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Obscuring Gendered Difference: The Treatment of Violence in Australian Government Alcohol Policy

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Abstract

Despite public debate about alcohol and public violence among young people in Australia, the issue of masculinities or gender is rarely visible in alcohol policy. Instead, policy recommendations aimed at reducing violence focus on changing the availability and consumption of alcohol. Drawing on concepts from feminist and science and technology studies scholarship, this paper analyses how ‘alcohol-related violence’ is constituted as a specific policy object, and how it coheres to obscure men’s contributions to and experiences of violence. Attention to the political effects of these policy practices is necessary for the development of more equitable alcohol policies.

Introduction

Previous analyses of the treatment of alcohol, gender and violence in the types of quantitative research most prominent in Australian policy debates (Moore, Fraser, Keane, Seear, & valentine, 2017; Moore, Keane & Duncan, 2020) indicate that this research frequently obscures or overlooks gendered drinking practices and their relationship to violence and other forms of harm. In this article, we build on and extend this earlier research by considering how Australian alcohol policy treats the relationship between alcohol, gender and violence.

Drawing on Carol Bacchi's (2017) work on 'gendering practices' and John Law's (2011) concept of 'collateral realities', we argue that Australian alcohol policy is both shaped by and shores up normative understandings of alcohol effects and of gender relations. We analyse the textual practices through which 'alcohol-related violence' is constituted as a specific policy object, and how it coheres to obscure attention to gender and, in particular, men's contribution to violence. Despite occasional acknowledgement of men's disproportionate involvement in alcohol-related harm, including violence, alcohol policy tends to preserve the freedoms of the normative liberal subject, favouring men and classic formulations of masculinity (including autonomy and independence), while curtailing the pleasures and freedoms of others. As a result, 'men' is rarely a category through which patterns of risk and harm from violence are routinely assembled as a meaningful site for intervention (for a recent exception, see <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/funding/mens-risky-drinking-grants>). We argue that critical attention to, and changes in, the gendering assumptions and accompanying political effects of alcohol policy should be prioritized in the development of more equitable responses to alcohol and violence.

Literature review

In recent decades, a growing body of international research has analysed the treatment of gender in alcohol and other drug policy. Several studies have focused on the gendered representations and effects of drug policy on women in the US (e.g. Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2004; Bush-Baskette, 2000; Campbell, 2000; Campbell & Herzberg, 2017; McCorkel, 2017; Thomas, Treffers, Berglas, Drabble, & Roberts, 2018), UK (e.g. Ettorre, 2004; Malloch, 2004; Wincup, 2016) and Canada (Boyd & Faith, 1999). Other research, in Australia and elsewhere, has argued that women's alcohol and other drug use is often framed in terms of gender-specific risks related to reproductive health and vulnerability to physical harm (e.g., Abrahamson & Heimdahl, 2010; Ettorre, 2010; Heimdahl & Karlsson, 2016; Keane, 2013, 2017; Thomas & Bull, 2018).

In Australia, the focus on women's perceived vulnerability in alcohol and other drug policy has been accompanied by relative silence over male conduct. Almost 25 years ago, Broom (1995, 411) argued that Australian drug research and policy 'can be improved by paying attention to the gender of men as well as women'. More recently, Moore, Fraser, Törrönen and Eriksson Tinghög (2015) showed how road accidents, domestic and public violence, vandalism, public disorder and crime are rendered as gender-neutral in both Australian and Swedish national drug policy, replaced by a focus on individuals, people, families and communities. Where gender is most evident in these policies is in relation to neoliberal categories of responsibility and blame: 'those places where gender is singled out [...] look skewed towards women's culpability' (Moore, et al., 2015, 426). Manton and Moore (2016) identified a decline in the explicit attention given to cultural narratives about masculinity and alcohol drinking, and to men's over-representation in alcohol-related harm, in Australian alcohol policy over the last 25 years. Moore, Fraser, Keane, Seear and valentine (2017) argue

that Australian policy debates have consistently ignored quantitative research highlighting the disproportionate involvement of young men in violence involving alcohol, and qualitative research exploring the contribution of specific masculinities to such violence.

Feminist researchers analysing the conceptual handling of gender in survey research on violence argue that gender-neutral research tools and practices obscure institutional and cultural supports for male violence such that gender cannot be adequately taken into account even if there is a political commitment to do so (Buss, 2015; Johnson, 2015; Walby & Towers, 2017). Feminist and critical masculinity studies scholars have also been particularly attentive to how scientific and political discourses treat gender as synonymous with women, while male experience is equated with an abstract or universal human subject (Carver, 1996, 2002; Fine, 2018; Kimmel, 1993). This subject is defined in relation to the absence of characteristics defining female embodiment and experience, equating gendered aspects of social life (including sexuality, intimacy and care work) with women and the private sphere (Carver, 1996, 2002; Kimmel, 1993). The equation of men with this universal subject instantiates rationality and individualism as masculine attributes, while the abstraction of male gender from analysis affords men the ‘privilege of invisibility’ (Kimmel, 1993, 30). In this article, we build on this literature by analysing how Australian government policy invisibilizes men as gendered subjects in enactments of the relationship between alcohol, gender and violence.

Approach

Our analysis is informed by two bodies of work. First, we draw on work that analyses policy as ‘productive, performative and continually contested’ (Shore & Wright, 2011, 1), and as directly implicated in producing the very problems it seeks to address (Bacchi, 2015, 2017).

