bailey et al., 2015; Hutton et al., 2016; Skeggs, 2005; Wykes & Gunter, 2005).

Although in the Mumbai context there are no groups of publicly intoxicated women, other factors associated with the culture of intoxication are evident, including neoliberal deregulation, contradictory discourses of femininity, a lack of on-line marketing regulation, and women being targeted by alcohol marketing. Highlighting this shared context is an important aspect of this article, which offers a timely first study documenting a new drinking culture participated in by young urban, middle class Indian women. This study addresses following research questions:

- What are the drinking practices and norms of a group of young middle class Indian women; and how do they make sense of them?
- What factors facilitate their practices and understandings?
- How do the drinking practices of young middle class Indian women impact on who and how they can be in the world?

¹ <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/whats-india-drinking-liquor-ban-highways-toddy-supreme-court-4605411/>, <https://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-is-the-future-sloshed-2291610>, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Indians-drinking-alcohol-up-55-in-20-years/articleshow/47313965.cms> and [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(08\)61939-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(08)61939-X/fulltext).

² While women in the UK subsequently consumed more alcohol and stronger drinks than before, they still consume less alcohol than their male counterparts (Measham & Østergaard, 2009).

Method

The study is located within the sub-field of critical psychology and used ethnographic participant observation with interviews conducted by the first author ('FA'). Ethnographies are an underrepresented method in psychology in part, because of historical tying in of psychology with natural sciences that makes researcher involvement suspicious. Thus, even when psychologists use ethnography to study complex social phenomena, including youth drinking cultures (e.g. Griffin et al., 2009; Szmigin, Bengry-Howell, Griffin, Hackley, & Mistral, 2011, 2008), they rarely analyse field notes in preference for transcribed recorded interview data. The present study sought to significantly expand this work by employing a range of data collection methods in a more explicitly integrated ethnography, allowing a contextualised analysis of social practices and sense-making.

The ethnography focused on a naturally occurring friendship group of five women aged between 22–24 years, who identified as middle class and who lived in Mumbai with their parents (a standard practise for young adults in Mumbai due to high property prices, alongside cultural concerns around young women living alone). All were heterosexual, and constructed their social lives in heteronormative ways. For example, there was always an assumption of heterosexuality when discussing their own or others' romantic relationships. Four out of five of the participants were architecture students, one an independent filmmaker. Following University ethical approval (Aberystwyth University's Psychology Research Ethics Committee, number 2014-10), participants were recruited through a pre-existing contact in Mumbai who introduced FA to the participants.

The ethnography began with market mapping and venue mapping activities. These activities involved documenting different types of drinking establishments and the 'offline' alcohol marketing campaigns in them, and having informal conversations with bar staff and managers. The aim was to create a detailed and rich understanding of alcohol marketing in Mumbai to examine how advertising by transnational alcohol companies was tailored towards the Indian market and to understand the material contexts of drinking practices. Participants were also met for an exploratory interview focusing on their preferred drinking venues (Nicholls, 2012). FA then visited these venues, familiarising himself with them and the drinking practices occurring there. This ethnographic component, combined with a reading of published and grey literature on alcohol marketing in India, allowed for an analysis of the wider discourses and material contexts in which the participants drank, it also informed the questions asked in a second in-depth interview with the participants. These semi-structured interviews lasted 30–120 min, and asked how the participants personally made sense of their drinking, using a few open questions designed to facilitate in-depth descriptions of what they thought was important about their drinking. Questions included asking what a typical night was like. The participants also showed FA their Facebook page and discussed any drinking related content (Niland et al., 2013).

After these interviews, FA accompanied the participants on four nights out. This allowed access to collective sense making and practices within their material contexts. During the observations, FA took on the role of participant-observer, drinking and socialising with the participants, and any of their friends when introduced, while also asking the participants and sometimes venue staff about the drinking practices occurring there. The research was overt, but did not significantly interfere with the participants' activities. The 'nights out' were varied and represented a range of normative practices for the participants. Field notes were written up after each observation.

