

Re-thinking the Kiwi bloke: Young men's stories of resistance to drinking alcohol as a way of performing masculinity

By Sarah Penwarden



Sarah Penwarden is a guidance counsellor at Diocesan School for Girls in Auckland, New Zealand, and runs a small private practice. She can be contacted at spenwarden@diocesan.school.nz

Abstract

Simply by being Kiwi males, young men in New Zealand are discursively positioned as drinkers. This study investigates how young men make choices along a spectrum of possibilities between accommodation and resistance towards drinking alcohol. In this article, I focus in particular on how those who resist drinking give an account of their choices, and whether there is a link between resistance and the subject positions that participants choose to take up. I will also look at how those participants who resisted being positioned as drinkers were able to reposition themselves in alternative masculinity discourses.

Keywords: alcohol, masculinity, discourses, resistance, subject positions, New Zealand

In this article I identify a number of links between the use of alcohol and the performance of masculinity among young men in New Zealand. As part of my Masters in Counselling research, I interviewed seven young Pākehā (European New Zealander) men who identified as drinking moderately or infrequently. These young men were aware of dominant discourses which acted to invite them to test their manliness through the performance of public drinking. In this article, I show how the participants exercised agency in resisting dominant discourses and re-positioned themselves in alternative masculinity discourses which at once draw upon and re-shape qualities of individuality, independence, and emotional strength.

Gender assignments

This article takes up a social constructionist approach to gender which posits gender as being formed in negotiation with others. We are *doing* gender in interaction rather than simply *being* a man or woman (Connell, 2002). Although it may appear that we have an essential gender core, individually and collectively we act out bodily signs which produce the *effect* of a biological gender identity (Phillips, 2006). Rather than being essential to people, as writers such as Bly (1990) have suggested, this article takes the position that gender amounts to a culturally constructed performance that none of us choose but each of us is forced to negotiate (Butler, 1993).

How we understand our gender assignment is influenced by the discursive construction of gender which is prevalent in our society. Men are positioned in masculinity discourses which expect them to act, speak and behave in certain ways, as Davies & Harré (1990) explained the working out of discourse. For example, discourses which produce men as masculine through drinking, invite men into positions where they test their manliness through drinking prowess. This hard-drinking masculinity is one of the dominant discourses of drinking in New Zealand, but it is important to understand the discursive struggle which nonetheless exists between dominant and subordinate discourses, and particularly dominant and alternative masculinities (Connell, 2000).

Although gender may be an assignment we are bound to engage in throughout our lives, it may also be one that we never quite fulfil. Indeed, after describing the repetitive nature of gender formation, Butler comments that ‘such norms are also continually haunted by their own inefficacy’ (Butler, 1993, p. 237). We may never fully live up to the gender project we are given, and ‘in that gap, in the different ways of carrying out the gender’s assignment, lie possibilities for resistance and change’ (Culler, 1997, p. 104). As we will see below, some of the participants in the study identified possibilities for resistance to gender norms, and other ways of negotiating and living their gender, in relation with alcohol use.

Mapping out a hard-drinking masculinity discourse

Historically, alcohol has played an important role in the development of colonial life for Pākehā men in New Zealand. The influx of colonists from Britain in the 1840s and 1850s skewed demography in favour of men which led to the growth of all-male institutions such as the pub where drinking was the central ritual (Phillips, 1996). A drinking culture emerged where ‘to “hold one’s liquor”, to “drink up large” but still have a clear head and even drive home, was the

mark of a “hard man” (Phillips, 1996, p. 79). It may be that this history and culture still invites men to identify as achieving masculinity through drinking.

Alcohol is the most commonly used drug in contemporary New Zealand. Approximately 88% of men in New Zealand identify as drinkers (Habgood, Casswell, Pledger, & Bhatta, 2001). According to the Alcohol Advisory Council of New Zealand (ALAC), 14% of the young people they surveyed (aged 12–17 years) in 2003 drank at least once a week. These respondents were male and typically consumed alcohol to get drunk. The ALAC (2009a) survey found that New Zealand’s drinking culture is one which tolerates drunkenness and the use of alcohol as a social lubricant. In 2008, a staggering one quarter of all adult New Zealanders identified as binge drinkers who consume harmful amounts of alcohol on a typical drinking occasion (see <http://www.alac.org.nz>).