We focus on the ‘making’ of problems, subjects and objects *in* policy rather than their presumed anteriority/exteriority to policy (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, 85). Furthermore, policy involves ‘gendering practices’ (Bacchi, 2017) through which categorical understandings of gender may iterate ‘men’ and ‘women’ in relations of inequality and subordination. In this approach, gender is not given in nature (as biological sex) and does not pre-exist its appearance in policy but is repeatedly iterated in the ways in which policy seeks to formulate and address problems. Gendering practices are highly variable: sometimes ‘women’ and ‘men’ are constituted in terms of differences, while at other times gender differences are obscured via the production of a generic norm.

Importantly, the variability in gendering practices means we must be attentive to those moments when gendered realities are being iterated even when gender is not visibly foregrounded. To this end, our analysis of gendering practices in Australian alcohol policy is further informed by John Law’s (2011) concept of ‘collateral realities’. According to Law, accounts of reality do not reflect, more or less accurately, a world ‘out there’, but actively bring it into being (2004). He suggests attention to the institutional and scientific practices through which realities are made. Law elaborates the concept of collateral realities to describe how specific realities are stabilized in practice. He defines collateral realities as:

realities that get done incidentally, and along the way. They are realities that get done, for the most part, unintentionally. They are realities that may be obnoxious.

Importantly, they are realities that could be different. It follows that they are realities that are through and through political. (2011, 156)

Unlike those realities that are explicitly described or enacted (such as ‘alcohol-related harms’ in alcohol policy documents), Law suggests attending to the oftentimes unintentional enactment of collateral realities, because it is these that ‘operate most powerfully to do the

real' (2011, 174). It is their assumed and taken-for-granted character, and their ongoing repetition, which operates 'to hold things steady' (2011, 172), and they function by putting 'beyond the limits of contestability' (2011, 174) that which appears to make the most common sense.

Part of the work of collateral realities also involves the 'washing away' (2011, 171) of the practices constituting such realities, permitting them to appear independent from and anterior to social practice. Attention to the 'gaps, aporias and tensions between the practices and their realities' (Law, 2011, 171) offers an effective 'entry point' for the questioning of what is taken to be real (Fraser, Moore, & Keane, 2014, 197). In the field of critical drug research, Fraser, Moore and Keane (2014), and Flacks (2018) have usefully employed the concept of collateral realities to analyse the stabilizing of 'addiction', and how constructs such as childhood and drugs are 'made' in drug law reform discourses, respectively. Informed by this work, we identify and trace the collateral realities that help to produce and stabilize 'alcohol-related violence' (and related terms) in ways that reproduce taken-for-granted assumptions about the properties and effects of alcohol, and normative categories and performances of gender.

Method

Our analysis is based on 18 publicly accessible Australian national, state and territory government alcohol policies, strategies and related supporting documents (Table 1). Where possible, we included the current alcohol policy or strategy for each jurisdiction and its immediate predecessor. Not all jurisdictions had current or alcohol-specific strategies. In these cases, we analysed the alcohol sections of broader drug strategies or consultation

documents (e.g. *ACT Drug Strategy Action Plan 2018-2021*), or discussion papers supporting or related to the development of such policies (e.g. the 2015 discussion paper accompanying the development of the *Queensland Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Strategic Plan 2014-2019*). Because of their high relevance to the topic of alcohol and violence, we also included a 2012 ‘fact sheet’ jointly produced by the NSW Department of Justice and the Australian Institute of Criminology (*Strategies to reduce alcohol-related assault in entertainment precincts*), the NSW government’s *Reducing alcohol-related harm Snapshot 2017* and the Queensland government’s *Safe Night Out Strategy 2014*.

Table 1: Australian Federal, State and Territory Alcohol Strategy and Policy Documents	
Federal	National Alcohol Strategy 2019-2028 (39 pages)
Australian Capital Territory	ACT Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Strategy 2010-2014 (86 pages) ACT Drug Strategy Action Plan 2018-2021 (22 pages)
New South Wales	Fact Sheet: Strategies to Reduce Alcohol-Related Assault in Entertainment Precincts 2012 (7 pages) Reducing Alcohol-Related Harm Snapshot, 2017 (4 pages)
Northern Territory	Northern Territory Alcohol Harm Minimisation Action Plan 2018-2019 (19 pages)
Queensland	Queensland Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Strategic Plan 2014-2019 (32 pages) Safe Night Out Strategy 2014 (27 pages) Reducing Alcohol and Other Drug Impacts in Queensland, Discussion Paper, August 2015 (16 pages) Queensland Alcohol and Other Drugs Action Plan 2015-17: Thriving Communities (24 pages)
South Australia	South Australian Alcohol and Other Drug Strategy 2011-2016 (19 pages) South Australian Alcohol and Other Drug Strategy 2017-2021 (21 pages)
Tasmania	Rising Above the Influence: Tasmanian Alcohol Action Framework 2010-2015 (extended to 2016)* (26 pages) *The term of the Framework was extended until the end of 2019
Victoria	Victoria’s Alcohol Action Plan 2008-2013: Restoring the Balance (44 pages) Reducing the Alcohol and Drug Toll: Victoria’s Plan 2013-2017 (58 pages)

	VicHealth Alcohol Strategy 2016-19 (15 pages)
Western Australia	Drug and Alcohol Interagency Strategic Framework for Western Australia 2011-2015 (15 pages) The Western Australian Alcohol and Drug Interagency Strategy 2018-2022 (64 pages)

The analysed texts are, in most cases, generic alcohol or alcohol and other drug strategy documents. Apart from the NSW ‘fact sheet’ and the Queensland *Safe Night Out Strategy*, none deal exclusively with alcohol and violence but consider the relationship between alcohol and a wide range of practices and forms of acute (e.g. ‘binge’ drinking, intoxication, drink driving) and chronic harm (e.g. cancer, liver disease, cardiovascular disease). Thus, documents differ in the extent to which alcohol and violence is addressed.

