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### **Displacements of gender: Research on alcohol, violence and the night-time economy**

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### **Abstract**

‘Alcohol-related violence’, especially among young people participating in the night-time economy (NTE), has been the subject of intense public and policy debate in Australia.

Previous sociological work has highlighted the relationship between men, masculinities and violence, but this relationship has received little attention in the research that tends to garner policy attention. In this article, we focus on the treatment of gender in Australian quantitative research on alcohol and violence in the NTE. We identify four ‘gendering practices’ through which such research genders alcohol and violence: de-gendering alcohol and violence

through obscuring gender differences; displacing men and masculinities via a focus on environmental, geographical and temporal factors; rendering gender invisible via methodological considerations; and addressing gender in limited ways. We argue that these research practices and the policy recommendations that flow from them reproduce normative understandings of alcohol effects and lend support to gendered forms of power.

## **Keywords**

Gender, alcohol, violence, quantitative research, night-time economy, Australia

## **Introduction**

‘Alcohol-related violence’, especially among young people participating in the night-time economy (NTE), has been the subject of intense public and policy debate in Australia. Yet the content of this debate has been informed by a surprisingly narrow range of research resources (Moore et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2020). Although an extensive sociological literature highlights the relationship between masculinities, alcohol and violence (e.g., Carrington et al., 2010; Lindsay, 2012; MacLean et al., 2020; Tomsen, 1997), and statistical sources underscore male involvement in violence (e.g., Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016), Australian quantitative research on alcohol and violence in the NTE has paid little attention to the role of male gender. As feminist researchers have argued, mainstream criminology has also tended to ignore the gendered aspects of violence, containing gender within a segregated, specialist field (Walby et al., 2014; see also Carrabine et al., 2004; Tomsen, 2008). In the wake of the #MeToo movement and greater official attention to institutional abuse by men, the harms of aggressive masculinity are being more clearly identified, investigated and challenged across a range of disciplines and fields. A more robust and consistent engagement with men and masculinities in research on alcohol and violence could expand understandings

of the structural issues and social practices that coalesce to produce gendered patterns of harm, as well as producing an alternative set of policy priorities.

In this article, we analyse the treatment of gender in recent Australian quantitative research on alcohol, violence and young people in the NTE – a youth-dominated leisure zone in urban centres offering the promise of alcohol and other drug consumption, pleasure, excitement and ‘play’ (Jayne and Valentine, 2016; Jayne et al., 2010; Murphy et. al., 2017; Shaw, 2010). In Australia, public debates and media representations of the NTE have been concerned with what have been termed ‘random’ acts of violence that are ‘fuelled’ by alcohol (Flynn et al., 2016: 183; Homan, 2017), without consideration of the extent to which these acts are actually random, the precise role of alcohol or the highly gendered character of violence. The problem has been framed by ‘a problematic geographical imaginary of night-time city centre streets awash with disorderly young binge-drinkers’ (Waite et al., 2011: 255-256). This discourse has led to the adoption of a limited combination of ‘classical sentencing recalibrations, neoclassical situation responses and public campaigns’ (Flynn et al., 2016: 183), including ‘lockouts’ (i.e., laws preventing patrons from entering, or re-entering, licensed premises after a specific time), earlier closing times and other measures designed to reduce violence by restricting alcohol availability in the NTE.<sup>1</sup>

We focus on NTE research in our analysis because of its prominence in Australian policy debates, such as those relating to lockout laws (e.g., Callinan, 2016; Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee, 2016). In doing so, we wish to draw attention to the political and practical consequences of degendered understandings of intoxication and its association with violence. In a context where calls for ‘evidence-based’ policy are common, and where large-scale quantitative studies are valorised as scientifically objective, robust and best suited

to informing alcohol policy, scrutinising the assumptions, methods, findings and policy recommendations of such research is crucial.