In understanding the connections between alcohol and masculinity, Phillips argues that ‘alcohol abuse as a public health problem derives in large part from the social construction of masculinity in general and male drinking patterns in particular’ (1996, p.64). In New Zealand culture, alcohol is used as a measure of manliness, a rite of passage which marks a symbolic boundary between boyhood and manhood (Campbell, Law, & Honeyfield, 1999). Alcohol is also used by adult men to gauge male hierarchies. The rural pub has been characterised as the context where dominant masculinities are publicly constructed and performed (Campbell, 2000). If the ability to ‘hold one’s liquor’ is a central test of identity for many men (Phillips, 1996), then to ‘falter in the performance of drinking vis-à-vis other men represents immaturity and low standing in male society’ (Hodges, 1989, p. 25).

There is evidence that ‘under-drinking’ (drinking too slowly, not enough, or low-alcohol beer) or abstaining, may lead other men to question a non-drinker’s manliness (Paton-Simpson, 1995). In accepting the unfavourable positioning of not drinking in a context which supports drinking, some men experience shame and embarrassment at not fitting in (Paton-Simpson, 1995).

Resisting a hard-drinking masculinity discourse

It is also important to note that the discursive terrain of masculinities is one site where dominant and alternative masculinities contest for power. Within this discursive context, men offer resistance to the dominant alcohol-masculinity discourse. Indeed, resistance happens when a person becomes critically aware of the discourses in which they are positioned (Burr, 1995) and engage in behaviours which ‘challenge or disrupt the prevailing power relations’ (Bordo, 1993, p. 199). There are groups within New Zealand which support resistance towards binge drinking. ALAC, for example, encourages moderation, the reduction of drunkenness, and supports young people to delay drinking (ALAC, 2009b).

In resisting the position offered within a particular discourse, men reposition themselves in what Weedon (1987) refers to as alternative or counter discourses. The young men in this study drew on discursive resources to produce alternative masculine identities or ‘sub-narratives’ which ran counter to a hard-drinking masculinity discourse.

Discursive positioning in talk

I recruited and interviewed seven men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine years of age who drank moderately or infrequently. Most participants were in their early twenties. Recruitment was via the snowball method. All participants were Pākehā. I conducted semi-structured taped interviews which I transcribed. The context of the study is described more fully in Penwarden (2003).

My analysis of the participants' talk is shaped by my understanding of the social world as being discursively constructed, and available to be read as text (Burr, 1995; Parker, 1994). When we understand discourses as constructed in language, language itself is not a clear prism for communicating ideas, 'but actually constructs the world and the self through the course of its use' (Wetherell & Maybin, 1996, p. 34). For example, men are produced as subjects through discursive constructions such as the 'typical Kiwi bloke' which makes available to them a set of concepts, images and ways of speaking that they take on as their own. In paying attention to language, I explored how participants positioned themselves with regard to alcohol-masculinity discourses. I was interested in the subject positions they took up along a spectrum of possibilities between accommodation and resistance. I was particularly interested in how some participants resisted and, in resisting, negotiated preferred identities. They did this through their use of language (Wetherell, 1998).

The subject position of the 'typical Kiwi bloke'

One construction of the Kiwi bloke is as 'the strong silent type who enjoys a few beers with his mates, watches rugby, and likes a bet on the horses every now and then' (Worth, Paris & Allen, 2002, p. 14). I asked participants: Do you think there is a 'typical Kiwi male'? How do you think your experience differs from that of a 'typical Kiwi male'?

When I was over in London I was pretty much the basic typical kind of beer-guzzling loveable Kiwi male, being a bloke and liking rugby or sports. (*Andy*¹)

Here Andy maps out the 'typical Kiwi male' discourse which involves familiar ingredients such as liking sport, drinking, and 'being a bloke'. Andy clearly identifies with this subject position he describes. I am taken by the juxtaposing of 'beer-guzzling' and 'loveable'. In this conversational act, Andy is re-producing but also changing the discourse to position himself more favourably as 'loveable.' This juxtaposition suggests that Andy supposes 'beer-guzzling' to be problematic, but he obscures this discomfort by using the adjective 'loveable'.

