youth coalition
of the ACT

Dutch Courage:
Young People, Alcohol and Alcohol Related Violence

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The Youth Coalition of the ACT acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional owners and continuing custodians of the lands of the ACT and we pay our respects to the Elders, families and ancestors.

We acknowledge that the effect of forced removal of Indigenous children from their families as well as past racist policies and actions continues today.

We acknowledge that the Indigenous people hold distinctive rights as the original people of modern day Australia including the right to a distinct status and culture, self-determination and land. The Youth Coalition of the ACT celebrates Indigenous cultures and the invaluable contribution they make to our community.

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Abstract

This Report discusses the findings of a Project aiming to investigate the experiences, perspectives and understandings of young people regarding alcohol related violence in Canberra. The Project examined the patterns of alcohol consumption, the value, and role attributed to alcohol and violence in the lives of young people who socialise in Civic. The Project used semi-structured focus group interviews and a survey with self-selected peer groups of young people aged 18 – 25 years. A 'pathfinder,' a key youth participant and contact, was used to identify the target groups, providing a means to access groups of young people, and arrange a familiar venue for the focus groups.

This was a qualitative investigation that sought to not only obtain the subjective experiences and stories of the participants but also to engage the participants in an analysis of existing theories and models accounting for alcohol consumption and related behaviours by young people. The participants were encouraged to provide their own explanations, theories and analysis based on their own experiences and the information they were provided with. The findings of the qualitative analysis were presented to research participants to validate, verify, refute and add further insights and clarification.

Two key findings emerged from the Project. Firstly, two groups of young people were identified regarding alcohol related violence, referred to as Group A and Group B. These Groups do not represent distinct communities, but rather different relationships to alcohol and violence within the broader population, and not (necessarily) any other kind of cultural differentiation. Group A encompasses the vast majority of the target group (18 – 25 year olds) of this research project: young people who drink, or associate with other young people who drink, and socialise in Civic. Group A are constrained by negative association with alcohol related violence and a desire to avoid conflict and the negative consequences linked to violence. Group B value violence as a means to obtain status, empower them and claim a legitimate identity.

The second key finding of the Project outlines the 'patterns of alcohol related violence'. These incidents of alcohol related violence are predominantly initiated by groups of young men aiming to bolster their status. Four phases were identified, including victim selection, justification, conflict and dispersal. Several approaches and potential 'ways forward' are identified in conclusion.

Dutch Courage

"Tradition tells that when the Dutch ruled the waves…prior to going into battle, sailors should be served plenty. They felt that, thus fortified, they would fight all the better. It did not take long for the English to become aware of the custom and take advantage of it to denigrate their formidable foe. His 'Dutch courage' was not real but merely artificially created by the 'spirit' infused into those otherwise 'gutless' sailors.

Another version (of the story) differs slightly. It claims that in the many wars the Dutch fought, at times the soldiers did not know what they were fighting for. To have to go into battle for something that meant nothing to them and against an enemy they had no reason to hate, was rather difficult."[1]

Introduction

It is not hard for anyone to believe that there are links between alcohol, disorderly behaviour and violence. Presentations in media, our own experiences and folklore support the intuitive response to this association. Moreover, there is an abundance of data verifying and addressing the link between alcohol and violence. However, when one starts to explore these issues it is apparent that the link between alcohol and violence is complex.

Many social issues seem to become more of a concern to the media and public when they include 'young people'. Thus, alcohol related violence is a more potent topic when focusing on young people's behaviour. The initial response of some people is to suggest that any moral panic regarding 'young people' is overblown, a 'storm in a teacup'. However, evidence indicates that young people (in this Project referring to 18 – 25 years) are more likely to be involved in alcohol related violence.

This report outlines the findings of a project that sought to provide a snapshot of experiences, expectations, meanings, values, attitudes and practices regarding violence and other negative consequences of alcohol consumption amongst young people. The aim of the qualitative research was to:

- Acquire an understanding from the perspectives and experiences of young people regarding alcohol consumption and alcohol related behaviour, particularly violence; and,
- Identify the cultural context that frames young people's understandings of alcohol and drinking related behaviours.

The Project investigated alcohol related violence that occurs in public, and focused on Civic, the central business district of Canberra. The project did not address sexual assaults (including rape), domestic violence, or violent crimes used for material gain. It is an assumption of the Project that the patterns, practices and nature of these other acts of violence differ. Furthermore, researching these other forms of violence would involve different methods of data collection.

Why do this project? What value does it add?

> *"If drinking practices are guided by symbolic meanings negotiated through social interactions, then understanding young people's drinking must also be understood at that level."*[2]

There is a lack of research addressing the social and cultural context of drinking and examining perspectives and experiences of young people.[3] The prevailing evidence regarding young people and alcohol related violence is from a predominately epidemiological and quantitative perspective. This data explores the consequences and effects of alcohol consumption and tells us who, where, when, what and how much young people are drinking.

The behaviour and practices of all people are shaped by many factors, including physiology, psychology, and the social, cultural and environmental context. Alcohol consumption is in part learnt behaviour that reflects the practices, social norms, standards, values, expectations, structures and constraints that shape people's lives.[4] Many of these cultural factors differ amongst cultural and social groups and also across age groups and generations. Within the category of 'young people' there are a diverse range of sub-cultures or 'tribes'.[5] Individuals do not always drink alcohol with

the same group of people or in the same place. Rather, in modern society, people (and perhaps young people in particular) traverse different social contexts and milieu, with diverse social affiliations.

Many social and cultural factors that affect drinking and drinking related behaviours are subjective – they can only really be known by asking people, as they concern the individual person's thoughts, opinions and feelings. For example, one can only find out the value attributed by an individual to alcohol consumption, or what their experiences, perceptions and expectations are, by asking them. The perspective and understandings of young people relating to their own lives is rarely prioritised in research, including alcohol and other drug research. The subjective account of young people regarding their alcohol consumption and related behaviour is significant as it is a key feature that shapes their behaviour. The subjective views of young people are an important factor in identifying barriers and enablers to changing patterns of alcohol consumption and alcohol related behaviour.[6]

This report is framed by the understanding that young people are capable of reflecting on, analysing, and providing insights into their own behaviour and that of others. The young people involved in this research (the participants) were presented with an overview of the prevalence and patterns of drinking, and a brief précis of some of the theories and explanations addressing young people and alcohol related violence. This information was used to provoke discussion and the participants were able to consider, refute, confirm and add to these ideas.

While the Project prioritised the subjectivity of young people – the perspectives and experiences of young people – this is situated against other sets of data. The questions and topics of interest pursued in the research with participants is framed by existing research. Different sets of data can support, conflict with or offer varying explanations. Triangulation of different data – comparing, contrasting and highlighting the similarities and differences in data – can provide important insights, and can lead to exploring different interventions and initiatives to affect positive change.

