
Special Issue Paper

Men and women: Do they value the same things in mainstream nightclubs and bars?

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ABSTRACT This paper explores whether young men and women, the main target market for mainstream nightclubs and bars, have similar or different preference priorities in respect of a first and subsequent visit to these venues. It suggests that an understanding of the gendered nature of place and the differing preferences of men and women can assist businesses in shaping their products and services around the needs of their customers. It suggests that this can be done through a study of preferences and expectations for price and non-price mechanisms of differentiation. In Phase 1 of the research, purposive sampling examined men and women's attitudes to the servicescape and offerings by mainstream nightclubs and bars. In Phase 2 of the research, the emerging themes were tested using quantitative data gathered by means of a questionnaire. The results highlight differences as well as similarities, in terms of the importance to men and women of various elements of the servicescape and service offering. In a saturated and competitive marketplace, these findings can assist mainstream venues within the late-night economy improve their competitive position. They can do this by isolating the elements that are gendered, thereby providing the venues with the opportunity to deliver service offerings that match these preferences and expectations.

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INTRODUCTION

While the evolution of marketing theory tends towards a portrayal of the consumer as feminine and the marketer as masculine, Beetles

and Harris' (2005) examination of marketing language found recognition of the feminisation of the marketing discourse, acknowledging alongside another study that gendered studies within marketing tend to be dominated by work written from a feminist perspective (Beetles and Harris, 2005; Catterall *et al*, 2005).

Gendered research in marketing is deemed to suffer to some extent from a problem stemming from definition of terms: while biological sex determines whether a person is a man or a woman, gender refers to a person's socialisation into male and female roles (Catterall *et al*, 2005). In the 1980s and 1990s the postmodern view of gender was as an unproductive dichotomy (Firat, 1994), and had we focused our study on nightclubs and bars targeting consumers who may be particularly defined by their gender or sexual identity we may have considered adopting an alternative position for our research. For example, a number of studies have been undertaken within the hospitality sector on gay spaces (Haslop *et al*, 1998) such as Manchester's 'gay village'. Skeggs' (1999, p. 213) work into this subject draws from 'a range of cross-disciplinary work, from feminist theory, political theory, cultural studies, cultural geography, sociology, leisure studies and queer theory'; Haslop *et al*'s (1998) work considered the socialisation process and gay lifestyles, similar to Pritchard *et al*'s (2002) study which took a socio-cultural gendered perspective focusing on the experience of lesbian consumers in particular; while Bell and Binnie's (2004) work has been informed by queer theory, a perspective that considers the fluidity of sexual identities (see Butler, 1990), which are 'no longer governed by a hegemonic meta-narrative that polarises identities into 'masculine' or 'feminine'' (Bairstow and Skinner, 2006, p. 72) and better aligns with the postmodern perspective. However, this paper examines the preferences of men and women to the design of *mainstream* city centre nightclubs and bars. While examining different preferences between the sexes could be undertaken from a purely

biological perspective, this may be a limiting approach as the focus of the study is also concerned with socialised roles of males and females, and is therefore gendered research. We therefore believe a consideration of differences based upon both sex and gendered socialisation to be more appropriate to study customers of mainstream leisure venues, recognising that the needs, desires and values of men and women increasingly drive both the political and business worlds (Peters, 1996; Bennett, 1998; Leyden and Schwartz, 1998) and reflecting that traditional perspectives in marketing are based within the categorisation of individuals into groups along established lines (Burton, 2002).

Mitchell and Walsh (2004) have found that despite calls for more research documenting the impact of gender (for example, Hansen and Bode, 1999; Otnes and McGrath, 2001), relatively few studies have been conducted with gender as a focus, and those that do exist are often very narrowly focused (Carsky and Zuckerman, 1991). Warner-Smith and Brown (2002) cite the work of key authors researching women's experiences of leisure such as Deem (1996), Mowl and Towner (1995) and Scraton and Watson (1998) who suggest that women's experiences of leisure may differ depending on where they occur and the relationship which women have with those particular 'places'. Barnett (2006, p. 449) has also identified gender as key element in studying 'the ways in which individuals participate in, allocate time to, assign and derive meaning from, and feel constrained within, their leisure'.

Skinner *et al* (2005) researched the preferences and expectations of the youth market for mainstream city centre nightclubs and bars. Although that article filled a gap in researching the relative importance of various elements of the physical space within which such leisure services take place, it failed to distinguish between the preferences and expectations of men and women consumers of these services.

The purpose of this paper is consequently to link the issues of marketing and consumption to the concept of leisure spaces, and to



examine the preferences and expectations of young men and women in regard to the mainstream late-night economy of the UK city centre. In contextualising the research, the paper helps meet the 'powerful call for some attempt to bring leisure and consumption studies closer together' (Deem, 1999, p. 169). In addition, it helps to address another problematic issue namely the lack of research into those situational factors that both affect and link customer attitudes, intention to purchase and behaviour (Foxall, 2002).

THE MAINSTREAM LATE-NIGHT ECONOMY IN THE UK

While the extant literature considers a range of issues relating to specific aspects of the late-night economy, more generalised background information relating to this economy is difficult to obtain outside of industry (that is, non-academic) sources. In consideration of the reliability and validity of including information gathered from such sources, in this paper we have considered sources such as Mintel to be able to provide a relatively balanced and unbiased overview of the market.

