Unwanted Sexual Attention in Licensed Venues: Considering LGBTIQ Young Adults' Experiences and Perceptions

BIANCA FILEBORN [*]

Abstract

Sexual violence within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) communities remains largely under-researched and under-theorised. Yet, emerging research suggests that sexual violence is a significant issue within the LGBTIQ communities. Additionally, the occurrence of sexual violence and unwanted sexual attention within specific social and cultural contexts is, for the most part, insufficiently examined. This article draws on research exploring young LGBTIQ adults' perceptions and experiences of unwanted sexual attention in licensed venues. Firstly, I consider the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of 'unwanted sexual attention' as a category of analysis. I then move on to consider participants' use of licensed venues, the particular significance of pubs and clubs to LGBTIQ young people, and their perceptions and experiences of unwanted sexual attention. Finally, I discuss the implications of these findings for theoretical and conceptual understandings of unwanted sexual attention and sexual violence.

Key words

Gender; sexual orientation; sexual violence; licensed venues; night time economy; LGBTIQ

Resumen

En general, se ha investigado y teorizado muy poco sobre la violencia sexual dentro de las comunidades de lesbianas, gays, bisexuales, transgénero / transexuales, intersex y queer (LGBTIQ). Sin embargo, investigaciones recientes sugieren que la violencia sexual es un problema importante en estas comunidades. Además, la incidencia de la violencia sexual y atención sexual no deseada dentro de contextos sociales y culturales específicos no está, en su mayor parte, suficientemente examinada. Este artículo se basa en la investigación de la percepción y experiencias de atención sexual no deseada en locales con licencia para vender alcohol. En primer lugar, se tienen en cuenta los fundamentos teóricos y conceptuales de "atención sexual no deseada" como una categoría de análisis. A continuación, se considera el uso de locales con licencia por parte de los participantes, el significado particular de pubs y discotecas para jóvenes LGBTIQ, y sus percepciones y experiencias de atención sexual no deseada. Por último, se tratan las implicaciones

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[*] Dr Bianca Fileborn is currently a Research Officer at the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society, La Trobe University, Level 2, 215 Franklin St, Melbourne, Australia. B.Fileborn@latrobe.edu.au

de estos hallazgos para la comprensión teórica y conceptual de la atención sexual no deseada y la violencia sexual.

Palabras clave

Género; orientación sexual; violencia sexual; locales con licencia; economía nocturna; LGBTIQ

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1. Introduction

This article explores the ways in which lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) young adults understand and perceive unwanted sexual attention in licensed venues[1]. Unwanted sexual attention and sexual violence within the LGBTIQ[2] communities remain largely under-researched and under-theorised (Kay and Jeffries 2010, Gillum and DiFulvio 2012, Fileborn 2012a, 2014, Jindasurat 2013). Emerging research suggests that experiences of sexualised violence within the LGBTIQ communities are common (Waldner-Haugrud and Vaden Gratch 1997, Bernhard 2000, Saewyc et al. 2006, Christopher and Pflieger 2007, Leonard et al. 2008, Rothman et al. 2011, Wang 2011). Yet, sexual violence is understood primarily within a gender-based framework at the theoretical, conceptual and policy levels (Kay and Jeffries 2010, Fileborn 2014). For example, within an Australian context the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022 frames sexual (and other) violence within a gender-based and largely heteronormative framework: that is, as occurring within a predominantly, if not solely, heterosexual context. This is not to deny or downplay the gendered reality of sexual violence, or to suggest that gender is irrelevant to the experiences of LGBTIQ people. However, this framing of sexual violence raises questions regarding how those who identify in a non-heteronormative way experience, understand, and perceive a form of violence that they are discursively largely excluded from.

The role of situational and cultural context in shaping sexual violence is also underexplored, although again emerging research indicates that situational context can be important in how sexual violence plays out (Clark and Quadara 2010). The occurrence of sexually harassing, unwanted and violent behaviours within licensed venues is becoming increasingly well documented (Watson 2000, Fileborn 2012b, 2014, Kavanaugh 2013). Licensed venues are also unique social sites, with venue-specific cultural and social norms – particularly with regards to sexual interaction. This suggests that there is a need to consider the ways in which unwanted sexual attention and sexual violence occurs in licensed venues, and how young adults understand and perceive their occurrence within these spaces. Pubs and clubs often hold particular significance and importance as a social space for LGBTIQ communities, and this indicates a need to consider the specific perceptions of LGBTIQ young adults.

Drawing on a mixed-methods research project undertaken in Melbourne, Australia, I seek to explore how LGBTIQ young adults understood and perceived unwanted sexual attention in licensed venues. I also comment on the extent to which heterosexual participants acknowledged or recognised that unwanted sexual attention occurred within LGBTIQ contexts. Before doing so, I briefly define and expand upon what is meant by the term 'unwanted sexual attention'. LGBTIQ people's experiences of sexual violence are further evidenced, as is the exclusion of their experiences from existing theoretical and conceptual accounts of sexual violence. The particular significance of pubs and clubs for LGBTIQ communities is also explored in more detail, as this provides important context to participants' understandings of unwanted sexual attention.