Prevalence and Patterns of Alcohol Consumption and Alcohol Related Violence

Estimates regarding the patterns of alcohol consumption and violent behaviour vary across studies.[7] This variation is the result of numerous factors, such as: differences in the way alcohol in crime is defined; whether figures relate to police attendance; different data collection processes; problems regarding measurement of alcohol consumption and intoxication; and underreporting.[8] Any data that relies on self-reporting of 'deviant' or illegal behaviour is limited in its reliability and validity. Nonetheless, there is evidence to suggest that self-reported data is more accurate than other official records from police, courts and treatment agencies.[9] The National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) publication notes that estimates regarding alcohol consumption by young people should be interpreted cautiously due to low prevalence and smaller sample sizes. Nonetheless, according to the 2007 NDSHS data:

- The average age that Australians have their first drink is 17 years;
- 22 percent of teenagers drink weekly;
- 1 in 4 people over the age of 14 reported having been verbally abused by someone under the influence of alcohol;

- People aged 14 years or older were more than twice as likely to be a victim of alcohol related harmful incidents than victims of incidents related to other drugs;
- 13.1 percent of Australians were put in fear of their safety by someone under the influence of alcohol; and
- 4.5 percent of Australians 14 years of age of older were physically abused by someone under the influence of alcohol.[10]

Characteristics of Alcohol Related Violence

Particular social indicators have been identified as predictors of alcohol related violence. These include:

- Being young, single, and male are the most significant predictors of alcohol related violence. In 2007, males were twice as likely as females to report being physically abused by someone under the influence of alcohol.[11]
- As age increases, the probability of being a victim of any alcohol related social harm declines significantly.[12]
- Males are more likely than females to be involved in incidents of physical abuse in pubs, clubs or in the street. Females are more likely to be involved in incidents in the home.[13]
- Alcohol consumption amongst young people is typified by frequent episodes of binge drinking. Intoxication (or determined drunkenness) is normalised for young people in Australia.[14]
- Alcohol-related violence in which both the victim and offender are under the influence of alcohol is more likely to be spontaneous or opportunistic, and more likely to involve strangers.[15]
- Alcohol related assaults are most common between 9pm and 3am on Friday and Saturday nights.[16]
- There is a relationship between seasonal changes, sporting and other events, and the rate of reported incidents of violence that is partly attributed to increased level of alcohol consumption.[17]

Although young people are more likely than other age groups to experience alcohol related violence, this may have more to do with their higher frequency of going out in the evening rather any other factor, i.e. night-time activity may be more significant than age regarding the likelihood of involvement in alcohol related violence.[18] Similarly, alcohol consumption may be associated with other lifestyle factors that increase the likelihood of exposure to harm, such as (again) being out at night and spending more time in clubs and pubs than other social groups.[19]

Methodology

The Project took a qualitative research approach, as there is a lack of qualitative research addressing alcohol related violence. Qualitative data can provide insights into the cultural, subjective and phenomenological aspects of alcohol related violence. As mentioned earlier, there is already a significant amount of quantitative data available and being collected, examining patterns of alcohol consumption and alcohol related violence.

Research Tools

Focus group interviews were the primary research tool of this project, framed by semi-structured questions and the explication of relevant data, theories and models accounting for alcohol consumption and alcohol related violence. Particular attention was given to the structure of the focus groups so as not to lead participants' train of thought.

Surveys were used to obtain baseline data and to collect systematic and replicable responses that could be compared and contrasted with the qualitative data collected through the focus group interviews. The survey consisted of 11 questions. The surveys were completed after discussing issues with the participants in order to not provoke the use of the language used in the surveys. Research participants do not necessarily think and discuss things in the terms used in response options of a survey that can frame and restrict their replies. These factors can limit the usefulness of surveys and questionnaires when endeavoring to obtain the perceptions and insights of research participants. In particular the vernacular and language categories the participants used can provide significant insights. For these reasons, the survey questions followed discussions pertaining to particular issues.

Focus groups were used not only to collect primary data from young people – their experiences, values and practices – but also to ascertain their understanding, analysis and interpretation of alcohol related violence. After discussing key issues, the participants were presented with different theories, explanations and models that have been used to account for alcohol related behaviour. This component of the focus group functioned somewhat like a university tutorial and aimed to assist participants to engage with the issues on an analytical and interpretative level. The participants refuted, confirmed and clarified the perspectives on these existing theories and explanations with reference to their own experiences. Conversely, some participants understandings of alcohol related behaviours were reframed through these discussions.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcribed interviews were analysed and themes were identified and coded. The major findings of this research emerged from the coding and analysis of these interviews. However, this process and the ensuing findings were presented to a group of the participants for discussion, verification and clarification. The results from this process were integrated into the findings.

Participants

Participants were recruited on the basis of having drunk alcohol within the last 12 months, and the Project concentrated on young people who go out to venues in Civic, Canberra's central business district. Key young people were engaged as

'pathfinders'. The role of the pathfinder is to recruit their peers to participate in the research, creating a path for the researcher to get access to subcultures or 'tribes' – hence 'pathfinder'. This resulted in self-selected peer groups participating in the focus groups. Self-selected peer groups are groups of people who, according to their own criteria, are unified as a group.

The time and location for the focus group interviews were arranged with each pathfinder. Each group chose a location familiar to them. Although participants did not drink alcohol before the interviews, several focus groups took place in venues that these peer groups frequent to consume alcohol.

The participants were aged between 18 – 25 years. This age group was selected because they can reflect on the current experiences and, with the benefit of hindsight, look back at their experiences prior to being eighteen years of age, which is the legal drinking age in Canberra.

Research participants signed a consent form (see Appendix A) prior to taking part in the research. Upon completing each session, the participants were paid for their time and insights.

In the interest of maintaining confidentiality the names of participants have been changed. Names have been replaced with a label that identifies the gender of research participants and a number (e.g. Male 1, Female 2 etc) or a letter (e.g. Female X, Male Y). There is no continuity in the use of any particular pseudonym; Male X in one dialogue is does not necessarily represent the same participant identified as Male X in another dialogue. This has been done on purpose so as to further ensure confidentiality of participants. However, this method does allow a dialogue or discussion to be followed.

Participant Profile

There were twenty-six participants in the research. Fifteen participants were male and eleven were female. The mean age was just under 21 years of age. Fifteen were fulltime students, one part-time and ten were not students. Ten participants were employed part-time, ten were employed fulltime and 6 had no paid employment. The average age of participants when they first 'got drunk' was 15.6 years of age. The average of the female participants when they first got drunk was 16.2 years, and for males it was 15.1 years. Fifteen of the twenty-six participants replied that they usually 'drink to get drunk' when they go out.

Project Constraints

The sample size of this project was limited by both time and budget. The qualitative methods used require a significant amount of time for the following:

- Identifying and recruiting pathfinders;
- Liaising with pathfinders to organise their peer groups (the participants);
- Developing rapport with the participants;
- Delivering the focus groups;
- Transcribing the interviews;
- Analysing the data;
- Presenting the findings back to the participants; and,
- Integrating the participants' feedback and insights following the presentation of findings.

While these factors limit the sample size, the quality of the findings and insights provided by this method are evident. Although the findings obtained by the Project of this nature are limited by sample size, the findings provide clues and insights that can be further validated and tested by future research.

Findings

Two central findings emerged from this research project. Firstly, this report outlines the two broad groups of young people that were identified who have divergent relationships to alcohol related violence, referred to below as Group A and Group B. Secondly, the report discusses what are referred to as the patterns of alcohol related violence, outlining the regularities of incidents of alcohol related violence in Civic, involving young people.

The Value and Role of Alcohol Related Violence: Group A and Group B

Different people have different relationships to alcohol and violence. The Project identified two broad groups, referred to hereon as Group A and Group B, which differ based on the values, norms and practices regarding alcohol related violence. These Groups do not represent distinct communities, but rather different relationships to alcohol and violence within the broader population, and not (necessarily) any other kind of cultural differentiation. These two groups are not folk categories that are used 'on the ground' – they are analytical categories. However, the research participants did recognise Group B with particular subcultures in Canberra.

Both of Group A and Group B are set within a broader culture. This broader cultural setting could simplistically be referred to as Canberra and the associated dominant values and norms (which in reality are not explicitly coherent and cohesive). This is somewhat of an *a priori* theoretical ideal. Canberra consists of numerous subcultures and groups of people. Some groups do not share all of the same values, norms and practices. These subgroups overlap with the prevailing norms of the broader community but have also normalised (to varying degrees) different practices and associated values. However, as these groups exist within broader society they are not clearly distinct, but are set against or within the dominant culture they are part of. These norms and values are represented and often exaggerated in media presentations as the dominant norms, against which portrayal of deviants are framed.

Group A encompasses the majority of the target group of this project; young people who drink or associate with other young people who drink, and socialise in Civic. Group B represents a sub-group of Group A, and has a different relationship to violence. Group A and B are intertwined and interact in many ways, and can belong to the same peer group. The 'angry drunk' within a peer group may belong to Group B where the others may not. However, it became apparent that these theoretical groups usually do constitute actual peer groups, most notably in Civic on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. Often a young person who stops exhibiting Group B behaviour will stop associating with the peer group that supported, encouraged and condoned violence.