FA occupied important insider-outsider positions in relation to the participants, which facilitated the ethnography. As an Indian who attended school there and was of a similar age to the participants, FA drew on knowledge of Mumbai to embed himself in the context, and did not look out of place drinking with the participants. This insider status

and knowledge fast-tracked the familiarisation phase of the ethnography, but it was constantly negotiated. For example, speaking to the waiters in Hindi, rather than English, likely facilitated hearing about their marketing strategies. While, being someone not currently living in India allowed FA to ask naïve questions about the participants' drinking practices, and also to share stories about British drinking that were of interest to the participants, allowing FA and participants to co-construct an understanding of their drinking culture. As a feminist, and a man interested in women's experiences who had spent significant time outside of patriarchal India, FA also offered a relatively novel position for the participants, which they oriented to by sharing their stories of sexism with him and including him into their group. It is also possible that the participants enjoyed having FA as a man with them since, positioned as a male chaperone, he potentially reduced unwanted sexual attention. Interactions with men were sometimes less easy, men could misunderstand the project or become uncomfortable explaining their standpoint on women's drinking, such as being 'okay' with women drinking, but only when with a male chaperone. Managing such gendered dynamics involved a continual negotiation, but beneficially functioned to show the contradictory patriarchal and liberal discursive sense-making within which the participants drank.

The ethnography was conducted over a period of six weeks, and represented an intense, in-depth exploratory study, offering the first mapping of material and discursive contexts of young women's participation in this new drinking culture. Although the limits of this ethnography include its focus on a specific, small friendship group, and thus the findings are not generalisable, the combined methods enabled the ethnography to value participants' personal and collective accounts, provide FA with experiential knowledge of the drinking landscape, and offer an analysis that contributes to understanding the practices and meaning making of a group of young women in Mumbai in an emerging drinking culture.

The analysis employed a Foucauldian informed poststructuralist approach, focusing on identifying discourses, relatively coherent forms of sense-making that construct an issue and through which people are constituted, but with the possibility of exercising agency within the nexus of discourses available to them (e.g. author B, 2014). The conditions of possibility for the discourses articulated by participants were also considered (such as wider institutional discourses, economics, policy, material conditions, and mechanisms by which discourses circulate such as marketing); as were the consequences for subjectivity and practice (who and how they can be in the world), in part because discourses offer 'subject positions', types of people produced within a discourse associated with certain actions, feelings, responsibilities and forms of talk (Davies & Harré, 1990). We also considered 'technologies of self', that is, what work the participants did on themselves to be understood as located within a subject position (Author B, 2014; Foucault, 1988, p. 18). This framework was applied by performing a version of Willig's (2008) Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) to the data collated in the observation fieldnotes, transcribed interviews, market and venue mapping activities.

The FDA focused on 1) identifying discourses constructing drinking in the data; 2) the subject positions produced by these discourses that were either explicitly stated by participants or that the researchers considered to be produced by the talk or text analysed; 3) the conditions of possibility enabling this sense making (developed by comparisons across the different data sets and the literature review); and 4) the implications for subjectivity and practice, such as what the participants described being able to say, think and do when making sense of themselves through a discourse, including technologies of the self. The market and venue mapping data and observation fieldnotes were reviewed against this analysis to provide further analytical development, creating an integrated ethnographic analysis. Conventional qualitative quality criteria were upheld throughout, including reflexivity, iterative cycles of separate and collective data analysis by the researchers, peer

review, seeking counter evidence to test ideas, and a continual movement between analysis and data, so that the analysis remained inductive and grounded in the data.

Analysis

The analysis showed that participants identified their drinking practices as part of an emerging, consumer-oriented drinking culture. Below, we describe and contextualise the participants' drinking practices, before discussing the discourses with which participants constructed their drinking as both a fun practice of the global elite and a site of tension for Indian women.

