Comfort, pleasure and *schadenfreude*: extending affect into neutralisation theory among UK Brexit prepping consumers in crisis

Extended Abstract (165 words)

This paper extends neutralisation theory in the light of contemporary discontinuous changes to household food consumption in the UK. This change follows heightened consumer-perceived resource scarcity wrought by the Brexit crisis and it's segue into the Covid-19 pandemic. Our respondent cohort of self-identified "Brexit prepping" middle-class mothers, more accustomed to provisioning for fresh, healthy, and wholesome food for their families within traditional structures of good motherhood, have increased provisioning, storage and consumption of less-healthy alternatives (such as packaged, tinned and preservative-enhanced convenience foods) and augmented this with luxury items, including alcohol and sweet treats. Our respondents utilise a series of neutralisation strategies for this consumption activity including short-term affect-laden justifications, these include short-term comfort relating to self-care (particularly regarding mental-health and wellbeing assessments), pleasure in developing new competencies and skills, and even *Schadenfreude* towards non-prepping (m)others. We develop the neutralisation theory array to account for this current trend in consumption behaviour, and particularly in terms of introducing affect-laden neutralisations to augment the predominantly cognitive and rationalisation-based underpinning of classic neutralisation theory.

Key Contributions to academe and practitioners (173 words)

This paper adds to and develops a popular theoretical framework "neutralisation theory" adding extensions to the five main neutralisation strategies and adding a discussion of the ontological underpinning of classic neutralisation theory, in terms of its hitherto rejection of affective responses such as pleasure and comfort to contentious behaviour. We make the argument, drawing on the evidence from our data, that these responses should form part of the

neutralisation lexicon and as such provide a development of this classic framework for analysing contentious consumer behaviour. In empirical terms we contribute understanding of a growing consumer trend, prepping.

Several non-academic stakeholders would find value in this manuscript. Retailers who might wish to attract preppers and understand how their neutralisation strategies can be overcome in the retail setting; Policymakers might use our findings to develop policies and plans to help avoid panic-buying and pathological prepping behaviours that purportedly cause food and other shortages. Drawing on the operation of preppers' neutralisation strategies can help policy makers to encourage the more proactive and sustainable practices of prepping.

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Main Paper (3,506 words, minus table)

Introduction: Brexit prepping, Covid-19, and the crisis of perceived shortage

Consumer concern regarding a perceived lack of food availability has emerged strongly in the UK since 2019 following the Brexit crisis, which has been exacerbated and extended by the Covid-19 pandemic. Brexit, a portmanteau of British-exit, is the term used to describe the UK's withdrawal from the European Union, which constituted a considerable change for UK citizens. The United Kingdom joined the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973, confirmed by referendum in 1975 (Walsh, 2016). The EEC developed into the EU in 1992, deepening political, economic and legal ties across the Eurozone. However, in 2009, the Eurozone fell into crisis, and the policy of austerity deepened divisions between the UK and the EU. Subsequently, on 23 June 2016, the UK held a referendum on whether the UK should leave the EU. The option to leave passed by a slim majority: 51.9% to 48.1%.

The result set in motion considerable exit negotiations, with then Prime Minister Theresa May invoking article 50 of the Treaty on European Union to formally give notice of intent to leave the EU on 30 March 2019. A liminal phase of uncertainly entered the UK political scene (Koller and Ryan, 2019), where fears of a no-deal Brexit (the UK leaving the EU with no trade arrangements in place) would lead to food and other shortages (Feng *et al*., 2017). UK food retailers, led by the British Retail Consortium (BRC) wrote to the Government in January 2019 warning of 'significant disruption' to the food supply chain in the event of a no-deal Brexit (Butler, 2019).

