



LION

WHERE EVERYONE KNOWS YOUR NAME:

The social and psychological value of having a local in Australia



Prepared by
Peter Jonason Ph.D.
Western Sydney
University

In consultation with
Prof. Robin Dunbar Ph.D
Oxford University

SUMMARY

CONTEXT

In 2016 Professor Robin Dunbar from the University of Oxford, in partnership with the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA), examined the role of drinking in local pubs in England, and found evidence of a significant role in social cohesion: people who had a local had better friendship networks and felt both more satisfied with their lives and more connected to their local community. Our study sought to add further evidence for this role in the Australian context, using a larger sample size of patrons and sampling these patrons from a wider variety of venues.

OBJECTIVES

- To ascertain whether drinkers who are self-identified as local interact differently to casual visitors.
- To evaluate psychological health and wellbeing indicators for people who have a local as a subsection of the general population.
- To study and compare beverage preferences of local and casual drinkers.

ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

Being social and interacting with others is a fundamental feature of human life.

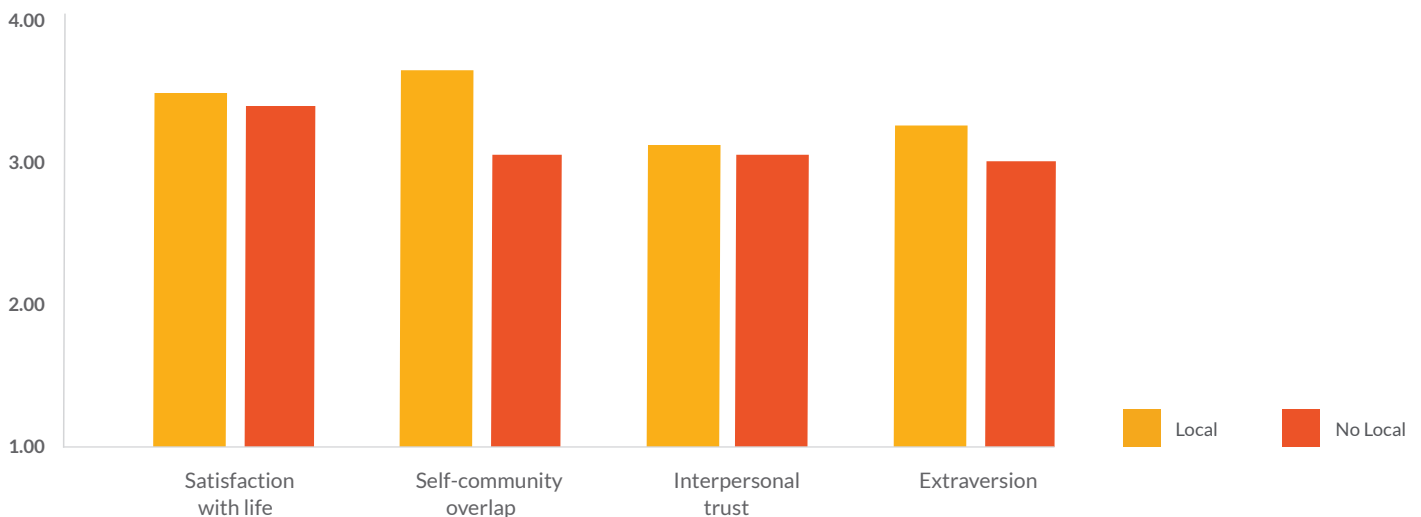
Interpersonal interdependence is key to human survival; evidence suggests that it is a defining characteristic of what motivates our lives and it appears to be an evolutionary adaptation that shaped the design of human psychology.

It relates to important psychological outcomes like anxiety, depression, jealousy, loneliness and self-esteem, and lack of social connection may also cause a number of chronic physical diseases.

Humans are dependent on social contact, and we use crutches like social media and television to substitute for the real thing. Ironically, this increasing dependence on technology means that actual human contact has become rarer than at any point in history.

Pubs and licenced clubs are a key outlet for many people to connect with other people without an intermediating screen.

Differences by having a local or not



METHODOLOGY

We conducted two studies to test our hypothesis:

STUDY 1

- Online survey of Australian adults, N = 1,232 and weighted for age, sex, income and location (urban vs non-urban dwellers).
- We asked a series of questions to establish patterns for demographics and alcohol consumption, including whether people had a local.
- We also compared various psychological measures (e.g. propensity to trust, satisfaction with life) and community connectedness between people who had a local and those who didn't.