These two groups both interact in public space: they frequent the same venues; pass each other in public places; stand at the same taxi rank; and, interact amiably for the most part. Some people move across both groups at discrete stages of their life. Moreover, an individual may socialise with different peer groups that span Group A and Group B – university friends, sports friends, and old high school friends may all socialise differently, with varying patterns of alcohol consumption and varying expectations and values regarding alcohol related behaviour and violence.

Group A

Group A encompasses the vast majority of the target group (18 – 25 year olds) of this research project: young people who drink, or associate with other young people who drink, and socialise in Civic. These young people 'go out' frequently, drinking and socialising. This group is not representative of all 'young people'. There are other young people in this age category who do not fit the profile of the target group of this research.

During the research it became apparent that there is a relatively coherent and collective set of values and norms shared by the majority of young people in Group A. This group of people is significant because, as a demographic, they are likely to be involved in alcohol related violence. Whether the 'innocent victims' of alcohol related violence or the occasional offender, this group is more involved in alcohol related violence than other social groups (although not compared with Group B), as reflected in the statistics earlier in the report.

Group A's relationship to, and interaction with violence is significantly linked to alcohol. When sober they are unlikely to take part in violent conflicts. Violence in this group is policed and constrained by peers and the values and norms of behaviour that they share with them. For Group A, violence is viewed negatively. However, it is not injury or physical damage that is seen as a negative consequence but the possible social sanctions – the disapproval of significant others (parents and friends) and the possibility of getting a police record.

Role and Value of Alcohol for Group A

Alcohol plays a significant role in the lives of Group A, and is highly valued for a number of reasons. Participants identified 'having fun' as the most valued reason for consuming alcohol. Similarly, the survey findings showed 'having fun' as the most positive consequence of drinking alcohol. Moreover, 'having fun' was considered a 'very likely' consequence of consuming alcohol. Several participants noted that having fun was their primary goal and alcohol helped facilitated this.

Intimately linked to the value of alcohol consumption in facilitating 'having fun' is the role of alcohol in socialising. Alcohol has several roles in structuring and facilitating the meeting of new people, and reinforcing and strengthening existing social relationships.

Alcohol consumption structures the sociality of Group A in numerous ways. Firstly, alcohol can be the focal point of an activity (such as in drinking games and actively pursuing intoxication). Secondly, buying 'rounds' creates a pseudo social contract that ensures reciprocity and therefore company and social obligations associated with buying rounds. Thirdly, particular alcoholic drinks and drinking venues are associated with certain 'types' of evenings. For example, rum was associated with anti-social behaviour and alcohol related violence and Jaeger-bombers linked to high-energy activities. Fourth, initiating social interaction is linked to 'going for a drink' or 'having a beer,' that are acceptable ways of asking people to socialise. More broadly, social events of varying significance are marked by the consumption of alcohol that is seen as an integral part of celebrations. For example, people notably mark eighteenth and twenty-first birthdays with consumption of alcohol, but also graduating, and more mundane events including the end of the week, sporting events, and public holidays.

For Group A, socialising is intimately linked with alcohol consumption. This is represented in the following statements:

> *Male A:* "I find that if I want to meet someone who I think I would be good friends with I usually will go and drink with them."
> *Female A:* "The proof of that is like O-week. I mean like how many events that revolve around drinking. This year they have tried [to not just have drinking related activities] but like all the night-time events are all about drinking, that is how you meet people."

Alcohol is considered to permit, excuse and facilitate meeting new people, linked to particular sets of behaviour and trying out new behaviour. Firstly, alcohol consumption and 'being drunk' allows young people to take part in activities that they otherwise find difficult. This aspect of alcohol consumption is related to the confidence boosting and inhibition lowering proprieties of alcohol. Secondly, being drunk provides a legitimate excuse for a wide range of behaviours that would otherwise be considered inappropriate. Thirdly, most participants linked particular behaviours like 'picking up' and dancing with alcohol consumption.

The sentiments regarding the excusive model of alcohol related behaviour are summed up by several of the participants:

> *Male X:* "I think it is true. I think you can add it on the end of a sentence, you know '…but I was really drunk' and people are like 'aahhh'. And it becomes almost funny. Like, 'I hooked up with the ugliest woman on the face of the earth…but I had half a bottle of vodka.'"

> *Male A:* "The thing about social circumstances when alcohol is involved and, say, we are sitting here and there are girls over there, then it is fine to be cheeky. You know what I mean? Like you can interact with girls when there is alcohol involved."

> *Male Z:* "We definitely tell stories…it is not that it is accepted. It is that it has happened so you might as well laugh about it. You can't change it."

It is interesting to note that different peer groups of young females had varying views on whether being intoxicated excused particular behaviour. The following comments from young women discuss how the 'shame' attached to particular behaviour cannot be so easily turned into a positive for women:

> *Female A:* "I think there is more shame about it [for women]. Even like stumbling around or, definitely, puking on yourself."
> *Female B:* "For me I would be like extremely embarrassed. But I think there are other girls who just don't care."
> *Female C:* "I would feel more embarrassed for another girl."
> *Female A:* "When a guy does it, it is like more expected. Like he is just drunk. But if a girl does it you do take it like a slight against their character."
> *Female B:* "It definitely does like continue on the conception and history of what a woman ought to be: more refined, more in control."
> *Female A:* "And like guys are expected to do the primal hunter thing and are supposed to show masculine aggression that is like a good thing."
> *Female B:* "The difference in gender expectations are pretty big."

Risk Taking in Group A

Group A take more risks when consuming alcohol as drinking is seen to facilitate, permit and excuse risk taking. Group A identify 'risk taking' with potentially physically harmful behaviour. Furthermore, there is a strong link between anti-social and disorderly behaviour (yelling, verbal abuse, property damage, public disturbance, etc.) for Group A. The average response to the survey indicated that whilst affected by alcohol participants had 'verbally abused someone,' 'accidentally injured someone', and 'created a public disturbance' on average once or twice in the past 12 months.

Despite young people identifying 'risk taking' with more overt and public displays of anti-social and dangerous behaviour, it became clear in the analysis of the interviews that most risk taking is social. Alcohol consumption is linked to taking social risks, such as talking to new people, dancing, and discussing topics that are otherwise difficult or considered unacceptable.

The Value of Violence in Group A

Although Group A does not condone violence and view it in negative terms, under particular circumstances violence was valued. The discussion below was between a group of university students who, until this point in the conversation, had unequivocally presented violence as unacceptable:

> *Male 1:* "I remember like my brother used to get in fights and stuff, maybe like twice in front of his girlfriend, and generally speaking his girlfriend is not like big into violence, but each time like he has done that [got into a fight] she has been quite proud of him. But generally they do appreciate it [violence] in some weird way."
> *Female 1:* "It is masculine virility."
> *Male 1:* "I think that if you like win the fight, but if you are just being aggressive and you get the crap beat out of you then I don't think it is seen like being a real man. Like if you are the alpha male then yeah, you are like awesome."
> *Female1:* "You're top dog."
> *Female 2:* "For me it depends on the reason for the fight and like how drunk you are. For example, like [my boyfriend] if he was really, really drunk and just started throwing punches at people, even if he won I would be extremely angry at him. But if say someone is like threatening me or like threatening another girl and [my boyfriend], even if he was very drunk, stepped in and didn't go psycho, but did enough to stop it, I think that would be like really, really cool."
> *Female 1:* "That is very true actually."
> *Female 3:* "I have this friend back [in my home town], I don't know what she does, but like her boyfriend has to always stand up for her. And every time he does she is like so proud that he does that."
> *Female 1:* "I know girls who like deliberately provoke that."

It is interesting to note that both the males and females in Group A are seen to value violence that fits into their shared moral and ethical framework. However, the gender roles pertaining to alcohol related violence needs to be explored in more depth, as

there were groups of females that reported young women also being involved in more violence.