What is a typical male? Someone that plays rugby and gets pissed? Don't get me wrong, I love rugby, rugby's wicked. I thoroughly enjoy playing it. But you often see after big games all the boys are in the bars. (*Carl*)

Here, Carl makes some complex conversational moves. Through his first question, he perhaps challenges the construction of a 'typical Kiwi male'. Just as quickly he asks a second question, positing the typical Kiwi male as someone who likes drinking and rugby, showing his familiarity with the discourse. However, lest anyone think he, as a Kiwi male, does not like rugby, he hastily repositions himself as a sports-lover: 'I love rugby', 'I thoroughly enjoy playing it'. He then makes another move, by naming the nexus between sport and drinking alcohol. He positions himself as outside the bar, watching the rugby players drink inside. In this move again he can be seen as negotiating and resisting particular positionings in rugby/drinking discourses.

While Andy accommodates to positioning offered in dominant masculinity discourses, and Carl offers a more complex response of challenging, supporting and then resisting, Ed challenges the logic of the discourse itself:

I am maybe a typical New Zealander in my appreciation for beaches and the outdoors, but I don't see myself as a typical Kiwi bloke. I can't say I fit anywhere near what a stereotypical Kiwi man is. I don't think such a thing exists anymore. (*Ed*)

We will see below that Ed clearly resists being positioned as stereotypical (in the ways offered by my opening question) and actively repositions himself in alternative discourses of masculine identity, thus contributing to the production and reproduction of these alternative discourses.

The subject position of drinking alcohol as the measure of masculinity

I was particularly interested in how the young men were aware of the subject position of drinking alcohol as a measure of masculinity. I was also interested in how the participants positioned themselves with regard to light drinking practices and the conversational moves they made in speaking about such practices.

I asked about their experiences of social expectations to drink. I also asked to what extent they had been influenced by those expectations. A number of participants spoke of the role of drinking alcohol in the construction of masculinity, particularly the competitive aspects where men assert their manhood relative to each other (James & Saville-Smith, 1994).

Why do they have the Commonwealth Games? People want to win. Drinking's just another sport. It's an endurance race. (*James*)

Ben believes that people go to parties and get 'totally smashed' so that other people will talk about their exploits:

It's the whole 'I've got a better story. I've done something more extreme'. (*Ben*)

In the next extract I suggest we can hear what I have come to think of as the 'voice of the crowd', that is, those anonymous voices that carry the terms of a dominant discourse. Here is the familiar but nameless voice of the crowd, which pressures Carl and others to drink:

People go out to town thinking, 'Let's get pissed, let's get wasted, who cares'. Sure there's going to be that pressure. They're going to say, 'Come on man, a drink's not going to hurt you'. Especially people who've just turned eighteen. 'Come on man. It's wicked. Let's get pissed'. (*Carl*)

Carl very clearly characterises the social expectation to drink without appearing to consider possible effects. Interestingly, Carl does not show how he responds to their positioning of drinking as 'wicked', that it is great fun; although, in suggesting that those who have just turned eighteen are most likely to be caught up in such ideas, perhaps he is distancing himself a little.

Accommodating to the alcohol-masculinity discourse

Participants took up a variety of positions with regard to alcohol-masculinity discourses.

I'm glad I tried it 'cos it was just one of those things you want to do. It's like being in another country. I've been there. I've got drunk. (*Andy*)

Andy initially accommodates to the discourse, comparing getting drunk to travelling and having new experiences. He goes onto say:

If you didn't do something when they dared you to do something, 'Skull this back'. If you backed out you would be a pussy or something. (*Andy*)

Here, Andy positions himself as in a crowd of men who want him to test his masculinity through his ability to drink. If he does not complete the test, he will risk being deemed feminine, in binary terms the opposite to masculine, and thus a pejorative description. Andy's statement demonstrates the competitiveness of drinking among young male peers, where drinking contests are 'vehicles for the intimate expression of status' (Hodges, 1989, p. 25). Andy's statement shows links between masculinity and the ability to 'skull' drinks, and clearly shows that not drinking risks being positioned beyond the margins of masculinity.

