High Spirits: Young Women's Pleasure in the Night-Time Economy

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Abstract

This thesis makes significant contributions to scholarship at the intersection of gender, pleasure and the night-time economy (NTE). Specifically, it explores the experience of young women students, who seek pleasure by going on nights out. In the northern city which acts as the location for the research, the NTE has been shaped to provide a 'student scene' characterised by cheap, mid-week drinking. The wealth of research about the risks of alcohol consumption has come to dominate public discourse about young women and the NTE. In contrast, there is a dearth of research/scholarship about the pleasures of nights out and this is where this study makes an original contribution. In focusing on this aspect of drinking culture the thesis complements (and complicates) research oriented around risk and responsibility and contributes to debates on neoliberalism, (post-) feminism and contemporary subjectivities.

Based on seven focus group interviews, with 27 young women students, aged 18-24, the thesis employs a qualitative methodology, inspired by interpretative phenomenological analysis, to examine their pleasure-seeking in the NTE. I argue that the pleasures of nights out are best understood as coming from experiences of mutuality and I suggest the concept ‘opened out’ subjectivity, to characterise a pleasurable sense of self which is deeply relational. In doing so I present novel perspectives on some central themes of NTE, gender and alcohol research, including the importance of crowds, relationships and presentations of the self.

My analysis revealed that several pleasures of nights out were experienced as a result of managing the reality of gender inequality. Examples of this include the intimacy and close friendships strengthened through caregiving in the context of risk of sexual harassment and violence, and the pleasures of collective beauty work conducted in a cultural context of women’s continued objectification and arguably, subjectification. My analysis of beauty work in particular marks a break with current understandings, moving beyond the often cited ‘post feminism sensibility’, to frame

such work as a collectively negotiated pleasure practice, which is both complex and context specific.

The importance of relationships is central to my analysis which foregrounds female friendship against a backdrop of continuing gender inequality in this cultural context. In this way, the thesis advances understandings of gender and alcohol use as situated practices in complex social fields.

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Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Approval was sought for this research and granted by the Northumbria University's Ethics Committee on 04.01.2017.

I declare that the word count of this thesis is 70,248 words.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Young women's consumption of alcohol and their engagement in the night-time economy (NTE) have been the subject of intense media and public concern in recent years. For example, in the national press changes in the alcohol market and in women's drinking practices have been accompanied by media coverage that is extremely condemnatory in tone. British society is said to be in 'the grip of an out of control binge-drinking culture' (Vine, 2017) linked explicitly to young women's drinking. Reflecting on the increased use of public services over the festive period, one journalist writes:

> And you know the worst of it? When they regain consciousness the next day, long after the street cleaners have washed away the vomit and other unmentionables, long after the St John Ambulance crews have packed up and gone home, long after the last Jagerbombs have been necked and the empties put out for recycling, [the women] won't be embarrassed or ashamed (Vine, 2017)

Such sentiments are typically accompanied by images intended to show the undesirability of young women's intoxication. This attention raises questions about femininity – social norms and expectations of gendered behaviours – as well as young women's negotiation of the various influences which contribute to their embodied femininity in the NTE. It also raises questions about the responsibilities of governments, the market and consumers in terms of alcohol consumption; while epidemiological evidence shows supply side controls are the key driver in terms of

reducing problematic drinking practices, government policy, along with the mainstream media, consistently foreground consumers need to self-regulate.

What is too often missing in these debates about young women, alcohol and the NTE is any consideration of the pleasures derived from drinking in the NTE and how the pursuit of these pleasures can inform better understandings of young adult cultures, women and alcohol and the NTE as a cultural context. This PhD seeks to address this absence by studying the pleasure young women experience drinking alcohol in the NTE of England's North East region. From this vantage point, it further reflects upon contemporary social life, gender norms and subjectivities. This is a multifaceted research field and though primarily sociological, the thesis draws upon and critically engages with a range of disciplines and theoretical approaches, including public health, social policy and feminism. To contribute to the existing body of knowledge, this research uses focus group data to argue for the importance of mutuality in understanding young women's drinking experiences. In doing so, the term 'opened out' subjectivity is introduced to characterise the sense of connection that is central to pleasurable drinking in the NTE.

At the level of popular culture, the participants of this study are subject to extensive critique, existing as they do at the intersection of two categories of drinkers who evoke moral panic: young adults and women. A third category- the binge drinker- is closely linked to young adult drinking practices in particular. In academia young women drinkers are of interest to researchers across disciplines. Public health perspectives emphasise the alcohol-related harms specific to young women and social policy research has sought to address these. Criminologists have explored the gendered nature of risk in the NTE; feminist writing has also foregrounded women's inequality in this cultural context. In Geography, the risks and inequalities of the NTE, and who is responsible for managing them, has dominated the discourse. Across disciplines there is an interest in how neoliberalism is shaping social life and for those writers interested in gender, post-feminist sensibilities, said to be intimately related to neoliberalism, are also in

analytical focus. Throughout this literature, there is surprisingly little research into the pleasures young women experience through alcohol use in the NTE, how these pleasures are best understood and what they can tell us about contemporary young womanhood.

Though responding to this lack of empirical research on young women's NTE experiences as an academic, the motivation for this thesis is also, in part, personal. I started drinking in my hometown's NTE as a teenager and though my drinking practices have changed through the years my love of 'big nights out' has never truly gone away. As a young adult, going out was an unmatched source of joy and I continue to think of my NTE experiences as overwhelmingly positive in terms of my social development, as well as being critical to my most important and enduring relationships. From this position, the dearth of writing on pleasure was striking when I began to research young women's drinking. Whether the intention of research is minimising young women's alcohol consumption, making them safer in the NTE or better understanding their navigation of complex cultural discourses around their drinking, pleasure sits at the heart of this leisure practice, and tracing its contours is essential. Pleasure is often taken as a given in substance use research; this thesis joins a growing body of work which focuses on the constructive aspects of intoxication, revealing the complex interactions of cultural, social and subjective forces in the experience of young women drinkers.

Thesis structure

Chapter Two draws together research on young women's drinking from a wide range of perspectives. It begins by placing young women's drinking in context, historically and in terms of policy, before moving on to discuss the distinctly gendered aspects of young women's drinking experiences and the academic responses to this. The specific drinking context under examination, the NTE is then explored, along with a justification of including pleasure in this area of research. Finally, conceptual threads which run throughout the literature- neoliberalism,

post-feminism and subjectivity- are outlined to situate this thesis in the theoretical landscape.

The methodology employed is under consideration in Chapter Three. Outlining first the research aims and design, it goes on to discuss in detail the epistemological foundations of this qualitative thesis, which are inspired by a pragmatist philosophy. A detailed and reflective account of the research process as it was conducted is also provided, along with reflections on the limitations of the research design.

My analysis of young women's pleasure is presented over three analysis chapters, with each employing a distinct analytical focus: the social, the interpersonal and the self. What emerges as central in accounts of pleasure in the NTE is mutuality and a subjectivity characterised by an 'opening out', towards collectives, towards others and towards different understandings and experiences of the self.

Chapter Four (Pleasures of the night-time economy) sets the scene for understanding the interactions and the embodied and affective experiences that occur in the NTE (explored in Chapters Five and Six respectively). Presenting an analysis of talk related to the structures and norms of the NTE, it details the 'scenes', belonging and collectivity central to young women's pleasure. It also highlights how the management of gendered risk is incorporated into their understanding and experience of the NTE.

Being with friends is at the heart of going out and going out together can establish and strengthen friendships. It also out brings us into contact with various 'others' and these encounters are shaped by social processes particular to going out. These interactions can make a night or ruin it. Chapter Five (Friends and foes) covers talk connected to how young women relate to other pleasure seekers in the NTE- a process mediated by the norms and structures of the NTE discussed in Chapter Four and the subjective experiences outlined in Chapter Six. A significant theme to emerge in the analysis of interactions was that of sexual harassment in the NTE and

the chapter details the mechanisms through which young women manage this reality.

Chapter Six (Pleasure-seeking subjectivities) brings into focus the embodied and affective experiences young women have in the NTE and presents an analysis related to how subjectivities are cultivated and managed. Focusing on intoxication and beauty work, I argue that the excuse value of alcohol and the social norms of the NTE act as an assemblage enabling a distinct and pleasurable experience of the self, one which is deeply relational.

The concluding chapter of the thesis places my findings into the wider academic discourse, showing where they can support, enhance and challenge the existing body of research on young women's drinking. It also highlights the implications for future work and draws focus upon areas that would benefit from further study.

Chapter Two

Literature analysis

Alcohol, gender and pleasure in the NTE

How gender, pleasure and the NTE are related is a central concern of this thesis. In order to explore this in an interdisciplinary way, academic literature from across research fields require review and these are dealt with in the following sections. Drawing on literature from across public health and social policy research, the first section identifies the dominant discourses surrounding young adult alcohol use, the context within which young women's drinking, in particular, can be understood. Highlighting the centrality of risk in existing research and of 'responsibilisation' in policy responses to this, it introduces the tensions inherent in discussions of young adult pleasure-seeking through alcohol use. Research on the relationship between gender and alcohol consumption is then presented, and I argue that the area presents a significant opportunity to explore contemporary gender identities and identity work. Following a review of empirical studies detailing the differences between women and men's drinking, it presents research that frames alcohol consumption as an opportunity to 'do gender' and explores how gender emerges in drinking contexts. Identifying the failure of research in this area to prioritise narratives of pleasure, I show how the current study can support a more nuanced understanding of gender in young adult drinking contexts.

The existing research on the drinking context in focus, the NTE, is then in focus. Commonly characterised as a space for 'letting go', various forms of regulation operate within the NTE; this section analyses work on these regulations and their implications for pleasure and emergent (gendered) subjectivities. As will become clear, the role of pleasure is largely absent in the research on young adult alcohol use, gender and alcohol, and the NTE. I place this absence in context and highlight the need to explore drinking from the perspective of pleasure and pleasure's regulation, before addressing themes that run through the research literature, namely neoliberalism and post-feminism. How this thesis navigates debates around their relationship to subjectivities is also considered.

Young adult drinking

Young people's drinking and drinking culture in the UK is at the heart of this research. It is an area that has been explored from a number of perspectives including public health, social policy, criminology, and youth studies. The following section reviews research in this area, identifying prominent themes as well as notable absences. As gender is discussed in detail later in the chapter, in this first section it will be bracketed to allow for consideration of the material that exists regarding 'young people' as a distinct category of research and policy interest. Following the Office of National Statistics age ranges, 'young adult' will refer to those aged 16-24 (Office for National Statistics, 2016).

Policy context

Though young adult alcohol use is in focus here, the trends of their alcohol consumption largely reflect the macro consumption trends found in the UK overall; these show comparatively higher rates of use compared to the rest of Europe. As Aldridge, Measham, and Williams (2013) have argued, this has become a near constant source of media and public concern in the UK and one which necessitates government action. This 'strange brew' of political imperatives clashing with research and evidence based recommendations (Aldridge et al., 2013: 25) has led to

deep ambiguity at the heart of British alcohol policy (Measham and Brain, 2005). In order to contextualise the role of alcohol in young people's lives an overview of the UK's recent alcohol-related social policy is therefore necessary.

To begin it is important to acknowledge that the UK, along with the rest of Europe, has a complex relationship with alcohol. A World Health Organisation (WHO) review (2018) shows that the European region drinks the most alcohol in the world and that the costs of this, both economic and social, are significant. Despite its commonplace status, alcohol is carcinogenic and a major contributor to ill health and social disorder (World Health Organisation, 2018). The UK has a higher average than the EU region for alcohol use disorders (13%, to the EU region average of 8.8%) (World Health Organisation, 2018: 298) and the UK Government currently calculates the cost of alcohol to the country to be £21 billion a year (Institute of Alcohol Studies, 2016).

The WHO sponsored report *Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity* (Babor et al., 2010) outlines the strongest evidence available for effectively minimising alcohol-related harm through public policy, and makes a number of recommendations. Under the auspices of the Alcohol Health Alliance, researchers in the UK tailored this information to better respond to the national context and their report, *Health First* which was published in 2013 (Anderson et al., 2013). *Health First* (2013) makes 30 recommendations under six categories: development of public policy; national taxation and price policy; regulation of alcohol promotion and products; licensing and local authority powers; drink driving measures; early intervention and treatment; and mass media. Their top ten recommendations include minimum pricing (set as 50p per unit of alcohol), evidence based health warnings covering 1/3 of product labels, limitation of sales hours, taxation relative to alcohol strength, a reduction in the blood alcohol limit for driving and a number of restrictions relating to alcohol advertising, promotion and sponsorship. In summary the report supports a whole population approach to reducing alcohol consumption and the resultant

alcohol-related harm, and advocates regulation of the alcohol industry through appropriate policy initiatives.

In contrast to the overwhelming evidence that market regulation is required (Anderson et al., 2013; Babor et al., 2010; Fitzgerald and Angus, 2015), the current UK Government has continued to resist calls to introduce legislation to do this, favouring a collaborative effort with the drinks industry. From the 1980s onwards, successive UK governments have pursued an agenda of privatisation and deregulation in most policy areas and the alcoholic drinks industry is no exception. Reforms and initiatives in this area are embedded in a commitment to (an increasingly global) neoliberal ideology, in which free markets are understood to render the best possible solution to social needs. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Thatcher/Major governments relaxed controls on alcohol, and generally endorsed the industry's self-regulation, particularly in regards to marketing and advertising. However, the most high-profile piece of legislation in recent years, the 2003 Licensing Act, came from the New Labour Government (1997-2010). In line with New Labour's 'Third Way' approach to governance (charting a middle road between state control and free markets), the drinks industry was involved in the process of policy reform, having lobbied to this end previously (Baggott, 2010). Controversial at the time, the 2003 Act continues to attract attention, as one of its intended outcomes, curbing binge drinking, has not come to fruition. Broadly, the Act aimed to simplify licensing by consolidating a number of prior amendments to licensing legislation. The controversial element of the bill was that it lifted a number of restrictions relating to the sale of alcohol, and included an extension of licensing hours, allowing 24- hour sales. The Government's position was that a more liberal application of opening hours would lead to staggered closing times throughout city centres and minimise the effect of closing time (binge drinking as people rushed to get a final drink before time was called and large congregations of drinkers in city centres leaving bars simultaneously). Measham and Brain's (2005) critique of the Act, focused on what they claimed were the flawed premises underlying its development. Firstly, they argued that given the way 'problem drinking' is defined,

it is not a minority of problem drinkers who are driving the culture of excess. Next, they questioned the extent to which the culture of the NTE can change via legalisation of this kind. Finally, they question the assumption that the Southern European style of alcohol consumption (upon which the Act was modelled) is less problematic in terms of public health and social order than the Northern European one, with UK drinking habits are associated.

The apparent failure of the Act to bring about a family friendly café style nightlife with 'responsible drinking' (Talbot, 2006) and the increase of alcohol-related harms (particularly from a public health perspective) has attracted a great deal of media attention and led to a parliamentary review of the Act which published its report in March 2017 (Select Committee on the Licensing Act 2003, 2017). This acknowledged various failures of the legislation and made a series of recommendations to remedy these.

While the 2003 Act was at least partly intended to minimise some of the social costs of the UK's drinking culture, in terms of public health there have been few legislative commitments. Regarding evidence based policy, a review by Fitzgerald and Angus (2015) has shown that while the current UK Government acknowledges the need for harm reduction measures, it does not pursue evidence based policy reform in terms of alcohol use. Comparing the implementation of recommendations from *Health First* across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, the review suggests that despite the efforts of devolved administrations (particularly Scotland) the UK central Government's policy decisions are informed more by ideological commitments to the free market than by evidence relating to public health. For example, the Conservative Party's 2010 manifesto pledge to introduce minimum unit pricing (MUP) on alcohol resulted in a U-turn when they came to power (as part of the

Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition), following a consultation in which the drinks industry was heavily involved (Gilmore, 2014; Gornall, 2014)[1].

Setting aside more philosophical concerns about the role of government in regulating people's pleasure (which is discussed later in this chapter), the starting point for government action in the UK is that the amount (and cost) of alcohol-related harms should be reduced. Despite the strong evidence that a whole population approach is required to minimise these harms (Anderson et al., 2013; Fitzgerald and Angus, 2015) successive governments have developed strategies and policies focused on target demographics; young adults are one such group. Hobbs et al. (2005) suggest that this tendency to isolate 'irresponsible consumers' acts as a pressure valve for the failures of liberalised alcohol policy; as long as excessive consumption is framed in terms of a deviant minority who have failed to be responsible, there is no need for policy makers to re-evaluate their methods. This reasoning is representative of the neoliberal approach which has coloured policy since the 1980s. The economic aspects of this (e.g. deregulation, privatisation) go hand in hand with a prioritisation of certain values, for example 'individual choice' and 'personal responsibility'.

'Responsibilisation', the process through which responsibility is taken away from collective agencies and given to individuals, is considered a central feature of neoliberal sense-making and is particularly evident in discourses around young adults (Kelly, 2001). An example of this discourse in public policy can be found in *Safe, Sensible, Social: The Next Steps in the National Alcohol Strategy* (Department of Health, 2007). The policy has been extensively critiqued as presenting binge drinking as a deficit of young people's self-control (Hackley et al., 2011) while

[1] An overview of the role of the drinks industry in helping develop UK policy between 2004-2010 can be found in Hawkins et al. (2012) and an evaluation of public-private collaborations in public health policy development, including those relating to alcohol, is provided by Moodie et al. (2013).

obscuring the role of Government, media and alcohol manufacturers in promoting particular drinking cultures (Hackley et al., 2008). Hackley et al. (2015) have also argued that policies emphasising moderate, 'responsible' consumption might inadvertently encourage the very behaviour they seek to limit by providing young adults with discursive material to be resisted, in the spirit of youthful transgression. While such analyses are helpful in revealing the prevailing logic of those writing policy, the relationship between alcohol policy and drinking culture is complex (Measham and Brain, 2005); we cannot assume policy is an instructional source material for identity work in young adults. In-depth analyses of drinking cultures and their meanings to those who participate in them are therefore needed to supplement the research on 'top down' discursive contexts.

In summary, though successive UK governments have recognised the need to reduce alcohol-related harms, there has been no consistent application of evidence-based approaches to this. Instead, and in line with neoliberal reasoning more broadly, the burden has consistently been handed to individuals who are expected to 'self-regulate' in their capacity as consumers, even while they are bombarded with marketing and cultural messages that promote drinking. Young adults in particular are frequently presented both in the media and in public policy as failing in this capacity, perpetuating long standing moral discourses around 'troublesome youths'.

Young adult drinking research

Regarding the empirical study of young adult drinking there are a number of sources of statistical information which can be used to study drinking trends. The Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC) have been compiling national data in this area since 1988, using secondary schools to source participants. The Office of National Statistics also compiles data of this kind and 'young adults' are a specific category in their analysis. Both of these data sets show that young people are drinking less overall, with a slow decline from a peak in the early 2000s (NHS Digtial, 2017; Office for National Statistics, 2015). However, there is significant

regional variation in drinking behaviour and national averages tend to obscure these differences. In the North East region, which is of interest in the current study, compared to the rest of the UK, people were the most likely to have ever drunk alcohol and also the most likely to have drunk in the last week (Health and Social Care Information Centre, 2015). Additionally, NHS data shows that the number of alcohol specific hospital stays for those under 18 in the North East is the highest in England (Public Health England, 2016a). this is likely related to specific drinking practices and cultures. It is for this reason the current project takes a single geographical and cultural context as its focus. The specificity of the city in question, Newcastle upon Tyne, is discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

It is important to note that the quantity of alcohol consumed is not the only relevant factor in assessing healthy attitudes and behaviour in regards to drinking (Rehm et al., 1996). Binge drinking, heavy episodic drink or drinking to get drunk are terms frequently equated with young adult drinking and this pattern of consumption is strongly associated with a number of increased health and social costs (Francesconi, 2015). This might explain the fact that while averages for young adult drinking have dipped, there has been a number of increases in the consequences of young adult alcohol consumption, including hospital admissions; between 2002 and 2010 these rose by 57% for men and 76% for women for those aged 15-24 (Institute of Alcohol Studies, 2013). How these increases are related to the policy changes that have been enacted, as well as the role of the NTE in local economies, is a central concern of research and is discussed in more detail below.

Professionals in public health have an obvious interest in the area and research from this perspective often focuses on alcohol-related harms, and their costs. Researcher in other fields have sought to understand alcohol use as it relates to young people and their unique cultural movements. For example, the emergence of the dance scene (and the associated drugs) in the late 1980s and early 1990s meant a shift in terms of alcohol's position in youth culture and this was studied extensively by those interested in alcohol's rebranding as a psychoactive substance

(Brain et al., 2000; Measham, 2008b; Measham and Brain, 2005). By the end of the 1990s there was evidence that recreational drug use, rather than a subcultural or a rebellious phenomenon, had become normalised and that excessive alcohol use was part of this new norm (Brain et al., 2000; Parker et al., 1998). Measham and Brain (2005) argued during this period that the determined pursuit of altered states should be understood with reference to the dominant cultural discourse of consumerism and against the backdrop of the minimisation of state regulations, arguing that under such conditions the market is 'free to seduce consumers' while being exonerated of any role in the 'consequences of deregulated consumer excess' (2005: 278).

Measham (2004) has elsewhere identified three waves of alcohol recommodification which have promoted immoderate alcohol consumption, particularly in regards to young adult drinking practices. These are: the introduction of high strength bottle beers and white ciders in the mid-90s; the second wave of 'ready to drink' and flavoured alcohol (alco-pops), promoted in the late 90s; and in the early 2000s the increased visibility of shots, aftershots and shooters. Measham (2004) ties these market-led changes to the decline of ecstasy consumption and the increase in the heavy sessional alcohol use evidenced in the early 2000s. Given the continued evolution of young adult drinking practices and contexts, revisiting this finding with reference to a new cohort of pleasure seekers in the NTE is a priority of the current research.

While researchers tend to agree on the need to reject moral panic narratives around young adult alcohol use, there exist tensions in this research area regarding how to interpret young adult hedonic excess in drinking contexts. While some researchers frame it as a calculated, agentic component of young adults' engagements with the NTE (Haydock, 2014; Parker and Williams, 2003; Szmigin et al., 2008), others suggest it is a forced adaptation to consumer capitalism (Hayward and Hobbs, 2007; Hobbs et al., 2005; Smith, 2013; Winlow and Hall, 2009). Similarly, while Haydock (2014) suggests neoliberal alcohol policy represents a rejection of

the carnivalesque[2], for Winlow and Hall (2009), the carnival-like excesses of the NTE (and the policies which enable/encourage them) actually maintain the wider social inequalities as they offer a temporary escape from the drudgery of unfulfilling work, zero hours contracts, and increasingly atomized social relations. Pleasure-seeking is thus typically framed as symptomatic of wider social realities and little attention is given to the subjective aspects of pleasure in alcohol use.

Winlow and Hall's (2009) research is explicit in its commitment to emphasising the importance of structural factors in the shaping of young adults' lives. They present a clear juxtaposition between the realities of economic disempowerment and young adults' belief that they are autonomous individuals making free choices in their leisure and consumption. Though rarely approached directly in the scholarship on young adults' drinking, this is essentially a question of agency and there are shades of it throughout the research. For example, Hollands' (2002) attempt to reconcile the post-modern optimism regarding a proliferation of lifestyles and the reality of structural inequality stops short of acknowledging the impasse at which social researchers find themselves regarding issues of agency, structure and assumed false consciousness. Gill (2007a) has highlighted these tensions in relation to feminist analyses and sought a middle ground which recognises the frequent disconnect between people's understanding of their situation and less subjective accounts of their lives. Writing of the need for researchers to maintain 'critical respect', Gill (2007a) argues that the influence of culture should not be denied in research which seeks to empower, nor should autonomous choice be 'fetishized' (Gill, 2007a: 73). While researchers can respect the narratives of the group in question (young women employees in Gill's case study and young women drinkers in this thesis) we can maintain a critical reading of the contexts of those narratives and the choices

[2] Haydock (2014) is here employing an understanding of carnival (and the social subversions evidenced within it) as cathartic and ultimately beneficial to those who participate.

made therein[3]. The current project attempts to navigate this terrain by foregrounding subjective experiences of pleasure in the NTE, without losing sight of the influence wider social discourses referenced above.

Public health research has consistently demonstrated that alcohol-related harms are worthy of government attention; in doing so they have overwhelmingly focused on the risks associated with alcohol use. In terms of how alcohol risks are managed, government policy is largely characterised by a discourse of individual choice (particularly in terms of consumption) and subsequently, responsibilisation or the individualisation of social risk (Kelly, 2001). It is with reference to this process that young adults' carefree abandon in the NTE is often characterised; intoxication offers a respite from the realities of responsibility through readily available consumerist approaches to alcohol. Though some research has moved towards acknowledging positive aspects of drinking culture, for example its role in building and supporting friendships (de Visser et al., 2013; Eldridge and Roberts, 2008; MacLean, 2015) young adult drinking is overwhelmingly framed as problematic either in terms of the behaviour of young adults, or in terms of young adults being failed by government (in)action.

Pleasure-seeking, as 'determined drunkenness' (Measham & Brain, 2005) or 'calculated hedonism' (Szmigin et al., 2008), has been explored to understand the implications of alcohol policy, however its subjective contours have received comparatively little research attention. Pleasure is known to be a primary motivator of alcohol consumption (Coleman and Cater, 2005); with a more nuanced understanding of what aspects of drinking culture provide the pleasure driving young adult participation in the NTE, we can more effectively map the material and subjective realities of young adult lives. The current research explores young adult

[3] The theoretical and methodological implications of adopting this approach are discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

alcohol use in a way that is sensitive to the role that going out drinking plays in young adult cultures and ultimately, identities. Where it aims to make a specific contribution is in supplementing the existing literature by focusing on the pleasures of drinking and its contexts, relating these in a bottom up way to the wider social realities of contemporary life. This can inform better social policies (as argued by Duff, 2008) as well as ensuring there are alternative discourses surrounding young adult alcohol use, which do justice to their experience and perspectives.

Though young adults are a distinct category of policy and research interest, as Hollands (2002) notes we cannot assume a homogenous young adult experience in this cultural context. Drawing together insights relating to discourses of young adult drinking, this project explores young adult experiences of pleasure and regulation, with a particular interest in gender. How gender mediates or is implicated in drinking practices is an area of significant research interest and this is discussed in more detail below.

Gender and alcohol

The second body of research relevant to the current project surrounds gender and alcohol. Though women's alcohol consumption in the UK has been increasing since the 1970's (Plant and Plant, 2006), men on average continue to drink more and with greater frequency (Office for National Statistics, 2016a). Furthermore, men are disproportionally represented in statistics on alcohol-related harms, from hospital admission through misuse to death (Health and Social Care Information Centre, 2015; Public Health England, 2014a). These differences and the changes surrounding them reflect something central about gender norms in contemporary society and can inform a discussion on emerging subjectivities in late modernity. The following chapter discusses the reported gender differences in regards to alcohol use and then explores qualitative work focusing on the relationship between gender identities and drinking behaviour.

The gender gap

The gender gap in terms of alcohol consumption has been described as one of the few universal gender differences in human social behaviour (Bloomfield, Gmel, & Wilsnack, 2006), though differences in terms of consumption quantities and drinking context vary significantly between societies. International research projects, such as GENACIS (Gender, Alcohol, and Culture: An International Study) (WHO, 2003), have sought to map these in order to better understand the differences between women and men within and between cultures. Affiliated research in Europe, the EU Concerted Action project *Gender, Culture and Alcohol Problems: A multi-national study,* released its report in 2005 (Bloomfield et al., 2005). The research focused on drinking contexts, alcohol-related violence, social inequalities and societal level factors in terms of problematic use, reporting significant diversity throughout the European region. One of its more robust findings was that where there was more gender equality, there were smaller gender differences in terms of drinking. However, there was not a simple explanation for this, and the authors highlighted factors such as age, education and the degree of societal modernisation in mediating the relationships they found. Taking a wider view and incorporating research from outside the EU, Holmila and Raitasalo (2005) likewise report that there is no consensus in terms of explaining this gender gap. Biological differences regarding alcohol tolerance, gender-specific roles in other areas of life, motivations for drinking and societal regulation of people's behaviour are all presented as plausible explanations, but none can individually account for the variety of women's and men's drinking. In short, alcohol consumption is an extremely complex social behaviour stratified by various factors including gender, age and class, and its acceptability is embedded in wider social values, norms and customs.

Attitudes to drinking in the UK

The increase in women's drinking in the UK suggests something has changed in terms of the acceptability of women's alcohol use, however there remains a clear

double standard regarding attitudes to women and men's drinking, with further distinctions concerning age and class[4]. In general this double standard normalises (though it does not necessarily condone) men's heavy drinking and the possible consequences of this, such as violence, while framing as problematic women's consumption. The double standard is evident in media representations of women's drinking (Day et al., 2004; Patterson et al., 2016), as well as in many accounts of those who drink (de Visser & McDonnell, 2012). Measham's (2008a) study of historical attitudes to intoxication in the UK suggests this has a long precedent, tracing the emergence of gender specific drinking discourses to the Middle Ages, when diverse forms of regulation around alcohol consumption became apparent. Drawing a parallel between the current concern for women's drinking and their exclusion in the Middle Ages, Measham (2008) argues that attitudes to intoxication are shaped by and are symbolic of, anxieties about problematic sociodemographic groups. How we understand women's drinking should therefore be contextualised with reference to the broader desire for moral regulation and social control of public life[5]. This is supported by Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2007) who have documented how the rapid changes in modern life (and the resultant social anxiety) have been framed in terms of a 'gender crisis', in which 'the gender minority are coerced into carrying the gender majority's sense of moral panic' (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2007: 6). It is no surprise then that while ostensibly reporting on genuine changes in demographic trends, UK media coverage of women's increased drinking

[4] This differential treatment of men and women's drinking has been buoyed by a scientific discourse that positions men's bodies as more able to handle alcohol, reflected in the NHS recommendations for safe(r) alcohol consumption, which until 2016 listed different units for men and women (21 and 14 units per week respectively). Following a review of evidence however, the NHS no longer makes this distinction; both men and women are advised to not regularly consume more than 14 units of alcohol a week.

[5] There are strong parallels here with the continuing concern around young adults alcohol use, discussed above.

is often condemnatory in tone. A review and critical analysis of UK newspaper representations of women's drinking suggests that while some de-gendered drinking discourses have emerged, these exist alongside pervasive, traditional representations of women in the media overall (Day et al., 2004).

In their paper, Day et al., (2004) demonstrate how young women's perceived inability to maintain normative 'feminine' behaviour when drunk (e.g. by fighting) is frequently depicted in media coverage and that images intended to convey the undesirability of drunken women and women's drunkenness are common. Day et al., (2004) also highlight as problematic the frequent use of bio-medical, scientific narratives surrounding women's drinking which serve to legitimise or lend support to traditional representations of women which are far from scientific. An example of this is the recent resurgence of 'empty nest syndrome', as a tabloid explanation for the amount of alcohol women in their 40s and 50s consume (see for example, O'Regan (2016) and Spencer (2015)). Such accounts assume the centrality of the caring role in women's lives; alcohol becomes a coping mechanism when children leave home. Gaining popularity in the 1960s, the idea was potent folk-psychology but lacked credible evidence (Allan and Cooke, 1985) and remains to be empirically demonstrated (Mitchell and Lovegreen, 2009).

Writing specifically about representations of binge drinking, Patterson et al. (2016) have shown how the emphasises in newspapers are at odds with the epidemiological evidence; this media disproportionally focuses on young adults, women and public drinking in reporting on the issue. They noted in particular the media's tendency to present women as out of control, harming their physical appearance and as putting themselves in danger when they participate in 'binge drinking'. On this final point, it is particularly concerning that women's safety is framed in terms of their capacity to protect themselves, rather than on the circumstances which make them unsafe, mirroring the 'individualisation of social risk' (Kelly, 2001) noted above with reference to young adult drinking.

Media focused on the youth market has also been studied and shown to present a more positive though highly gendered pictured of young adult drinking. Analysing six monthly UK magazine (three targeting women and three targeting men), Lyons et al. (2006) identified three discourses running through this media relating to alcohol, masculinity and machismo, and the normality of intoxication. While women's drinking was part of this normality, it was derided in the magazines addressing a predominantly male audience. Given the significant changes in the production and consumption of media in recent years and changes in drinking cultures, more contemporary accounts of how women's drinking is perceived are essential. This thesis represents an important contribution in this regard.

While some news outlets generate a moral panic regarding women's drinking, other media, in particular alcohol advertisements, are eager to frame women's consumption in more positive ways. Women's alcohol use has changed in tandem with other aspects of their lives; an increase in their disposable income was closely followed by the recognition that they are a group worth investing significant funds into targeting. While some attempts to engage women emphasise the importance of maintaining desirable, socially sanctioned forms of femininity (e.g. the infantilising 'Lambrini girls just want to have fun' campaign for the cheap, sweet, fizzy perry Lambrini), alcohol has also been positioned as a way in which women can challenge restrictive gender norms. For example, in their 2016 advertisement *Make Your Own Rules* (Haig Whisky, 2016) Haig refer to the well-known idea that whiskey is 'a man's drink' and implores women to defy this double standard (and buy the premium priced whiskey). As Hackley et al. (2015) have argued in relation to alcohol marketing generally, 'marketers are astute in exploiting the transgressive dynamics of some consumer groups'. Economically empowered women who want to resist traditional gender roles are clearly one such group. The advertisement approaches of Lambrini and Haig also highlight how socio-economic status (and class) are bound up with gender in a market-led alcohol culture: Lambrini is a low-cost alcohol product, while Haig is premium priced alcohol and in attempting to capture different market segments they draw on distinct presentations of desirable

femininity. Though is a relatively new phenomenon as it relates to womens' drinking specifically, it is a continuation of the ways in which alcohol use has been historically employed to differentiate social groups; Jayne et al (2006) reference this when they discuss the class dimension of Hogarth's artistic depiction of gin and beer drinkers in his 18th century prints *Gin Lane* and *Beer Street*. Gin, which was the favoured drink of the working class, is in these prints shown as source of social misery, with images foregrounding violence and a mother's inability to care for her children.

The media is an obvious source of influence when discussing how inequalities relating to gender come to be perpetuated. However, the double standard is part of a wider sense-making reality in which individuals are also implicated. To understand how the double standard comes to be experienced in the lives of women and men, de Visser and McDonnell (2012) explored the perspective of university undergraduates. Identifying first how egalitarian participants were in terms of gender roles, the researchers interviewed a sample of the most and least egalitarian. Participants saw various aspects of drinking culture as gendered, and even the most egalitarian participants acknowledged that participation by women in the masculine realm of beer drinking, binge drinking, and public drunkenness was a transgression of sorts. The study also highlights the role of drinking behaviour in maintaining a preferred gender identity. Given the cultural belief that aspects of drinking are gendered, women account for their own drinking behaviour (and the behaviour of others) is an area worthy of study. How they work within and through gendered practices to articulate or accomplish their gender identity has been explored through a number of qualitative studies, which are discussed in the following sections.

To summarise, alcohol use and women's alcohol use in particular, is a historically (and globally) complex social behaviour, embedded in wider cultural processes. Though there have been a number of changes in the acceptability of women's drinking in the UK (which cannot be understood outside of the neoliberal policy

enactments of the last 30 years) there remains a double standard evident both in the media and in the awareness of the general public (upon which advertising depends). Awareness of this double standard affords individuals the opportunity to participate in or resist its presence (or both), through their own gender presentation and their responses to others. Drinking can therefore be understood as a site in which gender can be articulated in and through practice.

Doing femininity

Given the history of social attitudes to women's public drinking, for those young women committed to a traditional femininity and who want to simultaneously participate in the promised delights of the NTE, new ways of 'doing femininity' must be negotiated. The obvious starting point is to not get too drunk, not by being able to 'hold your drink' (such as would be the case for a man) but rather by not drinking too much to begin with. Self-control in terms of consumption is something valued in other areas of women's life, for example in restricting food intake to maintain a low body weight. Another way women can partake in drinking but maintain femininity is to choose appropriate drinks- sweet, fizzy drinks that are not discernibly alcoholic (although note Haig's attempt to undermine this to capture a new market, as detailed above). A final point relates to drinking contexts; to successfully participate in the NTE requires familiarity with a range of context- and gender- specific social norms. Like attitudes to alcohol more generally, such social norms are also coded in terms of class and ethnicity.

While the acceptability of women's drinking has increased, new attitudes to women's drinking have not uniformly replaced old ones and a number of tensions are said to exist between the old and the new. Griffin et al. (2012) explore these in their study of young women's experiences in the NTE and they identify a number of dilemmas for women: to drink with men, but not drink like them; to act as agentically sexy but avoid being a 'drunken slut'; to be sassy and independent but not feminist. To make sense of how women inhabit the contradictions evident in post-feminist drinking culture they employ the technologies of sexiness framework

(Evans et al., 2010) arguing that women's behaviour in drinking spaces is linked to a process of 'othering' alternate groups of women. In doing so women are able to position themselves as on the right side of respectable femininity (as opposed to the 'other women' who fail to do so). In Griffin et al., (2012) this was evident both with middle class participants, who derided the 'chavs', and among working class women who identified a particular housing estate as a source of girls who failed to maintain respectability. This emphasis on respectability draws on Skeggs (1997) work which identities the pursuit of respectability as central to working class women's gender identity.