Under Conservative Boris Johnson's majority government, the UK left the EU on 31 January 2020 with the EU–UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement formally entering into force on 1 May 2021. This period of discontinuous change for UK consumers, from March 2019 (formal notice of intent to leave the EU) and January 2020 (Brexit day) represented a period of highly intensified fears over food and other shortages. In this period the phenomenon of 'Brexit prepping' emerged (Kerrane *et al.*, 2021); as reportedly one in five UK consumers began stockpiling goods given ongoing concerns of food availability (*The Guardian*, 2019). Several online Brexit-prepping communities emerged; spaces to seek reassurance and advice to aid prepping activities (Wollaston, 2019).

This Brexit-inspired response to food insecurity perception among UK consumers might be characterised as a short-term emergent phenomenon. However, what might be called "prepping behaviour" has gained further momentum due to the co-terminus Covid-19 pandemic (February 2020-) (Zilliac, 2020). The Covid pandemic has seen consumers engaging in the kind of panic buying (Taylor, 2021) and perceived heightened food insecurity (Arafat *et al*., 2020; Bentall *et al*. 2021) predicted by the (then highly marginalized) Brexit prepping communities. At time of writing (August, 2021) this is particularly salient to the UK consumer as food chain disruption brought about by the contemporary "pingdemic" (Rimmer, BMJ 2021)

of the UK Covid infection track and trace system have resulted in shortages and empty shelves in supermarkets across the UK. It is not hard to make the case that food insecurity is becoming a more enduring and obdurate issue for the UK consumer and their family.

Prepping has traditionally been seen as a contentious activity - associated with delusions around impending apocalyptic crisis, isolation, guns, and shelters (Mills, 2019). However, more recent research positions prepping as increasingly mainstream (Barker, 2020; Campbell et al., 2019) with research employing ideas of resilience, anticipation, and precaution within the prepping umbrella. Echoing our assertions above, Mills (2019) argues that preppers are increasingly preparing for basic security needs, particularly for food, that emerge because of the more widespread precarity of neoliberal societies. Although these more recent works hint at the increasing practice of prepping behaviour, prepping is still viewed in wider society as a marginal, non-normative (even deviant) consumption behaviour (Barker, 2020). This paper thus foregrounds this study as engaging with a context of food-insecurity-derived longer-term changes (i.e. an emerging trend) to procurement, storage and consumption behaviours that are becoming deeply embedded in the lives of consumers worldwide. However, these behaviours remain largely non-normative within society, with contemporary preppers reported to be hard to access, secretive and holding strong perceptions that their own prepping activities are a controversial set of practices (Kerrane *et al*., 2021). This is encapsulated in the Brexit prepping mantra that: "*the first rule of prepping club is that we don't talk about prepping club".*

Extending neutralisation theory: comfort, pleasure and self-care justifications

Neutralisation theory illuminates the myriad ways that individuals justify norm-violating or controversial actions (like prepping) to themselves and others, softening the impact on their identity and relationships (Sykes and Matza, 1957, p. 666). "*I didn't hurt anyone*," "*They had it coming*" and "*I didn't do it for myself*" are examples of common neutralisation assertions

(Kaptein and Van Helvoort, 2019). In consumer studies, neutralisation theory has been employed to illuminate ethical behaviour in retail settings (Strutton *et al*., 1997); alcohol consumption (Piacentini *et al.*, 2012); retail disposition (Rosenbaum and Kuntze, 2003); perceptions of corporate action (De Bock and Van Kenhove, 2011); and fair trade/ethical consumption (Chatzidakis *et al*., 2007).

Five neutralisation techniques were originally identified in Sykes and Matza's (1957) seminal work as methods individuals use to assuage guilt, protect their self-concept and avoid the disapproval and condemnation of others:

1. *Denial of responsibility*: Individuals deny responsibility of the aberrant behaviour because factors beyond their control were operating (Rosenbaum and Kuntze, 2003). They see themselves as more "acted upon" rather than "acting" (Strutton et al., 1994; Sykes and Matza, 1957) *(e.g. "it's not my fault, I had no other choice");*
2. *Denial of injury*: Individuals contend that their misbehaviour is not serious, as no party directly suffers because of their actions (De Bock and Van Kenhove, 2011) (e.g. "*what's the big deal, nobody will miss it?*");
3. *Denial of victim*: Blame is countered - arguing that the violated party deserved what happened to them (Rosenbaum and Kuntze, 2003; Strutton et al., 1994), with retaliation or punishment rationalised (Sykes and Matza, 1957). The individual positions themself as an avenger (the 'victim' is ascribed the position of wrong-doer) (e.g. "*it's their fault; if they had been fair to me, I wouldn't have done it*");
4. *Condemning the condemners*; accusations of misconduct are deflected, shifting attention to the motives/behaviours of those who disapprove (Strutton *et al*., 1994; Sykes and Matza, 1957), for example, highlighting that those that condemn perform similarly disapproved actions (Chatzidakis et al., 2007; Rosenbaum and Kuntze, 2003) (e.g. "*the police break the laws too*");

5. *Appeal to higher loyalties*; Norm-violating behaviours are justified on the basis that an individual is attempting to actualise a higher ideal (Chatzidakis et al., 2007). The demands of larger society are sacrificed by the demands of smaller social groups (e.g. friendship/family) an individual may belong (Sykes and Matza, 1957). Norm-violation may occur not because such norms are outright rejected but, others are accorded precedence (Sykes and Matza, 1957) (e.g. "*to some what I did may appear wrong, but I was doing it for my family*").

During data coding, neutralisation theory emerged as a relevant analytical framework as our respondents (unprompted) presented a high level of justificatory rhetoric while describing their prepping behaviour. They clearly perceived this activity as controversial and non-normative. Given the review of prepping above, these neutralisation strategies are unsurprising. However, this framework of neutralisation strategies (Table 1) only provided a partial analysis, as other neutralising strategies emerged relating to self-care, comfort and even pleasure in their prepping behaviours and associated consumption.

Deviance experts have primarily used the ideas of pleasure and gratification in the controversial or non-normative act as an argument *against* neutralisation theory (Topali, 2005; Shinkel, 2004), where underlying conventional norms underpin the perpetrators' moral code, and neutralisation is employed to deflect guilt and reproach from others. Where pleasure and gratification emerge, it is argued, neutralisation is not relevant as its "explanatory boundaries extend only to those individuals able or willing to experience guilt" (Topali, 2005, p.484). There has been, however, recent shifts in this stance, with work emerging outlining how, for example, justifications of stress are used to neutralise slacking or deviant behaviour in the workplace (Gugerain, 2019) and justification of pleasure seeking context are used to neutralise flaming behaviour in online environments (Hwag, et al, 2016). This paper argues that in the

face of the guilt, threat to self-concept and reproach (even ridicule) from others, justifications of prepping behaviours and consumption practices relating to respondents' rights to pleasure and self-care, even *schadenfreude* emerge as *de facto* neutralisation strategies.

Our paper, therefore, makes two linked contributions. First, the empirical contribution enhances understanding of the shifting nature of prepping behaviour *per se*. In addition, the work deepens understanding in an in-depth empirical environment of consumer justifications for controversial and non-normative consumption activities. Second, this paper augments and extends the established theory of neutralisation to encompass more affect-laden dimensions, of consumers perceived rights to pleasure and self-care, hitherto largely ignored or placed out with the standard neutralisation framework.

Method

Scholars have bemoaned the fact that nuanced research on prepping is scant, and that research fields are slow to catch up with this emerging consumer trend (Garrett, 2020). To gain initial insight into the prepping community, a year-long (April 2018-April 2019) non-participatory sensitising netnography (Kozinets, 2014) of the online communities (comprising 16,000 members) that emerged to offer support to Brexit preppers was undertaken. 21 respondents actively engaging with Brexit prepping were then purposively recruited (Patton, 2002) to take part in a series of in-depth interviews, with approval of site moderators. Only women (who previously to the Brexit crisis had never formally practised prepping) responded to our recruitment appeals, and all were mothers (which reflects broad membership of the online Brexit prepping sites studied). Phone or video-conference interviews were conducted which were semi-structured in nature, exploring broad themes covering prepping experiences and motivations.

