Social Science & Medicine 296 (2022) 114712

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Social Science & Medicine

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/socscimed

Affordances of home drinking in accounts from light and heavy drinkers

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Alcohol
Home
Domestic
Consumption
New materialism: place
Practice theory

ABSTRACT

Home drinking contributes substantially to health harms associated with alcohol consumption. Drawing on practice theory and new materialism, we argue that drinking is a social practice that allows particular sets of effects, or affordances, when it takes place in a person's home. Qualitative interviews were conducted by telephone with 40 Australian adult home drinkers, of whom 20 drank at a level designated as low risk and 20 at a level which exposed them to a higher likelihood of harm. Our analyses identified four substantive affordances of home drinking practice. The first two concern transformations of home life. Home drinking allowed both celebration and smoothing of dissatisfaction with domestic relationships. Through producing subtly different affective states at home compared to in other locations, drinking practice rendered domestic settings home-like: as places of comfort and respite. The second two affordances of home drinking concern how home as a place acts in the co-constitution of drinking patterns. This entailed routinising alcohol consumption alongside other home-based practices and loosening constraints on intoxication. Importantly for our argument, each of these operated with greater intensity for participants who drank at a heavier level than for those who drank more moderately. For example, heavy drinkers expressed a greater imperative to alter relationships and affective states at home and emphasised how being at home produced opportunities for, and removed obstacles to, heavy drinking. We show that home drinking is patterned with other activities and entwined in domestic wellbeing and the emergence of home as a space of privacy, autonomy and relaxation for Australians in our study sample. Understanding home drinking as deeply embedded in the constitution of contemporary western domestic life helps to explain heavy alcohol consumption in these settings. It also supports the need for targeted public health responses such as restrictions on home delivery of alcohol.

1. Introduction

The consumption of alcohol in the home (hereafter, 'home drinking') has long been a part of life in westernised countries (Hands, 2018). This has increased during lockdown restrictions on movement precipitated by COVID-19 (Callinan et al., 2021; Nicholls and Conroy, 2021). Prior to COVID-19, almost two thirds (63%) of alcohol consumed in Australia was drunk in people's homes (Callinan et al., 2016). Although pubs were long regarded as the main British drinking-place, the proportion of drinking that occurs at home in the UK rose between the 1970s and the early years of this century (Foster and Heyman, 2013; Foster and Ferguson, 2012). A diary survey involving a sample that was representative of adults in the UK during 2009–11 showed that 78% of drinking occasions involved consumption of off-premises alcohol – i.e., alcohol not drunk in a pub, restaurant or other commercial venue (Ally et al., 2016).

Home drinking contributes appreciably to alcohol-related harm. In Australia, 56% of all alcohol consumption in the drinker's home exceeded the daily average of two Australian standard drinks (ASD; comprising 10 g of alcohol each) recommended in Australian drinking guidelines current at the time (Callinan et al., 2016). In a UK study, 60% of older women's high risk drinking occasions and 45% of men's occurred at home (Ally et al., 2016). Alcohol use in domestic settings can exacerbate acute harms such as violence (Laslett et al., 2015). Among men, 6% of disability adjusted life-years lost globally are attributable to alcohol, and the equivalent figure for women is 2.2%. This generally entails illnesses such as cancer and heart disease where the effects of alcohol are not context-dependent (Venkateswaran et al., 2018). Home drinking's contribution to long-term morbidity is therefore likely to be

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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2022.114712
Received 26 July 2021; Received in revised form 21 December 2021; Accepted 8 January 2022
Available online 12 January 2022

commensurate with its substantial prevalence as a proportion of all drinking.

Prior to recent reporting on drinking during COVID-19 lockdowns (Conroy and Nicholls, 2021; Nicholls and Conroy, 2021), alcohol researchers have generally been preoccupied with drinking in bars, clubs and other public venues, with particular attention to young people's drinking in the licensed venues of the night-time economy (i.e. Bøhling, 2015; Griffin et al., 2009). This more visible and carnivalesque form of drinking also captures media attention, with coverage of young people's drunken exploits in city centres across the world (Törrönen, 2003). Quotidian drinking practices of adults in their homes have been largely overlooked, both by researchers and also in policy (Callinan and MacLean, 2020; Hilton et al., 2014; Holloway et al., 2008; Nicholls, 2011; Törrönen, 2003).