The complexity of the NTE as a site for 'doing femininity' is also explored by Nicholls (2016) and she highlights the ways in which women's options are constrained. Focusing on choice of drink, Nicholls (2016) argues that context is a vital component of decision making in this regard; beer may be appropriate while watching a football match with male relatives, but not appropriate on a girls' night out. While some women challenge the gender norms, Nicholls (2016) argues 'that imitating masculine drinking practices – particularly to enhance heterosexual desirability – is unlikely to be liberating for women and fails to challenge gender norms or assign more positive meanings to female drinking in its own right' (Nicholls, 2016: 88). However, this is a rather circular logic in that it defines certain practices as masculine a priori. What Nicholls (2016) fails to acknowledge is that such practices are only masculine in so far as they are performed exclusively by men; through their participation (which does not have to be read as 'imitation' as she claims), women do change gender norms associated with said practices. Furthermore, Nicholls' (2016) position suggests there is such a thing as 'female drinking in its own right' as though it were not always already relational, and that assigning positive meanings to it is an important step in women's liberation. Both pieces of research point to a deficit of women's critical engagement with gender issues as somehow central to their continued oppression and both locate the possibility for liberation within women's control; through solidarity in the first instance, in terms of their choices in the second.

Women's experience in sub- and counter-cultures has also been researched and findings from such studies can demonstrate the complexity of contemporary attitudes towards femininity, or femininities. For example, Hutton's (2004) work has emphasized the role risk plays in women's pleasure-seeking in club spaces, with a focus on sexuality and drug use. Detailing the club scene in England's North West in the late 1980s and early 1990's, Hutton makes the distinction between mainstream and underground scenes, suggesting that the latter offer space for women to construct sexual identities which resist traditional, passive images of femininity. She ties this to reports that in these underground spaces, women experience less sexual harassment than in the 'meat-market' mainstream, in which a heightened heterosexuality operates. However there are tensions in her participants' accounts and many acknowledge that unwanted touching is in fact very common in underground clubs, due in part to the use of ecstasy and the affectionate drives that accompany its use. Touching, hugging and massaging are expected to be tolerated, leaving women open to covert harassment by men. Furthermore, in the case of assault the fact those involved were 'off their heads' has its own excuse value. It seems reasonable to suggest then, that ideas around 'femininity' can be reformulated in an ostensibly positive way, without radically undermining the kinds of sexist behaviour held to be the product of the current gender order.

Approached primarily from a feminist perspective, work on women and alcohol has been critical of the supposed gains for women in post modernity. The research tends to highlight instead the remaining structural inequalities women face in light of the new highly individualised, consumerist discourses evident in young adult culture (Bailey et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2012; McRobbie, 1993; Nicholls, 2012; Nicholls, 2016). In doing so there has been a tendency to attribute false consciousness to women who do appear to find enjoyment in spaces that are

framed as sites of their continued subjugation, such as the NTE[6]. As noted above, the current research attempts to navigate this concern by drawing inspiration from Gill's (2007) 'critical respect'.

While some research on gender and alcohol has adopted a bottom up approach in defining gendered drinking behaviour (e.g. de Visser and McDonnell (2013); Lyons and Willott (2008)), others rely on top-down models invoking 'normative' gender identities drawn from popular culture, media and advertising (Griffin et al., 2012; Nicholls, 2016; Riley et al., 2016). This is a point of departure for the current project in that it does not assume that normative standards of gender expression are equally felt across groups, nor that the interpersonal regulative practices such as 'othering' (Evans et al., 2010) are the primary source of gender management.

As with research on young adult alcohol use, pleasure is almost entirely lacking in the literature on drinking culture and gender yet there are a number of ways they may be related beyond the differences described above. For example, in a culture steeped in post-modern ideas around self-invention, gender is arguably a central site for anchoring a subjectivity, an 'epistemological organizing theme' (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2007: 4) and the opportunity to work within a distinct social context to express and explore this may also be a source of enjoyment. How the widespread double standard noted above, and other (invisible) regulations, are experienced and work to enable/disable specific pleasures for young adults is also worthy of study and is central to this thesis.

The current project takes the decision to drink and drink choices as 'symbolic resources for the construction of identity' (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998: 132) and explores in detail how these resources are put to use in highly gendered ways. However, there is more involved in going out than drinking alcohol and the study

[6] This is not unlike the research highlighted early in this chapter (e.g. Winlow and Hall, 2009) which frames young adult enjoyment in similar terms.

explores a range of gender practices central to this context. The complexities of the NTE's relationship to individual and social needs and wants is a central focus in the current enquiry. The specificity of this social context is explored, with particular reference to regulation, in the following section.

The Big Market: consumption and commerce in the NTE

NTE research is concerned with how nightlife is shaped by political and economic factors as well as by those who use the products and services it provides. It is drawn from a range of academic disciplines and tends to foreground one of several intersecting spheres of interest including policymaking, economic forces, regulation and control, and mainstream/sub-cultures. The aim of the current research is to explore how young women experience the NTE and how their experiences of pleasure and gender come to be in this space. To contextualise this, understanding how features of the NTE are supported by top-down regulatory approaches as well as by those whose consumption constitutes the NTE's success, is essential. In outlining these processes, the research can shed light on the co-productive relationship between the cultural, material and subjective realities of young women's experience in the (increasing neoliberal) NTE. While the NTE is characterised as a space for 'letting go', various forms of regulation are evidenced there; both formal, legislative regulation as well as cultural normative forms. With reference to Hadfield's (2014) 'four modes of exclusion' the following section will set the scene for researching the NTE, and its pleasures, from the perspective of its young adult customer base.

Negotiations of power in the NTE

NTE research has been described as going through three phases in the last two and a half decades (Hadfield, 2014) and I begin this section by reviewing these stages before locating my own research in this field. The first phase, (beginning in the 1990s) centred on regenerating city centres and cultivating new modes of consumption that would foster economic growth, broadly in line with the emerging

dominance of neoliberal discourses in politics and policy. This was followed by a number of initiatives by central government, most notably those related to licensing such as the 2003 Licensing Act, which were, in part, intended to facilitate a more European-style late night café culture. When alcohol-centric businesses consolidated their pre-existing dominance, a second phase of research began, which extensively critiqued both earlier work on the potentials of the NTE and the efforts of policy makers. This research highlighted the growing inequalities in the NTE, the complexities of regulating these spaces (with a particular focus on violence) and the inadequacies of policies that expected the market to regulate itself. The third and most recent phase of NTE research incorporates international studies to broaden our understanding of what the NTE can be: negotiations of power and social exclusions continue to be prominent. This thesis contributes to this continued emphasis on power but expands the focus beyond institutional regulation, to include the social and cultural norms the participants describe in discussing their pleasure-seeking.

Developing his argument regarding social exclusions Hadfield proposes a conceptual model built around four 'modes of exclusion' in order to understand the 'situated assemblages of power, capacity and influence' evident in the NTE (Hadfield, 2014: 1), These are: law, statue and urban design; police governance; private governance of affect; and informal governance. The first of these details the explicit attempts at control by the government, for example licensing, while the second refers to the regulatory activity of enforcement agencies in shaping behaviour and social expression in the NTE. The third and fourth modes are of direct relevance to the current study in that they incorporate the subtle socialising forces of consumer markets and social processes respectively. It is important to note that while separating out these modes may be analytically useful, in practice these modes are related. For example, it is government action (mode one) which empowers enforcement agencies (mode two), and economic policies (mode one) are directly related to the market's capacity to impact daily lives (mode three).

Regarding the third mode which explores the impact of consumerism, the literature in this area is largely critical of the neoliberal policy enactments at the heart of contemporary NTEs which have facilitated this, and there is a sense of users of the NTE being seduced in to consumption practices that further embed them in neoliberal economies (against their own best interests). For example, Hollands and Chatterton (2003) discuss the concentration of corporate ownership of nightlife, in which local and creative entertainments give way to globalised, themed and/or branded offerings. They frame their critique in terms of neo-Fordist approaches to the market, arguing that policies following this approach fail to deliver the diversity promised, while consolidating wealth in ever fewer hands.

This is a sentiment echoed by Hobbs et al. (2005). Borrowing from anthropology notions of communitas (collective joy) and liminality (the state of 'betweenness' and suspended rules), they challenge not just the presentation of the NTE by its producers, but also that of its attendees. Referring to a pseudo-communitas, generated by corporate venues whose policies and practices create highly structured consumption experiences at odds with the prevailing belief in the choice and variety of urban nightlife, Hobbs et al. (2005) go on to argue that while undoubtedly a space characterised by liminality, this liminality is not experienced 'as a liberating and creative form of social engagement, but as a structural pressure' (Hobbs et al., 2005: 166). The specifics of how a pseudo-communitas can be generated are not provided and indeed in terms of Turner's (2012) formulation of communitas and liminality, it is not possible to generate a pseudo-communitas; if the experience does not come from the collective, if it does not bubble up 'from below', then it is not communitas at all. Furthermore, in making this claim Hobbs et al. (2005) go beyond a critique of the context of pleasure to deny the authenticity of participants' experiences of pleasure as false consciousness. For reasons expanded on below this is something the current thesis seeks to avoid.

Research around consumerism also includes concern about the loss of traditional and alternative leisure opportunities, compounding existing social inequalities.

Chatterton and Hollands (2002) account of the mainstreaming of cultures in the NTE is one example of this and they highlight how matrices of power operating at the policy level serve to privilege certain interests, for example large pub companies/chains (PUBCOS). Theorising NTE 'playscapes' in terms of production, regulation and consumption, they argue changes across these aspects of the NTE coalesce to marginalise and ultimately squeeze out non-mainstream nightlife. One aspect of this is process discussed by Talbot (2006) who details the closure of several subcultural venues in a borough of London in the wake of the 2003 Licensing Act. Discussing the Act and the White Paper that preceded it, Talbot (2006) is critical of gentrification as the primary means of (often much needed) regeneration and is particularly keen to identify 'disorder' as a contentious measure of nightlife regulation; highly classed and racialised, what looks like disorder to one sociodemographic group may be experienced as merely exciting to another. While stimulating diversity was one of the intended aims of the Act, with local authorities being at greater liberty to issue licences, this increased diversity was an assumed consequence of stimulating the market. Talbot (2006) argues that subcultures have been negatively impacted by the changes in licensing as prioritising the avoidance of risk (commercially and in terms of the aforementioned 'disorder') limits the fertile ground of subcultural innovation.

Moving beyond the impact of consumerism, Shaw (2010) identifies and seeks to develop a shift in research towards cultural and phenomenological aspects of the NTE. Writing on neoliberal subjectivities in this context, Shaw adopts an understanding of power as dispersed and negotiated in multiple ways, setting this interest within the fourth mode of governance, informal governance, as outlined by Hadfield (2014). Shaw (2010) challenges the dominant model of NTE subjectivities as a tension between a mythical liminality and the reality of compliant consumerism (Hayward & Hobbs, 2007), and suggests a more fluid relationship between these possibilities; rather than existing as mutually exclusive, consumerism might be understood as the medium through which the desire for phenomenological difference is actualised. Arguing that the focus on regulatory frameworks in NTE

research has obscured the 'complex topographies' of the NTE (Shaw, 2010: 901), Shaw suggests that more attention on the processes through which subjectivities emerge can support the research field. One aspect of developing this is through the study of microfascisms; subjectivities are said to be microfascist when they threaten the existence of other subjectivities[7] (Shaw, 2010: 897). How various factors (including the mood of a venue) come to privilege certain subjectivities and shape the process of their emergence is an area in need of study. The current project furthers this research agenda with a particular focus on how gender, pleasure and regulation are implicated in this process.

Running parallel to the political-economic perspectives outlined here are approaches that employ non-representational theory, and frameworks inspired by it, to introduce affect and assemblage into the research field. Demant (2013) writes that the move towards assemblage has been driven by a desire to balance the (dominant) politico-economic perspective, which is limited in terms of its understanding of human behaviour as overly determined by political-economic rationalities. For example, Demant (2009) has used Actor Network Theory to challenge constructivist approaches to young adult identity (including those relating to gender), and bring into his analysis the 'networks between all things relevant to the phenomena' (2009: 25) of young adult drinking. In other work, Demant (2013) has placed emphasis on how space is implicated in experiences of intoxication, taking the nightclub as a specific site of affective fields, drawing on Deleuzian ideas of assemblage to do so. This approach is also adopted by Bøhling (2014) who describes the affective dynamics of an electronic music venue as modulated by

[7] Given the importance of gender performance in the NTE, there is an interesting parallel to be drawn with work on gender that identifies the role of subjectivities, often mediated through group dynamics, in maintaining normative gender enactment (e.g., hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and technologies of sexiness (Evans et al., 2010)).

crowds and processes of imitation and suggestion. In doing so Bøhling (2014) embraces a 'highly plastic model of the subject' (2014: 385).

Approaches such as these can help produce 'thick descriptions of everyday life…and [counter] politically paralyzing pictures of the unity of capital with notions of a more open social field' (Rankin, 2011: 564). However, it can also lead to something of a taxonomy of 'actants' (human and non-human agents whose relationship to one another constitute the phenomenon under investigation), which fails to recognise the relative impact these actants have in the socio-material contexts under consideration. Furthermore, in ascribing affective capacity to non-human actants (objects, ideas and processes), this approach runs the risk of obscuring the human agents who create/place/maintain the non-human ones.

In the sense that my work aims to move beyond a narrow political-economic reading of subjectivity in the NTE (discussed later in this chapter) and gives focus to the affective dimension of nights out, I am aligned with this intention of assemblage oriented work. However, my research maintains an interest in the structural and discursive contexts in which young adult drinkers operate and sees an analysis of this cultural context as vital in understanding their experience, particularly from the perspective of feminist critique. Furthermore, I am unwilling to forsake a critical perspective on the NTE and to bracket from consideration concepts such as structure and culture in favour of a radically horizontal ontology deemed necessary in this approach (Demant, 2013), and in line with new materialisms more broadly (Fox and Alldred, 2019)[8].

A further challenge to political economy perspectives of the NTE comes from geographies research which has foregrounded the importance of place in exploring drunkenness. As well as drawing attention to the supra- and inter-national context

[8] For a wide ranging critique of new materialisms and their ethical and political application see Rekret (2016).

of drinking typical of NTE research, scholars such as Jayne et al. (2006) have highlighted the ways in which spatially specific cultural practices *emerge with* the structural changes highlighted above, for example corporatisation, rather than being *determined by* those changes. They call for a more context specific approach to public drinking that takes account of specificity without collapsing analysis into a case study approach which does not lend itself to wider theorising. The current study attempts to navigate this tension by taking into account the historical and cultural meanings of drinking in its chosen location, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, while recognising that these meanings are related to wider social and economic trends beyond that immediate context. Further discussion of the city's importance to this study is provided in Chapter Three. This study also addresses Jayne et al's (2006) call for a much more nuanced understanding of how alcohol is related to constructions of social groups, including gender.

It has been suggested that the NTE does not provide an inversion of the social order, but rather a mirror of it (Hayward & Hobbs, 2007, p443); its study can tell us a great deal about the socio-political context and the subjectivities it produces. The neoliberalisation of the NTE has been the major focus of research in this area since the 1990s when it became clear that the optimism surrounding this vision of urban renewal was ill-founded. How power is negotiated in this space has continued to be a central concern for researchers and a great deal of attention has been paid to the consequences of legislation and government policy. In addition to these top-down modes of regulation, there are a number of less obvious though productive regulative forces at work in this social context, including those relating to appropriate behaviour, which, as discussed earlier in this chapter, are highly gendered. Despite the extensive critiques noted above, young adults continue to go out in significant numbers- that they desire and are able to experience pleasure in doing so is almost entirely absent in research focusing on the NTE and the political contexts of its management. Gender differences in experience of the NTE are, like pleasure, largely assumed in critical work of this kind and how these regulations

may work in and through gendered bodies has not yet been explored; the current study seeks to address this neglect.

Approaches to pleasure

Arguing for the centrality of pleasure in drinking culture, how pleasure and its pursuit come to be shaped by social forces is the focus of this section. Our choice of pleasures among the plethora of those available both reflects and constitutes our memberships of the diverse cultures within and between geographical boundaries. Unlike the world of work, which is compulsory for the vast majority of people, the pleasures we pursue in our leisure time are an area in which agency and choice are ostensibly exercised and thus present a significant opportunity for identity work (Haggard and Williams, 1992). At the same time, pleasure and its pursuits are in many ways regulated, legally, socially and interpersonally and cannot be understood outside of this wider social context. Pleasure is therefore a site in which the tensions between agency and structure, which frame the current project, can be explored. Specifically, this research can contribute new material to help negotiate the tension that has emerged around young adults' pleasure-seeking behaviour in their drinking cultures- as an agentic, calculated hedonism (Szmigin et al., 2008) or as a forced adaptation to an aggressive consumer capitalism (Winlow & Hall, 2009) [9] in a way sensitive to gender considerations. The following sections review research on pleasure and argue for its importance as a consideration in writing on alcohol, gender and the NTE.

[9] A parallel can be draw with the tensions around agency in feminist interpretation of women's engagement with sexualised culture; while some writers claim young women can be empowered through their participation with this, are others more sceptical about this as a possibility given the wider context of gendered inequality (for a review of this debate see Evans and Riley (2014: 17-38).

Researching pleasure and alcohol

A great deal of literature on alcohol use and the NTE has focused on the dangers and difficulties individuals face in light of changes to the regulation and cultures of drinking. As has been noted throughout the previous sections, the differential impact of social policies has been at the forefront of commentary, with age and gender (along with class and ethnicity/race) continuing to shape people's opportunities and experiences in this cultural context. Furthermore, risk, responsibility and responsibilisation have dominated the discourse as it relates to alcohol use in the NTE, both in terms of official outputs (e.g. alcohol policies) as well as responses to these by researchers. While acknowledging the need for academics to pursue research that highlights the marginalising effects and unintended consequences of social policies, where the current project seeks to make a contribution is in terms of putting front and centre the pleasures of going out and drinking alcohol in the NTE. There are a number of reasons it is pertinent to do so; not least that pleasure is the primary motivator in terms of people going out drinking[10]. This section discusses the literature on the pleasures of alcohol and outlines the ways it has been studied. A review of literature exploring the regulation of pleasures follows this. Though the research on alcohol and the NTE are distinguishable, there is a significant overlap and the following review will move between these bodies of work drawing together common threads as they relate to both top-down governance of pleasure and less obvious forms of social regulation which shape the pursuit and expression of pleasure.

[10] This is a vital component of developing appropriate social policies (as argued by Duff (2008)), but is also required to ensure our understandings of subjectivities in cultural contexts are driven by empirical work and are holistic in their descriptions of social life.

Before any detailed analysis of research on pleasure (or the lack thereof), it is important to frame the relationship between pleasure and risk being employed in this study. Though there is a distinction evident in research which emphasises risk at the expense of pleasure, these are not to be consider as mutually exclusive. Rather, research focusing on pleasures of drink and drugs can acknowledge the risks inherent in their consumption. Indeed, as it relates to urban drinking in particular, the pleasures of alcohol are known to go 'hand in hand with negotiating and navigating the risky city' (Jayne et al. 2006; 464). In articulating the subjective contours of pleasure, this research helps demonstrate the intersecting features of pleasure and risk, moving beyond a binary account to show the ways in which they are entwined in the collective and public experience of drinking alcohol.

Despite pleasure's obvious role in alcohol consumption, there remains a dearth of research in this area. This reflects a tendency across drug use research, in which pleasure is taken as a given and granted little serious attention (Duff, 2008; Moore, 2008). In order to make best use of the research that is available, acknowledging alcohol's categorisation as a drug allows us to draw inspiration from the research which has been conducted on drugs and substance use more broadly. In their introduction to a special edition of *International Journal of Drug Policy* which focuses on pleasure, Holt and Treloar (2008) outline a number of reasons the subject has been neglected, as well as providing reasons that it should be considered in drug research, particularly with regards to successful harm reduction policies. Noting that it has been considered a 'frivolous' (Holt and Treloar, 2008: 349) area of research given 'the pandemics of global suffering' (Holt and Treloar, 2008: 349). Other explanations include the lingering 'Judeo-Christian suspicion and oppression of pleasure' (Bunton & Coveney, 2011: 9) and the lack of scientific techniques to measure it, given its highly subjective nature (Duff, 2008). Moore (2007) also reflects on the absence of pleasure in drug use arguing that in the social field of drugs research it is professionally safer to accept the focus on risk and harms, given that 'writing about pleasure does not earn the researcher much in the way of research capital' (Moore, 2007: 335). I would add to this that a neo-Marxist

suspicion of pleasure delivered by the market has meant NTE research (approached primarily from this perspective) has minimally engaged with the pleasures experienced there. Holt and Treloar (2008) note how studying pleasure can undermine a rational actor model of substance use and the current research aims to develop this question of the rational actor, articulating more clearly how alcohol consumption and the pleasures of its contexts dynamically interact with emergent subjectivities.

In terms of how we study pleasure, or what there is to study, a number of perspectives have been taken. Becker's (1953) work on marijuana use is central to research that argues for the importance of context for intoxication experiences; his research demonstrates that one learns to enjoy the 'high' of marijuana, that is, one learns to interpret the physiological experience as one of pleasure. Coveney and Bunton (2003) also state that the pleasures derived from drug use are both innate (physiological) and socially constructed. Developing Zinberg's (1986) seminal writing on marijuana use they highlight the relationship between 'drug, set and setting' in the experience of psychoactive substances, and this can be used as a starting point for understanding how pleasures can be studied sociologically. In terms of the current project, the 'drug, set and setting' model supports the idea that pleasure emerges through dynamic social processes, supporting this project's commitment to explore intoxication experiences in an embedded, contextualised way. Using the model to disaggregate the pleasures of intoxication, it is sufficient to note that ethanol, the psychoactive substance in alcohol, produces in small doses euphoria, relaxation and disinhibition[11]. Relating to set (referring to 'mind-set') Coveney and Bunton (2003) note the importance of e xpectation and given alcohol's widespread popularity and close association with pleasure and pleasurable experience at a cultural level (as clearly evidenced in advertising as well as film, TV and social media postings), this may further support young adults' experiences with alcohol as

[11] For a review of psychological research on the effects of alcohol on mood, see Sayette (2017).

pleasurable by default. In terms of setting, the current project's focus on the NTE provides an opportunity to explore this in depth. How the pleasures of going out are cultivated, satisfied, enabled and disabled by the wider social context, the NTE and its management, has not yet been explored and in this sense, the project can make an original contribution.

Though 'set' is linked above to expectation, there is potentially scope to use the idea to incorporate a subjective, experiential component to discussions of pleasures. Exploring the pleasures of nights out among young adults in Melbourne, Australia, Duff (2008) focuses on the dynamics of space, embodiment and practice, with particular reference to performative aspects of experience in consumption environments. Using a qualitative methodology Duff (2008) identifies a number of 'pleasures in context' ('pleasures in practice', 'pleasures in space' and 'pleasures in the body'), which he suggests are neglected in research at the expense of physiological considerations. This approach, which employs an understanding of identity as being remade in and through specific practices, is in line with the theoretical framing of the current study which explores the co-productive relationship between subjects and cultural norms. Furthermore, in its attention to the intricacies of participant's experiences and the relationship these experiences have to subjectivity, Duff's (2008) work highlights a number of themes central to the current project. Of particular interest is what is described as 'experience of difference', the opportunity while intoxicated to inhabit a distinct subjectivity. This is linked to the idea that leisure time can act as a site of 'ontological security', where individuals 'can expressively work out [their] desired self- identity' (Kuentzel, 2000: 88). This is the practical work of reflexive modernity as discussed in the following section. How experiences of selfhood are negotiated with reference to the regulating processes discussed below, is a central concern for the current research.

Moving away from the subjective side of pleasure, Bunton and Coveney (2011) have noted the close relationship pleasure has to historical changes, for example the Reformation is cited as being influential in 'reforming' relations to the body and its

pleasures (Bunton and Coveney, 2011: 9). Working towards a taxonomy, they identify four types of pleasure- carnal, disciplined, ascetic and ecstatic- and make a case that their expression and cultural visibility reflects broader social values. To review these briefly: carnal pleasures are characterised by their physicality and immediacy and include 'bodily basics' and 'libidinal urges' (2011: 13); disciplined pleasures incorporate a level of personal reflection or intellectualising to these, and in doing so introduce a sublime quality to experience; ascetic pleasures are those derived through controlling bodily urges, a conquering and domination of the body and elevation of the mind; finally ecstatic pleasures are initially linked to spiritual ceremonies and then described in terms of a contemporary celebration of consumption and excess. Ecstatic pleasures are closely linked in this context to intoxication through psychoactive substances.

In tandem with Duff's (2008) attention to the experiential component of drug use, Bunton and Coveney's (2011) categories, while neither clean cut nor exhaustive, may provide a starting point in contextualising the data generated as part of this project. Though Bunton and Coveney (2011) describe types of pleasure with reference to their historical emergence, no reference is made to social factors such as gender or class or how these might interact with the historically contingent approaches to pleasure they identify. These factors play an obvious role in determining which pleasures are available to individuals or deemed appropriate at any given time; as Measham (2008) highlights gender, class and religion have historically shaped narratives of drinking in the UK, and continue to do so.

Pleasure and regulation

A starting point in the discussion of pleasure's regulation is to recognise the ways in which this seemingly personal experiential state is shaped by social forces. Obvious examples relating to alcohol and the NTE include the laws covering the sale of alcohol (incorporating age of purchaser and times of day) and the licences required to sell alcohol, play music and generally conduct business at particular times. The changes in these areas, particularly licensing as discussed above, have drawn into

sharp focus the complexity of discourses around the role of government; within contemporary sense-making, social liberalism, which seeks to support individual citizen's freedoms, is invoked in support of neoliberal economic policies, removing restrictions on those industries which have been regulated historically for 'the common good'.

From the Gin Laws of the eighteenth century through restricted licensing during the First World War to the 2003 deregulation discussed above, governments have long been invested in managing citizen's intoxications. However, as O'Malley and Valverde (2004) demonstrate, what form this regulation takes is embedded in wider social discourses, in particular conceptualisations of freedom. In their review of official documents from the 18th century to the present day, they argue that as ideas of freedom have transformed so too have the ways in which governments must manage 'free' subjects; in this context, notions of pleasure are employed strategically to uphold the liberal construction of a rational subject. Pleasures which move beyond those defined by the prevailing rationality, -'disreputable pleasures' - are those which undermine the key requirements of liberal subjects such as responsibility. As is noted above, tying heavy consumption to irresponsibility and ultimately irrationality is clearly the approach taken by the UK government over the last 30 years and its relationship to neoliberalism specifically is discussed in the final section of this chapter.

Measham's (2004) review of licensing and leisure spaces in the UK also takes a historical approach and explores the relationship between consumption and control in clubs and pubs. Assessing the place of legal and illegal drugs in each of these spaces Measham (2004) argues that the control methods employed since the 1980's are commercialisation and criminalisation. Criminalisation is of less importance to the current project as it is concerned with legal drug use- alcohol consumption. However commercialisation has been linked to a lack of genuine diversity in the NTE (Hollands and Chatterton, 2002) and Measham's (2004) framing of it as a means of control is of interest. If control is exercised in this way, there are

clear financial advantages for those who are doing the 'commercialising'. What is less obvious however is that there are disadvantages for the participants of the NTE who continue, en masse, to go out. A review of the pleasures of going out, such as this research provides, may help identify what exactly has been lost and what remains, in light of the regulating influence of commercialisation.

Though pleasure and its pursuit are at the heart of drinking culture, it is largely neglected in the areas of research reviewed in this chapter. This neglect requires remedy as an acknowledgment of, and focus on, pleasure can strengthen the priorities of public health, specifically harm reduction, as well as inform more bottom up understandings of young adult cultures. Pleasure is highly subjective (Duff, 2008) and yet closely tied to political and cultural context (Bunton and Coveney, 2011; O'Malley and Valverde, 2004); it is therefore a meaningful focus for a study such as this, which seeks to understand the complex relationship between macro and micro social processes. Starting with descriptions of the lived experiences of pleasure in specific drinking contexts, as experienced through gendered subjectivities, this research takes a bottom up approach to understanding the relationship between the regulation of pleasure, gender and the NTE.

Neoliberalism, post-feminism and subjectivity

At the heart of this project is an interest in young women and what drives their participation in the NTE. However to set that in historical context is essential, given that there has been wide ranging social change in the past 30 years in ways that impact this research area, not least the extensive legislative change regulating the NTE and the significant increases in women's alcohol consumption. Research from a public health and social policy perspective seeks to address this, in ways shaped by the prevailing economic and political logics. Feminist writing has focused on the gender dimension of this, particularly the cultural responses to these changes and the continued inequality women experience both in terms of representations of their alcohol use and regarding their participation in the NTE. An interest in the coalescing forces of neoliberalism and post-feminism shapes much of the scholarly

work on young women's drinking and these are considered in turn in the following sections. Finally, how these forces relate to subjectivity and thus come to bear on the current study, will be considered.

Neoliberalism

Critiques of neoliberalism feature prominently across the research disciplines pertinent to this PhD, most clearly regarding the relaxation of alcohol licensing and the management of the NTE. Though first and foremost an economic model, its influence as an ideology has been traced to virtually all areas of society from political discourse and education to gender relations and subjectivity itself. Emerging in the 1930's under economists such as Hayek, neoliberal economics builds on the classical liberal idea of self-regulating markets, necessitating minimal government intervention. The reasoning follows that left to self-regulate, market forces will ensure the most efficient and positive outcomes for the economy and by extension, society. A lack of government intervention is also said to ensure the best possible conditions for human freedom and liberty, concepts that are central to both classical liberalism and neoliberalism.

Following the widespread adoption of Keynesian economic policies following the Great Depression and Second World War (advocating government intervention to mitigate market failure) high unemployment and raising inflation in the 1970's led governments in both the USA (under Reagan) and the UK (under Thatcher) to adopt neoliberal policies[12]. Deregulation, liberalisation and privatisation were and continue to be central to this perspective as it relates to the economy. Though there have been widespread changes to the UK economy as the result of this economic model, neoliberalism does not exist as a hegemonic force and various

[12] Internationally, institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have ensured developing economies adopt neoliberal policies by making doing so conditions of receiving development funds (Polillo and Guillén, 2005; Weller and Singleton, 2006).

elements of Keynesianism remain (though admittedly under what seems like constant threat), including the welfare state and the National Health Service, both of which are antithetical to neoliberal principles. As it relates to alcohol use and the NTE, this commitment to free markets is set in tension with the Government's historical role in promoting the public good. In regard to public health, it is with reference to the cost to the (publicly funded) NHS that Britain's 'alcohol problem' is frequently said to require intervention. In this way the Government's role is presented as implementing economic sense, rather than being morally (or ideologically) motivated. Regarding alcohol specifically, Measham and Brain (2005) have noted that there are social costs as a result of this approach to industry; liberalisation and deregulation of the drinks industry (which have fuelled consumption), have occurred in tandem with a privatisation, marketisation and erosion of the services which are needed to manage the public consequences of private consumption. The results of this are a further individualisation of risk and a responsibilisation of the individual consumer, who is increasingly held responsible for whatever problems arise from their drinking.

The favoured modes of governance in neoliberal economies focus on the individual, and this is closely linked to the promotion of free markets and lack of state involvement in the lives of citizens. In this view, the government's role is not to interfere with the liberty of the population but rather to encourage the individual's self-regulation and promote 'rational choices' (those which internalise and normalise market-oriented behaviour). It is this aspect of the neoliberal ideology, its mode of governance, that has become central to much of the critique from sociology, cultural studies and beyond and which plays out in discourses around young women and alcohol. Taken with Foucauldian understandings of power as dispersed and omnipresent, and of individuals as being produced in and through discourse, in such critiques neoliberalism is said to produce neoliberal subjects whose identity and sense of self are shaped through the rationalities of this ideology (Barry et al., 1993; Rose, 1999).

The relationship between the macro (economic) and the micro process of subject formation in this field of research is typically understood with reference to Foucault's 'governmentality' - the mode of governance that operates by promoting certain premises and logics, which in turn shape conduct. Neoliberal governmentalities are those drawn from the world of business and commerce, favouring entrepreneurial values such as competition and the pursuit of self-interest. These values are proliferated throughout society in both government outputs and popular culture and become a kind of common sense. In this way, neoliberalism is argued to have a constitutive, structuring influence not just on the material conditions of people's lives, but also on their subjectivity (Rose, 1999) .

Foregrounding autonomy, liberty and self-creation, in neoliberal ideology subjects are required to be rational and self-regulating. Furthermore, in the absence of collectivist understandings of society in which the Government is empowered to act for the public good, the individual bears ultimate responsibility for themselves. Personal and professional hardship and failure are in this reasoning best understood as the result of choices the individual has made, so the individual is ultimately held and (holds themselves) accountable.

The relationship between these ideas and the changes to the material conditions of people's lives is complex, for example as industry has changed as the result of national and global politics and policy, so too the influence of work based and class identities declined. From within sociology, Gidden's *Third Way* (Giddens, 1998) attempted to reconcile the once dominant ideology of social democracy and the emerging hegemony of neoliberalism, suggesting a third way between these positions was possible. Though in many ways a critique of neoliberalism, certain aspects of Gidden's work support the adoption of neoliberal ideals. For example, notions of individual 'reflexivity' map tidily onto the neoliberal necessity of the subject's self-regulation, and the process of 'disembedding' from traditional values and identity markers opens up the neoliberal possibility/ imperative to create

ourselves (with the assistance of the market)[13]. Central to neoliberal subjectivities are the consumption regimes said to shape identity through choices in tastes and habits (Rose, 1999: 46) and leisure practices (such as are under investigation in this thesis) are considered central to individual's self-articulation. Young women's contemporary experiences of drinking, going-out and the NTE are, then, embedded in not only a NTE affected by neoliberal market economics, but also ideologies about personhood, consumption and self-regulation.

Alongside this interest in how the political rationalities of neoliberalism come to manifest through subjectivities, are critiques of post-feminism. These share an interest in Foucauldian motifs of governance through 'sense-making', in which subjects naturalise certain logics and power relations presented by the culture at large. Gender is central to this thesis and the work is informed by feminist perspectives; as such, an overview of important themes in contemporary feminism, with a focus on post-feminism, is required. The following section does this to highlight an understanding of how neoliberalism impacts on feminist interpretations of young women's engagement in pleasure, alcohol and the NTE.

Post-feminism

Though typically understood to have developed in waves, feminism's history in terms of theory and its involvement in popular culture is more complex than the notion of waves can capture (Dean, 2010; Lewis and Marine, 2014). Even if feminist movements can be delineated in terms of their priorities, highlighted by the successes of activists or the focus of popular writers, individuals who identify as feminist are more likely than not to have a patchwork of beliefs and motivations. This has never been truer than at the present time; in 2019 a plethora of feminist positions and reactions to them, can be found in every cultural domain. Amidst concerns of repudiation and feminist dis-identification (Scharff, 2016), feminism's

[13] For a specifically feminist challenge to Third Way ideology see McRobbie (2000)

embrace by some of the world's biggest cultural stars provides unparalleled positive exposure for this diverse movement. These changes are such that some have described the current status quo as one of post-feminism, a term under discussion in the following section.

Despite the enhanced exposure for feminist messages, there is concern from some activists and researchers that the values being proliferated in feminism's name are falling short of the movements' historical aims, entrenched, as these values so often are, in capitalist, consumerist (that is, neoliberal) priorities. Indeed the centrality of 'empowerment', 'equality' and 'choice' to the most visible feminisms in contemporary pop culture, suggest many of the more radical, wide-ranging societal critiques feminism has provided are currently out of favour. Though each of these terms has a place in the feminist lexicon, there are clearly shortcomings of their dominance, for example the centring of 'choice' is problematic for a number of reasons, not least how tidily it maps onto consumerist discourses. The context of 'choices', particularly the limitations created by structural inequality along the lines of class, ethnicity/race as well as gender, is not foregrounded in such feminist positions.

McRobbie (2008) has perhaps best articulated the tensions in this regard, highlighting the instrumentalisation of a specific modality of feminism for market purposes. This trend has also been noted outside of academic feminism for example, Zeisler (2016) writes that 'marketplace feminism' is possibly its most popular iteration in her native USA. The reasons for this are not difficult to surmise; the marketplace feminism Zeisler (2016) subjects to analysis is not looking to radically overhaul any of the power structures of contemporary society. Rather, individual women are encouraged to find 'empowerment', allowing them to operate within those pre-existing (and inequitable) structures. Those structures are, at least at the economic level, characterised by the neoliberal logic outlined above. As the empowerment pursued is frequently tied to successful self-transformation

through consumption (Gill, 2007b; Gill, 2008) individuals become further embedded in market economies that do not, ultimately, serve their best interests.

