



Research paper

'Hyped up': Assemblages of alcohol, excitement and violence for outer-suburban young adults in the inner-city at night

Sarah MacLean^{a,b,*}, David Moore^c^a Centre for Health and Society, School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne, 3010 Victoria, Australia^b Centre for Alcohol Policy Research, Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre, 54-62 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy, 3065 Victoria, Australia^c National Drug Research Institute, Faculty of Health Sciences, Curtin University, 54-62 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy, 3065 Victoria, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 11 October 2013

Received in revised form 30 January 2014

Accepted 4 February 2014

Keywords:

Young adults

Outer-suburb

Night time economy

Alcohol

Violence

Affect

Assemblages

ABSTRACT

Background: Young adults from across greater Melbourne are drawn to the city centre night time economy (NTE). There is some evidence that young adults who live in outer-suburbs are involved in higher rates of weekend night time assaults than their inner-urban peers, both as perpetrators and as victims. Using the notion of 'assemblages', this article explores outer-suburban people's participation in the affectively charged spaces of inner-city entertainment precincts to show that trouble in the NTE cannot be attributed to alcohol and other drugs alone.

Methods: We provide a narrative analysis of interviews conducted in 2012 with 60 young adult drinkers aged 18–24, half of whom lived in an inner-city area and half in outer-suburbs.

Results: More so for young adults from outer-suburbs than those who live closer to the city, going to the city is an event marked out as different from everyday life. Their sense of being 'hyped up' in the inner-city made different sets of practices possible, particularly in relation to drinking and being open to new engagements with friends and sexual partners. Participants also spoke, however, of discomfort, danger and fear. Violence was most likely to occur at points where people felt a dissonance between their heightened affective states and the spaces where they found themselves.

Conclusion: In this analysis, outer-suburban young adults' positioning within the assemblages of the city centre NTE makes conflict and violence more likely for them. Efforts to improve NTE safety should maintain a focus on managing alcohol availability. Nonetheless additional strategies to decentralise the NTE, ensure better late night public transport to outer-suburbs or to support people to manage sudden affective shifts in NTE might also play a greater part in the overall effort.

© 2014 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

Introduction

In developed countries around the world, drunkenness, public disorder and violence in inner-city entertainment precincts are an issue of concern for police, health practitioners, policy makers and researchers alike (Szmigin et al., 2008). This article is an attempt to understand a social statistic concerning assault during the high alcohol use hour of 8 pm to 6 am on Friday and Saturday nights in Melbourne, the capital city of the Australian state of Victoria. Victorian police data for 2012, which we have analysed elsewhere, suggest that 18–24 year olds from Melbourne's outer urban suburbs were more likely to be involved in assaults which occurred during these times than were young adults who lived closer to the

city centre (MacLean, Wilkinson, Room, Moore, & Matthews, 2014). Young adults from outer-suburbs were involved in these assaults as perpetrators at more than twice the rate of those who lived in inner suburbs (61 per 10,000 people as against 27 per 10,000 people) and as victims at just under twice the rate (43 as against 25 per 10,000 people). The local government area of City of Melbourne which includes the city centre was strongly over-represented as the location where assaults occurred during weekend nights (MacLean et al., 2014).

Rather than concluding that young adults who live further from the city centre are inherently more egregious or more vulnerable than their inner-urban peers, we draw here on insights from cultural geography to understand how outer-suburban young adults' relationship to, and engagements within, the city centre at night are part of assemblages that result in a particular range of harms. The inner-city at night is a place of great excitement. It offers different possibilities for being in the world and, at times, produces fear and trouble. We argue here that this is particularly the case for young adults from the outer-suburbs, who travel long distances into the

* Corresponding author at: Centre for Health and Society, School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne, 3010 Victoria, Australia.

Tel.: +61 3 90353114; fax: +61 3 83440824; mobile: +61 4 18778081.

E-mail address: smaclean@unimelb.edu.au (S. MacLean).

inner-city and engage with its night time economy (NTE) in particular ways. To make this argument, we draw on interviews conducted with 60 young adults living in inner and outer Melbourne. We explore what attracts young outer-suburban adults to the inner-city rather than local entertainment precincts, and consider the affectual experiences that are possible within the inner-city and what is unsettling or frightening about these environments. We also explore participants' views on points where assaults and other forms of conflict are most likely to occur. We conclude that efforts to improve safety in the inner-city at night should broaden the focus from alcohol, or indeed alcohol in conjunction with other drug use, to incorporate an understanding of the social geography of people's engagements with it. Some general implications of this analysis are explored in the article's conclusion.

Debates focussed on the NTE have become dominated by epidemiological research in which problems are attributed largely to quantifiable measures – for example, in the United Kingdom 'units' and in Australia 'standard drinks' – of alcohol (Jayne, Valentine, & Holloway, 2011). In this regard, much research effort has been given to identifying how forms of alcohol-related harm such as violence rise according to two measurable variables – alcohol consumption by individuals and the overall availability of alcohol in specific localities. Researchers have argued, for example, that rates of alcohol-related problems rise in relation to the number of units of alcohol consumed by individuals within drinking sessions or as blood alcohol content increases (Cherpitel, 2007; Taylor et al., 2010). In terms of measuring the alcohol saturations of localities, increasing the numbers of liquor licenses granted in an area has been linked with higher prevalence of adverse health outcomes including assault, domestic violence and drinking at levels harmful to health (Kavanagh et al., 2011; Livingston, 2008, 2011; Livingston, Chikritzis, & Room, 2007). Conversely, reducing alcohol availability through mandating earlier closing hours for licensed venues has been associated with reductions in these outcomes (Kypri, Jones, McElduff, & Barker, 2011). However, such 'unit' approaches have several limitations: 'in informing everyday drinking practices'; as being a flawed method of medical diagnosis for 'health problems'; and as offering an unsatisfactory measure of 'drunkenness' (Jayne et al., 2011, p. 829).

