



Masculinities and Mental Health in Young Men

From Echo Chambers to
Evidence

Edited by
ZAC SEIDLER

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Masculinities and Mental Health in Young Men

“This important book offers new ways to catalyse progress in better supporting, rather than just problematising, the mental health needs of young men.”

—Prof. Simon Rice, *Global Director, Movember Men’s Health Institute*

“A well researched, thoughtfully argued, and compassionate take on the largest challenges facing young men, and therefore us all. This is a book that couldn’t have come at a more critical time.”

—Chanel Contos, *Activist and CEO, Teach Us Consent*

“The crisis with young men’s mental health is real. Equally real is the crisis of how we think about young men. This book takes us from crisis to opportunity, from talking about young men to talking with them. It is centred in care - caring for and about young men, and caring about real solutions rather than throwing up our hands in alarm.”

—Gary Barker, *CEO, Equimundo Center for Masculinities and Social Justice*

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—Dr. Judy Chu, *Author of When Boys Become Boys*

“‘From Echo chambers to Evidence’ is an essential guide for mental health professionals dedicated to supporting young men. It insightfully combines research, policy, and practice to co-design effective interventions that promote healthy, strength-based approaches for young men. A must-read for anyone in the field.”

—Dr. Matt Englar-Carlson, *California State University, Fullerton*

Zac Seidler
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Finally, to all the young men out there. We see you. We will keep working tirelessly, advocating and researching to be able to better support you through this messy thing we call life. Don't give up hope.

Always remember, nice guys finish first.

Zac Seidler

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PART I

Introduction



Introduction

Zac Seidler

THE STATUS BRO

At a time riddled with commentary on the state of young men's health, the question naturally arises, why another book, another hot take, another opinion to add to the cacophony of voices in the sector? The nature of the current compilation of cutting-edge research reviews, all comprehensive in their mining of existing evidence on young men's mental health and aspirational in their suggestion for future research and policy innovation, is what differentiates it from the fray. This, in addition to the style and tone taken to bring the experiences of young men to life, aims to offer a fresh take on an ongoing "crisis" that greedily takes up column inches the world over. As the title suggests, it is about time we move beyond echo chambers and instead, lean on the evidence.

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I have read too many books on men and boys that promise *the* solution to the reader. The solution to the problem of young men's lack of help-seeking, young men's violence, young men's suicide. Yet they spend hundreds of pages laying out the problem and offer half-baked conclusions in the final chapter that inevitably lean on masculine tropes like "role modelling" as the panacea. The best way to counteract this trend is to instead lean on the evidence and at each turn clarify what we know and what we need to know next. By compiling the work of hundreds of scholars, and being willing to not only seek consensus but invite debate and disagreement of ideas about what is happening for young men, we can begin a new narrative focused on opportunity. Without this, we remain complicit in perpetuating a stagnant status quo that is serving neither young men nor those aiming to support them.

This book centres the places and spaces young men frequent, it seeks not only the quantitative data pointing to trends but dives into the qualitative evidence from the mouths of young men. We aim to embrace the messiness of manhood as it intersects with mental health. It must be stated upfront that the chapters that follow are only as strong as the evidence they report on, and in most cases research to date has taken a problem-based, deficit-focused lens to young men's mental health which limits our ability to fully lean into the paradigm shift we are seeking, with an entirely new lens of strength-based, healthy masculinities. Nevertheless, even where the waters are murky, we have taken it upon ourselves to chart a course towards a future where young men and those around them can flourish.

YOUNG MEN AT RISK

This book has an aspirational agenda, rather than an alarmist one. We are not interested in re-prosecuting well-worn ideas about the ills of young men. Instead, we focus on building capacity, compiling insights, and generating momentum among researchers, clinicians, and those who live, love, and laugh with young men. What the evidence (or lack thereof) tells us, is that there is a long way to go.

What is clear is that much of the work in this field either perpetuates stereotypical masculine norms or relies on them, taking a homogenous view of young men as problematic and at-risk of doing and experiencing harm. This theme, thread, feel and flavour of young men as categorically at-risk seems now a hardened belief. It is a starting point driving the

research, it is a lens throughout data collection and write-up, and it is the vantage from which policy solutions are often posed. How to mitigate risk, reduce harm, and safeguard communities are all noble objectives, but they all lack one thing; they overlook the young man at the centre of it all. They miss his world in all its complexity, his strengths in all their depth, his masculinities in all their diversity.