2. Literature on drinking at home

While overshadowed by analyses of drinking in licensed venues, the qualitative literature does provide insights into experiences associated with home drinking. Most studies draw on data collected in the UK and focus on motivations for and meanings of home drinking. Achieving relaxation is most commonly reported as a motivation for home drinking (Foster and Ferguson, 2012; Holloway et al., 2008). Emslie et al. (2012) found that people in early-middle age drink at home in the evenings, sometimes heavily, to alleviate stress related to work or domestic responsibilities. Choosing to drink at home rather than elsewhere is also driven by cheapness and convenience, particularly for parents with young children (Foster and Ferguson, 2012; Holloway et al., 2008). Importantly also, drinking at home facilitates a symbolic transition from one identity to another – for instance from worker to private individual or, after childcare responsibilities are completed, from parent to adult (Brierley-Jones et al., 2014; Nicholls and Conroy, 2021). Lyons et al. (2014 p. 270) argue that this is achieved through alcohol's capacity to differentiate drinking occasions 'from normal, everyday embodied experience'.

Qualitative studies suggest that people regard drinking at home as entailing limitations and constraints that render it inherently less harmful – such as feeling that they should wait until children are asleep (Foster and Heyman, 2013; Holloway et al., 2008; Lyons et al., 2014). This affects men and women differently (Emslie et al., 2012). In Scotland, women described a greater imperative to retain a sense of control than men did. Women were concerned to avoid giving the impression that their drinking exposed children to harm in the home (Emslie et al., 2015; Lyons et al., 2014). Middle-class participants in one study regarded regular moderate drinking at home, particularly at dinnertime or when children were not present, as part of a 'respectable and sophisticated' middle-class lifestyle, contrasting this unfavourably with drinking large quantities of alcohol in venues outside the home (Brierley-Jones et al., 2014). The perception that home drinking is benign does not accord with stories from women and children who survive alcohol-related intimate partner or family violence (see, for example, Wilson et al., 2017). Yet, as Holloway et al. (2008) conclude, the symbolic association of home as a haven from harm can make it difficult for people to acknowledge harms or problems associated with domestic drinking.

3. Home drinking as social practice

For our analysis, we regard home drinking as a social practice. Social practices are recognisable sets of actions that are reproduced across time and places by many people and which entail a relatively stable 'set of established understandings, procedures and objectives' (Warde, 2005, p. 140). Thus they become to some degree organised and normative (Nicolini, 2017). Practice theorists regard individuals as 'carriers' of practices. We can distinguish between a practice and any individual's performances of it at a particular point in time, 'by which its continual reproduction or survival is ensured' (Maller, 2015, p. 58). Importantly, social practices entail dynamism as well as reproduction. As the elements of any social practice alter, and as other practices around it evolve, so a practice is reshaped (Southerton, 2013).

Social practices do not have absolute boundaries and their identification involves interpretive decisions (Nicolini, 2017). While drinking at home may be regarded in some circumstances as a social practice in its own right, at other times it is perhaps better viewed as a smaller action within more substantial home-based social practices. We are interested here in the effects of home drinking as a social practice on its own and as part of other practices.

Recent practice theorists incorporate the new materialist insight that the social world is produced by assemblages or networks including non-human as well as human actors (Maller, 2015). Scholars informed by new materialism have argued that alcohol and other drug use practices emerge through interactive networks of elements and forces. These include bodily actions involved in consumption, properties of substances, meanings ascribed, settings and times where use occurs and other people present, as they contingently align in networks (Demant, 2009; MacLean and Moore, 2014). Accordingly, the pleasures and problems that alcohol can bring are co-constituted within networks or assemblages comprising configurations of multiple elements and forces, some of which are human and others are not. The effects or outcomes that practices give rise to, including possibilities for pleasures and problems, are termed – in the language of new materialism – as 'affordances' (Ahmed, 2006; Pink, 2012). Rather than simply being settings where practices occur, places work within networks to orientate people to certain activities and afford specific sets of effects or outcomes (Ahmed, 2006; Pink, 2012).

Within this practice theory framework, the tendency of individuals to act or affect others in predictable ways, shaped by individual and collective histories and physiology, remains one of many forces at play (Dennis, 2020). Individuals have histories and proclivities that predispose them to particular alcohol consumption patterns. We refer here to inclinations to light or heavy drinking as 'dispositions' (Twine, 2015).

The aim of this paper is to identify affordances of the social practice of drinking at home, and whether these differ for those who drink at lighter and heavier levels. To do so we draw on interviews with 40 Australians aged 30–65 who drink alcohol, and at least some of it at home. Using practice and new materialist theorising (Reckwitz, 2002; Warde, 2005), we consider these accounts to trace what home drinking *does* (Dilkes-Frayne et al., 2017): what happens around and as a result of it, what it allows and how it changes things. Despite the commonplace nature of home drinking and its potential to be problematic, few studies provide focused exploration of home drinking or consider how conceptualising home drinking as a social practice might inform public health interventions. No existing research, to our knowledge, explores how home drinking differs for heavier or lighter consumers. By understanding practices as produced though both human and non-human elements, we extend research with a constructivist interest in what drinking at home means (Emslie et al., 2015; Foster and Heyman, 2013) to take account of the effects of place in the network of elements and forces that produce home drinking practice.