## **Approach**

Recent work on knowledge-making practices (e.g., Barad, 2007; Latour, 2004; Law, 2004; Mol, 2002) views them as ‘productive, performative and continually contested’ (Shore and Wright, 2011: 1). In particular, we draw on Carol Bacchi’s poststructuralist approach to policy problematisations, which has been taken up in recent drug research (e.g., Fraser and Moore, 2011; Lancaster and Ritter, 2014; Manton and Moore, 2016; Pienaar et al., 2018). For Bacchi, policy ‘objects’, ‘categories’ and ‘subjects’ are not self-evident but are actively made in practice, with the analytical aim being to ‘return attention to the politics involved in the coming to be of “things”’ (Bacchi, 2017: 36). Bacchi’s feminist approach to knowledge-making practices emphasises the production of unequal gender relations. She uses the term ‘gendering practices’ to refer to the ‘active, ongoing, and always incomplete processes’ that produce ‘women’ and ‘men’ as naturalised categories in policy discourses and practices (2017: 20). Furthermore, because gendering is a ‘practice of subordination, constituting “women” and “men” in a relation of inequality’ (Bacchi, 2017: 21), we must scrutinise how knowledge-making practices contribute to the (re)production of unequal gender categories and relations. Her point is that policies create gendered subject positions, as well as problems and objects that are also gendered. Gendering practices are highly variable: ‘women’ and ‘men’ are at times constituted in terms of differences, while at other times gender differences are obscured via the production of a generic norm. These ideas help us to analyse how particular realities of alcohol and of gender are iterated in research on alcohol and violence in the NTE. Rather than given in sex, gender may be understood as an effect of the assembling of objects, categories and subjects in knowledge-making practices. Indeed, alcohol, gender

and violence may each be understood as objects in ‘ongoing formation’ (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016: 86).

In taking this approach, we acknowledge that two separate but related issues emerge for our analysis. Although our focus is the displacement of masculinities in NTE research on alcohol and violence, our intention is not to authorise inattention to the agency of men. The disembodied problem of violent masculinity is not the same as the material problem of violent men, but they are of course related (for discussions of this issue, see Beasley, 2015; McCarry, 2007). It could be that a focus on gendered performance and masculinities inadvertently exacerbates the invisibility of men’s culpability. This is not our intention. We would argue there is a need to acknowledge the gap between the two in order to avoid collapsing them. To conflate men and masculinities would be to evacuate the politically crucial space in which men (and others) can actively renegotiate the masculinities with which they are associated.

## **Method**

Several strategies were used to generate a set of Australian quantitative studies on alcohol and violence in the NTE for analysis. First, the Web of Science, ScienceDirect and Scopus databases were searched for relevant peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2008-2018. Search criteria included combinations of keywords: ‘alcohol-related’, ‘violence’, ‘assault’, ‘intoxication’, ‘gender’, ‘masculinity’, ‘young people’ and ‘night-time economy’. Second, the reference lists of identified texts were searched to locate other relevant peer-reviewed publications that addressed these topics. Articles were excluded if they did not use quantitative methods or did not focus primarily on alcohol and violence in the NTE. We also excluded studies of ‘alcohol-related presentations’ to emergency departments, which we have

analysed elsewhere (Moore et al., 2020), studies where violence was not the main focus, and studies of alcohol and violence in other settings or populations.<sup>2</sup>

These search strategies produced a set of 37 research texts. These texts vary in study site, topic and method, and cover the main Australian research institutions and teams involved in this type of work. Not all of the texts focus on violence as an outcome variable, with some establishing links between intoxication and violence on the basis of existing literature. Most of the analysed texts follow the conventional introduction-method-results-discussion format adopted in quantitative research, in which study limitations and recommendations for further research and policy appear in the discussion section. Because much of the research we analyse was conducted by large teams, located in multiple institutions and researching multiple sites, there is considerable overlap in the texts' author lists.

In analysing this research, we ask: How does it enact the relationship between alcohol, violence and gender? How does it constitute alcohol effects? What is the relationship between the data it reports and the policy recommendations it makes? In applying the insights of Bacchi's work on 'gendering practices', our aim is show how normative understandings of gender and of alcohol effects are reproduced in quantitative research on violence, with consequences for the realities constituted by and the policy recommendations adopted in such research. We should make clear that we are not claiming that this research intends to have these effects. Rather, its attention to and treatment of gender reflect the specific disciplinary conventions, practices and techniques that underpin its aims to reduce violence associated with alcohol.

In the iterative-inductive analysis that follows, we identify four ‘gendering practices’ in Australian quantitative research on alcohol and violence in the NTE: (1) de-gendering alcohol and violence; (2) displacing men and masculinities; (3) rendering gender invisible; and (4) addressing gender. Because many of the articles feature more than one gendering practice, we trace examples of the gendering practices in evidence to greater or lesser extents across the sample.