We undertook a systematic analysis with a specific focus on the simplification practices Law suggests are central to the enactment and stabilization of realities (2011). For Law, there is no founding reality that precedes the methodological and representational strategies and conventions guiding knowledge-making and problematisation practices. The empirical task is to explore the ‘possible patterns of relations, and how it is that these get assembled in particular locations’ (2011, 157). Law suggests attending to the role of textual and other strategies in the simplification and stabilization of reality. To this end, all material was read and coded, and articulations related to alcohol, violence and gender identified. In the next stage of analysis, specific assumptions underpinning these articulations were identified and analysed as enactments of collateral realities.

In focusing on the gendering effects of these simplification practices, we attend to how policy formulations produce and stabilize specific problems, objects and subjects, and marginalize

alternative ways of thinking about alcohol, gender and violence. In the sections that follow, we discuss three collateral realities that help to both stabilize ‘alcohol-related violence’ as a common sense object of policy and obscure gendered difference:

1. Alcohol is the primary cause of violence;
2. Because alcohol is the primary cause of violence, its availability should be reduced at a population level;
3. ‘Young people’ are developmentally immature and therefore vulnerable to alcohol-related violence and other forms of harm.

We conclude by reflecting on how these collateral realities enable responses to alcohol-related harms, including violence, in which gender is obscured, while foreclosing others. In being iterated as assumptions that rationalise and legitimise policy, they turn ‘what is being done in practice into what necessarily *has* to be’ (Law, 2011, 174).

Causality

Although violence in the night-time economy (NTE) has received sustained attention in Australian media and public debates (Hart & Wilkinson, 2019; Homan, 2019), the extent to which violence (or related terms such as ‘assault’) is discussed in alcohol policy varies greatly. Here we analyse the first collateral reality that helps to stabilize ‘alcohol-related violence’ as a common sense object of policy and obscure gendered difference: the ways in which the relationship between alcohol and violence is discursively iterated in policy as causal and extracted from the complex assemblage of relations and objects that constitute violent events (Race, 2014, 2016), including gendered social relations. The simplification practices employed to enact this collateral reality include the listing and aggregation of risks from a diverse range of health and social problems, and the deployment of several framing terms, including ‘alcohol-fuelled violence’, ‘alcohol-related harm’ and ‘harmful drinking’.

These concepts rest on the ontological separation of alcohol from those who drink (Duff, 2016).

Our first example is drawn from the *ACT Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Strategy 2010-2014*. The strategy cites ‘an authoritative review of pharmacological, psychological, sociological, and epidemiological studies’ that ‘concluded that there is an indisputable causal link between alcohol consumption and violence in Australia’ (2010, 19). If we turn to this review, however, we find that it does not focus on Australia and offers a more complex view of the relationship between alcohol and ‘crime’ in general:

The evidence suggests there are multiple contributing factors to the relationship between alcohol and crime, including the effects of alcohol, the characteristics of the person, the drinking situation, and the cultural framing of both drinking and criminal behavior. (Graham & West, 2001, 439)

The ACT strategy’s explicit attention to alcohol-related violence as a stand-alone concern is relatively rare, however, as is its stark attribution of causality. As *Victoria’s Alcohol Action Plan 2008-2013: ‘Restoring the Balance’* puts it: ‘The relationship between alcohol, crime and violence is complex’ (2008, 33). The acknowledgment of complexity in some documents is undermined, however, by reintroducing causality in other ways, including use of the metaphor ‘fuel’ to describe the relationship between alcohol and violence. For example, the *Northern Territory Alcohol Harm Minimisation Action Plan 2018-2019* opens by declaring that ‘Too much of the crime and violence that we see in the Territory is *fuelled by alcohol*’ (2018, 2; emphasis added). Likewise, *Victoria’s Alcohol Action Plan 2008-2013: ‘Restoring the Balance’* describes ‘alcohol-fuelled violence’ (2008, 19) as a ‘consequence’ of ‘excessive

alcohol use’ (33). The use of the fuel metaphor privileges alcohol as *the* factor causing violence and (as we will argue below) justifies blanket restrictions on its availability.

Less direct than the term ‘alcohol-fuelled’ is the use of terms associating alcohol with violence in such a way as to render alcohol the primary object of concern. These include the framing of alcohol as a ‘*major contributor* to death, disease, crime and violence, social problems, health services and emergency services use’ (*ACT Drug Strategy Action Plan 2018-2021*, 8, emphasis added); or the suggestion that alcohol is ‘*involved in*’ assaults and domestic violence incidents (*ACT Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Strategy 2010-2014*, 19; *Victoria’s Alcohol Action Plan 2008-2013: ‘Restoring the Balance’*, 33, emphasis added) – two heavily gendered forms of crime. The Tasmanian policy seeks to ‘minimise the harms *arising from* the use of alcohol’ (*Rising Above the Influence: Tasmanian Alcohol Action Framework 2010-2015*, 7, emphasis added). Although these descriptions avoid direct attributions of causality to alcohol, causality is reintroduced through the listing of diverse individual and social problems, including violence, or the combination of acute and chronic forms of harm. The latest *National Alcohol Strategy 2019-2028* (16) uses the same technique of listing and combining when it argues that:

Community safety and amenity can be impacted [by alcohol-related harms] through contribution to experiences of violence and assault, crime (including drink driving and crashes), additional social costs and lost productivity, and reduced capacity within

community services (including emergency departments, ambulance services and police departments).

The effect of grouping such diverse problems together enacts a collective object, ‘harms from alcohol’, despite the unique complexity of each ‘harm’ listed. This practice operates to reify drinking alcohol as the pre-eminent ‘risk-factor’ for alcohol policy attention. This technique stabilizes both the independent, anterior role of alcohol, and an individual, de-gendered drinking subject, on whose body the intoxicating effects of alcohol act.