4. Method

Participants for the in-depth interviews analysed here were recruited after completing an online survey about home drinking, focused on consumption patterns. Advertisements were placed on Facebook profiles of Australians aged 30–65, with 2113 respondents completing the survey. People were eligible to access the survey if they were aged 30–65 and drank in their own homes at least once a week. The proportion of

alcohol consumed in the home is much lower in younger drinkers, rising steadily with age, while the amount consumed per occasion in the home decreases as respondents age (Callinan et al., 2016). Therefore this age group, where the amount consumed per occasion and the proportion of alcohol consumed in the home are both high, was of particular interest.

Two groups of potential interview participants were identified from those who had agreed to be recontacted for an interview when completing the survey. These were: light drinkers (LD) whose survey responses indicated that they drank at home but consumed fewer than 14 ASD a week and who, therefore, consumed alcohol within Australian health recommendations current at the time (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2009); and heavy drinkers (HD) who consumed considerably above the guidelines: at least 35 ASD weekly within their own home. This demarcation meant that we sampled drinkers at either end of a spectrum: those who drank above the recommended level but consumed fewer than 35 ASD drinks per week were excluded. Ethical approval was provided by La Trobe University [HEC18343].

Survey respondents were invited to participate in a telephone interview, initially in random order. We interviewed 40 participants, which allowed us to access people with a range of demographic characteristics in both of the LD and HD groups, while remaining manageable. After completing half of the interviews, we approached additional participants purposively to ensure a mix of ages and genders across both groups.

The eventual sample was evenly split between LD and HD (see Table 1). It included 19 men and 21 women and participants from all Australian states and territories. At least two participants from the LD and HD groups were interviewed in each life decade represented in the sample (not shown in the table), with slightly more in their 40s and fewer in their 60s. Participants were relatively privileged compared with people in the Australian population who received an income in 2019, with 10% earning less than 30,000 Australian dollars per annum and 40% earning over $110,000. Interviews were conducted by telephone in late-2018 to mid-2019 by two researchers, both of whom identify as female and have many years' experience conducting qualitative research interviews about substance use. Participants are referred to here by their interview number, whether they were classified as LD or HD and as man (M) or woman (W).

Interview participants were asked to tell us about drinking at home, how it fitted into their lives and whether it was different from drinking elsewhere. We used an informal conversational interviewing style to encourage participants to share detailed accounts of their lives (Bourdieu, 1996). Rather than ordering discussion sequentially around the researchers' questions as occurs in structured interviews, this approach entails encouraging interviewees to expound on issues relating to the research topic that they regard as important, with the interviewer probing for detail. Interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim and the transcripts imported into QSR NVivo 12. Data were coded by the first author in descriptive and analytic phases (Wolcott, 1994). The first round entailed coding to the elements of place, including the timing of home drinking and the people with whom it is done. A more fine-grained analytic coding framework was subsequently devised to identify distinct effects of home drinking. This occurred through an iterative process involving reflection and close analysis of the interview material in each code.

Table 1
Participant demographic information.

Gender	
Woman	21
Man	19
Non-binary	0
Drinking status	
Light drinker	20
Heavy drinker	20
Age	
30-39	10
40-49	13
50-59	12
60-65	5
State or territory	
Victoria	12
New South Wales	7
Queensland	6
Australian Capital Territory	2
Northern Territory	1
South Australia	1
Tasmania	1
Annual household income (Australian dollars)	
$0-$29,999	4
$30,000-$64,999	8
$65,000-$109,000	12
$110,000+	16

5. Analysis: four affordances of the social practice of home drinking

Our analyses identified four substantive effects or affordances of home drinking practices, each of which operated with greater intensity for participants who drank at a heavier level than for those who drank more moderately. The first two concern transformations to home life that occur through the practice of drinking at home. These are celebrating domestic relationships or muting disappointment that domestic life was not what participants had hoped for, and making home into a place of comfort, respite and safety. The second two affordances highlighted here concern how home as a place co-constitutes drinking patterns, rendering alcohol consumption routine through its connection with other home-based practices such as eating dinner and, for some, allowing opportunities to become intoxicated. Each of these is elaborated below.