Other participants show a more complex, reluctant accommodation.

To sit around with a whole lot of other guys laughing and joking and to drink orange juice seemed like a bit of a cop-out. I suppose I drank to fit in. (*Ben*)

Ben has internalised an unfavourable position as light/non drinker in the alcohol-masculinity discourse calling it a 'cop-out'. He notes now, looking back, that he was uncomfortable being positioned as an outsider and 'drunk to fit in'. Most participants were aware of being positioned unfavourably by peers if they didn't drink.

There's a lot of pressure that comes in when you're talking about drinking stories because I don't have any. I just laugh at their stories. You feel very outside of the conversation. (*Ben*)

Ben is positioned as an outsider in the male student culture, because he doesn't share in the 'common currency' of the male community (Phillips, 1996). Ben accommodates to the discourse by laughing along with their stories, rewarding the drinker/storyteller who enjoys acceptance among the 'chorus of male peers' (Pittman, 1993).

Mark links drinking alcohol, and binge drinking in particular, with 'acceptance', which he forgoes. He is aware of how he positions himself, in drinking lightly or moderately, and believes he is 'pressured to drink a lot more than I'd like to by my peers'. It appears that to drink to a level one is comfortable with may for some young men involve forgoing social acceptance. James speaks of feeling funny when he's at a function and doesn't drink, adversely positioned as an outsider:

You feel like the one left out. Everyone else is having a great time. Sometimes you feel completely bored.

Resisting the alcohol-masculinity discourse

The first step to resisting a discourse requires the speaking subject to become critically aware of how they are made subject (Davies, 1991). One of the questions I asked participants was whether they were aware of some of the alcohol advertising that targets young men and what they think of it. Many of the participants were critically aware of how they were positioned as young men (and possible drinkers) by the advertisements, bearing in mind Lion Red's stated aim to 'reflect the New Zealand male to himself' (Hill, 1999, p. 69). Andy's reading of the Lion Red's *The measure of a man's thirst* advertising campaign was that:

It's for kids growing up. That's part of being a man. It's being able to handle your piss.
(Andy)

Mark remembered the DB Patron Saints of Beer Drinkers advert he had seen on television. He appears to position himself critically as he speaks of them:

There are three guys up in heaven watching males doing machoist acts and they see an Aucklanders doing something they think is a bit of a poofter act and they lay judgement on him because of it. Tui ads are much similar. It just reinforces the obvious ideas which are already there about machoism and rugby. (Mark)

For Mark, 'machoism' is 'the quality of being impressive among male peers'. I asked him whether he was aware of machoism having any effect on his life.

I don't think so. I always thought it was quite pathetic. It's very prevalent in male culture. It's a bit hard to describe but everyone knows what it is. It's sort of trying to impress others. (Mark)

Mark gives an account of the discourses which act upon him when he watches that particular DB advert. He is aware that he is expected to side with the men doing machoist acts, rather than the 'poofter' Aucklanders. His comment –I always thought it was quite pathetic'– shows him taking up resistance towards how he is positioned by the advert.

So then, what is the rationale behind resistance? One can argue that some individuals may experience tension between what they want as a person, their wishes and desires, and the subject position which they are occupying (Weedon, 1997). While one person occupies a subject position freely, another may do so reluctantly, and still others offer partial or full resistance. Some individuals may experience a particular subject positioning as constraining, possibly because they have access to other more satisfying positionings and identities outside it.

My interest here is in how a person takes up authorship in their life, resisting being positioned in a particular discourse as a subject and thus subverting the discourses themselves (Davies, 1991). To do this, a person needs to have access to alternative discursive resources with which to construct their identity. The participants who resisted the identity offered to them by the alcohol-masculinity discourse were able to do so because they had access to alternative, preferred identities which lay outside the dominant discourse. In tracing participants' use of language, I noticed both 'the voice of the crowd' and the use of the first

person pronoun. Often, participants used the personal pronoun 'I' to give a clear account of their preferred authorship of their lives as a person.