1.1. The boundaries and semantics of 'unwanted sexual attention'

The term 'unwanted sexual attention' was used in this research to refer to a broad range of sexually harassing and violent behaviours and experiences. It is underpinned by Kelly's (1988, p. 41) continuum of sexual violence, which conceptualises sexual violence as:

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[1] The terms 'licensed venues' and 'pubs and clubs' are used interchangeably throughout this article.
[2] The acronym LGBTIQ has been used here as it reflects the way in which the overwhelming majority of my participants identified their gender identity or sexual orientation. However, it is acknowledged that not all individuals who are same-sex attracted or gender diverse identify with the identity categories contained within the LGBTIQ acronym.

> Any physical, visual, verbal or sexual act that is experienced...at the time or later, as a threat, invasion or assault, that has the effect of hurting her or degrading her and/or takes away her ability to control intimate contact.

Such a broad and inclusive definition was implemented intentionally. As this study was exploratory in nature, a broad and diffuse definition of 'unwanted sexual attention' was necessary in order to capture the full range of young adults' experiences and understandings. As the terms 'sexual assault' or 'sexual violence' connote more extreme manifestations of sexualised harm, it was felt that the use of these terms would have discouraged participants from also discussing more 'minor' incarnations of these behaviours. Additionally, sexual violence and sexual assault are also associated with legal definitions of sexual harm. The term unwanted sexual attention was also used to avoid any confusion with these legal definitions, which tend to conceptualise sexual harm in a more limiting manner.

1.2. Sexual violence and LGBTIQ communities

Sexual violence has largely been understood within feminist theory as a form of gender-based violence. It is primarily perpetrated by men against women, and is clearly implicated in the continuation of gender-based power relations and men's oppression of women (Brownmiller 1975, Radford et al. 1996, Kilmartin and Allison 2007, O'Toole et al. 2007, Sheffield 2007, Anderson and Doherty 2008, Messerschmidt 2012, Lombard and McMillan 2013). Certainly, the gendered nature of sexual violence is well supported by extensive research evidence, and it is important to reiterate here that it is not my intention to deny or downplay this. There are also gendered differences in men and women's embodied experiences of sexual (and other) victimisation and the subsequent impacts of this (Kelly 1996, Lombard 2013). However, such theoretical accounts also present a particularly heteronormative view of what constitutes gender-based violence: in which men perpetrate against women within the context of heterosexual relationships. The ways in which gender comes in to play in same-sex sexual violence is less well articulated in these accounts, and there is largely silence in regards to how gender might intersect with other forms of oppression related to sexuality, or sex and gender identities that sit outside of male/female, man/woman binaries. Although gender is fundamental to our understandings of sexual violence, to what extent can it account for LGBTIQ people's experiences?

Emerging research illustrates that LGBTIQ individuals experience sexual violence across a range of different contexts. In Waldner-Haugrad and Vaden Gratch's (1997) survey research with lesbians and gay men, just over half of their sample (52%) reported having experienced sexual coercion within the context of a same-sex relationship. Rothman and colleagues' systematic review of the lifetime prevalence of sexual assault for those who identify as gay, lesbian and bisexual in the US found that that the prevalence ranged from 12% to 54% for gay and bisexual males, and between 16% and 85% for lesbian and bisexual women (Rothman *et al*. 2011, p. 55). Bernhard's survey of 136 lesbian women found that 54% of these women had at least one experience of sexual violence (Bernhard 2000, p. 73). LGBTIQ individuals can also experience sexual violence as a form of heterosexist abuse: that is, where they are targeted specifically on account of their gender identity, sex or sexual orientation. Within an Australian context, 12% of participants in Leonard et al.'s (2008) research reported having ever experienced heterosexist sexual assault. Another US-based survey of transgendered individuals found that 10% of participants had been sexually assaulted due to their gender identity (Grant et al. 2011). This brief exploration of the literature illustrates that sexual violence is a common experience for LGBTIQ individuals, and one that should be accounted for within our theoretical frameworks for sexual violence.

Although some theorists have begun to develop accounts of sexual violence that are inclusive of the experiences of LGBTIQ communities (Kelly 1996, Girschick

2002, Ristock 2002, Kilmartin and Allison 2007, Lombard 2013), dominant understandings of sexual violence still work to obscure or ignore them (Tomsen and Mason 2001, Girschick 2002, Erbaugh 2007, Fileborn 2014). As Erbaugh (2007, p. 451) articulates, dominant frameworks for men's violence against women do not sufficiently explain the occurrence of violence in same-sex contexts, or for those who sit outside of binary understandings of sex, gender and sexuality. In particular, these dominant frameworks fail to take into account the role(s) of heterosexism, homophobia and transphobia in LGBTIQ sexual violence (along with a myriad other intersecting identities and forms of oppression) (Erbaugh 2007, Kay and Jeffries 2010, Fileborn 2014). This is not to suggest that gender is irrelevant to the experiences of LGBTIQ people, but rather that men's gendered oppression of women alone is unable to account for the scope of sexual violence that LGBTIQ people experience.