It is the perception of some of the participants that, as one young woman put it: "a small group of people are ruining it for the rest of us." This belief, that a subsection of young people cause and are involved the majority of alcohol related violence, is supported by the findings of this Project.

Group B

> *Male A:* "We have got a friend who is just an angry person. And he doesn't need alcohol at all he just, he will just fight. And he just… I think he goes out to fight, man. He says it all the time, he says it when he goes out."

Group B consists of young people who have a different relationship to violence than Group A. These young people are involved in significantly more alcohol related violence. They value and participate in violence in a difference way to other people. The patterns of alcohol consumption seen in Group B are very similar to Group A. Moreover, for the most part, Group B are like Group A: they usually go out drinking in order to have fun and socialize. However, they will often go out expecting or looking for a fight. If they are not consciously pursuing a violent conflict when they go out they are still more likely to take an opportunity to fight, or try and resolve a problem with violence.

It must be noted that there needs to more focused research investigating Group B. These preliminary findings are based on a small sample of young people that belong to this group. However, much of this data is derived not only from the first hand accounts of Group B but also the experiences of Group A. As mentioned previously Group A and Group B do socialize together. They may not necessarily be peers and go out drinking together, but they may be associated through other means, such as work, sport, family or school.

Status and Empowerment in Group B

The project findings indicate that incidents of alcohol related violence that occur in Civic involving 18-25 year olds are primarily about status and empowerment. The capacity to be violent is valued by Group B and is a form of cultural capital. Therefore, participating in alcohol related violence can bolster one's reputation if their peers belong to Group B. Being a 'tough guy' – someone who gets into fights and can 'handle himself' – can be the primary characteristic or emphasized feature of one's identity. The participants told stories and mentioned people they know who are primarily identified by their capacity and willingness to get into fights. It is interesting to note that these 'tough guys' were attributed a significant social role by many of the participants from Group A, in particular males. It was, however, unclear as to whether the 'tough guys' were respected, liked or feared. The association between these particular acts of violence and status is supported below by the role of the 'audience' and the prominence of story telling. The following quotes highlight how particular people are known for their reputation and go some way to convey the ambiguous recognition attributed to them:

> *Male G:* "Some people are known for fights, I mean like in my age group. You knew people who could fight, you knew what they looked like and that. They still do it now. I went out to watch [this guy] fight and Adam was saying 'stay away from that guy, stay away from that guy, and that guy.'"

Interviewer: "Is violence valued?"
Male X: "100%. It is. Canberra has this really weird culture of like, if you're like a crazy dude and you fight, people will know who you are. 100%. I was having a think about it, and talking to you [gestures to the male sitting next to him] about it, there is this mad culture behind it, like 'he is a crazy dude I want to be friends with him.' You know what I mean? Yeah, it is really weird. Yeah and I reckon they do, they get like good looking girls because of it, because everyone knows they are a crazy dude."
Female: "I can see what you're saying."
Male Y: "Like if you go up to [a particular club] you see those guys with their chains on and they have all got their blonde sluts with them. They wouldn't have the blonde sluts with them if they weren't like hard."
Male X: "Yeah they are crazy. Yeah people like that. For some reason people give like so much more respect. If you meet one of those people you like automatically – not because you are scared of them but…"
Male Y: "I reckon it is because we are scared of them.'
Male X: "Not always man. Sometimes you know them. Like Daniel [not real name] back in the day. You were always nice to him.'

Retelling stories of drunken exploits is common amongst Group A and Group B for numerous reasons. Firstly, stories of drunken exploits can reframe an embarrassing incident, providing an excuse for otherwise unacceptable behaviour. This story telling could be referred to as 'spin,' saving face and minimizing the negative impact of particular events. Secondly, stories are a potent way to continue to gain status and secure one's identity. Long after a particular event has transpired, stories continue to convey one's status and identity.

There is a strong link between the value given to violence, the attribution of status and the role of violence as a way to reclaim power or a sense of control. When reflecting on the behaviour of Group B, the participants maintained that the offenders of alcohol related violence were 'insecure.' The acts of violence were seen as a potent act of empowerment. This was supported by the participants who had been offenders of alcohol related violence, who noted that they had few alternative means to vent their frustrations and assert themselves. One man articulated how his violent behaviour related to his position in the world and broader social issues:

Male A: "For me it [being violent] was about other issues. I just used to hate the world and everyone in it."
Interviewer: "Do you think other people who go out to get into fights on purpose had the same issues?"
Male A: "I don't think the guys I went out with had the same issues as I did but they certainly have their own."

Peers, Families and a Culture of Violence

Whilst Group A's involvement in alcohol related violence is constrained by the views of their peers, Group B will often encourage, incite and participate in violent conflicts. The findings of this project indicate that Group B may have a family history of violence, or indifference towards violence. It was suggested by young people who had been part of Group B that there were few negative consequences amongst family and friends for getting into trouble for involvement in violence. This was discussed with other young people from Group A who noted:

> *Male G:* "My mum and dad would freak the hell out."
> *Male F:* "No way. You know when you have totally disappointed your parents, that's the worst."

Conversely, a man from Group B, when asked if his parents were concerned about his behaviour, said:

> *Male Q:* "I got dropped home [by the police] a fair bit from the age of 14 to 17 I guess. I didn't get locked up until eighteen…I don't know if [my parents] were concerned or not. The fighting was going on either way. I don't get along with my parents very well. There was always fighting, like screaming."

A young man who identified as belonging to Group B in the past, discussed why he actively pursued fights whilst intoxicated:

> *Interviewer:* "What was [alcohol related violence] about for you?"
> *Male Y:* "My brother and his mates used to gang bash me. I was just angry. I just exploded and then – we are not allowed to see each other still – and I just exploded. And I had that freedom. It is like 'this has stopped, finally'…I was angry before that, but I went out more. My folks split up; Dad was gone, no one to bring me into line. It rolled over and I gave back everything."
> *Interviewer:* "Giving it back to other people?"
> *Male Y:* "Mm hmm [he nods]. That is not what I thought at the time. You know I was just angry, that was my thought."

This young man's quote summarized how his exposure to violence, in particular the victim of violence, led to him becoming violent offender – "it rolled over and I gave back everything."

Another young man whose friends were involved in alcohol related violence talked about why he did not join in, emphasizing the role of his family:

> "I come from a pretty strict household. My Mum is like a single Mum and we were closely knit, I also used to live with my grandma a bit. I guess like when I was younger I hung out with those groups of friends and we wouldn't do it [drinking] at my house or anything it would always have to be down south. And if I was drinking I was always staying the night. Because if my mum found out it would kill her. So I would always come back the next afternoon. It sort of doesn't happen any more. Now I feel better that I can do stuff at home because I don't really hang out with those guys anymore."

The participants I spoke to who were or had been in Group B, noted that they were relatively unaware of the negative consequences of their actions. When one young man was asked what he understood as the negative consequences of alcohol related violence he said: "I understand capsicum spray and tazers." He then went on to talk about the damage incurred due to his violence:

> "The last fight I got into in the city I stomped some dude's knee out – granted he was a piece of shit and I hated him – but it still affected a lot

of people. It still affects me now because I have got to worry about stuff coming back… 'conviction not recorded' yeah."

This quote is punctuated with a sentence that referred to this young man's disbelief at how he never got a police record for his violence despite police involvement.

The Patterns of Alcohol Related Violence

By collecting and analysing young people's stories, experiences and knowledge of alcohol related violence in Civic, it became apparent that there are regularities and patterns to these incidents. These regularities and patterns are referred to in this report as the 'patterns of alcohol related violence.' This conceptualisation of alcohol related violent incidents are a model or template that represents a norm. Not all incidents follow the patterns and regularities outlined below. However, the majority of reports of alcohol related violence fit this conceptualisation as there is an endless variety of permutations and configurations of these norms.