### **De-gendering alcohol and violence**

The first gendering practice we identify involves the de-gendering of alcohol and violence. As Bacchi (2017) notes, gendering sometimes involves the obscuring of gender differences via the production of a generic norm. Here, violence is treated as a gender-neutral phenomenon and alcohol consumption is foregrounded in the method, results and discussion sections. In the texts we analysed, de-gendering takes two main forms: an emphasis on intoxication and the progressive disappearance of gender.

An emphasis on intoxication is particularly apparent in those research studies employing surveys, breath testing and observation in order to assess the extent and levels of intoxication among patrons of licensed venues. Although careful to avoid explicitly attributing direct causality, these studies focus on the relationship between intoxication and alcohol-related harm, including violence. Although they may include ‘male’ and ‘female’ demographic data in descriptive statistics, the primary focus is blood alcohol concentration levels and other indicators of intoxication (e.g., Droste et al., 2018; Mazerolle et al., 2013; Miller et al., 2014), alcohol and energy drink use (e.g., Devilly et al., 2017; Droste et al., 2016), ‘pre-drinking’ (e.g., Devilly et al., 2017) and consumption plans (Curtis et al., 2017) as the basis for assessing population-level risks of harm.

An example of de-gendering texts that emphasise intoxication is an article reporting the findings of a large survey of licensed-venue patrons conducted in two Australian cities with different regulatory approaches to alcohol (Miller et al., 2016). The analysis focuses on motivations for pre-drinking, associations between these motivations and intoxication, and ‘involvement in violence in the last 12 months’ (2016: 181). ‘Involvement’ in violence remains undefined (i.e., whether as a perpetrator or victim) and, in the measures section, it becomes ‘witnessed/involved in aggressive or violent incident’ (2016: 179), although the two aspects are reported separately in a table (2016: 180). Gender is not mentioned in the article’s introduction nor in the extensive list of domains described in the list of survey measures, although ‘male sex’ is recorded as a demographic variable in the results section. Despite reporting that males are 2.39 times more likely to be involved in violence (Table 3, 2016: 183), and ‘male sex’ is associated with higher odds of involvement in violence, the discussion text refers only to ‘patrons’ and ‘individuals’, thus naturalising the relationship between intoxication, men and violence. On the basis that participants identified price as a ‘key motivator for pre-drinking’, the policy recommendations suggest ‘addressing the price disparity between packaged liquor and licensed venue purchases’ in order to reduce pre-drinking (2016: 185). In this text, violence is de-gendered through the emphasis on intoxication. Alcohol is stabilised as a discrete entity, the consumption of which may be moderated (through changes to price policy and trading hours) to reduce assaults and other forms of harm.

The second main form of de-gendering in the research texts we analysed involves the progressive disappearance of gender. Here, the gendered dimensions of violence are highly visible in the first article in a series but disappear in later texts reporting the results of



subsequent research on the same topic. An example of such a series involves research on the impact of earlier closing times for licensed venues on rates of assault.<sup>3</sup> One of the earliest analyses of the impact of changes to closing times in Newcastle (Kypri et al., 2011) compares the incidence of assaults before and after the imposition of early closing times in 2008. The article presents a table comparing the gender and age distributions of ‘persons of interest’ (i.e., ‘possible perpetrators’) and ‘victims’ in non-domestic assault cases in Newcastle with nearby Hamilton, a control site (2011: 307). The comparison shows the substantial over-representation of men as both persons of interest (the male to female ratio ranges from 4:1 to 4.88:1) and victims (the male to female ratio ranges from 3.17:1 to 4.88:1) at both time points and in both sites. This is clearly recognised in the text describing these results: ‘perpetrators and victims of assault are overwhelmingly young men’ (2011: 306). However, the highly gendered disparity in assaults is not mentioned again and the article’s findings – that earlier closing times lead to reduced assaults – are deployed to support blanket trading restrictions. In a five-year follow-up to the initial evaluation of the Newcastle experiment (Kypri et al., 2014), the acknowledgement of the ‘overwhelming’ representation of young men in assault statistics found in the 2011 text disappears. Likewise, a subsequent review of later data on the Newcastle intervention similarly overlooks young men in arguing for the ‘cessation of alcohol consumption’ as ‘the key to achieving reduced assault risk in the [NTE]’ (Kypri et al., 2016: E2).