In several literature reviews and research articles, cultural geographers Jayne, Valentine, and Holloway (2008, 2010, 2011) have offered an alternative framework for understanding alcohol consumption that encompasses but goes beyond quantitative approaches. Rather than theorising alcohol as the main independent causal factor in harms such as violence, a notion which is implicit in much quantitative work, (Jayne et al., 2011, p. 835) frame drinking and drunkenness as a:

complex interaction of alcohol with embodied identities (age, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc.), emotional and embodied states (hunger, thirst, sadness, excitement, etc.), varying neurological responses to alcohol, social mixing, personal interaction, atmosphere (sounds, smells, moods, feelings), non-human materialities such as the taste and viscosity of different drinks and drinks containers (glasses, bottles, etc.) as well as the physical layout of commercial venues or public spaces (opportunities to sit, stand, move, dance, availability of toilet facilities, the proximity of other bodies).

They argue that drunkenness is a 'psychoactive sociality' that emerges from an 'assemblage of embodied, emotional, affective and material human and non-human interactions' (Jayne et al., 2010, p. 549). As Duff (2012) explains, the assemblage framework suggests that 'harm should be regarded as a property of the assemblage and not of any one discrete body therein [e.g. the drug or drug user]'.

To understand the city at night we rely also on a well-established geographical literature on emotions, affect and place, where affect is understood to be co-produced by, and flow between, people and the places they inhabit. Affect is unevenly distributed across urban landscapes. In Melbourne, mid-to outer-suburbs affected by deindustrialisation are amongst the most socioeconomically disadvantaged. The loss of industry and employment brings a sense of degradation to these areas. In contrast, wealth is now concentrated closest to the city centre where connections to the global economy are strongest (Baum & Gleeson, 2010). This establishes a dynamic where outer-suburbs are generally poorer places than the inner-city in terms of overall wealth, opportunity, infrastructure, entertainment and also, less tangibly, excitement and intensity.

We use the notion of 'affective space' (Reckwitz, 2012) to describe how feelings, sensations and emotions cohere in locations. Cities, and particularly city centres, are places of intense activity and consumption. They are 'roiling maelstroms of affect' (Thrift, 2004, p. 57). Cities are spatially zoned, with particular areas devoted to entertainment and designed to promote affective intensity to attract people. Within these zones, venues are styled to appeal to different cultural groups. Reckwitz writes that affective spaces are 'always already connected to a specific cultural sensitivity and attentiveness on the part of the carriers of practices, a specific sensitivity for perceptions, impressions and affections' (2012, p. 255). Our article draws on an 'assemblage' formulation to explore alcohol, embodiment, emotion, affect and place in the accounts of young drinkers from outer-suburbs, and how this might suggest new or adapted policy responses to problems in the city centre at night.

Method

The study reported here was designed to explore the place of alcohol within the lives of young adults living in contrasting urban settings. Interviews were conducted in 2012 with 60 young adults aged 18–24 years, involving equal numbers of males and females. All participants had consumed at least one alcoholic drink within the previous six months and all had visited inner-city entertainment precincts. Ethics approval for the research was granted by the University of Melbourne and Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committees.

Participants lived in two local government areas (LGAs) within greater Melbourne. The first of these was the outer-suburban LGA of Hume. Hume stretches from the north-western deindustrialising suburbs of Broadmeadows and Gladstone Park where social disadvantage is acute, to Sunbury, a small and less impoverished satellite town 34 km from Melbourne's central business district. The second LGA, Yarra, abuts central Melbourne and contains several entertainment precincts. Whilst Yarra has experienced gentrification over recent decades, public housing estates within its boundaries mean that its socio-economic distribution is somewhat polarised. In each LGA research participants were recruited via local tertiary institutions, flyers placed in shop windows, welfare agencies and word of mouth. The majority of participants ($n = 44$) were studying either full or part-time. Two-thirds were employed full or part-time and six participants were neither studying nor working. Seventeen were born outside Australia and 19 spoke another language in addition to English.

We focus in this article on the experiences of the outer-suburban Hume participants, although comments made by inner urban participants from Yarra serve as points of comparison. Hume participants were more frequently disengaged from both education and training than those from Yarra (five participants as opposed to one). Other than this, demographic characteristics measured were similar for study participants from both LGAs.

Interview participants were offered the choice of completing interviews on their own ($n = 35$), or with one ($n = 16$) or two friends ($n = 9$). Research interviews were semi-structured and conducted by three experienced interviewers and participants were invited to share narratives about a recent 'big night out' in the city. Interviewers probed to explore how people travelled to entertainment precincts, what attracted them to these places, what they drank whilst they were there, how they returned home and whether they had encountered conflict or other trouble during the night. All research interviews were recorded, transcribed and then coded using the qualitative software package NVivo. This enabled the rearrangement of data as narratives were identified and clarified.

Our analysis is grounded in the theoretical assumption that people's stories both shape and are shaped by lived experience (see De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Ezzy, 1998). Narrative approaches to research analysis offer insights into the meanings and contexts of cultural and social practices and as such have become increasingly established within the repertoire of analytic tools used by drug researchers (MacLean, Bruun, & Mallett, 2012; Pennay & Moore, 2010; Tutenges, 2013). Accounts offered by participants in research interviews conducted for the study may thus be regarded as versions of stories that circulate amongst, and are enacted by, young adults in Melbourne. Three narratives are relevant to our concerns in this article: attractions and possibilities in the city at night, fear and inconvenience far from home, and feeling 'out of place' at critical points of the night. We discuss each of these in turn.

