Alcohol and serious leisure: Exploring meanings and practices of drinking in the home

Presenter: Robyn Dwyer

Authors: Robyn Dwyer, Sarah MacLean, Janette Mugavin & Sarah Callinan
Issues

• Widespread, growing concern about alcohol consumption among health experts, academics, policy makers, community groups and the media.

• “Safest level of drinking is none” ([www.cancervic.org.au](http://www.cancervic.org.au)).

• More than three-quarters of Australians have at least one alcoholic drink in a year – 77% in 2016 (AIHW, 2017).

• Majority of this drinking occurs in home settings – 63% in the drinker’s own home (Callinan et al., 2016).


Issues

• Explore the meanings and practices of home drinking among Australian adults, aged 30 years and older.

• Consider the tensions between these and public health efforts to reduce alcohol consumption in the population.
Approach

- Data from interviews with 40 people participating in a study of home drinking among Australians aged 30 years or older.

- Sample from a larger dataset of people who completed an online survey about home-drinking and who indicated they were willing to be contacted for in-depth interviews.

- Two groups – 1) drink within NHMRC guidelines\(^a\) \& 2) drink well above the guidelines\(^b\).

- Attention paid to gender and age diversity.

\(^a\) \(< 15\) standard drinks per week + never \(> 4\) drinks on a single occasion

\(^b\) 28 or more standard drinks at home per week
Approach

- Mainly case-study approach, focusing on the narrative of one participant, Karen.

- **Serious leisure**: ‘systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that people find so substantial, interesting, and fulfilling that […] they launch themselves on a (leisure) career centred on acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience’ (Stebbins, 2007, p.5). ‘[C]an be seen to add meaning and value to the lives of participants and can readily become a significant source of personal or group identification’ (Thurnell-Read, 2016, p.70)


Drinking at home

‘I’ll have a glass of wine with dinner’ (Judith, 50-54 yrs age group, within guidelines)

I’ll have a drink ‘when we’re getting ready to cook dinner’ (Steven, 45-49 yrs age group, above guidelines)

“it’s something to do to relax I suppose. So yeah, when I get home from work or whatever it's quite relaxing having a beer.” (Jason, 40-44 yrs age group, above guidelines)

[when you’re looking after children] you search for some ways to have something enjoyable or rewarding in your day, and that's like, ah, I've got that drink to look forward to. […] I've got just something that's like a reward or something, which you can't do by other more healthy perhaps ways, like going for a jog or going to the gym or something that could be another form of stress relief, or meditating or something like that, that you're supposed to do. No, you can't do that with kids, so you do the one thing you can do, which is have a glass of wine or something. (Annemaree, 40-44 yrs age group, within guidelines)
Karen, 45 years old, drinks above the guidelines

having just moved and rearranged all my stuff I discovered there's like 18, 19 boxes of wine. [...] Some of those wines I've had eight years or more, so it's not like I routinely turn over 19 dozen [=228] bottles of wine, but it is something I collect. [...] It's a bit of a joke, but that's why I bought my crappy old house. Because it has a cellar. [...] But it requires some work before I put my precious babies down there.

If I knew that somebody was taking me, say out to [country region], then I'd probably plan to stop at a few wineries that I know and pick up some more wine, and I would have specifically in mind what it was I wanted. [...] Certainly when I travel away, if I'm going to a wine region, there's a good chance I'll spend a couple of hundred bucks on wine. [...] That would normally have me coming home with two or three dozen. [...] A trip to somewhere would probably be, if not for the purpose of wine, but if it's a winery region, then I definitely would be trying and buying stuff that was reflective of that particular area.
Identity performance

if someone's coming over then I'll be very conscious of what wine I'm choosing to have. It may well be a wine-maker coming to visit, so I'll be pretty conscious about what wine it is I'm choosing to share with them. Talking about wine and places we've been wine tasting is certainly part of the enjoyment I get from drinking
Embodying place, time, relations

What wine often is for me is, ‘oh, I was with my family when we bought this wine. Do you remember? It was up in the mountains, we da, da, da, da’. There's a whole back story attached to it that isn't about alcohol at all but the experience of where we first tasted this drink, or what was happening when we bought it last time.
Materialising relationships

There's wine that I like because I first had it when I was out for dinner with someone who became a very dear friend, and that was the first time we'd ever hung out together. [...] there's a really different value attached to it than just the notion of drinking at home because you've got to have a drink.

Some weeks ago a friend of mine had bought [me], really a rather nice bottle of gin, and I thought, you know what, it's been a pretty big old weekend, I think just one glass won't hurt, so I had a glass of gin and tonic. [...] The gin was... a lot of the spirits are actually just on the bench, and I thought of the gin again, and I'd been talking to the person who'd given it to me, so I thought, oh yeah, I'll pour a glass and I'll send him a text.
Health promotion messaging

Tips to cut out alcohol

- ‘Cutting out alcohol doesn't need to limit your lifestyle. In fact, avoiding the hangovers and the tab from a big night out can bring many immediate benefits.’

- ‘Choose a non-alcohol drink that feels like you’re drinking something special – a healthy mocktail or soda and lime.’

- ‘Be mindful in situations when you would normally drink alcohol – often we choose a beer at the pub out of habit.’

- ‘Be aware of triggers that have you reaching for a drink – a stressful day at work? Try going for a walk instead. A celebratory drink with friends? Treat yourself to a mocktail.

Discussion

- Karen’s narrative serves as a reminder of the complex ways in which alcoholic beverages – wine, gin and tonic, whisky – are entangled in people’s everyday lives – how they provide meaning, enact identity and make material the relationships people have with one another.

- Stands in tension with health promotion messaging to simply ‘cut out alcohol’

- It is important that health promotion interventions give respect to others’ meanings and consider the effects and consequences of messages that demand people give up important values, pleasures and relations that inhere in their engagements with alcoholic beverages.

- If these tensions are not given consideration, there is a substantial risk that any messaging around reducing alcohol consumption will be met with resistance or ignored.
Thank you

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