

Response

“All the King’s horses and all the King’s men . . .”: What is broken should not always be put back together again

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Introduction

Miller, Chikritzha, Droste, Pennay & Tomsen (2017) raise multiple methodological questions regarding our recently published study into the night-time entertainment districts (NEDs) of Queensland, Australia (Deville, Allen & Brown, 2017). They also raise wider ethical concerns regarding working with police and allowing research participants to enter their own data into questionnaires. As reported in an earlier issue of this journal (Deville et al., 2017), we conducted a point of entry study into NEDs which found: a high prevalence of preloading (79%); little meaningful difference between the genders in this prevalence and breath alcohol concentration (BAC); a much higher preponderance of people reporting to pre-drink for reasons of socialisation (rather than just price) compared to earlier research; and a large number of people to have no meaningful understanding of the BAC system. Here I respond to concerns raised by Miller and colleagues. First, I provide a context and common ground for this debate in the specific domain of Queensland. Next, I look at the sample we acquired in comparison to Miller (2013), explain motivations for preloading, and why our results are different, as well as more reliable than those reported by Miller. I further point

out why the lack of clarity around rejection rates is important and demonstrate that having police involved in such research is a good idea. I also address issues of misplaced concern in relation to the engagement of the energy drink industry and media, and the multiple charges of ethics violations implied in the commentary by Miller and colleagues. Taken together, I provide a corridor for future research, informed by the use of our scientifically reproducible methodology.

Common ground

Our research team had been collecting our SmartStart data in Queensland since 2014. In 2016 the Queensland government introduced lockdown laws (since rescinded) and the earlier closing of pubs and clubs in Queensland to reduce alcohol fuelled violence. Miller vocally supported this proposal (Queensland Coalition For Action On Alcohol, 2016) and is currently acting as the government’s independent evaluator (Queensland Government tenders, 2016). I am, therefore, cognisant and appreciative of their great investment of time and energy into this issue, particularly in Queensland.

To address Miller and colleagues’ comments we must surely have a shared goal for paying attention to our research area. A primary focus of research into our area is surely the reduction of alcohol fuelled violence in the entertainment districts in which we are collecting data? With this in mind, I am a little surprised by the complete lack of focus on the finding that our research method seemed to be associated with fewer arrests and, by extension,

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lowered violence, in the entertainment districts in which we operated.

Cutting nature at its joints: who & how do patrons enter NEDs?

In assessing preloading to the entertainment district, we wished to find out how inebriated people were as they entered the NED. The NEDs (those designated as a 'Safe Night Precinct' in Queensland) have extended trading hours compared to pubs and clubs elsewhere. Miller and colleagues did not use this design, did not collect these data, and so cannot answer such questions.

In our research, conducted with police who have a vested interest in knowing how drunk or violent people are as they enter the NED, we collected data on everyone who had or hadn't preloaded as they entered the NED. In other words, as we did *not* omit people we can always look at the different subsamples independently at a later date (as we did in the original paper and do again here below). In effect, we focussed only on those entering the NED, not those already in the NED or leaving the NED, as did Miller and colleagues in their prior research. This is an important distinction: Miller (2013) had collected data on preloading by asking a cross-sectional sample whether they had preloaded (i.e., consumed alcohol before "going out") but had done so from patrons already in the NED. Underlining Miller and colleagues' comment regarding the "importance of maintaining transparency in reporting the methods of analysis" we must admit to not being able to tell whether Miller's (2013) mean BAC was of people who had preloaded and were now drinking in the NED or were from people who had only preloaded and were trying to gain entry into the NED. This is an important limitation of their research method in relation to preloading, as we have a wealth of evidence regarding memory errors in research participants asked to recall their reasons for a previous behaviour. For those interested in this area I recommend any books or articles by Daniel Schacter, Garry Wells or Elizabeth Loftus on this issue.

Unlike any past research with a large sample, and because we collected all these data *only* from people as they were entering the NED, we were later able to look at whether people who had drunk at a suburban pub were entering the NED any differently to people who had drunk in a home. This is a strength of our research and adds to our knowledge base, hopefully moving the field forwards. As outlined in the paper, and seemingly missed by Miller and his colleagues, we analysed these people (those who had drunk in

suburban pubs) separately and found them to be similar to the rest of the sample (page 137 not only included a full section devoted to this but also a graph for those less inclined to rely on statistics). I am unsure why one would include preloading at a sports club (as did Miller, 2013, p.36) but not the suburban pub next door to the sports club? In effect, why is Miller measuring preloading? There seems, here, to be a lack of theory and utility by using a simple prevalence approach to research and this leaves the investigators to guess at effective interventions, if they do this at all.