The regularities of alcohol related violence demonstrate that these incidents follow a pattern. This pattern suggests that the offenders need to justify their actions, if only with a poor façade of an excuse. Furthermore, these patterns provide insights that could lead to approaches and initiatives that could help people avoid these conflicts.

It is important to reiterate that this research is examining alcohol related violence in Civic involving young people. This investigation does not include violent crime motivated by material gain, sexual violence or domestic violence. These forms of violence, which may or may not involve alcohol, do not fit into this representation of the 'patterns of alcohol related violence.'

The patterns of alcohol related violence do not represent a set of conscious strategies and practices that the initiators or offenders follow. Rather, these regularities are unspoken norms that are not explicitly conveyed. They are a set of behaviours that may not be consciously known to the individuals who do them.

Status, Empowerment and Picking the Victim

Alcohol related violence in Civic is motivated primarily by status and empowerment. These two notions are inextricably linked. The capacity or ability to be violent, to be a tough guy, is a valued resource amongst Group B. However, this form of cultural capital is recognised and acknowledged by the community more broadly. Physical violence, 'beating up' somebody, is a potent symbolic act, a proclamation of power, if only fleetingly. The recognition attributed to violence, whether considered valuable, feared or respected, translates to status within particular social groups, of which Group B is a proponent. To take part in a violent conflict is therefore not only about power but also about status and one's place in the world, and identity.

In order to acquire status and an identity seen as worthwhile through alcohol related violence, one needs to select an appropriate victim. There needs to be a sufficient degree of similarity between the offender and the victim to gain status. A male needs to select a victim that is the same gender, age and similar physical size. It is difficult to get status and feel empowered by attacking a significantly smaller opponent, someone much older or younger, or of a different gender. This degree of similarity needed to acquire status provides accounts for the similarity in the profiles of victims and offenders of alcohol related violence seen in the statistics.

> *Male Z:* "You have almost got pick someone bigger than you I reckon. Otherwise it is [sarcastically] 'sick, so you beat up some skinny little dude'."

While the offender needs to select a victim who is relatively similar to him or herself, they also want to balance this with being sure they can win the fight. This process is

not a rational set of actions but done with a practical logic derived from being able to 'read' people, a sense or feeling rather than a conscious list. This process can happen very quickly, not detracting from the spontaneity and opportunism often seen in these conflicts.

Strength in Numbers

Alcohol related violence involving young people in Civic is predominantly initiated by young men in groups. Their peers provide encouragement, a confidence boost, and a safety net. These conflicts start as a one-on-one interaction with the offender's (or conflict initiator's) group acting as backup. This group of peers also provides the important role of the audience – an important factor in acquiring status and making a statement about one's identity. The following quotes are indicative of the response from participants talking about how conflicts are organised:

> *Male K:* "It is usually groups. Like, when you see the big fights outside of work – we finish at about 5 in the morning – it is usually a big group of guys that sort of want to fight. They want to take on a bouncer or a few, that is when we usually call the cops in. When I like go to pick up drinks, usually there is like this much in it, a tiny bit in it, usually I can just tidy it up. But if some guy sees it and he will be like 'what the fuck?' and he will like start it up. But usually it is like when there is a group of them. You notice they are more confident in groups."

> *Male G:* "Most fights they either outnumber them [the victim], then it doesn't matter what size they are [the individuals]."

> *Male A:* "I think that when guys do go out [to pick a fight] they usually do it in a pack. You never see a tough guy by himself who is going out to hit on girls and try and pick fights. Like guys just don't work that way. If they are in a pack of guys that is when you have to watch out."

Several young men noted how they had to change their peer group in order to stop being involved in alcohol related violence. One man noted how his new peer group do not condone or value violence:

> "I used to be the same. When I was younger I used to hang out with these 4 guys and the attitude in that group was sort of aggressive. We used to fight. I hang out with one of them now and the rest I don't contact. Now the people I go out with don't value that. Especially my girlfriend, if I was going to get into a fight she wouldn't be happy. Even with my friends now they think it is stupid at this stage. It is sort of not worth it. I sort of value their opinion a lot."

The Four Phases of Alcohol Related Violence

Four phases or stages of alcohol related violence emerged from the stories and experiences of the research participants. Not all alcohol related conflicts fit this model. Sometimes one of these phases is skipped. At other times the interaction is interrupted or particular events or strategies prevent progress to the following stages.

As will be seen, phases of alcohol related violence suggest that there is a need for the offenders to justify their violence. This leads to potential initiatives and strategies to prevent and intervene in this process. Often the progress towards the physical

confrontation involves the potential victim colluding or 'taking the bait.' It is important to note that this is not a shift towards blaming the victim. Rather, identifying the role of the potential victim can help avoid unnecessary violence.

The four phases of alcohol related violence identify a progression. The four phases are:

- Phase One: Victim Selection
- Phase Two: The Interview – "Baiting"
- Phase Three: The Conflict
- Phase Four: Disperse

Phase One: Victim Selection

In this phase the potential offender selects their victim. This process is somewhat determined by the criteria for a victim outlined earlier. [Reiterate criteria here re: degree of similarity] There seem to be two main avenues for selecting a victim; firstly, the opportunistic or spontaneous model; secondly, the aggressor initiating contact.

The opportunistic model involves a potential victim drawing attention to him or herself. This can occur in numerous ways. However, there appears to be a link between drawing attention to oneself by being loud and bumping into people (on purpose or by accident). Group A taking part in anti-social and disorderly behaviour can lead to them becoming a potential victim – having drawn attention to themselves.

At other times, the potential offender can choose a victim and pursue them. This often involves initiating contact which often takes the form of the clichéd "what you looking at?" or bumping into someone. This process then leads onto the next phase.

Phase Two: The Interview - "Baiting"

This phase is central to justifying the potential conflict. Phase Two is the stage that usually determines whether a fight will occur. After making initial contact with the potential victim; talking, posturing and gesticulating occurs as the offender(s) and victim(s) 'test the waters' and appraise each other. This phase was referred to by some participants as when the victim 'takes the bait.' There were many discussions addressing this phase and how the victim often responds to the initial interaction in a way that leads to the next phase. The following quotes represent many other participants' sentiments:

> *Interviewer:* "Is it like 'come on, come on' or is it just like 'hey, boom' [mimes hitting someone]?
> *Male X:* "No way, no way."
> *Male Y:* "That is pretty rare. There is always talk."
> *Male X:* "You try and talk it up so much so they are going to make a move first. You are always like 'come one, come on' and just try and like ark them up more."

> *Interviewer:* "Could the victim actually walk away from it and not get involved?"
> *Male A:* "Yeah a lot of time."
> *Male B:* "Yeah. Most of the time you can."

> *Male C:* "Yeah I think so too. Like I haven't really been picked but if I was picked and I was like 'relax, I don't even know you. Chill out' so they would be like…whatever.
> *Male A:* "I think it is alcohol related because like a sober person is a lot more likely to just walk past where the drunk person is more likely to respond [to a threat or verbal abuse]."
>
> *Male L:* "…Most of the time if you want to avoid the fight you can, you just walk on."
> *Interviewer:* "Even when you are super pissed?"
> *Male L:* "Yep. You can avoid it if you want to."
> *Male N:* "Yeah with the fights I got in when I did get into fights I was being a bit of a dickhead. I definitely could have avoided both of them despite not throwing the first punch in either one. Just by talking I could have so easily avoided them. But, in my head I sort of wanted them to happen."
> *Male K:* "It is funny though sometimes because when you get really drunk and you are in a bad mood or whatever you just feel invincible, like you could take on anybody. It doesn't matter who you yell at or try and fight, you wouldn't normally do that but it is just you feel invincible."

As seen in these quotes, often the conflict can end at Phase Two. When presenting these findings back to the participants many noted that they avoid conflicts more often than they go through with them. However, while there is potential for the conflict to be averted at this stage, on occasions the offender will not take 'no' for an answer.