5.1. Celebrating and smoothing disappointment with domestic relationships

Alcohol is widely understood as a means of creating and sustaining social relationships with friends and colleagues (MacLean, 2016; Törrönen and Maunu, 2011). As might be imagined, home drinking appeared in our interviewees' accounts to have greater impact on their domestic relationships than on other connections. The following quotes highlight that wine transformed dinner into a 'ritual' or 'celebration', infusing the event with additional meaning and enhancing feelings of connection to family members:

> Like we mightn't have anyone over, but a Saturday night might well be a meal that I had to go out and find special ingredients for and prepare, and I am going to get a nice bottle of red to go with it for me and [partner] to enjoy. And we'll all sit at the table and whatever. Talk about the week past or whatever's happening and that sort of thing. Yeah. It is kind of a, I don't know, ritual. The wine and food connection is strong. It's almost like a nurturing thing. Feeding people and giving them wine is synonymous, I guess, for me. (#14 HD M)

> I usually think it adds a celebratory thing. It probably feels like a signifier that we are having a time together. (#9 LD M)

Holloway et al. (2008, p. 543) found that for their participants, home drinking 'smooths their passage through everyday life'. Beyond enhancing pleasures, both light and heavy drinkers among our interviewees told us that alcohol worked with other factors to soften relationships in the house, blunting participants' awareness of everyday annoyances and averting conflict with partners and children. This was particularly called for at the end of the day:

> It just helps me to cope with the very stressful time of the day … I'm really tired after looking after kids or picking them up and dropping them off lots of places and them talking nonstop and asking me things and needing help with everything. And then trying to cook dinner at the same time as looking after them. They want me to play with them, and I need to break up fights between the two of them, and just all that stuff going on is so stressful that just having a drink helps me to relax a bit, to cope with it and enjoy it a bit more, I suppose. (#16 LD W)

> Initially it makes me less irritated, or more receptive to whatever my husband wants to unload about his day or about the kids. It makes me feel I'm not missing out on a wild exciting life happening elsewhere. And actually, just, I really like wine. (#4 HD W)

Drinking at home was also notable for helping people manage dissatisfactions about the makeup of their household, particularly when they lived alone or regretted their household composition. It reduced a sense of tedium for a man who lived alone: 'If I don't drink, I tend to be bored and a bit lonely' (#12 HD M). For one woman, drinking wine transformed routine evenings into something special, demonstrating that she maintained social standards even though she was by herself:

> It's sort of a treat, I suppose, except that it's almost every day …. But it kind of feels nice. You get a nice glass, then you sit down. It makes what could be something simple at home into a bit of a production, particularly if it's just me. It doesn't feel like I'm having cheese on toast in front of the TV. It feels like I'm making an effort. (#34 LD W)

Another participant reflected on the propensity of home drinking to enhance his relationship with his partner and dampen longings to share their home with children or pets:

> We just sort of talk rubbish, have the television on and have a beer or two and talk about what's on with our - sometimes we have serious conversations, but I think it helps to [forget about] what would be. We don't have children. We don't have any pets. So, we have a lot of time just with ourselves and I think in some ways it helps fill that gap of how we interact with each other. (#3 HD M)

This quote and others above suggest that heavier drinkers feel a particular imperative to manage disappointments with their domestic relationships and alter their affective experience of being at home by drinking alcohol, as we explore further below.

5.2. Making home a place of comfort, safety and respite

Our interviews reinforced the notion that the effects of alcohol consumption emerge through the interaction of elements that include, but go beyond, biological effects of alcohol on the body (Bøhling, 2015; Demant, 2009). The affordances that drinking practices give rise to are co-constituted by the places where it occurs – including a person's home.

Participants spoke of specific sets of feelings and sensations that occurred when they added drinking to the mix of things that they did at home. Some of these, such as relaxation, were similar to described effects of alcohol outside the home (e.g. Törrönen and Maunu, 2007). Yet many participants also observed that alcohol produced subtly different affective states when they were at home compared to when they were out. For these people, drinking at home was characterised by lower arousal and reduced desire or capacity to engage energetically with others. Drinking at home produced a greater sense of comfort and safety than was engendered by drinking elsewhere:

> I think at home it's more of a relaxing feeling, whereas … when I'm out it's more of an energising feeling. I guess because you're out with - there's people and there's a different environment and it might be more - I think I feel more - like it gives me more energy. Whereas at home, it actually makes me tired. (#33 LD W)

> [I'm] relaxed at home, whereas […] when I'm drinking and I'm out, well, I would be sociable, I'd be with people, and therefore I'm more on edge. Yeah, more anxious and – yeah, and you know, I'm – yeah, more hyped up too, probably. So, much more relaxed at home. (#12 HD M).

Holloway et al. (2009) argue that the meanings of drinking in the home arise through contrast with the presumed opposite - drinking in public settings. We make the same contention in relation to affective dimensions of drinking in these two different settings. Beyond the significance of drinking as signalling relaxation and detachment, home drinking seemed, in our participants' accounts, to produce an affectively felt sense of home as a place of respite and comfort. Thus, drinking practices differentiated home from the outside public world - in effect, making home home-like.