In addition, epidemiological evidence of risk from excessive consumption of alcohol units and harms is semantically aggregated to constitute a single category of ‘risky’ or ‘harmful’ drinking. This aggregate notion of risk refers to a wide range of harms, from those that relate to the individual health consequences of drinking alcohol over many years (i.e. chronic forms of harm) to those that refer to the interpersonal and social contexts in which drinking occurs and their consequences (i.e. acute forms of harm). For example: ‘People who drink regularly at high levels place themselves at increased risk of chronic ill health, injury and premature death through accidents and violence’ (*Victoria’s Alcohol Action Plan 2008-2013: ‘Restoring the Balance’*, 7). Here, in addition to the gender-neutral representation of injury, accident and violence, patterns of risk associated with specific harms are aggregated and attributed to the regularity and volume of alcohol consumption by a de-gendered drinking subject. This foregrounds alcohol as the in-common, common sense cause of harm.

The technique of aggregation finds its expression in the concept of ‘harmful use’: ‘The harmful use of alcohol is a causal factor in more than 200 disease and injury conditions and is implicated in a significant number of accidents and assaults’ (*South Australian Alcohol and*

Other Drug Strategy 2017-2021, 8). Albeit ‘use’ (i.e. drinking) foregrounds the agency of individual subjects as ‘ontologically separate from and prior to this use’ (Duff, 2016, 16) – the routine listing and aggregation of harms associated with alcohol enacts it as the logical object for intervention. Whilst eschewing the issue of causality, it is instantiated due to the multiplier effect of linking very different harms to alcohol, which is then prioritized despite the potentially complex ‘causal chains’ of the more than 200 disease and injury conditions mentioned.

The multiplier effect of linking very different harms to alcohol is also particularly apparent in discussions of ‘intoxication’, which occupies a unique position in policy. It is both a harm (i.e. an outcome) and a causal risk factor for other harmful outcomes, as in the following example: ‘Drinking to intoxication increases the likelihood of other risky behaviours that often lead to serious harms such as vandalism, offensive behaviour, violence, road crashes and crime’ (*Rising Above the Influence: Tasmanian Alcohol Action Framework 2010-2015*, 10). The act of ‘drinking to’ intoxication directs attention to the individual subject of consumption, but the framing of intoxication as a source of risk for a diverse list of harms enacts alcohol as causal. This gender-neutral representation of intoxication downplays known gendered differences in the types and level of harms experienced by men and women, and the ways in which gendered meanings of intoxication shape drinking and intoxicated behaviour (Hunt & Antin, 2019). The Tasmanian policy also engages in repetition when it argues, on the same page, that ‘drinking to intoxication is a major cause of short-term alcohol-related harm, which can result in increased injury and death, verbal abuse, violence, motor vehicle accidents, and drownings’ (*Rising Above the Influence: Tasmanian Alcohol Action Framework 2010-2015*, 10). Men are over-represented in each of these categories of harm but

are made invisible by the emphasis on intoxication and the withdrawal from view of male gender as a relevant factor in such harm events.

In discussions of violence, intoxication is also regularly framed as a risk factor irrespective of whether one is a victim or perpetrator: 'While intoxication does not always lead to offending, it has been estimated that 47 per cent of all perpetrators of assault and 43 per cent of all victims of assault were intoxicated prior to the event' (*Victoria's Alcohol Action Plan 2008-2013: 'Restoring the Balance'*, 33). A Queensland discussion paper suggests that:

Alcohol was found to be a major contributor to 'king-hit' deaths in Australia with 24 people dying in Queensland between 2000 and 2012. Alcohol intoxication can also lead to increased vulnerability to violence. (*Reducing Alcohol and Other Drug Impacts in Queensland, Discussion Paper, August 2015*, 6)

A king-hit death refers to a one-punch assault resulting in fatality. Here, the categories of 'victim' and 'perpetrator' are collapsed, with intoxication privileged as the source of risk effectively responsibilising all drinkers equally. This conceals the gendered nature of public violence in NTEs where most perpetrators and victims of physical assault are male, and victims of sexual assault, unwanted touching and harassment are women and the perpetrators men (Graham, et al., 2014; Pilgrim, et al., 2014).

In summary, while alcohol is rarely singled out as a cause of violence, it is rendered as such in other ways. These include the repetitive listing of diverse individual and social problems as the basis to the constitution of several collective objects, including 'alcohol-fuelled violence' and 'alcohol-related harm'; aggregated levels of risk; and intoxication as both a distinct harm

and a risk factor in the occurrence of other harms. References to a nominal drinking figure further abstract gender from a causal account of alcohol's role in harm events. These gendering practices obscure or naturalize men's violence, treating it as an effect of alcohol on the bodies of individual drinkers rather than as co-produced by a range of elements and forces (e.g. gender, bodies, sexuality, social class, ethnicity, geography and density in public space). Whilst addressing alcohol as one element of any assemblage may reduce violence, it does so by responsabilising all drinkers, and leaving men, and the role of specific configurations of masculine practice (masculinities), unmarked and unchallenged.

Availability

A second, closely related, collateral reality is also implicit in the documents we analysed: policy emphasizes the restriction of alcohol as the primary technique for reducing violence as well as the other harms attributed to drinking. This collateral reality is itself co-constituted through the neoliberal policy enactment of alcohol harms as social and economic problems. This includes the regular articulation of harms from alcohol in economic terms related to deregulation, such as the role of the alcohol industry in promoting consumption and the costs to government of acute harms and chronic illness (*National Alcohol Strategy, 2019-26, 16*) or to employers due to lost days of productivity (*Reducing the Alcohol and Drug Toll: Victoria's Plan 2013-2017, 10*). Here, individual drinkers and vulnerable groups are prioritized as governmental sites of social and economic risk. Relatedly, Australian policy relies almost exclusively on epidemiological research in which problems are attributed to quantifiable measures of alcohol 'units' (Jayne, Valentine, & Holloway, 2012; McLean & Moore, 2014). Volumetric approaches have included analysis of available drinking hours and closing hours for licensed premises (Kypri et al., 2011) and the density of venues in

entertainment precincts where the disinhibiting effects of alcohol are understood to be intensified (Liang & Chikritzhs, 2011).