Drinking practices

The participants had several kinds of nights out, ranging from a few hours making the most of weekday drink promotions after class to 'big nights out'. After-lecture drinks took place from 2 pm to 6 pm, big nights happened at the weekends from about 8 pm to 1am. Most bars stopped serving by 1am, which meant drinking later could only happen at someone's house. On these rare occasions, drinking continued to about 3am. Typically, beer was drunk during afternoon sessions, vodka on big nights out. The choice of vodka maps onto increased marketing of spirits in India (Albella, 2011).

The number of drinks varied both between participants and across drinking sessions. During afternoon sessions participants consumed around 2–5 beers (300–350 ml), and for big nights drank around 3–10 spirits with mixers. This represents a norm that is more than the national average for urban Indian women (Parasuraman et al., 2009).

The fieldwork highlighted how areas of the city were more or less explicit in selling alcohol. City centre/tourist areas offered bars with entrances on the street, whereas the affluent and more recently developed outer suburbs tucked bars away at the top of shopping malls. The participants drank in bars where drinking was the sole purpose, in restaurants which served alcohol, and in 'restaurant and bar' establishments, where the ambiance and menus changed after dinnertime. As restaurants, these establishments were familiar to the participants' parents, and this familiarity – and lack of knowledge about the evening shift – meant that parents considered these to be respectable venues for young women to socialise, as Laëtitia said, this meant no "*resistance from your family*". As with their British counterparts, the participants in this study therefore had to manage issues of reputation, but their techniques were different because of the Indian macro drinking culture norm that made alcohol consumption more illicit.

All the venues were upmarket, evidenced by doormen, expensive drinks (when not on offer) and/or entry fees, location and reputation. The participants would go to several bars, with the aim of enjoying preferred establishments and exploring newer ones. Discovery and being seen in fashionable, new places was thus an important part of the drinking experience.

Bars were often themed. For example, a stock market themed bar had changing drink prices on screens in the venue and through a mobile phone app, encouraging customers to buy these drinks/stocks when low. Venues facilitated other activities designed to celebrate drinking and associate it with fun, such as a photobooth stocked with costumes or a waiter's badge reading '*Here to get you smashed*'. When asked, the waiter told FA that the badge was to teach new drinking practices.

Mobile apps allowed participants to know what was going on in bars even when not there, creating a sense of being part of a fun, collective practice; and offering an example of marketing techniques that facilitate drinking simultaneously online and offline (Goodwin et al., 2016). Participants also used Facebook to find new establishments and demonstrate being there by posting location tags and photographs. Several venues facilitated this process by employing photographers who took and uploaded images of groups having fun there; 'liking' the venue on Facebook gave the participants access to these pictures which they

could share online, a marketing practice identified elsewhere (Atkinson, Ross-Houle, Begley, & Sumnall, 2017; Carah et al., 2014; Carah, 2017). While participants did not describe these practices as gendered, they only shared images considered acceptable for family to view.

The norms evident in these practices were drinking for fun without being highly intoxicated, managing that drinking in relation to wider social norms (e.g. when bars shut, parental concerns), and being seen in public (both on and offline) to be having fun in cool, upmarket places. These practices were facilitated by the venues themselves. Other marketing explicitly associated European alcohol brands with 'Indian-ness', such as 'Absolute Seth', which replaced the word vodka with a common Indian surname. This was in line with Diageo's strategy of increasing vodka sales. During the fieldwork several western musicians had high profile events sponsored by the alcohol industry, in line with global practices of connecting alcohol brands to desired youth identities known as 'real world tie ins' (Atkinson et al., 2017; Lyons, Goodwin, McCreanor, & Griffin, 2015; Nicholls, 2012). Thus a combined range of marketing practices, including venues making alcohol fun, staff facilitating new forms of drinking, advertising associating new forms of drinking with being Indian, and alcohol-company sponsored events worked to construct drinking as a fun practice of cool, young Indian people.