What implications does this have for how LGBTIQ people understand sexual violence and unwanted sexual attention? The ways in which we theorise sexual violence has important implications for policy, practice, and broader community understandings of this harm. Jindasurat notes that the exclusion of LGBTIQ experiences from dominant accounts of sexual violence has implications 'for survivors' willingness to seek services as well as their access to services and treatment from service providers' (Jindasurat 2013, p. 60, see also Kay and Jeffries 2010, Fileborn 2012a). In the context of intimate partner violence (IPV) involving gay men, Kay and Jeffries (2010) argue that the heteronormative framing of this experience can result in victims remaining in an abusive relationship on account of being unable to recognise or define their experience as constituting IPV (see also Gillum and DiFulvio 2012). This raises questions regarding how young LGBTIQ individuals understand unwanted sexual attention in the context of these largely heteronormative discourses.

1.3. The importance of context: licensed venues and LGBTIQ communities

The licensed venue context is also likely to inform the ways in which participants understood and discussed unwanted sexual attention. As Clark and Quadara (2010) highlight, situational context and the specific social, cultural and behavioural norms of a space play a vital role in facilitating how sexual violence occurs, as well as how it is understood by others. Pubs and clubs can be highly sexual spaces used by the young (and not so young) to meet potential sexual or romantic partners and engage in varying degrees of sexual interaction (Snow *et al.* 1991, Lindsay 2006, Grazian 2007, Anderson *et al.* 2009). However, in some venue contexts overt sexual displays are not normative or welcome behaviours, and there is great variability in culture across venues (and, indeed, the culture of individual venues can also be fluid) (Hutton 2006, Lindsay 2006, Hunt *et al.* 2010). Norms also exist regarding the appropriate temporal and geographical locations of sexual interaction in venues (Griffin 2008). For instance, it may be more acceptable to engage in overt sexual interaction later in the evening, and in specific areas such as the dance floor. Sexual interaction is, in many venues, limited to heterosexual expression (Chatterton and Hollands 2003, Hutton 2006, Lindsay 2006).

For many LGBTIQ people queer-friendly licensed venues represent an important space for sexual interaction (Hankin 2001, Bullock 2004, Gruskin *et al.* 2006, Hammers 2009, Welker 2010), particularly within a cultural context where open expressions of non-heteronormative sexuality can be met with violence and abuse. For a number of participants in my own research LGBTIQ-friendly venues provided one of the few safe public spaces that they could openly engage in sexual interaction or look for a sexual or romantic partner (Fileborn 2014). More generally, licensed venues can function as an important space for LGBTIQ people in establishing their identity, and in seeking out a site of support, belonging and community (Bullock 2004, Rooke 2007, Welker 2010, Fobear 2012, Fileborn 2014). However, it should of course be noted that LGBTIQ-friendly or exclusive venues are

not experienced in the same way by all members of these diverse communities. For some, these venues can also act as sites of exclusion (Johnson and Samdahl 2005, Welker 2010, Fobear 2012, Fileborn 2014), while others do not identify with the dominant cultural signifiers used to denote queer spaces (Lugosi 2009) or place less emphasis on their sex/gender/sexual orientation as a marker of identity (Fobear 2012, Fileborn 2014). Nonetheless, the discussion here illustrates that pubs and clubs can hold particular meaning and value for LGBTIQ individuals, and this is important to take into account when considering their perceptions and understandings of unwanted sexual attention within these spaces.

Given that the situational and cultural context is important in informing understandings of both wanted and unwanted sexual attention, it is worthwhile commenting briefly on the specific context of the Melbourne venue scene. Melbourne, Australia is host to a diverse licensed venue industry, with hundreds of venues populating the Central Business District and inner-city suburbs. These venues cater to diverse cultural and sub-cultural groups, with venue styles ranging from pubs, hotels, cocktail bars, large commercial dance venues, and countless other niche venues (see also Lindsay 2006). There are also a handful of gay male venues, primarily located in the inner-city suburbs, and a small number of venues that cater specifically towards LGBTIQ groups. At the time of conducting this research there was no dedicated lesbian venue in Melbourne, although a small number of one-off nights (often at rotating venues) were in operation. The LGBTIQ participants in this study reported attending a range of different venue types, including LGBTIQ-specific venues, and venues that were mixed in terms of their patronage.

2. Methodology

This research project aimed to explore young adults' experiences and perceptions of unwanted sexual attention in licensed venues. Young adults, for the purposes of this study, were those aged 18-30 who attend licensed venues. In this study I was particularly concerned with exploring and establishing: the characteristics of unwanted sexual attention in licensed venues; the ways in which gender identity and sexual orientation, amongst other demographic features, may influence young adults' experiences and perceptions of unwanted sexual attention in licensed venues; the role of venue culture in facilitating young adults' perceptions and experiences of unwanted sexual attention; and, finally, the role of the physical environment and venue design in facilitating the occurrence of unwanted sexual attention.

