



'Social and Cultural Fragmentation, Exclusion, and Elite Formation in the Night-time Economy: A View from the UK'

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In the UK, recent research has begun to question overly-simplified dichotomous characterisations of nightlife cultures and venues, as either 'commercial' and 'alcohol-oriented', offering 'mainstream' pop music, or 'authentic'/'alternative'/'underground' and associated with widespread illicit drug use. Detailed ethnographic research in British towns and cities has revealed important elements of fragmentation, complexity and segregation alongside the continued importance of social structure and resultant social and spatial exclusion. The author (alongside colleague, Prof. Fiona Measham) has explored how informal processes – such as club launches, internet promotions and dress codes – act to produce and reproduce two contrasting forms of English nightlife elites: 'cultural elites' produced through the social, cultural and spatial exclusion of electronic dance music of black origin and its minority ethnic, working class and lower income followers from Manchester city centre dance clubs; and 'consumer elites' produced through the economic and cultural exclusion of working class and lower income club-goers from nightclubs in London's West End. Furthermore, our observational studies across England suggest that even the 'night-time high streets' of national chain-owned and themed venues attract a variety of audiences which, whilst sharing proximate spaces, remain socially and culturally fragmented. The complex and interweaving practices of cultural distinction and structural discrimination, alongside diverse poly-substance use (patterns and behaviours), produce stratified forms of nightlife, often closely intertwined with the formal and informal regulation, marginalisation, and criminalisation of specific cultural forms and social groups. The paper therefore argues for the construction of more nuanced conceptual understandings of the social divisions and inequalities within nightlife and in studies of young people's leisure opportunities more generally.