Drinking: a fun practice of the globalised elite

When talking about their drinking, participants also oriented to alcohol as a facilitator of '*fun*' (Emily), associated with '*freedom*' (Bethan), and being part of a consumer-oriented cool elite. Part of the pleasure of drinking was being seen, both virtually and physically, in the places that they drank. Being seen drinking in certain venues positioned the participants as people who went to the right places and who were able to identify new cool places. Drinking was thus a route to recognition, since being seen drinking in these places was evidence of being part of an elite group of party people defined in terms of their affluence and subcultural capital.

Extract 1

Jenna: Obviously, very stylish, cool quotient, more than anything it gives you that superiority privilege over your counterparts. Like 'yeah, I've been to that place' and like you can talk about it. You know, Facebook pictures, you can put up a string of pictures. You also have photographers at those places with Facebook pages, who put your photo on the club's page and all that. And I know people who share that and are like 'hey look, I am with this person and that person is singing cos there's a live gig going on' it's just an opportunity for people to meet other people from that creamy layer of society.

Above, Jenna talks about how drinking (and being seen drinking) in certain places and with certain people demonstrates being '*stylish, cool*'. She also highlights Facebook, photographers, and music events as some of the practices that facilitate this, echoing the 'nights out' analysis above. Jenna describes the drinking culture as a means for upper-middle class people, who she describes as the '*creamy layer*', to meet and socialise. She also constructs drinking as a means of gaining access to that class, her '*hey look, I am with this person*' implies that drinking allows people to present themselves as if they are part of the '*creamy layer*' and gain status from being seen with certain people. Since participating in these drinking cultures is something that high status people do, drinking where they drink and being seen with them, allowed the participants to construct an identity, to themselves and others, that they too were high status. Drinking – in conjunction with social media – can thus be considered a technology of self to produce oneself into a desired subject position, in this case a member of the elite '*creamy layer*' of society. Similarly, Emily describes an association between the '*fun*' aspect of drinking and the '*kind of people*' she drinks with:

Extract 2

Emily: [people] like having a good time, and these places they let them, and so people don't have to sneak in booze and all that. They don't have to think about it too much. They don't have to go to a shady bar to have alcohol or something like that. It's fun, and it's safer. You go to a shady bar, you don't know what kind of people you will meet there, and these places [where she drinks] you know, some of them have cover charges. Some of them have expensive booze. So a lot of people think about going there, and you know, you know the kind of people that will be around when you go there.

Emily makes a direct connection between having a good time and drinking alcohol. But a good time is also predicated on safety and not having *'to think about it too much'*. She describes a set of new establishments that are fun and safe because participants can drink openly and also be with a clientele with whom they feel comfortable. This is done by making it expensive (*'cover charges...expensive booze'*), in contrast to 'shady' bars, with uncertain clientele. Emily's sense-making can be read as both a classed perception since she associates feeling comfortable around 'known' middle class people, and a reference to the risks women face based on the different micro drinking cultural norms in Mumbai. In the ethnography, FA found downmarket bars in poorer areas that did not let women in after 11 pm. When FA asked why, a manager said it was because of concerns that, when drunk, male patrons might sexually assault female clientele.

In Emily's extract, safe, fun, establishments for alcohol consumption by young middle class urban Indians are important and novel. These establishments are fun and safe because they are expensive, limiting those who can participate, and producing a range of valued subject positions around being *'fun'*, *'cool'*, affluent and a member of an elite group. This elite group was not just the *'creamy layer'* of Mumbai socialites, but as Jenna explains below, aligned with neoliberal subjectivities in relation to values of individualism and living for yourself.