Phase Three: The Conflict

Phase Three is where actual physical violence takes place. The participants' information indicates that the person that initiated the contact usually starts the fight. The victim is usually caught by surprise, unaware that they have moved on from Phase Two. There does not seem to be any clear indicators that the fight has begun aside from the first strike.

Participants discussed whether there was a particular point that determines when the fight ends, and whether the offenders would draw the line at a certain level of damage inflicted on the victim (e.g. one party falls to the ground). However, all participants agreed that there seemed to be no limit. There was much discussion of kicking people whilst on the ground and "glassing." Thus, it is unclear what determines when the involved parties move onto the next phase.

Phase Four: Disperse

In this final phase the offender(s) and/or the victim(s) leave the site of the incident. This phase can determine who, if anyone, reports the incident. Victims appraise the situation and their injuries.

Mistaken Identity and "Grudges"

Whilst the four phases represent a norm or pattern of violent conflicts there are many incidence that do not fit this profile. Often these violent conflicts are justified by another means. The excuse of attacking someone due to mistaken identity seems to be quite common. Sometimes this might be a genuine mistake. At other times the guise of mistaken identity can be enough to justify an attack.

The excuse of mistaken identity is linked to young people having 'grudges.' It was noted on several occasions, that due to the small size of Canberra and the limited venues, people regularly encounter others with whom they have had previous conflicts. This often entails individuals, especially Group B, having to 'look over their shoulder' in fear of retribution for past conflicts, as demonstrated in the following quote:

> *Male F:* "I got into a few fights and you see them out again and they go 'oh, that's the guy who did this' and they come over and it's a cycle."

The following conversation summarises many of the discussions regarding grudges and mistaken identity:

> *Male A:* "A lot of the time it goes back months and months. Like your mate got involved in a fight with this guy, and smacked your mate up. So you see him and because you are drunk you do something because… you are not really… You grow another pair of balls. I have seen a lot of people like that. Like at a few parties I have been to, a couple of a mate's mates have fought these guys because probably a month ago or a year ago or years ago they beat someone they know."
> *Interviewer:* "Is that a Canberra thing? A small town thing?"
> *Female C:* "Yeah. I have grudges. With a boy and a girl. And I reckon if I get drunk I would do something about it. I mean this is going back a year and I still have that grudge."
> *Female A:* "And you always see people getting hit like mistaken identity. I was at a bar once and this guy just punched the guy next to me at the bar for no reason. He didn't do anything."
> *Female C:* "That is what happened to our friend as well. I am like, 'was that necessary at all?'"
> Female A: "One time my brother's friends went out and just punched this guy because they thought he was talking shit about him [my brother]. This guy is like 'I don't even know who your brother is.' They just punched him because they 'thought' that they heard him say something."
> *Male A:* "It is like my mates were going in this car to leave and this car pulled up and these guys jumped out and one of the guys had a bottle and said 'oh you bashed my cousin' or something. So he bottled my mate – the bottle didn't break – and he goes 'I wasn't even there, I don't know who your cousin is.' And that is shit."

Approaches and Initiatives

The aim of this section is to provide some possible direction for future initiatives. These ideas came either explicitly from the participants or have been inferred from the findings of the Project. Firstly, the implications of identifying the two groups, Group A and Group B, will be explored. These groups need different approaches taken to address their alcohol related behaviour and violence. Articulating the difference between Group A and Group B has consequences for the possible barriers and enablers regarding initiatives addressing alcohol related violence. Secondly, the report will discuss the learnings that have emerged regarding the patterns of alcohol related violence.

Different Groups, Different Approaches

It was clearly articulated by many of the participants that Group A and Group B would respond to different initiatives and approaches. Below the report will address the initiatives in two sections corresponding to the two different needs of Group A and Group B.

Group A

Group A are interested in maximizing what they see as the positive consequences of consuming alcohol and minimizing the negative. These young people are interested in having fun with their friends and avoiding violent conflicts, minimizing the likelihood of embarrassing themselves and not getting too hung-over. Group A will respond well to any initiatives that help them achieve these goals.

Education

The young people that participated in the project were interested to hear strategies that would assist them in avoiding any of the negative consequences related to alcohol consumption. The focus groups presented an opportunity for the participants to share with each other the different strategies that they use (some of these are outlined below). Moreover, presenting them with data and the findings of other research regarding alcohol related violence piqued their interest. For example, many of these young people were interested to know where the 'hot spots' for violence were in Civic and the times that these locations became more prone to violence. Education initiatives directed at this group could be quite potent given their interest. However, the content of the education needs to focus on their existing interests rather than hoping to change them – tapping into and mobilizing the desire to not get involved in alcohol related violence.

Underutilized Peer Support

The strategies already employed by Group A as a means to avoid violence and to managing drinking consumption and behaviour often relied on peer support. It was noted that everyone valued being supported by their friends who told them when they needed to drink less ("pull your head in") or when they had drunk too much and their behaviour needed managing. However, many of the research participants acknowledged that they often found it hard to approach their friends. Merely informing young people that their peers value and want their support would be a good start to encouraging peer support. This could be supported with education initiatives, perhaps

in particular peer education that involves the young people in creating approaches and strategies of peer support.

Increased Price of Alcohol

While Group A acknowledged that there was a link between the amount of alcohol they consumed and the likelihood of being involved in a violent incident, they did not support initiatives that constrained their drinking. There was a strong sentiment that any initiativees designed to restrict the amount of alcohol or patterns of consumption of alcohol would be circumvented. The topic of 'pre-drinking' if alcohol became more expensive in venues was frequently discussed. The below discussion is representative of many of the responses to increasing the cost of alcohol at venues:

> *Male X:* "That is why we go out Thursday nights because it is cheaper."
> *Interviewer:* "So if people increased the price of drinks people would drink less?"
> *Female X:* "Probably true."
> *Female Y:* "Yeah but it depends because you can still…if that is the case and we are going out on a Saturday night we will drink longer or more at home before you go out and you will just have to live on the $20 you take out."
> *Male X:* "You go to a mate's house before you go out."
> *Female Y:* "Or even a club where drinks are cheaper."
> *Female X:* "They are going to do it anyway."
> *Female Y:* "That is more dangerous because more people are going to get really drunk at home and then go in there [Civic] and keep going and be more messy. If people are offering them drinks they are going to go 'yeah, yeah' because they are already drunk. They are going to go out drunk and then buy more drinks because they are pissed."
> *Female X:* "If people want to drink and party they are going to find a way to do it."
> *Male X:* "I suppose once you are drunk you don't really care if you spend more money."
> *Female X:* "Yeah, I am the same. I am like 'lets get another hundred out it will be ok.' Then I will spend it, you know."
> *Male X:* "[Certain venues] have ATMs in them so it makes it easy to just go and take out more money."

Security and Police

The presence of security and police decreases the likelihood of Group A being involved in violent conflicts and taking part in anti-social or disorderly behaviour. It was suggested that security guards were not approachable and were not used as a means to prevent potential conflicts within venues. Many research participants discussed how they wished that they knew security guards could be used as a resource whilst in a venue. However, many of the research participants noted how dealing with security can be like dealing with Group B, as seen in the example below:

> *Female X:* "At [a particular venue] a couple of weekends ago we had a friend out, and she was hot and she was wearing a little dress and she looked good and whatever. We were just sitting down and she was dancing and a guy came up and grabbed her so hard that it was hurtful, he grabbed her ass. And I saw it and was like 'what the fuck.' She turned around and said 'fuck off, don't touch me.' And he like pinched her sisters boob, like painfully hard. So she like pushed him and was ready to punch him and

said 'don't fuckin' touch me' and we got the bouncer to kick him out. But she was ready to punch him. "

Interviewer: "So bouncers do that, help you?"

Female X: "Some bouncers."

Female Y: "The girls would like it if they did."

Female X: "Half the bouncers are drunk. Like at [this particular venue] they get free drinks. So like this bouncer [from the story above] was like wasted. Like drunker than us. So it was hard to get him to do something. He was like 'I would grab your ass too but I guess I will kick him out.' I mean, who says that?"