This series of texts focuses on the effects of restricting access to alcohol on reducing violence. The tendency to recognise (at least initially) but then bracket out male gender as a key variable appears to rest on the status of alcohol as the primary (perhaps the sole) source of harm within dominant public health frameworks. In this view, if earlier closing times

reduce ‘alcohol-fuelled violence’, the benefits accrue to any individual at risk of violence, irrespective of gender.

### **Displacing men and masculinities**

The second gendering practice we identify in the research texts involves the displacement of men’s disproportionate involvement in violence involving alcohol. This practice involves an initial identification of men’s role, which is then displaced by a focus on those environmental, geographical and temporal factors considered amenable to modification to reduce intoxication and harm. While this broadening of the focus beyond alcohol is both productive and consistent with sociological research, it remains curious that a key ‘factor’ such as masculinity is displaced.

Criminological studies of alcohol and violence tend to emphasise the identification of environmental factors that compel or precipitate illegal behaviour (e.g., Townsley and Grimshaw, 2013). In these studies, alcohol intoxication is less straightforwardly the cause of violence, instead being enacted as an accelerant mediated by a wide array of interacting environmental and social variables. For example, Palk et al. (2010) evaluate the impact of a lockdown policy, introduced in 2004 in the Gold Coast area, on alcohol-related offences in and around licensed venues. The article analyses data collected via a modified police activity log, which was used by all first response operational police officers to record details of their attendance at incidents in and near licensed premises. Young men are identified in the article’s literature review as the main source of alcohol-related violence due to ‘excessive drinking’ (Palk et al., 2010: 5): ‘violence often involves males under 25 years of age, and appears to be triggered by a number of factors including conflict with staff, violating bar rules, offensive behaviour, and conflict over interpersonal relationships’ (2010: 6). Although

young men's involvement in violence is clearly identified in this section, the impact of the lockdown on male violence is not considered in the discussion (even though the police activity log recorded the age and gender of those involved in the incidents attended). Instead, the article reports that 'alcohol-related disturbances were reduced by 6.2%' and 'street disturbances by 12.3%', with the largest reduction being in 'sexual offences requiring police attendance' (33.7%) (2010: 10) – the category in which males are likely to be the main offenders. The article concludes by recommending blanket trading restrictions to reduce 'alcohol-related disorder and violence associated with licensed premises' (2010: 12).

A follow-up analysis (Palk, et al., 2012), which again used police activity logs supplemented with stakeholder interviews (with police, security staff and politicians), extended the focus to include the impact of a lockdown policy introduced in Brisbane in 2005. Young men are again identified as 'most likely' to engage in 'occasional excessive drinking as well as acts of violence and public disorder' (2012: 466). However, the initial identification of young men as a key group leads into a discussion of place-based and situational theories of crime: 'crime and disorder can be reduced by manipulating key environmental factors that are viewed as providing opportunities and inducements to engage in socially deviant behaviour' (2012: 467). A consideration of gender is absent from the reporting of the quantitative and qualitative results and the discussion section, and the article closes by recommending a 'combination of multimodal environmental regulatory controls' (2012: 486) to address alcohol-related violence. Here, as in the 2010 article, the issue of men identified earlier in the article is displaced by a focus on environmental factors – gender thereby becomes an enduring, natural feature of individual patrons. It could be that addressing men and masculinity is regarded as too politically or strategically difficult, but the proposed solution is to make wholesale changes to the environment which impact all.