In investigating these areas a range of qualitative and quantitative methods were employed. Namely, this research used online surveys, focus groups and one-on-one interviews, and the research was qualitative in its approach overall. Data from each of these methods is presented in this paper. The remainder of this discussion will consider each of the three methods used, and their purpose, in turn.

Table 1: Overview of participants

Sexuality, Gender or Sex Identity	Surveys	Focus Groups	Interviews	Total
Gay men	34	2	0	**36**
Lesbian women	9	0	0	**9**
Bisexual women	16	2	1	**19**
Bisexual men	5	0	0	**5**
Queer	6	0	0	**6**
Intersex	1	0	0	**1**
Transgender	0	0	0	**0**
Other*	2	0	0	**2**
Heterosexual men	33	4	0	**37**
Heterosexual women	124	8	3	**135**
Total	**230[3]**	**16**	**4**	**250**

* The 'other' category included a participant who didn't identify with any particular sexuality, but said he had more sex with men than women, and a participant who did not elaborate any further on their sexuality beyond 'other'.

2.1. Online surveys

Online surveys were used to garner a broader overview of young adults' general uses of licensed venues, their reasons for going out, their perceptions of safety on a night out, and their perceptions of unwanted sexual attention in licensed venues. The surveys used a range of fixed and open response questions in investigating these themes. There were 230 responses to the surveys in total, with 73 of these respondents identifying as LGBTIQ. The surveys also provided a means to identify any unexpected themes or issues that required exploration in the subsequent phases of the project.

2.2. Focus groups & one-on-one interviews

Focus groups were drawn on in order to further examine the themes of the survey, with a particular interest in how young adults discuss, construct and contest unwanted sexual attention within a social context. Five focus groups were held in total, with group sizes ranging from two to five participants. A further two one-on-one interviews were conducted in place of a focus group when the other registered participants failed to attend. Excerpts from these two interviews are designated with an asterisk in order to distinguish them from the other interview component of this study. Two of the seven focus groups and interviews were held with members of the LGBTIQ communities. Where possible, the groups were run with participants of a similar gender identity and sexual orientation (e.g., gay men, heterosexual women) in order to compare the similarities and differences in perceptions and understandings of unwanted sexual attention according to these factors.

2.3. One-on-one interviews

One-on-one interviews were conducted with four young adults who had experienced unwanted sexual attention or sexual assault within a licensed venue setting. One of these four participants identified as bisexual. The interviews sought to elicit a detailed narrative of the participants' experience, and participants were encouraged to reflect on the role that the venue culture, physical environment and design of the venue may have played in facilitating their experience.

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[3] Participants were provided with the option to skip any questions in the survey that they did not feel comfortable answering. As such, the total number of responses does not always add up to 230. Participants were included in the analysis if they had completed the demographic questions at the beginning of the survey, and at least one further question.

Participants were recruited through a range of avenues, including: online advertisements, university mailing lists, counseling centres, and health centres. Difficulty was encountered in recruiting LGBTIQ participants for some aspects of this study, most notably the focus groups and interviews. Additional steps were taken to increase LGBTIQ participation, including placing advertisements in a LGBTIQ-focused bookstore, appearing on Joy FM (a local LGBTIQ radio station) to discuss and promote the research, and approaching the Queer student department at the University of Melbourne to promote the research. Despite overwhelming support from members of the LGBTIQ communities in promoting the research, these steps had little impact on the number of LGBTIQ participants recruited.

The online surveys were also used to recruit participants for the focus group component of this study. In order to participate in the surveys and focus groups, participants were required to be aged 18-30 and to attend licensed venues in Melbourne. Additional selection criteria for the one-on-one interviews were to have experienced unwanted sexual attention or sexual assault in a licensed venue setting. An overview of participants is provided in Table 1.

The quantitative survey data was analysed using SPSS to identify any trends in participants' perceptions of unwanted sexual attention according to gender identity and sexual orientation. The qualitative survey, focus group and interview data was analysed thematically. An initial reading of the qualitative data was undertaken to identify common themes and issues raised by participants, following Ezzy's approach to open coding (2002). This thematic analysis sought to identity major recurring trends in the data, and well as to identify any points of divergence in responses. A series of codes and sub-codes were generated through this process of open coding. A second reading of the data was undertaken, with the data organised into Excel spreadsheets based upon the codes generated in the open coding. Additional codes were also generated throughout this process and on subsequent readings of the data as needed.

3. Perceptions and understandings of unwanted sexual attention

Participants' perceptions and understandings of unwanted sexual attention were explored in a range of ways. Focus group participants were asked to reflect upon their understandings of 'unwanted sexual attention', including the types of behaviours they thought this entailed, how commonly they thought it happened, the impacts of this behaviour and so forth. Survey participants were provided with a definition of unwanted sexual attention, and were asked to reflect upon whether they thought unwanted sexual attention occurred in venues, how commonly they thought it occurred and who perpetrated this behaviour. Many survey participants also made additional comments regarding their understandings of unwanted sexual attention in the open response questions. While there was a great deal of overlap between the perceptions and understandings of both the LGBTIQ and heterosexual participants, there were also some unique themes and issues raised by the LGBTIQ participants.