We too often speak of young men as objects (to write meaning on), rather than subjects (to learn from and interact with). I would propose that we are afraid of discussing masculinities and men's lives in an optimistic and expansive fashion. This mirrors and reinforces young men's own silence and fears around their masculinity. In study after study we conduct with young men, we hear how disconnected they are from their gender, how little they think, talk, or are taught about it, and so how easily it is corrupted and co-opted by the loudest voices in the room or on their phone. It is a complicit cycle, stifling men truly being seen. In previously unpublished data, we surveyed 2009 Australian men about "what it means to be a man?" and over half of them described traditional, stereotypical terms like "make the money" or "protect the family". Worryingly, 20% of men said, "I don't know" or "I don't care" painting a clear picture of the work ahead.

The overriding emotion underpinning much of masculinity is fear. Masculinities are so often upheld by the fear of femininity or homosexuality, the fear of being outed as a fraud by peers, and the fear of not playing the part effectively. Those of us working in this field must not buy into this fear. This fear is what drives, in my eyes, the rise of young men's "ontological insecurity", or their lack of a fully realised, well-defined self-concept. As the adage goes, you cannot be what you cannot see, and our discussion around young men has lacked depth and nuance, it has lacked a munificent objective of growth and understanding and therefore has left them without a guiding light about what to strive for. The alarmist narrative is ridden with "don'ts" but it has been evidenced now that young men cannot build a strong identity based on how *not* to be. If we continue to fail to provide more strongly worded advice about how young men *can* develop in ways that benefit themselves and others, the vacuum will continue to be filled with problematic voices.

THE GENDER RECKONING

We exist now at an inflection point, a moment I refer to as a “gender reckoning” where the convergence of the #MeToo movement and the rise of “toxic masculinity” (as the media-driven term of choice) have placed young men’s lives in the spotlight. Their schools, their peer groups, their sporting clubs, and their online interactions receive an unrivalled level of scrutiny in the wake of generations of bad behaviour that went unchecked. As a result, a backlash response has arisen as young men seek out what they see as dominant voices, often online, offering them back certainty and power that feels better to them than waves of shame or guilt being sold elsewhere.

In order to avoid an increasingly radicalised male politic, where men’s rights activists and manosphere influencers weaponise misogyny to galvanise disillusioned communities of young men, we have to find ways to listen and connect. We must still poke and prod at masculinities but we should enter into these discussions with curiosity and a desire for growth, an approach of “how can we help”, not further dislocation and detachment. We do not want to buy-in to, nor reinforce, a belief that we are breeding a generation of “lost boys” who are moving beyond our reach.

This book will shine a light on young men’s distress and empathise with its reality. A quote I have always held close in my work with men is from sociologist Michael Kimmel when he says that male privilege might be true, but it is not *real* for many men. This isn’t always about the facts and stats, it is about a lived reality, a feeling, and so while many young men do have more opportunity than others, we have to reckon with the fact that they don’t feel that way. You just have to look at the discrepancy between reported rates of depression and anxiety, where women typically outnumber men 3:1 in diagnosis rates, and yet when it comes to rates of suicide, acts of interpersonal violence, loneliness, and social isolation, this ratio is typically reversed. Men are crying out for help, and while they aren’t necessarily doing it in the way we’d like or can diagnostically understand, the clear sentiment on the ground is that the longer this underlying male malaise and disillusionment goes without purposeful, empathic response, the more fuel to the fire for any antisocial behaviour.

If we are to get young men on-board a prosocial movement focused on gender, racial, and sexual equality, we must get into conversation on their level and build solutions *with* them. Much like the foundations of feminism were built on the idea that women were not to blame for their

circumstance, but rather they were shackled to a patriarchal structure that limited their autonomy, we must see how young men's attitudes and behaviours exist within structural dynamics that need to be deconstructed. We cannot demand answers from the individual without questioning the systemic pressures underpinning his decisions.

