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**Noticed and then forgotten: Gender in  
alcohol policy stakeholder responses to  
alcohol and violence**

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European Conference on Addictive Behaviours and Dependencies  
23-25 November 2022

## Acknowledgment of Country

*I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. I pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging*

# Acknowledgments

## Research participants

- 42 Australian, Canadian and Swedish alcohol policy stakeholders who participated in the research

## Co-authors

- Adrian Farrugia, Helen Keane, Mats Ekendahl, Kathryn Graham & Duane Duncan

## Funder

- The research was funded by an Australian Research Council Discovery Project grant (DP180100365)

## Research staff

- Adrian Farrugia, Duane Duncan and Emily Lenton (various responsibilities including project coordination, interviewing, coding and analysis)

# Introduction

- Our project: A critical analysis of the handling of gender in research and policy on alcohol and violence in Australia, Canada and Sweden
- 1<sup>st</sup> phase: Research and policy on alcohol and violence rarely addresses its heavily gendered character
- 2<sup>nd</sup> phase: Interviews with alcohol researchers and **policy stakeholders**
- We ask:
  - How do alcohol policy stakeholders in Australia, Canada and Sweden articulate the relationship between men, masculinities, alcohol and public violence?
  - How do these understandings inform their perceptions of viable responses to this violence?

## Some context

Male perpetrators commit a disproportionately large share of violent crime, especially sexual violence, in Australia, Canada and Sweden:

- Australia: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017)
- Canada: Cotter & Savage (2019)
- Sweden: Statistics Sweden (2018)

## Approach 1/2

Carol Bacchi (2017):

- Policy 'objects', 'categories' and 'subjects' are actively made in practice:

When we develop or analyze a policy, we ought to ask specifically how it is potentially *gendering* and how it may encourage the production of behaviors and characteristics conventionally associated with those called 'women' and 'men,' making them come to be. (p. 20)

How do alcohol policy stakeholder understandings of gender, alcohol and violence constitute certain gendered subjects and problems in ways that shape possible responses?

## Approach 2/2

Terrell Carver (2005 [1998]):

- De-gendered narratives [establish power hierarchies of citizenship relating to sex and sexuality...] when they treat ‘man’ or ‘men’ or ‘persons’ [...] as ‘equal citizens’. Hierarchies of power *are noticed and then forgotten* within discourses that are consistently represented as quintessentially egalitarian—so we forget we forgot. (p. 19)
- The paradoxical construction of the ‘universal subject’ in politics and political theory as both masculine and de-gendered pushes important activities in society to the political margins and works to make change unthinkable for men. (2002 [1998] p. 18)

Our approach enables an analysis of the gendering practices that work to first *notice* and then *forget* male violence in policy responses to alcohol and violence.

## Method

- 35 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 42 alcohol policy stakeholders in Australia, Canada and Sweden
  - Australia: 14 interviews with 15 participants (11 women, 4 men)
  - Canada: 10 interviews with 12 participants (6 women, 6 men)
  - Sweden: 11 interviews with 15 participants (14 women, 1 man)
  
- Policy managers and policy staff:
  - National, state, territory, province or local government health, social welfare or liquor licensing departments
  - National, state, territory, province or local non-government health and/or alcohol and other drug sector agencies
  - Related organisations delivering public health advocacy or alcohol policy advice

# Analysis

1. *Noticing* the relationship between men, masculinities, alcohol and violence
2. *Forgetting* men and masculinities in policy responses to alcohol and violence

## *Noticing* the relationship between men, masculinities, alcohol and violence 1/3

- Silvia (Australia) argued that alcohol can ‘exaggerate’ men’s violent ‘tendencies’:

Men’s propensity when things are not going well [is] to act out, women’s propensity [is] to act in, and [...] psychoactive drugs would exemplify and exaggerate those tendencies [...] particularly alcohol.