Reflecting on the complexity and diversity of contemporary feminism, some have employed 'post-feminism' to capture the current status quo. However the term has been said to lack specificity with Gill and Scharff (2013) identifying four distinct uses. The first is that it represents an epistemological break within feminism, implying a transformation that challenges its early forms; in this sense it is considered alongside other anti-foundationalist movements such as post-modernism and post-colonialism. A second usage employs it to note the historical shifts since the 'second wave', and in the USA is frequently synonymous with 'third wave' perspective. A third way of using the term is to refer to a backlash against feminism, incorporating a retrosexism (Whelehan, 2000) lamenting the loss of traditional roles and positioning feminism as the cause of women's unhappiness. Finally is Gill's (2007b) definition, which describes post-feminism as a 'distinctive contradictory-but patterned sensibility intimately connected to neoliberalism'. Post-feminism is in this understanding an object of analysis rather than an analytical perspective (Gill, 2007b: 148). It is this perspective which shapes my engagement with post-feminism in the current research.

In terms of characterising this sensibility, McRobbie's (2008) writing on the 'aftermath of feminism' has been influential. Drawing attention to the status of feminist critique as 'taken into account' (though not necessarily acted upon), McRobbie (2008) shows how it is effectively neutralised as a threat to the established order. Feminist and antifeminist ideas are in this way entangled; a key feature of the post-feminist sentiment Gill (2007b) observes. Gill (2007b) notes other trends of post-feminism as including the representations of femininity as a bodily property, a move from objectification to subjectification and a focus on individualism, choice and empowerment. Identifying these trends in contemporary culture is central to scholarship on post-feminism, which focuses on how they can 'reshape, intensify and reinforce forms of gender power' (Riley et al., 2016: 20). In

this sense, writing on post-feminism is concerned with identifying the novel ways in which gender inequality manifests and the discursive constructions employed when this occurs. Young women today operate in a cultural context in which post-feminist sensibilities circulate; as we will see in the findings chapters, some draw on a vocabulary of choice and empowerment in their discussions around gender and the NTE. The extent to which these logics can be said to underpin both their experiences of pleasure, and the gender inequality they might experience, is an important area of interest in my analysis.

Subjectivities

Critiques of both neoliberalism and post-feminism challenge understandings of the self as independent, autonomous and 'free' to make choices, drawing attention to the importance of constraints individuals experience as the result of economic and gender based inequality. However, there are disagreements regarding the extent to which individuals *can* be held to be agents of their experience and how best to understand the relationship between macro and micro social processes, between structure and agency. In the literature under review subjectivities, as the 'combination of identity, body and behaviour' that constitute an individual (Shaw, 2015: 459), are understood to be created either wholly or in part by their 'social, natural and symbolic context' (Shaw, 2015: 459). In order to explore how the tensions between agency and structure further, the following section reviews the technologies of sexiness (Evans and Riley, 2014) framework. The framework presents a novel way of navigating structure vs. agency debates with reference to the discursive context of relevance to this thesis, neoliberalism and post-feminism.

Technologies of Sexiness (Evans and Riley, 2014) explores the cumulative impact of the consumerism, post-feminism and neoliberalism that characterize cultural change in the past 30 years, making a case for how this unique set of circumstances has given rise to new subjectivities relating to sexuality. Reviewing the sex wars of

the 1980's,[14] the authors outline how recent debates around 'sexualisation' have resulted in stagnation. They highlight the general 'noise' of the debate and the difficulty of contributing without being inadvertently sucked into the established patterns of emotive positioning, a 'moral feedback loop' focusing most frequently on 'the vulnerable young woman'. Their analysis identifies an under developed notion of 'agency' as a central reason for the tensions evident within academic work. The parallel with this thesis should be clear; drinking is a consumption behaviour embedded within social discourses in which a gendered moral panic operates. Furthermore, given its interest in the socially patterned yet subjective dimension of pleasure, attention to the wider social discourses of contemporary culture, such as the technologies of sexiness, frameworks is essential.

To move beyond the stagnation they identify, the authors develop and employ the technologies of sexiness framework, which sets agency within a cultural context that simultaneously enables and disables women's engagement in sexualized culture. In doing so they articulate a Foucault inspired principle of technologies/techniques. In their reading, technologies of subjectivity are those available identities modelled through cultural outputs; technologies of self are those techniques and processes through which individuals create a sense of self. This sits comfortably with understandings of gender as performative and provides the basis for the current research's exploration of gendered behaviour in a specific consumer space. What the model allows for is a recognition of agency within limitations, and of possibilities for subversion against these limitations.

Evans and Riley (2014) outline how the emergence of cultural conditions throughout the western world, shaped by neoliberalism, consumerism and post-feminist sentiment, has created a female sexual subjectivity that is pleasure-

[14] The sex wars were a period of debate between feminists focusing on sexual identity and practices. For an overview see Duggan and Hunter (2006)

seeking, knowledgeable and confident. Their primary research uses focus groups to explore how this potential subjectivity is navigated by women from two generations, whom they label pleasure pursuers (ages 25-31) and functioning feminists (ages 48-54). In linking the women's talk to the matrix of neoliberal, post-feminist, consumerist sense-making, they make a case for the impact of this socio-historical context on both the women's subjectivities and their relationships with other women.

Central to their argument is an understanding of the coalescing forces of neoliberalism, post-feminism and consumerism, which collectively shape the sense-making of the present time. Their position that these create a matrix out of which new forms of sexiness emerge and are engaged with, is substantiated with reference to the speech acts of the women, inferred through talk around issues such as visiting a sex shop with a gift card to make purchases and watching pornography. While women can resist aspects of this matrix of sense-making they cannot seem to step outside of it; technologies of sexiness becomes something of a grand narrative in which all behaviour can be understood with reference to its features. At best, the women have some power to sustain and/or undermine these logics but they cannot act outside it; it is truly hegemonic.

In this sense the authors fall prey to the cultural determinism that they resist earlier in the book; the women are presented as exercising choice between a number of limited options. Even then, the authors are guilty of occasionally attributing false consciousness to the participants, for example when discussing beauty work which they claim women 'reconstituted as pleasurable', as though it is not pleasurable in a straightforward way, but must be *re*constituted as such.

This concern about the supposed hegemony of neoliberalism is discussed by Barnett et al. (2008). They note as problematic the end point of the logic much writing on subjectivities employs, which couples Gramscian state theory and governmentality so that 'everyday life is the result of residual effects of initiatives emanating from dispraised but coherent concentrations of authority' (Barnett et al.,

2008: 628) The social becomes thoroughly reactive in such a reading, in that all social action is understood as a reaction to top-down forms of governance, such as social policy. Furthermore, the authors suggest that the idea political rationalities and subjectivities can be effectively brought into alignment through governmentality 'betrays a careless nominalism of the self' (Barnett et al., 2008: 644). That is, they call into question the understanding of selfhood that is presented as open to 'neoliberalisation'. Instead, the authors argue for a more modest influence to be ascribed to the process of top-down subject formation, and rather, for focus to move to how people are always 'socially constructing' subjectivities, which emerge through ongoing joint action. This is a starting point for the current research which attempts to map young women's experience firstly in their own terms and then with reference to prominent culture discourses.

Evans and Riley (2014) make clear that they adopt an approach in debt to Althussian ideas of subjectivity, centring on interpellation. As such their research is built upon the premise that subjects are 'hailed' into being by the cultural institutions with which they interact. This perspective is common in feminist approaches to women's drinking and is particularly evident in Bailey et al. (2015) who discuss young women's negotiation of femininity and drinking culture. Though they at no point make explicit their commitment to this understanding of subject formation, the consistent use of the phrase 'called on' implies that the authors ascribe considerable importance to an abstracted 'culture' in the experience of their participants. For example, the young women are described as being 'called on' to 'craft consumer identities' (Bailey et al., 2015: 4), 'operate as pleasure-seeking subjects' (Bailey et al., 2015: 17), and 'occupy positions of excess' (Bailey et al., 2015: 18), yet the authors provide no clear explication of who or what does this 'calling', nor what the possibilities are for women's recognition and responses to it.

By contrast, Evans and Riley are explicit in their approach and a discourse analysis of various media is therefore central to their argument that neoliberal, post-feminist and consumerist ideologies characterise the current cultural climate.

However as they note, top-down models of media influence are outdated; more than ever young adults are acting as contributors to the cultures they participate in and the duration and direction of these cultures (and their sense-making) is difficult to predict. Furthermore, an analysis focussing on widespread and visible cultural outputs can neglect other sources of influence in terms of women's identity and subjectivity, such as the more immediate material conditions of their lives. While taking seriously the importance of post-feminism, consumerism and neoliberalism in contemporary culture, the current project aims to disrupt the supposed hegemony of this matrix of ideologies, by exploring women's experience in their own terms and building from this, understandings of their cultural world and their place in it.

Conclusions

This chapter has reviewed various approaches to the focus of the current study- young women's pleasure in alcohol use and engagement in the NTE. Taking each in turn it has explored the key themes of research on young adult drinking, gender and alcohol, the NTE, and pleasure, before drawing together common threads in terms of theoretical grounding and critique. Throughout it has identified gaps and shortcomings in existing research to which this thesis will respond. The first section outlined the wider social context of alcohol research, including how government action in this area is framed by broader commitments to neoliberal ideologies, and showed how as a result, the discourse surrounding young adult alcohol use foregrounds risk and responsibility. Research was then reviewed to demonstrate the heterogeneity of 'young adult drinking' along gender lines, identifying drinking context as a potent site of gender expression. The multiple and complex ways in which the NTE and its management are implicated in the emergence of specific subjectivities were subsequently discussed. Pleasure was identified to be lacking in each of the research areas reviewed and the relevance of its inclusion in research of this kind was then presented. Finally, important features of existing research as it relates to subjectivities were discussed and their relation to this project highlighted.

The meeting point of gendered subjectivities, pleasure and the NTE has thus emerged as an area of importance for understanding the relationship between the socio-political context and the personal realities of young adult leisure practices, and the current research addresses this directly. In drawing into focus the subjective dimensions of the NTE and exploring how gender, pleasure and their collective regulation are related, this study can complement the existing risk and responsibility focused writing on young adult alcohol use. The next chapter sets out the methods and methodology adopted for the study.

Chapter Three

Methodology

This chapter covers all aspects of the project's methodology. It begins with a review of the aims of the project and describes the research design intended to meet those aims. Next, it covers in detail the approach to fieldwork in terms of the theoretical and epistemological frameworks employed. It then outlines the process of research as it was conducted, highlighting its grounding in methodological considerations from the relevant literature. Finally, reflections on the process and limitations of the research are provided. Though attention is paid to my positionality and reflexive practice in the section 'Reflections on the research process', throughout the chapter reference will be made to the multiple contingencies of conducting qualitative research of this kind, in particular the rationale for decisions taken during this research process.

Research aims

The aim of this thesis is to establish a more nuanced understanding of the pleasure young adult women derive from nights out and the relationship this pleasure has to both gender and the regulation of the NTE. In doing so it can contribute to the existing literature on young adult alcohol use, gender and alcohol, and the NTE. The research design is underpinned by the following objectives:

1. To develop understandings of the role of pleasure in young women's participation in the NTE

2. To analyse accounts of pleasure in relation to gender norms and practices
3. To examine how different forms of regulation of the NTE are implicated in experiences of gender and pleasure

The study was designed to explore how young women understand a particular dimension of their social world, with reference to both their gendered subjectivity and the social and economic context within which their pleasure-seeking operates. In its interest in exploring the lived, embodied perspectives of its participants, the research is clearly located in a qualitative, interpretative tradition. Participant understandings of the NTE and their experiences in it were captured through hybrid 'focus group interviews' (Palmer et al., 2010).[15] Their accounts are taken to both reflect and construct their 'lifeworld'[16] in relation to this social context. How they make sense of their experience is of particular interest and for this reason, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was chosen as an appropriate fieldwork approach to guide my research and analysis.

Study design overview

The study was an in-depth qualitative project using young women's accounts of their experiences in the NTE of a city in the North East of England. Focus group interviews were designed to both map the drinking culture young women encountered in this NTE and to explore how they made sense of their experiences there.

[15] They are considered hybrid in the sense that they attempt to capture the multiple perspectives gained through focus groups, alongside more personal accounts associated with interviews.

[16] Lifeworld is use to emphasise the lived condition of people's reality, reflecting their subjective construction of the world they experience. It derives from phenomenology and is particularly associated with Husserl (1970).

Focus group interviews of between three and five participants were chosen as a data collection method to help capture a shared and normative understanding of going out culture. This shared environment was decided on in the hope participants would contextualise, challenge and develop points made by other members. Furthermore, as the groups were comprised of pre-existing peer groups there was the added benefit of witnessing something of their social dynamics as they relate to nights out. Unlike focus groups designed to capture a breadth of perspectives on a given phenomenon, or interviews focused exclusively on idiographic accounts, focus group interviews can capture rich data while considering the social context in which said data was shared. In discussing the suitably of focus group interviews for IPA studies, Palmer et al. (2010) argue such an environment allows participants to co-constitute narratives and provide multi-perspective accounts. Given that the subject of interest is both a shared cultural context (the NTE) and subjective responses to it, this is a method well suited to the study.

Focus group interview audio files were transcribed and analysed while data collection was ongoing. Focused on accounts of the NTE and participant experiences there, an initial analysis was carried out to identify key themes and 'objects of interest' for the participants- what they chose to talk about. A cross-case analysis was then conducted to allow for points of similarity and difference to emerge between and across focus group interviews. Further analysis was conducted to help identify more clearly how participants made sense of the experiential claims highlighted in the focus group interviews.

Approach to fieldwork

As noted, the research is located in a qualitative, interpretative tradition and this perspective has shaped both the research questions and the study design. In terms of a specific theoretical and epistemological orientation, a number of intersecting paradigms are of interest and these are discussed in this section. The work is heavily influenced by interpretative phenomenological analysis providing as it does

both a comprehensive perspective and associated methodology and this is discussed in detail; the importance of pragmatism and feminism are also noted.

Epistemological position

This study adopts a functional view of knowledge drawn from a pragmatist ontology (Frankel Pratt, 2016). Pragmatism is associated closely with a number of American intellectuals who began to develop its central tenets from the end of the 19th century. Though there is diversity within their writings, pragmatists share a number of overlapping perspectives that characterise their work and of particular relevance is their relational understanding of knowledge, reality and truth. A pragmatist epistemology is one that allows enquiry to develop without committing to a strict realist or relativist ontology; knowledge is understood to reveal reality by acting on it (Bem and De Jong, 2013). Knowledge is, therefore, a product of an interaction between the subject and 'the world out there', a coping with the world. What allows us to cope (i.e. what 'works'), is said to be true, but not in the absolute sense as all truth is subject to revision. Pragmatism's commitment to the contingent nature of truth is reflected in the formulation of abductive reasoning, attributed largely to one of pragmatism's founders, Pierce. In abductive reasoning or 'inference to the best explanation', what we already know serves to orientate us to phenomena we seek to explain and explanatory considerations are taken into account. Explanations can be true in the sense they are in accordance with what we know, adequately explain the phenomena and allow us to act, but they are always subject to revision given new information; a recognition that we are employing abductive reasoning thus ensures our commitment to the contingencies of our explanations and our claims to 'truth'.

In terms of what this means for the individual, John Dewey's writings on pragmatism are particularly influential (Dewey, 1929; Dewey, 1998). Foregrounding the problem-solving tendencies of human social engagement, mind and the world are said to be co-constituting: our understandings predispose us to certain actions and the results of action tell us something about the world. In terms of its impact

on this thesis, the commitment to the co-constituting nature of individual perspectives and 'the world out there' allows for an appreciation (and consideration) of the 'situatedness of knowledge' (Rose, 1997), both for research participants and researcher. This 'situatedness' has been a key theme in feminist writing in the qualitative tradition (as discussed below) and is an intersection between pragmatist and feminist approaches to knowledge and research (Rorty, 1990). In its interest in the lived experience, pragmatism can also be understood as compatible with phenomenological approaches to research- those that emphasise the subjective dimension of human experience.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis

The methods employed in this research are strongly informed by IPA, a qualitative approach characterised by an interest in how people make sense of their experience. Its use was developed initially in health psychology to explore the subjective side of illness missing in quantitative work, for example, how pain is experienced and understood from the perspective of those who feel it. Following research in this area, highlighting previously neglected aspects of psychology, IPA has now been employed in several studies across the social sciences.

IPA has been extensively described in writing that has provided details of its theoretical orientation as well as procedural guidelines (Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2009; Smith et al., 1997; Smith and Osborn, 2004; Smith and Osborn, 2008). In terms of conceptual underpinnings, IPA is inspired primarily by phenomenologists of the 20th century, such as Husserl, interested in the structure and contents of subjective experience. It borrows from this tradition an understanding of experience as a system of interrelated meanings, forming a gestalt or lifeworld. This is the totality of a subject's reality, reflecting and supporting shared cultural meanings. Attempting to get as close to participant lifeworlds as is possible, IPA is also strongly influenced by Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology, recognising there is no uninterpreted phenomenon, no pure experience to be described neutrally. Attention is therefore focused on the interpretation of experiences, or

the ‘sense-making'. In this way, IPA employs a ‘double hermeneutic' in that the researcher is attempting to make sense of the participant making sense (Smith et al., 2009).

Hermeneutics also informs IPA's approach to analysing texts through its adoption of the ‘hermeneutic circle'. This approach posits that parts must be understood with reference to the whole, and an understanding of the whole is built through understanding the parts. In practical terms and regarding the analysis conducted for this research, transcripts are approached with this understanding in mind, with the whole of the focus group interview providing a context for each speech act. Individual focus groups are then considered as part of the whole - the body of transcripts which comprise my data overall. Research in the IPA approach is understood to be a dynamic process with research contexts and researcher perspectives invariably shaping the resulting analysis. The researcher is thus required to undergo attempts at ‘bracketing’, a process of reflection focussing upon one’s knowledge and position. This commitment to interrogating one’s starting point in terms of the research, bracketing that which is outside of the data to be examined, is a vital part of working with IPA. Though it will never be absolute, a recognition that the researcher brings interpretative frameworks (‘fore-structures’) to the process is necessary. Details of my own attempts at bracketing during this research are provided below.

Given its burgeoning popularity as a method, IPA has been employed in a variety of contexts since its early use and new applications of IPA continue to shape its place in the qualitative toolbox. In terms of what makes an analysis IPA, there have been various attempts to outline its features while maintaining a commitment to its flexible application. Smith et al. (2009) identify several common processes and principles in IPA research. These are moving from the descriptive to the interpretative, a commitment to participants’ points of view, and a focus on meaning-making in context. Ultimately, they suggest that what makes research IPA is simply that the interest remains with how the individual comes to make sense of

their lifeworld with clear links to the words of the participant- extensive use of quotations is typical of IPA.

Smith (2004) writes elsewhere that IPA's key characteristics are that it is idiographic in its approach, inductive in its reasoning and interrogative in terms of the existing research in a given area of academic interest. In terms of this final characteristic, it is particularly well suited to my research, which approaches young women's drinking from a novel perspective – the experience of pleasure. Specifically, in the previous chapter, reference was made to the dominant discourse of risk, particularly as it relates to responsibilisation and 'irrational consumer' understandings of excessive drinking. Through returning to much more fundamental questions of how young adults experience the NTE, and approaching this from a phenomenological perspective, the research can interrogate the current sense-making.

The specifics of my use of IPA for this study are described below in greater detail but a general overview can also be useful at this point. Like most qualitative research IPA is inductive and iterative with a number of processes employed during analysis. Palmer et al. (2010) note four clusters of activity in this analytical process beginning with reflections on researcher position and perspectives (bracketing). This moves on to a line by line analysis of the transcript focusing on experiential claims and concerns. Attention is also paid at this time to language use, particularly the use of metaphors and idioms. Emergent themes are then identified. The fourth process is more nebulous and is described as 'a dialogue between the researcher and the data' (Palmer et al., 2010: 103) regarding what it might mean for participants to have made these claims in this context. This is the point at which the account becomes genuinely interpretative. This is not a linear process but rather an ongoing and flexible approach to working with the data. Bearing in mind these clusters was a useful way to orientate myself and remember the big picture during the long and winding process of analysis, which is outlined in more detail later in this chapter.

Sample size and saturation

Given IPA's strong idiographic focus, saturation is not emphasised in terms of data collection. Rather, small sample sizes drawing on a relatively homogenous sample are considered best suited to the method (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014; Smith and Osborn, 2008: 56). In terms of homogeneity, the reasoning is that by ensuring similarity across particular dimensions (in this case participants were a similar age and all enjoyed participating in Newcastle's NTE) in-depth analysis can tune into the variability within the group, highlighting genuinely idiographic elements (Smith and Osborn, 2004: 50). This was certainly the case with my own participants; given the narrow scope of the focus group interviews, saturation would have been achieved on a thematic level very quickly. Smith also notes that from the phenomenological tradition, particularly Husserl's work on essences, IPA carries the assumption that to get close to the individual is to reveal the universal or aspects of 'our shared humanity' (Smith, 2004: 43). If there is always a trade-off between depth and breadth in research, IPA's commitment is to the former and Smith (1997) has even advocated a sample size of one, to those brave enough to attempt it. For this study, which used focus group interviews, seven focus groups were conducted.

Quality in qualitative research

There has been some debate regarding how quality can be assessed in qualitative work, given its epistemological distance from the quantitative tradition. In terms of ensuring rigour in my own research Morse et al. (2002) has proven particularly useful. These researchers discuss the move away from the constructs 'validity' and 'reliability' in qualitative research in the 1980's, as researchers attempted to articulate the value of qualitative research in its own terms, free from the positivist vocabulary inherited from quantitative work. While agreeing that a recognition of qualitative research's unique processes and contribution is necessary, they argue

that an emphasis on 'trustworthiness' (as described by Guba and Lincoln, (1980)[17]) has actually undermined the perceived value of qualitative work. Specifically, Morse et al. (2002) suggest that this focus has led to an emphasis on post hoc evaluation of qualitative research (encompassing its significance, value and utility) and that the rigour born of iterative, responsive research is not captured in such measures. Finally, they make a case for maintaining a commitment to verification and in doing so they outline a number of strategies to support verification throughout the iterative process of qualitative research. Investigating, checking, questioning and theorising are at the heart of the qualitative research process and verification at each stage ensures validity; validity ensures rigour. Running alongside verification is a wider notion of 'researcher responsiveness' as essential for ensuring rigour; this refers broadly to the openness, sensitivity, creativity and insight a researcher cultivates, as well as a willingness to relinquish ideas which are poorly supported. Though this is difficult to measure, I link this sensibility to the processes of reflection and bracketing and I demonstrate my own commitment to these later in this chapter. Before that, in the following section, I outline the geographic context in which the research was conducted.

Geographical and cultural context

As noted previously, there is significant regional variation in drinking behaviour in the UK. The most recent HSCIC report (2015) shows that those in the North East region were the most likely to have ever drunk alcohol and the most likely to have drunk in the last week. Additionally, NHS data shows that the number of alcohol-specific hospital stays for those under 18 in the North East is the highest in England (Public Health England, 2016). These regional rates of drinking are likely related to specific drinking practices and cultures. It is for this reason the current project takes

[17] In developing a criteria for evaluating qualitative work, Guba and Lincoln (1980) outline four components of 'trustworthiness': credibility; transferability; dependability; confirmability.

a single geographical and cultural context, a city in the North East of England, as its focus. In doing so, it aims to produce an in-depth and detailed study of young women's alcohol use.

This research takes Newcastle upon Tyne as a case study for exploring young adult women's engagement with the NTE. Newcastle's history of heavy industry, predominantly mining and shipbuilding, are bound up both with class and gender in important ways and this is reflected in the history of leisure in the city. While understandings of class and gender have changed, drinking and drinking culture remain virtually synonymous with the city and for this reason it has been at the centre of numerous studies of the NTE. Supporting the city's reputation as a party town is the MTV show Geordie Shore, currently in its 20th series, which shines a light on the excesses of a selection of the city's young inhabitants nationally and internationally. Furthermore, Newcastle has a large student population (around 50,000 between the two Universities) and this is an important factor in understanding its NTE.

Newcastle provides an ideal location for this study in that it is an example of the (neoliberal) attempt to restructure the NTE into a youthful, 'urban playscape' (Chatterton & Hollands, 2002) with the NTE contributing hugely to the city's success since the demise of its traditional industries, coal and shipbuilding (Byrnes et al., 2001). While Newcastle has undoubtedly become more cosmopolitan in recent years, its NTE has also been described as a 'divided city' segregated along socio-economic lines ('charvers', students, white-collar workers) (Byrnes et al., 2001) and as health statistics demonstrate, the invigoration of the NTE has not been without social costs (Health and Social Care Information Centre, 2015; Public Health England, 2014a; Public Health England, 2014b; Public Health England, 2014c; Public Health England, 2016a).

Previous studies of Newcastle's nightlife have foregrounded a range of issues, reflecting the diversity of NTE research overall. Early accounts such as Chatterton and Hollands (2002; 2003) tracked the material and social changes in the city

following deindustrialisation and they explore in detail the first wave of investment in the NTE (as outlined in Chapter Two). Adopting a political economy perspective the authors' focus was largely, though not exclusively, on the production of nightlife and they extensively critiqued the homogenising influence of policies which, among other things, enabled corporate ownership at the expense of local and independent ownership. Supporting this perspective is research by Byrnes et al., (2001) which focuses on the effects of these changes at the level of consumption. Their research argues that the social divisions in the NTE were, in important ways, bound up with a market segmentation inevitable within the economic logic at play, evident in both in local and national government policy.

Moving beyond a focus on production, other studies have explored social and cultural aspects of Newcastle's drinking culture. Nayak's (2003) study presents insights relating to alcohol and gender and he argues that drinking maintains its historical value as a social context in which classed masculinities play out. The Geordie identity is central to his analysis which links changing understandings and experiences of class to bodily enactments of masculinity through alcohol use. The importance of place, both in terms of the regional identity his participants assume and in terms of the public nature of nights out, is emphasised in Nayak's work. This geographic specificity (along with its focus on age and gender) is an important consideration for the current research which attempts to remedy the relative silence in research on local (i.e. subnational) drinking cultures, identified by Savic et al. (2016). In later work, Nayak (2006) has enriched his analysis with reference to youth transitions, arguing that in light of changes to the labour market, consumption practices, including drinking, become a salient point for the display of (hyper-)masculinity for working class men.

Though the emphasis on deinstrustialisation centred men's changing social experience, more recently, research on women's drinking experience in Newcastle has been conducted. A notable example of this is Nicholl's (2016) study which explores women's negotiation of femininity during nights out in the city. However,

while this research provides a welcome articulation of young women's experience, the simplistic, a-prioi categorisations of working class (as Geordie) and middle class (as non-local students) employed in the analysis fails to capture the complexity of current identifications and the changes in student identity discussed in more detail below.

Newcastle's natives ('Geordies') are not unaware of its long standing reputation as a city with an active nightlife. The city's association with heavy drinking and the pleasures to be had in Newcastle's NTE are frequently promoted by city officials and businesses in attempts to attract tourists (and students) to the city. Rather than relying on one-dimensional depictions of the pleasure of going out in the NTE, the current research develops a much more nuanced understanding of what that pleasure consists of as well as of its relationship to both gender and the wider social discourses around young adult drinking.

It is undeniable that the Geordie identity and the city itself are bound up with alcohol use and that the historical association of its NTE with white, working class masculine drinking cultures continues. However, there have been myriad changes in the economic, social and political landscape in the decades since Newcastle first caught researchers' attention as an fruitful site for exploring the effects of deindustrialisation, in terms of changing nightscapes and urban cultures, not least the place of women's drinking discussed in the previous chapter.

One such change impacting Newcastle (though reflecting a national trend) is the increase in its student population. Chatterton's (1998) analysis of the impact of high student numbers in 'UniverCities' links market segmentation to social divisions in the NTE, however as Latham (2003) has argued in relation to gentrification in the NTE, top down market segmentation is not always successful in creating discrete populations; new hybrid cultures can be expected and this is something the present research can explore. Furthermore, the population of students in Newcastle has increased in tandem with changes to the demographics of the UK's student population overall. Based on current participation rates 50% of young people (and

56% of young women) are expected to participate in HE by age 30 (ONS, 2019). In an era of 'massification and democratisation' of HE (Reay, 2016) the traditional student stereotype (adolescent and middle- / upper-class) has given way to a much more diverse and heterogenous groupings and indeed, hybridities (Reay, 2009; Crozier, 2019). While social class continues to shape student experience (Reay, 2016), the lines between local and student (as discussed by Holt and Griffin, 2005) are far less clear than has been the case historically. With many more young people attending university, from the region and beyond it, the impact of the student population on Newcastle and its nightlife is more complex than can be accounted by political economy perspectives and class considerations alone, which have dominated the research field to date.

In building upon the existing research while recognising the significant changes in the city and in the UK's drinking cultures in recent years, the current study aims to explore young adult cultures from the bottom up, through discussion of the city, its student scene and young women's experiences in it. In doing so it can acknowledge the legacy of Newcastle's industrial past, and the class and gender relations which have shaped aspects of its culture, without assuming these shape contemporary young adult experiences in a deterministic way.

Fieldwork

IPA typically employs in-depth individual interviews to generate participants' accounts of the given area of interest. However, as this research was interested in exploring both the norms of the NTE and individual understandings of experiences there, a hybrid focus group interview was decided upon. Participation in the NTE is an extremely social and shared activity and it follows that discussion of it would benefit from a shared environment. This proved to be the case, and stories of the same night out often came from multiple participants, providing rich multi-perspectival accounts of experience well suited to IPA.

The apparent tension of using focus groups to capture idiographic accounts is considered by Palmer et al. (2010) who reconcile the two with reference to a focus group specific IPA procedure. In their paper, which details the use of focus groups to explore experiences of mental health services, they outline an eight-step process which takes account of experiential claims as well as the context of those claims i.e. the focus group. These seven steps are the result of problem-solving during the analysis, amending the four processes described above. My own version of this protocol, adapted to my research interest, is shown in Table 1.

Summary of protocol

1. **Open Coding**
    a. Conduct a line by line analysis of transcript summarising content of each line/passage with one word or short phrase ('code')
2. **Looking for themes**
    a. Identify experiential claims and rich passages of text relating to codes
    b. Explore these claims noting emergent themes
3. **Contextualise claims: explore 'positioning'**
    a. Explore the function of statements made by respondents. (What do their statements *do*?)
    b. Where is there consensus and/or disagreement?
4. **Contextualise claims: focus on roles & relationships**
    a. Examine references to other people: What roles and relationships are described? What meanings and expectations are attributed to these?
    b. What are understood to be the consequences of these?
5. **Language**

Throughout stages 1–4, monitor language use, paying particular attention to use of metaphor, euphemism, idiom, etc. Consider:

a. *Patterns*
Repetition, jargon, stand-out words and phrases, turn-taking, prompting – are these identified in individuals or the whole group?
b. *Context*
Impact on language used; descriptions of feelings/emotive language; jargon and explanation of technical terms; impact of facilitator.
c. *Function*
How/why is certain language being used? (e.g. to emphasise/back-up a point, to shock, to provoke dis/agreement, to amuse/lighten the tone?)

6. **Adaptation of Emergent Themes**

Return to the emergent themes from step 2b. Adapt them according to the work done subsequently. Answering the following questions will help:

a. What experiences are being shared?
b. What are individuals doing by sharing their experiences?
c. How are they making those things meaningful to one another?
d. What are they doing as a group?
e. What are the consensus issues?
f. Where is there conflict? How is this being managed/resolved?

7. **Integration of Multiple Cases**

To draw the analysis to completion:

a. Pick out commonalities and stand-out differences between groups drawing out superordinate themes.
b. Frequently revisit the transcripts to check themes in relation to original claims made to help ensure accuracy.
c. Consider the analysis in the wider context of existing relevant theories, models and explanations

Table 1. Analysis protocol (Amended from Palmer et al., 2010)

Participants and recruitment

The group interview recruitment strategy was driven by purposive sampling considerations; Newcastle's NTE is the focus of this research and participants were selected for their knowledge of, and participation in, its drinking culture. In order to ensure the sample was in some sense representative of normative drinking practices, inclusion criteria were limited. In keeping with the ONS 'young adult' category, participants were aged between 16 and 24 years old; the only other requirement was that they had been on 'a night out' in the city's NTE. From a practical perspective, however, there was an additional consideration, namely how to reach young adults who use the NTE. Given the large percentage of young adults now in FE (compulsory until age 18) and HE (Office for National Statistics, 2019), educational institutions came into focus as a way of making the first contact with the age group of interest. Recruitment, therefore, took place on two educational sites in the North East region: a secondary school with a large 6th form (to recruit those aged 16-19) and a university. Requests for participation were made initially to gatekeepers in each of these sites. At the secondary school the leadership team and Head of 6th form were contacted first by letter and then by email, at the university, undergraduate programme leaders and tutors of courses in a chosen faculty were approached with the assistance of the research supervisor.

Following gatekeeper approval, both cohorts (6th formers and undergraduates) were addressed in a school/college assembly and at the beginning of lectures/seminars respectively. Students were provided with a description of the research and what being in a group interview entailed; signup sheets were then circulated and those who expressed an interest were contacted via email to arrange a group interview at their convenience. Information sheets (Appendix A) and consent forms were emailed prior to the focus group interviews and were also available at the focus group sessions.

This method of recruitment was effective for recruiting 33 participants for nine focus group interviews. Of these, two all-male focus groups (six participants) were

ultimately excluded from the analysis. This was due to a lack of parity between genders, necessary for the kind of comparative analysis initially considered. Furthermore, as the research evolved a more homogenous sample was desired and additional recruitment in high school was therefore not pursued.

The resulting sample consisted of 27 female undergraduate students interviewed across seven focus groups. These students represented a mix of student types, including those from the region living at home, those from the region living in student accommodation and those who had moved to the city. Given this diversity and the growth in student numbers, as 'students' they therefore represent a much broader categorisation of participants than might have been the case historically, when student populations comprised predominantly middle and upper-middle class, private school-educated, white people at university away from home. It is also important to note here that while this study details the experience of young women students specifically, the social lines between student and non-student are not clear cut; students and non-students do not exist in mutually exclusive social worlds and many participants discussed going out drinking with non-student friends from school, home and work. The student identity is however central to many aspects of these young women's accounts of night outs and while aspects of this study can inform better understandings of young adult drinking culture in general, the findings of this study are specific to young women students.

Though demographic data was not collected from participants, biographical information inevitably accompanied, and contributed to, the richness of these young women's stories and as such, where it is relevant to the analysis, this is noted alongside discussion of their comments. Given the fact ethnicity is known to impact drinking cultures (Bhopal et al., 2004; Hurcombe et al., 2010; Nayak, 2003, 2009), it is important to note that all participants were white British. A table showing the participants in each focus group can be found in Table 2, below.

Focus Group 1	Tina Amy Andrea
Focus Group 2	Lindsey Amelia Marion Ellie Maggie
Focus Group 3	Nia Lisa Berny Val
Focus Group 4	Josie Alli Eleanor Lauren
Focus Group 5	Carey Georgia Tanya Laurie
Focus Group 6	Jamie Maddie Gemma Lucy
Focus Group 7	Anna Claire Pam

Table 2: Focus group groupings

Aside from the ONS categorisation, there was another rationale for targeting 16-24 year olds in education. Though Newcastle's NTE is diverse in some ways, a large number of bars and clubs target this age range, with drink promotions and advertised 'student nights' mid-week. Predominantly aimed at undergraduates, this mainstream scene is youth oriented and provides the context for young adult initiation into the NTE. As new entrants into the NTE, the research participants were likely to have a less than comprehensive knowledge of the city's NTE. Many in this age group are still finding their feet in terms of what they like and dislike, and they are still discovering the kinds of spaces in which they want to spend their time and money. Their perspective as new entrants is then particularly interesting as

they learn to take pleasure in their NTE experiences, framed by what they feel is available to them. Their perspectives furthermore represent a mainstream understanding of the NTE as few in this age range have long-established habits of drinking in the NTE nor are they embedded in niche sub- or counter-cultural scenes. The relative novelty of their experience in the NTE further supported the use of IPA as participants were still in the process of making sense of their experiences in that context.

Data collection

Data collection began in spring 2017 and ran for 18 months. Focus group interviews were conducted in private rooms at the educational institution from which participants were drawn and lasted around an hour (+/-10 minutes).

Focus group interviews were formed by self-selecting peer groups, except for one participant who offered to join a group interview consisting of their course mates with whom they were familiar but not particularly close. Water, juice and snacks were provided and this assisted in setting a friendly, casual atmosphere. I had met most of the interviewees prior to the meeting (and had been a seminar leader for a number of them in the previous semester) but introduced myself and gave an overview of the project before we began. An outline of the group interview process was then given in which I explained my role, that what they said was confidential and that they could disagree or give alternative perspectives to their friends. Finally, the signing of consent forms was followed by an opportunity for participants to ask any questions. The semi-structured focus group interview proper then commenced, following a question schedule designed to cover the areas of interest (shown in Appendix B). This comprised of six questions in total intended to cover the various areas of research my thesis hopes to enhance. As well as these questions, I followed up certain participant comments asking for clarification or for further information. The tone was very informal and light-hearted with laughter (mine included) common in each session.

As the research was exploratory, rather than deductive, the focus group interview questions were intentionally broad and open-ended. The question schedule was not amended between focus group interviews to ensure all participants were exposed to the same questions, rather than being asked to respond to more specific questions that emerged from previous participant responses. However, where participants failed to mention issues that seemed central to other focus group interviews, additional prompts were given as part of an ongoing commitment to verification and researcher responsiveness (Morse et al., 2002).