Attractions and possibilities in the city at night

The first narrative concerned the pleasures of inner-city leisure. Being amongst crowds of revellers can create an intoxication akin to drunkenness (Collins, 2008; Tutenges & Sandberg, 2013). Bella (21, female [F], outer-suburb [OS]) described being in the city centre as a 'rush', a physical intoxication in itself. She described how she would put more effort into her appearance when going to the city to enhance the experience and mark it as different from her everyday life:

It's more of a rush 'cause there's just so many other people doing the same thing that you're doing and have like the same kind of goal. It hypes you up a lot more . . . And 'cause when you go to the city you dress up nicely and you wear heels and you make yourself look amazing and you just, [it] heightens the whole experience.

Indeed both interviewees from inner and outer-suburbs experienced the city centre as a space of enhanced excitement. Edith (19, F, inner urban [IU]) differentiated between going into the city and spending time in her local entertainment precinct, even though this area featured a large number of cafes, restaurants, bars and clubs. She argued that the excitement of entering the city centre was at least in part deliberately generated by people themselves. In her account, people actively contribute to producing the inner-city atmosphere, feeling an obligation to be seen to be enjoying themselves by 'faking' excitement if they do not genuinely feel it:

The city is really like kind of more hyped up 'cause you spend a lot of money pre-drinking, a lot of money on the taxi home, food. Sort of just like it's not that much further [than going out within her suburb] but it just kind of feels like it can be a bigger spender . . . Yeah I think the boys are a bit more arched up and have to look like they're getting really drunk. Whereas I think at home it's just much more like comfortable. If one boy has a beer the rest have to have beers and it's kind of like a competition, competition to get girls. So I think it's a bit more fake excitement.

Young people living in outer Melbourne suburbs report a lack of local activities, exacerbated by poor access to public transport (Robson, 2009). Far fewer licensed venues are available in outer-suburbs than closer to the city and perhaps as a result, much of young adults' drinking in outer-suburbs takes place at private parties (MacLean, Ferris, & Livingston, 2013). Outer-suburban participants in the study felt that venues close to home were either non-existent or were unappealing because they closed early, played bad music, or were populated by people they already knew and saw regularly. For example, Dragan (22, male [M], OS) lived in Broadmeadows and argued that there was very little to do locally: 'Oh you can go to maybe down in Roxburgh Park [neighbouring suburb], but as far as Broadmeadows, there's pretty much [nothing]. . . there's not many hangouts for young people'.

But the absence of local alternatives was not the only appeal of being in the city centre at night for outer-suburban research participants. Most visited the city irregularly, though generally on weekend or public holiday eves. Being in the inner-city was a way to mark a special event or to enjoy a particularly big night. Dave (21, M, OS) would only go to the city when he had money. Alice (19, F, OS) went on 'occasions like birthdays or . . . like when we finished year twelve [the final year of secondary school] last year'.

Outer-suburban interviewees, in particular, commented that the 'atmosphere' or affective experience of excitement they felt when visiting the inner-city set this experience apart from everyday life in their home suburbs, transporting them from the mundanity and familiarity of their lives in the suburbs. As Alice said: 'It's a better atmosphere in the city than what it is here in Roxburgh Park.' Carley (18, F, OS) lived in the urban-fringe town of Sunbury on Melbourne's north eastern outskirts. She illustrated the notion of the inner-city as an affective space when she described how the emotional and physical sensations aroused by being there motivated her to travel long distances from her home suburb: 'Me and my friends just like the night life really, we like the feeling we get when we go out.' Trent (18, M, OS) enjoyed the vibrant sensory experience of being in the city, commenting on columns of fire that periodically erupt outside a large city venue: 'I just love how alive it is, like I love walking down South Bank out the front of Crown [Casino] with the flames and just everything going [on], all the people and the restaurants, just the noise'.

Participants identified a number of reasons for the charged atmosphere of the city centre. As Edith suggested, the overall expense of a night in the city contributed to people's expectation of having an exceptional time. For Angie (19, F, OS) the city 'vibe' was related to the density of people, pubs and clubs with contemporary decor, and famous DJs, all of which turned her evening from something mundane into an 'event':

I think in the city [it's] the vibe. Like [they're] more pubs and there's a lot of other people you might not know because it's not your local area so you've got more, like there's more people meeting people, different people. And like just I think the clubs there, they make more money, so they might update the decor or get bigger DJs or something. They'll turn into events.

For Carley, the opportunity to be with new people was an important attraction of the inner-city. What appealed to her was 'Dancing all night and meeting a group of new people . . . Because [we live in] a small town . . . we know a lot of the people and even if we don't know them we've seen them, and you know what they're like'.

Clearly, licensing and venue design play into people's drinking patterns and attraction to the city. Due to the relative cheapness of purchasing alcohol from bottle shops close to home rather than at city venues, most participants from both inner and outer-suburban locations would pre-drink before they went out, to reduce their expenditure at city venues. Jade (19, F, OS) pointed out that her local

pub closed at 1am, which meant that she and her friends were left drunk and with nothing to do once the venue closed: 'Like to us it's no point drinking a heap and then going straight home. You wanna just be out with friends, and yeah, all of that basically'. Trent (18, M, OS) talked about how at the licensed club in his local area the television was on with the soccer which really lowered the mood. This was a reason he didn't choose to go there but rather sought out city venues. He also said he frequently saw his mum's friends at the local pub.