## *Noticing* the relationship between men, masculinities, alcohol and violence 2/3

- Curtis (Canada): the ‘data tells us’ that in the ‘nineteen to twenty-four [year-old] age group, males more than females’ are the ‘ones more likely to become involved in violent acts’
- ‘It’s pretty well known that young men are more likely to drink and drive or use substances and drive [because] they have that testosterone’

# *Noticing* the relationship between men, masculinities, alcohol and violence 3/3

- Tilda (Sweden) gendered alcohol and violence as an issue related to men:

If you look at [an] aggregated level, I mean there's so much research that shows that [...] the risk of [men] sort of becoming violent, aggressive, is higher than among women.

# *Forgetting* men and masculinities in responses to alcohol and violence 1/3

- Steven (Australia): men have an increased 'risk of violence and poor behaviour' in drinking settings but policies addressing the night-time economy do not need to focus on men because:

Interventions in night-time entertainment precincts, simply because of the distribution [...] or the composition of people [...,] necessarily means that there is more of a focus on young men.

## *Forgetting* men and masculinities in responses to alcohol and violence 2/3

- Morrie (Canada) discussed the ‘association between males and violence’ and is working on policy addressing the ‘specific intersection between alcohol and sexual violence’ at university:

... really the recommendations would be more [...] how alcohol is served safely on campus [...] Just ensuring that if you’re having events where alcohol is being served that, first of all, you’re not offering [it] at a discount, you’re not having sort of ‘ladies’ nights’, these kinds of things that can drive consumption sort of into [the] binge drinking category.

## *Forgetting* men and masculinities in responses to alcohol and violence 3/3

- Marta (Sweden) discussed an intervention to reduce consumption at sporting events:

I think the policies are written on a general basis for the population, but then alcohol consumption at sporting events in Sweden, it's mainly men that are attending those. It's the same law, and the same law would apply if there was an event where only women were present and drinking. So, it's the same laws but depending on the event, I'm thinking if there's an event where tens and thousands of women are attending and drinking and fighting, you know, and I can't really think of [such] an event.

# Three gendering dynamics

1. Gendering alcohol and violence as related to men and masculinities
2. Backgrounding men and masculinities within initiatives that seek primarily to address harms associated with them
3. Restricting the consumption and freedoms of all people in order to reduce harms understood to stem primarily from men's violence

## Conclusion 1/2

- Men were identified as central to alcohol and violence by alcohol policy stakeholders in Australia, Canada and Sweden
- Rather than interventions focused on the nexus between masculinities, alcohol and violence, alcohol policy stakeholders proposed generic interventions
- Such approaches work to background men and masculinities and, therefore, to limit opportunities to address gendered violence in, and beyond, drinking contexts
- This process works to render men and masculinities unproblematic and beyond scrutiny

## Conclusion 2/2

- Despite alcohol policy's willingness to single out other population groups, men remain outside the scope of explicit policy attention
- Women's drinking receives explicit policy attention: e.g., product warnings about the dangers of consumption during pregnancy
- In working with a generic de-gendered subject, policy stakeholders mobilise an account of gender in which those most implicated in that violence are '*noticed and then forgotten*' (Carver, 2002 [1998])
- The power relations reproduced through enactments of masculinity and implicated in alcohol and violence, while indirectly managed, go unmarked and the kinds of change required of men remains unthinkable

# Further reading

Research Article

## Noticed and then Forgotten: Gender in Alcohol Policy Stakeholder Responses to Alcohol and Violence

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Qualitative Health Research  
2022, Vol. 32(10) 1419–1432  
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DOI: 10.1177/10497323221110092  
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### Abstract

In this article, we analyse interview data on how alcohol policy stakeholders in Australia, Canada and Sweden understand the relationship between men, masculinities, alcohol and violence. Using influential feminist scholarship on public policy and liberal political theory to analyse interviews with 42 alcohol policy stakeholders, we argue that while these stakeholders view men's violence as a key issue for intervention, masculinities are backgrounded in proposed responses and men positioned as unamenable to intervention. Instead, policy stakeholders prioritise generic interventions understood to protect all from the harms of men's drinking and violence without marking men for special attention. Shared across the data is a prioritisation of interventions that focus on harms recognised as relating to men's drinking but apply