Extract 3

Jenna: it's definitely making us more individualistic and it's a very new thing for us, cos if I think of America, like they have had the individualist culture for a while, like the whole *'live for yourself, dream big for yourself'*

Jenna makes a causal argument that participating in drinking culture creates a more individualistic outlook, opening up the possibility of taking up new subject positions associated with pleasurable, aspirational autonomy, to *'live for yourself, dream big for yourself'*. Her talk also evokes Diageo's Indian marketing strategy of associating alcohol with female empowerment, and the marketing associated with the culture of intoxication in other countries that constructed drinking as a site for freedom and independence (e.g. Bailey et al., 2015). In its celebratory tone, Jenna's talk also echoes women's accounts for participating in the culture of intoxication (Dobson, 2014; Griffin et al., 2009; Hutton et al., 2016; Niland et al., 2013). But, in constructing this *'individualist'* outlook as *'new'*, she also orients to tensions between traditional Indian principles of collectivism and neoliberal values of individualism and autonomy, a tension that does not need negotiating by women from Anglo-American cultures and which highlights the interplay of gendered and national identities for our Indian participants.

Across the data set, drinking in upmarket venues offered a range of pleasurable subject positions and practices. Drinking was constructed as fun and enabling a good time. It also allowed the participants to be recognised as valued people, have access to valued people, and imagine themselves as having a life trajectory produced by their own volition, characterised by individualism, freedom and a consumerist, global orientation. This sense-making maps onto wider discourses of neoliberal individualism and the role of consumerism in facilitating individualist self-projects. These wider discourses were articulated in various ways, including venue design, social media and international companies' marketing strategies, as well as in the participants' sense-making.

Drinking was also facilitated because participants considered such venues safe. Below, we consider why these young women needed to consider safety along with their fun.

Drinking: a practice structured by gender inequalities

When participants talked about alcohol as a fun practice they characterised the drinking culture in terms of gender equality, where middle class men and women were expected to behave in similar ways. The expense of the venues they drank in further shored up this sense of equality, with similarly classed people imagined drinking together. However, in a different discourse, the participants constructed the drinking in these upmarket bars as structured by gender inequalities around sexuality.

Extract 4

Jenna: I think there's still a bit of inequality when it comes to drinking. Say a bunch of friends go out to drink. I always find the men, telling the women to not drink too much, cos 'hey you'll go out of control' and you'll end up flashing the whole world' or on the other hand you'll have men who'll just give the women too much to just get lucky with them ... [later in the interview] this one guy who will not drink, cos he has to take her home you know, so he'll deny himself the good time because he feels she wouldn't be able to handle. And I have found this protective nature more of the women than for their male friends, cos then it's like 'yeah he'll be fine, he can manage'. So, which can be connected to the outside, the way the world will look at her and I guess they are trying to be safe, but it all slip into the personal, cos the outside slips into how you deal with a small social group.

In Jenna's extract above, men are constructed as feeling a need to manage women's sexuality, either to protect them from the effects of alcohol which are linked to reputation management (*'you'll end up flashing the whole world'*) or through taking on predatory role (*'give the women too much to just get lucky with them'*). This is constructed as an issue of *'inequality'*, and one that cannot be completely escaped since the drinkers must return home and interact with a wider society that judges women differently to men (*'the way the world will look at her'*). Thus the safe space of elite drinking is not hermetically sealed, rather the *'outside slips in'*, structuring the interpersonal dynamics of even these individualist drinkers. Other participants' talk and the ethnographic observations also showed how patriarchal social norms structured participants' experiences and positioned men as protectors or predators.

Extract 5

Bethany: unfortunately, in the society here, when a man talks to a woman it makes more of difference, cos they wouldn't listen to the woman. But I dunno if the person protecting knows all this or if they are just doing it at impulse. So that's why sometimes when I go to a place I go with a guy, just so I'll be more comfortable and I don't have to think.

Echoing Emily's *'I don't need to think'* above, Bethany explains how participating in the pleasures of drinking are determined by the absence of unwanted sexual advances from men. And, in a society where men do not listen to women (presumably telling them that they are not interested), drinking as a practice of freedom is constrained, requiring the co-option of male friends as protective chaperones.