Participants self-identified as white British, heterosexual and middle-class, were aged between 27 and 61 and were in paid, professional/senior managerial employment (except for Emily, who was a stay-at-home parent). The women lived with their male partner and children (aged 3-20 years). Interviews were recorded and transcribed, lasted between 60-90 minutes, and a gift-card was offered as thanks for participation. Ethical guidelines were closely followed, with this project holding university ethics board approval. We follow Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic approach to data analysis. Each transcript was initially read and re-read by individual members of the research team. Notes and memos were exchanged which focused on developing a full understanding of each participant. Once this stage of analysis was complete, patterns across participants emerged, in an iterative manner.

Findings

In the findings we present the results of our coding across the spectrum of the five major neutralisation strategies (Table 1), adding illustrative quotes to demonstrate the full range of neutralisation strategies encountered during the research. This part of the analysis underpins the claim that participants perceived their prepping activities and consumption as controversial and non-normative and gives a close analysis of the range of neutralisation behaviour found in the data.

Table 1: Illustrations of "big 5" neutralisation strategies across the dataset (adapted from Sykes and Matza, 1957)

Neut. strategy	Illustrative quote	Analysis/Explanation
Denial of responsibility	**Melanie**: Prepping for me is about trying to predict, and saying hang on a minute, I don't trust the government to make a good decision, which they haven't so far. Everything that I read about the food chain and food security and about just-in-time delivery, it's all out there, it's all fact. But nobody in Central government seems to pay any attention to that. So how are they possibly going to help if things do go wrong? So, you have to deal with it on your own. **Andrea**: I mean yes, I would like to give them fresh, organic, free-range, what have you. But it won't be like that, you won't be able to get hold of all that stuff, the government has made sure of that. So tinned it is, what option do I have? **Hannah**: We did not vote for Brexit, we do not support the UK leaving the EU so I will therefore try and make sure my family do not suffer as a result of other people's actions and David Cameron's games that landed us here in the first place. I've been driven to do this.	Here, **Melanie** and **Hannah** relate their need to engage in prepping behaviours as a result of forces beyond their control, and hence deny that their actions emanate from any kind of choice. **Andrea** links this denial of responsibility directly to the kind of food she is stockpiling (i.e. tinned food), which would not normally form part of her weekly food provisioning. This theme was very common in our data, as respondents blamed the UK government, (and sometimes the EU) for "*getting us in this mess",* others who had voted for Brexit, and others who were not preparing for the inevitable "*SHTF*"[1] as they put it, including government, retailers *and* consumers.
Denial of injury	**Jane**: It's insurance. It's an insurance policy. You're thinking, if it goes bad, I've got it; if it doesn't go bad, still got it. Nothing will go to waste. It's in tins, it's dried, nothing will go to waste. Either myself or somebody else will use it, I don't really see the problem with it, I don't see what the harm is…I would use everything that I have bought, if it's not needed. I consciously decided that I wouldn't buy anything that I didn't know or anything that I didn't like. It will all get used. If I don't use it, I would give it away to a foodbank. End of story. **Sarah**: The way that I look at it is like this: what's the harm? Yes, they're full of e-numbers and preservatives, which ordinarily we would run a mile from, but it's only temporary. Will it kill them to eat a few Fray-Bentos pies and tinned meat for a few months? No. There's no harm done.	Here **Jane** and **Sarah** directly link their behaviour to a denial of injury. They both justify their behaviour by asking rhetorically what harm they are doing. In our dataset, respondents often drew on this strategy when discussing the controversial nature of their behaviour as viewed in those terms by friends, family and neighbours. Respondents often spoke about charitable giving (i.e. to a food bank) as an end point of prepping, should the anticipated shortages not happen, and this is an additional bolster to their denial of injury justifications.
Denial of victim	**Anna**: It would be that, the immediate, my in-laws they are elderly and they would need to be looked after. But beyond that, I'd have to be, I don't know. I'm not a harsh person, but my next-door neighbours, they are big leavers. They are very vocal. Do you know what? You wouldn't be coming near that [stash], pal. Because you are the reason that we are in this predicament, this position. And I think I would need to be a little brutal and say "No. We haven't got anything stockpiled! Isn't it awful?". **Laura**: To begin with I used to explain to them what I was doing, but not anymore. I'm bored of the funny looks. I think I'm just going to sort myself and my family out. They can fend for	**Anna** and **Laura** draw on the denial of victim neutralisation strategy by re-directing blame towards the victim of their prepping activities. This neutralisation strategy is complex as several imaginary/predicted victims emerged from the data (including "we are the real victims" as seen in denial of responsibility above). Not least of these were the unprepared (m)others that were anticipated to claim victimhood once the food