THE MEETING OF TWO WORLDS

Anyone who works with young men will know there are two camps where much of this thinking takes place, on the ground and in the lab. But these two worlds often compete with one another, regularly at the expense of shared learning. There is a deep theoretical and conceptual field of inquiry into masculinities and young men's mental health that is often academically complex and nuanced but can lack real-world relevance or uptake. My team and I have spent much of our time trying to straddle this world with its lofty ideals alongside a more grounded approach with partners in the field through their programme delivery. These community-based interventions that go to "where young men are" often attempt co-design and exist to serve a particular group or need and to connect with a hard-to-reach cohort. But equally, this work often lacks a robust evidence base to ensure we are doing more than just following our noses. The field requires the balanced contemplation and integration of these two worlds at the same time, as neither alone is sufficient. This book seeks to find the "goldilocks zone", deriving learnings from both worlds, that is hopefully just right. What this book strives to do is offer a pragmatic guide, pointing to the theory, highlighting what is going on in programmes, and sailing through to the next steps.

THE STRUCTURE

I have always found that the most successful entry point to having a useful conversation about men and boys is by taking a health lens. It's a trojan horse to meaty conversations that I have found effectively invite and include women and girls into a dialogue (as the health and wellbeing of the men around them directly affects their lives), while also an angle young men are willing to engage with. It is the special sauce behind the success of the place I call home, Movember. While the humble moustache may have been the gateway for Movember into these conversations with millions of men, we are a unique charity in the current ecosystem, with a

mandate to empathise and understand young men's lives to build a future where they can live healthier, longer lives. This is the ethos that underpins all of our work.

But to date, our definition of what constitutes health is far too limited. Typically if you are to read a book about men's health it will remain overly siloed, avoiding the inherent cultural and political narratives intersecting with outcomes, and focusing on health systems and behaviours alone (historically on bits below the belt). Unlike most books you might have read on the topic of young men's mental health, we have purposefully avoided taking a traditional diagnostic lens to the chapter structure. Following the medical model to get a glimpse into the day-to-day realities of young men's lives is well-worn and hasn't progressed the narrative in decades. Instead of focusing on symptoms of anxiety or ADHD again, we have sought out places and spaces frequented by young men, and their common behaviours that directly impact their wellbeing. Our aim is to dive into unconventional spaces where young men's mental health manifests. To this end, we have explored men's mental health as it exists alongside, or is affected by, pornography, gambling, use of alcohol, social media, dating apps, and gaming. These contexts are omnipresent in young men's contemporary lives, and we hope to highlight that we can no longer be contained by rigid ideas of what and where health exists for young men. In fact these social issues around violence, abuse, loneliness, addiction, and suicide are all fundamentally public health issues, requiring public health solutions.

While we are exploring topics like gambling, gaming, and alcohol, you will see a clear decision not to frame these topics through a pathological lens of addiction or disorder, but rather seek out a balanced, strength-based approach to the topic, understanding and respecting the nuanced relationship young guys have with them. In our eyes, there is no benefit to trigger-happy media responses suggesting blanket "banning" or "blaming" without exploring the role of something like gaming in how young men interact with each other and being willing to weigh up any benefits alongside the harms. Going to where young men are does not just mean talking with them, but learning *from* them, to co-design solutions to the complex problems that are their lived reality. Young men reliably tell us that they are lonely, they struggle to navigate dating, they feel tied to their phones as if their life depends on it and they don't learn the difference between porn and true intimacy. It is an increasingly complex world for

them to move through, and it's time we took a new approach to engaging with this critical cohort.

This book will comprise a series of contemporary evidence reviews and narrative syntheses of the young men's mental health research space across several areas outlined as central to the lives of young men. "Young men" refers to men aged 12–25, and where possible, evidence specific to this age cohort was sought (while also being supplemented by evidence outside this range where necessary and abstracted based on the authors' expertise).