The participants' engagement in drinking cultures was thus limited in terms of establishments they could go to and techniques for managing men's sexual advances. Participant observations also highlighted safety issues when travelling to and from venues, whereby the participants sometimes hired a driver for a night, or if from wealthier families, used a family chauffeur. Even then, safety and equality were not guaranteed since men in the bars they frequented could be risky. Drinking thus also produced subject positions orienting around a vulnerable and risk managing self, located in wider sexist sensibilities.

Similarities between the participants in this study and women participating in Anglo-American cultures of intoxication are evident in their need to negotiate a contradictory context in which drinking is associated with individualism, freedom and equality and the need to negotiate gendered constraints related to sexuality and reputation management. Such conditional and contradictory participation in drinking cultures is thus shared across countries, but experiences differed in relation to the intersections of gender with nationality, seen in the way Bethany's 'in the society here' orients to India as an explicitly patriarchal culture. It is this intersection between gendered and national identities that is the focus below.

Drinking: a practice 'against Indian culture'

In associating their drinking with individualism, consumerism and personal gratification, the participants' talk mapped onto neoliberal government policies but contrasted with other government discourses articulating Indian national values through notions of community, spirituality and collectivism. An example of which occurred during the fieldwork when seeking to preserve 'traditional Indian culture' the government banned St. Valentine's Day. As Bethany's extract below shows, there are consequences to being positioned as being 'against Indian culture'.

Extract 6

Bethany: we were drinking in a friend's house, and a friend, a girl and a guy were drinking on the street and they weren't being loud and stuff. So the policeman turned up and he hit the girl and the guy with sticks and was like 'what is all this, this is against Indian culture, girl and guy roaming around drinking so late at night'.

Bethany directly links the police response to the drinking practices of the young people in her story as being understood as 'against Indian culture'. Several people told FA about policemen beating people found publicly drinking, suggesting that the police rigorously manage activities considered Western, despite wider economic policies of consumerist expansion. This contradictory valuing and devaluing of what are seen as Western practices placed the participants in a precarious situation. Drinking allowed the participants to take up subject positions associated with being modern, fun and part of a globalised elite, but drinking also made them vulnerable to being constructed as sexual objects (for men to protect or predate) and to police violence through the intersections of gendered and Indian national identities.

Conclusion

This paper offers the first study to document women's participation in a new drinking culture in urban India and to analyse how they make sense of their participation. It showed a norm of understanding drinking as a practice of freedom, individualism and equality, facilitated by a range of on and offline corporate practices, but where such freedoms were constrained by wider gendered and national discourses that made women's participation riven with inequalities and vulnerability. As such, this drinking culture shares certain characteristics of the culture of intoxication found in countries where alcohol consumption is the macro-culture norm³ (Bailey et al., 2015; Lyons et al., 2014; Measham & Brain, 2005). It is therefore an important and novel finding to identify such a drinking culture emerging in significantly different context where the macro-culture devalues alcohol consumption (Benegal, 2005; Savic et al., 2016). Given the similarities between this study and the culture of intoxication, in both alcohol marketing and participants' sense-making, we predict an increase in drinking and drinking as

cultural norm for young urban Indian people.

Factors facilitating the participants' drinking identified in this study included a range of material and discursive practices by venues, both on and offline, which were supported by international alcohol and entertainment companies, in turn supported by wider neoliberal economic policies. These practices tied drinking to valued identities in line with culture of intoxication research (e.g. Lyons & Willott, 2008; McCreanor, Greenaway et al., 2005; McCreanor, Barnes et al., 2005; McCreanor et al., 2013), while other practices, such as waiters with badges 'here to get you smashed', worked as pedagogies of drinking for the novice consumer. Still others, (e.g. 'Absolute Seth' vodka advertising) linked Indian identities with international alcohol brands. In multiple ways drinking was thus constructed as a positive practice for Indian young people, challenging notions of alcohol consumption as antithetical to Indian culture.