[1] The colloquialism SHTF (Sh*t hits the fan) was a common heuristic used by Brexit preppers to describe the day the food runs out

	themselves – it's their problem when they go hungry, assuming they're not preppers, not mine. They should have listened to me.	shortages stopped them from provisioning for their families.
Condemning the condemners	**Tracy**: Panic buying is a massive thing, although I think we've been accused of causing food shortages by buying [excessively] – there was a thing in the paper about preppers being a problem rather than a solution because we're causing – we're going to cause food shortages which is ridiculous because all we're doing is stocking up a bit at a time so that when the panic buying kicks in, which it will at some point, I think, we take the strain off others… in actual fact, we're taking slow, sensible precautions so that we don't have to do this. It's others who will be causing the panic and decimating stock after Brexit, not us. They're the problem. **Judy**: Pointing the finger at us preppers, like we're inciting panic buying and the end of the world, that kind of thing, that's just not us. We slowly, slowly collect and store things over weeks and months. We're not the problem, don't be pointing the finger at us. It's the non-preppers that will cause the empty shelves and the looting when they realise, they should have taken action a long time ago.	Here **Tracy** and **Judy** draw on condemnation of those who would judge them or have judged them. The main criticism of Brexit preppers reported in the data is that this behaviour creates panic, and normalises harmful stockpiling behaviours, leading to shortages. Tracy and Judy turn this criticism around by arguing that Brexit prepping (unlike the stereotyped prepping behaviour *per se*) is designed to be sustainable and sensible, and of benefit to the wider community. They argue that those criticising them should "*take a leaf out of their book*" and that ultimately, their unpreparedness will lead them to the kind of panic-buying and stockpiling excesses they condemn
Appeal to higher loyalties	**Anna:** "I know it's not ideal, what kind of Mum would let their kids survive on Pot Noodles for months on end? But what bothers me more is that they feel hungry, those little tummies rumbling, they can't sleep because they're starving. I'd rather they were filled up with crap rather than they have to cry themselves to sleep at night because I can't offer them good, healthy food. Getting them fed, whatever that is, Spam, Pot Noodles, Super Noodles, is more important than what others, other Mums might consider the 'right' thing to feed them. They mean the world to me, and I won't let them starve". **Cris**: "As a mum, you'd move heaven and earth to make sure they [children] were ok, so I'm doing it for them. It might sound daft, but they're the driver, they're the ones that keep me going when others are looking at me like I'm a loony. They've got to be sorted at all costs.	Here **Anna** justifies buying food she would normally not buy and would indeed designate as junk food due to the appeal to higher loyalties of being a good mother. Cris, cites her prepping activity as primarily driven by this appeal to the higher order of good motherhood. Both justify this controversial activity, including buying foods that would normally be seen as the opposite of evidence for good motherhood, using the need to be a good mother first and foremost to actually provision for your children, so that they do not go hungry.