One's residence is not automatically or pre-discursively a place of retreat, safety and cosiness. Rather, it is made so through well-established ideologically-embedded meanings wherein home is imagined as a refuge from public life (Holloway et al., 2009; Pelzelmayer et al., 2020). For our interviewees, the practice of home drinking generated affective states that afforded their capacity to experience home as a refuge, aligning with the ideological meanings of home:

> 'it's just about being comfortable I guess … it's just cooling and enjoyable' (#1 LD M), and 'I'm just comfortable having – drinking by myself, watching my TV shows or a movie or whatever' (#12 HD M).

For others, drinking while engaging in the activities that were available to them at home produced a sense of sufficiency, as we saw above, alleviating discomfort or unhappiness:

> If I was bored and I had a beer or whatever, I would feel content and feel – and then I'd have another beer, and then before I know it, it'd be fine, being at home. I wouldn't feel the need to do anything else or go anywhere or I'd be quite content in my own little world. (#29 HD W)

While a desire to alter affective states also motivated light drinkers in our study to consume alcohol at home, it was a much less marked or pressing concern for them than for the heavy drinkers. Heavy drinkers in our sample spoke of how home drinking afforded them a sense of fun (#29 HD W), enjoyment (#36 HD W) or relaxation (#8 HD M). They enacted being at home and drinking by wearing what they chose to, by lying down or by laughing as loudly as they pleased (#28 HD M). These were things that could not be done while drinking outside the house and were at the same time both made more pleasurable and facilitated by the addition of alcohol. In this sense, drinking is entwined with other practices such as pyjama wearing (#40 HD W) through which they experience being at home as providing 'a homely feel' or sense of 'cocooning' (#12 HD M):

> You know, like, if somebody said, here we could go out or you could just go home and walk around in bare feet and have a glass of red and, you know, sit and lie on the couch; I'd choose that. It is – it's sort of – I mean it has a homely feel; it's just something that, yeah, one of the things that happens at home. (#14 HD M)

> So, yeah, [when drinking at home] you don't have to worry about how you're going to get home afterwards and getting in a fight or offending someone. Anything like that. It's a cocooning thing. I'm in my world and I'm fully in control of my environment. (#12 HD M)

Drinking was part of enactments of the autonomy and control of space that are possible at home. In the following quote, one participant spoke of barring incursions of the outside world (such as phone calls) when he drank at home, making home an inviolate space for him and his partner:

> We tend to drink at night when people don't ring us; … that way we can drink and not have to talk to anybody but each other. We don't want to have conversations on the phone when we've had a few

drinks because we're probably liable to bite somebody's head off. (#28 HD M)

In contrast to the energetic social selves that practices involving drinking outside the home give rise to, drinking at home produces cosiness, comfort, wellbeing and release from the outside world's demand of civility. Through this, a drinker's home, and particularly the home of a heavier drinker, becomes constituted as a place of retreat and safety.

5.3. Routinising alcohol use as part of other home-based practices

We turn now to consider how home drinking practices afford or produce effects on alcohol consumption patterns. Here we suggest that alcohol use becomes routinised through patterning with other practices enacted in the home, and in the next section we argue that home as a setting facilitates drinking to intoxication.

Drinking was an activity in itself for one woman who explained, 'when I'm drinking I don't want to do anything' (#7 HD W). For the other participants, however, drinking was 'bundled' (Shove et al., 2012) with other practices in the home, knitted into and performed along with them. For such interviewees, it may be argued that drinking is better regarded as an activity within a wider practice of being at home, rather than a distinct social practice in itself. Concerning other social practices in the home, drinking was most frequently described as being part of, or 'involved in', cooking or eating dinner:

It's usually while I'm getting stuff done. Like, if I'm in the kitchen, I'm cooking, I'll drink while I'm doing that, or even if I'm doing dishes or something like that, I'll have a drink on the go there. We've got quite a few kids so [I'm] usually fairly busy with things. I don't get to sit down and just do that [drink]. (#23 LD M)

… I like to have a beer while I'm cooking and then I like to replace it with another one before we eat. So, yeah, drinking is involved in the meal preparation as well …. There is something very enjoyable about having a glass of wine or a glass of beer whilst you're cooking. It sort of seems to go hand-in-hand with the activity (#3 HD M).