The subject positions available in this drinking culture allowed the participants to understand themselves as people who were fun, high status, individualistic, autonomous, modern and 'dreaming big'. These subject positions were gender neutral, available to both men and women and located in a wider individualist discourse, but offered women a radically different way of making sense of themselves in the context of patriarchal India. From this perspective, drinking acted as a technology of self through which women experienced themselves in new ways. The processes by which people internalise marketing messages are complex and highly debated, but the poststructuralist approach we use suggests that people are interpellated by a discourse because it somehow speaks to them (Riley, Evans & Robson, 2018). What our findings suggest, is marketing that associates alcohol consumption with freedom and empowerment spoke to these middle class urban young Indian women.

What such marketing does not address is the wider context in which women live. Drinking cultures are not hermetically sealed, and a robust finding across research on youth drinking cultures is that women have to manage contradictory positionalities when drinking (Bailey et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2013). This study contributes further important evidence that women who are interpellated by the empowerment discourse of contemporary international alcohol marketing are made vulnerable to wider sexist discourses around reputation management that can lead to sexual harassment. Our study also shows that in India this is intensified by the intersections of gendered and national identity discourses in which alcohol consumption is constructed as against Indian culture, making those participating in this new drinking culture vulnerable to state violence.

This study also contributes to analysis of the contradictory psychological demands made on women who participate in drinking cultures. A robust finding in the culture of intoxication literature is that women must negotiate contradictory demands (e.g. of drinking to get drunk while not appearing drunk) or gendered constraints to their participation such as more carefully managing their online images (Lyons et al., 2017). This paper adds a novel contribution by considering the context of India, where drinking simultaneously opened up the possibility for women to understand themselves as free individuals and as restricted by their gendered positionality in Indian culture. These contradictions map onto political and economic discourses in government policy that seek to benefit economically from neoliberal deregulation while placating those concerned about rising consumerism with anti-Westernisation discourse. The failure to resolve these tensions at policy level were experienced by the young women of this study.

In contributing these novel and important findings, the study provides support for the use of ethnography in psycho-social research. Combining ethnography with discourse analysis within an overarching poststructuralist framework enabled an analysis of the dynamics between individual and collective sense-making, material conditions, international corporate marketing strategies, and wider economic, public and policy discourses. In so doing, the study produced a rich, in-depth analysis of a newly forming phenomena. As such, it makes an important

³ Although the participants in this study consumed less alcohol and did not get publicly drunk, in contrast to ethnographic research on the UK's culture of intoxication (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2012).

and timely contribution to critical analysis of an emerging drinking culture that is tied to expanding international alcohol marketing and neoliberal deregulation. These contributions support the decision to do a time-focused ethnography with a small number of participants while considering, with both breadth and depth, the wider discursive and material contexts in which they operate; and aligns with arguments on why small scale but in-depth qualitative research makes good social science research (Riley, Evans & Robson, 2018).

The study points to future research developing understanding on the ‘pedagogy of drinking’ and any further shifts towards culture of intoxication style drinking in countries with ambivalent drinking cultures who are targeted by transnational alcohol companies. Such research should include in its analysis the psychological impact on those who are interpellated to participate, as well as the dynamics between drinking culture norms, subjectivity, discourse and materiality.

This study highlights the impact of neoliberal rationality on drug /alcohol consumption (also see, Lyons et al., 2017; Riley et al., 2010) and subjectivity (Ong, 2007) and the challenges women face when taking up individualised discourses of neoliberal subjectivity. The article also contributes to a developing literature exploring how power works through pleasure and interpellation, relevant to those interested in the subjective effects of policy and marketing. We also contribute to another emerging area, that of transnational postfeminism, which explores how feminised forms of neoliberal citizenship are producing new subjectivities across a range of countries such as India, China, Russia and Nigeria (Riley et al., 2017). We conclude by noting the importance of developing gendered analyses of neoliberal policies of alcohol deregulation. We hope this paper contributes to a sustained critique of alcohol marketing that exploits women’s desires for empowerment and freedom without addressing the wider sexism that makes them vulnerable when interpellated by this address.

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