Due to the high energy and engaging nature of the focus group interviews, I chose not to take notes and instead to give the participants and their stories my full attention. However, immediately following each group interview I wrote a memo which included reflective notes on how I felt it had gone, along with any ideas, thoughts or feelings I had regarding the session. When the focus group interview data/transcripts were moved to NVIVO for analysis these memos were transferred to that software, for ease of access.

Transcription

Each group interview was transcribed using SoundScriber and Microsoft Word software. Three of the first transcripts were also initially transcribed using Google Voice speech to text software; I would listen to the transcript and verbalise what I heard into a microphone. This would generate a transcript that I could edit in real time. An editing process in which I listened again and made corrections where necessary was then completed using SoundScriber. As I became more proficient at using SoundScriber, it was quicker to exclude this initial stage.

Using the conventions of IPA as outlined by Smith and Osborn (2008) audio files were transcribed at the 'semantic level'- all words spoken, laughter, long silences and false starts and anything else deemed significant were recorded. Of course, this is not a neutral process and I made decisions about what constituted significant aspects of the group, worthy of note. I did so with reference to the context of the

focus group interview overall as well as an understanding of the topics being discussed. For example, I considered meaningful everyone talking at once, which was common in certain groups and made note of this in the transcript. Participants quoting each other or quoting themselves was common and this was indicated in the transcript with quotation marks. Where ends of clauses were not obvious, grammar in the form of full stops were not included, to capture a sense of the fluidity of participant expression.

The tempo of the groups, the regional accents and vocabulary, and the tendency of certain groups to (joyfully and excitedly) talk simultaneously made transcription a difficult and time-consuming process. Each audio file was listened to multiple times to ensure accurate transcription. At the end of the transcription process for each focus group, the names of all participants (as well as friends they discussed) were changed. Names and corresponding pseudonyms were saved in a password protected file on the university network. Alternative names for any bars, clubs and venues mentioned were also generated and these alternative names were used within and between focus group transcripts.

Coding for content and identifying themes

A 'zig-zag' (Rivas, 2018) approach to data collection and analysis was adopted with transcription and early analysis beginning before all data had been collected. This was for a number of reasons including the fact there were large gaps between data collection opportunities. It also ensured a longer period of analysis overall and a greater familiarity with and sensitivity to the texts. Completing transcripts individually and analysing them in isolation also aligned with IPA's commitment to idiographic accounts.

When complete each transcript was imported to NVIVO to be analysed. My initial analysis was completed in NVIVO for the various benefits it affords (Basit, 2003), including speed and being able to view all material coded in the same way simultaneously, which was helpful when integrating multiple cases. Changing code

titles and un-coding pieces of texts with ease are also possible using the software and this allowed for an ongoing, iterative and cyclical process of engaging with the text and codes. Throughout this process, memos were generated in NVIVO where I made note of any thoughts that might prove useful, particularly potential connections with readings and theories I had encountered during the research. These were noted partly to ensure their inclusion in my regular 'bracketing' reflection activities.

In line with many qualitative research methodologies, writing on IPA does not provide a prescriptive nor definitive account of how to analyse the dataset but rather denotes an analytic focus. Despite this, a number of texts were instructive when developing my analysis strategy which largely followed the principles of IPA discussed in detail by Smith et al. (2009). At its most simple expression, IPA like all qualitative analysis, requires multiple readings of the text, an initial noting process (referred to here as coding), development of emergent themes and making connections across these themes (Smith et al., 2009). With interviews and a small sample size (both typical of IPA research to date), it is at this point that the research moves onto the next case/text. However, where there are larger sample sizes Smith and Osborn (2004) suggest connections across themes are made at the group level. In terms of identifying code and themes, my approach was largely informed by Palmer et al. (2010) who provide a protocol for approaching data which takes account of both the experiential claims of participants and interactional elements of the focus group interview. Adapting their protocol to my own research, each transcript was read a number of times and approached in multiple ways. This process is summarised in Table 1.

Analysis began with a process of open coding on my first group interview transcript, where a single word or short phrase could summarise the content of the line or passage. This process was 'open' in that I did not identify codes in advance of analysis but rather attempted to capture the content of the transcript in its own terms. This resulted in codes that were largely descriptive, using participants' own

vocabulary where possible. Following Charmaz (2014) gerunds were preferred, (e.g. early codes included 'getting ready' and 'pulling') to avoid unintentional attribution of behaviour to participants (i.e. sometimes they were talking about trying to pull, other times about pulling culture in the NTE). Using the method identified in Palmer et al. (2010) these codes were taken as 'objects of interest' and experiential claims associated with them were highlighted for further analysis.

As a number of weeks had often passed between focus group interviews, before beginning an analysis of a newly transcribed focus group interview I reviewed the codes already generated. There is a potential tension here with the inductive approach favoured by IPA in which all texts be given an opportunity to 'speak for themselves'. However, when multiple cases are discussed it is considered appropriate to use previous themes to orientate the subsequent analysis providing there is a disciplined respect for convergences and divergences between cases (Smith, 2015: 73). Given that this study was designed to understand the cultural and social context young women encounter in the NTE as well as their personal navigation of it, I reasoned that exploring commonality across accounts was an important part of the analysis. When rich experiential accounts were addressed these were discussed in the context of their own focus group interview, maintaining a commitment to the idiographic. In line with recommendations from Smith et al. (1997), a second round of analysis was conducted on all transcripts to see whether codes that emerged in later readings were, in fact, evident in transcripts analysed earlier in the process, when I was potentially less sensitive to noting them. Though frequency is not typically of interest in qualitative work, Smith et al. (2009) do consider this necessary in IPA research dealing with multiple cases.

Overall this first phase of analysis was characterised by my attempts to ensure a 'hermeneutics of empathy' (Smith et al., 2009: 36) (contrasted by hermeneutics of suspicion detailed below). To work through texts with a hermeneutics of empathy is to attempt to construct meanings from the text itself, without (explicitly and/or intentionally) importing theoretical perspectives. This is a process requiring some

effort, as I experienced during my analysis; theoretical perspectives encountered in my literature analysis, as well as my own nascent theories about what was going on in the data, dawned on me a number of times. On such occasions memos were taken so these could be dealt with at a later time and I returned to an emphasis on understanding the participants' experiences from their own perspective and in their own terms.

Identifying superordinate themes

Open coding of all transcripts led to the generation of over a hundred codes, though the number fluctuated due to the constant moving, merging and re-naming of codes. When all transcripts had been coded in this way, codes were drawn together to form 'themes'. Abstraction and subsumption of codes and themes continued until three overarching areas of interest ('clusters') relating to the research questions were identified with each explored in detail in the subsequent analysis chapters.

Having worked with codes to establish themes and eventually analytically relevant clusters, I returned to the transcripts afresh to read them with these in mind. Though I could have worked from NVIVO's extracts for each theme, I made the decision to print off each transcript and review them 'the old fashioned way' with highlighters and annotations. The commitment to the hermeneutic circle adopted by IPA is such that multiple readings and taking each transcript as its own account are central. In reviewing excerpts in NVIVO, I felt I had lost a sense of connection to certain focus groups. I decided, therefore, to re-engage with whole transcripts, reintroducing the wider context for quotations, something excerpts did not allow. This stage also functioned as the beginning of a more in-depth analysis, moving towards more abstract insights, during which I made notes of ideas as they came up. It was at this stage the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' (Smith et al., 2009: 36) came into focus- questioning and problematizing claims made by participants. While in this sense, there was a move away from the participants' perspective, analysis remained close to the text and I did not employ an established theoretical

framework (such as psychoanalysis), to make sense of the texts I was reading. Notes were taken throughout this time to assist in the subsequent stages of analysis.

Ongoing analysis

Later analysis was less formal than what preceded it, as I pursued ideas and hunches in an iterative fashion moving between the transcripts and my writing on them. Beginning with a descriptive account of my findings, I started to write up my fieldwork, incorporating memos and notes from throughout the research process. Discussions with others and visual representations of my data were also used extensively during this stage of the research. Drawing upon insights garnered throughout these processes, new possibilities for making sense of the data emerged and these would result in my final analysis, which follows in subsequent chapters.

Reflecting on the research process

Having rejected a positivist account of knowledge production, qualitative researchers in the social sciences have long grappled with epistemological concerns relating to the 'truth' of their claims, as the debates around how to assess quality in work of this kind demonstrate (Golafshani, 2003; Seale, 1999; Seale, 2002; Tracy, 2010). The need for researchers to be 'responsive', 'reflective' and 'reflexive' is frequently noted, though what exactly this means can be unclear. Anxiety around producing work of a high standard when freed from the objectivist paradigm can be particularly acute for post-graduate students given their outsider/novice status and this is something I have experienced first-hand. In wrestling with these issues, the concepts of bracketing and positionality (both of which emphasise the need for reflection) have proven useful and the following section will detail their impact on my working practices.

Bracketing

Bracketing in IPA is the process of interrogating one's starting point in terms of the research, bracketing that which is outside of the data to be examined. It comes from an acknowledgment that there is no neutral position to be held in relation to an area of interest and that by noting our intellectual leanings we might find opportunities for more direct encounter with the data, less mediated by imported structures and frameworks. It is a process recommended early during IPA research and one that continues throughout engagement with the research materials. My own attempts at bracketing focused on several discrete areas including my biography (of which more is written below) as well as my theoretical and conceptual knowledge around the topic, resulting from the literature analysis. In practical terms my 'bracketing' took the form of writing and visualising the various assumptions I had about what might emerge from the data collection process, with reference to where those assumptions derived from. In doing so I was able to think through what I was expecting to see, and to prime myself to look for alternative meanings in the data set as it became available.

Positionality

Throughout the 1990s in the social sciences, there was a growing 'suspicion about the possibility of "objectivity" and value-free research' (England, 1994: 241) and a sensitivity to how researchers' actions, particularly in terms of fieldwork, can perpetuate inequitable social relations. This latter point was perhaps more acute for geographers given the legacy of colonialism in the discipline. Both England (1994) and Rose (1997) accounts of positionality grew from critical perspectives in Geography, informed by post-colonial and feminist critiques of knowledge production (and a tacit acceptance of Foucault's power/knowledge concept). While their insights on positionality offered a necessary corrective to a legacy within that discipline of inequitable power dynamics fostered by imperial /colonialism, their writing has had a substantial impact throughout qualitative social science. Though positionality has garnered a great deal of attention since that time, it is these earlier

formulations I find most compelling and with which I have more extensively engaged. For that reason, my discussion takes them as its focus.

Both writers presented positionality as a challenge to the epistemological assumptions governing researching though England's (1994) article is more explicit in this regard, providing a critique of neo-positivism and a justification of its demise in the social sciences. Noting the tendency of feminist academics to establish or enter into a 'researcher as supplicant' dynamic with participants, England's central concern is ensuring research is ethical. She writes of her own 'mental hand-wringing' regarding her research, fearing the possibility she is engaged in 'colonising participants in some kind of academic neo-imperialism' (England, 1994: 247). The thrust of her argument is that the researcher's biography influences research. This enables and inhibits certain research methods and insights, and 'filters the data, perceptions and interpretations of fieldwork experience' (England, 1994: 251). Echoing Spivak (1988) she concludes researchers cannot claim to speak for the groups they research but in reflecting on their position and acknowledging the partiality of their accounts we can conduct more ethical research. Positionality then is an awareness of limitations carried throughout the research process, encouraging us to look for blind spots in our questions, method and interpretations. These limitations, according to England, are linked to the biography of the researcher and their position with the matrix of social power relations.

Rose (1997) builds on the literature around positionality following England's (1994) work. Rose writes that her reflections grow out of her failure to achieve the 'transparent reflectivity' prescribed as a cure for 'the god trick'- the positivist claim that knowledge can be neutral, objective or universal. The challenge of transparent reflectivity is to recognise your position in a landscape of power made visible through reflective practice, a task predicated on notions of agency and power that are far from clear-cut. It is a challenge 'so presumptuous about the reflective, analytical power of the researcher' (Rose, 1997: 311) that Rose argues it should be considered unanswerable, labelling it a goddess-trick to match the god-trick

described above. Instead, she advocates an approach that recognises all knowledge as situated and partial and argues reflexive practice will not make it otherwise. In this sense, her article presents positionality as an epistemological orientation that recognises the limitations of research to 'know' the world. In her conclusions, Rose (1997) notes the political aims of much social research and how these can be met while acknowledging the gaps in the interpretative authority of researchers.

Given the value attached to reflection in the qualitative tradition, as a new researcher, there is a temptation to describe the ways in which I suspect my 'positionalities' have shaped the research. However, of the two prominent perspectives on positionality discussed, I am more closely aligned with Rose's (1997) contention that 'transparent reflectivity' is an impossible aim and one unnecessary when taking seriously the idea that all knowledge is situated (including the findings of the hardest of sciences). Instead, where I feel reflections are useful is in terms of how they contextualise how I have gone about my research; tracing a line between what is already known of the subject of interest and what I present in my analysis. What I can see in my data, using the methods described here, is one among many possible narratives. My analysis is an attempt to answer specific research questions, questions shaped by a review of the literature, which highlighted the dominance of some discourses at the expense of others. I am not claiming an exhaustive understanding of the pleasures of young adults' going out but rather aim to shine a light on a number of hitherto neglected facets of their social and cultural life. My skill in translating the data I have into something resembling the reality of the phenomena has less to do with an acknowledgement of my positionality and more to do with my learning through doing how to conduct good research. What follows are therefore a number of reflections on the research process focussing on my emerging identity as a researcher.

Examples of reflective practice

Following Morse et al. (2002) the following reflections are an attempt to demonstrate my researcher responsiveness, the capacity to recognise how I am

impacting the research in ways I may not have intended. While not all such recognitions require action, some do and examples of these are detailed here. Beginning with England's (1994) focus on biography I was encouraged to think through how I was positioned in regard to my research. This project is undeniably close to my heart and an academic interest in the subject matter followed a long and significant participation in the culture of interest. What quickly came to light during my writing on this was not the complexities of positionality as power relations but rather something more immediate in my work on this area- my position as an insider/outsider of the community of interest. While neither can ensure good research, and there are advantages and disadvantages to both, awareness of how such a position can impact enquiry is an obvious starting point from reflections of this kind. A sense of moving within and between insider and outsider status has been an on-going process, my understanding of which has been enriched by broader reflections on what I am doing in this research.

To begin with my 'insiderness', I am a native of Tyneside and have been drinking in its NTE since I was 15. Since that time, I have enjoyed much of what it has to offer as the city, and my tastes, have changed. I began the project with an affection for the city and its inhabitants and a sense that something important was missing from the narratives which attempt to describe them. However, in multiple ways, this sense of being an insider is complicated by other aspects of my biography. My age means that any experiences I identify in common with the participants of this research are based on memories almost two decades old. Furthermore, the educational trajectory I have followed and my success in this area, have complicated my feelings of belonging in the working-class culture that was so central to my own experiences of participating in the NTE as a young adult. Still, at various points in data collection, I felt a sense of understanding that went beyond the merely descriptive; I have experienced many of the delights the young women described and many of their accounts evoked memories of my teenage nights out and of the friendships that were integral to them.

Early in the process of data collection I became aware of the complexity of identifying with participants and I began to actively look for differences that existed between their experiences and my own, ways in which things in the NTE have changed since I was their age or how what I considered continuities could be experienced and understood differently. This expressed itself in various practical ways, for example by clarifying meanings and requesting more detailed answers in focus groups, rather than using my own intuition/pre-existing knowledge to inform fuller understandings. It was born out in the analysis partly by the method employed, which insists on 'bottom up' reading and closeness to the text. At other times during data collection, I needed to work across a sense of difference, encouraging myself to identify in order to understand participant's perspectives. For example, in one focus group, a participant talked disparagingly of young men, whom she felt she was able to manipulate into buying her drinks. For various reasons, I disliked like this attitude and part of what followed that focus group was a series of reflections on dealing with difference. It was a useful counterpoint to the experience of previous focus groups where I had, in a straightforward way, liked the participants and recognised in them something of myself or more often, friends of mine and people I used to go out with. In this instance, my dislike of the participant's perspective acted as a barrier to understanding her and her lifeworld. While I cannot claim to have bridged the gap entirely (I still dislike their opinion), cultivating a less judgmental attitude through reflective writing, and talking to others, has enabled a more in-depth analysis than would have been possible otherwise.

Running alongside this awareness of my insider/outsider status was a growing interest in the dynamic established with the participants and how it might shape the data collection encounter and subsequent analysis. Though I have not attempted to erase myself from the research process, there are certainly ways in which I have needed to resist what feels like instinctive responses to topics of interest in focus groups. For example, when sexual harassment came into focus my strong feelings on the subject, informed by experience and a long-term

engagement with feminism, surfaced quickly and managing these required consideration. Specifically, though I was tempted to challenge what I considered the casual and minimising way many serious incidents were discussed, I decided this would have constituted an unethical interjection. The participants did not agree to a lesson on feminist explanation of gender relations, which I feel my contribution would have been. This was complicated by one of the ways in which I found myself positioned in relation to participants- I had taught a number of them in the semester prior and I wanted to avoid as far as possible carrying this dynamic into the focus group, lest they censor themselves. Furthermore, I reasoned that the minimisation of such incidences could be serving a purpose, for example by allowing them to manage their own affective realities in the NTE. To undermine that would have consequences beyond the focus group, something I was keen to avoid.

In both of these examples, the primary task was to negotiate a new identity as 'researcher' and this required me to think through the kind of researcher I wanted to be. During data collection, my major insight involved listening more and talking less, something that needed active attention as in many other areas of my life (including my teaching practice) I am defined by my capacity to talk. During analysis, my reflections led me towards maintaining a commitment to the text (the transcript) and conscious attempts to generate alternative possible explanations for my analysis, as it emerged.

Limitations

Using the methods described here I have gathered and analysed data on the experiences of young women in Newcastle upon Tyne's NTE. What follows is the result of a sense-making process I have undertaken, aided by the skills developed during the study. My resulting discussions are intended to represent something of the lifeworlds of young adults in this region, drawing on but ultimately moving beyond their words to understand the connections between their social, material and cultural realties.

Limitations of any piece of research must be understood in the context of what the research is intending or claiming to do. That is, the epistemological orientation provides the criteria against which success must be judged. Throughout this chapter I have made clear that my own position is one informed by a truly qualitative approach, and is one not concerned with capturing 'maximum data of a descriptive kind' (Mason, 2011). As a result, I do not consider certain features of the research, such as the small sample size, a limitation (though I recognise it may be considered so by others). That said, there were inevitably practical difficulties I would rather have avoided, for example the recruitment of young men. While the study was initially devised as an examination of young adult drinking with both women and men, the difficulty in recruiting young men has meant that I do not have sufficient data to discuss young adults overall. Furthermore, the resulting participants discussed a predominantly student focused NTE and while there were some references to the 'gay scene', my analysis focuses on mainstream (and heteronormative) bars and clubs.

Ethics

The project was granted ethical approval from the Northumbria University ethics committee before participant recruitment. An amendment was made in June 2017 to include the use of transcription software and this was granted. However, following a trial, the software was not used for the transcription.

All focus group interviews were recorded on a Dictaphone and the recordings were uploaded to the university network immediately following the session. Recordings were then deleted from the device. Consent forms were scanned and stored in a password protected file; hard copies were kept in a locked cabinet. A file detailing participants and establishment pseudonyms was created and stored separately. All files containing participant information were stored in password-protected files on the university network.

Introduction to findings chapters

This analysis is concerned with how gender and pleasure are related to the NTE's culture and management. Emerging in my analysis and running through the following chapters is an understanding of the NTE as a social context in which gendered subjectivities are (re)produced. Taking a performative view of gender and subjectivity more generally, the NTE is also shown to be a space and time in which social norms are negotiated and reconfigured, in tandem with the performative acts young women engage in. Each chapter explores this by employing a distinct analytical focus: the cultural/collective, the interpersonal and the subjective. What surfaces as central in accounts of pleasure in the NTE is mutuality and a subjectivity characterised by an 'opening out', towards collectives, towards others and towards different understandings and experiences of ourselves.

Chapter Four (Pleasures of the night-time economy) sets the scene for understanding the interactions and the embodied and affective experiences that occur in the NTE (explored in Chapters Four and Five respectively). Presenting an analysis of talk related to the structures and norms of the NTE, it details the 'scenes', belonging and collectivity central to young women's pleasure. It also highlights how the management of gendered risk is incorporated into their understanding and experience of the NTE.

Being with friends is at the heart of going out and going out together can establish and strengthen friendships. It also brings us into contact with various 'others' and these encounters are shaped by social processes particular to going out. These interactions can make a night or ruin it. Chapter Five (Friends and foes) covers talk connected to how young women relate to other pleasure seekers in the NTE, mediated as it is by the norms and structures of the NTE discussed in Chapter Four and the subjective experiences detailed in Chapter Six.

Chapter Six (Pleasure-seeking subjectivities) brings into focus the embodied and affective experiences young women have in the NTE and presents an analysis

related to how subjectivities are cultivated and managed. Focusing on intoxication and beauty work, I argue the excuse value of alcohol and the social norms of the NTE act as an assemblage enabling a distinct and pleasurable experience of the self, one which is deeply relational.

Chapter Four

Pleasures of the night-time economy

The NTE is marketed as a place for leisure and pleasure and the participants in this study described in detail how they found pleasure there. Sociality is central to this pleasure, however the importance of the top-down management of the NTE is also evident; the cost, variety and promotion of nights were all highlighted as contributing to the pleasure these women source in the city after dark, providing a structure for the interactions that are so central to their enjoyment.

Taking the NTE as the primary focus, this chapter will firstly introduce nights out as the young women describe them. This is a NTE discussed in terms of variety and abundance and there being something for everyone. I go on to highlight the importance of 'scene' and the sense of belonging and acceptance young women experience in their pursuit of pleasure. Finally, in detailing young women's navigation of the NTE and its users I provide details on divisions in the NTE, which provide context to the decisions young women make there, including those relating to safety.

While acknowledging the influence of market driven segmentation in the NTE, my own analysis suggests attention to this dimension of the night overstates the role of 'producers' (those who pursue profit in the NTE) in creating the affective zones central to the NTE's success, a theme developed in the second half of this chapter. As it relates to pleasure, my analysis shows the distinction between producers and

consumers is blurred; at the heart of enjoyment in the NTE are the collective atmospheres that these young women help constitute through their participation.

'Something for everyone': abundance and division in the NTE

Participant experiences in the NTE were discussed with great enthusiasm, excitement and laughter and the NTE they described is one rich in terms of variety and choice. Newcastle was consistently described as a 'heavy drinking scene' (Amelia, Focus Group 2)[18] and that the opportunity to go out was spread across the full week was a selling point for Newcastle:

> Marion: You can go any night of the week, like I've been speaking to friends who go to different uni's and 'we could go out on a Sunday' and they're like 'what, no way there's nothing open here on a Sunday.'
>
> Amelia: Yeah there is something here every night of the week.

Not only are bars and clubs open every night, they are sufficiently busy all week to create 'a night out experience'; the party like atmosphere participants pursue is closely related to crowds. As Lauren (FG4) notes, 'if you go out every night in Newcastle there is bound to be loads of people'. The kind of people constituting that crowd is equally important and a sense of belonging was clear when participants discussed their own preferences for nights out.

Their status as students in particular was closely tied to their participation in the NTE; many of the nights they attended were 'student nights' and when out there was a clear desire to be around other students, for reasons explored in more detail later in this section. The following analysis discusses key features of the NTE as described by the participants including cost and availability, before reflecting on how social divisions and safety in the NTE factor into their experience.

[18] Hereafter, FGx will be used to refer to specific focus groups.

The cheap and cheerful student NTE

Despite changes to working patterns in the past 30 years, the weekend remains the busiest time in the NTE. However, due to their flexible work (students have as little as 10 hours of contact time a week) the weeknight is the domain of students. This is driven to a large extent by the efforts of bars and clubs to create a weeknight bar/club culture to complement their weekend trade; students are for many industries a clearly defined market segment.

Given the high cost of HE and the low incomes of those living on student loans, being 'skint' is understood to be a central part of the student experience and as such, much of the promotional work in the NTE focuses on price related offers. The cost of nights out (especially on a weeknight) was therefore, unsurprisingly, a major discussion point in all focus groups; participants reported that they can go out with very little money and have a good time, something enabled by the low cost of alcohol. This was presented as particular to Newcastle, which was frequently compared favourably to their hometowns including Edinburgh, Dublin, Oxford and London on these grounds:

> Yeah I feel like the two major things that impress me about Newcastle is how cheap it is and how much choice there is. Comparing it to Oxford, I always compare it back to Oxford because Oxford has like three clubs and they're so expensive, I come up here and I'm in shock kind of thing…up here it's just so cheap, like I've got into the mind-set where I feel bad if I don't go out because it's so cheap I might as well. (Andrea, FG1)

> Back home, it's like really expensive like ridiculous, like even if...whatever day of the week you go out a Saturday night here is expensive but that would be seven days a week back home. So when I come down here the night life is so much better because it's more affordable, so I enjoy it more because I can afford it, I've got the money go out and have a good time. (Eleanor, FG4)

There was a clear relationship between the cost and the pleasure of nights out and the low cost in Newcastle compared to other cities was lauded. As Eleanor describes having been unable to afford nights out in other cities, being able to

afford to go out was in itself presented as a source of enjoyment. It also means that you can go out more frequently or drink more when you do go out[19]. Participants were under no illusions as to the potential dangers of drinking too much and the possibility of over-doing it when the drinks were so cheap; Ellie (FG2) described the city as 'really cheap, dangerously cheap', making this link explicit. Many had first-hand experience of getting 'too drunk' (defined and discussed in detail in Chapter Six). Still, this risk was hardly a deterrent and all spoke of their delight with the low cost of alcohol and of nights out overall. Their student status was frequently invoked when explaining their appreciation for cheap drinks, no doubt influenced by the student oriented marketing they frequently encountered, which focuses on price promotions.

Of particular interest was the sale of trebles- something closely associated to the city as their sale is banned by various other local authorities around the UK, including many participants' hometowns. Newcastle has a number of 'trebles bars' (where a 75ml shot is the standard measure for a spirit and mixer drink) and these are particularly cheap. Not only do these bars sell trebles, there are offers specific to this measure, something every student was aware of. For example, (FG3):

> Lisa: Oh I think it's definitely, on a student night you can get three trebles for £5.50 or has it gone up a little bit?
>
> Val: It's gone up to £5.50, no £5.95 now. So it's gone up 45p
>
> Lisa: But still under £6. So that's nine shots of vodka or whatever and you just, and obviously this is our…the bar before we go to the main place…so you're having nine shots. And this is after you'd had like, a bottle of wine

For some participants the price of drinks here was the draw and part of an overall strategy to get drunk cheaply. As Lisa noted, for her group of friends these trebles

[19] This is precisely the logic underpinning calls from those in public health to introduce MUP. See for example Holmes et al. (2014).

bars are not the 'main place' for a night out, they are a stopping point. Nor are they the first part of the night, as for many they will follow pre's[20] at home. FG6 highlighted that the central appeal of treble bars is the price of the drinks:

> Gemma: I think when I'm drunk, there's a place called Cellar which is three trebles for a fiver and I just decide on the day I'm like 'yeah lets go'
>
> Maddy: Ah it's minging in there, you stick to the floor
>
> Gemma: Yeah I know, but it's three trebles for a fiver

Gemma recognizes that the bar is 'minging' (disgusting) but repeats the cost of the drink to emphasise the (economic) rationality of going there. FG3 gave a particularly rich description of their view of trebles, in ways that intersected with their identity as drinkers:

> Lisa: I remember the first time...
>
> Val: I think it's amazing
>
> Lisa: I had two trebles and I was like…I think I'm quite a good drinker, I was like 'whoa'
>
> Berny: The first time I had trebles
>
> Lisa: And then the third one
>
> Interviewer: 'I'm spent'
>
> Berny: I got taken home the first time I had trebles. It was in fresher's and I had trebles and much too much and my flatmates took me home.

[20] 'Pre' – predrink (pre's – predrinks), typically in halls of residence or student flat-shares. This can include various contexts for example drinking while getting ready to go out, drinking and chatting with music on, or playing drinking games. The defining feature is that you are drinking alcohol and that it is preparation for a night out, rather than a house party, which is its own event.

In describing these environments, participants presented themselves as strategic and savvy in terms of how to enjoy themselves with little money. For example, Nia who described herself as ‘a lightweight’, purposefully held off buying drinks, knowing that her friends would not manage all three and she would ‘pick them off’ (take one from the many available), while Berny would share the three with two friends (meaning each had a treble for £2). As it was on a physically difficult to drink so much liquid, Val requested the bartender give her less mixer. This inevitably made her drinks stronger but this was not something that seemed to bother her and she described the presence of such deals as ‘amazing’. Her strong constitution for the alcoholic content was explained with reference to her heritage; though raised in the UK, Val is Polish and the stereotype that this implies (a capacity for heavy drinking) was something all members of the group seemed to share.

Aside from trebles, there were a number of other cost related considerations discussed by the young women including the cover charges for entry into bars and clubs. The participants in FG4 were extremely money conscious, positioning themselves as prudent in this regard:

> Lauren: I would literally die if someone asked me for (sic) to pay for entry
>
> [Laughter]
>
> Lauren: I don't think I go to any clubs where you have to pay entry. I go straight to Temple I get my three triple vodkas for a fiver, a free Jägerbomb and I'm done for the night. Get ready for bed
>
> Alli: I begrudge paying entry fee, definitely nah
>
> Eleanor: I hate spending over a fiver on entry fees I think it's like...
>
> Lauren: Yeah
>
> Alli: I think £3 is expensive
>
> Josie: I don't mind paying entry to be fair like but then I'm a lightweight anyway so

> Lauren: That's what I mean that's why I don't bother paying entry because as soon as I walk into Temple and I'm…I'm and sat on the floor in the toilets just like away with the fairies because I'm that mortal

While Josie is happy to pay entry fees, this is explained with reference to her cost cutting overall- as 'a lightweight' she doesn't have to spend much money on alcohol. At this point Lauren agrees but goes on to use her lightweight status as a reason it is not worth paying entry fees; after the trebles she is 'away with the fairies', sat on the floor of the toilets. Lauren's use of fairies suggests a pleasant and dreamlike subjective state and if she can reach this level of enjoyment in a bar selling cheap drinks with no cover charge, she does not see the logic in paying more for it. While sitting in the toilets 'mortal' drunk might not seem a particularly desirable state, for this focus group (and for others) it clearly was. Lauren's telling of the story was also imbued with humour and received with a kind of recognition from the other participants. This is partly related to the special status of toilets in the NTE; these are women only spaces, where women talk, share compliments and engage in beauty work[21]: they were consistently discussed in positive terms. The fact of being on the floor represents another aspect of the pleasures of nights out, discussed below: the casting off of certain social norms, while protected from criticism by commonplace understandings of intoxication.

While the NTE is frequently discussed in terms of abandon, FG4's exchange above highlights the strategic nature of engagement with the NTE, maximising pleasure for the minimum cost. As these examples show, navigating the NTE (and discussing this) is a process through which the participants narrate their identities as, for example, students, good drinkers and/or savvy patrons. In doing so they also

[21] Given the strong public dimension of nights out, toilets can also provide a kind of respite from one of the major sources of stress on a night out – unwanted attention from men.

situate themselves as agentic in their engagement with this cultural context, conscious of their options and active in choosing what they want.

Scenes in the NTE

Even within the student focused NTE there were a number of scenes available and this was highlighted as a particularly strong selling point for the city in terms of attracting students. These scenes described typically revolve around music, atmosphere and/or clientele and their abundance was discussed at length, as exampled in FG2:

> Amelia: That's the best thing in Newcastle, there's literally one thing for everybody. There is every single scene
>
> Marion: Yeah, you can pre with a load of people and they're all off out to different places
>
> Amelia: Yeah because obviously you've got the Temple lot. And then there's HiFi which is a lot more underground. And then Roxy which is dance music and then like you said, like Rise and that. So there is something for everyone which is really good

This also appeared in conversations in FG6:

> Gemma: I don't know, it's like whatever, however, whatever night out you're wanting, there is somewhere for it. So you can go dressed up or you can go just jeans and trainers you can…I don't know it's just crazy

Amelia notes the presence of multiple scenes in Newcastle, defined by venues that cater for certain musical preferences (dance, rock etc.). Participation in these scenes is presented as relating to preferences and not related to exclusionary social practices or strict dividing lines within social groups; as Marion notes you can socialise with a mix of people before going out and then subgroups with a preference for a particular kind of night will follow their interest to a club of their choosing.

While Amelia's and Marion's comments highlight the provisions for different people, Gemma's makes a slightly different point, one which acknowledges the

variety of subjectivities individuals can inhabit. Using dress as an example, she notes how on a given night you may want a particular kind of experience and that whatever you want, you can find. This is not about different people, so much as about the same person on different nights, in different moods. As Andrea (FG1) notes, 'whatever your mood there's somewhere you could go to'.

While it may be the case that subsections of the student scene are as accessible as some participants suggest, this also reflects their cultural capital as there are undeniably groups in the city who would not have the option of a 'dressy night out' in the 'nice bars'; either because they did not have appropriate clothing to be read as belonging there and/or who could not afford (or see the sense in paying for) the more expensive drinks sold there. It is also likely that those from other socio-economic backgrounds would be uncomfortable, and possibly fearful, in some of Newcastle's more traditionally working class bars.

In focus groups reference was made to the mainstream, indie (independent music) and gay scenes in the city along with more specific designations of particular bars as 'pulling bars' or 'cool bars'. Of course, the way in which these were described helped locate students in their own scene. For example, FG1 shared the following:

> Amy: I think some people do like [the club being packed]…because it's like busy which means it's good but I just want to move around, I hate having to like stay, stand in one…place
>
> Andrea: I feel like a lot of clubs like The Ruby Lounge and Bruno's, all that stuff, people go because they think it's cool
>
> Interviewer: Right
>
> Tina: Yeah
>
> Andrea: They want people to know that they've gone to these clubs because 'tis (sic) a cool scene
>
> Amy: I think it's also like they are pulling clubs
>
> Andrea: Oh definitely yeah
>
> Amy: They're definitely places you want to pull after a night out

Amy is initially explaining why she does not like a popular venue. She acknowledges that being busy means that it is good (or perhaps it is good because it is busy) but that given her preference for moving around it is not a good match for her. Andrea suggests people go there for reputational reasons- they want to be seen as cool. Wanting to be seen as cool is certainly *not* cool and in calling out this motivation, she positions herself as outside of the social group who are concerned with those issues. Her comments and behaviour in the NTE highlight clearly how leisure practices come to function as important in young adult identity construction, providing the participants with the opportunity to position themselves within and against particular scenes.

While past research has emphasised the role of 'producers' the in NTE (those who pursue profit there as well as those who manage it such as local councils), attention to scene can provide an important counterpoint, as a scene's status is defined at least in part by factors outside of the direct control of producers. Scenes, like the NTE overall, are best understood as an assemblage without a single agent or cause. Scenes do not map easily onto market segments but relate to more subtle social divisions and the pleasure of participation typically revolves around a sense of fitting in.

A striking, and visible, feature of the NTE is people's appearance; even those who preferred to dress more casually on nights out made reference to 'getting ready'[22]. While dress code can be set by bar management and enforced by bouncers, for most participants dress codes were unofficial and driven by social and interpersonal factors as opposed to anything 'top-down' as Amy (FG1) explains:

> Like when I first came up here I searched the club we were going to for dress codes to see if I could like wear trainers, just because like

[22] Getting ready is so central to going out that it is discussed in both Chapters Five and Six. It incorporates dress, makeup, alcohol and interaction, as well as conscious attempts to 'get in the mood'.

> I'm 5ft 10 I don't need heels in my life, but then like, some of them were but they weren't like that strict.

This is an important aspect of scene and of fitting in. Tanya (FG5) imagines there is a type of feedback loop between clubs and their clientele:

> It probably started as a social context then it probably…then the people who run the club said 'well everyone looks better in this' so for photos of the club then 'we'll get everyone to dress up like that and everyone will have this vision of the club'

Both refer to a type of expectation present in the NTE; for Amy this is embodied by other people, while for Tanya it is part of the management's 'vision'. Tanya's comment evokes something subtle about the NTE, with 'vision of the club' highlighting the importance of the reputation of bars and clubs to provide a certain type of experience. This reputation is mediated to some extent by the marketing practices of the venues in question- including flyers, posters and a strong presence online through social media.

Tanya's reference to photos is telling here as the photographs taken in the clubs are often tagged by social media users, essentially generating free publicity for the venue. There are also official club photographers who take photos that will appear in online promotional material (as well as being available to buy as keyrings). As Tanya notes, people looking good is central to this and it raises the profile of the bar in question to host an attractive clientele. Aligning yourself with the expectations of looking good (however that is conceived) is an important part of the process of going out, and this is true across the board in terms of the scenes described above.

In other descriptions of scenes, there was a clear link to atmosphere. Lindsey (FG2) reported the following:

> I went out…for Halloween and I was with people from work. And it was mint because obviously I love my friends at work but we went into somewhere and they were playing hip-hop and stuff like that and I was like 'what is this?' and my friends are going 'do you not know any of these songs?' and I'm like 'no'. And I was just not

> enjoying it and the different types of people that were in there…they just weren't my people either. You could see lads trying to pull lasses and I was like 'I divvint like it in here, please get me out' and then we went to the Crown which is your rock and indie music, and I was at home.