Hobbs, Winlow, Hadfield, and Lister (2005, p. 163) have written that urban entertainment zones are 'spatial and temporal locations within which the familiar protocols and bonds of restraint that typify routine day-time social life fade to black and are replaced by configurations of excitement, uncertainty, pleasure and pain'. A powerful narrative of freedom from the constraints from everyday life when far from home echoed in outer-suburban participants' accounts of going out to the city (see also Bellis, Hale, Bennett, Chaudry, & Kilfoyle, 2000). They argued that the atmosphere of the inner-city helped them to feel free to be different from their everyday selves. Riley (21, M, OS), for example, would act 'a bit more stupid' in the city because he was not surrounded by people who knew him: 'you get a bit more reckless.' Similarly Paul (22, M, OS) felt able to approach strangers in the inner-city and strike up conversations with them. He believed this to be unlikely to happen closer to home: '... just grab people and [say] "come and join us". And you know [I'd] never do that out this way [in his home suburb], just go up to a random person and say "come and have a drink with us", and sit down and talk'.

Participants also spoke of the city as a sexually charged place where they could meet new partners in relative anonymity. As Michelle (19, F, OS) explained, young women with boyfriends are able to find new, casual partners in the large venues of the city centre. Zain (24, M, OS) was frank about the reasons for visiting a nightclub in the city: 'Why do you go to a nightclub? ... You're there to either get off your face [very intoxicated], pick up a bloke or pick up a sheila, and that's it'. He saw drinking near home as a quite different and more sociable exercise to be enjoyed with friends.

Like Zain, many interviewees from outer-suburbs said they drank particularly heavily before and during a night in the city whilst others, as we discuss below, felt unsafe being intoxicated a long way from home. Carley and her friend Zara (20, F, OS) felt they were most likely to get very drunk at a city nightclub. Yusef (20, M, OS) said he drank much more in the city than in his home suburb in Hume, attributing this to the different atmosphere there: 'Because [of the] different atmosphere, different, different people. Everyone around me is drinking. Everyone around me is drinking even more than they would drink it when they're in their local area'. These comments suggest that inner-city affective atmospheres enable young adults, and particularly those from outer-suburbs, to experience heightened emotional states of excitement and pleasure, and to configure their social engagements in new ways.

Fear and inconvenience far from home

The second narrative provided by interview participants closely knitted fear and worry into the feelings of excitement elicited by travelling into the inner-city. This was the case for people from inner-suburbs too, although the anxieties discussed tended to vary by participants' social location, as is also evident in other research (Pain, 2001). Whilst all participants were concerned about their own safety and the safety of friends in the inner-city at night, this was heightened for those from the outer-suburbs. Dave (21, M, OS) felt that he would be less relaxed in the inner-city than he was near

home, and was particularly wary when his girlfriend accompanied him:

Just definitely when you go out into the city you've gotta be a lot more on guard ... there's a lot of dickheads out there. Like it's becoming worse. Over the last four or five years it's gotten bad. Like if I'm going out and the missus [his girlfriend] is coming, I won't drink nearly as much as if I was by myself. . . You've gotta be alert and on guard.

Getting home from inner-city entertainment precincts home was more complex, more expensive and more risky for outer-suburban participants; whereas those who lived closer to the city could often walk or ride a bike home if they needed to. Young women from the outer-suburbs of Hume were particularly conscious of the risk of getting into an unpleasant or frightening situation when they were far from home. Kara (19, F, OS) spoke of feeling reassured when she went out locally that her mother could come and get her whenever she wanted her to. In contrast: 'In the city, you know if anything happens, you know you're in trouble. You can't get immediate help.' Women often worried that their friends might get too drunk and they might be called upon to shepherd them home, that they would be uncertain what to do if left on their own when a friend 'hooked up with' or went home a new male sexual partner, or that they may have their drinks spiked. Alice spoke of her anxiety about being with strangers: 'When we're in the city we're more cautious of who our friends talk to'. Conversely, Carley felt safer in the inner-city than she did in her outer-suburb because of the visible presence of police and bouncers.

Whilst a few participants (usually the heavier drinkers) said they drank more in the inner-city, others such as Dave above were careful not to become drunk due to anxiety about being far from help if they got into trouble. Dave drank 'less in the inner-city than at home.' So did Michelle (19, F, OS):

I'm more responsible in the city 'cause I'm so much further away from home and it's harder to get home if you do drink very strong. In Sunbury, I probably go over the top a lot 'cause I know that I live five minutes away and my dad always picks me up.

We commenced this article by referring to a statistic suggesting that outer-suburban young adults are over-represented in assaults during high alcohol hours (MacLean et al., 2014). Men from both inner and outer-urban settings who participated in the research feared getting embroiled in conflicts in the city at night and thought carefully about how to avoid this occurring. However, it was striking how much more frequently the outer-urban participants were able to relate stories about witnessing and participating in violence and conflict than those from inner-suburbs. Dave, from an outer-suburb, refused to go out to the city with his friends if they were accompanied by their girlfriends in case his friends responded angrily when other men approached or looked at their partners. Hayden (18, M, OS) avoided the city because he felt that he couldn't avoid attracting fights there: 'I think I must have a face that people hate ... I'm serious, every time I go out into the city, someone always kicks on me and there's always a fight. I can't help it.' Cooper (19, M, OS) claimed that 'idiots' would start a fight in the city by looking at him oddly. Lachie (18, M, OS) hadn't been to the city at night for at least a year because he disliked that it was full of men 'who think they're tough and shit' and who try to provoke bouncers in order to impress other people.

A minority of research participants enjoyed fights. Yusuf (20, M, OS) acknowledged that the possibility of a fight was part of the appeal of visiting the city on Friday and Saturday nights, using the US terminology of a 'rumble'. In contrast, there was distinctly less chance of a fight at his local suburban pub:

Yusef: Everyone yeah especially on the weekend everyone just gets together and you know [it] becomes a rumble, you know.