Mark feels he does not fit at all within the narrow subject position offered by a drinking masculinity. He clearly resists being positioned as a drinker, and forgoes 'the publicly available versions of masculine identity and the socially conferred status of manhood' that drinking offers (Smith & Winslade, 1997, p. 17):

I haven't really valued alcohol that much. I haven't really been into sports that much. It [these preferences] kind of wrecks me as a stereotypically Kiwi person. (*Mark*)

Mark refers to himself as a 'person' rather than specifically as male. We will see later an alternative storyline of what is important to him and what identities he draws on.

For me, I've never been one to really succumb to peer pressure. If I want to go out and drink I do, and if I don't, I don't. (*Ed*)

Here there is a strong sense of Ed enacting a storyline of not going along with the crowd but living by his own decisions.

As well as having a strong sense of alternative identity which can account for resistance, two of the participants give a critique of a dominant masculinity/drinking discourse where they challenge the rationale of it:

There's a lot of people who think you should be getting drunk every Friday night. The more I'm around that culture constantly, the more I feel how pointless it is. (*Ben*)

Ben externalises the voice of the crowd which invites him to drink to fit in, and he challenges its logic. Ben shows himself as a speaking subject who is aware of being positioned by a discourse, and takes up an act of authorship ('I feel') to disrupt the discourse (Davies, 1991).

The more you drink the more your mates go (and it's a bullshit idea) 'You should see him drink a yard glass. He can skull it in two goes! He's a legend!' (*James*)

Here, James mocks the discourse. He uses the voice of the crowd ironically to show his resistance to the male drinking rituals and his refusal of the rewards gained from drinking competitively. The question arises whether this resistance is something Ben and James engaged in privately at events when they didn't drink, when to offer public resistance would have been very difficult.

In explaining their resistance, some participants give an account of the effect of having a community of support which might enable critical discursive awareness and resistance. George speaks of a turning point in his life after an accident when he made a change and repositioned himself with regard to drinking:

I was so out of my face I didn't realise I was falling off a three metre bank onto the road. By drinking this amount every night I realised I was going to lead myself very quickly to a quick death. (*George*)

When George reports having told his friends he wasn't going to drink again for six months, they took him seriously:

They went 'okay' and kept me to it. A lot of people respected the decision I'd made to stop drinking because it had been such a lifestyle. (*George*)

As well as friends supporting his repositioning towards resistance, George reported his church having also helped him:

I was helped by my pastor at the time. I really felt God told me to stop [drinking]. (*George*)

I am interested to speculate about how communities of support, such as friends, family and church, may encourage critical discursive awareness and, in some cases, resistance. Ben, who clearly voices his discomfort with expectations by peers to drink — 'it's pointless' — suggests his parents' non-drinking stance had a formative influence on his attitude towards drinking, creating a discursive space for him to resist. In contrast, Andy experiences friends as supporting the status quo and not creating any space for discursive awareness or resistance. Andy has taken up an accommodating position, having not experienced his friends as trying to slow his drinking down: 'It rarely happens. You're sort of your own man'.

Re-positioning in alternative discourses

In looking at repositioning, it is helpful to keep in mind the idea that people have access to 'multiple readings of ourselves' (Davies, 1991). Postmodernism offers a reading of multiplicity and variety in understanding human experience (Burr, 1995). Like Ben and James, these multiple positions might involve outward accommodation and inward resistance. For some, the dominant story is the much more compelling one, with alternative identities only hinted at. These alternative identities may appear as faint traces, full of gaps, not clearly named (White & Epston, 1989; White, 2005). For others, alternative identities are more evident:

I enjoy watching sport and playing sport but I don't *live* for sport. I prefer a nice wine. I like to cook and do all those things. I don't mind sharing the housework. What used to be perceived as a typical Kiwi bloke, they just didn't do those things. It's just the way I've been brought up. That comes back to the independence thing. (*Ed*)

Ed takes pleasure in showing how he actively resists the positioning of a stereotypical Kiwi male, in contrast to Andy's comments about the pressure to skulk back a drink so he doesn't look like 'a pussy'. Ed draws upon an alternative discursive storyline of independence. Although the notion of independence fits within traditional masculine values in New Zealand, the kind of independence Ed supports is an independence of thought, a refusal to be constrained by the terms of dominant masculinity.