The seven reviews were broken up into three key thematic areas:

1. Risky Business: Navigating the Masculine Minefield of Alcohol and Gambling
2. The Competitive Edge: Masculinities and mental health in young men's sports and Gaming
3. Algorithms in Action: Deciding the Future of masculinity Through Online Battlefields of social media, Porn, and dating

Each review was undertaken to answer two key questions, namely, (1) "What evidence exists in this field?" and (2) "What can and should be done about it?". These are not systematic reviews in the traditional academic sense given how limited the evidence base was in many of these spaces, rather, they are a means to gain a comprehensive overview of where investment and thought leadership exist in the given fields of inquiry and to direct future efforts. The reviews take the form of a rigorous but flexibly structured literature synthesis, aiming to ensure a comprehensive ascertainment of the current state-of-play in key priority areas. Grey literature from reputable government and NGO organisations (including policy documents) were sought to supplement the empirical literature, but were collectively considered "existing research".

The reviews were conducted by a tightly-knit team of researchers with years of experience in the fields of mental health and masculinities. Each chapter was co-authored by several members of this team, and then reviewed by partners and experts in their respective fields, ensuring each maintained a coherent focus while also covering the most pressing issues in these spaces. By compiling these reviews across several areas that are central to young men's lives our aim is to provide readers and organisations a strategic and streamlined evidence-base, galvanising the sector to

move the field forward through practical initiatives that will resonate with young men. Most importantly, we hope that this work paves the way for clinicians, researchers, and policy-makers to better support, understand, and connect with young men, in all facets of their lives.

What follows in the pages to come is not always a pretty picture. Our research team went down dark rabbit holes (think incel forums) aiming to do our best to leave the comfort of our academic ivory tower and climb into the often harsh reality of many young men's lives. Nonetheless, we all came out with optimism and hope for the future, and hopefully, this comes through on the page.

Unlike most edited collections which span endless chapters and authors, this book was compiled by a single research team with years of knowledge in the space, with each chapter reviewed by other partners and experts in their respective fields. This book was truly a team effort and meant that we could design and structure all of the chapters together to flow consistently to aid context and understanding. This also allowed us to form cohesive conclusions, drawing connections between normally siloed fields of study. Enjoy.

PART II

Risky Business: Navigating the Masculine
Minefield of Alcohol and Gambling



Pour Decisions: Young Men's Mental Health and Alcohol Use

Krista Fisher, Kieran O’Gorman, and Michael J. Wilson

BACKGROUND

Globally, young men drink more, and experience more alcohol-related harms than young women (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2021; World Health Organization, 2018). This places young

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men at greater risk of a wide range of physical and mental health problems (AIHW, 2019). Young men are diagnosed with alcohol use disorders at higher rates than other disorders such as anxiety or depression, yet exhibit particularly low rates of service use for alcohol problems (Reavley et al., 2010). Despite this, research on alcohol-related issues often adopts a gender-blind approach where gender norms, roles, and relations are ignored, in order to treat everyone the same despite the pre-existing underlying inequalities generated by gender norms (Gough & Novikova, 2020). This occurs despite data suggesting alcohol use is often intertwined with gender and masculinities (Moore et al., 2017). In addition, research and policy into young men's alcohol consumption typically focuses on usage patterns and related harms at the individual level, with a subtext of responsibility for mitigating harms lying with drinkers (Moore et al., 2023). There is scope for the alcohol industry to adopt greater responsibility. Corresponding structural, policy-level, and systemic change holds potential for widespread impact in reducing alcohol-related harms among young men. It is crucial to understand why young men drink, what keeps them drinking, and how we can design better systems and services to support them in adopting healthier drinking behaviours.

While alcohol use and harms aren't an issue exclusive to young men, there are a number of reasons that young men warrant focused research. While the gender gap between men's and women's drinking rates have narrowed in recent decades (Slade et al., 2016), men remain at greater risk of excessive consumption and alcohol-related health problems (White, 2020). Additionally, middle-aged and older men are more likely to misuse alcohol and drink excessively when compared to younger men (AIHW, 2023). Hence, there is a compelling reason to promote early intervention and harm prevention efforts among young men, setting them up for healthier consumption habits across the lifespan.

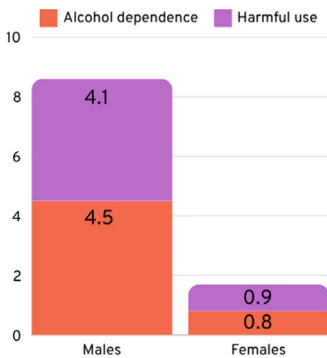
What are the Harms Associated with Young Men's Alcohol Use?