Other studies focus on geographical density. Liang and Chikritzhs (2011, see also Livingston, 2011) analyse the association between the density of on- and off-site licensed outlets, alcohol sales and assaults. The article's methods section notes the gendered percentages of reported assault for residential locations and on-site licensed outlets in the available police data: 89% male perpetration in residential locations and 81% male perpetration in licensed premises. It also notes that the 'proportion of young men in [a municipality] was a substantial predictor for total assaults and those occurring at "other places" [e.g., in the street]' (2011: 530). While the acute gendering of violence is identified, the article argues that, in relation to on-site premises, the concentration of bars in a precinct, or 'amenity rather than [alcohol] availability' (2011: 532), is a better predictor of assault. Whereas 'domestic violence' (implying male violence against women) is available to characterise the violence occurring in residential locations [2011: 531]), no such construct is available for naming the pattern of observable public violence. Hence, the gendered character of public violence largely disappears. The density of venues is said to act as a 'conduit' for violence because the purchase of relatively inexpensive alcohol from off-site outlets increases the 'violence occurring at on-site outlets by: (i) increasing the prevalence of alcohol-impaired people arriving at on-site venues; (ii) increas[es] the level of intoxication among drinkers; or (iii) both' (2011: 532). The article further argues that 'situational characteristics (e.g., crowding)' and the 'movement of patrons in the [NTE]' (2011: 533), rather than a focus on alcohol availability at on-site premises, might form the basis for more effective approaches to reducing violence. However, the conclusion implicates the economic availability of alcohol at off-premises outlets in violence in residential and NTE settings, thus displacing questions about men and masculinities onto alcohol units and 'negative amenity effects' (2011: 534).

Our next example displaces gender via a combined focus on both density and drinking environments (Burgess and Moffat, 2011). The article analyses the contribution of the geographical density of licensed premises to alcohol-related violence in central Sydney. Using NSW police assault data, it reports that virtually all assaults occurred within 200 metres of a liquor outlet and were more densely clustered near licensed premises. In a study of geographical density, it is perhaps unsurprising that there should be no reference to gender in the analysis. But the article goes on to identify a range of other ‘factors’, in addition to density, that influence the incidence of assault: ‘the quantity of alcohol sold, the level of adherence to responsible service guidelines, the type of license, the trading hours, patron numbers, patron demographics, type of beverage consumed, environmental characteristics of the drinking setting and so forth’ (2011: 12). The relative ranking of de-gendered ‘patron demographics’ in the list suggests that it is considered less significant than factors relating to alcohol consumption and availability. Its inclusion in this lengthy list also invites readers to conclude that the complexity of violence is such that there is little that does not affect it and thus creates the space for an appealingly straightforward solution: reducing alcohol availability.

In addition to environmental factors and geographical density, alcohol and violence have also been explored in relation to temporality. As we have seen, temporal restrictions on licensed premises – that is, reduced trading hours – are among the most frequently endorsed solutions to alcohol-related violence. Coomber et al. (2016) describe a study of the correlates of intoxication in licensed venues using observational data from the main late-night entertainment districts of five Australian cities. All observations are based on assessment by individual researchers trained to recognise the signs of intoxication from alcohol and other drugs. The article does not canvass the relationship between men, alcohol and violence in its

introduction, instead citing research on the contribution of intoxication, alcohol outlet density, time of night and venue characteristics (e.g., crowding, staff practices, drink promotions) to the incidence of violence. Despite this, the ‘estimated percentage of male patrons’ was one of seven ‘predictors of patron intoxication’ (2016: 8) examined. The article identifies four key findings. First, time of night is the strongest predictor of both signs of intoxication and high levels of intoxication, and therefore restrictions on opening hours for licensed venues are necessary. Second, it argues that increased venue crowding significantly predicts increases in signs of intoxication and in high levels of intoxication, and argues for reduced venue capacity. Third, it notes the ‘novel’ (2016: 12) exploration of demographic factors that allowed the authors to identify a 5% increase in the odds of high levels of intoxication per venue for each percentage increase in male patronage. Citing Australian Bureau of Statistics data, it also argues that ‘high levels of male intoxication is [sic] a strong predictor of violence and harms’ (2016: 12). Fourth, the article identifies a significant positive association between the percentage of patrons aged under 25 years and signs of intoxication. Putting these findings together, we might say that large groups of young men, drinking heavily for many hours in crowded venues, are more likely to be involved in violence. Contrary to its own findings, however, male gender is absent from the article’s conclusion:

Time of night and proportion of younger patrons are strong contributors to patron intoxication. The findings [...] support the use of interventions with a substantial evidence base, such as restricted trading hours. (2016: 13)

Enacting intoxication as the primary source of harm, the recommendation for restricted trading hours rests on the displacement of male gender by time and age.