Interviewer: That doesn't happen if you go to the local?

Yusef: Nah usually its old people kicking back and drinking, minding their own business.

Outer-suburban participants' greater exposure to violence in the inner-city was probably related at least in part to the large mainstream venues that almost all of them attended. As others have argued (Lindsay, 2006; Measham, 2004) nightclubs are engineered and marketed to attract particular segments of the population. Nightclubs offer 'affective spaces' where experiences, practices and sensations connected to 'specific cultural sensitivities' (Reckwitz, 2012) are available. People in turn seek out venues where they can enact particular gendered, ethnic and socio-economic selves. Young adults from outer-suburbs in both Lindsay's (2006) and our research generally attended large commercial venues playing mostly mainstream music, rather than the smaller more culturally elite 'niche' venues which inner suburban participants prided themselves on knowing about and frequenting. Large crowded venues where discounted drinks are promoted are those most likely to be the scene of alcohol related problems (Hughes et al., 2011).

Participants from the outer suburbs frequently spoke of difficulty getting home from the city late at night particularly when they stayed too late to return on regular public transport. Amy (19, F, OS) and her friends complained that a taxi from central Melbourne to Sunbury cost well over AUD100. Their alternative was to catch the Night Rider Bus which would take two or three hours, getting them home around six in the morning. Carley related two frightening experiences involving the bus, first when accompanying a friend who was very drunk, whom she thought might start a fight, and second, when she was kicked off the bus by the driver for disruptive behaviour that she claimed she wasn't actually involved in, and had to wait in an unknown area for the next bus.

Male participants found it harder to get cabs but conversely felt safer waiting in the city for public transport to resume at 5 am, although they often pointed out that this was when fights occurred. Lachie spoke of being stranded in the city and sleeping outside a supermarket after being chased by a group of men: 'I don't know, we were just got like chased by older blokes and then we just kind of like just ran off and just went like tried to find a secluded place and then we . . . slept under like a Safeway [supermarket], sort of like a docking area.' Others said that when they were stranded in the city they continue to drink. Many people went to fast food outlets to spend time waiting for transport, noting that conflict often occurred in and around these places. One such story of being stranded in the city was particular distressing. Rima (21, F, OS) and her friend ended up going to the house of two men they'd met because they had run out of money, had no way of getting home and felt unsafe on their own in the city. Rima's friend was later sexually assaulted by the men. Although not all participants from the outer-suburban cohort had encountered harm of this severity, the sense of risk they felt in the inner-city contributed to its construction as a place of alterity to their home suburbs.

Feeling 'out of place'

The third narrative provided by interview participants focussed on affect. Inner cities at night are places where relationships are distinctly unstable. Along with the exciting possibility of new social and sexual encounters, affective states can tip unexpectedly from exhilaration and openness to new engagements and into a sense of dissonance and discomfort, accompanied by arguments

and violence, particularly when people's expectations of having an exceptional night are high (Collins, 2008). Others have suggested people are attracted to venues which offer affective spaces (Reckwitz, 2012) where they feel a sense of belonging through being with other people who are culturally and socially like them (Measham & Moore, 2009). We argue that moments where conflict occurs are often characterized by struggles to adjust to affective changes, or points where people feel 'out of place' within an affective space. This occurs for instance, when their sense of entitlement to access a venue is slighted, when they sense antipathy from another venue patron, or when, still drunk, they are forced outside onto the street when venues close.

Previous research on the NTE has identified parts of the night where conflict becomes more likely in the city. Queues to enter venues seem to be particularly problematic (Shepherd & Brickley, 1996). The process of gaining admission to a venue is a moment where people feel assessed for suitability according to criteria that are sometimes out of their control, and some outer-suburban participants in our study were conscious at this point of the stigma that accompanies living in a disadvantaged neighborhood (Warr, 2005).

Outer-suburbanites were not always welcome in the inner-city. Inner-urban participants in our research frequently commented that on weekend nights too many out-of-towners were in the city getting drunk and potentially becoming violent. Ryan (23, M, IU) avoided large venues populated by 'muzzas' (young men of southern European descent) and 'bogans' (working class or uncultured people, often from outer-suburbs), whom he feared would be aggressive (see also Siokou, Moore, & Lee, 2010):

I wouldn't go to a club if I didn't know the music and I knew it would be full of muzzas and bogans and people I didn't wanna hang around with and who I find really aggressive. . . . I just don't like being around that sort of environment when I'm wasted, when I'm drunk and when I'm high. I don't wanna be around these big guys that are maybe trying to start a fight with me or pushing me out of the way.

Similarly, Mitchell (23, M, IU) was wary of the city on weekend nights because it was full of people 'from out in the country . . . who aren't normally around the city getting really, really wasted'.

Being denied access to an affective space is understandably distressing. Zain (24, M, OS) spoke of showing his driver's licenses when trying to enter a large venue to prove that he was of age to legally purchase alcohol. On one occasion the door staff noticed that Zain lived in Broadmeadows and refused him entry on the basis that the venue had previously had trouble involving men from his suburb, the injustice of which made him very upset. Collins (2008) writes that violence sometimes results when individuals or groups are refused access to a social setting such as a party due to some perceived unsuitability. This status slight reinforces the cultural inferiority of the excluded party. Zain's experience and the disparaging comments by inner-urban young adults about the influx of visitors to the city suggest that outer-suburbanites may be right in thinking that their right to be part of the city NTE is contested, that they themselves are sometimes regarded as unsuited to the city. This contributes to an atmosphere of anxiety and tension, with frustration spilling over at points such as venue entry.