Another example is priority two of the *National Alcohol Strategy 2019-2028* (19), ‘managing availability, price and promotion’, which squarely frames alcohol availability as the problem:

There is a large body of research, showing that in countries where substantial alcohol deregulation has occurred, increasing alcohol availability has resulted in increased risky drinking, assault rates, child maltreatment, drink-driving, car crashes and hospital admissions. (*National Alcohol Strategy 2019-2028*, 19)

Research linking alcohol to a long list of complex social problems, from countries with unique social, cultural and economic backgrounds, foregrounds alcohol availability as the source of similar problems in Australia.

Australian policy relies almost exclusively on epidemiological research implicating pricing, hours of sale and outlet density to inform policy measures designed to reduce supply, consumption and harm. Social epidemiology is underpinned by a ‘risk factor orientation’ and typically adopts a probabilistic rather than deterministic orientation to risk (Krieger, 2011, 150). This means that it traces the interaction of ‘risk factors most “proximate” to the “outcome” under investigation’ (Krieger, 2011, 153). Recommendations focus on those factors amenable to practical intervention based on recognition that knowledge of the precise mechanism or pathway is not necessary to effect change (Krieger, 1994; 2011). Yet, a reliance on such factors, and their codification in policy recommendations, does not consider their unintended effects and forecloses other ways of knowing or intervening in such

problems. This is especially the case in relation to the handling of gender, which is rarely considered as a system of relations shaping social life, including drinking. Mainstream epidemiological practice regularly treats gender (or ‘sex’) as a fixed and stable aspect of individual bodies and identity (Krieger, 2003). This can include accounts of gender as a social role or set of normative prescriptions, wherein gender is iterated as the aggregation of alcohol effects on individual ‘men’ and ‘women’ (Keane, 2017). Gender is also often excluded in primary studies and reviews assessing the effects of population-level policy interventions to reduce alcohol-related harm, due to data limitations and ‘gender-blindness’ (Fitzgerald et al., 2016, 1742). This can readily result in the naturalisation of gendered assumptions, particularly when policy enacts violence as ‘alcohol-related’.

A clear example of the handling of gender can be found in the second priority of the *Tasmanian Alcohol Action Framework 2010-2015*: ‘Community safety and amenity’. This suggests that research reporting ‘a strong link between liquor outlet density and violence’ has ‘confirmed that as the number of outlets increased so did alcohol-related harm’ (10). Neither the well-known gendered dimensions of assault nor the gender of ‘offenders’ are described. The Framework instead emphasizes harms attributed to intoxication among ‘young people’, including assaults ‘near or at on-licence type venues such as pubs, clubs and nightclubs’ (10). The Framework earlier notes that ‘females are becoming more represented as both offenders and victims of assault in public places’ (3). Thus, women’s drinking and safety are singled out, while men are in this instance invisibilized. In its focus on restricting alcohol as the basis to securing community safety and amenity, women are addressed as a specific problem for policy, while male gender and behaviour is left unproblematised. This enacts masculinity as synonymous with public space— and both are naturalized as a background feature of those problems caused by alcohol. As Moore et al. (2015, 426) observed of Australian and Swedish

drug policy: ‘those places where gender is singled out [...] look skewed towards women’s culpability’.

The gendered enactment of public space is also apparent in policy formulations addressing the situational and built-environmental factors contributing to violence. A fact sheet commissioned by the New South Wales Department of Justice and prepared by the Australian Institute of Criminology (*Strategies to reduce alcohol-related assault in entertainment precincts*, 2012) emphasizes use of awareness campaigns, safety audits and training in premise management, design and crowd control as the basis to raising ‘awareness of the risk factors for alcohol-related violence’ (2). It recommends that known ‘hot spots for violence’ (2) be used to identify the factors contributing to high rates of alcohol-related violence, including identification of high-risk premises, peak offending times, and the *characteristics* of victims and offenders. Gender is here not treated as a factor, but an attribute or characteristic of individuals. Yet, this risks unproblematically instantiating the categories ‘men’ and ‘women’ as emerging from biological sexual difference and naturalising the relation between alcohol, masculinity and violence (Campbell & Herzberg, 2017; Hunt & Antin, 2017). The fact sheet does not identify or specify the relation between alcohol, gender and intoxication, emphasising instead the contextual factors that have been demonstrated in epidemiological research to moderate the behaviour of ‘intoxicated and aggressive patrons’ (3).

Temporality is also a focus of policy recommendations centred on the availability of alcohol. The Queensland strategy recommends support for the cessation of alcohol service at 2am or 3am in specific Safe Night Precincts with a 1am lockout. This reflects the authority of Australian epidemiological research on reduced trading hours, which recommends earlier

cessation of alcohol service as the basis to reducing violence (Kypri et al., 2011). Elsewhere (Moore, Keane & Duncan, 2020) we have argued that such research brackets out gender in the stabilization of alcohol as a source of harm (see also Hart & Wilkinson, 2019).