Discussion: adding affect to neutralisation theory

Neutralisation theory is said to hold 'universal applicability' (Hazani 1991) because it can be applied to any situation in which an individuals' behaviour is inconsistent with their beliefs (Maruna and Copes 2005; Hwang *et al*, 2016). Clearly, as evidenced by the strong justificatory and neutralising responses (table 1), the middle-class respondents in this study felt that their prepping behaviour was inconsistent with their habits, norms and beliefs. However, as Maruana and Copes (2005) remind, norms of behaviour are highly contextual, and a link to the types of people studied needs to be made, in order to fully understand the neutralisation phenomenon. Here, the respondents were all new to prepping, and had joined these rather secretive prepping communities as a response to a political event. Responses by already existing members of a subculture, for example, established preppers, would be unlikely to respond in the same way. The neutralisation strategies of the respondents were broad and encompassing in terms of the big five strategies (table 1), but a careful reading of the data illuminated very emotion and affect-driven additional neutralisations and justifications that emerged, These are categories relating to short-term comfort, relating to self-care (particularly regarding mental-health and wellbeing assessments), pleasure in new accomplishments, and even *Schadenfreude* (pleasure in the downfall of others) towards non-prepping others.

Affect-related neutralisation strategy extensions

1) Short-term comfort and wellbeing ("I do this because I'm stressed out")

One of the emergent themes used to justify the prepping activity related to short-term comfort and wellbeing needs. These covered aspects relating to prepping *per se* as having a positive effect on mental health and wellbeing, particularly the issue of displaying agency where the respondents felt stressed and overwhelmed by the situation they found themselves in:

"*You never know what's around the corner, leave with a deal, leave without a deal, don't leave at all. I've realised that you have to be prepared for all eventualities and that you have to take back control from all the worry and stress that Brexit is causing. I can reduce this stress by doing something and for me, prepping is that something*" (Emily)

"*it just gives me some inner peace, protecting, feeding, future-proofing for them*" (Sarah)

Short-term comfort and wellbeing also related to the practice of buying and eating comfort and/or junk foods, a trait normally healthy-eaters have been found to engage in when experiencing negative affect (Parker, Parker, & Brotchie, 2006; Stubbs & Whybrow, 2004) As Emily explains above, this epochal point in British history facilitated a high degree of stressors. In table 1, respondents (*denial of injury* and *appeal to higher loyalties*) report buying junk food as only under the duress of the current crisis, and not something that is congruent with their normal habits. An extension to this was, however found in the data, where respondents expressed a felt need for comfort, indeed even a right to comfort in their buying and consumption of "unhealthy foods", both for themselves:

"*it brings pure joy, such comfort, I can have that nice bottle of wine, or our special coffee, and I will deserve all that, because of all the work going into the stash*" (Andrea)

and their children,

"*I'd like to say you know what, I do have this little box of chocolates stashed away and it's a bit of a treat. I'd like to, I just want to mitigate. This is awful. We're having to think like this, and I think God you know they're like 16 and 14 and they are going through all this and it's really sh*t. And I don't want them to have this in their memory as children. I want them to have an idyllic, fun-filled childhood with little trauma*" (Anna)

2) ***Pleasure in display and development of competencies ("I do this because I'm enjoying developing my own skills")***

A further neutralisation strategy that emerged to justify prepping behaviour among this group of (hitherto) non-prepping mothers related to the felt need to develop skills, and adjust their provisioning, storage and consumption habits in such a sway to assuage the guilt they felt at becoming preppers.

"*To be honest, I've quite enjoyed the prepping. It's given me time to think about what we use, where we could cut back. I'm an expert now on storage and stretching meals, making them taste that bit better using somewhat basic ingredients. I think I've learnt a lot*". (Andrea)

As time progressed, and store cupboard needed to be rotated, respondents reported that they were faced with a dilemma, eat/feed the family with convenience foods now rapidly going out of date, or throw it away? Most respondents chose the former,

"*It's something that I've started to do in the past few weeks, just because I've realised that I've got all these flippin' tins. What if it's horrible? Don't get me wrong, I'd much rather have fresh stuff, just for health reasons, or taste, but I think you just have to be creative. I've enjoyed changing recipes and trying to make things taste better, or as best as possible*" (Melanie)

The respondents all largely expressed pleasure in developing new skills relating to "their stash" *"I just think, sixty, seventy years ago my grandparents always talked about making do and reusing that or sowing that hole in a pair of trousers, or whatever it may be. I'm trying to see it as maybe an opportunity to return to that kind of approach, that kind of attitude. I think society is just too wasteful now…that's the beauty of going through something as bleak as this, or one of the positives I'm having to draw on, it's got us examining what we buy and eat and use*" (Melanie) and reframed this contentious activity as instead a pleasurable opportunity to engage in personal development towards a better (and less wasteful) life.