Lindsey's dislike of this space is bound up in a number of considerations. She did not know, or like, the music playing nor did she relate to the people there. Of particular concern was the sexualised atmosphere in which men's efforts 'to pull' were visible to her. Her discomfort is such that she asks her friends to 'please get me out'. Through aligning herself with some affective atmospheres and away from others, Lindsey's social identity is performed (both in the club and in the focus group). In doing so, she finds a place she feels 'at home', something which points to a deeper sense of belonging than simply liking the music.

In locating themselves in a given scene the participants pointed towards, often complex, relationships between preferences (musical, atmospheric) and capital (financial, social). An example of this can be found in examining further the way in which different parts of the city were contrasted by the participants of FG4:

> Josie: I've been to the Market and The Square but I wouldn't go out down Deneside or the East Quarter.
>
> Interviewer: Your face was twisting then. Why not?
>
> Alli: When you hear the East Quarter you think that is expensive
>
> Eleanor: Yeah posh restaurants
>
> Alli: Yeah like The Bank, I know people go there for classy drinks like
>
> Lauren: Oh I'm just not classy enough I just love me cheap trebles

Alli's initial point is that it is 'expensive'. This is picked up by Eleanor as 'posh' and reconstituted as 'classy' by Alli. Lauren then makes the claim she is not 'classy enough' for such places, though her love of cheap trebles suggests this is not experienced as a sense of exclusion. Lauren made this comment with humour and confidence; wherever she is located in the NTE she seems happy with it. And this is not surprising given the abundance of options available which have been designed

and marketed to her, and are populated with those with whom she identifies (i.e. young people generally, and students in particular). Furthermore, she is not alone in this positioning; as the extract shows, the rejection of classy, posh and expensive venues is a collective act, performed both in the NTE and in the focus group itself and supports a shared sense of cultural identity.

Feeling like you 'fit in' in bars and clubs is central to enjoyment of the NTE and this data supports an understanding of this leisure activity as an opportunity for identity work; for interacting and placing ourselves within social groups and developing a distinct sense of self through the process. As Lindsey's (FG2) comments reveal, these processes can be deeply felt and feeling out of place is a barrier to engagement in the collective affects, which I argue below imbue nights out with their clear appeal.

To summarise the findings presented so far, the NTE that participants discussed was largely student focused and was defined by its popularity and low cost (increasing its availability). Its abundance meant a plethora of options regarding where to go. Despite the sense of there being something for everyone, and the implicit idea that consumers can simply choose where to locate themselves in these cultural practices, there are a number of factors shaping engagement with the NTE which are not entirely about choice such as the desire to avoid certain types of people and navigating risks. This points to divisions in the NTE, which is the focus of the following section.

Choices in context: divisions in the NTE

Choice featured prominently in participant accounts. It was with reference to choice that many explained the existence of multiple scenes in the NTE, comprised of different people. How participants recognise and navigate others in the NTE therefore provides a context for understanding the sense of collective belonging central to the pleasure of nights out. Much of the discussion indicating the importance of belonging and scene focused on music, dress and atmosphere; there

was a notable absence of most demographic considerations with participants making few explicit references to class, ethnicity or sexuality when describing their preferences for nights out. However there was an occasional acknowledgment that some scenes do operate along lines such as these. The following section details three distinctions between those in the NTE that emerged in focus groups, before considering how the management of risk shapes participants' engagement with the NTE.

Students from the other university

All focus groups situated themselves within the cheap and youth oriented scene in the city, however a number of focus groups, as exampled here in FG7, referred to a further division within that.

> Pam: I don't think it really influences us but the Newcastle/Northumbria split…
>
> Interviewer: What is that?
>
> Pam: Just like different nights for different unis
>
> Interviewer: Right ok, are they advertised in that way or is it just you get a sense…
>
> Anna: yeah, they give, they advertise Beach Club on a Tuesday for Northumbria
>
> Claire: It's all run by Northumbria students
>
> Pam: And they kind of gear it towards…whereas if you spoke to a Newcastle student they'd be like 'what's Beach Club?' whereas it's all we hear isn't it? It's all over our Facebook walls and it's all over…everyone talks about it
>
> Interviewer: Right so there's kind of is a split but it doesn't interfere with your going out too much
>
> Pam: No, I would go to a Newcastle night if someone said, coz I'll know someone from Newcastle and if they say it's really good, I'll try it I'm not gonna not go there

While this division was presented neutrally and was attributed to marketing practices by Pam's focus group, for FG2 this was an issue bound up in wider social discourses; the other university is the more prestigious institution. Ellie (FG2) explains that her first encounter with students of this University was while working in the NTE, as a bartender on a trial shift:

> I was serving people and the guy I was with was saying 'have you not noticed all the rahs from Newcastle'. You know they're called the rahs from Newcastle. And I realised they were so rude like I couldn't believe how rude they were, how people can be so rude to someone who is serving them.

'Rah' is a derogatory term, used to identify an affluent middle or upper class person and indicates a generally, and obliviously, privileged attitude. The rudeness Ellie encountered was explained by her friends to be a function of this privilege (FG2):

> Marion: They generally just think they're better just because they got like…
>
> Amelia: Yeah you can tell when somebody is from University of Newcastle, you can just tell

Drawing together issues related to wealth, education and social prestige this is clearly an issue relating to class, though students did not frame it in those terms. That 'rahs' are entitled and rude is a familiar trope[23] such that embracing working class identity in opposition to it was a source of bonding within certain focus groups. This is demonstrated clearly both in Ellie, Marion and Amelia's exchange, as well as Lauren et al.'s (FG4) discussion of classy bars, above.

Importantly there is no clear line between participation in certain scenes and class status but rather individual bars and nights were described as being dominated by

[23] This is particularly evident in social media content, for example the viral parody 'Gap Yah' (VMproductions, 2010) mocking the privileged attitude of young adults who take a year out before university to travel.

one university or the other, likely due to social networks and/or targeted promotion. During the student experience at least, which can be understood as a shared period of liminality, class divisions are partly obscured by other factors. Despite this, divisions were evident. These are particularly prominent in FG2's discussions:

> Amelia: I don't know, I feel like they are different…University of Newcastle dominate some nights and that's a Newcastle one.
>
> Marion: I play hockey and on Wednesdays we go out for sports night and we used to do…we used to go to Discos as the pre-bar and then go out. But then Newcastle have now have dominated that so we don't go there anymore.

Marion is on a sports team and attends a popular sports night aimed at members of student sport societies; given the high profile varsity context of the University's sports teams, it is unsurprising she was sensitive to this division. Though choice was consistently referenced in terms of which bars to attend, Marion here highlights a factor in that decision making: avoiding a social group with whom you associate negative interactions, and undesirable affective experiences such as feeling looked down upon as she states here.

FG6 also noted this divide and explained it with reference to both the top-down promotions and management of the NTE as well as social factors:

> Maddy: I think some places are Newcastle students because they go out and like shirts and ties and dressed all booted up and then we're in…
>
> Gemma: It's alright on a night out until you get on to the conversation of what uni you're at
>
> Interviewer: Would that be an issue?
>
> Gemma: Literally, everyone is like...I didn't think the whole, is it the varsity thing?
>
> Maddy: Yeah

> Gemma: Until you mention what uni you're at and they're like 'oh my god'
>
> Maddy: I think like when Gok Wan was at Fabulous they were doing competitions between Newcastle and Northumbria, things like that. I think nightclubs do that because they know both uni's are going out

As Maddy suggests, the pre-existing (and historical) social division between the universities is capitalised upon by the bars in that they set up competitions between the groups. However, this explanation is interwoven with Gemma's more sociological reading of the situation- she references the smart dress of the students from the other university, as well as her experience of telling people which university she is at ('oh my god'). Gemma's reaction to this is one of surprise; until she experienced it, she was unaware of it and even now is unsure of what to call it, guessing at 'varsity'. The class divide is thus reproduced in and through the NTE's structures, in tandem with student participation. However, it is not so present that all students are aware of it and the differences between students are, by their own accounts, not obvious hence needing to ask the question of which university they are at.

There is also a gender dimension to this university distinction, as evidenced in discussions in FG2:

> Marion: They are just all…I don't know. They're just not very nice on a night out
>
> Interviewer: Please tell me more about what you mean. Please describe what you mean
>
> Marion: They're just, all the boys are so cocky. Oh it really gets to us and they've started…oh I don't know, they just follow us. We're just like 'please stop'

Marion's comments serve to highlight how bars and clubs are defined as much by the presence of certain groups as by factors more clearly in the management's control such as their music or dress policy. Importantly, in reproducing discourses of otherness, such as those relating to University and class, participants were able

to position themselves in the complex cultural domain the NTE represents. For example, Marion resists what she feels is the misplaced arrogance of students of the other university, while Pam claims to be unaffected by the perception of a split.

Ethnicity and 'race' in the NTE

The North-East of England is one of the least ethnically diverse regions in the UK and despite having the most diversity in the region, 85% of Newcastle's population is white (Office for National Statistics, 2018). All participants were white and ethnicity/race did not feature in the discussions of six of the seven focus groups. However, the comments that were made suggest these are, in important ways, factors in shaping experiences in the NTE. The first mention of ethnicity/race came from Ellie (FG2):

> Interviewer: So are you aware of any particular scenes in Newcastle, which you're not part of?
>
> Ellie: Well I remember the first time I went to Green Rooms and you can see through, what's the club on the other side of the club? Satellite?
>
> Interviewer: Yeah
>
> Ellie: And I just looked through, I thought it was part of the same club and didn't realise. And it was only black people in there, in Satellite and I thought it was a racially segregated club
>
> [Laughter]
>
> Ellie: I was so shocked

The musically distinct club nights in question operate within the same building, which is only partially, and temporarily, separated (the division between the spaces can be removed for larger scale club nights). Ellie was shocked because she thought it was a purposefully segregated space and the group laughed at her for thinking it. That it remains an example of segregation, though cultural rather than enforced, did not generate further discussion. Later, Amelia (FG2) referred to another club night that 'loads of black guys go to', which played trap, an American rap music.

In these examples, parts of the NTE are clearly operating along ethnic/racial lines but this was framed in terms of choice, and in both instances linked to a musical preference. However, there are more complex social forces at work here, as demonstrated in the following, which Amelia (FG2) recalled:

> One of my friends is black and this girl [in the queue to get into the club] was going all 'my nigger, my nigger' and my housemate was saying 'You can't say that. Why you saying that to him?' And then her other friend, the friend of the girl who was saying that, started filming it because my housemate was having a go at this girl saying 'You can't say this, why you filming me?', and this girl was just starting shit out of nowhere, it was really bad.

The woman 'starting shit' by using racist vocabulary had the support of her friend, who filmed Amelia's housemate; the attention was thereby placed on the person who was 'having a go', rather than on the person who, using racist vocabulary, triggered the incident. The young woman said this publically, and her use of 'my' suggests she positioned herself as somehow within a community where using the word in question is acceptable. Her comments represent something of the 'conservative post-racial' logic operating in the culture of the UK (Paul, 2014), which (just like certain forms of post-feminism) takes as its starting point that idea that historical oppressions no longer operate (Goldberg, 2015).[24] For those who adopt this position, concepts and vocabulary that were once deemed clearly discriminatory, are engaged with, often in the spirit of irony. However, given that

[24] Post-feminist and post-racial perspectives share a number of common features not least an ambiguity in the meaning of the terms and a diversity in how they are employed. Furthermore, both terms are entangled with anti-foundationalist attempts to de-essentialise social constructs (gender and race), and have been appropriated into contexts far beyond the intentions of those initially employing them. For writing on the emergence of post-racial perspectives and their contribution to the research, see Nayak (2006) and for contemporary implications of 'post-race' in terms of anti-racisms see Paul (2014).

structural oppressions of black and minority ethnic groups continue, use of such terms is highly problematic as it suggests such oppressions no longer exist. How these considerations impact the choices and the perception of choices for those in the NTE requires further exploration[25].

As noted above, these were the only instances in which ethnicity/race came to be discussed in the focus groups and no participants reflected on how their own ethnicity was a factor in explaining their enjoyment of NTE. As white subjects in Newcastle's NTE they are likely to experience a level of privilege that was never acknowledged.

Older clientele in the NTE

Emphasising their connection to the student scene was the way in which participants talked about non-students. When discussing the fact you could go out any night of the week, Amelia and Marion (FG2) noted the following:

> Amelia: I feel like weekdays is more student nights though, like weekend…I've been out to some places that on a weekday would be like students and then on a Saturday it's local
>
> Marion: it's full of 50 year olds
>
> Amelia: yeah, so it changes on the weekend

Here, Amelia conflates two social groups, non-students and locals, and Marion introduces a third, older people. The conflation itself is in one sense easily understood in this instance as the participants in this group had all moved to Newcastle for university; in practice, it would be difficult to identify who is a local and who is not if they are at a night meant for students and of the 'appropriate'

[25] For one of the few in-depth studies on race and the NTE, see Talbot (2016).

age[26]. Marion's point about the weekend being 'full of 50 year olds' seems to confirm this. In fact, each focus group made reference to the presence of older people in the NTE and generally this was not considered a good thing. Lauren (FG4) noted the following:

> I went to Discos and there was loads of men dressed in, I don't know, stupid outfits but they were like really old. I'm not talking 40s, 50s I'm talking 60s practically 70s. Like still partying. I didn't know where to put myself, thinking maybe this isn't for me tonight, I think I'm going to find somewhere else to go this isn't my scene. It was proper uncomfortable.

Lauren is here describing a bar she usually enjoys, playing music she likes. However, having gone on a Friday night, there was a different crowd to the one she was expecting. She is clear in stating that the presence of older people made her uncomfortable and gave a sense that the environment was not 'for her'. This shock and displeasure was shared by others who spoke of older adults in the NTE, as in FG5:

> Carey: Like if I went to a club and seen someone my mam's age I would be like 'oh god what is she doing here?'
>
> Interviewer: Do you think there's much of that in Newcastle? Do you think there is much diversity?
>
> Georgia: Yeah
>
> Tanya: There's a lot of old people
>
> Carey: Up like The Ridge area like Oz bar and that, they are old bars. Whereas further down towards The Square, it's not as bad. But

[26] The student/local divide in discussions of the NTE has been discussed by Holt and Griffin (2005) as an example of how social class is constituted. However this is made more complex in the current study as many of the students were local and/or working class and students, and the city has a large population of local students. The changing demographics of student cohorts are also likely to further contribute to the changing nature of this divide.

> then, it's their town as well still, do you know what I mean? You sort of expect it
>
> Tanya: Yeah like I know at home my Dad goes out with his friends to some bar for food and drinks and they end up going to a club and I'm like 'oh my god, no'. But then I see people out here like my Dad's age and I think 'what the hell are they doing here?' But then they're probably just where their night has took them. They're not going to be here for long, they'll probably just be like…
>
> Carey: 'It's full of bairns now, let's leave'

Carey comments that Newcastle is for older people too, and imagines the discomfort to be mutual, suggesting older adults would leave a bar populated by younger adults. Tanya implies it is not older adults' intention to end up in a bar with young people, and again suggests they will not stay long. Having made clear their initial dislike of seeing older people on nights out, they arrive through conversation at a more considerate position. Interestingly, like Carey who uses her mam as a reference point for older adults, Tanya thinks about her dad to help explain the presence of older people on nights, with both using 'oh my god' to express their discomfort at the prospect. This was also how Eleanor (FG4) framed her encounter with older people:

> It's like you're going out with your daddy or grandda or something and you're like 'I don't know if I should be doing this'.

University was many participants' first time living away from home and these comments suggest this provides the physical, as well as psychological space, to be free of parental involvement. The presence of older adults seems to conjure their parental figures to the extent they do not want to see, or perhaps more importantly, to be seen by these NTE users (while respecting their right to be there). This is related to the appeal of the NTE, where the loosening of social codes enables experimentation with regards to identity. Particularly for students who have moved to Newcastle, the NTE presents an opportunity to reinvent themselves and this is tied to the technologies of appearance discussed in Chapter Six. Part of the night's appeal is its freedom from certain types of surveillance and regulation, allowing the transgressive behaviour that is so enjoyed (under fuller consideration

in the 'Social inversions' section below). Their comments suggest that for these participants older adults can represent a parental, and by extension regulating, gaze, limiting their fun.

However this is not the only reason young women might be uncomfortable around older people on nights out, or specifically around older men. Fairchild (2010) has noted that certain factors increase the fear women experience in instances of sexual harassment, and one of these relates to the age of the perpetrator where younger men are deemed less threatening. This was reflected in the comments of participants in this study, for example Pam (FG7) who commented that encountering the 'oldies who sort of creep on you' is worse than simply seeing older people in the NTE. Nia (FG3) described old men as 'the worst' and shared that one had 'grabbed her bum' a few nights prior, when she was waiting at a bus stop outside of a city centre bar. He was indifferent when she challenged him. Both Nia and Berny (FG3) labelled older men's sexual attention 'disgusting'. These comments highlight that young women's experiences in the NTE, and their desire to be around particular groups, are embedded within wider power and social relations. This context must be taken into account in discussions of 'choice', and this is developed in the following section.

With these three notable exceptions there was little talk of divisions in the NTE which were not about preference. This may reflect the success of the open market to cater for all tastes but is more likely due to the fact that in the NTE the participants' experience is geared towards them as students, and which, through participation, they help produce.

Managing harassment and risk

The analysis so far has, in line with my research interests, emphasised the pleasurable aspects of the NTE and the contexts in which pleasurable experiences arise. However, throughout focus groups references were made to a factor which undermined pleasure-seeking, namely sexual harassment. Though efforts to eradicate gender inequality have had various successes in recent decades, and

women's inclusion in the NTE is evidence of this, there is still a major inequality operating as it relates to harassment and other gendered risks. Most participants discussed it and managing this, and other risks (such as drink spiking), was a core feature of their nights out.[27]

The commonplace nature of sexual harassment on nights out meant that most participants had experience of some form of it, for example having been catcalled, touched without permission or followed. These occurrences are clearly differentiated and consequently require different kind of management. For FG2 this kind of treatment was more common at certain types of bars and Lindsey who had rarely gone out in the mainstream student scene was one of the few participants who did not figure this as part of her NTE experience. Amelia agreed that in the indie scene, people were there to enjoy the music rather than to pull and Marion explicitly linked harassment to the 'lad culture to get a girl'[28].

In terms of managing this harassment various approaches were taken including ignoring it, challenging men verbally and/or physically and seeking support from bouncers. While some described positive experiences with bouncers removing men on request (Andrea, FG1; Tanya, FG5; Pam, FG7), others had little faith in management's capacity to effectively limit unwanted sexual attention either because of an unwillingness (Ellie, FG2), or because of the nature of the space- clubs are dark and crowded and finding the person in question might not be possible (Anna, FG7).

[27] For an in-depth study of women's protective behaviours in the NTE, on see Armstrong et al. (2014)

[28] How participants made sense of sexual harassment is discussed in more detail in 'Gender, pulling and sexual attention', Chapter Five.

Risks related to sexual harassment were primarily managed within friendship groups, individually as well as collectively and the primary means of managing these risk throughout the NTE was through a 'safety in numbers' approach. Participants had a strong sense of mutual risk and spoke at length about remaining with friends as a safety precaution.

While other aspects of sexual harassment are discussed in Chapter Five and Six, here the findings are evidence to complicate the idea that women experience equal treatment in this cultural context and that the market ensures consumers are empowered to make free choices about their participation.

Those managing the NTE have successfully created a student focused NTE characterised by cheap, mid-week drinking. However, there is more to women's enjoyment here than can be accounted for by these efforts alone. The following section details the atmospheric side of nights out and demonstrates the importance of connection to crowds to the pleasure of the NTE.

Affective atmospheres

'Nights out' are a space, time and consumption practice almost entirely bound up with what is felt; there are few, if any, material gains from a night out. What few relics exist are typically linked to memories of the night in question, for example photographs and social media content. People go on nights out to have a good time; this is essentially immaterial and linked to the affective possibilities created by and through the NTE and its culture. The most striking features of the women's accounts of nights out is the laughter they describe (and generate again in the focus groups); virtually anything can be laughed at and this section presents an analysis of their joys.

In presenting my findings, I draw attention to the inversions in social order that characterise the desired atmosphere in the NTE. I move on to evaluate the role of the collective, showing how being part of a crowd invokes a range of pleasures. Finally, I argue that the collective good feelings young adults seek in the NTE are

mutually constituted through design and participation, drawing on 'the collective' to disturb the various dichotomies dominant in research in this field such as those between agency and structure, and producers and consumers.

Social inversions

In this section, I present data to show that part of the appeal of a night out is related to social inversions. Nights out are a distinct experience for the participants, as Josie (FG4) states, the pleasure of going out is about 'just getting away from it', drawing a clear distinction between the structures and norms of the day and the night-time, when new rules seems to apply.[29] Furthermore, nights out are contrasted with other social activities, even those which seem similar from the 'outside' i.e. being out with friends and drinking alcohol is not enough to make it a night out. Bringing this into focus is the following discussion from FG5:

> Interviewer: Would you consider [that evening] a night out?
>
> Tanya: No
>
> Interviewer: No, why not?
>
> Tanya: Don't know
>
> Laurie: A night out is…
>
> Georgia: It's quite civilized... which isn't normally a night out in the end
>
> Interviewer: Say more about that, what do you mean like 'it's civilized and therefore it's not a night out'?

[29] In contrast to research such as Smith (2014) and Griffin et al. (2016) which frame 'getting away from it' as a response to neoliberal living conditions, I argue this is not the only interpretation of such comments. This is taken up in more detail in the chapter's conclusion, as well as in Chapter Seven.

> Georgia: It's quite expensive so you don't buy too many drinks and it's kind of like sitting down. I suppose you could stand up but it's more talking rather than, rather than drinking
>
> Carey: And there's like families and stuff
>
> Georgia: Yeah
>
> Interviewer: A mixed space. So what's a night out like?
>
> Tanya: Loud. You wake up the next morning and your ears are ringing
>
> Interviewer: Ok
>
> Carey: And if you don't wake up with a sore throat you haven't been singing loud enough
>
> [Laughter]

The context for this exchange was Tanya sharing that she had been to a food and drink venue in the city centre on a Sunday evening. Though she was out with a friend, dressed up and intended to drink alcohol, she did not consider this a night out. The exchange begins with defining a night out in terms of what it is not-civilised. It also highlights the complex mix of associations of a 'proper' night out: there are social factors (e.g. no families present), financial ones (e.g. the comparably low cost), and embodied ones (e.g. sitting down vs. standing, talking instead of dancing and singing so much you hurt your throat). The NTE of a proper night out is dark and loud, designed for drinking and dancing rather than for conversations. Opportunities to talk are also appreciated however and a number of liminal spaces where this happened were referred to in focus groups, for example toilets, smoking areas and queues.

Georgia's point that a night out is not 'civilised' taps into a much wider theme to emerge from analysis relating to the NTE. Nights out are consistently presented as contrasting with the day, particularly as it relates to behaviour and social norms. The night is unpredictable and exciting for this reason. There is a buzz in Newcastle after dark and parts of the city are, quite literally, taken over by those out for a night of drinking as Lisa and Val (FG3) explain:

> Lisa: Like compared to other cities pretty much every night there's something on. And like when I brought my brother up here and we went on a night out, the main…I don't want to call it the strip, but Temple, Sea, you know the main road, it's…it is a bit manic and there's people everywhere, and it's not just like people in the club then on the streets it's quiet. Everyone is out, it's so busy
>
> Interviewer: So is that a good feeling or a bad feeling for the street to be full?
>
> Lisa: I like it
>
> Val: I love it
>
> Lisa: I mean obviously you've got to watch some people because if it is so busy then like…and you just see people walking across the road and you're like 'there's a car there you know'

Part of the NTE's appeal is the highly charged atmosphere Lisa describes as 'manic', an energy not confined to bars and clubs but literally spilling over into the streets and in her example, onto the road. This buzz is linked to crowds of people, who are 'everywhere'. An important part of this atmosphere is the excitement generated through the relaxing of social codes and the permissive attitude to public behaviour the NTE offers. While undoubtedly a space in which (highly gendered) judgements operate, participants also described a night in which unusual and transgressive behaviour is to be expected. Talking to strangers is one important aspect of this, and its significance is such that it is discussed at length in the following chapter. Singing and dancing with abandon were also commonly described; with dancing on tables as standard in one city centre bar (Carey, FG5). Even public vomiting comes to be seen in the joyful light of NTE participation as Lauren (FG4) describes:

> And then every night that we've been out in Newcastle and we've left Temple she'd spewed in the middle of the road, so that just makes my night. I just think it is so funny like she has walked across the road while spewing, it's just hilarious. Because she's not like ill, she's alright she's just being sick and it's just proper funny
>
> [Laughter]

Alli (FG4) shared that when her feet hurt she simply took her shoes off, even though this occasionally meant glass in her feet, which her dad would pick out the

following day. This (along with her parents driving to collect her from nights out) suggest Alli's family accept and support her pursuit of pleasure in this way and that this idea of youthful nights out, and their risks, is well known beyond those participating in it.

Part of the affective profile of a night out is that emotions are heightened and because of this what would be considered unreasonable behaviour in other contexts often goes unchecked. For example, Josie (FG4) describes her reaction to dropping her kebab at the end of the night:

> I was in a kebab shop one time, I got a lovely Kebab Pizza, I've never wanted a kebab pizza more than that time. I get it, it falls straight on the floor, I've never been so…. I went crazy and started throwing it round the kebab shop. It was devastating

Josie's dramatic language points to the intensity of her emotional states as she experienced them- both her desire for the pizza and her disappointment at dropping it- and it is in the context of this intensity that her reaction should be understood. As with many stories told in focus groups, there was a great deal of pleasure evident in the retelling, which in this case was met with amusement. Throwing food around is a childlike reaction to her disappointment and this lack of responsibility, or childish behaviour, is something many people partake in on nights out as Lisa (FG3) notes:

> We do so many silly things, wake up in the morning think 'oh my god, what were you doing when you were doing this?' I'm like 'Oooh, I don't know' but it was hilarious.

For Lisa, and others, the presence of regret the next day is married to the memory of the laughter. This laughter acts as both a compensation for regret and a justification of the initial 'silliness'. That this is entirely normative in the NTE is made clear by Lauren (FG4):

> [Having a good time with your friends is] just being freaks isn't it? That's what you do. [Laughter] But you do, you just fanny on with each other, grabbing hold of each other

These inversions of social norms are, for the most part, experienced as liberating and fun, as in Lauren's comments where the physical intimacy of grabbing each other and the shared transgression of social norms ('being freaks') is central to the pleasures of nights out. However not all transgressions can be considered positively, as the following section shows.

Violence

The experience of heightened emotions is discussed in detail in Chapter Six where the subjective dimension of nights out is in focus. However, there is another aspect to this emotionality which is pertinent at this point in the analysis; the visibility of other people's emotional states. Aggression, violence and fighting are examples of this and were discussed by all focus groups. Witnessing fights was not uncommon in the NTE and like so many other aspects of the night, Tina (FG1) described how these could be 'random':

> I've never had a fight but I've been on a night out with work mates and or just friends and like I've been with guys and they've randomly started fighting with someone in the street for no reason and…

While Tina claims there is no reason, Nia (FG3) describes men looking for opportunities to be aggressive, stating 'there's a lot of lads in [my hometown] that go out to fight'. Tanya (FG5) described her friend having been seriously attacked by three men in the NTE, resulting in a hospital admission and psychological and emotional trauma:

> I feel like boys would be, not nervous about walking home, but they're still at risk. My friend Charlie he got jumped in the club for no reason by three guys. Like they just turned around and started hitting him and he had to go to hospital and they thought they'd broken his cheekbone and stuff. And now he can't even like…sometimes he'll go to town in the day and he's scared in case he sees them, like he was going to drop out of uni. He was that scared.

Tanya here makes a distinction between the risks women and men face; having been discussing the risk women faced walking alone at night, she identifies male

risk as coming from the violence of other men. She recognises that while men may not feel nervous, they are at risk.

Counter to the stereotype that drunken aggression is the exclusive domain of men, several participants discussed women's aggression both in terms of 'getting started on'[30] (Berny, FG3) and in terms of witnessing women's violence. FG7 described a fight between women so ferocious that seeing it was said to be a 'once in a lifetime experience' (Anna, FG7). The behaviour of those fighting was described as 'insane' and participants noted that a typical fight between women would be 'bitchy', with 'slaps' and 'tugs' (Pam) and 'with words' (Claire). This fight however was more physical and in this sense pushed against their gendered understanding of fighting. Their noting of it as 'once in a 'lifetime' highlights how uncommon women's fighting is, particularly women fighting in a physically explosive, violent way.

Gemma (FG6) had also witnessed fights first hand and shared that one club night in particular seemed to attract this kind of behaviour, describing how she had seen girls thrown out for aggression and sharing the following:

> I walked past and my friend I was like 'hi' she looked at me and she was crying I was like 'what's wrong' and she was like 'I just got jumped in the middle of the club' and I was like 'what?' She was like 'some girl just started pulling my hair and then another one tripped me up'. I'd literally…I wouldn't know what to do if that happened to me

The fights described were between people of the same gender, with the following notable exception provided by Lucy (FG6):

> Last sports day my flatmate got knocked down by a boy, like it was all about the Northumbria vs Newcastle thing, they got in an argument and yeah…

[30] 'Getting started on'- someone approaching you aggressively and with the desire to fight. It does not indicate that physical violence has occurred.

What Lucy describes above involves a man physically assaulting a woman with no consequences (her friend 'just got up and laughed it off'). As with other instances of unlawful acts (including harassment and assault), the candid manner in which the participants discussed these issues suggests a context in which what is considered acceptable behaviour is radically different to 'daytime life'. Expecting the unexpected is part of going on nights out and much bad behaviour is normalised in the NTE. In this sense the risks experienced as part of nights out are not separate from the pleasures; they are entwined as part of the social inversions. At the level of experience this can add to the excitement of the night time city and, as has been noted elsewhere, in some sense the tensions evident in the NTE are part of what keeps the urban night space 'alive' (Jayne et al. 2006: 464). The acceptability of violence and harassment is clearly related to the excuse value alcohol intoxication provides, however social attitudes to drunken comportment are highly variable depending on cultural context (Room, 2001); the behaviour continues because it is not challenged in effective ways and given the importance of maintaining some risk for excitement, policies which seek to balance safety with economic benefit reflect the complexity of the risk/pleasure dynamic and indicate that they are not counterposed in a binary.

How the complexity of social inversions relates to what I argue is the ubiquity of sexual harassment in the NTE is discussed in more detail in the Chapter Five.

While there are different social codes operating in the NTE, this is not an 'anything goes'[31] context. Instead it is clear that participants experienced pleasure from the collective nature of nights out and that this was related to fitting in and sharing a

[31] As Drury and Reicher (2000) have argued in relation to crowds more generally 'rather than losing control over their behaviour, crowd members judge and act by reference to the understandings which define the relevant social identification' (2000: 581).

sense of belonging with their fellow pleasure seekers, which is the focus of the following section.

The collective

> I don't mind how big or small [the club is], as long as it's busy, as long as it's full of people. (Georgia, FG5)

As noted earlier in the chapter, that Newcastle has a well-attended NTE is a major selling point for students (and for its tourism more generally). There were many references to 'everyone' in the focus groups, indicating a sense of collectivity and togetherness that extended beyond friendship groups to include everyone in the bar/club. When talking specifically about what made for a good night, feeling on the same wavelength as others was central. This is linked to the permissive attitude so appealing in the NTE, in that it is enabled by a mutuality born of the collective pleasure-seeking of nights out, as FG4 make clear:

> Eleanor: I feel like if you make a fool of yourself, it doesn't matter
>
> Lauren: It doesn't matter if you are shit at dancing, you can dance the night away and no one's cares. Like no one is looking at you, thinking she's looking bad.
>
> Eleanor: Everyone's in the same boat, everyone is doing horrific dance moves. But because you're all drunk, it's brilliant, nobody cares.

The freedom to act in ways out of sync with usual social codes is fundamentally connected to the fact that 'everyone is in the same boat' and in allowing others to act freely and without judgement, participants experience this freedom themselves. The disinhibiting effects of alcohol are no doubt a component of feeling free to act in a carefree manner, but the relational nature of this experience is also important. The subjectivities that emerge in the NTE are public by nature, negotiated in and through social processes; in providing a social context in which distinct codes of acceptable behaviour are operative, and the unexpected is to be expected, the NTE becomes a space in which people experience themselves and their relationships to

others differently. Participating in this collectivity is aided by the immersive nature of the experience, with pounding music and flashing lights common in the NTE.

As the above excerpt from Lauren and Eleanor's (FG2) exchange makes clear, part of the pleasure of nights out is generated by the freedom to act without judgment from others- 'no one is looking', 'no one cares' and ultimately 'it doesn't matter'. In this instance dancing is being discussed and the desire to look good is trumped by the desire to dance, even if you're not good at it. This freedom might be contrasted with the daily life of the participants where they presumably feel people are looking and judging, people do care, and it does matter, but given the specificity of the NTE experience (they are unlikely to dance publically in their day to day life), whether the freedom is experienced as relational in this way requires further research.

That young women are concerned with their appearance is hardly a novel observation about contemporary young womanhood but that time in the NTE provides some release from this is of interest, particularly given the wider context of getting dressed to go out. I argue that while looking the part is an important part of the night out experience, a great deal of pleasure of being out is the release from the (largely internalised) scrutiny many experience in their daily lives. I argue that this freedom from scrutiny is not the result of individual effort, or psychological work, rather, it is a result of being attuned to, and contributing to the collective affects produced in bars and clubs which privilege release and disinhibition.

Unlike other aspects of nights out where being the same as your friends might be enough (i.e. style of dress) in this instance there is an anonymity granted in large crowds that is experienced as liberating, and this liberation is known by its absence:

> …you feel more comfortable dancing when there's loads of people because not everyone can see you because if there's only five people in the club and you're dancing you look like an idiot. (Carey, FG5)

There are other aspects of the collective that emerged as important in my analysis, including a sense of connection to the crowd and the feeling of a shared

experience. Discussing a student union organised bar crawl at the beginning of semester one, FG5 explained how their enjoyment was linked to the collective:

> Interviewer: …So what was so good about that night?
>
> Carey: I don't know I think it's because like everyone…
>
> Tanya: Everyone was in the same mood, was doing the same thing, from Northumbria.
>
> Carey: Yeah because like it was like everyone's…It was on the Sunday at the start of Fresher's week so everyone was in a good mood. Everyone was just like 'this is one of my first nights so I'm going to have a mint night'.

The sense of connection described goes beyond the university affiliation Tanya notes (Carey explained later that many people were not students as it was open to all); it is also about being in the same mood. Carey adds this was a 'good mood' and one linked to an intention to have a 'mint night'. Moods and atmospheres are here understood to be generated by the collective mind-set of those on nights out.

This is echoed by FG4 where the enjoyment of being on the same wavelength is enlarged. Though friendship groups and fellow students are central in many ways, the wider network of consumers in the NTE is also invoked in explaining the appeal of nights out:

> Eleanor: And loads more people been in the same position. Like everybody…instead of just five of you sitting in the living room getting drunk, the fact there's hundreds of youse in this one club or whatever, all just going off
>
> Lauren: And when that song comes on that every person in that club loves, and everybody's jumping to it- that is amazing. Like when everyone's got their arms up or something because they're jumping to it. I love that
>
> Alli: Everyone is doing the same thing
>
> Eleanor: It's brilliant

Lauren's comments reveal the multifaceted ways in which feelings of connection to the crowd emerge. There is the shared love of the song but also a shared physical

and demonstrative response to that- arms in the air, jumping. The 'going off' Eleanor mentions is another reference to the sense of release the NTE can provide, a release from the routines and modes of daily life, but a release into a joyful, collective experience of being subsumed into the crowd.

While previous research has emphasised what young adults are getting out of through their engagement with the NTE and particularly through alcohol consumption, my analysis emphasises what they are getting *into:* a sense of connection with those who share their desire to have a good time. While this desire to connect to the collective affect can be read against a backdrop of the pervasive neoliberal sense-making in which the individual is paramount, it can also be understood as a desire that predates the context. The desire to connect with large collectives is one that will find expression and satisfaction in culture, be it in churches, protests or football matches. In anthropology, concepts such as communitas (Turner, 2012) and collective effervescence (Durkheim, 1912) have been employed to capture the sense of collective high spirits. The descriptions provided by these participants are also in line with Bunton and Coveney's (2011) notion of ecstatic pleasure, outlined in the literature analysis, which links once ceremonial (and thereby collective) pleasures to the culture of intoxication. These connections have been particularly well studied in regards to ecstasy and rave culture (see St John (2004) for an overview of this literature).

The nature of this collective affect is also a key feature of the NTE and as noted throughout, as Eleanor and Lauren (FG4) describe, it is one related to connection, excitement and joy:

> Eleanor: Here everyone is so happy and bubbly like I've never seen anyone raging here, anyone that's going to be like, I feel like 'oh my god I don't want to go near them'. Everyone is so like buzzing and in a good mood that I'm like 'yeah'.
>
> Lauren: This is what I like, this is why I need to be here.