Recommendations in favour of trading hour restrictions tend to exclude analysis of who is affected, to whom such effects are considered acceptable, and their impact on other cultural and economic activities in the NTE (Hart & Wilkinson, 2019; Homan, 2019; Hughes & Weedon-Newstead, 2018; Murphy, Wilson, & Moore, 2017; Race, 2016). For example, in relation to the epidemiological evidence demonstrating a reduction in violence following the introduction of Sydney's lock-out laws, Race (2016, 107) notes the affective changes to NTE spaces for minority groups:

It bears noting that a reduction in foot-traffic — or indeed, incidents of reported violence — in traditional centres of queer social life does not necessarily equate to safety for those most vulnerable to night-time violence and abuse on the basis of sex, gender or racial difference.

Elsewhere, alcohol harms come into focus through the prioritisation of crime prevention strategies. The individual who drinks to intoxication and behaves criminally is generally represented as errant or irresponsible but is rarely explicitly gendered. The Queensland Government's *Safe Night Out Strategy* (2014) frames intoxication as an expression of individual anti-social behaviour characterized by a lack of respect for others and a breakdown in social norms. The strategy identifies a need for education about the 'risks of binge drinking' (7), clear standards of drinking behaviour and the introduction of 'tougher penalties for intoxicated *people*' (6, emphasis added). This includes the introduction of a new offence, 'unlawful striking causing death', to be punishable by life imprisonment (7). Issues related to masculinity, drinking and violence are implied by a measure strengthening penalties for

anabolic steroids (which are used primarily by men; see Day et al., 2008; Iversen et al., 2013), but men are otherwise invisibilized and all drinkers constituted as either responsible or criminal. Despite nominally identifying a culture of binge drinking, the policy enacts the Queensland public as an aggregate of individual rational or errant social actors subject to the fixed pharmacological effect of alcohol (e.g. disinhibition, impairment).

A subsequent Queensland policy document, the *Queensland Alcohol and Other Drug Action Plan 2015-17*, recommends ongoing support for the ‘Danny Green national coward’s punch campaign’ to address ‘*alcohol-fuelled violence* and [...] bring about a cultural change by demonstrating that violence is not acceptable’ (2015, 29, emphasis added). Despite the gendered connotation of the word ‘coward’ (which in Australia has been used by commentators to exclusively shame young men engaged in alcohol-related violence), and the link to the one-punch assault campaign led by former professional boxer Danny Green, the characterisation of alcohol as fuelling violence ensures its privileged status as the primary causal factor. This is further reinforced by the focus in the 28 other harm reduction measures described, which address the justice system, education, service user program and policy development, drug and alcohol testing, antenatal assessments, and public intoxication services ‘targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ (20). They also include ‘rest and recovery services within designated Safe Night Precincts to reduce alcohol-related violence and create safer entertainment precincts’ (20). Men are not specifically named here, nor even in another recommendation addressing ‘all forms of violence perpetrated against women, of which domestic and family violence is one of the most common forms’ (19). The implicit, yet unnamed, instantiation of male conduct and culpability in these harm reduction recommendations has the effect of naturalising the relationship between men’s drinking and

violence whilst problematising alcohol effects. Men do not qualify as a ‘vulnerable’ or problematic group and are not explicitly marked out for special attention.

In addressing acute forms of harm related to alcohol (e.g. violence, injury), Australian policy recommendations focus almost exclusively on supply restrictions. Gender tends to be treated as a fixed attribute of ‘male’ and ‘female’ bodies in this research, and rarely comes into focus as a ‘factor’ that might be addressed, unless women’s drinking and safety are being discussed. These gendering practices have the effect of naturalising the relation between men, intoxication and violence, treating it as inevitable or as modifiable via regulating the supply of alcohol to the entire population. This collateral reality serves to stabilize normative gender relations and common sense assumptions about alcohol effects. Elsewhere, supply reduction initiatives emphasize restrictions on drink promotions and taxes on alcopops, while increasing concern over pre-drinking and alcohol and energy drink consumption implicate ‘young people’ as a priority group. Given their status and visibility in Australian alcohol policy, we turn to this group next.

Vulnerable young people

A third collateral reality both shaping and shoring up normative understandings of alcohol effects and of gender relations in alcohol policy is the figuration of ‘young people’ as a specific policy concern. Simon Flacks (2018) has argued that the perceived developmental immaturity and vulnerability of ‘young people’ routinely composes a collateral reality in drug law reform debates and policy that operates to stabilize ‘drugs’ as the primary focus of concern. References to young people in alcohol policy are also usually gender-neutral (Lindsay, 2012; Moore, Fraser, Törrönen, & Tinghög, 2015; Thomas & Bull, 2018).

‘Young people’ are identified as a priority population in 12 of the 18 policies analysed, in relation to the impact of alcohol on families, and health promotion education, but most especially in relation to concerns about acute harms relating to alcohol:

[...] once this age group [teenagers] begin[s] to drink alcohol they are more likely to drink to become intoxicated than any other age group [...] Such risky drinking behaviour can lead to acute alcohol-related harms and to undertaking risky or antisocial behaviour. Social pressures can also influence young people to consume alcohol in harmful ways. Additionally, due to their developing brains and bodies, young people may be more vulnerable to the physical effects of alcohol and impairment of cognitive performance. (*National Alcohol Strategy 2019-2028*, 9)

Here, ‘young people’ are reified as the subjects of alcohol use. Pressure to drink is described as a social or contextual factor that mediates harm, but alcohol is stabilized as an independent, anterior agent, with loss of inhibition and the risk of harm attributed to the intoxicating effects of alcohol in the developing body of the individual young person (Keane, 2009).