As Table 2 illustrates, survey participants overwhelmingly thought that unwanted sexual attention occurred in licensed venues, and the vast majority also believed that it was a common occurrence. There were no differences in responses here based upon participants' gender identity or sexual orientation. Participants were also asked to reflect on who was primarily impacted on by unwanted sexual attention in pubs and clubs, and they generally responded that unwanted sexual attention primarily impacted upon women (see Table 3). The exception to this was gay and bisexual men, with the majority responding that unwanted sexual attention impacted on men and women equally. Given the small sample size these results should be treated with caution. Nonetheless, they do suggest some relationship between gender, sexual orientation and perceptions of unwanted sexual attention.

Table 2. Survey participants' perceptions of unwanted sexual attention

	Does unwanted sexual attention occur in licensed venues?	Is unwanted sexual attention common in licensed venues?
Yes	96.6% (n=224)	80.2% (n=186)
No	1.3% (n=3)	8.2% (n=19)
Unsure	1.3% (n=3)	11.2% (n=26)

Table 3. Who does unwanted sexual attention mostly impact on, all survey participants.

Gender/Sexual orientation/sex	Mostly impacts women	Mostly impacts men	Both Equally
Gay	29.4% (n=10)	8.8% (n=3)	61.8% (n=21)
Lesbian	66.7% (n=6)	-	33.3% (n=3)
Bisexual Men	40% (n=2)	-	60% (n=3)
Bisexual Women	81.3% (n=13)	-	18.7% (n=3)
Queer	66/7% (n=4)		33.3% (n=2)
Intersex	100% (n=1)	-	-
Other	100% (n=2)	-	-
Heterosexual men	93.9% (n=31)	-	6.1% (n=2)
Heterosexual women	88.7% (n=110)	1.6% (n=2)	9.7% (n=12)

For the LGBTIQ participants in this research, their definitions of unwanted sexual attention were generally broad and inclusive, and this was similar to how heterosexual participants defined this phenomenon. Participants commonly made reference to what might be considered 'minor', non-physical behaviours such as staring and verbal comments, to unwanted physical contact such as groping, as well as more 'severe' forms of sexual violence such as sexual assault and rape:

> **Benjamin[4]:** It's all...situation dependent, but...unwanted contact or even unwanted attention that's prolonged beyond the point that...it's been made clear that it's unwanted...it's attention as much as physical contact. (FG2)

Although, as Benjamin's comment suggests, for some participants what constituted unwanted sexual attention was dependent upon the particular context that the behaviour took place in. Other behaviours discussed by participants as being unwanted sexual attention included touching, groping on the dance floor, and generally invading someone's personal space. These findings are also in line with those of the pilot study for this research (Fileborn 2012b), as well as reflecting other participants' experiences of unwanted sexual attention.

However, definitions of unwanted sexual attention were also contested and variable:

> I think including 'staring' in this category is unfounded... Of course staring goes on in licensed venues, that's kind of the point and as long as [it's] not coupled with following or stalking, is both harmless and avoidable (Survey participant, gay male, 23,)

Yet for many other participants staring was mentioned as a form of unwanted sexual attention. For example, interview participant Clementine said that 'if people stare at you it's quite intrusive'. There was variation in terms of what counted as unwanted sexual attention, and what was wanted for one person in one context could be unwanted for another in a different context. This suggests a need to allow for a degree of fluidity in definitions of unwanted sexual attention, and a firm understanding of the importance of the context in influencing how a particular behaviour or action is experienced (Fairchild 2010). For Clementine, staring was

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[4] All participants are referred to by a pseudonym.

particularly problematic when she was out with a group of lesbian friends and was being stared at by heterosexual patrons, particularly heterosexual men. This indicates that how unwanted sexual attention is experienced is also mediated by, in this instance, sexual orientation. Gender is also likely to be playing a role here. Women routinely experience sexually harassing behaviours in their day-to-day lives, and are often socialised to be concerned for their sexual safety. Thus, a behaviour that represents 'the point' of going out for this male participant may signify a potential threat to women and at the very least contributes towards the routine sexual objectification of women in public spaces. That said the issue of what young adults' desire on a night out is a complex one. As highlighted earlier in this article, licensed venues can be sexual spaces and sexual attention can often be a *wanted* and desired part of a night out. As one survey participant noted, wanted and unwanted sexual attention are not necessarily mutually exclusive, nor are they static states of being:

> Sometimes people go out for the night longing for sexual attention and sometimes they don't…Can unwanted and wanted be absolutely separated in the intoxication of a night out on the town? Where does pleasure come in to this? (Survey participant, bisexual male, 27)

However, this also frames wanted and unwanted sexual attention as inseparable components of sexual interaction, foreclosing the possibility of other, perhaps more ethical, ways of 'doing' sexual interaction. While this individual rightly states that pleasure should be considered as an important component of sexual interaction, it is unclear from his comments how those on the receiving end of 'unwanted' forms of attention may also experience pleasure.