3) ***Schadenfreude* ("*I do this because it demonstrates my relative cleverness compared to others*")**

This neutralisation strategy again demonstrates pleasure, but projects justification of actions based on predictions of what will happen (i.e. who will suffer) and the respondents right to revel in that suffering. They see this as justified in terms of self assessments that they were right to engage in the prepping behaviours and others were misguided in their denial of the anticipated scarcity. This neutralisation adds affect into the neutralisation strategies of *denial of victim* and *condemning the condemners*. In terms of denial of victim Anna recounts her justification for prepping behaviours as "*because you are the reason that we are in this predicament, this position. And I think I would need to be a little brutal and say "No. We haven't got anything stockpiled! Isn't it awful?*". Anna, here is stating that the people who will be in trouble once the food shortages start (who will be by then victims) are unworthy of her consideration and help as they have not followed the same path as her, (i.e., they have not been prepping). This is echoed by Melanie, citing a lack of responsibility in those left behind, and questioning whether they deserve saving,

"*It's more about a lack of responsibility. We expect the government to bail us out, we expect to pitch up at A&E with a cut on our finger and, you know, they'll fix it for us. We expect to lead an unhealthy lifestyle and wonder why we get really ill, but that's okay. We don't take responsibility for ourselves anymore. And this is the attitude I struggle with when people have been critical of what I've been doing. They just feel that if something goes wrong they will sit back and wait for help, because somebody will sort them out. And my attitude, aside from thinking well that's actually not going to happen, I also think well hang on a minute – play your part as well. Why should people rescue you if you could take steps to avoid needing that rescue?* (Melanie)

However, other respondents went further in this denial of victim/condemning the condemners and expressed an anticipated pleasure in being prepared while others suffered,

"*If everything goes to pot, and there's rioting in the streets, don't I deserve a bit of me-time, to be able to sit down with a glass of wine and close the curtains and ignore the chaos? I've been prepping for months and months, while everyone else has gone about as business as usual, doing nothing, carrying on, not getting prepared. I'll sip that glass of wine and raise a toast to my efforts, and to be honest I'm quite looking forward to having my cake and eating it!*". (Juliet)

This display of anticipated *schadenfreude*, sipping wine while people riot, and feeling very self-satisfied, expresses not merely the denial of victim and condemning the condemners' neutralisations, but introduces the idea that pleasurable affective responses to this add to the power of the justification offered.

Conclusion

Affect-related neutralisations, particularly pleasure-related, are contentious within neutralisations theory, as classic neutralisation conceptualisations designate pleasurable feelings as outside the lexicon of neutralisation, as illustrating a disqualifying lack of guilt. Juvenile delinquents who argue that they did something bad "because it was fun" or they "got a buzz out of it", have been designated as demonstrating no guilt, and therefore the key internal norms of good behaviour have not been absorbed (and thus there is nothing to neutralise against). This paper proposes, drawing on our data, that rather than demonstrating lack of guilt, these pleasurable explanations instead enact powerful neutralisation and justification strategies in themselves. The participants in our study demonstrate a clear a broad ranging set of guilt responses to their contentious behaviour (as demonstrated in table 1), and augment this set of neutralisations with ones that draw on their norms of affect experiences and expectations, the right to have comfort in the face of crisis, and to counter stress for their mental health and wellbeing, the right to have pleasurable experiences, even and including the contentious pleasurable experience of *schadenfreude*.

Selected references