I wasn't interested in rugby at all. I think it's about being an individual and being yourself without feeling the need to do what everyone else does. (*Mark*)

In distancing himself from rugby, Mark draws on an alternative storyline of individuality.

Guys like to feel that they are strong, not only physically but emotionally. Being a guy for me is all about strength in every area. One part of me would like to fit in and one part of me doesn't respect people who get drunk to cover up your insecurities or for the pleasure of it. I hope that in myself I'm a bit deeper than that. (*Ben*)

Ben sees strength, a traditional masculine virtue, as being both physical and emotional. He draws on alternative storylines of his emotional strength and depth to discursively construct his masculine identity.

It's the old *Kia Kaha* — Stand strong. If you go back on it, then you haven't really made a decision. (*George*)

George also draws on an alternative masculinity discourse of having emotional strength in being able to 'stand strong' once he had made the decision to quit drinking.

In negotiating the performance of their gender identity, some of the participants repositioned themselves in alternative discourses of independence, individuality, and emotional strength. It is important to note that, although these discourses are alternative in that they run counter to using alcohol to gauge masculinity, they nevertheless reflect pioneer Kiwi male qualities of ruggedness, strength, resilience, independence, and innovation.

Visible here are the shaping effects of discourse. Mark, Ben and George call on aspects of traditional masculinity discourses just as they resist alcohol-masculinity discourses. They are active discourse users, being shaped by and shaping discourses. They are both made subject to discourse, and able to 'invert, invent and break old bonds' to create new subject positions (Davies, 1991, p. 50).

Making meaning of the research

In re-presenting the men's speaking, I have offered a sense of how the participants negotiated their version of the 'compulsory performance' of gender (Butler, 1993). I have shown how they were able to name the dominant alcohol-masculinity discourse, with its emphasis on drinking as competition where men jostle for position within gender hierarchies. Most of the participants, through their decision to drink moderately or lightly, were positioned unfavourably in this discourse. One spoke of feeling 'very outside of the conversation' in locations where drinking stories are a measure of manliness.

While some participants took up a position of accommodation to the discourse (albeit reluctantly for one), others challenged the logic of the discourse, resisted it, and chose to position themselves in alternative storylines of masculinity. Some of the participants accounted for their resistance through communities of support which helped foster critical awareness of the discourses they were positioned in as young men. These communities of support were mainly friends, family or churches.

It is interesting to note that the participants who repositioned themselves in alternative storylines of masculinity chose themes which resonate with traditional male values in New Zealand. One possible explanation is that there are limited discursive resources available in New Zealand for men to construct stories of self which are more satisfying, and in this it may be necessary to look beyond our shores². Hokowhitu, writing about Māori masculinities, suggests that Māori men can realise they are not bound by 'the constricting notions of traditional masculinity that have pervaded colonial history' (2007, p. 74). He points to many Māori men – composers, writers, artists, filmmakers who already locate their masculinity beyond the space defined for them by others. One reflection on this study may be that at a societal level there

needs to be a promotion of alternative narrative resources for men to draw on to help construct more creative and diverse stories of self.

Gender in research

A study of gender must involve reflection on a researcher's gender, in this case whether my female identity invited the telling of resistance stories to dominant alcohol-masculinity discourses. Did the male participants think I might tolerate stories of discomfort with dominant masculinity? Allen (2005) asked whether her gender meant that the young men participants in focus groups were more likely to constitute themselves in less traditionally masculine ways. She wondered if the participants saw her as more likely to tolerate 'softer' versions of masculinity. She also wondered if she could still unwittingly collude with the production of traditional masculinity through her sense of male identity, which is in itself constructed through discourses. The same questions are relevant here.

Towards the end of the research interview I asked participants whether they thought their answers might have been different if they were interviewed by a man.

You were basically asking my experience and I told you. You didn't have to reaffirm my story. I know how I feel about it. (*Ed*)

Ed gives no accounting for gender in our conversation.

As a girl I think you're less biased. I don't feel any pressure from you to have stories. I think that with a guy it would be very different. You probably draw different things out of me than a guy would. (*Ben*)

For Ben, being interviewed by a female researcher opens space for different stories, stories that are more reflective of his discomfort with pressure to drink, stories which suggest resistance.