The general public on nights out are here described as 'bubbly' and 'buzzing', conjuring an atmosphere that is dynamic and energetic. Eleanor notes the

possibility of this high intensity fun environment tipping over into expressions of high intensity emotions such as aggression, and her desire to avoid 'raging' people. In the collective good mood she describes, Lauren feels affirmed in her sense of belonging and that she is where she should be.

Conclusion

I began the chapter by discussing young women's pleasure-seeking in terms of the structures of the NTE, as designed by those seeking profit there, detailing the cost and variety of scene central to their descriptions. The low cost of alcohol is undoubtedly a major driver of the culture of excess, particularly for those students who had come from other towns with more expensive NTEs; these students felt a need to take advantage of the cheap drinks available. However, my analysis also made clear that despite the centrality of alcohol, the pleasures of this social context are about much more than physical intoxication. This sense of fitting in to their chosen scene was central to women's enjoyment. Though scenes are structured to some extent by marketing practices of management, this is not an entirely top-down process as the discussion around the importance of identifying with fellow revellers made clear. Management may control various factors including lighting, music and the cost of drinks, but they cannot ensure the venue is busy nor are their efforts solely responsible for the emergent atmospheres that so appeal to young adults.

This is a theme developed in the second half of the chapter which discussed the affective atmospheres which characterise the NTE's appeal. Focusing on the importance of social inversions, of the 'frisson of a world turned upside down and inside out' (Hackley et al., 2015: 2129), I presented an analysis of a good night out which linked the pleasure experienced to feeling part of the collective. In doing so, I argued that the desired atmospheres are mutually constituted through design and participation. In this sense the young women are co-creators of the NTE as to attend is to help construct the desired atmosphere. This finding challenges Winlow and Hall's (2005) claim that it is a false communitas that revellers experience,

generated by and for the profit of those managing in the NTE. Rather, my analysis reveals that despite the neoliberal structuring of the NTE, what is experienced is a genuine sense of connection to a group united in time, space and the intention to have a good time.

While my analysis of social inversions shares similarities with research on young adults that theorises their drinking as 'controlled loss of control' (Hayward, 2002), calculated hedonism (Szmigin et al., 2008) and licensed transgression (Griffin et al., 2016), it differs in important ways. Crucially, rather than framing young women's transgressive behaviour as a reaction to the (neoliberal) conditions of their lives, it emphasises a productive understanding of their collective experience; the joyful feeling of connection and mutuality and the freedom which they experience is a result of their shared disinhibition. In the case of terming this licenced transgression, it is important to note that the 'licence' to transgress is bestowed as much by those constituting the crowd in the NTE as it is by the 'powers that be' who are understood to regulate the spaces.

While their choices exist within a wider social and economic context, these women act agentically in their pursuit of pleasure, using their knowledge of the NTE to get drunk cheaply and to locate themselves in scenes that they feel aligned with and where they feel safe. Furthermore their participation constitutes, in important ways, these very scenes. Hollands' assertion that 'young people make their own night life but not under conditions of their own choosing' (Hollands, 2015: 19) would seem to resonate with this point. However, although Hollands' use of this phrase implies, at least in part, a Marxist critique of the context in question, I invoke it here to highlight young adults' active participation, rather than passive consumption, of nightlife. In this sense I hope to undermine more deterministic readings of subjectivity in the NTE.

These young women have a strong sense of being active in their pursuit of pleasure and their choices both reflect and constitute aspects of their identity, particularly in terms of them being students. I suggest the importance of this student status is the

reason historical markers of social identity related to drinking cultures, in particular class, did not emerge as central to the analysis of young women's pleasure. While the young adult scene is by no means homogenous, it may well be the case that the student experience ensures similarities in sufficient areas of life as to temporarily obscure the very real differences in socioeconomic backgrounds, and indeed trajectories. This supports an understanding of the NTE as a salient context for exploring young adult's identity work and my analysis highlights the complex interaction of structural, social and subjective forces in these young women's experience.

While acknowledging the ways in which women exercise their preferences in the NTE, my discussion of sexual harassment and of gendered risk more broadly, served to complicate claims of (market-led) equality of access and experience in this cultural context. Rather, and in line with much existing feminist research, my analysis shows these participants continue to experience mistreatment as a result of their gender, based upon long-standing gender norms and inequality. Managing gendered threats is a theme that cut through a great deal of discussion and is an important factor shaping a whole range of interactions in the NTE. These interactions are considered in detail in the following chapter.

Chapter Five

Friends and foes

Interactions in the Night-Time Economy

Being with friends is at the heart of going out and drinking together can both establish and strengthen friendships. Nights out also bring us into contact with various others (acquaintances, familiar strangers, and strangers) and these encounters are shaped by the unique social context the NTE represents. This chapter covers talk connected to how young adults relate to each other on nights out, detailing interactions mediated by the norms and structures of the NTE (discussed in Chapter Four) and the subjective experiences they have there (as detailed in Chapter Six). The key finding of this facet of the analysis is that pleasure is experienced in and through a deep sense of connection, where intimacy and mutuality are central. This is evident in accounts of friendship but also in women's talk of meeting other women on nights out. While a kind of intimacy (namely physical) is experienced in romantic and sexual encounters, for reasons detailed in the following analysis, respondents indicate this sexualised intimacy is secondary to the pleasures experienced on nights out overall, rather than as a focal point.

Though many participants spoke of having male friends, living with men, and going out in mixed sex groups, nights out remain a highly gendered social context and gendered norms and practices occur before and after activities in the NTE proper (bars and clubs). For example, getting ready to go out and how the night ends are

very much coloured by gendered considerations. The NTE is also in multiple ways bound up with sexuality, with the largely heteronormative 'pulling' possibilities of nights out discussed at length by participants. Men were frequently understood to treat nights out as opportunities for pulling and the ways in which women responded to the (frequently unwanted) sexual attention of men are woven into accounts of experiences in the NTE, providing the backdrop for their interactions with each other. To reflect this, the chapter begins with an analysis of women's understanding of the gender differences of nights out, particularly related to sexuality and interactions of a romantic/sexual nature. It moves on to discuss other aspects of relating in the NTE, both with friends and strangers and to discuss, where appropriate, how these are linked to gender norms and relations.

Gender, 'pulling' and sexual attention

Before exploring participants' talk on 'pulling', some clarification is needed as to what it refers to in this context. 'To pull' is to have a romantic/sexual encounter, which could be anything from a kiss to having sex; in these focus groups it is overwhelming referred to kissing, taking place in the bars and clubs. 'On the pull' refers to the specific intentionality of finding such an encounter and in the focus groups it was more often used with reference to a kind of attention men pay to women in the NTE. When discussing whether nights out were a gendered experience this was one of the most striking findings; these women have a strong sense that men's intention in the NTE is sexualised, that when on nights out they are on the pull, individually and collectively. Many noted how easy it was to spot such men with this 'vibe' (Alli, FG4) who could be identified a 'mile off' (Tina, FG1). There was talk of this aspect of the night being central for men, as a competition between them (FG4):

> Lauren:…I know that [my boyfriend's] friends, I've heard stupid stories from his friends when they have gone out and all they have done is hunt for women for like, so [he] has just gone home…all they've done is gone out and searched

> Alli: Some like have competitions don't they, like how many lasses you can get with

The assumed centrality of sexual and romantic encounters for men was frequently contrasted with the women's own reasons for going out, which were to have fun and be with friends. One participant, Val (FG3), identified herself as similar to men in terms of her attention to romantic possibilities, though her friend was quick to note that Val was an exception:

> Bernie: I know, like I've known boys who do actually, like they've told me that when they go out they choose a girl that they want. They will like, watch the dance floor, choose who they want to get with and then, it's literally all about that
>
> Val: To be fair I've done that before to boys like…
>
> Lisa: Yeah but you're an exception
>
> Val: If I'd like spotted a guy I fancied and given him like the look and they'd come over and like…

By the end of this exchange Val repositions herself as inviting sexual attention (encouraging them to come over), as opposed to actively pursuing men in the way that was described as common among men. Being open to but not active in this sexualised/romantic dimension of the NTE was noted by several other participants such as Andrea (FG1):

> No, even if I was thinking 'I wouldn't mind pulling' I still wouldn't actively pursue anyone… like I would literally just see what…like there's been a few nights where I've been like 'ah, I wouldn't mind' and it hasn't happened but I'm not bothered, I'm just going to have a good night anyway

A number of participants reference the fact they were in a relationship to explain their lack of interest in pulling and as evidence they were not deriving pleasure from this aspect of the night. For Lauren's (FG4) boyfriend, her continued participation in the NTE while in a relationship was a sticking point, perhaps reflecting his own (gendered) understanding of the NTE. Lauren describes him as 'sceptical' in this regard and prone to making 'sly comments' about the possibility

of her pulling. Alli (FG4) added that her boyfriend was 'the same', suggesting their boyfriends' shared awareness of the often highly sexualised nature of the NTE and demonstrating their suspicion and insecurity in response to this.

When the participants discussed women initiating sexualised and romantic encounters, it was typically at a degree removed. For example, Josie (FG4) initially challenged a gendered reading of pulling culture with reference to her own friends, some of whom would go out with the intention of pulling, and Lauren (FG4) described a friend who was 'constantly looking about' for her next target to 'snog their face off'. For some it was their younger, single selves that would go out on the pull:

> Yeah and when I was 18 I didn't have a boyfriend so I was like 'oh got to get these boys' and I think having a boyfriend as well changes things as well coz obviously I'm not out to pull I'm just there to like… (Andrea, FG1)

> Before, I did used to go out and I used to…not boast about it but me and my friends used to be like 'oh my god can you remember him? Can you remember him?'. It's weird thinking because I've been with Joe for a year and a half and...It's just weird. 'I feel disgusted!' [said sarcastically] [Laughter] (Gemma, FG6)

Gemma's sarcastic comment that she felt disgusted remembering her old behaviour reflected the general tone of discussions; that while there was an awareness of prior social norms which would look unfavourably on this, such attitudes were to be (gently) ridiculed. A notable exception was Alli (FG4) who stated she had distanced herself from her 6th form friends due to their interest in men during nights out:

> I was just completely different to them. Like they would go out and want the attention whereas I had a boyfriend so it was different for me. I went out have a good time with my friends and I know that I've rang my mam and been like 'will you come and get us[32]?' because it wasn't…I wanted to go out and have a good time with my friends whereas they were off looking for boys… I didn't want

[32] Used in this way 'us' means 'me' in the North East dialect.

> to associate myself with them doing what they were doing on a night out so I don't speak to them anymore

Alli's contribution is interesting in that she suggests looking for boys and having a good time are mutually exclusive, whereas her friends presumably had a good time *by* looking for boys and getting attention. Alli uses her status as 'in a relationship' to explain why she is not interested in this, however her feelings on the matter go beyond disinterest. She so wants to avoid being associated with women who pursue their romantic and sexual interest that she does not speak to them anymore. This judgement is something almost entirely lacking in other participant accounts, as is the extent of her discomfort, which she deals with by ringing her Mam to come take her out of the situation. This suggests a degree of dependence on her parents atypical among participants (many of whom had moved to Newcastle for University), and this closeness likely extends to inform her own position, reflecting the traditional views of her small, working class, ex-coal mining hometown. In such a context, respectability has traditionally been tied closely to sexual propriety and Alli can be understood to be engaging in the othering process described by Griffin et al. (2012) and Nicholls (2017). Alli's comments can also be understood in light of the importance of mutuality; in making the pursuit of men the focus of their nights, her friends have effectively excluded her from their pleasure-seeking.

While avoiding judging others, Maddy (FG6) also spoke of a discomfort at the prospect of personally engaging in what is in the NTE a very public, though intimate, act:

> Maddy: I wouldn't anyway though, if we were going out in a big group I wouldn't pull because, or I wouldn't even think about it, because I'd be scared of what they'd think of me, even though they're my friends. I just think it's awkward if they're looking at you and you're giving some random person…
>
> Interviewer: Right so it's not… what about for you [to Jamie]?
>
> Jamie: It doesn't bother me, like if you go out and pull, you pull, and my friends'll be like, in the back ground, cheering on

> Maddy: Yeah I know, that would make me feel weird

Maddy makes it clear that her concern is how she is perceived and she is aware that others do not experience fear of judgement for this act of public intimacy. For most of the participants, especially those who were single, the possibility of pulling on a night out was discussed as a source of pleasure but one that they could take or leave. Such was the centrality of friendship in accounts that often there would be an explicit decision made to not engage in this kind of romantic contact, as described by FG6:

> Lucy: I think there's some nights where you say to your friends 'This night none of us can pull'. Like you make a pact
>
> Gemma: Like a family night kind of thing
>
> Lucy: And you say no one is pulling, no talking to guys, just like on a friendly basis that's it Just like you stick together…

Gemma's naming such a night a 'family' night invokes just how connected the women feel in each other's company and in this context. They stick together and make a pact, something which reflects and is constitutive of the friendships that are so central to going out.

Though most women spoke openly about their romantic intentions in the NTE, there remains some evidence of traditional views on women's sexuality circulating culturally, as shown in Alli's judgement of her former friends and Maddy's fear of judgement. Even for those who spoke most confidently about enjoying this aspect of the night, gender roles were implicit, for example in this exchange from FG3 describing the belief that it was the man's role to initiate contact:

> Interviewer: But you did mention that girls expect boys to do the pursuit
>
> Lisa: They've got to be grafting yeah
>
> Val: But they should be nice about it, can be like gentlemanly and not like...groping you

> Nia: You know if a girl wants their attention though. Because if you're looking at a lad and you're giving him the eyes…I mean if you're not even looking at them then they shouldn't approach you
>
> Val: Yeah like if you giving them a hair flick and a smile like…

Nia and Val reference ways women can communicate their interest to men, ('the eyes', a hair flick or smile) and according to Nia men should not approach at all without such signals, which effectively makes women the initiator. For Lisa however, it is men who need to demonstrate their interest by 'grafting' (working hard). A further comment by Lisa (FG3) contextualises this:

> I think if you know the person and it's a bit of a banter, like you know them really well and they're like 'so you coming back?' 'no, go away' and in your head you're like 'hmmm could do'. I'm going to say 'no' because I can't just be like 'yeah sure' and then they're like 'what, what do you mean?'

Lisa's comment implies a kind of courtship dance; the woman makes it hard work by giving only minimal interest, at least initially, and in this example Lisa describes her internal state as one open to persuasion. She claims women cannot just say yes, seemingly for fear that the whole exchange was in jest, the banter that she notes. This would expose her own sexual desires in a non-reciprocal way, which is to be avoided.

The decision to run focus groups comprised of friends was made to enable a safe environment in which the women could speak openly. This was particularly important in these discussions where there exist highly gendered cultural ideas about sexuality, within which a strong double standard has traditionally operated. While it is possible some women were reluctant to discuss the extent of their sexual intentions in the NTE due to the influence of negative social attitudes towards women's sexuality, numerous participants across focus groups mentioned times they had pulled, as well as their enjoyment of this aspect of a night out. However, women confirmed a gendered reading of this aspect of nights out, characterising men as aggressively out on the pull in a way that was contrasted with their own position. However, with Alli (FG4) as the exception, traditional attitudes to women's

sexuality, which would cast sexual desire and its public expression as problematic on moral grounds, were not explicit in focus groups. If there was a factor limiting participants' placing more emphasis on pulling, my analysis is that friendship was so consistently placed at the centre of women's nights out that to have foregrounded pulling in personal accounts would have potentially undermined their credentials as good friends, the importance of which is discussed in detail later in the this chapter.

To summarise, pulling or the possibility of meeting someone can be a source of pleasure for these women and one which seems to carry with it little social stigma despite the persistence of certain gender stereotypes in some participant accounts[33]. This is in contrast to a body of work which presents women's overt sexuality as source of shame to be avoided (Evans et al., 2010; Griffin et al., 2012), particularly for working class women (Skeggs, 1997; Skeggs, 2001). Looking good is a central part of going out and is discussed in detail in Chapter Six; here it is sufficient to note that sexual/romantic attention (which is in complex ways linked to dressing up culture) can be both appreciated and reciprocated. A persistent and important aspect of the analysis of pulling is the conflation of sexual interest and sexual harassment, which is the focus of the following section.

Sexual harassment

As the previous section makes clear, romantic/sexual interactions are, for many, a pleasurable aspect of nights out. Furthermore, the NTE is associated with the possibility of this kind of interaction and parts of the NTE are highly sexualised environments (particularly clubs). Related to this is the high level of unwanted, unwelcome and nonreciprocal sexual attention women can experience in the NTE

[33] It must be noted that in most instances the encounters in question were kissing, rather than having sex, and there are numerous ways in which women's 'respectability' can be ensured in this context, for example in letting men make the first move.

(as discussed in Chapter Four), certain aspects of which participants linked explicitly to men's desire to pull.

Though it is an unlawful discrimination under the Equality Act 2010, sexual harassment was described as common place in the NTE. Various forms of harassment were described with unwanted touching generating much heated discussion. Men's sexual interest was again invoked as a reason they engaged in this behaviour, as exampled here in FG6:

> Gemma: I feel it's like maybe they're telling you something. Well they're not going to touch your bum if they don't find you attractive. So they're touching your bum with the intention of saying like…
>
> Maddy: 'Wanna have sex with me?'

The perceived relationship between attraction and this kind of behaviour for some was confirmed by Marion (FG2):

> Marion: One of my flat mates was like 'don't you take it as a compliment?'
>
> [Laughter]
>
> Amelia: What?!
>
> Marion: I know. It's disgusting

Amelia's shock, the laughter and Marion's assessment that it is 'disgusting' make it clear that for these women there is no way to reconcile attraction and unwanted touching, though Marion's (presumably male)[34] flatmate's comment suggest that

[34]. In her intergenerational account of women's safety work Vera-Gay (2018) reports on the presence of this attitude, writing 'girls are taught…what their mothers have been taught; to frame [sexual harassment] as complimentary or nothing' (Vera-Gay, 2018: 51). However, though it is possible Marion's flatmate was a woman making this claim, the strong and consistent message across focus groups that this behaviour was not acceptable suggests that interpreting unwanted touching as complimentary is not typical in this social group.

for some the two are closely linked. If there is confusion in the NTE about what constitutes appropriate behaviour, as Marion's flatmate's comment suggests, it is not held by these participants; focus groups were uniform in their condemnation of harassment, as Amelia and Marion are in the above excerpt. Reactions to it ranged from annoyance and frustration to indignation, with Ellie (FG2) sharing that she had hit someone for touching her. In this sense, sexual harassment is neither normalised nor accepted, at least among these women; it is consistently challenged verbally and physically, independently and with the support of friends and bouncers, as is detailed in the previous chapter. These young women manage risk effectively enough to mean that, on balance, nights out are still worth it, however this is the result of considerable safety work (Vera-Gay, 2018), incorporating practical, collective and psychological effort.

Another area of discussion was men's persistence and aggression in the face of rejection. This was commonly criticised in focus groups and there were attempts by participants to understand what drove that behaviour. Andrea (FG1) thought men were sensitive about being rejected because 'they'll get the piss taken out of them' by their peers and for Jamie (FG6) 'lad culture' drove men to think they 'kind of had to pull'. As well as highlighting their beliefs about contemporary masculinities, particularly the importance of heteronormative sexual prowess, these explanations also indicate a level of understanding (and sympathy) for those men who are deemed to be experiencing pressure to conform to their own gender expectations. Despite this understanding, focus groups spoke frankly and with frustration about the situation they faced from some men in the NTE. In discussions, many young women expressed a sense of empowerment at rejecting such behaviour, and the men who do it, in such strong terms. Furthermore, there is evidence that the management of such threats is folded into accounts of nights out in such a way as to enhance their pleasurable aspect, for example by fostering a sense of solidarity and intimacy with those you protect and are protected by, as detailed below.

Despite an awareness that men experience social and cultural pressure to take the lead in this area, Nia (FG3) considers sexual aggression as something characteristic of men in general, suggesting a more essentialist understanding of men's sexual nature:

> I think boys are so forward like if they want to talk…like if girls wanted to talk to someone they'd talk to someone but boys are so physical with stuff. Like straight away hands all over you

Furthermore, some men's behaviour led to various disparaging comments about men overall such as:

> Oh, I hate boys on a night out. (Bernie, FG3)

And more emphatically, in FG1:

> Amy: I just hate men
>
> [Laughter]
>
> Andrea: Men are trash
>
> Amy: Literally, fries before guys

Though many had male friends and boyfriends whom they recognised did not partake in this behaviour and many spoke of extremely positive interactions with men during nights out, women's understanding of men in the NTE is framed by the widespread experience of harassment and their awareness of sexualised risk. My analysis suggests this context frames in certain, important ways participants' female friendships and interactions in the NTE; managing risk collectively can act as a major source of bonding undermining the pleasure / risky binary referenced in Chapter Two. The following sections explore the pleasures of these friendships and interactions in detail and, where relevant, reference is made to how the gender norms and practices described so far come to bear on women's experience of the NTE overall.

Friendships: intimacy and mutuality

Nights out are a context in which friendships are made, strengthened and tested and the following section presents an analysis of participants' talk dealing with different aspects of this. Emerging as important in the analysis of friendship were intimacy and mutuality and these themes are here discussed with reference to talking, getting in the same mood, care taking and making friends.

Talking

Simply being with friends was frequently invoked as a reason why going out was fun and it was considered a trump card even if the club was 'rubbish', or there was bad music as noted by Amelia (FG2):

> Interviewer: What makes a good night?
>
> Amelia: Who you are with
>
> Marion: Yeah
>
> Maggie: Yeah
>
> Amelia: The friends you are with. You can go to a really rubbish club and be with your best mates and it will be a really good night. That's definitely a key factor

Many of the participants saw their friends in various other contexts such as at university and in halls of residence, begging the question what made their going out time together distinct. The analysis revealed that certain types of talk were considered important in this regard. Craic or banter (light hearted, humorous chat) was described as a particular source of enjoyment. Explaining that she often prefers the pre-drinking get-together to the main event of going out, Nia (FG3) noted the special context of such conversation:

> Even if it's just like, there's six of us in my little friendship group, and even if it's just us, the craic is so good especially when we're all drunk…the craic is so funny and it's like all the predrinks games, like the cards games and that.

Nia's comments are in line with culture understandings of intoxication; alcohol has known euphoric effects as well as disinhibiting ones, which can encourage more carefree talking. Under the influence of alcohol some conversations are characterised as being 'random' or about 'rubbish', as described by participants of FG4:

> Interviewer: And what's nice about that walk [home]?
>
> Eleanor: I-I don't know I just like I like how it like…I love how funny my flatmates can be
>
> Lauren: I can imagine youse[35] walking along when it's quiet but overhearing youse talk, talking absolute rubbish
>
> Eleanor: Yeah that's what I love about it. It's just so random
>
> Lauren: It's like when you're waiting for taxi on a night out on the way home and everyone's talking absolute rubbish
>
> Eleanor: That's the funniest point. As soon as you are waiting for taxi home or you're walking home, I just love how people are, what they talk about…Yeah
>
> Alli: It's so random isn't it?
>
> Lauren: Yeah
>
> Eleanor: So random
>
> Lauren: Random
>
> Eleanor: You wake up in the morning and you say 'why was I talking about that? I don't know why I was speaking about that'

The enjoyment derived from 'random' events, from stepping outside of the norms of daily life (including what constitutes appropriate conversation) has already been discussed in Chapter Four, along with other social inversions which create the night as a distinct social context in which subjectivities can emerge. The joy described

[35] 'Youse' is another feature of the regional dialect and denotes the second-person plural.

here by Eleanor is no doubt related to the influence of alcohol and from the perspective of participants this was certainly understood to be the case. When talking in this carefree way we are trusting those we are with to receive what we say without judgement, and as they are often drunk, as is the case with Eleanor's description, whole conversations can be built on very little substance.

Digging deeper into what the role of alcohol was in the kinds of talk on a night out, Lisa (FG3) noted that you get to know people better when drunk and when asked why participants gave several reasons:

> Nia: It breaks the ice doesn't it?
>
> Bernie: Because you've gone through embarrassing times…you've like cried
>
> Val: Or you've like saved each other from nearly dying
>
> Lisa: You've seen each other at your best and you've seen each other at the worst and you're just like…

Each of these explanations speaks to an intimacy facilitated by alcohol. Nia notes that alcohol 'breaks the ice', a phrase typically used in reference to enabling conversation between people who do not know already each other. However, given the group were discussing pre-existing friendships we can take breaking the ice more broadly to refer to the process through which alcohol encourages more intimate interactions. Bernie's comments suggest that the psychological vulnerability of embarrassment and/or crying is enough to foster a connection and Lisa claims that you get to know the range of a person's character when they are drunk, including their worst qualities (which presumably they would rather not show). There is a sense in which we cannot hide ourselves when drunk, we embarrass ourselves, we lose emotional control and cry, and our worst characteristics can rise to the surface. Crucially this opening out towards each other, revealing particular aspects of themselves, is mutual when drinking together, and positive exchanges in this state of vulnerability can result in a deep sense of connection. Though she does not specify what could nearly kill them (possibly cars,

from stumbling into the street, falling over or taking risks more generally), Val's comment about 'saving each other' is another example of how the mutuality of vulnerability is experienced, and is tied to a wider point regarding gender and the reciprocity of taking care (discussed in detail below). The management of risk is central to care taking narratives and here Val's comment shows that this is something which is bonding between those drinking together.

Focus groups also discussed in detail the intimate conversations that can occur on nights out. For Gemma (FG6) these were 'fully heart to heart' exchanges and conversations friends might have been waiting to have with particular people, eager for advice. Maddie (FG6) described conversations on nights out as 'better' and 'more meaningful' than the chit-chat common in the house. Though Lucy (FG6) felt these kinds of conversations got going even before the alcohol, participants in FG1 linked being able to talk in this his way with alcohol's disinhibiting effects:

> Amy: And I think it makes people feel more comfortable because like, not that you're vulnerable when you're drunk but you are…
>
> Andrea: More open
>
> Amy: I think it makes you seem, you can connect better with people, better when your walls are down and you're just vulnerable a little bit

The importance of the intimacy described here, of connecting deeply while 'walls are down' is a key finding of the analysis, and references to it are peppered throughout the focus groups. That women are more likely to reach out and get support from friends is a well-known gender stereotype and one reflected in their experience of drinking together, as in FG6:

> Maddy: But I feel like girls encourage…well not encourage each other to cry but they speak about it then get the girls opinion
>
> Gemma: But they'll speak about really deep stuff
>
> Maddy: But yeah boys will be like 'alright'
>
> Interviewer: What's deep stuff?

> Gemma: I don't know, breakups is a massive thing on night out
>
> Interviewer: Right, yeah
>
> Gemma: And the compliments go to an extreme you're like 'you don't need someone like that, you're the most amazing person I've ever met' you know full on and you're like 'oh my god'

The reference to break ups and the esteem boosting compliments, make the support aspect of such conversation explicit but as earlier references to craic and banter demonstrate, these emotionally charged conversations are only one way in which the pleasures of friendship were described. Contact after a night is also a source of enjoyment for young women, with things that happened providing the content for humorous conversations and generally giving you 'something to talk about' (Tina, FG1). Embarrassing stories can become highlights of the following days and there is great joy recalling funny incidents.

Nights out are a context in which friendships are performed and where these young women get to know each other and let themselves be known. Drinking together is time together, time to talk and to learn about each other enabled by the disinhibiting effects of alcohol.

Getting in the (same) mood

Discussions of time together revealed the importance of being in the same mood on a night out, something which reflects and fosters a sense of connection to one another. There is throughout these descriptions a pleasure that is clearly derived from feeling together, as part of a group. The following section details the ways in which participants get in the same mood, contributing and feeding off the atmospheres within their friendship groups.

Many participants got ready together and while the stress of looking good was frequently noted, this time was generally described in very positive terms and for some such as Maggie (FG2) it could be the most enjoyable part of the night. Music and drinks were usually a part of this process and talking during this time was

flagged by Lisa (FG3) as particularly important, with conversation about what might happen that night stoking excitement (Maddie, FG6). Eleanor (FG4) too described how this time together became charged:

> Like you'll get all excited, you'll be in the same room all getting ready. And you're so buzzing and you're like 'yes!'

For Tina (FG1) the atmosphere of pre-drinks was an indication of how the night would go and this is reliant on a collective rather than an individual mood:

> Yeah pre-drinks, that's really important before a night out, if that's gone well then it's like 'yeah this is going to be a really good night out, everyone is happy'.

Mutuality is central here, demonstrated by the fact that a good night is ensured when 'everyone' is happy. As well as allowing them to develop a shared mood, and helping them avoid being accidently over- or underdressed (and 'looking out of place'- Josie, FG4), getting ready together also affords women the intimacy of doing each other's hair and/or makeup as noted by Josie (FG4). While there is a certain intimacy in the physical closeness during these processes (getting undressed/dressed, applying each other's makeup etc.), there is also a sense of trust that they will do a good job, not insignificant given the stakes (detailed in Chapter Six). The shared understanding of the importance of looking good, and the eagerness to support others in their desire to achieve this, continues into the night and is extended beyond friends to potentially any woman they meet (as discussed in the section 'Making friends', below). During this getting ready time, a mutual and collective mood is cultivated as they make their preparations for the night out together.

Just as being together can generate excitement, so too can this closeness mean they are subject to the less favourable moods some bring into their nights out, as shown here in FG5:

> Interviewer: What makes a good night?
>
> Laurie: It all depends who you're with

> Tanya: Definitely. And what mood the people you're with are in… [My friend] was like being a downer the whole night. So when everyone else was sitting there while we're having fun like she's sitting there watching us, feeling bad
>
> Carey: I hate that because they're sitting there with a face like a smacked arse and you're just like 'smile, you're out, just get a drink, have a good time'.

The frustration with those who fail to share the desired mood demonstrates how moods are collective, contagious, and subject to disruption. These are not the club wide atmospheres described in Chapter Four, rather they represent a smaller scale collective mood dependent upon those in the friendship group or those who you are on a night out with. It is precisely because of this mutuality, their sense of connection, that these women are confronted with a dilemma in the face of other people's bad moods. For example, in FG1:

> Interviewer: What makes a good night?
>
> Tina: When no one starts crying…no one has a fight, no-one's sick
>
> Andrea: You haven't got to look after anyone else
>
> Tina: Like no one runs off, you don't lose anyone, and you go to a nice place I would say that's my check list

When asked what makes her nights good, Tina responds with a list of things she does not want to happen and these are about the group she is with rather than anything unique to her. Andrea makes the responsibility aspect of going out in groups explicit, as there are circumstances in which you would 'have to' look after members of the group (who imposes this injunction is left unsaid). I argue moods are felt collectively in this instance because women have a sense of responsibility to one another in the NTE, particularly friends, and this is an analysis developed and extended in the following section.

Caregiving and taking

Caregiving emerged as an important theme in accounts of nights out, with a number of participants across focus groups describing themselves as a 'mother', a (gendered) shorthand for being someone who looks after people. Taking care of friends included protecting them from men and helping them manage unwanted attention, for example by dancing wildly (and unattractively) directly at the man (as described by Anna, FG7). It also included defending friends if they had been mistreated by other pleasure seekers, specifically if someone had been rude to them, for example bumping into them and not saying sorry (Lisa, FG3) or calling them a name (Maddy, FG6). How this extends to emotional caregiving such as in supporting through break-ups has already been noted. More generally though, it referred to the need women had to take care of each other due to the risks associated with being in the NTE, particularly when intoxicated. This investment in each other's safety, and moods, is a key feature of the mutuality so central to the pleasure participants describe.

Drunkenness was linked to increased risk in a straightforward way and a few described staying 'semi-sober' to ensure everyone was safe or cutting their nights short in order to take home friends who had had too much to drink. Again, reciprocity was assumed in this regard with people recalling times when they had needed to be taken home. Carey (FG5) admitted she could find it 'annoying' to take care of friends, adding:

> But then when you're in that state, they look after you so that kind of weighs it up

While some participants clearly took pleasure from being a good friend in this way, others said caring for others could a source of frustration and it was given as a reason being sober is undesirable, tying into wider narratives about being drunk as a release from responsibility and the expectations governing daily life. A desire to avoid being sober also highlights the desire to experience mutuality and feel

connected to those you are out with, in the same positive mood and sharing similar experiences, including those of being drunk.

The need for caregiving is closely linked to the risk women perceive in the NTE, though there was some reluctance to name these risks. For example, Alli (FG4) said she stayed 'semi-sober' to make sure everyone was ok and when asked why they might not be ok, she said she did not know and internalised the issue by claiming she was 'just a worrier', leaving the causes / contents of her worries unspoken. FG3 spoke of covering drinks and drinking out of bottles (which are easier to cover), strategies suggested by parents, indicating that one concern is drink spiking. That drink spiking is closely linked to sexual assault was at no point made explicit. Similarly, when differentiating between the risks men face ('getting into fights' with its presumed dynamic of mutual participation), Josie (FG4) noted that with women 'you never know what could happen'. When I named rape as one of the risks, Josie agreed and added being 'taken away', indicating a fear of abduction. She followed this by offering these risks as an explanation for women staying together as a group. Women's solidarity in this sense is functional, and necessary.

Furthermore, risk can extend beyond the club environment to shape the entire evening. Tanya (FG5) described getting ready at friends' houses and taking supplies for the next day, with the plan of going back to sleep there 'so no one's walking home alone'. Even taking taxis was not considered safe; though again, rape, which seemed to underlie many of their concerns, was not named:

> I know that I would get scared if I was getting into a taxi on my own because I think the man is going to drag me away, hold me hostage and stuff. (Tanya, FG5)

Sexual assault is a well-known and much publicised risk of the NTE while being kidnapped is not (though it serves as a theme in numerous horror films). Given the willingness of participants to name and condemn men's sexual aggression and sexual harassment, the unwillingness to name rape as a possibility does not appear to be the result of avoiding being labelled a feminist (as in feminist killjoy (Ahmed,

2010)). Instead I suggest it reflects the deeply felt fear these women feel in relation to it; it remains unnamed so that they do not have to directly acknowledge the fact it is a risk they themselves face in the NTE.

The major strategy for taking care of each other in the NTE is simply staying together, including, for some, when going to the bar and/or the toilet. Lauren (FG4) expressed disbelief and frustration with those who 'wandered off' stating:

> I don't understand those people who can just wander off. Like if you're in a massive group with all your friends then one person…one goes off you just think 'Where you going? Why you going by yourself?' If you go to the toilet you go in groups, if you walk to a different bar you go in groups, even if you go to the bar

The frustration Lauren describes towards those who wander off indicates that she feels accountable for them should something go wrong, and suggests a lack of concern for their own safety requires an increased sense of responsibility on her part, in a way similar to those who drank too much and 'had' to be taken care of. This reveals another aspect of these young women's sense of connection; risks and responsibilities are shared and dynamically allocated, depending on people's levels of intoxication.

Highlighting the centrality of mutuality and reciprocity, talk of staying together moved fluidly between taking care of others and needing to be cared for with Alli (FG4) stating:

> Alli: See I have to go with someone that I know will look after me. I am like the mother, if everyone else is drunk I will stay...
>
> Eleanor: Semi-sober
>
> Alli: So that I know everyone is ok

Alli begins her description with an account of needing to be cared for then switches to describe how her own identity is bound up with caring for others, to the extent that her own consumption practices are shaped by a collective need for a 'semi-sober' person, a term offered by Eleanor. This moving between self and other was

also highlighted by Lauren (FG4) who revealed a logic based in empathic considerations:

> And I don't like leaving people in taxis, it makes me feel really...I would hate it if someone did it to me so I always get in the taxi with them without a doubt.

Similarly, Josie (FG4) noted:

> [Risk in the NTE is] probably why the girls stay as part of a group. See, like if I am with my friends I won't just be 'I am going off', I'll stay with someone and I'll be like 'I'm not leaving you'

Josie is discussing her decision to not leave the group but it is unclear whose protection is being established with this decision. Comments such as these make clear the relational, reciprocal nature of care at the heart of friendship in which the needs of self and other are not clearly defined. This is demonstrated in the following exchange between Jamie and Lucy (FG6):

> Jamie: I always have someone to walk back with, like Lucy said I know people that have walked home and had stuff happen and it sort of puts it in your mind, even when I'm drunk I still know I need someone to be there kind of thing
>
> Lucy: I feel like you're in that much of a state though, like if I've ever been in that much of a state where I don't know what's going on, I'll have always gone out with someone who looks after me and comes back with me

Jamie's awareness of (again unspecified) risk cuts through her intoxication, whereas for Lucy this is not always the case. Lucy's comment is interesting in that she links getting into a 'state' to being out with someone who will take care of her, that knowing she is taken care of allows (if not encourages) an abandonment born of a shared sense of responsibility, or taking care and being taken care of.

Taking care of others

As well as looking after friends, there was a more general sense of social responsibility in the NTE which was described as gendered; men are thought to not look after each other on night out. Two participants shared stories of having to step

in as caregivers for men whose friends did not perform this role. Both expressed a sense of responsibility towards men they did not know well. In fact, one, for Ellie (FG2), was a total stranger:

> There was this guy on a night out and he was so drunk he couldn't remember his name or anything and he had wet himself. We like got his phone and rang his mates being 'your mate, he doesn't know his name and all, you're going to have to come and get him'. And then I saw him out again and I was talking to him and he didn't know who I was and I said 'oh I was looking after you when you were drunk' and he said 'oh are you the one who embarrassed me in front of my mates and all' and I was like 'I embarrassed you? More embarrassing that you wet yourself'.