A subsequent article by the same research team (Coomber et al., 2017) analyses how different licensed environments change over the course of a night, including in relation to crowding and patron flow. Like the earlier study, the article notes that ‘high levels of male patron intoxication within venues predict violence and harms’ (2017: 1185). In the discussion section, the article notes that ‘violent offences within and around pubs may increase from 11 pm and later due to pubs remaining relatively crowded [...], [and] having an increased percentage of intoxicated [...] and male patrons’ (2017: 1192). However, the implications section of the article highlights the ‘substantial proportion of *people* in licensed venues being intoxicated, particularly after 1am’ (2017: 1193, emphasis added). Subsequent recommendations include stringent ‘responsible service of alcohol’ regulation and trading hour restrictions, which have been ‘shown to reduce intoxication levels [...], assaults [...], and [emergency department] attendances [...]’ (2017: 1193). Given the ample acknowledgment of men’s disproportionate involvement in intoxication and violence throughout the article, the exclusion of consideration of this issue from the recommendations seems particularly striking.

### **Rendering gender invisible**

The third gendering practice in quantitative research on alcohol and violence in the NTE is the rendering of gender invisible. This occurs as a result of methodological decisions or the limitations of available data. The first tendency is evident in an article examining the impact of legislation limiting alcohol service (2am and 3am ‘last drinks’), and a ban on ‘rapid intoxication drinks’ after midnight, on nightlife attendance, alcohol use and intoxication (Coomber et al., 2018: 1185). The article does this by drawing on patron surveys conducted one month before and after the legislative changes were introduced. Although the article does not investigate the effects of the changes on violence, it opens by arguing that previous

research has shown that such changes reduce ‘alcohol-related assaults and unintentional injury’ (2018: 1). Although gender was recorded as a demographic variable, data on pre-drinking and blood alcohol concentration are not reported by gender. Because the pre- and post-intervention participant samples are described as similar in their gender composition (2018: 4), gender disappears from the analysis. Given the nature of the research design, the primary focus by necessity becomes assessing population-level differences in drinking and intoxication before and after the introduction of the legislation.

De Andrade et al. (2016) provide an example of the second tendency: gender being absent because of data limitations. Like the studies by Palk et al. analysed above, the article assesses the effectiveness of the Gold Coast lockdown policy introduced in 2004, focusing in particular on Surfers Paradise and using police and ambulance data. The article does not consider the gendered nature of NTE violence in its introduction, and the data reported in the article – ‘crime incidents [...] coded as violent’ and ambulance attendances coded into ‘weekday and weekend subsets for head and neck injuries, assaults and severe intoxication or overdose’ (2016: 566) – make no reference to gender (or a range of other relevant variables such as age). On the basis of a review of other evaluations of lockdown laws, the article canvasses a wide range of problems introduced by lockdowns – inadequate public transport, insufficient club entrance signage, inadequate communication from door staff and the need for increased police presence at closing time – all of which ‘need to be addressed’ (2016: 571). Concluding that the lockdown had no impact on violence, the article recommends reforms to trading hours as a more effective approach. While researchers can analyse only the data made available to them (in this case, by police and ambulance services), overlooking the gendered limitations of these data reinstates alcohol’s primary role in violence and naturalises male violence.



## Addressing gender

Two of the selected research texts address gender: however, the first does this in a limited way with respect to policy and the second treats gender as a fixed attribute of individuals. The first article (Zinkiewicz et al., 2016: 199) argues that gender and socioeconomic status (SES) are ‘contributing risk factors in ARA [alcohol-related aggression] in patrons at licensed venues’. It draws on patron intercept surveys, including self-reports of intoxication and ‘involvement in a fight’ (2016: 197) in the previous 12 months, and reports that men are 2.56 times more likely to report ‘experiencing ARA compared to women (18.4 vs 7.2%)’ (2016: 198). Furthermore, ‘men in the most disadvantaged quartile’ make up 35.9% of those ‘involved in ARA’, despite comprising only ‘25% of the sample of total men’ (2016: 198). In this article, it remains unclear what is meant by ‘involvement in’ or ‘experience of’ ARA. Is this limited to being a perpetrator or victim, or does it include being a bystander to violence? Certainly, the article’s discussion of its limitations leaves open the latter possibility: ‘the survey only measured observed and self-reported incidences of direct physical violence’ (2016: 199). If the former, is it analytically sustainable to collapse the experiences of perpetrators and victims, and then to treat them as equally ‘alcohol-related’? If it includes bystanders, in what sense should observing a fight be understood as ‘alcohol-related’? When we reach the article’s conclusion, the highly gendered nature of the data seems insufficiently reflected in its policy recommendations. Although the article proposes strategies to reduce violence that are ‘both gender and SES specific’ (2016: 199), three of the four suggestions outline availability measures that would affect all patrons, with only one potentially capable of addressing men and masculinity specifically, and even then only in the most general terms: ‘promoting alcohol and violence prevention through education systems’ (2016: 199). Once again, we see an underlying tendency to emphasise population-level strategies that affect all patrons rather than a willingness to address male violence.