The conflation of ‘young people’ with risk is made alongside the deletion of gender in the representation of acute harm statistics. For example, a table in Victoria’s 2008-2013 plan, entitled ‘How alcohol affects Victorians every year’, includes 13 general population statistics including inpatient hospitalisations, emergency department presentations, ambulance attendances, public drunkenness, drink driving offences and alcohol-related deaths. Young people are specifically identified twice – ‘64 per cent of 18-24 year olds and 32 per cent of 14-17 year olds’ engage in binge drinking, and ‘approximately 2,000 assaults involv[e] young

people affected by alcohol' (*Victoria's Alcohol Action Plan 2008-2013: 'Restoring the Balance'*, 6) – but gender is ignored, despite the significant differences between men and women described elsewhere in the report. (For instance, although a graph illustrates a significantly higher 'estimated number of lives lost' from acute conditions due to 'risky' and 'high-risk drinking' for males than females, a subsequent discussion about assault and patterns of drinking remains gender-neutral. Instead, it emphasizes 'high alcohol hours' [11] and refers to epidemiological research demonstrating higher rates of alcohol intoxication on Friday and Saturday nights.) A discussion of risky levels of drinking among young people is similarly gender-neutral, with '18 per cent [of 18-24 year olds] undertaking risky drinking at least weekly, 44 per cent at least monthly and 64 per cent at least yearly' (9). A subsequent statistic suggests that '[n]ine per cent of both adult male and female respondents drink at long-term risky or high-risk levels, which is most prevalent among 18-24 year olds (18.9 per cent)' (9). Here, differences between men and women are being overlooked in the focus on 'young people'.

Similarly, Victoria's subsequent action plan, *Reducing the Alcohol and Drug Toll* (2013-2017), features a pyramid graph presenting 'Single Occasion Risky Drinking by Age and Sex, Victoria, 2010' (19) in a section on 'drinking culture'. The graph illustrates high rates of risky drinking among young men and women aged between 18 and 29. The rate then quickly decreases for women in older age groups but remains much higher among men. This point is noted in the subtitle of the graph ('Drinking too much alcohol is not just a problem for young people, rates at binge drinking are also high in older age groups, especially among men') but not elaborated in the recommendations, which suggest: 'working with young people to understand the causes of *early* problem drinking' (18, emphasis added). The document does not describe how 'risky drinking' translates into harm (i.e. violence or injury) or how this

might differ by gender. Rather, shared attitudes to alcohol, drinking and drunkenness are targeted in a nominal conceptualisation of ‘drinking cultures’ as the focus of policy attention.

In addition to obscuring gender, this ranking of ‘risky drinking’ means other forms of risk related to drinking environments (e.g. a high proportion of male patrons) or public transport (e.g. inadequate services leading to long waiting times [Duff & Moore, 2015]), are ranked as secondary. In the rare cases where young men are singled out, the effect can be to naturalize risk, men and alcohol. For example, Priority 4 of the Tasmanian framework addresses ‘high-risk groups and high-risk behaviour’:

The 2007 National Drug Survey Household Survey (AIHW, 2008) noted the proportion of teenagers drinking at least weekly is around 22%, and that males aged 20-29 years (17.2%) were the most likely group to consume alcohol at risky or high-risk levels for short-term harm at least weekly. (*Rising Above the Influence: Tasmanian Alcohol Action Framework 2010-2015*, 11)

The fleeting attention to gender in the above quotation is quickly displaced by a focus on ‘young people’ in the subsequent sentences:

alcohol-related car crashes in Tasmania are more prevalent among young people. In 2007, alcohol was implicated in 41 serious casualties, of which 31.1% involved drivers aged 17-29 years. Of those, the majority (51%) involved young people aged

under 21. (*Rising Above the Influence: Tasmanian Alcohol Action Framework 2010-2015*, 11)

Here, ‘men’ are invisibilized in favour of a focus on ‘young people’. By contrast, ‘women’ may be juxtaposed with the category ‘young people’: ‘While mean consumption has decreased, sub-groups (e.g. young people, women) within the population drink more now than in previous generations and at riskier levels’ (*ACT Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Strategy 2010-2014*, 23).

The gender-neutral framing of ‘risky or antisocial behaviour’, which is understood to follow ‘risky drinking’, is accompanied by an anxiety about the role of popular cultural narratives about drunkenness as a rite of passage. This is expressed in the aforementioned concept, ‘drinking culture’, which seems most often to refer to ‘peer pressure’ (see Savic et al., 2014, for a discussion of cultural narratives and youth drinking). In the context of evidence suggesting declining alcohol consumption among young people from the mid-2000s onwards (Pennay et al., 2018; Livingston, 2014), the special status of youth in policy appears to be increasingly expressed in relation to popular notions of ‘resilience’ and ‘potential’. For instance, the 2013-2017 Victorian plan recommends ‘fostering resilience and empowering children and young people to be socially confident’ as the basis to improving ‘learning and behaviour, inclusion, mental health and greater social cohesion and social capital’ (*Reducing the Alcohol and Drug Toll: Victoria’s Plan 2013-2017*, 20). The *ACT Strategy 2010-14* identifies young people as in need of support to ‘reach their full potential’ (11). This suggests a further shift of emphasis in harm minimisation rationalities from the prevention of harms through education to the cultivation of ideal states wholly distinct from alcohol use (Lancaster & Ritter, 2014). The 2015-17 Queensland plan identifies the need for an education

campaign targeting young people about ‘safe drinking practices’ and ‘alcohol-fuelled violence’ (3), so that they might:

develop greater understanding of the impact and consequences of alcohol and [other] drug use; build their capacity to make responsible, safe and informed decisions; and develop their ability to effectively manage challenging and unsafe situations.

(Queensland Alcohol and Other Drugs Action Plan, 2015-17, 13)

The recommendation that young people develop such skills and capacities is congruent with neoliberal notions of individual responsibility and adulthood (Phoenix & Kelly, 2013; Ekendahl, Karlsson, & Månsson, 2018). This approach to education in relation to substance use imagines agency as a function of valorized individual attributes and capacities. Alcohol effects are treated as moderated by individual reason and self-control, qualities it is possible to learn and exercise in a linear model of development, irrespective of the social forces shaping alcohol events.