The young man's lack of gratitude was met with frustration by Ellie and was not something the women in the focus attempted to explain. However given that going out culture has highly gendered norms and practices, his response is likely related to factors the young women are unlikely to experience first-hand. For example, his lack of gratitude may be the result of Ellie having put him in a difficult position with his friends; according to the women's own accounts, men's friendship does not involve this kind of caregiving and in contacting his friends Ellie has, on his behalf, asked for help. Furthermore, given the strong relationship between being able to 'hold your drink' and masculinity, it is possible his embarrassment also related to his inability to do this. Finally, reminding him that she had witnessed his state of intoxication, Ellie has undermined the much-appreciated anonymity described in Chapter Four, which can provide a buffer to embarrassing behaviour. While for the female participants, friendship groups provide the unit within which they feel safe, the young man's discomfort at having his drunken state revealed to his friends suggest this is not the case for him. There is a dearth of research on men's experience of intoxication, friendship and caregiving, and these are aspects of nights out which further research can pursue.

In a separate incident, there was an interesting domino effect of this caregiving and sense of obligation in which Andrea (FG1) felt responsible an unnamed man, and Amy felt responsible for helping Andrea help the man:

> It was really weird because [the other university] was my first choice so I knew him from group chats on Facebook and stuff. And we followed each other on Twitter and like we'd spoken a bit about politics. That was literally it, then I randomly got this message from him. Like 'Andrea help me' and I was like 'oh my god' and I felt like if someone asks me for help I will go help them because if I didn't go and something happened…

Andrea explained earlier that she was not particularly risk averse, that she does not carry with her much fear in the city (possibly due to growing up in a much smaller, presumably safer town). As such she was prepared to go and help this man alone, something Amy (FG1) would not hear of:

> Yeah, especially if they're drunk like if I…that's why I didn't let you go because if I let you go and something happened…

Here the man asking for help is positioned as the source of risk; he is the drunk man Andrea is referring to. As with other discussions of risk in the NTE neither Andrea nor Amy name the risks in question, only fearing that 'something' could happen.

While some women were critical of men leaving their friends, given that women's caregiving appears to be tied to their own anxiety around risk, men's lack of care may in fact reflect their own lack of fear, rather than an active disregard for their friend's safety. This is supported by the fact that in Ellie's story, the young man is not grateful for the help he received suggesting his understanding of the risks he faced in that state is different to Ellie's.

Psychological safety in numbers

The safety in numbers approach detailed above extends beyond physical safety in the NTE; when discussing their appearance on nights out many women made reference to their friend's appearances too, specifically making sure they were dressed similarly. Josie (FG4) spoke of a 'girls group chat' which was used before a night out to ask what people were wearing. Asked if such conversations were enjoyable, participants in FG4 shared the following:

> Josie: Well no, not really I just want to wear what you want to wear but it's like if someone else is going dressy, you don't want to wear something like jeans or shoes and look out of place
>
> Lauren: You know what…but it's so weird isn't it because when someone says 'I'm wearing a skirt' and then you second guess yourself and think 'ah maybe I should wear a skirt'
>
> Josie: You think maybe I should…
>
> Eleanor: I did that one night. My whole flat were going out in skirts and I had jeans on and I changed into a skirt because I thought 'I can't go out in jeans'

Tanya (FG5) also noted this dynamic, specifically in terms of not looking over or underdressed, something she was able to avoid because she and her friends would wear 'the same'. The importance of appearance came through strongly as a theme in focus groups and this kind of collective planning was one of a number of ways potential anxieties around how they looked were mitigated. Reflecting the extent to which this peer support could allow divergence from the norms of the typical female presentation in the NTE Tanya (FG5) joked:

> Like, I went out on Monday night and all of my friends said should we go out in our pyjamas and pretend it's a social

'A social' is a night out typically organised by a university society or sports team. The idea is to socialise with members of that group, and there is often a theme to the evening requiring matching clothes or fancy dress. Tanya's comments highlight the sense of protection afforded by that category; the group has its own rules around dress and to some extent conduct (shot drinking and drinking games often feature). While socials take place within the wider context of the NTE, they afford participants further exemptions in the eyes of other NTE party-goers. This is explicitly linked to being in a group; you can wear whatever you want as long as you are not on your own in doing so.

While some participants had felt judgement relating to their appearance (discussed in Chapter Six), in terms of the wider community of women in the NTE, there was also a great deal of support described. This took the form of compliments to other

women, something Gemma (FG6) directly linked to empathising with anxieties around looking good:

> Gemma: It comes back to the toilet thing though, girls get emotional about themselves, so in the toilet and you're walking past someone and you're like 'you look nice' because it just…I know it makes me feel good about myself if someone tells you, you look nice
>
> Maddy: Yeah
>
> Lucy: Definitely
>
> Gemma: And girls are so self-conscious about…like that…you spend so long getting ready so for someone to tell you, you look nice I don't know it's just like a yeah 'girl power'

Gemma's analysis of girls' compliments is met with agreement by Maddy and Lucy, suggesting this operates as a shared understanding of women's interactions. Within female friendships and among women in the NTE in general there was a solidarity described that appears to grow from a shared experience of the NTE's charms and challenges. As the above excerpt shows some of these charms and challenges relate to looking good and this is discussed in more detail below, as well as in the following chapter.

The analysis so far has focused on how the importance of connection manifests in pre-existing friendships but there are other dimensions to this, and the openness and willingness to connect on nights out spills over to colour a range of interactions in the NTE. The following section extends this analysis to explore the nature of interactions with strangers.

'Making friends'

The first data analysis chapter examined the feeling of immersion in crowds, of the large-scale atmospheres in the NTE and the pleasure derived from participating in them. The first half of this chapter has described how the pleasures of nights out are related to friendship. The following section draws together these insights to

discuss the pleasures of making new friends. Though the term making friends was used throughout focus groups, what this typically referred to was connecting with strangers in ways that are unknown in other contexts; sharing compliments and getting to know each other in an accelerated way. For most participants these interactions did not result in long-term friendship but they were significant interactions for the participants, nonetheless.

Social activity in the NTE is not restricted to inside bars but rather includes spaces such as toilets, smoking areas, queues to get into bars/clubs, the streets connecting popular areas as well as late night shops and takeaways. It is in these liminal zones that conversations with fellow pleasure seekers can be initiated, (thanks to the lack of pounding music that is typically present in bars and clubs), and for this reason they were described in positive terms. The smoking area in particular was described as a highly social area where people make friends, with some going out there explicitly for this purpose, despite not smoking. Lisa (FG3) explained her own approach to socialising here:

> It's really good. And obviously there's not music there, well normally, so you can hear people and like I'll say 'right guys I'm going to go for a cigarette, are you going to stay here or 'I'll come and find you' if it's a really small club, it's not hard, 'I'll come find you'. I just stand there enjoying my cigarette, maybe go on my phone, but like to be…I rarely go on my phone to be honest because someone will just come up to you like 'y'alright?'. Like to be fair, if I fancy a conversation just because like, 'ah they sound like funny people' I'll just be like 'ah have you got a lighter'

Lisa describes being approached by someone else as well as initiating chats herself, in this instance by requesting a lighter as a way to strike up conversation. While for some, such interactions were fleeting for others more extended interactions resulted from these chance meetings. For those who want to continue nights out after bars and clubs close, after-parties with newly made acquaintance are an option as discussed by FG3:

> Val: Yeah I love making friends like, I like just meeting someone and going to an after party with them. It's just nice

> Lisa: Yeah and to be fair people like socialise in the McDonald's and Subway. So that's like, after the club's finished at like three or whatever, you've still got then that afterwards and then if someone goes 'ah do you want to come to after party', you've got that

Val (FG3) was a participant with great enthusiasm for nights out and making friends was for her something fun as well as something that met her social needs:

> I just love making friends on a night out. So many times I'll wake up with 10 friends requests, from like different girls that I was just chatting to the night before like…Or like I've meet girls on a night out and like end up staying with them coz like my friends will be going somewhere I don't want to go

If Val is at odds with her friends about where to go, the hyper-social NTE can allow her to make new friends who she can stay with on her preferred night out. Val also reported that she had befriended a group of young men one night when she was reluctant to go home when the club closed; the men invited her to a late night pool hall and she went with them, maintaining a friendship with the group for a number of months following this. While Val was an exception in the degree to which she was willing to connect and maintain a connection (by, for example, joining a group of strangers on a night out), all women spoke of the joy of talking to new people, particularly other women. FG2's discussion demonstrates this:

> Maggie: When you're in the bathroom, you make friends and you just sit in the bathroom for 40 minutes having a wee chat
>
> Amelia: Just girls complimenting each other
>
> Marion: Yeah girls in bathrooms are so nice
>
> Amelia: So nice. 'Girl you're looking great tonight', 'yeah you too'
>
> [Laughter]

Maggie's comment that conversations could last 40 minutes is possibly an exaggeration (though Lucy (FG6) also claimed she could be in the toilets chatting for 30 minutes). Even so, it denotes that interactions do frequently extend beyond small talk and the sense of connection in these encounters is such that 'you could literally, on a night out in the toilet…think you've made your best friend' (Maddy,

FG6). This type of interactions between women was presented as extremely common, often taking place in the women's toilets. This is a space closely linked to the beauty work covered in more detail in Chapter Six; reapplying and sharing makeup and complimenting other women in the process is typical and in some bars there are women selling the use of various toiletries: deodorants, perfume, hairspray etc. Given the importance of appearances on night out, and the significant investment of time and energy many women make, telling someone they look good is an open hearted and kind thing to do, quite at odds with research which suggests women's interactions in this context are predicated on 'othering' processes and judgemental positioning (Bailey et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2012; Nicholls, 2016; Nicholls, 2017; Riley et al., 2016). Compliments can also be understood as just one of the many ways young women start a friendly conversation.

FG6 also discussed the importance of these interactions on nights out in a way which highlights the complexity of women's attitudes to appearances:

> Maddy: I feel like you always compliment each other like you're always like 'oh my god you look so nice tonight'
>
> Gemma: Even if they don't. You walk past someone and you're like 'excuse me', 'it's alright' 'oh my god you look so nice'. You think to yourself, what made me say that? No, even if they don't look nice, I'm just like…I would never walk past someone on the street and if they said excuse me, say like 'you look lovely'
>
> Interviewer: What do you think does make you say that?
>
> Maddy: I think the alcohol
>
> Gemma: I don't know. I think it's full on like girl power as well though
>
> Jamie: Yeah I think that girls on nights out as well, girls have each other's back, like where I'm from. Like if there's any trouble the lads'll step in but the girls will step in as well and be like 'calm it down'. Everyone's kind of got everyone's back which is nice to know

Maddy's use of 'girl power' implies an awareness of the wider context of gender inequality, along with the resistance to this the phrase represents. However, resistance here takes the form of solidarity between women, through shared participation in practices that many feminists consider problematic; while women can support each other emotionally in their pursuit of beauty, they do not challenge the beauty standards underlying their appearance based anxieties, nor the wider culture, which so highly prizes women's beauty. This is discussed in depth in Chapter Six.

Jamie's comments about 'everyone having each other's back' move the conversation away from the emotional/psychological support complimenting each other represents, to a more practical and possibly physical support. Everyone being of the same supportive mentality is something clearly valued, though as references to feeling judged by other women and the, albeit occasional, break out of fights make clear this is not always achieved.

The willingness to engage in these interactions with those you do not know is not simply a reflection of participants' inebriated states; it is also related to the sense of belonging they experience in the NTE they occupy and among people they identify with. Part of the collectivity explored in the previous chapter is that in the NTE these young women frequent, those they meet are typically students; it is a public space but it is also limited by certain demographic considerations as Berny (FG3) notes:

> I think it makes it better as well the fact that there's two unis and students and every…we're all at the same stage in life and I don't know, like if you go back for afters[36] it'll be at a student accommodation. It's not just like weird people's houses

[36] 'Afters' – an after party usually at someone's house.

These are young people and students of a university, living in the same area (if not halls) and likely connected through shared networks. From their perspective this limits the risks associated with making contact with strangers. In some instances, feeling part of a wider community provides a welcomed sense of protection such as for Tanya (FG5) who described what she would do if she found herself alone at the end of the night:

> I would talk to someone, a random girl and be like 'where are you going home?' then we would walk back together

Here Tanya describes approaching 'random' girl, but this person is not so random; she is a 'girl' (denoting her young age as much as her gender) and in the same scene as Tanya, which Tanya assumes means she is also a student (and therefore living in the same area). That Tanya anticipates a willingness to help on the part of the woman she approaches speaks to a particular manifestation of mutuality, one that is built upon a recognition that as women they are share an orientation to the structural and material realities of their experience in this space. The woman would understand Tanya's need to ask to walk together as the risks to women in the NTE are known to all, even if there is variation in how acutely they are felt. While the intimacy evident in accounts of friendship does not figure in descriptions of making new friends, a sense of mutuality is clearly still operative and this underpins their sharing of pleasure and in the case of these women, an assumption of (relative) safety in the presence of new people.

Conclusion

Each of the facets discussed in this chapter have revealed the intersubjective ways in which these young women understand and experience nights out in the NTE. Going out is described as an opportunity for talking and getting to know each other deeply, a time and space in which their moods can be experienced collectively and a context in which responsibility for safety is shared.

The sociality of nights out is central to the pleasures these young women experience. Exploring in detail the nature of interactions in the NTE this chapter has shown that, between friends there is a sense of connection born of intimacy and mutuality. One important aspect of this is the risks faced in the NTE which require a collective response; sharing responsibility through caregiving is a strategic necessity and one that reflects and constitutes a culture of closeness between young women.

The sense of responsibility these women feel towards one another must be understood in the context of the ubiquitous sexual harassment they experience and a wider culture of women's heightened sense of risk. While this is felt acutely in the NTE, Vera-Gay (2018) identifies it as pervasive in women's experience in the UK and evident across social groups, ages and ethnicities. Framing women's predicament as one which requires them to trade freedom for safety, Vera-Gay (2018) draws attention to the ways in which women consciously and unconsciously engage in 'safety work' to avoid sexual violence, including avoiding certain spaces. My findings, like the findings of Armstrong et al. (2014), show that when drinking in the NTE specifically protective strategies are adopted by, and operate within, groups of women. Their tendency to do this has been both reflected and encouraged by public safety campaigns encouraging women to look after each other (Vera-Gay, 2018: 45). While ostensibly intended to minimise women's risk, such messages naturalise the cultural conditions which make them unsafe and place the burden on women's safety on women themselves, rather than the (would-be) perpetrators of violence against them.

In one of the few studies to examine how women respond to unwanted touching, Graham et al. (2016) outline a number of strategies women employ on nights out and all of these, including evasion, aggression and friends' help, were reported by my participants. While there was a consensus between participants that harassment was common, and unacceptable, there were differences between individual responses to it; some were frustrated but rarely felt unsafe, while others experienced fear throughout their NTE experience. Furthermore, there were

distinctions between the forms and contexts of the harassment they suffered and this is in line with Fairchild (2010), who details how context influences women's experience and response to harassment. For example, participants of this thesis reported that though unwanted touching was common in bars and clubs the chances of it escalating were minimal given the crowds of people (who could presumably be called on to help) and the bouncers; as such it was less threatening than harassment in other spaces. While crowds and bouncers were thereby noted as factors minimising risk, for the most it was groups of friends who provided the protection and support needed to deal the reality of sexual harassment in the NTE.

In addition to the sense of connectedness that grows out of collective risk management, various other factors contribute to feelings of closeness: alcohol consumption, beliefs about alcohol consumption and the excuse value it has culturally, create a context in which intimacy is encouraged, particularly through talking freely and revealing otherwise concealed aspects of our identities. Meeting before entering the NTE allows for a kind of psychological as well as physical preparation ensuring a level of mutuality: looking the same, being in the same mood and being similarly drunk.

In discussing the differences between women and men's nights out, participants made it clear that their experience is gendered in multiple ways including their attitude to pulling, the way which they relate to their friends, and the care they give. The interactions between women and men were also a focus with the young women expressing enjoyment of the romantic possibilities of nights out alongside a consistent frustration around the persistence of sexual harassment. Navigating these pressures of the NTE clearly fosters a sense of solidarity and connection between women, even those outside of a given friendship group. One of the primary ways of connecting with other women was through the sharing of compliments, revealing the importance of feeling they look good on nights out. of Further discussion of this highlighted the participants' complex and often

contradictory positions on beauty work which, along with intoxication, is in focus in the following chapter.

Chapter Six

Pleasure-seeking subjectivities

A central concern of this research has been to identify the ways in which the pleasures of nights out emerge in and through complex social processes. As such there has been little attempt to prise apart and interpret the relative impacts of alcohol consumption and cultural norms, instead prioritising their emergence as relational. This chapter continues to explore the pleasures of nights out in this way, but with a focus on the subjective and experiential dimension of participant accounts. In particular, the chapter focuses on emergent subjectivities, drawing attention to the social patterning of those subjectivities within the context of the NTE and wider cultural discourse. Detailing first the role of alcohol in the production of subjectivities in the NTE, the chapter moves on to discuss the importance of (physical) beauty to the pleasures of night out.

Running through the analysis chapters is an understanding of the NTE as a context in which distinct subjectivities emerge. The first chapter explored this with reference to how the NTE's norms were experienced and how participants located themselves within atmospheres with which they identified. The second chapter focused on the centrality of interactions in generating the pleasurable subjectivities associated with nights out, highlighting the intimacy and mutuality which characterises those interactions. In this chapter the subjective dimension of nights out is foregrounded, with particular reference to intoxication and beauty work. I

show the ways in which these women express their agency, managing their subjectivity in the NTE using alcohol to induce subjective states and using the various technologies of contemporary womanhood to control how they look. To make sense of their choices, attention is also given to the wider context of beliefs, norms and practices around intoxication and beauty work.

I argue here that a major appeal of a night out is the 'experience of difference' (Duff, 2004); the opportunity to experience ourselves in a distinct social context where judgements are unlike those governing daytime conduct. In the NTE participants look, feel and behave differently to their everyday selves and this is a source of self-expression and pleasure. Furthermore, I show that even at this level of individual experience, the pleasures of the NTE are deeply intersubjective and the pleasurable sense of self experienced is one 'opened out' towards the social domain.

The pleasures of intoxication

Central to the subjectivities made possible by this social context are understandings of physical intoxication, which presuppose individual experiences in the NTE; there are powerful cultural narratives around what it means to be drunk and what licence it affords us to act in ways distinct from our day to day lives. The relationship between intoxication (as a subjective state) and understandings of intoxication (as a set of social expectations) is complex and this complexity is highlighted in the following analysis. I begin by exploring a number of beliefs about intoxication, before presenting an analysis linking these beliefs to the pleasures of the drunken subjectivity.

Intoxication feels good

Understandings of intoxication were implicit in focus groups indicating a shared sense of what it means to be drunk. Feeling drunk was in many ways presented as a straightforward way to feel good; having a drink makes you feel 'happy' (Tanya,

FG5) and 'buzzing' (Eleanor, FG4). This is the case even in the face of bad music or other undesirable events, as described by Andrea (FG1):

> Andrea: I fell down some stairs once and broke my phone
>
> Tina: I remember that yeah
>
> Andrea: That was at the start of the year it was awful. Still a good night though coz I got really, really drunk

Amy (FG1) also noted the strategic use of alcohol to induce certain moods, and specifically to enhance enjoyment:

> Amy: Coz I paid £10 entry into 45's on a Saturday and there was an event on and I hated it and I was not…
>
> Interviewer: Oh no
>
> Amy: I really hated it so I spent £20 on shots, just shots and I spent £70 overall
>
> Andrea: Oh my god
>
> Amy: Just because I didn't like it so I got really mortal drunk

Though she claims to have hated the event, Amy was able to use alcohol to alter her mood and participate in the night out, staying in the club with her friends and adding that when you do not like the club 'the drunker you get, the better'. Anna (FG7) also described alcohol's ability to affect her mood; if she was not as drunk her preference would be for disco music, but if she was 'drunk enough' she could enjoy pounding, lyric-free techno music too.

Being in the mood or the 'zone' for a night out is an affective state characterised by an 'energy' (Pam, FG7) and 'excitement' (Eleanor, FG4), which alcohol is held to provide. As has been demonstrated in previous chapters this is bound up with the collective nature of nights and 'the mood' is not something one feels in isolation. Being drunk was often contrasted to being sober, which was undesirable in the NTE, and this was tied to feeling disconnected from the collective atmospheres as well as from others in the NTE because they are, in general, drunk. The mutuality that is so

central to pleasure is predicated, at least in part, on the shared experience of physical intoxication. It is likely for this reason that abstainers from alcohol in the NTE can experience a sense of exclusion from the fun of nights out (Cherrier and Gurrieri, 2014; Piacentini and Banister, 2009).

When participants are not in the same intoxicated frame of mind, drunk people can be 'annoying' (Amy, FG1). For Maddy (FG6) it was difficult to tolerate 'the busyness' of being out which includes people bumping into her as well as drinks getting spilled on her. When drunk she either fails to notice these things happening, or they simply do not bother her. Lauren (FG4) also made reference to frustration with physical boundaries being breached when sober and when others were drunk:

> You're falling on me and I'm sober and that's doing my head in. But if I'm drunk and I fall in on you as well it's alright

The need for mutuality to make experiences pleasurable in the NTE is emphasised here and these comments highlight how physical boundaries are reconstituted in these spaces. This reflects the intimate nature of interactions in the NTE and must be read alongside the enhanced sociality described in the previous chapter; the blurring of physical boundaries manifests as part of a social context in which people's subjectivities are deeply interwoven. A willingness to participate in this is central to pleasurable experiences in the NTE and the term 'opened out' subjectivity, used throughout this chapter, attempts to capture the embrace of blurred boundaries which characterise nights out.

The increased responsibility for others when sober was not directly contrasted with a lack of care when drunk but was highlighted by Lucy (FG6) as another reason sobriety was undesirable. This was tied to the fact that when drunk we are less aware in general of our surroundings, and subsequently less accountable for what happens, as described in Chapter Four.

A major feature of the pleasurable mood being pursued in the NTE is laughter and references to alcohol's laughter inducing qualities are found throughout focus groups. FG5 offered the following:

> Laurie: I love it when me and my friends are drunk. It's actually…it's hilarious
>
> Interviewer: Hilarious like what do you mean? Like the craic is good or…
>
> Laurie: Yeah
>
> Georgia: Yeah
>
> Laurie: Things are just so stupid. Everything is just hilarious you're just in hysterics at nothing
>
> Interviewer: At nothing
>
> Laurie: Yeah just like
>
> Tanya: You could say something and everyone will start laughing and you can think 'it wasn't even funny' but we all laughed
>
> Laurie: It's just fun

Both Laurie and Tanya's comments show that alcohol is held to be responsible for the laughter; it makes you laugh at nothing. This is one of several ways in which alcohol is positioned as a means to enter subjective states that are at odds with every day experiences; stupid things become entertaining and laughter becomes commonplace. That this sense of humour is shared among those present further supports the centrality of mutuality in this context. Nia (FG3) also emphasised the importance of shared laughter:

> Even if it's just like, there's six of us in my little friendship group, and even if it's just us, the craic is so good especially when we're all drinking…the craic is so funny

For Nia the presence of alcohol is understood to enhance the conversation, with her using 'so' twice to emphasise just how good and funny the craic between her friends is. Importantly, Nia notes that it is good when they are 'all' drinking; this is a highly social activity and people's mutual participation is considered a central part of the process, as participant comments about being sober indicate. Though alcohol undoubtedly affects mood, it is clear that alcohol's role is also to enable the connection to the collective which in turn constitutes the shared mood so integral

to the pleasures of nights out. Subject to both the same physiological impacts as well as cultural understandings of what alcohol use entails, participant descriptions of pleasurable intoxication are deeply relational in nature.

There are well-known negative consequences to drinking including vomiting, risk of injury and hangovers, all of which participants discussed. However, these are generally not deterrents for the participants and most drank to or past the point of alcohol's ill effects becoming apparent. Tina (FG1) spoke of 'a weird thing' she did in which she closed her eyes and if she didn't feel she was spinning she could keep drinking. Knowing that one more drink would induce vomiting was the sign for Jamie (FG6) to stop and similarly Josie (FG4) stopped when she knew one more would make her 'gone'. Others such as Lauren (FG4) called herself 'greedy for the drink' and would continue even if she was 'mortal', just because it was there. Gemma (FG6) would drink until she went home, buying another drink even if she had been sick. Her reasoning for this was clear; she wanted to maintain the pleasurable experience she was having and sobering up would have undermined this. At no point did participants express the tensions between intoxication and femininity as Griffin et al. (2012) and Bailey et al. (2015) describe, nor did participants discuss the medical or long term consequences of excessive consumption.

A number of participants linked their heavy drinking to pre's specifically with Gemma (FG6) citing drinking while getting ready as the reasons 'girls' end up in such states'. It is particularly easy to overshoot when drinking at home, with a

Alcohol use was described as overwhelmingly positive in terms of its subjective affects. This is the case such that even its major disadvantages are appropriated into narratives of fun; embarrassing stories become humorous memories, hangovers a shared and bonding experience. Being drunk is associated with laughter and feelings of connection with others, something made clear by comments which show the difficulty in connecting to drunk people when sober. These participants make a conscious decision to enter into an intoxicated state

together and even at the subjective level the pleasures of alcohol are about connecting, both with your friends and with all those in the NTE with whom you share a drunken experience.

Intoxication makes you confident

At the centre of many accounts of alcohol's pleasures was confidence and being drunk was explicitly linked with the confidence to do what you would not do sober, including many enjoyable parts of a night out such as dancing, singing and talking to people. Andrea (FG1) and Maddy (FG6) for example both claimed they would likely 'be stood in the corner' of the bar/club if they were sober, reflecting a feeling of being on the fringes of the experience looking in, removed from the immersive pleasures described by other participants. Given the acceptability of interactive behaviour in the NTE, their hesitancy speaks of deeply felt personal inhibitions which alcohol use can ameliorate.

In the previous chapter the importance of sociality, of speaking more intimately with friends and of talking to strangers, was shown to be a central pleasure of nights out. This is an area in which the experiences of intoxication and the cultural expectations are shown to be deeply interwoven. Emphasising the social dimension of this were FG3's reflections:

> Interviewer: Yeah sociability, meeting people, I mean it certainly sounds like a big part of your enjoyment is meeting new people
>
> Berny: I think it's more acceptable as well when you're drunk and you can just…
>
> Val: Talk to strangers
>
> Berny: Yeah but otherwise you wouldn't be allowed
>
> Val: It would be weird, if you did that

Berny does not specify who would not allow talking to strangers and her use of 'acceptable' suggests it is a social norm that risks being breached. Val confirms that it would be a transgression of this kind with her choice of 'weird' as a descriptor. In

Berny's account it is not the NTE as a context that enables such pro-social behaviour but rather the fact of being drunk. However, there is a tension here in that no one knows who is drunk; it is the assumption of drunkenness that enables the loosening of expectations at the collective level. Those 'allowing' the talking to strangers do so because in the NTE there is a collectively held idea of sociality operating, based on beliefs about alcohol and its effects.

This was demonstrated by Amy (FG1), who said that she would pretend to be drunk even if she was sober and that 'people can't question it'; the disinhibited behaviour is acceptable in this social space regardless of what is going on internally because of the assumption of intoxication in the NTE. However, while the behaviour might be acceptable, in terms of the subjective experience of participating in this social context, confidence is required to behave in the disinhibited ways that are so pleasurable and for many participants, alcohol provided this. Jamie's (FG6) experience draws together the subjective and the social; describing herself as shy without a drink she felt it was easier to talk to people, partly because you felt more confident but also because 'everyone is kind of in that situation' that is, drunk.

FG1 also discussed the ways in which alcohol benefitted interactions with those who they 'knew less':

> Amy: If I was with people that I didn't know, like knew less, I'd probably feel more obligated to drink because I'd want to be like….
>
> Tina: Confident
>
> Amy: Yeah, but if it was with you guys
>
> Andrea: Yeah to be fair I could not be drunk, that would be fine
>
> Amy: If I just didn't want to drink because I was feeling a bit ill or something but wanted to go out like I'd be fine. But with people, you know like if someone from uni, that we didn't really speak to was like 'do you want to come out' and I'd be like 'yeah' I'd feel like I'd have to get like…
>
> Andrea: Yeah like just to be able to keep the conversation going and stuff

Andrea's comment that the alcohol keeps the conversation going links back to early points about the carefree, often random, chat that goes on when under the influence. Alcohol is also tied explicitly to feeling confident, foregrounding its relaxing and disinhibiting effects. It is a recognition of their close friendship that Andrea feels they do not need alcohol to make their interactions easy, although they did note its role in 'heart to hearts', enabling increased intimacy.

There was, of course, great variety in accounts of the need for 'Dutch courage' from focus group participants; some made it clear that they needed alcohol to partake in pleasurable though potentially transgressive behaviour in the NTE, others claimed they did not need it. Carey (FG5) for example contrasted herself with her peers because unlike them she does not need alcoholic drinks to be sociable. For Amy (FG1) the confidence she experiences in the NTE is also associated with age and she noted that now she was older she did not need alcohol to be 'silly' (showing silly to be both desirable state and something that previously required alcohol).

On the other hand, Maddy's (FG6) enjoyment of a night out was limited without alcohol due to what she described as her 'self-confidence'; only if she had had enough to drink would she be able to dance and not care whether she was being judged. The fear of judgement appeared a number of times in focus groups, and here we can see the instrumental (and in this sense agentic) use of alcohol to avoid it; part of the collective, intoxicated mood in the NTE is a shared release into drunk behaviour. As the limits of acceptable behaviour are shifted when people are under the influence of alcohol, there was the understanding that those who are drunk do not care if they are being judged but also, that they are not judging others, as Lucy's (FG6) comments demonstrate:

> I feel like it's people who don't judge. Like do you know places where it's crowded but not too crowded but like everyone has kind of had enough to drink to just not care what people think.

Given many participants shared the experience of finding drunk people annoying when they were sober, yet relished connecting with those same people when also

drunk, the assumption that if everyone in the club is drunk you are not being judged does not seem unreasonable. This fear of judgement and the related efforts to fit in (by conforming to highly gendered expectations relating to appearance in the NTE), also emerged as themes in relation to beauty work and this is discussed later in this chapter.

While alcohol could be used to facilitate a joyful subjective state it also allows participants to connect to the collective moods of the NTE, which are constituted by the participation of pleasure seekers there. It does this particularly through its disinhibiting effects, making these women feel free to act in ways out of keeping with their usual public behaviour.

> You can do whatever you want to do. You know like crazy things you do in your bedroom that no one sees? You then take that to the club when you're drunk. (Lisa, FG3)

On a subjective level the pleasurable experience of intoxication was framed in terms of confidence and on the social level it was tied to understandings of the NTE as a space in which judgemental attitudes are, in some important respects, suspended. However, as has been noted throughout, this is not an entirely unrestricted environment; while there is clearly a relaxing of certain social codes, there are still limits to what constitutes acceptable behaviour and participants exercise skill in navigating these codes effectively. The social acceptability of emotionality in the NTE (and its limits) are in focus in the following section.

Intoxication and emotions: the safety net

Alcohol has a range of physiological impacts and these interact with the context of consumption in such a way as to create a range of highly variable responses; throughout focus groups reference was made to the emotionally charged nature of nights out and alcohol was understood to be responsible for much of the behaviour participants witnessed in the NTE, both in their friendship groups and in the general population of those on nights out. While not a direct cause of pleasure, this belief,

that alcohol diminishes agency and so has a certain currency has an excuse value, provides a safety net for the social risks taken on in the pursuit of pleasure.

As well as speaking generally of alcohol's effects, many participants spoke of their own experience in terms of a drinking identity, discussing the kind of drinker they understood themselves to be. This was presented as a distinct aspect of their character and in this sense, going out into the NTE allowed for a self-expression unique to this context. For example, in FG1 Amy spoke of being 'passionate' in her exchanges and inclined to angrily 'ramble about nothing' while Andrea got into 'debates about politics'. Crying was also a possibility:

> I think I like, you know when you get drunk and you're like 'oh I could cry right now' but I like, I'm not actually crying coz I don't really care, it's just alcohol. I've had a few of those where I haven't actually cried but I've been like 'oh I'm just so upset' but I'm not really. (Amy, FG1)

In Amy's account we see alcohol positioned as the direct cause of the crying and her experience of sadness is simultaneously met with an understanding that she doesn't 'really' care and is not 'really' upset. Amy was not unique in this experience of crying and Jamie (FG6) shared the following:

> I'm always emotional drunk though, so…even with a drink I'll end up crying about something, I always end up crying, either happy crying or sad crying so, I just don't know which side it's going to be. If it's the cocktail and girly night it's more emotional but if it's just like she said double vodkas and coke, it's just as emotional but it's about nothing it's just silliness really but…

Evoking Zinberg's (1986) 'drug, set and setting' model, Jamie's comment highlights the co-productive relationship between expectations and experience- on a girl's night out, framed as it is by the norms of sharing talk and intimacy, the emotional outpouring is more significant than in other contexts. Beliefs about the social context- the idea that girl's nights out are charged with intimacy- can actively shape, if not elicit, the intoxication experience. In the other nights out described by Jamie– where double vodkas have been consumed (a drink often available as part of the promotions detailed in Chapter Four), the emotionality is held to be the

direct result of the excessive alcohol and unlikely to be related to anything personally significant. Importantly, this capacity of alcohol to induce crying is not tied to negative affect alone; Jamie (FG6) is also likely to cry with happiness and her surrender to this possibility (she does not know which will happen) is part of her drinking experience. In making sense of this type of experience participants narrate a complex understanding of agency and subjectivity- they decide to get drunk but the consequences of that for their subjectivity cannot be guaranteed; they recognise that in this state they are not entirely in control of their actions and are open to what will come of the night.

Despite alcohol's clear excuse value Amelia (FG2) noted how some friends could be trusted more easily to forgive indiscretions. She described her own emotional behaviour when drunk:

> Yeah I'm really mardy when I'm drunk. I just get really upset over nothing and then the next day I'm like 'why was I upset? I'm really sorry'. But then again it depends on who you're with as well because if I've been mardy when I'm drunk my friend Sophie's just like 'well I don't mind, you were drunk, it's fine'. Whereas some people you'd be more worried about how they've taken what you did or something.

She later noted that her own accepting attitude to drunken behaviour was based on her understanding that 'we've all done it', reflecting the mutuality that cuts through so much of the NTE's culture. However, as Amelia notes, not all friends are equally willing to tolerate drunken emotional outpourings and this was echoed in FG1 where Tina described losing patience with certain friends who cried. These friends' emotions were discussed in terms of a desire for 'drama' and for this reason, Tina did not want to invest in supporting them. In this instance, the presence of alcohol is not enough to justify their emotional behaviour; it is a pre-existing desire for drama (rather than alcohol's intoxicating effects) that leads to crying. In both of these examples, the NTE becomes a testing ground for the friendships between the young women, where they are able to demonstrate and recreate their bonds by drawing the lines of acceptable behaviour where they wish. Precisely because these

relationships are so central to their enjoyment, stakes are high if discord does occur. Pam (FG7) for example, would rather be threatened with physical violence than fall out with her friends:

> [It] wouldn't bother me, if someone started on me but if I'd fallen out with them two [her focus group partners], then I'd be like 'oh my god, I just don't want to be here'. It'd just ruin it.

Though there are limits to the excuse value alcohol affords, depending on the strength of relationship, a great deal can be forgiven. At this extreme end of acceptance for drunken bad behaviour was Lauren (FG4), who described a particularly rich account of an incident with a friend:

> My friend accused…I lost my necklace and my friend…we took her to bed and me and Jake were still out looking for my necklace because I was proper panicking I was like 'oh my god'. She sits up and she was like 'don't you fucking accuse me nicking your necklace'. She was absolutely mortal. She woke up the next day and she was like 'ah did you find your necklace?' And I was like 'yeah after you…after I'd apparently accused you of nicking it' and she was like 'I didn't say that, I haven't said anything'. I was like, 'well you must have been asleep' because she was an absolute mess. Funniest time of my life.

Lauren's description reveals several beliefs about alcohol and these beliefs frame her decision to move past the incident, attributing her friend's behaviour to the fact she was so drunk. After quoting her friend's initial outburst in which she swears at Lauren, Lauren states that her friend was 'absolutely mortal', so drunk that she had to be taken to bed, and this serves to legitimise her aggression. Her friend remembers something of the incident asking the next day if Lauren found her necklace, yet she denies knowledge of the accusations she made. Lauren calls her friend 'a mess' and laughs off the incident.