Structural changes within the industry have been thoroughly examined within the academic literature with agreement on the result of these changes, namely a marketplace saturated with a range of venues, competing strongly for market share (Knowles and Howley, 2000; Knowles and Egan, 2002; Pratten and Scofield, 2002; Pratten, 2003; Pratten and Scofield, 2003). It is estimated that in 2004 there were 81 455 on-licensed public houses, bars and nightclubs in England and Wales (Mintel, 2006a). While this figure dropped slightly from a peak of 81 933 such venues in 2003 (Mintel, 2006a), the market is still highly competitive and over-supplied. Indeed, in Scotland the number of pub and entertainment venues showed an increase in the same period (Mintel, 2006a).

In such a highly competitive environment effective target market segmentation becomes very important (Dibb *et al.*, 2002). A key

market segment targeted by mainstream night-clubs is that of 18–24-year olds, fairly evenly divided between men and women with students accounting for one-third of this market (Mintel, 2006a). Indeed, Mintel (2006a) found that 'age is the most significant factor affecting attendance – clubbing dwindles significantly once respondents reach 25'. Mainstream city centre bars target a slightly wider age group of 18–30-year olds (Mintel, 2006b). Numbers of 18–24-year olds are growing, while the number of 24–35-year olds is in a slight decline across the UK (Mintel, 2006a) so it would seem that the target segment is likely to be sustainable.

Strategic issues do not end with effective segmentation to target initial customers. Once a venue has attracted a customer for the first time, many nightclubs and bars see retaining customer loyalty as a key issue for the industry (Mintel, 2006a), reflecting the paradigm shift in marketing away from a transactional approach, and towards building and maintaining long-term profitable relationships with loyal customers (Grönroos, 1994). The way gender impacts on a customer's loyalty and repeat purchasing behaviour is an area that has so far been under-researched, although some consumer behaviour studies 'have found significant relationships related to biological sex' (Ndubisi, 2006, p. 50). Therefore, this paper will also examine differences between male and female customers' intentions to re-visit night-clubs and bars.

Striving to win and retain loyalty with a relatively young market by being the cool or 'in' place to be is not easy (Nancarrow *et al.*, 2002). On the one hand, young consumers are spoilt for choice in the town centre, with around 2000 nightclubs (Mintel, 2006a) and 2750 high street bars (Mintel, 2006b) across the UK. On the other, they have a tendency to be hedonistic and live for today (Mintel, 2006a,b), leading to the urge to find new places as soon as current places became popular and consciously moving on searching for something new (Nancarrow *et al.*, 2002). Given this, to aspire to maintain a steady clientele on

the basis of continual innovation can be problematic and other means of competing are necessary.

THE SERVICE OFFERING

In terms of competitive strategies, there has been a tendency for pubs to compete either on price or on non-price mechanisms. Where price mechanisms are concerned, promotions on drinks are popular, with students frequently targeted midweek with lower prices (Mintel, 2006a). The provision of alcohol is still the core service offered by such venues. Mintel (2002) notes that 'the average club derives around two thirds of its revenue from the sale of beverages, and it is therefore a vital source of profits'. However, the negative behaviour of anti-social intoxicated clientele within the high street still concerns stakeholder groups. Kinsey (2002, p. 52) notes that 'there are increasing volumes of research identifying that early-doors discounting and happy-hours policies fuel the binge drinking mentality'. A heavy reliance on drinks promotions and price competition within the industry has led to research on the policing of anti-social behaviour (Barclay and Thayer, 2000; Jones *et al*, 2003). Studies of the social context within which these policies occur have led Freeman (2002, p. 50) to point out that clubs 'don't enjoy a high moral ground stance in the eyes of the public, so there is little sympathy over public order issues'.

While competing on price brings with it a range of disadvantages, there are a number of limitations with this approach. Frequent patrons who are highly involved and identified with the organisation may perceive little need for price discounts (Beatty and Kahle, 1988). The service marketing literature bears this out in highlighting the advantages of competing on non-core service elements. In the case of night-clubs and bars this would imply competing on elements other than alcohol and dancing.

The service marketing literature recognises the effects that front and backstage personnel, along with other customers, can have on

customers' experiences (Langeard *et al*, 1981). The literature also describes the specific advantages of competing on the range and quality of supplementary services provided (see Lovelock *et al*, 1999) and the effect of the environment within which the service is offered (Bitner, 1992). Bitner (1992), building on earlier work, developed the concept of 'servicescape' to describe the physical setting or infrastructure where service encounters take place. A definition of the servicescape (Booms and Bitner, 1982, p. 36) places the emphasis on the physical aspects of the service environment: 'Physical Evidence: The environment in which the service is assembled and in which seller and customer interact, combined with tangible commodities that facilitate performance or communication of the service'.

Bitner proposed that the servicescape can create an image and critically influence the behaviours of both customers and employees in the physical environment. Emotional and cognitive reactions to the environment may be transferred to people and/or objects within the environment (Obermiller and Bitner, 1984) so that products viewed in an environment deemed to be pleasing are evaluated more positively than products viewed in an unpleasing environment. In this way, perception of the servicescape appears to influence unrelated feelings about the products and service. This influence is thought to play a key role in service businesses such as hotels, restaurants and retail stores and if managed effectively, can lead to a source of competitive advantage for those service providers who are able to differentiate their servicescape from others.