Both male and female outer-suburban participants generally felt that fights were more likely in the city because people were surrounded by so many strangers, whereas their relationships with people who were part of their daily lives would constrain conflict when they were closer to home. The 'elevated emotional atmosphere' (Collins, 2008, p. 243) associated with being in the city also made violence more likely. Many fights that people spoke of occurring in inner-city venues were triggered simply by a stranger

looking at them or their friends or partners in an upsetting way or bumped them and spilled a drink, thus changing their sense of participating in an affective space of safety, sociality and belonging. As Dave put it, when people are very drunk they respond quickly and aggressively to any intrusion or apparent slight: 'All it takes is like a little bump, like an accidental nudge or someone thinks you're looking at them wrong or anything.'

Another time where violence occurs frequently is at the end of the night when people spill out of venues and either wait in taxi ranks or wander the streets looking for venues with even later hours or fast food outlets (Finney, 2004). At this point people spoke of feeling tired and frustrated, expressing a sense of disconnection between their drunken bodies and the spaces where they now were. As their intoxication began to wane they wanted to be home, or at least anywhere other than where they were. For Zara, getting home was a problem because she was often very drunk and no longer enjoyed being in the inner-city: 'we feel a sense of urgency to go home, usually when we're at the point you know we're very intoxicated and we just wanna be home within twenty minutes'. Bella hated travelling home on the Night Rider Bus with people in a place where being heavily intoxicated was suddenly inappropriate: 'You've got absolutely off their face people on the bus. Like the amount of times we've been on it and there's been punch ons [fights]'. Alongside the physical and logistical difficulties they experienced in travelling home, the investment in time, money and emotional energy required for outer-suburban young adults to access the inner-city seemed to make dealing with atmospheric shifts particularly fraught.

Discussion: possibilities for assembling less harm

If, as Duff (2012) argues, the discomforts (as well as pleasures) that people experience within the inner-city emerge from specific assemblages of alcohol, embodiment, affect and place, rather than from 'any one discrete body therein [e.g. alcohol or the young adult]', is it possible to intervene in these assemblages? Although the assemblage framework is relatively new to scholarly work on alcohol, and more work clearly needs to be done, what new insights and general policy directions might an assemblage framework, and a particular focus on embodiment, and affective spaces, suggest for the management of the NTE?

As we noted earlier, such a framework can encapsulate interventions that target alcohol consumption and availability (even if such solutions often prove to be politically unpopular) but it also suggests some new directions that go beyond current reductionist orthodoxy regarding alcohol's causal role in harm. For example, public health typically understands 'alcohol-related harms' as arising from combinations of various factors but the term itself makes clear where the emphasis lies. Greater availability of alcohol (e.g., through extended trading hours), and higher density of liquor outlets, to take just two examples, results in more harm. If policy reduces availability or density, the argument runs, the result is less harm. In our view, no measure works in isolation (an unremarkable point no doubt accepted by many in the alcohol field) but addressing specific factors may also have unintended consequences – such as increasing drinking rates in order to reach intoxication where trading hours are limited (a dramatic example being Australia's 'six o'clock swill' (Room, 2010) where early closing led to what might today be termed 'binge drinking'). But the more significant point is that elements in an assemblage do not interact as distinct and enduring pre-constituted entities or 'factors' but emerge, coalesce and re-constitute each other as the assemblage unfolds over time. Thus we cannot take for granted that assemblages involving high alcohol consumption and young adults will inevitably and always lead to violence and other 'risk behaviours'

or even, as Brown and Gregg (2012) have recently argued, that such acts will be seen as problematic or 'regrettable'. It also depends on other aspects of the assemblage: for example, the places in which the drinking is being done, what forms of masculinity and femininity are being enacted through drinking, and how alcohol is in turn constituted in specific subcultural settings (e.g., as an 'excuse' for violence, as a key element in sociability).

The inner-city NTE emerges from many forces, actors and non-human elements, and is differently configured for people from inner-urban and outer-suburban settings. These forces include the geographic, financial and cultural centrality of the city, the importance of which is reinforced by the long distances that many participants must travel to access city-centre spaces. Being far from home offers young adults from outer suburbs a sense of anonymity and freedom from the usual restraints of their everyday lives. Some seemed to grasp this as an opportunity to enact a cultural narrative entailing greater risk taking (Bellis et al., 2000). For young adults who live in smaller or under-resourced communities, the inner-city offers a thrilling mix of unknown people, popular culture, opportunities for new emotional states, heavy drinking, sex and (for some) violence, an assemblage that produces, and is re-produced by, highly charged affective states. The high cost of pre-drinking, transport, venue entry and vigorous marketing of on-premise alcohol add to the obligation felt by young adults to extract as much excitement and pleasure as possible from their 'big night out'. Licensing policy (late venue closing hours and alcohol availability) encourages influxes of people to entertainment precincts, and precinct planning ensures night-time revellers are concentrated in relatively confined areas. The preference of those from outer-suburbs for large mainstream venues, where alcohol is heavily promoted, also exacerbates their chances of encountering harm, as does their occasional sense of being unwelcomed within the inner-city. Policing and bouncers are also part of these assemblages – offering some revellers a target for violence, and others a sense of security. Poor access to late-night public transport means that people from outer-suburbs are too often stranded in the city far from home when they no longer wish to be there. All these elements of assemblages tend to re-constitute intoxication, or 'psychoactive sociality' (Jayne et al., 2011, p. 549), in potentially more problematic ways.