Other activities which some participants constructed as going 'hand-in-hand' with alcohol included feeding children, connecting with and spending time with partners or other household members and watching digital media. One (#28 HD M) articulated his predilection for drinking in the garden: 'When I'm drinking I will … go out and water my garden and do things like that with a glass of wine in my hand'. Both the consumption of alcohol and the activities that went along with it were established and routinised as quotidian and enjoyable parts of home life by their connections and sequencing with each other (see Conroy and Nicholls, 2021). This is hinted at in participant #20's appeal to the interviewer to agree with her that drinking and food preparation are self-evidently linked:

When the children were home it was like, okay, time to cook dinner, so time for a glass of wine, right? (#20 HD W)

The light drinkers we spoke with often described their drinking as confined to the duration of a specific activity, such as cooking, or as marking a boundary between roles and activities, such as relaxation after children go to bed (Lyons et al., 2014). One woman drank 'one glass at night, generally around the 8:30–9:00pm mark, once my daughter's in bed' (#18 LD W). Other light drinkers only drank while eating dinner: 'We generally wait till the meal's served, so we don't generally drink with the preparation of the meal' (#30 LD M).

In contrast, participants in our study with a disposition (Twine, 2015) to heavier drinking tended to speak of a greater range of activities at home as better done with a drink on hand:

Well … last night, we were both here. We were either on the computer or watching TV. We started off with some wines and then we got up and did dinner and we had a few more wines and we watched TV and we swapped between the computer or TV …. Then in fact we had, I don't know, four or five, half a dozen glasses of wine and then that was it. Then we go to bed and sleep all right and get up the next day and do what we have to do. (#28 HD M)

I would describe myself as a typical mummy drinker. [I usually have my first drink] at 17 hours on the dot. That's when I'll start making dinner, so while I'm preparing dinner and chatting to my husband and my daughter …. We have two glasses then while I do all that, and then I will often have one with dinner, and then I'll have another one when she's in bed. (#36 HD W)

Oh I'm quite a binge drinker. Once I start, I can't stop …. I usually have music going and usually start off by cooking something and have a drink with that …. By the time I finish cooking something, I can't be bothered eating it [laughs]. So yeah, that's usually the routine for me. Sometimes it differs. As I say, sometimes I can just have a beer straight away in the morning. That's usually how I go. I mainly drink alone …. I have a few drinks and hop on Facebook and watch [something]. (#31 HD M)

Both light and heavy drinkers in our study described highly routinised and repeated patterns of home-based activity that were reinforced though anticipation and enjoyment of alcohol. It is in this sense that we suggest that home drinking becomes embedded in the 'routines of home' – that is, the everyday practices or habits through which we constitute home life – through its mutually reinforcing entanglements with other home-based practices. For some then, drinking at home involves, as Conroy and Nicholls (2021) identify, relatively little thought or active decision making. Notably, alcohol consumption was bundled with a much wider range of activities for heavier drinkers than for those who drank more moderately. Heavy drinkers were less likely to engage in home-based activities without a drink on hand, with the effect that they consumed more regularly and over longer periods of time at home.

5.4. Loosening constraints on, and producing opportunities for, becoming intoxicated

Concerning drinking in public settings, the proclivity of places to orientate people towards heavy consumption, as well as how places themselves are constituted though drinking practices, has been the subject of a number of studies. For example, Jensen et al. (2019, p. 362) show how 'spaces such as the NTE [night-time economy] offer certain paths of behaviour which impress differently on their participants, just as participants of the NTE impress on these paths through their specific engagements with it.'

An important way that place orientates people to drinking more or less is through the relative accessibility and cost of alcohol (Babor et al., 2010). Drinking at home costs substantially less than drinking at public venues. This is primarily because take-away alcohol is cheaper than alcohol purchased for consumption in venues. Moreover, drinking at home enables people to avoid other expenses associated with public drinking – childcare, taxis, playing poker machines at venues where alcohol is sold, or eating out. The relative cheapness of packaged alcohol enhanced the appeal of drinking at home for some of the LDs in our study, but was particularly compelling for the HDs whom we might assume spent more money on alcohol:

It's a hell of a lot cheaper to drink at home. I could buy a box of beer, which is, say, $40, and it would get me drunk two nights in a row, whereas if I went to the pub, I might not even be able to get drunk on $40. (#29 HD W)

Some heavy drinkers in our study observed that going out to bars and venues entailed deterrents to drinking to intoxication, making it easier 'not to go completely overboard if I decide to' (#21 HD W). Disincentives to becoming drunk in a public setting included fear of getting stranded without transport; risking drink driving casualties or arrest (#28 HD M); becoming embroiled in a fight (#31 HD M); or having to put up with other drunk people (#28 HD M). While fear of strangers or attracting the attention of police prompted caution when drinking in public, many felt it was safer to become intoxicated at home. This was particularly the case for women:

> I feel like you can drink a bit more at home because in that – in those safe surroundings at home [you are] with people you trust and who'll take care of you. You're not really consciously thinking that, but there's that feeling of safety and being able to let yourself go. (#35 LD W)