While participants thought that unwanted sexual attention was a common occurrence in clubs and pubs, many participants commented in the surveys and focus groups that they thought most of the unwanted sexual attention that happened would be in the less 'serious' end of the spectrum. As a queer male survey participant commented, "I feel that a lot of unwanted sexual attention is either fairly minor or covert". Some participants, particularly gay men, contested whether the occurrence of this behaviour was such a 'big deal', and a few participants suggested it was something they could easily handle. The following quote from a gay male survey participant encapsulates this viewpoint:

> I really don't think the topic is an issue. We are all adults so if someone was to approach me with unwanted sexual attention I would just tell them to fuck off. (Survey participant, gay male, 30)

However, it should be noted here that men (albeit, usually heterosexual men) have been consistently identified as viewing sexually harassing behaviour, such as that occurring in the workplace or on the street, as less serious than women (Laniya 2005, Fairchild 2010). Men generally do not experience unwanted sexual attention and sexual harassment in a systematic and insidious way and this is likely to influence how they perceive and interpret unwanted sexual attention in licensed venues. Men can also face significant barriers to identifying and discussing sexualised harm, given that dominant norms of masculinity often dictate that men are always 'up for' sex, or that they should be competent at defending themselves physically from any threat (Kramer 1998, Davies *et al.* 2006, Graham 2006, Abdullah-Khan 2008, Braun *et al.* 2009, Weiss 2010). This masculine performance was apparent in the following participant's comment:

> There is very little attention that I get which I would consider to be unwanted. (Male, 23, doesn't identify)

This type of gendered performance may be compounded for gay men, as the 'gatekeeping' role of stereotypical femininity has been removed (Braun *et al.* 2009). Additionally, Braun *et al.* (2009, p.356) observe that the sexual culture in many gay male social spaces (or the perception that these are sexual spaces) means that sex can 'become a means of accessing gay male communities', and this may also

shape the ways in which gay men talk about wanted and unwanted sexual attention in pubs and clubs. That said, a number of gay male participants also disclosed first hand experiences and observations of unwanted sexual attention taking place in gay venues. It is unclear precisely why some men were more willing to disclose or identify the occurrence of unwanted sexual attention in gay spaces, although it may be that factors such as age or being an established member of gay communities play a role here. Additionally, there is great diversity in how gay men perform their masculinity and sexuality, and this can also account for the differences in how they discuss and perceive unwanted sexual attention. It may be particular iterations or performances of masculinity that are associated with all sexual advances being constructed as 'wanted'.

4. Venue context, harm and unwanted sexual attention

While there was a degree of subjectivity in the types of behaviours participants identified as being unwanted, their perceptions were also shaped by the concept of harm (Fileborn 2012b). Participants often distinguished between a behaviour or an interaction being unwanted but acceptable (e.g., often within the context of people trying to pick up, an acceptable and normal behaviour in many venues), and something being unwanted *and* harmful or problematic. Where participants drew this line varied. Most commonly, a behaviour became unwanted *and* harmful based on the level of physicality (i.e., unwanted physical touch was often, but not always, viewed as harmful), or in instances where the participant felt that they had made their lack of consent to, or lack of interest in, a sexual encounter clear (see also Kavanaugh 2013):

> **Alex:** My thoughts on when it becomes harmful is when it either becomes physical…or when it goes from just a comment to harassment…my sort of rule of thumb is when the answer is no, that's when anything beyond that becomes unwanted. (FG2)

There is a level of acceptance that some unwanted behaviours should be accommodated on a night out, in this case provided that the behaviour does not extend beyond the point where a verbal 'no' has been expressed. That said, Alex did go on to acknowledge that a behaviour could be unwanted before this point, and that there may be a range of reasons why young people do not say 'no' to unwanted advances. This acceptance that a certain level of unwanted sexual attention should be accommodated for may also be playing a useful social function. While the negative aspect of these behaviours should not be ignored, if every unwanted experience was interpreted as being highly harmful or threatening, this may result in young LGBTIQ people being further restricted in their use of venue spaces (e.g., simply not going to venues out of fear etc.). Gender is also likely to come in to play here. As illustrated earlier, many male participants contested the idea that unwanted sexual attention was a 'big deal' and positioned it as something they could handle. Without wishing to downplay the barriers that men face to acknowledging sexual harms, this also suggests that there may be very real differences in the ways in which men and women perceive unwanted sexual attention depending upon the particular gendered performances they engage in. In such instances unwanted sexual attention may be 'accommodated' for as it is genuinely not interpreted as a harmful or threatening experience.