The collateral reality that surfaces from this analysis thus frames ‘young people’ as vulnerable due to the physical susceptibility of their youthful bodies and brains. It also reifies individual agency as the modifiable factor determining harm, which responsabilizes all individual young people equally, whilst stabilizing alcohol as a discrete and independent substance with stable effects. A further effect of this focus on maturity and rationality is the regular obscuring of gendered patterns of consumption, risk and harm, except in those cases where young women are singled out for special attention.

Conclusion

In this article, we have drawn on Bacchi's (2017) work on 'gendering practices' in policy, and on Law's account of 'collateral realities', to analyse the ways in which alcohol becomes the common sense source of violence in Australian alcohol policy. To this end, we have identified three collateral realities that help to stabilize 'alcohol-related violence' as a taken-for-granted object of policy while generally obscuring gender and gendered social relations. In the first, several textual practices enact alcohol as the primary cause of violence. This informs a second collateral reality, namely that the availability of alcohol should be reduced at a population level to prevent violence. And thirdly, the iteration of the developmental immaturity and vulnerability of 'young people' to alcohol-related violence and other forms of harm enacts alcohol and individual self-control as natural targets of intervention, while obscuring gender difference.

In addition to shoring up normative understandings of alcohol effects, these collateral realities stabilize normative gender relations in alcohol policy, turning, in Law's words, 'what is being done in practice into what necessarily *has* to be' (Law, 2011, 174). Importantly, this rarely involves the explicit identification of gender categories such as men and women, masculinity and femininity. Rather, gendered norms and assumptions about alcohol use and violence are reproduced through a process that appears on the surface to omit or ignore gender (Bacchi, 2017; Moore, Keane & Duncan, 2020).

Specific attention to violence varies across the policies reviewed, and it is most often described as one of several harms attributed to alcohol. Although attributions of direct causation between alcohol and violence are generally avoided, the repetitive aggregation of risks across diverse harms serves to reintroduce causality, stabilizing a nominal (de-gendered)

risky drinking subject and the reality of alcohol effects. This collateral reality is apparent in the emphasis on harmful and risky drinking, and on intoxication. These terms function as scientific abstractions that foreground and attribute risk to the effects of alcohol ‘extracted from the multiple, heterogeneous relations and entities’ that constitute harmful events and which ‘confer their specificity’ (Race, 2014, 319).

In attending to the problem of availability, attention turns to a range of temporal and environmental factors that affect the expression of harms attributed to alcohol, including violence. Drawing on epidemiological research recommending trading hour restrictions and attention to the density of venues as the basis to reducing violence, policy stabilizes alcohol as the source of harm by shifting attention from individual patterns of harmful drinking to the interaction of population-level factors in levels of consumption. These factors are enacted as stable objects in interaction, whilst other forces and elements bracketed out in epidemiological practice are also, consequently, obscured in policy recommendations that rely on this narrow evidence base. Interventions target all citizens equally. In doing so, they downplay the role of men and masculinity specifically and mark women out as vulnerable in accounts of public space as the gender-neutral backdrop to alcohol-related violence.

The constitution of ‘young people’ as a priority group is a third collateral reality through which alcohol is stabilized as an independent, anterior substance with unchanging properties. The displacement of gender afforded by the concern over young people’s vulnerability to alcohol is accompanied by an increasing focus on their resilience. A focus on the individual agency and sensible decision-making of young people enacts an independent, mature ideal citizen subject, displacing gender as a critical tool for apprehending the dynamics of NTE and other public violence.

In relation to acute harms associated with alcohol, including injury and assault, men are of course central to public health and law and order campaigns, such as the coward punch initiative discussed above. However, they are made invisible as gendered subjects by the ways in which these campaigns appeal to men as individualised subjects. Moreover, the prevailing policy response to violence addresses the wide social availability and consumption of alcohol, further eschewing a critical engagement with the role of masculinities in violence. It may be difficult for policy makers to legitimize recommendations that apply to only half of the population (i.e. men), although such difficulties rarely impede policy recommendations addressing women's 'vulnerability' (Keane, 2013; Thomas & Bull, 2018). Feminist and critical masculinity studies scholars have identified the broader social consequences of these gendering practices, including the equation of gender with women and the diversion of feminist theorising on gender and its application to the margins or to parallel policy spheres (Bacchi 2017; Carver, 2002; Keane, 2013). Such practices also operate to make invisible the competitive and hierarchical character of masculinities, treating violence as an inevitable effect of alcohol on the bodies and brains of young men. The likelihood of young men committing violence when intoxicated thus composes a further collateral reality 'made along the way' (Law, 2011, 156). But the invisibility of masculinity as gender makes any requirement for change on the part of men 'unthinkable' (Carver, 2002, 18). Additionally, in naturalising gender as sex, alcohol policy then reinforces conventional ideas about what a man is, iterating certain qualities and characteristics as synonymous with men. As in the coward punch example, a failure to specify the role of men in violence not only brackets masculinity from critical attention but reinforces an account of the ideal male subject as rational and in-control. In concert with the making of women's 'vulnerability', the iteration of normative assumptions about the effects of intoxication on young men's rational decision-

making capacities lends support to blanket alcohol restriction policies in which women's freedoms and pleasures are treated as dispensable. In constructing the problem as one of alcohol effects, not only are specific configurations of social practice that clearly contribute to violence ignored, but policy is also implicated in enacting the very masculinities it ought to unsettle when problematising violence. Attending to such political effects should be prioritized if more equitable responses to alcohol and violence are to be developed.

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