Visual cues and preferences are often grouped under the heading of 'store atmospherics', a field driven by the notion that the physical form of a product is an important element in the product offering (Bloch, 1995), producing certain effects in buyers (Kotler, 1973). It is recognised that forms perceived as pleasurable are preferred (Yahomoto and Lambert, 1994) and used more often than those not perceived as pleasurable (Jordan, 1998) and that this leads



to enhanced purchasing (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982; Groppe, 1993). Visual cues and other 'representations which frame knowledge of and entitlement to the city' (Skeggs, 1999, p. 214) have also been found to impact on the enjoyment of the city space by females, and offer cues as to its safety and accessibility. One example of this is provided by Pratten (2007) when considering the visual cue of door staff employed by licensed premises. Pratten (2007, p. 85) believes that 'everyone has an image of the typical pub or club bouncer. For many, it is a large man in a dinner jacket and black bow tie'. He goes on to cite a survey that 'discovered that women were deterred from visiting premises that employed bouncers ... This is because of an expectation of trouble. If the premises have door staff, they must expect trouble' (Pratten, 2007, p. 86).

The servicescape becomes particularly critical in the offering of intangible services to first-time customers who tend to 'rely on the tangibles associated with the service as clues or indicators of the level of quality that is available, thus reducing the feeling of buying an unknown quantity' (Knowles and Howley, 2000). Extrinsic cues can serve as a form of non-verbal communication, imparting meaning through 'object language' (Ruesch and Weldon, 1956) and acting as cues from which quality can be inferred (Zeithaml, 1988; Iacobucci and Ostrom, 1993).

One segmentation variable that has been discussed is gender. While commentators may agree on the case for focussing on gender, the problematic nature of such a focus has been noted (Caterall and Maclaran, 2005). The difficulties are linked both to the scope of an examination of gender and marketing, and also to the fact that 'researchers working from very different theoretical perspectives can disagree on the meanings of the term' (*ibid*). Interpretations can range from the postmodern view that gender is an unproductive dichotomy (Firat, 1994), to the evolutionary psychological perspective that plays down the influence of socio-cultural factors, emphasising instead the

operation of innate factors (Lupotow *et al*, 1995). A word on these approaches is appropriate at this point.

Typical of the postmodern approach is Alcoff's view that 'a subjectivity that is fundamentally shaped by gender appears to lead irrevocably to essentialism, the posing of a male/female opposition as universal and ahistorical' (Nicholson, 1997). Butler, likewise, argues that 'woman' as a unitary category is a construct of psychoanalysis, 'giv[ing] a false sense of legitimacy and universality to a culturally specific and, in some cases, culturally oppressive version of gender identity' (Butler, 1990). It is opposed also by critics who argue that women can, in fact, shape their identities without essentialist causal factors being implicated (De Laurentis, 1986; Alcoff, 1988; De Beauvoir, 1989).

Against this postmodern approach, is the evolutionary psychological perspective gaining in popularity in several disciplines and forming an 'influential, emerging paradigm that could have significant implications for the study of gender and consumption' (Caterall and Maclaran, 2005). This perspective argues that sex differences are aspects of human nature that reflect the different demands and circumstances that historically affected male and female reproductive success.

Where gender is concerned, commentators have made assumptions as to the nature of gendered space preferences. In this way, Mintel (2004) cites the case of All Bar One which converted large town centre pubs into light and airy bars, with a good selection of wines and informal menu, that would attract females, especially those without male company. It was thought that this would provide a more attractive venue than the traditionally darker pub with a row of men on bar stools. Skeggs (1999) likewise, argues that a city centre venue such as 'the straight male club and pub is the most extreme example' (of a heterosexual space that may not easily be claimed by heterosexual women) and Jones *et al* (2003) argue that women want a safe, female-friendly environment

when socialising at night in town and city centres. Another study, this time by Iacobucci and Ostrom (1993) examined the impact of gender on attitudes to service encounters. They were seeking to establish the relative importance of relational service as the provision of the core service but concluded that the studies needed restructuring in order to better be able to compare the relative salience of these points. They did find evidence of differences in the reactions of men and women in one-shot encounters (in this situation, the women rated the female service-providers significantly higher, and the male service providers significantly lower than the respective male ratings) and in service encounters with previous histories (the men rated the male service provider significantly higher and the female service provider significantly lower than did the women). A final study (Schmidt and Sapsford, 1995b), examining the attitudes of women to the pub environment, found concerns focused on the effects of being in a male-dominated environment.

Two points are relevant. First, these findings are consistent with the literature on design and physical surroundings supporting the notion of an interactionist aesthetic. Interactionist aesthetics stands in contrast to universalistic aesthetics in not presupposing a single set of standards, and in finding that aesthetic preferences, notably design preferences, vary according to segmentation variables (Moss and Colman, 2001; Moss *et al*, 2006). There is a body of work that finds that optimal design for one person or group may be suboptimal for others (Moss and Colman, 2001; Moss *et al*, 2006, 2008), leading different groups of customers to have different needs and desires for their physical surroundings (Baker *et al*, 1988). The finding of a lack of homogeneity in people's preferences argues in favour of an interactionist paradigm (one in which notions of beauty are interactive between objects and people) rather than a universalist paradigm (in which notions of beauty are fixed).

The second point is that the discussion of gendered differences in pub preferences has

hitherto, been focused on the *service* aspects of the pub servicescape, with an absence of work devoted to reactions to the *physical* aspects of the pub servicescape. As we have seen, the concept of 'servicescape' includes the physical, not just service environment and the aim of this paper is to redress the balance in research on men and women's attitudes to the pub servicescape by examining the attitudes of men and women to the use of space at pubs and late-night venues. Given that brewers and public houses increasingly view women as an important client group (Key Note, 1991), the need for detailing male and female reactions to the physical aspect of the pub servicescape (Schmidt and Sapsford, 1995a,b; Deem, 1996) is pressing.