The second article (Hyder et al., 2018) treats gender as a fixed individual attribute rather than a relational dynamic. It identifies and describes correlations between verbal and physical aggression, key demographic variables (gender, age and occupation), pre-loading, levels of alcohol consumption, and use of energy drinks and other drugs in a large Australian nightlife sample. Statistics on men's greater perpetration of physical and sexual violence are presented in the opening paragraph of the article's introduction. The study reports that men are more likely to be 'involved' in verbal and physical aggression (whether as perpetrator or victim is not specified), which 'reflects the reality that males are affected by a range of developmental, biological, psychological, social and societal influences, which predispose them to experience higher levels of violence throughout their lifetime' (Hyder et al., 2018: 10). This construction of men's predisposition to violence enacts it as gendered, but also treats it primarily as an individual attribute. Hyder et al.'s formulation foregrounds gender but inadvertently provides little analytical purchase on which influences are most relevant to violence (see also Duff, 2013: 169), as well as excluding any consideration of gender as a hierarchical system of social relations. However, in contrast to this analytical imprecision, and the identification of a wide range of factors, the article narrows its focus to argue that intoxication is significantly associated with physical aggression and concludes by recommending 'policy action on alcohol supply and demand' (Hyder et al., 2018: 11). This recommendation is preceded by a ranking of correlates of aggression. Although occupation, gender and age are discussed first, only energy drink consumption and illicit drug use are described as 'major modifiable correlates' (2018: 11). Because gender is conceptualised as an individual attribute, it is understood to precede and condition the consumption of alcohol rather than being meaningfully co-constituted in the gendered practices of socialisation in the NTE (on this see Waitt et al., 2011: 256). Gender's status as a fixed attribute precludes it from consideration in

the article's policy recommendations, which emphasise the significant association between intoxication and physical aggression, and identify 'policy action on alcohol supply and demand as a key response to [NTE] aggression' (Hyder et al., 2018: 11).

## **Conclusion**

In this article, we have analysed the gendering practices (Bacchi, 2017) evident in Australian quantitative research on alcohol and violence in the NTE. We have argued that these practices are complex and varied, irreducible to a simple overlooking of gender. The examples in the first set of research practices treat violence as a gender-neutral phenomenon: alcohol consumption, particularly intoxication, is foregrounded or gender progressively disappears in successive texts published on the same topic. In the second set of research practices, men's disproportionate involvement in violence involving alcohol is acknowledged but then displaced by a focus on those environmental, geographical and temporal factors considered amenable to modification. These first two gendering practices are by far the most common in the analysed quantitative research texts when compared with the final two practices. In the third set of research practices, gender is effectively rendered invisible by a methodological decision or because of the (un-noteworthy) limitations of available data. The final set of research practices address gender, but this is either done only in a limited way with respect to policy or by treating gender as a fixed (and therefore unmodifiable) attribute of individual NTE patrons. Although our focus here has been original research, it is worth noting that some of the practices we identify are replicated in systematic reviews of research on alcohol and violence in the NTE (e.g., Nepal et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2018; Wilkinson et al., 2016). The gendering practices evident in earlier research are thus authorised and reproduced through citation in later research.

Like all forms of scientific knowledge production, quantitative public health research is required to follow specific disciplinary conventions, practices and techniques that shape its handling of complexity. It is also expected to adopt a standardised publication format and style, which limits what can be included in articles such as those we analysed. The focus on alcohol consumption and intoxication can, for instance, be seen as a generic public health response to the alcohol industry's ambition to play down the harms of alcohol. Our analysis, however, has drawn attention to the ways in which such research thereby excludes the 'multiple, heterogeneous relations and entities' that constitute violent events (Race, 2014: 319). While we have drawn attention here to the exclusion of men and masculinities, other excluded relations and entities include bodies, sexualities, objects, subjectivities, affects, knowledges, technologies and practices. Such research iterates and reproduces objects, categories and subjects that are not self-evident but are made in practice.