The line between unwanted but acceptable, and unwanted and harmful also varied depending on the social context and the type of venue that people were in:

> **Alex:** It can happen anywhere…a cocktail bar can have it happen but it becomes unwanted maybe a lot earlier, whereas a dance floor it becomes unwanted a little bit later, and at a [gay male] sauna it becomes unwanted when it might actually be physical. (FG2)

Participants who responded in this way tended to suggest that unwanted sexual attention could happen in any type of venue, it was just the particular form of

behaviour that changed. This had particular implications within some gay male venues, such as sex on premises (SOP) venues. Alex commented that saunas and SOP venues were the 'sort of venue where you can't expect not to get sexual attention, because you're walking around with your clothes off or wearing a towel'. Thus, sexual attention is an inherent component of attending these venues, and this renders the concept of sexual attention being *unwanted* almost impossible (or, at the very least something that should be put up with and tolerated within these spaces). Likewise, there is a much higher threshold for what 'counts' as unwanted sexual attention being constructed in Alex's comment. Whether this reflects the actual experiences of gay men using SOP venues is less clear.

In contrast, other participants saw unwanted sexual attention as happening in certain types or genres of venues, and particularly venues with highly sexual cultures or venues that provided spaces for dancing. For example, one survey participant said that 'as most licensed venues are places where people go to "pick up", I think you have to accept there will be occasions where you will be propositioned and it will be unwelcome' (bisexual female, 27). The idea that some forms of unwanted sexual attention are to be expected in licensed venues may also be related back to the concept of harm, and where each individual draws the 'line' between unwanted, and unwanted and harmful sexual advances. Given that what is viewed as 'harmful' unwanted sexual attention can be related to the specific venue setting, it may be that in venues with a sexual culture young adults are more willing to accommodate some forms of unwanted attention. However, this is certainly not to suggest that they are welcoming or accommodating of all forms of unwanted advances in these venues, and it is likely that there are certain contexts where the behaviour would shift into the territory of unwanted and harmful. Additionally, this is not to say that venues with a sexual culture are concomitant with unwanted sexual attention:

> Even in highly sexualised places like [venue], people are respectful to you saying "No", or not interested. (Survey participant, bisexual male, 30)

This suggests that it is not just venues with a 'sexual' culture (such as SOP venues) that are of concern here. Rather, it may be venues that foster a sexual culture that is devoid of respect or mutual concern for ethical and consensual sexual encounters that enable the occurrence of unwanted sexual attention.

5. Gender, heteronormativity and unwanted sexual attention

As illustrated earlier in this article, the dominant frameworks for understanding sexual violence typically construct it in a heteronormatively gendered way. That is, as perpetrated by a man against a women, and often within the context of a heterosexual relationship. Such frameworks clearly shaped many participants' understandings of unwanted sexual attention, although they were also challenged and contested by others.

The LGBTIQ participants in this research generally identified unwanted sexual attention and sexual violence as occurring across a broad range of contexts and victim/perpetrator configurations (see Fileborn 2014 for further detail). Their responses challenged heteronormative understandings of sexual violence, and highlighted the need for theoretical accounts of sexual violence to extend beyond, but still include, gender as an explanatory factor. A smaller number of heterosexual participants also acknowledged that unwanted sexual attention could occur within non-heteronormative contexts:

> It depends on the venue. I mean, at a gay bar, or it could be, it could be anyone. Depends on the context and who's involved. But I would say generally the problem, if it's a problem, it's mainly for women and resulting from men I would say would be the main, the main issue. (Cameron, interview participant*)

> I can think of times where it's happened with almost every different variable. Like gay guys looking at, or making it clear they were interested in someone who wasn't gay who was male. And…a bit with gay females…the stereotype is definitely the straight guy going for the straight girl. (Mary, FG4)

However, more commonly heterosexual participants exclusively discussed unwanted sexual attention as taking place within heteronormative contexts. Of course, this may well be because it reflected these participants' personal experiences and observations of unwanted sexual attention, and was thus the most relevant context for them to discuss. It is not necessarily the case that participants were unaware of the possibility for unwanted sexual attention to occur in non-heteronormative contexts, but rather that this was not particularly salient for them to discuss. Nonetheless, the fact that many heterosexual participants did not overtly identify or discuss the occurrence of unwanted sexual attention in non-heteronormative contexts suggests a lack of awareness or understanding of this being an issue. It is also noteworthy that no heterosexual participants identified the occurrence of unwanted sexual attention as a form of heterosexist violence or abuse, despite this being a relatively common experience for LGBTIQ participants.

This has important ramifications and implications for LGBTIQ individuals who experience unwanted sexual attention or sexual violence. For example, one bisexual focus group participant drew attention to the ways in which heteronormative framings of sexual violence may prevent others from acting in a bystander capacity for LGBTIQ people:

> Laura: I've found straight venues take it a lot more seriously.

> Interviewer: Ok, so in what way? Like how do they respond differently?

> Laura: Well they respond to a man dominating a woman a lot more seriously than they would a woman trying to dominate a woman.

> Interviewer: Why do you think that is?