The prevalence of alcohol use and misuse among young men (Fig. 2.1) makes it a key issue for early intervention and prevention. Alcohol misuse, abuse, excessive drinking, and problem drinking are all often interchangeable terms within the literature, where individuals are described as experiencing health or social problems from drinking, or increased risk of these problems occurring due to consumption beyond recommended levels (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2018). It is

worth noting that these terms are distinct from alcohol dependence and/or alcohol use disorder, which necessitates physical dependence on alcohol and can include experiencing withdrawal symptoms, loss of control, and increased tolerance, as well as problems arising from drinking (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2018; Manning et al., 2018).

Irrespective of terminology, however, young men’s drinking can have substantial mental health impacts, often exacerbating existing issues and creating new ones. Drinking to cope with, or in response to stressful life events is common irrespective of gender. Yet alcohol appears to be a more common “go-to” coping mechanism for men: they are more likely to drink to cope with stress, and do so in response to a wider variety of stressors (Esper & Furtado, 2013; Temmen & Crockett, 2020). This may be because drinking is seen as a more socially acceptable coping mechanism for men (Lynch et al., 2016), albeit an ineffective one in the long term (D’Aquino & Callinan, 2023). Research appraising alcohol use as an “avoidance-oriented” coping behaviour has documented links with higher distress (Brownhill et al., 2002; Chuick et al., 2009), insomnia,

Prevalence (%) of worldwide alcohol use disorders by sex, 2016



(WHO, 2018)

Monthly risky drinking among 14-24 year-olds in 2019

15.3% vs. 5.3%

young men

young women

(AIHW, 2021)

Alcohol use accounts for:

12%

of deaths, and

10%

of disease burden in males aged 15-49, globally

(GBD 2016 Alcohol Collaborators, 2018)

Fig. 2.1 Key statistics on the harms associated with alcohol use

and later sleep quality issues (Lam et al., 2018; Ogeil et al., 2019) and even suicidality (Clapperton et al., 2019) in the long term. Moreover, men diagnosed with depression drink alcohol more frequently and in greater amounts compared to women with depression (Cavanagh et al., 2017), and compared to non-depressed men (Pedrelli et al., 2016). This can create a vicious cycle wherein men drink to cope with depressive symptoms, which in turn exacerbates their depression (Bulloch et al., 2012). Young men who drink heavily while depressed are less likely than those who don't drink heavily to be engaged in mental health treatment (Pedrelli et al., 2016), suggesting that these young men may attempt to self-medicate with alcohol. Other underlying explanations may also be possible, such as these men being more avoidant in general and therefore more likely to drink, and less likely to address problems directly.

In extreme cases, alcohol use and intoxication can be implicated in suicide attempts and death, contributing to increased impulsivity, disinhibition, impaired judgement (Pompili et al., 2010), psychological distress, and difficulty considering and implementing alternative coping mechanisms (Hufford, 2001). While the link between alcohol consumption and suicidality isn't exclusive to young men, alcohol use confers a greater risk of suicide for men compared to women (Amiri & Behnezhad, 2020). The true extent of this difference remains unknown as most studies fail to report results by gender (Poorolajal et al., 2016).

Even if young men and women experiencing suicidality drink to the same extent, their motivations for doing so are likely gendered. For example, young men may respond to significant life stressors (e.g., job loss, relationship breakdown) by engaging in unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as social withdrawal, suppressing negative emotions, and alcohol misuse (Borges et al., 2017; Lynch et al., 2016; Möller-Leimkuhler, 2003), all of which may in turn increase risk of suicidality.

Alcohol misuse also co-occurs with other risky behaviours which increases men's risk of harm to themselves and others. For some men, social drinking can result in (either intentional or unintentional) conflict with other young men. Men are more likely to experience alcohol-related harms in public or interpersonal contexts (e.g., violence, property damage) while women, on average, appear more likely to experience private consequences (e.g., "blackouts"; Dumas et al., 2013; Park & Grant, 2005). The young men who adhere strongly to traditional masculine norms are also more likely to engage in violence while drunk compared to young men who don't strongly adhere to these norms

(O'Brien et al., 2017). This violence is sometimes seen by both young men and women as driven by biological forces outside the control of young men (MacLean et al., 2020). Drinking also increases the likelihood of other risk behaviours for young men, such as risky sexual behaviours (e.g., unprotected sex), physical and/or psychological abuse towards their intimate partners, and drink driving (Cho & Yang, 2023; Moore et al., 2011; White, 2020). For drink driving specifically, this risk is once again amplified relative to age as while men in general are twice as likely to drive under the influence of alcohol compared to women, young men are even more likely to do so (González-Iglesias et al., 2015; White, 2020).