It should be noted that, in recognition of the fact that women consumers do not form a homogeneous target segment based upon gender alone (Scraton and Watson, 1998), this research focuses on the determinant attributes (Solomon *et al*, 1999) and preferences of young men and women, particularly in the 18–25 age range. The focus on this age group is determined by the fact that this is the main target market for city centre bars and clubs.

METHOD

As we have seen, the main target market for city centre bars and clubs is young men and women in the 18–25 age group. For this reason, the focus in this research has been on the same age group and it was decided to use students as the group from whom to illicit responses on the basis that (i) they were easily available and constituted a useful convenience sample, (ii) they mimicked the demographics of the largest demographic market segment.

The investigative character of this research (with its aim to understand the phenomenon in its social context) imposed the inductive approach, a common approach in qualitative research insofar as it is 'a theory building process, starting with observations of specific instances, and seeking to establish generalizations about the phenomenon under investigation' (Hyde, 2000, p. 83). Accordingly, the



research started with a qualitative phase, aimed at better understanding the subjects of the research and their attitudes, 'mapping the [respondent's] overall range of behaviour and attitudes' (Hague and Jackson, 1996; Smith and Fletcher, 2001).

In determining how many respondents to use for this first phase, it was recognised that while quantitative sampling is driven by the imperative of representativeness, qualitative sampling is concerned with the richness of data. This can place a lesser priority on representativeness than on the achievement of quality data (Gummesson, 1991) making it 'possible to use small samples to provide a fairly robust indicator of the overall direction of people's behaviour and especially attitudes' (Smith and Fletcher, 2001). In the light of this, it was deemed appropriate to use non-probability sampling (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Lincoln and Guba, 1986) with two focus groups. These were convenience samples of men and women and the genders were kept separate in order not to adulterate the views of the men and women. The all-male group consisted of five males (all students aged between 21 and 23) and the female group consisted of four females (all students, all aged 21). An open-ended interview format was employed (Coolican, 1999) to illicit the unbiased views of respondents.

The focus groups lasted an average of 1 h during which focus group members were asked a number of prearranged, mostly closed questions. Non-obtrusive interviewing measures were used to minimise the participants' awareness that they were involved in the research process (Haslam and McGarty, 1998) and, as part of this, participants were encouraged throughout the focus group to express their views on related topics. This made the conversation informal and relaxed for the interviewee (Coolican, 1999). The establishment of rapport with the respondents was an essential part of the interview, and the interviewers did this by emphasising the anonymity and confidentiality of responses. Participants were also given the

opportunity to withdraw from participation, in line with ethical practice, but no one, in fact, did so. The researcher conducting the focus groups used a recording device and this left him free to interact with respondents for the duration of the focus group. Transcriptions of the focus group sessions were produced subsequently.

As noted earlier, these qualitative data were analysed using an inductive approach in which 'general principles (theories) are developed from specific observations' (Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_research). Once emerging themes were identified, these could be tested by quantitative methods such as a questionnaire. This is phase 2 of the research.

The inductive method used was useful for eliciting constructs on the elements on which young people place a value when selecting between nighttime venues. Those interviewed could not be said to be representative of their age group but the interview provided a rich source of data from which a survey instrument could be generated and administered to larger groups of students. It would then be possible, via this survey, to establish the representative nature of the views expressed.

PHASE 2

The themes arising from the focus groups and depth interviews were investigated by means of a survey administered to students on a UK campus. The choice of student was, once again, determined by the fact that the student population is representative of the industry's main target market age group. It was aimed to collect responses from a minimum of 60 respondents, roughly equally divided between men and women in order to produce a normal sample, allowing subsequent generalisation of the results (Moss and Gunn, 2006).

A questionnaire was administered to all 98 members of a class with a clear instruction that there was no obligation to complete the questionnaire. This was a non-random sample but one that could be held to be representative of the industry's main target group of young

adults. In the end, 60 responses were obtained, giving a response rate of 61 per cent. A total of 40 per cent of respondents ($n=24$) were male, 60 per cent ($n=36$) were female; 90 per cent of respondents were aged between 18 and 25 ($n=54$), 10 per cent were older (aged 26–54); over 78 per cent of respondents ($n=47$) were from the UK, 15 per cent ($n=9$) were from other EU countries, and almost 7 per cent ($n=4$) defined their ethnicity as Asian, black or of mixed race. Respondents were pre-qualified by asking if they had visited a mainstream city centre club or bar within the previous 12 months. Eighty per cent of respondents ($n=48$) visited such venues at least once per week, just over 13 per cent ($n=8$) visited such venues once or twice per month, and almost 7 per cent ($n=4$) visited less frequently.

Survey questions centred on aspects of the servicescape (type of exterior, type of seating, male or female clientele) and service offering (friendly service, music, price of drinks) highlighted in the focus groups and interviews. Some elements were interrogated using pictorial representations (photographs) and some verbal questions. Where pictorial representation (photographs) was used, the order of each photograph was randomly selected in order to lower the risk of list bias.

It is recommended practice to use ordinal or ranking scales (these do not use interval values but order items on an underlying continuum) when equal interval scales cannot be used. This type of ranking is used to rank elements in order of prestige (Oppenheim, 1992). Adopting this principle in the study on late-night venues described here, respondents were required to rate a range of six different offerings in order of preference (with 1 being the respondent's strongest preference and 6 the lowest preference). In addition, respondents were also asked to rate those factors that would be most likely to attract respondents for a first visit to a nightclub or bar, and then factors that would be most important in prompting a return visit. The data collected were subjected to a frequency analysis in SPSS in order to identify

the effect, if any, of the independent variable, gender.