> I'm not saying I would choose to get drunk at home because it's safer, but I certainly foresee a lot less risk of me being assaulted or lost or losing a wallet if I was at home, versus if I was out and drunk. (#27 HD W)

Drinking at home is less constrained than in venues, where drinks are measured (Nicholls and Conroy, 2021). Just as being at home extended drinking over time for heavier drinkers, many of the heavy drinkers we spoke with also reflected that being at home loosened restrictions on or afforded intoxication. The ease of ordering alcohol deliveries to their home at any time of day facilitated this: ' … you can order online late at night, which is really not a great thing for people like me' (#21 HD W). Heavy drinkers explained that while drinking outside the home is limited by price, opening hours and restrictions on sales to the intoxicated, being at home allows a person to drink for as long as one wants and as much as one wants. One described drinking binges where he would not leave the house for days, other than to walk to the bottle shop:

> I tend to kick it off earlier on the Thursday and think I'll stop before Monday comes around. Sometimes I do and sometimes I don't. (#31 HD M)

Physical features of home as a place also actively facilitated heavy drinking. One woman could easily navigate a familiar environment when intoxicated and felt safer having diminished control at home:

> Oh [drinking so much as to be out of control] doesn't really matter when I'm at home. Well, I'm barefooted, I don't have shoes on, and I know my surroundings. It's a safer place to be … I can just walk up the stairs and go to bed and I'm there. (#7 HD W)

The privacy of home reassured some heavy drinkers that they would not be laughed at or judged for drunkenness (#29 HD W). One participant appreciated that he could consume as much fluid as he liked at home without the inconvenience of queuing for a bathroom (#31 HD M). Others, including the woman quoted above, felt unrestrained in drinking at home to intoxication due to the ease of finding a bed or a couch to collapse onto.

6. Discussion

This paper considers how people's discussions of home drinking point to the existence of distinct drinking practices in domestic settings, entailing particular affordances or effects. We make two main points.

The first of these extends an argument that has been previously made about drinking in public settings: that the places where drinking occurs are part of networks of elements and forces that constitute distinct social practices, each allowing specific sets of possibilities. Writers analysing drinking in public places have shown how place changes the body's capacity to be affected by alcohol and to affect others (Bøhling, 2015; Demant and Landolt, 2014). The excitement of central city places intensifies sensations associated with drinking for those from outer urban areas, in turn producing the NTE as place of risk and frisson (MacLean and Moore, 2014). This perspective on place has, however, rarely been explored in relation to alcohol use in the home.

Like drinking in other contexts, the social practice of home drinking emerges from the interactions of a network of elements and forces (see Demant, 2009). These include the psychoactive properties of alcohol, the physical structures of home, the meanings of both home and drinking, the times when people are at home and the drinkers' relationships with other people present. These forces act recursively to produce distinct characteristics, experiences and effects of home drinking.

In the context of home, drinking contributes to functional benefits for many people and enhances their capacities to create and maintain domestic life. Drinking alcohol at home allows celebration of domestic partnerships and family, and also dulls domestic irritations that arise in daily life with these same people. For those who live alone or do not have the family configuration they wish for, the absence of a partner, children or pets in the house becomes easier to accommodate when drinking.

Drinking in the home produces different sets of affective experience to drinking in other locations – with participants ascribing greater capacity for relaxation and disengagement on drinking at home, compared with drinking in public places. Holloway et al. (2008, p. 535) write that home is discursively framed as a haven and place of 'comfort, familiarity, intimacy, relaxation and privacy'. The building one resides in is not naturally or intrinsically any of this. Rather, it is made so through the practices that we and others enact in and around it (Pink, 2012). Consumed at home at a time when other obligations are not pressing, alcohol allows enactments of autonomy and control over space and engenders feelings of comfort and safety that are hallmarks of being in one's own place.

Although our focus here is not on comparing the practice of drinking at home for women and men, the quotes from our participants make it evident that differences exist, which is unsurprising given that much of women's alcohol consumption has arguably occurred at home due to stigmatisation of their public drinking (Emslie et al., 2015). Women in our study were more likely to use alcohol for its effect of maintaining domestic harmony and to drink at home because they felt safer to be intoxicated there than at pubs. Women with children also drank at home because of childcare responsibilities. One reflected that it denoted 'mummy time,' thus legitimating drinking as part of time out from motherhood duties and perhaps countering social mores that mothers should avoid alcohol.

The network of elements entailed in the practice of home alcohol consumption includes drinkers with their own drinking histories and dispositions. The second main argument we make in this paper is that the interplay of drinking with home (with its material, temporal and relational elements), recognisable in the accounts of all our research participants, had particularly intense effects for those who drank more heavily.