It was also noted that there are very few female security guards in Canberra.

Limited Late Night Venues and Taxi Ranks

It became apparent that there are only a limited number of drinking venues open in Canberra at early hours of the morning (after 2am) that continue to have significant numbers of clientele. As a result, many people move to key venues at particular points in the evening that they would not otherwise frequent. This results in several social groups mixing that would not otherwise interact. Furthermore, people are often intoxicated by this time. The interaction between these groups often causes tension and results in a higher likelihood in violence.

The interactions between different social groups also occurs at the taxi ranks whilst people wait for taxis. Again, as above, this interaction often results in tension and increased chances of violence.

It was suggested that if the smaller venues that cater to specific sub-cultures/groups remained open longer, then this interaction late at night between these sub-groups may not occur. Several initiatives at taxi ranks would also reduce conflicts, such as: increasing the number of taxis; increasing number of taxi ranks; and, policing the taxi ranks.

Group B

Group B requires a different set of initiatives to address their alcohol related violence. It is important to emphasis the ambiguous relationship between alcohol and violence for Group B. Merely addressing their patterns of drinking may have little impact on the incidents of violence involving this group. Rather, it is their relationship to violence that needs to be addressed in conjunction with patterns of drinking.

Like Group A, alcohol has a significant role in the lives of Group B. Unlike Group A, however, Group B are not interested in minimizing their involvement in alcohol related violence. Rather, they are interested in pursuing violence whilst being supported by their friends and the courage that alcohol provides them. Furthermore, Group B do not see the negative consequences of alcohol related violence, and perhaps violence more generally. Instead, violence is seen as a legitimate and valid means of improving their position in the world, if only in their social milieu, and solving problems.

Security and Police

There were discussions by people in Group B and speculation from Group A around how security guards and police are negotiated. Some young men that belonged to Group B noted that violence in a venue rarely led to little more than being ejected. Both groups noted that it was not always the offender that was asked to leave the establishment after an altercation. It was even suggested by a couple of young men that it was sometimes easier for security to 'throw-out' the victim, rather than the offender, and merely verbally reprimand the offender to minimise further confrontation. For this reason conflicts often start in venues, in the offender's knowledge that the negative consequences are minimal or non-existent.

Regarding the police, Group B either does not care whether the police are nearby or are quite conscious of where they are. Often the opportunistic nature of some of these conflicts entails little reflection regarding the presence of the police. However, participants suggested that the police rarely do much in reaction to incidents of alcohol related violence unless someone is obviously damaged or there is property damage. Police involvement is rarely seen as a negative consequence as it is viewed as unlikely and ultimately not a deterrent.

Counter to deterrence theory, the consequences regarding alcohol related violence are neither swift, nor certain. It is recommended that alternative responses from security and, most importantly, the police are investigated that are, in line with deterrent theory: responses that are swift, sure, but not severe. For example, within venues security guards could swiftly and with no uncertain terms ban patrons who incite violent conflicts.

Police responses to alcohol related violence need to be swift and certain to deter and discourage people from taking these actions lightly. In line with deterrence theory[20] the responses by police do not need to be severe. However, people need to know that the consequences, whatever they may be, are certain, and that they cannot walk away from being involved in violent conflicts.

Victim and Offender Crossover

Whilst it may be difficult for the police to determine who is the offender and victim in a conflict, it may not be necessary if the aim is to deter people from being involved in alcohol related violence. Given the similar profile seen in the victims and offenders and, as this Project suggests, the role that victims can play in colluding in many incidents of alcohol related violence, having consequences for all parties involved may have its merits. However, returning to deterrence theory, it is not necessary for the consequences to be severe to impact people's behaviour. Rather, it may be sufficient to merely record the names and driver's license numbers of people involved, in order to identify repeat offenders who need targeted responses. This has the added benefit of identifying a target group that can have focused and relevant initiatives aimed at them. At present, there is no way to identify repeat offenders of alcohol related violence, as many of them have not formally been in contact with the justice system.

Justification and the Value of Violence

Group B take part in alcohol related violence in part due to the value attributed to violence within their peer group. Moreover, the capacity for violence is often recognised by the broader community as valued. Violence being a valued

resource/attribute makes it easier for Group B to justify their behaviour. In particular circumstances, as addressed above, the negative consequences related to police involvement may not outweigh the positive consequences afforded the violent offender. If the value associated with alcohol related violence is problematised then it becomes harder for a potential offender to justify their behaviour – the potential balance of positives and negatives become unclear. This culture change needs to address the whole of the community and not just Group B. However, particular initiatives could target Group B given the likelihood of their involvement in alcohol related violence and their different relationship to violence.

It was suggested on several occasions by participants that education and marketing initiatives could draw on existing folk wisdom concerning alcohol related violence. There is a common belief amongst Group A and, ironically, Group B, that people who get drunk in order to pick fights are insecure. This folk wisdom was linked to the advertising campaign addressing speeding by young men. The advertisement is referred to as the *'Speeding. No one thinks big of you'* campaign by the RTA – associated with the 'wiggling pinky' gesture. This advertisement implied a lack of 'manliness' associated with the need to impress other people with speeding. This advertisement was recalled on numerous occasions by the participants as a potential avenue regarding alcohol related violence.

Future Research

It is clear that there needs to be more research focusing on Group B including the need to determine different subgroups within Group B and the factors that differentiate these groups. The initial findings of this Project suggest that Group B have a different history of violence. Broader social factors, such as family history and exposure to trauma, need to be more thoroughly researched in relation to Group B.

Implications Regarding the 'Patterns of Alcohol Related Violence'

The patterns and regularities of alcohol related violence in Civic imply that there are several approaches that can be taken by people to avoid conflicts. The need for the offender to justify their actions has implications that have been addressed above, notably the need to change the perceived consequences of alcohol related violence and problematise these behaviours. However, participants noted numerous strategies that they have used to avoid progressing through the four phases of alcohol related violence. Each of these phases can be linked to particular practices that can prevent the interaction escalating or provide support on how to respond after these events.

The first and second phases of alcohol related violence (see above for more information) are the talking and justification phases. It is at these phases that the research participants emphasized the ability to prevent a physical conflict. Merely having this discussion amongst the peer groups involved in the research provided the other participants with ideas for how to avoid future conflicts. Moreover, having the discussion with these groups helped them to explicitly articulate to each other that they do not value violence and encouraged each other to support each other and 'back out' or avoid conflicts. In light of these insights it became apparent that the peer group discussion and education that explicitly outlines the patterns of violence and link to status could have an impact on young people's involvement in alcohol related violence. This strength based approach acknowledges the skill, attributes, knowledge and experiences of young people and encourages them to explicitly articulate their social norms and values regarding alcohol and alcohol related violence. Mediated dialogue amongst young people could highlight that the majority of young people's

values and norms are in no way representative of young people as presented by the media.

Conclusion

The findings of this project provide the foundations of further research and the potential for future approaches and initiatives. The qualitative data collected in this project needs to be used in a dialogue with quantitative research findings and pre-existing understandings to provide insights into the social processes that shape the practices of young people.

This project endeavoured to use the research participants not only as a source of data but also as collaborators, contributing their analysis and interpretation. This process of interpretation and analysis provided more than just empirical data, but produced insights that help explain and give meaning to what we already know about alcohol related violence from existing methods of research. The analysis presented in this Project provides theories to explain what others have observed. These theories include: the divergent value systems seen in Group A and Group B that represent different relationships and roles regarding alcohol related violence; the patterns of alcohol related violence the indicate a need for offenders to justify these acts of violence; and, how the patterns and motivations for alcohol related violence are tied to status and empowerment. These explanations or theories are not absolute laws or rules and need to further explored. However, these theories could shape how further data, both quantitative and qualitative, is collected and analysed.