Our data and analysis also suggest further measures that consider other aspects of the assemblage, such as helping people to modulate their affective states on leaving venues, perhaps through winding down the atmosphere in venues prior to closing, or providing distractions whilst people wait for transport. Better transport to move people out of the city is also essential. Vans and buses could move people quickly away from venues, security staff could be stationed on Night Rider Buses. Regular late-night public transport would reduce concentrations of tired, frustrated and emotionally drained people in the city in the early hours of the morning and should be available until the last venue closes. Here, it is not merely alcohol that emerges as causal in violence but that 'trouble' arises from alcohol's interaction with delays, frustration, competition for inadequate transport and gender, in other words, intoxication is being reconstituted as a bodily burden rather than a pleasure.

Limiting the numbers of patrons allowed in a venue at any one time is another means of reducing alcohol-related harms that has been identified in previous literature (Babor et al., 2010), but is rarely debated perhaps because, like reducing alcohol availability and trading hours, this would cut into entertainment industry profits. Smaller and less densely populated venues could be marketed to young adults from the outer-suburbs, although it is possible that an influx of people from the suburbs might meet with a chilly welcome from existing patrons of these venues. Finally, we have argued that research participants struggle to adjust when they experience

a sense of being suddenly out of place in NTE, such as when they are refused entry to an affective space such as a nightclub, feel their sense of sociality within a club to be undermined by being jostled, or when they are required to leave a venue at closing time. Strategies to assist people to anticipate these states of dissonance and moderate affective responses that are sometimes expressed through violence are also worthy of consideration.

Decentralising the NTE offers another possibility for addressing harm via the creation of new assemblages. Local pubs in small suburbs are likely never to be exciting enough to compete with the inner-city NTE. New NTE hubs spread across the city could draw in people from large catchments, just not so far from home or in such intense concentrations. Whilst such an approach would be most unlikely to appeal to everyone or eradicate problems in the inner-city, it might serve to reduce pressure on the city as the key site for a big night out for people from across greater Melbourne. It would be important to ensure similar closing hours and licensing condition in these outer-suburban entertainment hubs as in the inner-city to give them any chance of competing with the city NTE. This, however, might be achieved by restricting inner-city alcohol availability rather than by liberalising liquor provisions in suburban areas – otherwise problems might simply be replicated in these new hubs or diverted from the inner-city.

Conclusion

Others have argued that heavy drinking and ‘alcohol-related problems’ are not a subversion of the spaces of the NTE, but rather are directly promoted through the commercial imperatives of companies and governments that thrive on revenue from alcohol sales (Hayward & Hobbs, 2007). As such, alcohol-related violence and intoxication are not only problems for the NTE but also function as part of the spectacle that draw people to it. In our study the perils of being in the inner-city at night were closely linked with its pleasures: accessing exciting venues, drinking alcohol and engaging with new people.

The excitement, sociality and unease that our research participants reported experiencing in the inner-city cannot be attributed to the effects of alcohol alone. As we have argued, these affective states are produced or enacted through their interaction with the often charged and fraught zones of the NTE. In this analysis, outer-suburban young adults’ particular spatial positioning in relation to the city centre makes some adverse outcomes such as conflict and violence more likely for them and provides a plausible explanation for their over-representation in Melbourne weekend night assault statistics. Whilst the two imperatives of reducing harm and maintaining a vibrant inner-city NTE might, to some extent, be incompatible, thinking through people’s complex and emergent engagements with and in these spaces might allow for consideration of more innovative policy.

Acknowledgments

We thank Mutsumi Karasaki and Christine Siokou for conducting the Yarra interviews. We are also grateful for funding from the Australian Research Council (LP 100100017), VicHealth and the Victorian Department of Health. Hume City Council, Yarra City Council and the Municipal Association of Victoria have each made in-kind contributions to the study. The National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University is supported by funding from the Australian Government under the Substance Misuse Prevention and Service Improvement Grants Fund. We also acknowledge Robin Room’s guidance on study on which this article draws.

Conflict of interest statement

None declared.