RESULTS

The focus group discussions raised issues that centred on six main areas. These were: (i) exterior cue: preferred type of venue, (ii) exterior cue: security, (iii) interior cues: other customers, (iv) interior cues: spatial functionality and layout, (v) elements that prompt a first and second visit and (vi) perceived importance of different offerings.

The focus group comments, and questionnaire results for each of these is discussed below.

Exterior cues: Preferred type of venue

Focus group responses

The focus groups referred to three types of venue, the traditional bar, the wine bar and the Latin themed premise. In order to establish respondents' relative preferences as between these types of bar, survey respondents were asked to rank order venues illustrating three different types of late-night venues. Each type of venue was illustrated by two photographs.

Questionnaire responses

An analysis of frequency of response indicated clear differences between the preferences of the men and women as between these different types of late-night venues (see Table 1). The most preferred of the three venues was the traditional bar but the margin by which it was preferred by men and women varied substantially. Thus, whereas it was ranked as first or second preference by 60 per cent of the men, it was similarly ranked by only 39 per cent of the women. Preferences for wine bars were similarly skewed with 34 per cent of the women putting it in first or second place as against 20 per cent of the men. The male and female responses to the Latin themed bar or club were similar (16 per cent as compared with 21 per cent, respectively).



Table 1: Type of venue preferred by men and women

<i>Preferred type of venue</i>	<i>By women (%)</i>	<i>By men (%)</i>
Traditional pub	39	60
Wine bar	34	20
Theme pub	16	21

Exterior cues: Security

Focus group responses

Security was an issue thrown up by both male and female focus groups, with responses indicating that the level of security inside a venue could be inferred by the nature of the security presence outside a venue. One 21-year-old female focus group member believed security to be very important as 'I don't like going somewhere where you don't feel safe and have to feel vulnerable'. Another 21-year-old female focus group respondent added 'you don't want to have to look over your shoulder all the time'.

Questionnaire responses

In the pictorial survey, respondents were asked whether they believed that formally or informally dressed door staff emitted a greater image of security. Male and female responses differed greatly on this issue with 87 per cent of the men believing that more formal as opposed to informal attire offered the greatest image of security, and women's responses split 50:50 in this respect (see Table 2).

These findings show that the feelings expressed by one of the females in the focus group to the effect that 'if they have bouncers on the door who are dressed smartly then it looks quite good' are not universally held by women in the survey group. It appears that the presence of informally dressed door staff is equally likely to emit an image of security to females as formally dressed door staff. One can speculate as to whether this is related to the

Table 2: Percentage of men and women believing formal/informal attire to be associated with image of security

<i>Attire of door staff that inspires the greatest feelings of security</i>	<i>Men (%)</i>	<i>Women (%)</i>
Informal attire (short-sleeved tee-shirt)	13	50
Formal attire (broad shouldered jacket)	87	50

fact that the doorman dressed in short-sleeved tee-shirt appears more ready to engage with a troublemaker, or that possibly he looks more approachable than the doorman in formal attire. Further research would be needed to establish which if any of these reasons underlies the attitudes of the women.

Interior cues: Other customers

Focus group responses

In the focus groups, men identified the opposite sex as the critical factor in the decision to select a bar. 'Women. That's why blokes go to bars for, and for the drink.... the classier the place, the classier the female population'. One male focus group respondent suggested that the number of women in a bar was important 'for single lads definitely'. How busy the venue looked was a critical factor in deciding whether to enter:

How busy it looks when you're walking past. If it's not that busy then you're not going to have a good atmosphere. If it's too busy then the bar is going to be rammed and so it could take half hour to get a drink and everyone is going to be bumping into you and you don't want that. You want something in between.

I don't mind where I go as long as it's the right people there. I hate going to place when there's people there with attitude who just want to bump into you and fight.

A response of a female focus-group member bears out women's greater interest in a broad constituency. For one respondent, ideal customers are 'people who are there for a good time... and not just get plastered ... and they could be any age and from any background'.

Questionnaire response

Following on these varied responses, respondents were asked to rank order a number of types of venue. These included venues with predominantly male clientele, venues with predominantly female clientele and those venues showing pictures of predominantly mixed clientele. The results showed that 43 per cent of the male respondents indicated a preference for a predominantly female clientele compared with only 7 per cent of the women seeking a predominantly male clientele. Instead, 81 per cent of the women favoured a predominantly mixed clientele, an option preferred by only 53 per cent of the men (see Table 3).

Interior cues: Spatial functionality and layout

Focus group response

In the focus groups, views were expressed on preferred seating arrangements. One 21-year-old female focus group respondent expressed the view that seating needed to be comfortable:

I think it's important to have seating so you can have somewhere where you can relax, a lot of places you go into there will be a couple of chairs or whatever and that's it, it's

fine if it's not that busy but when it's busy you can't sit down and have a break from all the pushing and shoving.

Questionnaire responses

The importance ascribed to seating led to a question in the pictorial survey about preferences for seating arrangements. Responses show that bar stools were the least preferred by 48 per cent of respondents (men and women finding these equally unappealing) with sofas being the most preferred overall, with men showing a greater preference for them over women (84 per cent of men opting for sofas as their first choice, as compared with only 41 per cent of women). Individual seating was also offered as an option and 36 per cent of women rating this as their preferred seating choice as against only 12 per cent of men (see Table 4). These responses suggest that, contrary to the stereotypical image of late-night venue customers on barstools (Intel, 2004), both men and women express a preference for comfortable seating arrangements, with men showing a marked preference for sofas as against individual seating.