> Laura: Not sure…I suppose it's just another heteronormative thing. Um, it's less common in gay clubs, or at least the ones I've been to, this is all…completely subjective…but I'd say mostly because it's more common for a man to be harassing a woman than it is for any other configuration. (interview participant*)

For Laura, heteronormative understandings of unwanted sexual attention and sexual violence contribute towards venues taking unwanted sexual attention that occurs within this paradigm more seriously, and implies that venue staff are more likely to intervene in this situation. Laura also suggests that the prevalent nature of heteronormative unwanted sexual attention means that venue staff are more likely to recognise and respond to this. However, as outlined earlier in this article many LGBTIQ individuals do experience unwanted sexual attention and sexual violence in both licensed venues and other situational contexts. As such, Laura's comments do not necessarily reflect the reality of LGBTIQ people's experiences. It is unclear whether this heteronormative framing of unwanted sexual attention discouraged LGBTIQ participants from reporting or disclosing their experiences to venue staff or other patrons. Certainly, it is concerning that a lack of awareness or recognition of unwanted sexual attention or sexual violence in non-heteronormative contexts may prevent bystanders from intervening or responding to this behaviour. It should also be noted that venue staff and security were generally seen to respond poorly, or to not recognise, unwanted sexual attention when it occurred regardless of the gender identity or sexual orientations of the people involved. There were also a range of other factors that contributed towards unwanted sexual attention not being taken seriously, such as victim dress and level of intoxication.

6. Conclusion

This article set out to explore the ways in which LGBTIQ young adults understand and perceive unwanted sexual attention in licensed venues, as well as the extent to

which heterosexual participants recognised and acknowledged unwanted sexual attention occurring within non-heteronormative contexts. LGBTIQ participants generally understood unwanted sexual attention as constituting a diverse range of behaviours. However, the ways in which unwanted sexual attention was understood was also variable and context-dependent. Some participants held different understandings of what 'counted' as unwanted sexual attention, and many distinguished between what they considered to be 'harmful' or 'non-harmful' manifestations of this behaviour.

The findings of this research indicate that the venue context is important in informing how unwanted sexual attention is understood. The normative behaviours and sexual context of a venue can shape when sexual attention becomes 'unwanted', as well as the extent to which an unwanted advance will be tolerated. Unwanted sexual attention should be conceptualised in a way that takes this fluidity and context into account. It is not necessarily helpful to view a certain form of unwanted sexual attention as being harmful or problematic in all contexts. Likewise, individuals may experience the same form of unwanted sexual attention in very different ways.

While there was a great deal of similarity between heterosexual and LGBTIQ participants in terms of their understandings of unwanted sexual attention there were also some divergences, particularly in relation to venue context and culture. This was especially apparent in relation to SOP venues and venues with highly sexual cultures, discussed primarily by gay male participants, where there appeared to be a much higher 'threshold' for a behaviour to constitute unwanted sexual attention. This is not necessarily inherently problematic, especially given that the venue context informs young adults' embodied experiences of unwanted sexual attention. It is not my intention to create 'victims' where the unwanted sexual attention experienced is genuinely unproblematic or un-harmful. As highlighted earlier, sexual interaction can be an important and valued part of venue culture. As some participants noted, highly sexual venues can also be respectful spaces. However, it is also concerning that some young adults might downplay or feel unable to speak out about unwanted sexual attention that becomes construed as part of a 'normal' night out at some venues.

Together, these findings suggest a need to encourage young adults to develop the skills to function as ethical sexual actors (Carmody 2003, 2005, 2009). Carmody (2005) advocates for an 'ethical erotics' approach to sexual violence prevention, and her work is of great relevance here. According to Carmody 'all sexual encounters, regardless of the gender of the people involved, invite the possibility of ethical or unethical sexual behaviour' (Carmody 2003, p. 201). Drawing on Foucault, Carmody suggests that 'ethical subjects...not only reflect on how they constitute ourselves as moral subjects of their own actions, but essential to this subjectivity is caring for others' (Carmody 2003, p. 211). Thus, to be an ethical sexual actor requires the individual to reflect upon their own desires, needs and actions, as well as how these impact upon others. A consideration of power relations and a reflection on our own position according to gender, race, sexuality and so forth is also a vital component of being an ethical sexual subject. Such an approach would arm young adults with the skills to negotiate sexual activity in a context-dependent way, while still providing space for sexual pleasure and desire.

There was also some evidence to suggest that heteronormative framings of sexual violence obscure LGBTIQ people's experiences of unwanted sexual attention in pubs and clubs. Although further work is required in this area, it was apparent that there was a lack of recognition of unwanted sexual attention occurring within LGBTIQ contexts. Likewise, some participants believed that others did not take unwanted sexual attention occurring within LGBTIQ contexts seriously. This may act as a further impediment to LGBTIQ people disclosing or seeking help for unwanted sexual attention within pubs and clubs. Additionally, it is possible that this lack of

recognition also prevents others from acting in a bystander capacity in response to unwanted sexual attention occurring in a non-heteronormative capacity. Such findings highlight the need to ensure that our theoretical, conceptual and policy approaches to sexual violence and unwanted sexual attention are inclusive of diverse gender, sex, and sexual orientation. Finally, although some of the differences between and within LGBTIQ participants' understandings and perceptions were articulated throughout this discussion, due to the small sample size in this research it was not always possible to consider the diversity within and between these rich and complex communities. Further work is required here to continue to articulate the ways in which perceptions – and, indeed, experiences – of unwanted sexual attention are informed by the intersections of identity, culture and place.

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