But, for argument's sake, let us look at this as Miller and colleagues would have it. If we were to remove from our Brisbane sample anyone who mentioned preloading in a suburban pub, hotel, motel, or hostel (all similar types of places), then of the remaining 1,884 participants, 78.4% of our sample said they had preloaded. Not a vast difference to the 79.72% who said 'yes' to preloading in our original data, but very different to a pre-drinking rate of 60% which Miller and colleagues mistakenly believe we would get. However, I believe that where Miller and colleagues are making their mistake is by including these 281 people as a "No" to preloading. Of course, if one were to see these people as having already been drinking 'in town' or 'out there' or 'having already entered the night time economy' (as Miller and colleagues have said we should) then they would not have met inclusion criteria into our study of people entering the NED. That they would have been included in Miller's previous and current studies and classified as a 'No' for preloading demonstrates why we may be concerned regarding those studies.

Pre-loading motivations: to socialise or to save money?

Miller and colleagues also point to the inclusion of these people (suburban pub drinkers) in our sample as to why we had so many people (and vastly different to their research) selecting "to socialise" as their main reason for preloading. So, to cut along the dotted line that has been drawn in their commentary we reanalysed our data, both including and excluding these people—it made no difference.

In our original paper we had 44.57% reporting to preload in order 'to socialise' and 37.43% preloading 'to save money'. Removing anyone who drank at a suburban pub, motel, hotel or hostel means that we now have 42.55% preloading 'to socialise' and 39.95% preloading 'to save money'. I am sure Miller and colleagues now see that their reason makes no difference to the interpretation

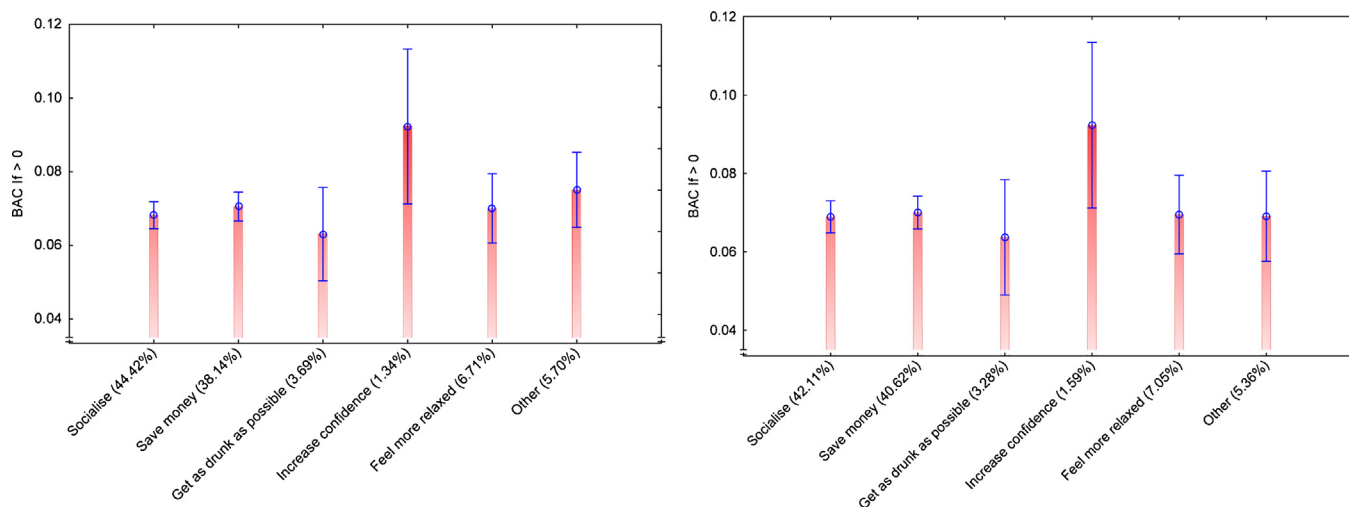


Fig. 1. Comparison of original (Devilly et al., 2017; left) and new (right) graphs for motivations for preloading, if BAC greater than zero—with and without data from people preloading in suburban pubs.

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