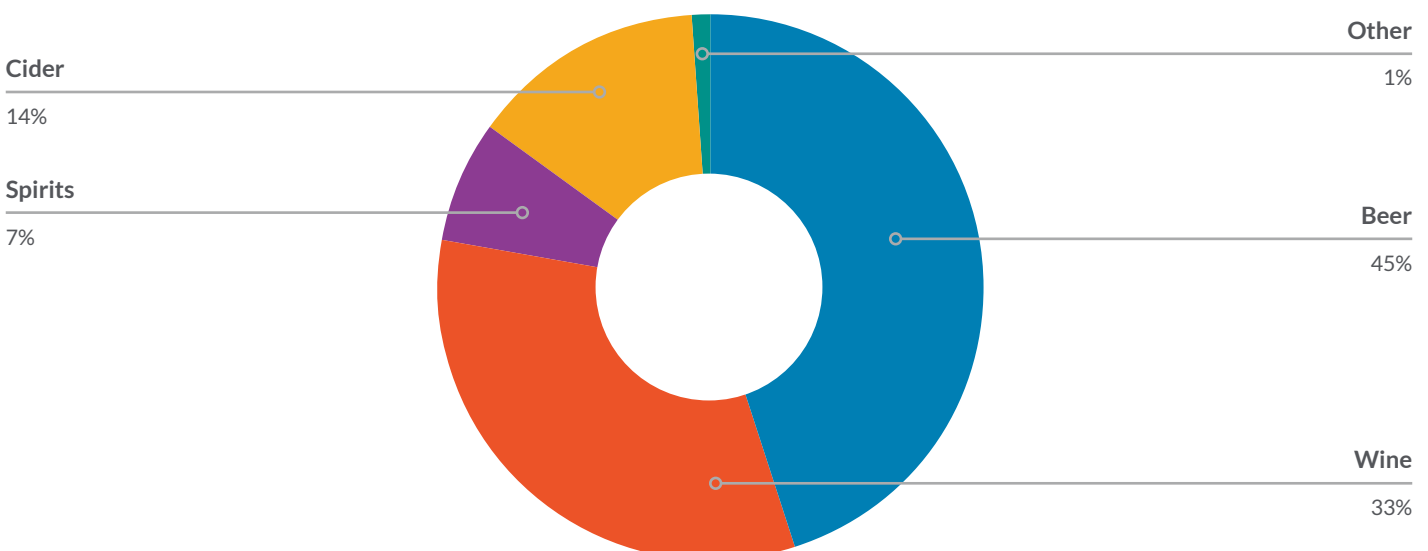
STUDY 2

- Observational study of conversational dynamics in Australian hotels and licensed club, N = 162. Thirty-six venues were selected from the six Australian states, with three urban and three regional venues in each state.
- Researchers selected an individual and recorded the types of beverages being consumed in their group, gender mix, conversation group size, conversation length and number of people present in conversation with that individual for twenty minutes.
- The target individuals were then asked whether they are "locals" or casual visitors in the venue.

FINDINGS

1. People who have a local are more trusting and satisfied with life;
2. They also have broader friendship and support networks, and identify more closely with their community;
3. Most people who have a local say they use it for socialising and drinking with other people. Only six percent of people who identified as having a local said they drank there alone;
4. Beer is the most commonly consumed beverage for those who have a local;
5. Women and men appear to socialise in their locals in different ways, with men more likely to engage in intimate conversations and women more likely to converse in larger groups;
6. Those who lived in rural areas, who were light/moderate drinkers, and had a local, had greater general mental health and less anxiety than those without a local.

Preferred beverage of people with a local



SIGNIFICANCE AND NEXT STEPS

This study confirmed a number of Robin Dunbar's findings, including that people with locals are more trusting, more satisfied with life, and more connected with their community.

It showed that local pubs can have an important role to play in providing a venue for intimate social interactions that otherwise mightn't exist in people's lives, particularly in rural areas.

It also established that beer is the beverage of choice for these critical social interactions.

Our research further supports the need for consideration of the ongoing sustainability of these important venues. When it comes to issues that impact locals, acknowledgment should be given to the broader role they play in social connection for communities, particularly in rural areas.

ABOUT DR PETER JONASON



Dr Peter Jonason is a social-personality psychologist who draws upon psychology, economics, biology, primatology, anthropology, and ethology to understand human nature. He undertook a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Communication Sciences, followed by a Masters in Communication Services at the University of

Connecticut, before heading to New Mexico State University where he obtained his PhD in Psychology. In 2014, Peter was awarded the Ig Nobel Prize for Psychology, for research showing people who stay up late at night are more likely to display anti-social personality traits. Peter has previously taught at the University of West Florida and the University of South Alabama and is currently a senior lecturer at the Western Sydney University, specialising in Evolutionary Psychology, Statistics, and Research Methods.



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