Appendix A: Consent Form

Dutch Courage: Alcohol, Violence and Young People

The Youth Coalition of the ACT is asking young people (12-25 years) about their experiences and perspectives regarding alcohol related behaviour, in particular violence. We would like to hear about your experiences, insights and understanding on these and related issues.

Justin Barker is the researcher employed to undertake this research. The information we get will be turned into a written report and presented at the Crime Prevention and Community Safety Forum Symposium for 2010.

Your name will not be used and what you tell us will be confidential.

You can refuse to answer any questions and change your mind at any time about doing the interview.

To thank you for being interviewed you will be given $20.

We need you to agree to take part in this research project. It is your right to say no. If you do agree, please sign this form to show that you are happy to take part in this interview process.

I have read and understood the consent form and agree to participate in the research contributing the 'Dutch Courage: Alcohol, Violence and Young People.'

Person's name:…………………………

Signed………………………………..

Received $20:   Date:…………………

Appendix B: Cover Sheet

Dutch Courage: Alcohol, Violence and Young People

The Youth Coalition of the ACT is asking young people (12-25 years) about their experiences and perspectives regarding alcohol related behaviour, in particular violence. We would like to hear about your experiences, insights and understanding on these and related issues.

Justin Barker is the researcher employed to undertake this research. The information we get will be turned into a written report and presented at the Crime Prevention and Community Safety Forum Symposium for 2010.

Your name will not be used and what you tell us will be confidential.

You can refuse to answer any questions and change your mind at any time about doing the interview.

To thank you for being interviewed you will be given $20.

We need you to agree to take part in this research project. It is your right to say no. The consent form you sign will be kept separate from the questionnaire.

If you have any queries please contact:

Justin Barker
Youth Coalition of the ACT
justin@youthcoalition.net
6247 3540

Appendix C: Theories, Explanations and Issues Relating to Alcohol Related Violence

This appendix provides further information on some of the theories and explanations accounting for alcohol related violence and some of the issues associated with this topic. These were used in the focus groups as discussion points that were conveyed to the participants who debated the merits of these explanations and issues set against their experiences and perceptions. In other words, these perspectives were used to, firstly, frame the experiences of the participants – providing a lens to examine their experiences – and, secondly, the experiences of the participants were used as a means to appraise the validity and salience of these explanations and associated issues. This section, therefore, provides a brief overview of existing theories accounting for alcohol related behaviour.

Control, Independence and 'Rite of Passage'

Alcohol is often attributed as having a key symbolic role in the lives of young people. Accounts addressing patterns of alcohol consumption amongst young people often refer to drinking as a key 'rite of passage' that marks the transition from childhood to adult-hood.[21] These theories are explicitly[1] or implicitly linked to the value placed on independence and exercising control or agency in the lives of young people. The legal age for drinking in Australia is 18 years and alcohol consumption is the domain of adult behaviour, hence, in part, the symbolic value attributed to alcohol. The ability to legally assert one's independence and (relative) freedom can be exercised by consuming alcohol.

Drinking has been seen as a celebration of adulthood. However, these theories may be presenting a simplistic picture of the relationship between the stages of 'child' and 'adult' which may not reflect the dynamics of being a 'young person.' Moreover, the relationship between 'control' and 'out of control' is complex, as are the ideas of independence and freedom – what do these ideas mean in the changing values and norms of young people? Are different values and practices exhibited by young people generational – indicative of not the behaviour of 'young people' but of new sets of values, practices and expectations – or linked to a life stage and their proposed liminality (being between neither a child nor an adult but 'betwixt and between')?[22] There appears to be different phases or stages between what have been referred to as childhood and adulthood. The notion of 'emerging adulthood' could be seen as a distinct stage in life or a prolonged liminal stage, neither adult nor child, with its own unique values, norms and expectations, including different patterns of alcohol consumption[23]

The notion of alcohol consumption being a significant rite of passage resounded with nearly all of the participants of this project but only pre-eighteen years of age. After the age of eighteen years alcohol consumption was in no way associated with participating in practices that symbolized adulthood or spoke represented their ability to control alcohol. Rather, alcohol consumption was more about losing a bit of control.

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[1] Lincoln and Homel note that their project "recognise[s] that youthful alcohol use has an overriding 'rites of passage' element." (2001: 55). De Crespigny concludes that young women see the use of alcohol as a critical rite of passage *(de Crespigny, C. (2001) Young Women, Pubs and Safety, in Alcohol, Young Person and Violence (eds) P. Williams. Australian Institute of Criminology research and Public Policy Series. No. 35)*

Prior to turning eighteen years of age getting intoxicated marked a significant moment in the lives of these young people. It was not consuming alcohol in moderation or trying alcohol but the experience of getting drunk that would change one's reputation, popularity, and frequently one's social networks. The significance of getting intoxicated was seen most clearly observed by those who abstained from underage drinking.

Victim / Offender

As noted above, the risk factors associated with being an offender of alcohol related disorderly behaviour and violence – being male, young, single, having an income, and high alcohol consumption – are also the factors associated with being a victim.[24] However, the causal link between offending and victimisation is difficult to explore with the available data. Qualitative information about the nature of alcohol related violence can provide some insights into the relationship between the two and gives clues for future research.

This Project investigates the nature of alcohol related violence and how and why there is a connection between being an offender and a victim. This could have implications regarding how to deal with victims of alcohol related violence. Moreover, it may be the case that a division between victim and offender is not always appropriate when investigating alcohol related violence or violence more generally.

Alcohol and Drinking as Symbols

Alcohol and alcohol consumption patterns can be seen to have symbolic values that convey socially constructed meanings. The symbolic value of any item or practices can differ from its use-value. A diverse array of symbols are used as markers of identity, distinguishing those that use these symbols – indicators of difference. Patterns of alcohol consumption are affected by the symbolic meanings attributed to drinking. However, these practices and their meanings are dynamic, constantly being negotiated, appropriated and reinvented. The symbolic meaning and value attached to alcohol is central to advertising and marketing. It has been suggested that the changing drinking patterns are linked to changing symbolic meaning and value of alcohol. However, it is important to taken into account the changes in symbol meaning happens at many levels, often reflecting broader cultural changes as well as the choices and agency enacted by individuals. Young people interpret, reinvent and recode symbolic meanings and values, creating their own subjective world, but framed by broader cultural and social factors. This Project examines the understanding that young people have, the cultural perspective from the ground.

Excusive Theory, Social Interactionism and Disinihibition

Some explanations for the link between alcohol and violence suggest that the consumption of alcohol excuses or permits certain behaviour, including violence. This explanation can be linked to both the pharmacological properties of alcohol and social learning models. The disinihibition explanation suggests that alcohol lowers inhibitions that normally restrain people's behaviour, emphasizing the pharmacological properties of alcohol. Conversely, social learning models suggest that individuals learn what behaviour is sanctioned whilst intoxicated. The most prominent social learning model is social interactionism, of which Howard Becker's work stands as the exemplar.[25]

Symbolic interactionism emphasises meanings and symbolic significance in people's lives. In the case of alcohol symbolic interactionism would suggest that people learn: how to drink, the patterns of consumption (what to, when to, how to, etc.); to recognize the effects of alcohol; and how to enjoy the sensations they perceive.[26] Counter to popular understandings of the effects of alcohol (or marijuana in Becker's analysis) as biological, symbolic interactionsim demonstrates that experiences and practices associated with getting intoxicated and the interaction with other people who use alcohol.

There are three main premises of symbolic interactionism.[27] First, people interact with things based on their meanings. Second, these meanings are derived from social interaction – meaning is not inherently or objectively pre-determined but constructed and re-constructed. Third, people make use of meanings through interpretation. In daily interaction with these meaningful things people interpret and re-present or alter meanings as they negotiate their lives.

The idea that certain behaviour is excused, condoned, encouraged or facilitated by consuming alcohol was widespread amongst the participants in this research project. The title of this project was selected due to the significance alcohol plays in allowing young people to experiment with certain types of behaviour whilst drunk – alcohol lowers young people's inhibitions and simultaneously excusing their behaviour.

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