Where other research (Foster and Heyman, 2013; Holloway et al., 2008; Lyons et al., 2014) suggests that drinkers feel they are relatively constrained in their home-based consumption, this was not the case for heavy drinkers interviewed for our study. Heavier drinkers in our study described a greater range of home-based activities as usually undertaken while drinking, thereby embedding drinking more deeply in their routines. For them, home became more markedly a place of retreat and seclusion when drinking and they spoke more frequently about how alcohol helped them manage domestic dissatisfactions at home. For those with a disposition to do so, being at home also affords or allows heavy intoxication. This is for reasons that include - but go beyond - the cheaper price of off-premise alcohol. Material features of home such as privacy from strangers' judgement and the availability of beds and couches to collapse on loosened constraints on drinking heavily. At the same time, the capacity to become intoxicated at home worked

affectively for heavier drinkers to reproduce culturally embedded and ideologically-framed experiences of home as a place of comfort and autonomy, where one's own desires become paramount over conventions about presenting a sociable self.

As Maller (2015, p.54) writes, a practice approach informed by new materialism has a particular salience in health research because it broadens our gaze beyond individual decision-making so that 'health and wellbeing are considered outcomes of participation in a set of social practices, mutually constructed by the materiality of everyday life'. This paper shows how drinking at home produces, at least for some, amicable and satisfactory domestic relationships, alignment of one's sense of home with ideological meanings, patterning of home life, and opportunities for heavy consumption. It appears that home drinking is deeply embedded in the production of domestic life in present-day Australia and similar societies. Few participants discussed adverse consequences of their drinking during interviews; perhaps these had not emerged for them to date. Nonetheless, some of the long-term harms to health and wellbeing with which regular heavy alcohol use is linked (Venkateswaran et al., 2018) may lie ahead for heavy drinkers in our study. Although these harms are experienced by individuals, they are also social in origin.

Our study indicates that heavy home drinking emerges though complex interactions of disparate elements and forces, including and reaching beyond the individual's proclivities. Understanding home drinking as a social practice suggests opportunities to address the health and social problems which heavy home drinking appears to exacerbate. Public health campaigns should continue to look beyond the drinker; this might entail, for example, implementing strategies such as campaigns that interrogate social meanings of drinking at home or seeking to limit the range of home-based activities that heavier drinkers regard as suitable to engage in while consuming alcohol. Given heavy drinkers' emphasis on ease of access in facilitating home drinking, imposing tighter controls such as time restrictions on alcohol delivery to private residences would be advisable.

We note some limitations to this study. Interviews were conducted prior to the restrictions associated with COVID-19. These restrictions dramatically increased the proportion of drinking done at home and likely introduced new dimensions (see here Conroy and Nicholls, 2021). As we have argued elsewhere, the pandemic and its shifting of alcohol consumption to the domestic sphere provides a greater imperative to understand the dynamics of home drinking (Callinan & MacLean, 2020). A further limitation is that other practices that routinise life at home, enhance domestic satisfaction and generate an affective sense of home are considered only peripherally here. Clearly there are additional pathways by which these effects are achieved. Further, we did not ask our participants directly about drinking with visitors to the home, a situation which no doubt brings dynamics that are not considered here.

Finally, other researchers (Holloway et al., 2009; Jayne et al., 2010; Pelzelmayer et al., 2020) caution against dichotomising public and private drinking spaces without tracing connections to drinking in other places. While this advice is no doubt apt, a research focus on the specificity of home drinking, as we offer here, is critical in better understanding these important locational linkages. Redressing the lack of research on home drinking, this paper shows how the practice of drinking in domestic settings is deeply embedded in the constitution of contemporary western domestic life. This helps to explain the persistence of heavy alcohol consumption, and supports other research (Mojica-Perez et al., 2019) arguing for targeted public health responses such as restrictions on home delivery of alcohol.

Credit author statement

Sarah MacLean: conceptualisation, methodology, formal analysis, writing – original draft, writing - review and editing. Robin Room: conceptualisation, methodology, writing - review and editing. Megan Cook: investigation, formal analysis, writing - review and editing. Janette Mugavin: conceptualisation, methodology, investigation. Sarah Callinan: conceptualisation, methodology, writing - review and editing, project administration, funding acquisition.

Acknowledgements

SC is funded by a Discovery Early Career Research Award from the Australian Research Council (DE180100016). This work was also funded by an Australian Research Council Discovery Project (DP2000003316). The Centre for Alcohol Policy Research is co-funded by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education, an independent, charitable organisation working to prevent the harmful use of alcohol in Australia (http://www.fare.org.au). We thank Robyn Dwyer for insightful suggestions.

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