James, too, believes he would perform himself differently with a male interviewer where he might jostle for status and position through talk:

There'd be more ego in my answers. They'd probably be less true. I'd probably be trying to impress. (*James*)

It is interesting to speculate whether the resistance that Ben ('how pointless it is') and James ('it's a bullshit idea') offered to alcohol-masculinity discourses was something they engaged in privately, given the social pressure to drink and that 'to question masculinity is to be critical of our national ethos' (James & Saville-Smith, 1994, p. 64). Laying aside my gender, it may be that, in the relative privacy of the research setting, participants were well positioned to question dominant constructions of masculinity. It is my belief that the context of a respectful research setting and my questions which presupposed there *was* resistance, opened space for the telling of more private stories of resistance.

As this research progressed, I became more aware of my hand as researcher in the research. In particular, I noticed how I was languaging masculinity, and how my languaging could lead to the reification of dominant masculinity or the critiquing of it. Looking back on the research, I wonder if I reified ideas of 'stereotype' and 'typical' by inviting participants to speak

about themselves in this way. I also wonder if I inadvertently co-produced traditional masculinity by asking participants what 'being a man in New Zealand' meant to them. Ben voiced some discomfort with this line of questioning.

The more I try and think 'Okay, what should I do in this situation?' then I trap myself in that stereotype. If I start to try and define myself what it is to be a guy, it just forms the trap of staying what is socially acceptable for a guy to be. (*Ben*)

In this way I have come to appreciate the importance of the power of language to shape us, and to be aware as a researcher and counsellor of how language uses us, as well as how we use language.

Implications for counselling practice

In looking at implications for counselling, it can be easy to succumb to the 'climate of negativity' (Weaver, 2001, p. 10) that surrounds young men in New Zealand, the construction of them as reckless and careless of themselves and others, particularly with alcohol. The overall picture of young men in this study is one of care of themselves and the importance of self-protection. As a narrative practitioner, one can look out for moments of resistance to dominant discourses, whether this is in conversations young men have with families or friends, or in more subtle ways, in how some young men talk about the choices they have with regard to alcohol and masculinity. If the first step in enabling resistance is for people to become critically aware (Davies, 1991) of the discourses in which they are positioned, then counselling itself can provide another context for resistance.

Narrative practitioners can also listen for opportunities to thicken and develop alternative stories, the half-formed identities which spring from resistance. They can also be on the lookout for unique outcomes, moments in a conversation which provide an entry point into alternative stories of what the client finds meaningful, valuable and hopeful in their lives. Alternative stories do not arrive fully formed, but are evident as thin traces, full of gaps. Through questioning, a narrative therapist may be able to encourage people to fill these gaps (White, 2005, 2007).

My hope in producing this article has been to trouble the taken-for-granted view of young men as heavy drinkers. My hope has also been to promote greater choice for young men in how they craft their sense of masculine identity given the discursive resources available to them, and to support the struggle for new ways of doing gender.

Notes

1. All participants' names have been changed to protect their identity.
2. One example is the international film *The band's visit* which tells about the visit by an Egyptian police band to a small settlement in Israel. In a quiet moment, two of the men in the band recite to each other the poetry of the classical Arab poet, Rumi.