References

- Babor, T., Caetano, R., Casswell, S., Edwards, G., Giesbrecht, N., Graham, K., et al. (2010). *Alcohol: No ordinary commodity – Research and public policy* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Baum, S., & Gleeson, B. (2010). Space and place: Social exclusion in Australia’s suburban heartlands. *Urban Policy & Research*, 28(2), 135–159.
- Bellis, M. A., Hale, G., Bennett, A., Chaudry, M., & Kilfoyle, M. (2000). Ibiza uncovered: Changes in substance use and sexual behaviour amongst young people visiting an international night-life resort. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 11(3), 235–244.
- Brown, R., & Gregg, M. (2012). The pedagogy of regret: Facebook, binge drinking and young women. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 26(3), 357–369.
- Cherpitel, C. (2007). Alcohol and injuries: A review of international emergency room studies since 1995. *Drug & Alcohol Review*, 26(2), 201–214.
- Collins, R. (2008). *Violence: A micro-sociological theory*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- De Fina, A., & Georgakopoulou, A. (2008). Analysing narratives as practices. *Qualitative Research*, 8(3), 379–387.
- Duff, C. (2012). After methods, after subjects, after drugs. *Contemporary Drug Problems*, 39(2), 265–287.
- Ezzy, D. (1998). Theorizing narrative identity: Symbolic interactionism and hermeneutics. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 39(2), 239–252.
- Finney, A. (2004). *Violence in the night-time economy: Key findings from the research Findings* (Vol. 214). London: Research Development and Statistics Directorate, Home Office.
- Hayward, K., & Hobbs, D. (2007). Beyond the binge in ‘booze Britain’: Market-led liminalization and the spectacle of binge drinking. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 58(3), 437–456. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2007.00159.x>
- Hobbs, R., Winlow, S., Hadfield, P., & Lister, S. (2005). Violent hypocrisy: governance and the night-time economy. *European Journal of Criminology*, 2(2), 161–183.
- Hughes, K., Quigg, Z., Eckley, L., Bellis, M., Jones, L., Calafat, A., et al. (2011). Environmental factors in drinking venues and alcohol-related harm: The evidence base for European intervention. *Addiction*, 106, 37–46. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1360-0443.2010.03316.x>
- Jayne, M., Valentine, G., & Holloway, S. L. (2008). Geographies of alcohol, drinking and drunkenness: A review of progress. *Progress in Human Geography*, 32(2), 247–263.
- Jayne, M., Valentine, G., & Holloway, S. L. (2010). Emotional, embodied and affective geographies of alcohol, drinking and drunkenness. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 35(4), 540–554. [10.1111/j.1475-5661.2010.00401.x](http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2010.00401.x)
- Jayne, M., Valentine, G., & Holloway, S. L. (2011). What use are units? Critical geographies of alcohol policy. *Antipode*, 44(3), 828–846. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2011.00927.x>
- Kavanagh, A., Kelly, M., Krnjacki, L., Thornton, L., Jolley, D., Subramanian, S., et al. (2011). Access to alcohol outlets and harmful alcohol consumption: A multi-level study in Melbourne, Australia. *Addiction*, 106(10), 1772–1779.
- Kypri, K., Jones, C., McElduff, P., & Barker, D. (2011). Effects of restricting pub closing times on night-time assaults in an Australian city. *Addiction*, 106(2), 303–310.
- Lindsay, J. (2006). A big night out in Melbourne: Drinking as an enactment of class and gender. *Contemporary Drug Problems*, 33(Spring), 29L 61.
- Livingston, M. (2008). Alcohol outlet density and assault: A spatial analysis. *Addiction*, 103, 619–628.
- Livingston, M. (2011). A longitudinal analysis of alcohol outlet density and domestic violence. *Addiction*, 106(5), 919–925.
- Livingston, M., Chikritzis, T., & Room, R. (2007). Changing the density of alcohol outlets to reduce alcohol-related problems. *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 26(September), 557L 566.
- MacLean, S., Bruun, A., & Mallett, S. (2012). ‘I’ve had a pretty tough life but that’s not why I do this’: Narratives of autonomy and control among alcohol and drug service-engaged early teenagers. *Journal of Youth Studies*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2012.704990>
- MacLean, S., Ferris, J., & Livingston, M. (2013). Drinking patterns and attitudes for young people in inner-urban Melbourne and outer-urban growth areas: Differences and similarities. *Urban Policy and Research*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08111146.2013.831758>
- MacLean, S., Wilkinson, C., Room, R., Moore, D., & Matthews, S. (2014). *Young adults and alcohol: developing policy responses in inner- and outer-urban settings*. Centre for Alcohol Policy Research (in press).
- Measham, F. (2004). Play space: Historical and socio-cultural reflections on drugs, licensed leisure locations, commercialisation and control. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 15, 337–345.
- Measham, F., & Moore, K. (2009). Repertoires of distinction: Exploring patterns of weekend polydrug use within local leisure scenes across the English night time economy. *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 9(4), 437–464.
- Pain, R. (2001). Gender, race, age and fear in the city. *Urban Studies*, 38(5–6), 899–913. <http://usj.sagepub.com/archive/>

- Pennay, A., & Moore, D. (2010). Exploring the micro-politics of normalisation: Narratives of pleasure, self-control and desire in a sample of young Australian 'party drug' users. *Addiction Research and Theory*, 18(5), 557–571.
- Reckwitz, A. (2012). Affective spaces: A praxeological outlook rethinking history. *The Journal of Theory and Practice*, 16(2), 241–258.
- Robson, B. (2009). *Building lives, building community in Craigieburn and Roxburgh Park*. Melbourne: The McCaughey Centre/VicHealth Centre for the Promotion of Mental Health & Community Wellbeing, The University of Melbourne.
- Room, R. (2010). The long reaction against the wowser: The prehistory of alcohol deregulation in Australia. *Health Sociology Review*, 19(2), 151–163.
- Shepherd, J., & Brickley, M. (1996). The relationship between alcohol intoxication, stressors and injury in urban violence. *British Journal of Criminology*, 36(4), 546–566.
- Siokou, C., Moore, D., & Lee, H. (2010). 'Muzzas' and 'Old Skool Ravers': Ethnicity, drugs and the changing face of Melbourne's dance party/club scene. *Health Sociology Review*, 19(2), 192–204.
- Szmigin, I., Griffin, C., Mistral, W., Bengry-Howell, A., Weale, L., & Hackley, C. (2008). Re-framing 'binge drinking' as calculated hedonism-empirical evidence from the UK. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 19(5), 359–366.
- Taylor, B., Irving, H., Kanteres, F., Room, R., Cherpitel, C. J., Greenfield, T., et al. (2010). The more you drink, the harder you fall: A systematic review and meta-analysis of how acute alcohol consumption and injury or collision risk increase together. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 110, 108–116.
- Thrift, N. (2004). Intensities of feeling: Towards a spatial politics of affect. *Geografiska Annaler*, 86B(1), 57–78.
- Tutenges, S. (2013). Stirring up effervescence: An ethnographic study of youth at a nightlife resort. *Leisure Studies*, 32(3), 233–248.
- Tutenges, S., & Sandberg, S. (2013). Intoxicating stories: The characteristics, contexts and implications of drinking stories among Danish youth. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2013.03.011>
- Warr, D. (2005). Social networks in a 'discredited' neighbourhood. *Journal of Sociology*, 41(3), 285–308.