What Precipitates and Enables Young Men's Alcohol Use?

Masculine Norms

The relationship between alcohol consumption and masculinity is complex. Drinking is most commonly referenced by the literature as a way for men to assert their masculinity. Drinking large amounts of alcohol while maintaining composure is seen by some young men to demonstrate endurance and toughness (Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 2020), especially when accompanied by physical violence against other young men (Mullen et al., 2007). Particular masculine norms are associated with more hazardous patterns of consumption. Young men who adhere to the norms of “playboy” (i.e., displaying sexual prowess through frequent, promiscuous sexual encounters), risk-taking, self-reliance, and winning are more likely to report alcohol-related problems in both Australia and the US (Iwamoto et al., 2011; Teese et al., 2023). Even in studies where actual gender differences in drinking behaviour are relatively minor, young men report greater endorsement of norms that linked masculinity to drinking and binge drinking (de Visser & McDonnell, 2012). These associations are present from a young age, with high school boys who conform to these norms drinking more frequently (Iwamoto & Smiler, 2013). Notably, the association of drinking with masculinity is not limited to Western countries, with men in countries such as Nigeria (Dumbili, 2022) and Vietnam (Nguyen et al., 2021) also positioning heavy drinking as a masculine activity.

Men themselves don't always acknowledge the influence of masculine norms on their drinking behaviour, instead emphasising that drinking is an autonomous decision that they make for their own enjoyment (Roberts et al., 2019). Yet men commonly report drinking as a key means by which

they socialise with friends (Roberts et al., 2019), and men report stronger beliefs than women that alcohol is beneficial for socialising (Lau-Barraco et al., 2012). This may be more pronounced for men at the fringes of their social circle, since young men who report feeling less close to their group of friends report greater expectations that alcohol will help them fit in (Tartaglia et al., 2018).

On the other hand, drinking can also serve as a way for men to circumvent traditional masculine norms. Alcohol's disinhibiting effects can allow for displays of emotional vulnerability and support (e.g., expressing love to friends or disclosing problems), behaviours traditionally seen as feminine (Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 2020). Indeed, for UK men, qualitative research has found that drinking beer in the pub together allowed a context when some non-traditional masculine behaviours were acceptable for men, which included the explicit discussion of emotions and mental health (e.g., with close friends; Emslie et al., 2013). Traditional masculine norms remain influential to some degree however, with men in social drinking situations reluctant to infringe on each other's autonomy (and therefore their masculinity) by suggesting that they drink responsibly (Duncan et al., 2022; Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 2020). Young men therefore adopt more individualistic approaches than young women to managing the risks of excessive alcohol consumption (i.e., alcohol misuse) on a night out, preferring to intervene only after clear negative consequences (e.g., fights) have manifested (Dresler & Anderson, 2018).

Commercial Determinants

Global recognition of the role of large multinational corporations in a broad array of negative health, social and planetary outcomes is increasing, termed "commercial determinants of health". Indeed, alcohol use is a leading risk factor for disease burden worldwide, accounting for nearly 10% of disability-adjusted life years and 12% of deaths among male populations aged 15–49 years (GBD, 2016; Alcohol Collaborators, 2018). Responsible corporations have historically shirked responsibility for their role in preventing harms associated with their products, preferring instead to centre narratives of individual responsibility for harm reduction. In particular, Gilmore et al. (2023) summarise a range of practices implemented by the commercial sector that negatively influence global health outcomes. Of key relevance here are marketing practices, which have served to normalise drinking among young people leading to increased consumption (Atkinson et al., 2019).