Elements that prompt a first and second visit

Focus group and questionnaire responses

The elements that focus groups had mentioned as elements that would attract them to pubs and nightclubs were grouped together in a single question in which respondents ranked

Table 3: Percentage of men and women's preferences that are for a mixed or single sex clientele

Type of clientele preferred	By women (%)	By men (%)
Largely female clientele	13	43
Largely male clientele	7	8
Mixed clientele	81	53

Table 4: Percentage of male and female respondents preferring a variety of seating arrangements

Type of seating arrangement preferred	Women (%)	Men (%)
Bar stools	22	4
Individual chairs	36	12
Sofas	41	84

**Table 5: Servicescape factors attracting respondents for a first and subsequent visit**

Factor	Percentage of women giving this as a first or second choice		Percentage of men giving this as a first or second choice	
	First visit	Return visit	First visit	Return visit
<i>Exterior cues</i>				
Exterior décor	65	9	38	5
Level of security	12	9	12	5
<i>Interior cues</i>				
Gender of clientele	15	15	33	36
Customers' level of sobriety	3	12	0	4
<i>Spatial layout and functionality</i>				
Comfortable seating area	20	23	25	18
Cleanliness of toilet facilities	9	17	4	14
Location of dance floor	3	12	25	42

these elements according to the extent to which these would attract respondents to a venue for a first and then for a subsequent visit (see Table 5).

Where the importance of servicescape elements for a first visit is concerned, the responses show that men and women both place a higher priority on the external appearance of the building than other factors. However, the relative importance of this factor varies between men and women with a much higher percentage of women rating this as important (65 per cent) compared with a smaller percentage of men (38 per cent). For men, the gender of the clientele had an almost equally important place (33 per cent) while for women, the next most important factor, comfortable seating, was listed by a much smaller percentage of women (20 per cent) as an important factor in a first visit. Where core service offerings are concerned, two other factors, sales promotions on alcohol and service with a smile, also appear to be stronger motivators for men than for women (see Table 6).

In the case of the ranking of factors related to a subsequent visit, all interior motivators discussed above increase in importance for both men and women, the most marked cases for

women being the increased importance of sales promotions on alcohol and entertainment. Moreover, other factors (for example, cleanliness of the toilets and entertainment) increase in importance, with these factors weighing more heavily with female than male respondents. Where exterior cues are concerned, the exterior décor continues to weigh heavily with women while having much diminished importance to men.

Perceived importance of different offerings

Focus groups

The final set of factors surveyed concerned reactions to a variety of service offerings referred to by respondents in the focus groups. These included a relational component ('service with a smile') as well as the importance of music and low alcohol prices.

Both men and women referred to the importance of service. Where music was concerned, one 21-year-old female focus group member made the following comment:

The music, the people it attracts. If they're really dodgy people who are brawling all the

Table 6: Core service offerings and relational factors attracting respondents for a first and subsequent visit

Factor	Percentage of women giving this as a first or second choice		Percentage of men giving this as a first or second choice	
	First visit	Return visit	First visit	Return visit
Entertainment	37	52	33	43
Sales promotion on alcohol	25	42	41	49
Service with a smile	12	15	26	44

time, then you don't want to be there, but if it's people who are having a good time then it just raises the atmosphere.

On the other hand, one male focus group respondent highlighted the importance of music as a factor in attracting women to a venue. 'Good music is a must. This gets the women dancing and so I can work my magic on the dance floor'.

Where the price of alcohol is concerned, several men in the focus groups agreed on the importance of low price drinks:

Price drink does it for me, if you're going spending £3.20 on a bottle you'll have to be loaded to have a good night then, especially if you're going to put up with a big group of lads then you tend to drink quite a bit, so if there's real cheap drinks then that can be quite tempting ... It's a personal thing, even if I had the money I'd feel ripped off paying £3 or £4 a bottle, it's a pride thing.

At the end of the day, who's going to say no to walking by a bar that's got £1 on all shots and bottles?

Yes, you know what venues got drink promotions on. It used to be X's [name of a City Centre venue], X's [name of a City Centre venue], to have cheap drinks on a Thursday, I didn't even like reds so we'd start there and have a load of drinks there and go somewhere nice after.

Yes, that's true, when Dylan's used to be open they used to have £1.20 a double that was cool. X [the name of a City Centre venue] know you're paying top dollar for average drinks ... You may as well go round the corner and get Bar £1.50 at X [name of a City Centre venue], bargain.

Yes, you don't want to come out of a place thinking Christ you've had like ten drinks and spent £50-£60 quid in a night. What a waste of money. You don't want to feel that ripped off.

There was a negative reaction from female respondents to variable pricing:

you're in a no-win situation. You go on a Monday and it's rammed and pay a £1 a bottle and go out on the weekend and it's rammed and pay £4 a bottle.

For women, price did not appear to be a key determinant in choice of venue:

I think quality is just as important as price because, um, I don't think you'd go to a place just because it's cheap and the quality isn't very good. I think you need an even balance of both to make a good venue all round.