Why is gender overlooked in quantitative research on alcohol and violence in the NTE and who might benefit from such a stance? Could it be that identifying gender as a major factor in NTE violence might disrupt gendered forms of power? For example, if reducing the availability of alcohol in the NTE is an effective means of reducing violence, and men are most responsible for this violence, should men's access to alcohol be limited? Such a policy has yet to be suggested even though it would be consistent with the 'evidence base', and with alcohol policy's willingness to single out a wide range of 'priority groups' (such as women, especially pregnant women, older Australians, young people and Indigenous Australians). Instead, blanket measures such as 'lockout laws' are proposed that not only obscure important contributors to violence, but unnecessarily limit the choices of those least likely to contribute to, and are more likely to be the victims of, such violence (most notably women, especially in the case of sexual violence). Imposing limits of this kind reiterates and lends

support to gendered forms of power in which women's freedoms and pleasures are understood to be readily dispensable in the service of others.

This is not to argue that there should be no regulation of alcohol but that blunt policy levers, such as lockout laws, affect all NTE participants regardless of their involvement in violence. The imperative for research and policy would therefore seem to be to 'probe the assumptions that result in gendered inequities' (Hearn and McKie, 2008: 83) and to address configurations of masculinity – in health promotion, law reform, education and initiatives focused on licensed environments, and in broader efforts to address socioeconomic disadvantage – rather than place faith in interventions that ban drinking at certain times in certain places. Common objections to calls for measures addressing men and masculinities include a lack of evidence for effectiveness and the long-term generational shifts required to achieve cultural change. Yet such objections have not stymied efforts to address men and masculinities in a range of other settings – for example, in relation to family violence or mental health (e.g., The Men's Project and Flood, 2018; VicHealth, 2020).

Our aim has been to 'return attention to the politics involved in the coming to be of "things"' (Bacchi, 2017: 17), in particular to the politics of the 'active, ongoing, and always incomplete processes' producing 'women' and 'men' as naturalised and unequal categories (2017: 20).

That the research practices we identify are so varied and widespread suggests a need to:

1. Increase awareness and recognition of the ways in which normative understandings of alcohol effects and of gender are iterated and reproduced in quantitative research on violence, with consequences for the realities constituted by, and the policy action recommended in, such research;

2. Revise the disciplinary norms that govern quantitative research on alcohol, and thus shape and regulate its assumptions, methods and analytical procedures, in order to encourage and facilitate new forms of work that attend more fully to gender;
3. Reconsider the reliance on quantitative research in ‘evidence-based policy’ in light of the identification of the normative assumptions imbuing such work (see also Moore et al., 2020).
4. Include a greater focus on qualitative research and mixed-method approaches in order to expand understandings of the structural issues and social practices that coalesce to produce gendered patterns of harm.

One of the articles we have analysed above – on the impact of earlier venue closing times on assaults – closes with the following statement:

There would be value in costing these assaults in terms of the emergency response, medical care, disability, foregone income and lost productivity, and to assess the public’s willingness to continue bearing the cost of late-night trading. (Kypri et al., 2014: 326)

We close with a different but in our view no less important question: in the wake of the #MeToo movement and greater official attention to institutional abuse by men, how willing is the public to continue to bear the cost – social as well as economic – of men’s violence?

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> According to critics such as Shaw (2014), the ‘NTE’ construct limits understanding as it reduces this space to bars, clubs and associated alcohol consumption, while emphasising economic relations. In this article, we do not have the space to examine the constitution of the NTE in depth and we use the term as it is central to the research being analysed.

<sup>2</sup> In making this decision, we acknowledge that at least some of the violence occurring in other settings (e.g., in private residences) is preceded by alcohol consumption in NTE settings.

<sup>3</sup> For another example of the progressive disappearance of gender across a series of related texts, see Menéndez et al. (2015b), Menéndez et al. (2015a) and Donnelly et al. (2017).

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