References

- Alcohol Liquor Advisory Council. (2009a). *NZ Statistics*. Retrieved 2009 from http://www.alac.org.nz/NZStatistic_170103.aspx
- Alcohol Liquor Advisory Council. (2009b). *Strategies*. Retrieved from <http://www.alac.org.nz/Strategies.aspx>
- Allen, L. (2005). Managing masculinity: Young men's identity work in focus groups. *Qualitative Research*, 5(1), 35–57. doi:10.1177/1468794105048650
- Bly, R. (1990). *Iron John: A book about men*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Bordo, S. (1993). *Unbearable weight: Feminism, Western culture, and the body*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Burr, V. (1995). *An introduction to social constructionism*. London, England: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of 'sex'*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Campbell, H. (2000). The glass phallus: Pub(lic) masculinity and drinking in rural New Zealand. *Rural Sociology*, 65(4), 562–581.
- Campbell, H., Law, R., & Honeyfield, J. (1999). What it means to be a man: Hegemonic masculinity and the invention of beer. In R. Law, H. Campbell, & J. Dolan (Eds.), *Masculinities in Aotearoa/New Zealand* (pp. 166–186). Palmerston North, New Zealand: Dunmore Press.
- Connell, R. W. (2000). *The men and the boys*. St Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin.
- Connell, R. W. (2002). Hegemonic masculinity. In S. Jackson & S. Scott (Eds.), *Gender: A sociological reader* (pp. 60–62). London, England: Routledge.
- Culler, J. (1997). *Literary theory: A very short introduction*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Davies, B. (1991). The concept of agency: A feminist poststructuralist analysis. *Social Analysis*, 30(December), 42–53.
- Davies B., & Harré, R. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 20(1), 43–63. doi:10.1111/j.1468-5914.1990.tb00174.x
- Habgood, R., Casswell, S., Pledger, M. & Bhatta, K. (2001). *Drinking in New Zealand: National survey comparisons 1995 & 2000*. Auckland, New Zealand: Alcohol & Public Health Research Unit.
- Hill, L. (1999). What it means to be a Lion Red man: Alcohol advertising and Kiwi masculinity. *Women's Studies Journal*, 15(1), 65–83.
- Hodges, I. (1989). Make mine a large one. (Unpublished doctoral thesis). University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.

- Hokowhitu, B. (2007). The silencing of Māori men: Deconstructing a 'Space' for Māori masculinities. *New Zealand Journal of Counselling*, 27(2), 63–76.
- James, B., & Saville-Smith, K. (1994). *Gender, culture and power*. Oxford, England: Open University Publications.
- Parker, I. (1994). Discourse analysis. In P. Banister, E. Burman, I. Parker, M. Taylor, & C. Tindall (Eds.), *Qualitative methods in psychology: A research guide* (pp. 92–108). Buckingham, England: Open University Press.
- Paton-Simpson, G. (1995). *'Underconsumption' of alcohol as a form of deviance: Minimum drinking norms in New Zealand society and the implication of their production and reproduction during social occasions*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand.
- Penwarden, S. (2003). *Young men's stories of resistance to masculinity and alcohol use*. (Unpublished master's thesis). Waikato University, Hamilton, New Zealand.
- Pittman, F. (1993). *Man enough: Fathers, sons and the search for masculinity*. New York, NY: Putnam.
- Phillips, D. (2006). Masculinity, male development, gender and identity: Modern and postmodern meanings. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 27, 403–423. [doi:10.1080/01612840600569666](https://doi.org/10.1080/01612840600569666)
- Phillips, J. (1996). *A man's country? The image of the pakeha male, a history* (Rev. ed.). Auckland, New Zealand: Penguin.
- Smith, L., & Winslade, J. (1997). Consultations with young men migrating from alcohol's regime. *Dulwich Centre Newsletter*, (2&3), 16–26. Retrieved from <http://www.dulwichcentre.com.au/consultations-with-young-men.html>
- Weaver, S. (2001). *Teenage boys talk: 50 New Zealand teenagers talk about their lives*. Auckland, New Zealand: Random House.
- Weedon, C. (1997). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Wetherell, M. (1998). Positioning and interpretative repertoires: Conversation analysis and post-structuralism in dialogue. *Discourse & Society*, 9(3), 387–412.
- Wetherell, M., & Maybin, J. (1996). The distributed self: A social constructionist perspective. In R. Stevens (Ed.), *Understanding the self* (pp. 219–280). London, England: Sage/OUP.
- White, M. (2005). *Workshop notes*. Retrieved from <http://www.dulwichcentre.com.au/michael-white-workshop-notes.pdf>
- White, M. (2007). *Maps of narrative practice*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton.
- White, M., & Epston, D. (1989). *Literate means to therapeutic ends*. Adelaide, Australia: Dulwich Centre Publications.
- Worth, H., Paris, A., & Allen, L. (Eds.). (2002). *The life of Brian: Masculinities, sexualities and health in New Zealand*. Dunedin, New Zealand: University of Otago Press.