Questionnaire responses

The questionnaire responses appeared to support the focus group responses (see Table 7 showing the percentage of respondents giving a factor as their first or second choice):



Table 7: Perceived importance of various service offerings

Factor	Percentage of women giving this as a first or second choice	Percentage of men giving this as a first or second choice
Buy one get one free	55	58
Everyday low alcohol prices	50	70
Speed dating	0	4
Music	55	33
Quiz	5	8
Happy hour	33	25
Service with a smile	98	100

The questionnaire responses show that, as in the focus groups, men and women's responses to the importance of music and low price alcohol differ, while remaining similar where the importance of relational factors is concerned. Thus, 98 per cent of the women and 100 per cent of the men put relational factors as a first or second priority item in the overall list of service offerings.

DISCUSSION

The empirical work described here has aimed to probe the significance or 'signification' (Danesi, 1994) of elements connected with nightclubs and bars. In doing this, one is really mapping what Yuri Lotman has termed the 'semiosphere', in other words 'the semiotic space', of nightclubs and pubs (Lotman, 1990, pp. 124–125). The reasons for this are more than merely of academic interest since the town and city centre late-night economy is a highly competitive saturated market. Many venue types are now competing for market share (Jones *et al.*, 2003; Pratten, 2003), following a structural shift in the industry, with the boundaries between these venues blurred. Overall admissions to late-night venues have been falling, and all vie for market share among consumers aged largely 18–25. To understand

the preferences of this group of people is all-important.

A large proportion of this youth market consists of students and the respondents used in the study, both in the initial focus groups and in the survey responses subsequently generated, mirror this target population in terms of age and occupation. One hundred per cent of focus group respondents, and 90 per cent of survey respondents were students aged 18–25. Eighty per cent of survey respondents were frequent visitors to mainstream city centre pubs, clubs and bars, visiting such venues at least once per week. Although Mintel (2002) found that numbers of frequent club goers had contracted slightly, it would appear that the student market is still important to this sector.

Demographically, the target market consists of near parity proportions of men and women and the literature has made a number of assumptions about their determinant attributes (Solomon *et al.*, 1999) and preferences. Skeggs (1999, p. 216) assumes that a city centre venue such as 'the straight male club and pub is the most extreme example' of a heterosexual space that may not easily be claimed by heterosexual women while Jones *et al.* (2003) assume that women want a safe 'female-friendly' environment when socialising at night in town and city centres. Again, Iacobucci and Ostrom (1993) take the view that men would be more attentive to the quality of a core component of the service encounter than to the relationship component ... conversely women would be most attentive to the quality of the relationship component. This leads them to predict gender differences for short-term service interactions with the gender differences disappearing as the service provider and client interact over extended durations. The paucity of empirical testing of these assumptions, coupled with the importance, in a competitive late-night market (Mintel, 2002), of identifying from determinant attributes (Solomon *et al.*, 1999) the extent to which space should be gendered in pubs, were the triggers to the research reported here.

Previous research had established the extent to which women's experience of leisure may differ from men's (Deem, 1996; Scraton and Watson, 1998) and as realms of productive consumption, late-night venues have an important role to play in identity formation (Scraton and Watson, 1998).

The results reported here show that, among this key target group of 18–25-year-old students, the large traditional city centre pub or bar was the type of pub that was preferred by the majority of the sample, with the men markedly more enthusiastic (at 60 per cent of first and second preferences) about the traditional pub than the female respondents were (at 39 per cent of first and second preferences). Themed pubs and wine bars were liked by only 20–21 per cent of the men in this target group, whereas 34 per cent of the women, only 5 per cent fewer than the percentage of women preferring the traditional pub, expressed a preference for the wine bar. Women's preference for the themed pub was a low 16 per cent.

Without further data, we can only speculate as to the reason for the low attraction of the themed pub. It is possible that this may be because these themes represent too much of a passing fashion trend to maintain competitive advantage (Nancarrow *et al*, 2002) or because this type of venue may just be too expensive for students. Either way, a more standardised offering, with elements of the wine bar to appeal to women, may be the way forward for businesses to ensure sustainability in a saturated marketplace.

Other tangible cues outside a venue can also entice customers inside by reducing purchase risk (Knowles and Howley, 2000). From the focus group and questionnaire data, it is clear that male respondents allowed the external environment to influence decisions concerning entry or non-entry. Thus, one of the men in the focus group commented that a factor in their choice of pubs was 'how busy it looks when you're walking past', and a negative factor was perceived to be a place with 'people ... who just want to bump into you and fight'.

These attitudes appear to illustrate Langeard *et al*'s (1981) findings that the service experience of one customer is affected by other customers in the service environment. They are also consistent with Bitner's (1992) research showing exterior servicescape factors to be important in attracting first-time visitors to a venue.

It is not just clientele that can influence external impressions, but outside door staff as well. According to the literature, safety and security are particularly important among females (Schmidt and Sapsford, 1995a,b; Jones *et al*, 2003). Despite that, the pictorial survey shows that only 50 per cent of the women, as compared with 87 per cent of the men, believe that more formally dressed door staff emit a greater image of security than informally dressed door staff. This leads one to question the conclusions of Schmidt and Sapsford (1995a,b) and Jones *et al* (2003) regarding women's elevated concern with security.

The literature speaks of men having a primary interest in pubs as a vehicle for meeting women, and women conversely placing a premium on female-friendly environments (Jones *et al*, 2003) that are not male-dominated (Schmidt and Sapsford, 1995a,b; Skeggs, 1999). These assumptions appear to be supported by the results of the focus groups and questionnaire, with a large proportion of the male questionnaire responses (43 per cent) indicating a preference for a predominantly female environment, as compared with a small proportion (7 per cent) of women looking for a predominantly male environment. The differences between men and women's attitudes, reinforcing earlier research findings, are apparent from the fact that only 53 per cent of men, but 81 per cent of women, prefer a mixed clientele.