Alcohol advertising draws so heavily on masculine norms that it has been described as a “manual on masculinity” (Strate, 1992, pp. 78). These advertisements, especially those for beer, have long portrayed men’s alcohol consumption as a pleasurable release, a reward for hard work, an opportunity to bond with other men, and (more recently) an escape from supposedly complex and demanding romantic commitments with women (e.g., family duties and other domestic tasks that infringe on time available for male-centred recreation; Towns et al., 2012).

Alcohol advertising in sport is a key example of how alcohol is not only marketed towards young men, but is also heavily intertwined with other cultural markers of masculinity. Alcohol advertising in sport can serve to ingrain the norm of drinking as masculine behaviour long before young men are legally allowed to purchase it. Sports broadcasts are a key means of exposure to alcohol advertising for young people in the US (Zwarun & Farrar, 2005) and Europe (de Bruijn, 2012). In Australia, alcohol TV advertising is generally prohibited during the daytime and early evening to limit its exposure to children and adolescents. An exception is made for broadcasts of sports such as Australian Rules Football and rugby, however, which can and do heavily feature alcohol advertisements (Fujak & Frawley, 2016), often with endorsements from male sporting stars (Jones et al., 2010). Further, alcohol advertising and company sponsorships are commonly displayed on sports club websites and players’ uniforms (Sartori et al., 2018). In developing countries such as Uganda, young men’s exposure to alcohol advertising is even more widespread (Kabwama et al., 2021). This means boys and young men are exposed to large amounts of alcohol advertising while watching their sporting role models, creating a strong association between alcohol and sporting prowess from an early age (Carr et al., 2016). One experimental study found that young men who were shown alcohol advertisements consumed more alcohol in the immediate aftermath (Engels et al., 2009).

Internet advertising is also a growing concern. One Australian study found that boys (aged 12–15 years) exposed to alcohol advertising via the internet were three times more likely to have recently consumed alcohol (Jones & Magee, 2011). This is representative of a global trend towards social media-based alcohol advertising aimed at young people (Curtis et al., 2018; Mart, 2011), with clear links to underage drinking (Sargent & Babor, 2020) and drinking in early adulthood (Jernigan et al., 2017). Restricting young people’s exposure to social media-based alcohol advertising is a complex problem to address. Age restrictions

on content assume that users register with their true date of birth. In the absence of third-party age-verification, this can easily be fabricated (Jernigan & Rushman, 2014). Furthermore, deliberate attempts at “viral” marketing mean that underage men can nevertheless be exposed to alcohol marketing via their peers (Hastings et al., 2010).

Low and no-alcohol drinks (or “NoLos”) have recently been introduced as alternatives to alcoholic drinks. NoLos are marketed as having the same branding and taste as their alcoholic counterparts. While NoLos are seen as a promising means by which people can reduce their alcohol intake, evidence to date is slim (Corfe et al., 2020). For people with alcohol use disorders, NoLos may actually induce cravings and a desire to drink alcohol (Caballeria et al., 2022; Hew & Arunogiri, 2024). Because of their similar branding, NoLos can also be used as a form of “alibi marketing”, building brand recognition and even consumption habits in populations who otherwise could not or would not drink alcohol (e.g., minors; Nicholls, 2022). One unexplored area of research is whether this branding (and its often masculine associations, in the case of beer; Nicholls, 2022) carries with it the same masculine credibility among groups of men.

Socio-cultural Factors

Young men’s drinking is not only linked to their masculinity but also to other aspects of their identities. Key here is the concept of “drinking cultures”: the patterns, practices, values, settings, and occasions in which alcohol is consumed in a particular society or group (Savic et al., 2016). For example, drinking is heavily ingrained in Australian identity, with alcohol being commonly consumed in a plethora of social contexts (Lindsay et al., 2009). Drinking in Australia is closely tied to mate-ship, national identity, hard work (i.e., being the provider and therefore deserving to blow off steam), and autonomy (Fomiatti et al., 2022). In Ireland, drinking is a common social pastime for young men while help-seeking for alcohol-related problems is discouraged. Young Irish men report that masculine norms encouraging stoicism and self-reliance are compounded by Catholic norms that privilege confession as the preferred form of help-seeking, while widespread heavy drinking among Irish men is normalised (Lynch et al., 2016). In the UK, the custom of buying “rounds” (i.e., members of a group taking turns to buy everyone else a drink) further ingrains drinking into social gatherings, meaning that the