The literature also speaks of men being more attentive to the quality of a core component than to the relational component (Iacobucci and Ostrom, 1993). The results of the focus groups and questionnaire do not support this conclusion since the proportion of men and



women placing a premium on service with a smile are very similar (100 and 98 per cent, respectively).

As regards seating, there is no pre-existing literature on the relative preference of men and women as between individual seating (bar stool/chairs) and group seating (sofas). The responses to the pictorial survey demonstrate a marked preference by men for group seating (sofas) and a marked preference by women for individual seating (58 per cent), with the majority of women favouring individual chairs. Without further qualitative data, one can only speculate as to the reason for these differences. It is possible that women's preference for indi-

vidual seating is a reflection of a greater concern for privacy and security (Schmidt and Sapsford, 1995a,b; Jones *et al*, 2003).

Music is a key attractor to such venues for our respondents, particularly women, a finding that emerged in the focus groups and was corroborated by the questionnaire. This is a key finding and one with important implications for pubs and bars. Where live music is concerned, the new licensing system for England and Wales which came into operation in autumn 2005 introduced a combined license for alcohol and entertainment, that has reinvigorated the use of live music in pubs and bars (Druce, 2004). There is as yet no research on men and

Table 8: Comparison of findings in the literature and the findings in the present study

<i>Earlier literature: findings and source</i>	<i>The findings of the study reported here and whether these concur with the earlier findings</i>	<i>Whether the two sets of findings concur (yes/no)</i>
Men interested in a predominantly female clientele (Mintel, 2004)	Men interested in a predominantly female clientele	Yes
Women interested in a clientele that is not male-dominated (Schmidt and Sapsford, 1995a,b; Skeggs, 1999)	Women interested in a clientele that is mixed	Yes
The service experience of one customer is affected by other customers in the service environment (Langeard <i>et al</i> , 1981)	Men judge a pub by the people outside it	Yes, for men
External servicescape factors are the most important in attracting first time visitors to a venue (Bitner, 1992)	The pub's exterior is the most important factor in attracting women	Yes, for women
Women have a greater concern than men for privacy (Schmidt and Sapsford, 1995a,b; Jones <i>et al</i> , 2003)	Women prefer individual seating, whereas men prefer sofas	Yes
Men have a greater interest in core service issues than relational ones (Iacobucci and Ostrom, 1993)	Men are extremely interested in both core service and relational issues	No
Late-night venue customers like barstools (Mintel, 2004)	Late-night venue customers prefer comfortable seating	No
Women have a greater concern than men for security (Schmidt and Sapsford, 1995a,b; Jones <i>et al</i> , 2003)	Men are more concerned than women that door staff wear formal attire	No

women's preferences as between live and recorded music, and then between different styles of music, and this is a key area for future research.

It should be noted that the provision of low priced alcohol continues to be perceived as a core offering (Lovelock *et al*, 1999) but one which has considerably greater importance for men than women, illustrating Iacobucci and Ostrom's (1993) findings regarding the importance of the core service offering to men. For women, unlike men, music has as an important a place as low priced alcohol.

The extent to which the findings of the questionnaire are in agreement with earlier findings in the literature are summarised in Table 8:

CONCLUSION

The preferences of young men and women for elements in the service offering of late-night venues appear to diverge in many respects, reinforcing concepts of the gendered space (Pritchard *et al*, 2002). This study of consumption preferences on the part of men and women reveals differences that can assist in the development of a more customer-focused perspective. Some of these differences are in line with earlier findings in the literature, but some are at variance. Those that are similar concern men and women's relative interest in a predominantly female and mixed clientele, in the extent to which factors in the external environment are used as a way of judging the internal environment and in women's apparent greater concern for privacy. Conversely, areas on which the questionnaire findings appear to depart from those of earlier literature concern the apparent lesser concern of women in security issues, people's preference for comfortable seating as compared with barstools, as well as in the high interest shown by men both in relational aspects of service delivery and in the core service offering.

In a marketing context, the findings suggest that late-night industry can gain and maintain competitive advantage in ways anticipated in

earlier discussions, as well as in new ways. Corroboration of the priority areas for men and women is important in a saturated market whose members need to find strategies for survival. The data presented here show that for both genders, service with a smile as well as the venue's exterior is of paramount importance in motivating men and women to enter a nightclub or bar, while for men, communal seating and a pub that attracts women serve as motivators. Women, in turn, appear to be motivated by separate seating, music and the quality of the exterior décor, the latter perceived as offering tangible clues as to the nature of the venue and its clientele. Since a prime motivator for male customers for a first and subsequent visit is the presence of females, paying more attention to the needs of female customers is likely to attract male as well as female customers.

This study highlights some of the factors that are likely to be priorities for male and female customers. In doing this, it finds elements that conform to earlier findings, and elements that differ. Overall, however, the importance of the notion of gendered space is reconfirmed (Pritchard *et al*, 2002).

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

This is in the nature of exploratory research and so, although the questionnaire responses were adequate in size and generalisable, the sample size for the initial focus group on which the categories in the questionnaire are based, were relatively small. A follow-up study could therefore usefully repeat the focus groups with a larger sample in order to compare views with those reported here. In a second phase, it would be possible to envisage repeating both the focus groups and questionnaires overseas in order to obtain a cross-country comparison.

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