In FG6 there was also some reflection on the gendered nature of emotionality in the NTE. Lucy (FG6) described how she had had to take male friends home in the past 'because they're so emotional' and the responses to her comments highlight the complex terrain contemporary gender roles represent:

> Interviewer: Has anyone else had that experience? [providing emotional support to men on night out]
>
> Gemma: The lads where I'm from…[laughter]
>
> Maddy: My gay friends cry but I think…I know he's still a guy but I feel like sometimes they are more emotional
>
> Interviewer: Maybe a difference masculinity in operation
>
> Gemma: I'm really trying to think if I've ever...I don't think I've ever seen a boy cry on a night out
>
> Lucy: Have you not? It's about life, they just tell me all about their life and they just have a little break down
>
> Gemma: I've had like heart to hearts with boys but I've never seen a boy cry
>
> Maddy: Seen them cry, yeah
>
> Gemma: Unless…I've seen boys cry in pain but that's not the same
>
> Maddy: But I feel like girls encourage…well not encourage each other to cry but they speak about it then the girls opinion

With references to regional differences and sexuality, these young women suggest an intersectional understanding of masculinity. In the process of this exchange emotionality is narrowed down to mean 'crying' and no reference was made to emotions culturally coded as masculine, such as rage (which at other points in the interview participants recalled witnessing). Gender stereotypes around men's reluctance to discuss emotions still circulate culturally, yet Gemma and Lucy's comments suggest something has changed. Gemma's comment about having heart to hearts with men sheds light on the heterosocial dimension of the intimacy described in Chapter Five, something which has received minimal research attention. Whether such conversations are happening between men, or whether men are choosing to talk to women about their feelings due to women's perceived experience and expertise in this area, is something future research with young men can explore.

The disinhibiting effects of alcohol together with the social understandings around the consequences of alcohol consumption, and gender, work together in these young women's accounts to allow them to make sense of their experience in the NTE. Beliefs about alcohol account for the often unpredictable behaviour they witness, such as fighting, as well as the subjective dimension of their nights out – as charged with a range of possible emotions. It is a subjectivity characterised by an acceptance of what comes of the night and an opening up into the possibilities, as they are understood.

The pleasures of appearances

In the Chapter Five attention was given to the (heteronormative) sexual/romantic component of nights out, particularly male/female dynamics. Relating to this, though deserving of a distinct analysis, is the importance of beauty and its status as a capital in this context. While some participants linked (other women's) beauty work to an explicit desire to attract men, the analysis revealed a much more complex range of feelings regarding appearances in the NTE. Feeling you look good is central to the pleasures of going out and feeling you do not look good can be a source of deep discomfort.

Individual attitudes to the pressures of looking a certain way were varied with some noting how the pressure was often 'in your head' (Val, FG3), others trying not to care what other people think and one explaining her own lack of anxiety with reference to the fact she had a boyfriend (carrying with it the assumption that looking good is to attract men). The contradictions and tensions in these participant accounts are in part due to the varied subject positions possible in relation to these ideas; some women were extremely invested in their appearance, others less so. How they are related to the contradictions inherent in the post-feminist sense-making is discussed in the chapter's conclusion.

The following section deals with two aspects of appearance related talk, detailing first the pleasures of beauty work and moving on to argue that even those who

claim to reject these processes desire to fit in to their chosen scene in a way closely linked to appearances. 'Beauty work' is about using the various technologies (makeup, hair products) to achieve an acceptable appearance, as determined by the culture at large. Growing out of a feminist critique of women's objectification, the term helps make visible the labour required to achieve this.

The pleasures of beauty work

The demarcation of night from day was previously shown to be related to the pleasures of nights out and discussion around appearances show that they are linked to that demarcation. Nights out are commonly associated with a highly stylised and more formal dress than day time, something enabled by a tradition of dress codes in bars and clubs. Furthermore, Newcastle has a reputation for the attention to appearances made evident in its NTE:

> I would say that especially on the weekend, I'd say everyone makes a big effort. They do in [my hometown] as well but I think, maybe it's just like… especially the…girls the way they dress and everything, but especially the boys. Coming up here I think the boys are a different species up here. (Lisa, FG3)

Lisa emphasises the collective effort of those in the NTE, particularly that in Newcastle it is 'everyone', both women and men, who want to look good (as opposed to just women). Interestingly Lisa notes that the boys 'up here' are a 'different species'; but given that she is participating in a scene dominated by students it is likely that many of the men she sees 'up here' are not the native species (Geordies), but rather other students who are also familiar with the city's reputation as a place to get 'suited and booted' and who chose to participate and therefore create that visible culture. In this sense, Newcastle' reputation precedes it and participant expectations shape their encounter with the city, just as social understandings of alcohol shape the intoxication experience (as I argue in Chapter Six).

Despite this reputation as a place to get dressed up, as with other aspects of the NTE, participants spoke about their personal appearances in terms of diversity and choice; there are lots of different bars and clubs and these each have their own norms relating to style of dress. There are also different kinds of night out and getting dressed up was presented as one option among many. Though Amelia (FG2) preferred, in general, casual nights out she added:

> So yeah, sometimes me and the girls are like 'oh I feel like getting dressed up', once every few months or something we'll go on a classy night out.

For Amelia, getting dressed up is linked to an experience of classiness which shapes the tone of the night out. Different styles of dress are associated with different kinds of nights out and different subjectivities; how we dress is closely related to how we feel. Maddy (FG6) commented that, met with the prospect of a dressy night:

> I get excited like 'ah yeah' I get to do my hair and makeup all nice instead of just putting some Vans and my jeans on

This kind of night out is framed as an exciting opportunity to get dressed up, and make a change to her everyday look. Looking 'nice' or 'pretty' was a clear pleasure for a number of participants, such as Val (FG3):

> I love part of like, when I get ready and looking really dolled up and pretty. And then going out and people like 'oh I love your dress' or 'oh I love your eyeshadow' and people just complimenting you.

Val's pleasure is about both feeling she looks good and being told she looks good through being complimented by others; getting this kind of validation from women strangers was shown to be a source of bonding between women in Chapter Five.

For other participants, getting dressed up for nights out was described as 'just part of it' (Josie, FG4) and something that allows you to feel 'you're properly ready' (Alli, FG4). As participants of FG5 noted:

> Interviewer: What's good about being dressed up?

> Laurie: I don't know, it just makes you feel better I think. Like it's obviously good being in your pyjamas but I don't know I just like the feeling of being dressed up
>
> Carey: To be fair though it does make you feel better going out, thinking 'I've put loads of effort in'.

'Effort' appeared a number of times in discussion of appearances and putting in effort was related to getting in the mood. The joys of getting ready have already been detailed in Chapter Five when the highly social nature of the occasion was outlined. At the subjective level, there were other pleasures to be found during this time, particularly related to the opportunity to use makeup to look different to everyday life. Ellie (FG2) for example shared how her enjoyment of putting makeup on was about 'seeing the transformation' and Lauren (FG4) described how her night out makeup was different to her day makeup. Despite owning 'enough to open a shop' Eleanor (FG4) did not wear makeup through the day at all; it was for nights out that she invested this money and when she had the chance to practice her skills and artistry/creativity.

There is an investment of time and energy (and often money) in looking good in the NTE and the pay-off is feeling you look good and feel good by extension. This was presented as a straightforward relationship and how the pleasures of looking good were linked to wider discourses, of (particularly female) beauty was not something that emerged in the focus groups. Looking good was particularly prized because of its capacity to confer confidence as Berny (FG3) described:

> I feel like when you get dressed up it just gives you confidence, it's not actually about what you look like, it's just feeling confident and then when you're out you want to feel confident

Berny's linking of getting dressed up and feeling confident go to the heart of what many feminists consider a major cause of women's continued oppression; objectification and the close association between women's perception of their beauty (relative to the cultural norms) and their sense of worth, or in this case specifically confidence. Beauty is highly valued in our society and a great deal of feminist writing has attempted to highlight how women's value has been

historically tied to their ability to create and maintain a beautiful physical appearance. Woolf's (1991) *The Beauty Myth* brought this to cultural prominence arguing that this association of women and beauty was a major source of women's oppression, one pernicious in its operation as it is internalised and performed by the women themselves. More recently, Gill's (2007b) writing on post-feminism has highlighted the ways in which women's beauty work has moved beyond a concern with the male gaze to a 'self-policing, narcissistic gaze' framed by notions of choice (Gill, 2007b: 151). Riley et al. (2016) have expanded on this to describe women's interactions as invoking a post-feminist gaze, which operates as a regulatory force between women.

Complicating these positions, is the pleasure women get from participating in the beauty order, and in the NTE this is tied not only to their physical appearance but to a distinct sense of self that had been entered into for the night out. A further challenge to a simplistic feminist reading of women's beauty work, one that locates the anxiety about appearance as a function of a sexist double standard, is the experience many young women have of men's appearance related anxiety. While most women agreed that they took longer to get ready than men and that many men were not interested in extensive grooming, others highlighted men's participation in regimes of beauty work and as Lisa (FG3) notes above, the city is known for the smart attire of everyone on a night out, men included. These are themes discussed in the conclusion of this chapter.

The pleasures of resisting beauty work

Many participants discussed the pleasures of getting dressed up as occasional activity, rather than being a necessary condition of going on night outs. The student scene in general was described as casual (few bars had official dress codes in place for women) with participants going out in jeans, t-shirts and trainers, often explicitly rejecting typical markers of femininity associated with the NTE, such as

dresses and high heels[37]. In doing so, a number of participants claimed to not care about how they looked on nights out, a claim undermined in every case by comments that suggested they cared a great deal. For example, Carey (FG5) stated that she is not 'really bothered' about how she looks, does not care if she looks 'like a scruff' and that she does not 'do much' in terms of getting ready. However, she also said that she knows what she is wearing on a night out 'a couple days before' and that her Mam would iron her clothes for her. Furthermore, she acknowledged that you 'feel better' when you have made an effort.

Participants of FG7 also claimed to have opted out of the 'dressing up' culture of the NTE, sharing the following:

> Pam: We don't get dressed up
>
> Claire: We always go out in jeans, which is really weird because I never used to until I came to [the city], I never used to wear jeans on a night out but it's all I wear now
>
> Pam: Just can't be bothered
>
> Anna: And no heels
>
> Claire: Hassled with a dress that you have to keep pulling down
>
> Pam: Boobs going everywhere because you can't put a bra on
>
> Claire: Flats as well, no heels
>
> Anna: Ah yeah, converse
>
> Interviewer: And do you feel comfortable going out into a bar in those kind of clothes or do you feel like there's a pressure to dress up?
>
> Pam: I mean we all wear makeup

[37] This is contrast to Bailey et al. (2015) who describe the desire/pressure to wear heels as pervasive amongst their female research participants.

Claire: Yeah

Anna: We all like, look presentable

Though they chose not to wear dresses and heels, Pam acknowledged that they do conform to at least some aspects of the gendered expectations around appearances in the NTE- that they wear makeup and that they are 'presentable' i.e. meet the expectations of their scene of choice. An exchange in FG1 revealed similar complexities with Amy and Tina discussing their decision not to wear heels:

Andrea: I feel like some places you go, all the girl are in heels and you're like 'I should wear heels'. I hate wearing heels

Interviewer: Do you feel any pressure to wear heels though I mean could you go out do you think anyone actually notices?

Amy: I don't care anymore, when I first started going out I thought I had to wear nice shoes but now I just wear converse, I don't care

Tina: Yeah I feel like that definitely coz if I wear heels I'm like 6ft 1 and like…

[Laughter]

Amy: Same

Tina: I used to wear heels when I went out but then it was my boyfriend he said to us, 'you look really tall' like...

Andrea: Ahh

Tina: 'Really really tall' and I was like 'oh no I feel uncomfortable now' so I just went out in trainers but like...

Many participants across focus groups discussed the decision to not wear heels as relating to the physical comfort they experience but Amy and Tina's positions are more complex. In the case of Amy, she is willing to opt out of what was at one time an important marker of feminine beauty, the high heel, but she links her desire to wear trainers to her height, having stated earlier that at 5ft 10 she does not 'need heels in my life'. For Tina, the decision to stop wearing heels was also tied to being too tall but in her case was a direct response to comments made by her boyfriend. Their decision to opt out of wearing high heels has to be understood within the

context of normative, society wide ideas about women and men's appearance; being tall is a quality much prized in men, and not so in women. Their decision to opt out of wearing heels is less about rejecting the unrealistic expectations of society relating to women's appearance and more about being selective in terms of which ones they breach. It is vital to note that like so much of the NTE, this is done within the support provided by friendship groups.

This tension between claims of not caring and a clear investment in appearances which conform to the expectations of the NTE is also related (in an ambiguous way) to the heteronormative sexual/romantic possibilities of nights out. That women's beauty work was an outward signal for sexual attention and interest was occasionally implied, for example Amy (FG1) and Lauren (FG4) spoke in detail about enjoying getting dressed up, and then justified their 'not caring' about beauty work as a function of them being in a relationship. Lauren (FG4) later made this link explicit, adding that it was 'maybe the difference' between girls who were fully dressed up and those who were not; the former were trying to pull. But as the women's own accounts suggest beauty work is about more than pulling as the following section makes clear.

In terms of how participants reconcile 'not caring' and doing the beauty work they do, it is worth noting the various technologies these young women have at their disposal to create their desired look. Getting dressed up can include attention to clothing, shoes, jewellery, skin (ie shaved/tanned), nails, hair and makeup, and participants described various approaches to these. Beauty was a capital generated through engagement with technologies and each participant made reference to their own preferences. For example, Alli (FG4) often bought new dresses for nights out but wore no makeup; for Val (FG3) styling her hair was the most important part of her getting ready and for Eleanor (FG4) getting her face 'sick'[38] could

[38] 'Sick' – slang for cool / high quality

compensate for being casually dressed. By engaging selectively with these the participants were able to make claims of not caring overall, while clearly engaging in certain areas and, in this sense, beauty is a capital that can be creatively generated. There was often at least one possible effort they could have made (face, clothes, hair, shoes) that they chose not to, and in doing so can maintain that they 'don't care'. It may also reflect that, for some participants at least, looking good was less important to them than other parts of the night out, such as good conversations, dancing, singing and finding themselves in an atmosphere they enjoyed.

In terms of why they would claim not to care, the data suggest a number of possibilities. Given that there was for some a tacit association between getting dressed up and being on the pull, and the fact participants largely positioned themselves as indifferent to male attention, a lack of concern for how they looked can be understood as evidence of their lack of interest in pulling. For participants such as Carey (FG5), the rejection of beauty work was also about asserting confidence and she commented:

> It just depends how much you care what everybody thinks as well.

Carey claimed she did not care what people thought about her and likewise Tanya (FG5) commented:

> I don't get that stressed [getting ready] but then I don't care as much. Like, if my makeup doesn't sit right I'll take it off and put mascara on and go out like that

Tanya says she will take her makeup off if the application is not going well and to demonstrate how little she cares say says she will simply wear mascara. Though this is a contrast in terms of other participants such as Nia (FG3) who would not leave the house without a 'full face', Tanya still cares enough to wear mascara; going out without any makeup on does not seem to be an option.

Josie (FG4) acknowledged she was aware of the standards operating in the NTE but added 'but it's not like it's going to let you…get to youse'. More explicitly feminist

were Ellie (FG2) who commented 'you are not there for people to look at' and Andrea (FG1) who stated she was not out to 'impress anyone'. Lauren (FG4) was keen to position herself as empowered in her choices relating to makeup, sharing the following:

> I do have different types of makeup. I don't know why I do but that's just my personal preference…I'm not a girl who spends hours on the makeup, it takes me about half an hour to do my makeup before going out. Takes me about three seconds to do this you know what I mean? I don't really get forced in a way. It's my choice, I enjoy it, enjoy dressing up

Through comments such as these participants were able to distance themselves from the need for validation from others in the NTE, and present themselves as strong, confident women. Lauren minimises her investment by claiming it only takes her 'three seconds' to do her makeup. What other comments betrayed however was a deep sense of wanting to belong and feeling that you fit in. Those who admitted to enjoying dressing up foregrounded their own choice and pleasure in doing so and no participant discussed dressing up in the hope they would meet a man or that one would find them attractive. In fact, given that most of the attention women gave and received was from other women it makes more sense to understand these beauty cultures as located in women's networks, and dynamics between women. Women within friendship groups and within the NTE overall can thus be understood as a 'community of practice' (Lyons and Willott, 2008; Paechter, 2006) articulating 'femininity' (and intoxication) in a localised and context specific way. This community extends beyond the NTE, to include the shared preparation for nights out, as well as the conversations and texts running up to the night out, through which they ensured a similarity in style of dress. It might also be considered to include the social media networks related to the NTE in which they participate (following club nights and promoters on Instagram for example), something future research can address.

To summarise, the NTE these women enjoy is one in which some effort is put into appearances but where there exist no overall standards of dress. Though there is a

history and reputation of the NTE as a space for smart attire there are multiple scenes operating in the city, each with their own expectations. Lacking in participant descriptions but evident on analysis is that running through their sense of choice was a desire to both look good and to conform to what looking good meant within a given bar/club/scene. Complicating this further is the recognition that these scenes are constituted by those who attend; through their attendance and collective decision making regarding appearances women can be situated within some beauty norms and simultaneously outside of others.

A major finding around appearances in the NTE is that while many women enjoyed the beauty work associated with nights out, the most important thing was to fit in by dressing for the night you wanted, and going to bars and clubs which had the atmosphere you desired; classy night or casual. In meeting the standards of your chosen scene you participate in that community and are connected in this way to the others who have chosen to have that kind of night. The pleasures of feeling embraced and at one with a scene were discussed in Chapter Four, how this plays out with regards to appearances is explored in more detail in the following section.

Fitting in by looking good: mutuality and belonging

Despite the lack of official dress codes there were still norms operating in the NTE where, as Amy (FG1) noted, 'the dress code is like what other people kind of expect you to wear'. What you are expected to wear is dependent upon the bar, club or scene in question with Josie (FG4) stating 'you know what you should wear for where you're going' and others such as Amy (FG1) demonstrating knowledge of this kind:

> Yeah so if someone told me oh we're going to the quayside for that, I'd dress up. But if someone was like we're going into town I'd probably just wear dungarees

Whether to get dressed up was presented as a decision made at the group level; friends decide the kind of night they want and dress appropriately. A number of women spoke in particular about birthday nights out, marking these as special

occasions by spending more time and energy on getting ready for them, dressing more formally and in a way that is further removed from their everyday style of dress. This represents another way in which women expressed their agency, emphasising their choices (collective in this instance) above externally imposed standards of dress.

The agreement between friends ensures they will fit in where they go, a central concern for many. While there was a general sense of knowing where to go for the night out you wanted, a number of participants had experienced being inadvertently out of sync with the appearance of others, as described by FG2:

> Amelia: So like Satellite on a Thursday. I went there once like last year, very dressy, very dressy, girls in really nice outfits and fancy heels and stuff but…
>
> Marion: Same with Candybox on a Friday, I went once and everyone was in skimpy dresses and heels and I was like I don't think this is for me…
>
> Interviewer: What were you wearing?
>
> Marion: I was in trainers and jeans so I was like 'hmmm'
>
> [Laughter]
>
> Amelia: That's the thing you can go like that but like you feel a bit odd one out…not just the same

Both Amelia and Marion make reference to what other women are wearing; women set the tone for other women and the need to fit in is clearly gendered. While Amelia describes this discomfort as an internal sense of not fitting in (a social pressure which is experienced as internally generated), there was also evidence it comes directly from other people in the NTE. For example, Ellie (FG2) shared details of an interaction she had in the NTE:

> Boys drop comments as well. If you're like…I can't remember where I was but I was just wearing casual clothes but it was really dressy and some guy was like 'aha are you just coming from your work' and I was like 'whatever' and then I had a wee mini backpack as

> well and some guy said 'oh, are you going inter-railing with that backpack?' [Laughter]

Ellie's response of 'whatever' suggests that she wants to communicate that she is not deeply affected by this and the story was told with humour and met with laughter. While both of these comments are framed as jokes, Ellie's sharing of them at this point in the conversation demonstrate how they function to maintain the expectations relating to a certain level of formality in certain parts of the NTE, whether she is able to dismiss them or not.

While the men's comments were not described as deeply felt in Ellie's case, members of her focus group (FG2) described how other people's actions could have an impact on their night:

> Amelia: There are some lovely girls that I've met on nights out and there are other ones who will look you up and down and I'm like 'What are you doing?'
>
> Marion: Just make you feel bad for no reason at all
>
> Interviewer: Can you give me an example of how they might do that?
>
> Marion: Like if they're in dresses and heels and you're walking in trainers they do just look you up and down as though 'what are you wearing?'

The need to conform to unspoken dress codes is here shown to be actively maintained by people on nights out and is a clear example of the post-feminist gaze (Riley et al., 2016). Furthermore, this is relational: by dressing casually, Marion is cast as underdressed but also inadvertently casts the women as overdressed, something which might factor into their unkind behaviour.

This fear of judgement, of being made to feel bad, was not an insignificant threat to a night out for some and in discussing the risk of being underdressed in a bar, Eleanor (FG4) stated she would rather go home than open herself up to that kind of feedback:

> If we ended up deciding to go somewhere like really quite fancy, I'll be like 'I'm going home'. I feel like…I don't know…it's almost like I'd go there and feel looked upon and judged

Likewise, being overdressed was a possibility and discussing a popular student venue in town FG3 shared the following exchange:

> Nia: I've never worn heels
>
> Val: No, like if you wear heels in 45s [a club] you'd look…
>
> Lisa: You'd be the odd one out

For these young women looking good in the NTE is about fitting in. Having made an effort to look good, those in the NTE are also vulnerable to feeling they have failed in this regard through either unkind comments from others in the NTE or through an internal comparison with others as Pam (FG7) describes:

> Sometimes I will walk, because we went to 45s and when we were there I just, the amount of girls who had jumpsuits on, everything, blow dries and I was just walking around in my jeans like 'alright maybe I should have made an effort'.

Pam is not confronted with unkind comments – she can see with her own eyes that she is not in line with the norms of the club, she is excluded from them because she did not make the effort, framed as a personal choice as opposed to anything structurally determined (like not having enough money to buy expensive clothes). If the pleasures of engaging in the NTE are related to a distinct subjectivity, it is a subjectivity into which time and energy (and to some extent, money) around appearances has been invested. The pleasures are linked to embodied as well as social factors, for example enjoying makeup application and the comfort of certain clothes, along with the time together with your friends, generating the positive affect that you carry into the NTE. Locating yourself among others who share your desire for a particular kind of night is also vital and is tied to the much wider point around the sense of mutuality and collectivity which shapes so much of the pleasure in young adult experiences in the NTE. Extending the analysis from Chapter Four, which showed the collective moods to be constituted by participants

and emerging from their shared experience (rather than by any top-down mechanism of control by those operating the NTE), dressing appropriately (i.e. similarly) is an outward signal of that participation, enhancing feelings of mutuality and shared enjoyment. Making the effort to dress distinctly from their everyday selves and in line with those they identify with, these young women help shape the NTE environment they then enjoy.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on two dimensions of the subjective side of nights out, the experience of intoxication and the pleasures of beauty work. Intoxication, and ideas around it, enable pleasure in various ways; through encouraging laughter and more free flowing interactions, bestowing confidence and providing a safety net for behaviour that steps outside of what would usually be considered acceptable. This allows for an 'experience of difference' as described by Duff (2008), which is further enabled by the culture of 'dressing up' in the NTE; participants describe looking and feeling different in the NTE and these two facts are related.

Many participants enjoyed the process of beauty work and the social context in which it occurred, particularly getting ready together. While there could be anxiety around appearances on a night out there was also a great deal of variety of nights out available and dressing glamorously or wearing lots of makeup were not shown to be necessary for participation in the NTE. This finding is in contrast to the vast majority of work which looks at women's appearances in this context, which suggests maintaining a normative femininity is a central concern for women (Bailey et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2012; Hutton et al., 2016; Skeggs, 1997; Skeggs, 2001). Despite the clear influence of society wide ideas about women's beauty, young women overwhelmingly framed their own decisions around appearances as an issue of choice, and exercising this choice is one way participants cultivate a specific and pleasurable subjectivity in this cultural context. Importantly my analysis shows the extent to which this negotiation of beauty norms occurs at the group level, within friendship groups. Decisions are made by peers about what kind of night

they want, where to go and how to dress. This focus on group decisions can help to avoid the agency/structure impasse so much writing on beauty work reaches when using an individualist framework.

Work on appearances is also a way in which these young women signal their participation in their scene of choice and this is important when relating the study's findings to research that has explored non-mainstream night time cultures. Both clubbing culture (Hutton, 2004) and the metal scene (Riches, 2015) have been suggested as spaces in which traditional, oppressive attitudes towards women are somehow transmuted. For example, the sexual harassment associated with the heteronormative and mainstream scenes that feature prominently in the current study, is shown to be, if not eradicated, then certainly reduced, in Hutton's (2004) study of club culture. Likewise, Riches (2015) draws attention to women's embodied practices at metal nights, particularly the mosh pit, to argue for an understanding of the scene as inclusive of women. While it may be the case that women in dance and metal scenes have a distinct gender experience, it is difficult to imagine ultra-feminine 'girly girls' being embraced in counter cultures such as these, which in some sense set themselves in opposition to the mainstream and what it represents. That is, it is likely women in these subcultures are equally subject to (scene specific) norms around appearances, albeit different norms to those operating in mainstream cultures. Women's appearance must therefore be understood in this context of identity positioning, as well as in terms of feminist critiques of sexualised culture and objectification.

The three preceding analysis chapters have each explored an aspect of young women's pleasure in the NTE, drawing attention to the cultural, interactive and subjective facets of their experience. Mutuality, connection and an 'opened out' subjectivity have come through as central in this analysis, which has shown the various ways in which gender is woven into the practices of young women drinkers. The following chapter draws together these insights and returns to the existing research, to locate the findings there.

Chapter Seven

Conclusions

The intention of this study was to provide a highly situated account of alcohol use, gender and pleasure. Taking Newcastle's NTE as its context, the thesis explores the co-productive nature of the cultural, material and subjective realities of the young women participants and sought to understand their experiences in light of this. To compliment (and complicate) research which focuses on the risks women experience in the NTE, this study was designed to provide an in-depth analysis of their pleasure there. In doing so, it also aimed to highlight the specific ways in which gender practices are woven into the cultural and social behaviours under investigation and to make visible the subjective and affective dimension of nights out. This was set against a backdrop of scholarly work that emphasises the influence of neoliberal and post-feminist sense-making in contemporary culture and their possible role in subject formation.

My analysis of the existing literature highlighted the relative lack of detail on the subjective (though socially patterned) dimension of pleasure-seeking behaviour. This thesis provides a detailed account of pleasures, which show the complex mix of cultural, social and personal factors at play. The findings chapters have each presented an analysis pertaining to one facet of participants' experiences in the NTE (the cultural and collective, the interactive, and the subjective), revealing mutuality and an 'opened out' subjectivity as at the heart of pleasure.

This chapter first reviews the major findings of the thesis before returning to the existing research literature to situate the findings there, with attention to the ways in which they can support and challenge current perspectives. As the literature was drawn from a range of research fields these will each be discussed in turn, with opportunities for further work highlighted where appropriate. Following this, implications for policy are considered, along with how the key findings of this thesis can be developed. Finally, limitations of the current study are discussed.

What's so good about going out?

Understanding the appeal of the NTE to the young women participants who seek pleasure there has been the fundamental focus of this thesis. It is my contention that without a clear articulation of their pleasures it is not possible to make sense of young women's experiences in the NTE, both in terms of understanding their social needs as well as managing the risks they perceive. Furthermore, I argue that without an understanding of what young women are getting from their NTE experiences we cannot effectively challenge the aspects of drinking culture which pose the significant health and social risks detailed in the literature analysis.

The importance of mutuality to the pleasure these young women experience in the NTE runs through the analysis chapters and is the major and novel contribution to the research field. This goes beyond accounts of bonding with friends during drinking (de Visser et al., 2013; MacLean, 2015; Niland et al., 2013) to include a sense of connection to the collective, to the crowds of pleasure seekers in the NTE united in their desire to have a good time, as discussed in Chapter Four. This feeling of connection is shaped to some extent by the marketing around the student scene and the participants' student status was clearly important to their understanding of their experience of this context (attending student nights etc.). However, given the expansion of HE and the increased percentage of young adults studying beyond the age of 18, the student experience is no longer one associated with a mono-culture, nor with a particular socio-economic group. In the context of multiple student scenes, being a student is minimally defined by a shared economic status: students

are understood to have limited financial resources and the student scene focuses on drinks offers and promotions. Furthermore, their pursuit of feelings of connection need not be interpreted as a sign their everyday lives are defined by isolation (as in 'pressure valve' explanations of NTE excess (Hobbs et al., 2005)); as Mugford and O'Malley (1991) have argued in response to a deficit model of pleasure-seeking, pleasure can also be understood as a desire for intense sensations. Intense sensations, and emotions, are an integral part of the appeal of nights out, as discussed in Chapter Six. On the collective level, this intensity is manifest in the dynamic (and often transgressive) atmospheres which characterise the NTE's appeal.

Mutuality is also the central focus in my analysis of the pleasures of interaction (Chapter Five); for these women the NTE is a collectively experienced social context. They plan, prepare and participate in the NTE as a group and their joyful moods are generated through the interactions they have. The framing of nights out as time out from the day to day, along with the disinhibiting effects of alcohol, provides a platform for the intimate talk that both reflects and constitutes their bonds. The enhanced sociality of the NTE also enables a reaching out towards others and talking to strangers, particularly other women, is another expression of the pleasures of connection. In clear contrast to the ways in which they discussed men's going out culture, for these women sexual interests were a secondary concern and managing the (often unwanted) sexual attention they experience in the NTE resulted in a strengthened sense of connection between women. Taking care of each other, in the context of highly gendered risks, was another way in which the mutuality, and reciprocity, were articulated.

Chapter Six developed my analysis of mutuality towards an understanding of experience in the NTE as characterised by an 'opened out' subjectivity. Alcohol was shown to confer joy and confidence, both through its physiological effects and its reputation as a social lubricant with an associated excuse value. This, together with the efforts made to look the part (in line with the group's desire for a particular

type of night and with the scene of choice) point towards an experience of self that is outward facing, primed for interaction, ready to affect and be affected. This 'opened out' subjectivity is the basis of pleasure-seeking in the NTE; it enables the blurred boundary between self and other that underscores the much desired experience of connection and mutuality. The intoxication and beauty work associated with the NTE facilitate this experience of self by allowing individuals the opportunity to both feel and look distinct from their day time life. Young women's expectations for the night are embodied in the processes of collective preparation - in getting ready, and drinking, together.

These findings foreground the subjective dimension of nights out and can help researchers understand better the continued appeal of going out for young women amidst a plethora of high profile risks including accidents when drunk, the long term consequences of excessive alcohol use, and victimisation, particularly sexual harassment and violence. The stigmatising media representations of drunk women noted in the literature analysis chapter did not feature strongly in these young women's accounts, partly, I suggest, due to the prominence of collective constructions of their drinking culture: within their communities women's heavy drinking is not stigmatised. Appreciating the deeply felt sense of connection at the heart of women's nights out should therefore be at the forefront of interventions to support safer drinking practices as well as in analyses of women's experiences in the NTE.

In addition to this central finding regarding mutuality and connection, the research also generated a number of specific insights that contribute to the existing literature, which are reviewed in the following two sections.

Neoliberal logic: young adult drinking in public health and social policy

Much of the material in the public health and social policy field reviewed in the literature analysis chapter cast young adult drinking as a problem to be solved,

either through population wide measures to reduce alcohol consumption (the public health perspective) or through encouraging more responsible drinking in this age group (the approach of recent government policy). This latter point is in line with the prevailing logic of the neoliberal economic model, which stresses minimal state intervention in markets in favour of individual responsibility and risk management.

My data clearly show that the cheap cost of alcohol is a driver of heavy consumption, with participants stating that they drink at home to save money and go to trebles bars early to get drunk cheaply. They also state that when drinks are more expensive they drink less; the relationship between the market and consumption practices is clear-cut and in line with the reasoning used in favour of MUP. In this narrow sense, they are very much rational consumers, and financially responsible, aiming to reach a pleasurable level of intoxication within their financial constraints. That their desirable state of intoxication is considered excessive and irresponsible by certain groups (national media, public health officials) did not feature in their accounts and this is likely a function of the normalisation of heavy drinking Parker et al. (1998) describe.

Quite in line with Parker et al. (1998), my findings show that very heavy drinking is, at least within this demographic, the norm and many participants considered it a central part of their student experience. In that my findings show the desire for mutual experiences predicated on shared levels of intoxication, they enrich the normalisation thesis by providing a subjective and affective dimension[39]. The availability and abundance of cheap alcohol in the NTE and the encouragement through promotion of cheap drinking options works in tandem with the visibility and acceptability of drunken comportment on the streets of the city. Though

[39] Cf. Bøhling (2014) for an exploration of this from within a non-representational framework, with reference to Tarde's notion of 'imitation'.

certain media have helped generate a moral panic around young adult excess, they have also publicised excessive drinking and possibly fed into young adult drinkers' self-understanding, normalising excess as a typical feature of this age group's drinking culture. Ultimately, the perspective of those whose opinions matter to the participants (that is, their peers), is that this is typical young adult behaviour. Often, their behaviours are neither criminal nor sufficiently disruptive to require regulation by the devolved powers of the NTE such as bouncers. Furthermore, though licensing laws prohibit the sale of alcohol to drunk people, participants described drinking far past this point, including after having vomited. Overall, there appears virtually no feedback from their immediate environment that their level of intoxication is unacceptable or dangerous from a health point of view. The dangers which were identified, most notably sexual harassment and violence, were presented as manageable within friendship groups.

Given the current government's ideological commitment to citizens' liberty as it relates to alcohol use, and its simultaneous need to educate the population and minimize the costs of alcohol-related harm to the NHS, public health campaigns have attempted to educate young people into making 'the right choice'. One way 'responsible drinking' has been encouraged through public health initiatives is by foregrounding the risks, for example through a scare tactic advertising campaign commissioned by the UK Home Office, showing (in gender specific ways) certain undesirable consequences of excessive consumption (Squibb, 2008).[40] However, as Brown and Gregg (2012) have shown in relation to regret, these messages are not an effective deterrent and my research makes clear that managing risks and their consequences can be built into narratives of pleasure; remembering embarrassing incidents with humour is one example, demonstrating your value as a friend by caring for those who have 'overdone it' another. If behaviour change is the

[40] The Binge Girl / Binge Boy campaign focussed on looking unattractive and violence respectively.

intended outcome of research in this area then what young adults are getting out of their drinking must come into focus. Understanding how those pleasures can be met in ways less deleterious to health would seem a priority in this regard. My own findings, which show young women are seeking a feeling of collective belonging and mutuality, can serve as a launch pad for further research on emerging young adult cultures. Young adults are inhabiting a cultural context in which rapid changes to the world around them, including the rise of social media, are undermining traditional forms of social interaction, including going out. How the market, and other forces, rise to meet young adults' need for connection and mutuality is a particularly rich vein which future research can pursue.

The policy emphasis on information over regulation is predicated upon an understanding of decision-making subjects (as rational consumers) that has been critiqued. Furthermore, as Babor et al. (2010) note, alcohol is 'no ordinary commodity' and decisions made around its purchase and consumption are sensitive to a wide range of cultural influences. My research shows that the decision to drink, the amount drunk, and the behaviour while drunk are bound up with a strong sense of connection to peers, but also to the atmospheres of the NTE overall. Decisions are not in this way truly personal but are socially constituted. This finding supports and enhances the existing public health literature, which advocates population level change rather than targeting 'problem drinkers', by providing a rationale why this should be the case; problem drinkers are a function of cultural norms and these are collectively established.

Returning to an analysis of neoliberalism's influence in understandings of this context, the focus on mutuality introduces the possibility of resisting the individualism so central to its ideology, as well as undermining the very subject position upon which its ideology rests: that of the independent and autonomous agent, motivated by self-interest. Throughout the discussion in focus groups, the distinction between self and other was blurred in favour of a self-in-relation. A recognition of this self-in-relation opens up the analysis towards a consideration of

agency in collectives, mediated through relationships. This may prove a particularly fruitful area of exploration for further studies of this context, with an emphasis on how decisions are negotiated at the group level.

Though the consumption context is shaped, to some extent, by the prevailing neoliberal economic model, whether the subjectivities under investigation are best understood as 'neoliberal' is very much open to debate. My findings, which emphasise mutuality, connection and an understanding of pleasure and risk as experienced in and through collectives, go some way to suggesting neoliberalism's influence as a sense-making logic implicated in subject-formation, is limited. Though 'choice' features prominently in the findings this cannot be assumed to represent the hegemony of a neoliberal subject position; instead, it can be taken to reflect a genuine sense of available options. Further research into how people from other demographic groups discuss nights out can build upon these findings.

Post-feminist sensibilities: Gender, Intoxication and the culture of the NTE

Gender has run throughout the findings chapters and feminist perspectives have in many ways shaped the analysis. How the widespread double standards around drinking and drunken behaviour, and other (invisible) regulations, are experienced and work to enable/disable specific pleasures for young women was a prominent theme. These data sit against a backdrop of feminist critique that highlights women's continued struggles in this context, both material and psychological; how women navigate femininity is particularly well studied. Post-feminist sensibilities are also emphasised in the existing literature, showing how feminist critiques are both taken into account (McRobbie, 2008) and simultaneously repudiated (Scharff, 2016) in contemporary media culture. Research invested in this perspective has sought to identify in empirical work how these media discourses manifest in the talk, relationships and subjectivities, of women.

My analysis revealed that several pleasures of nights out were experienced as a result of managing the reality of gender inequality. Examples of this include the intimacy and close friendships strengthened through caregiving in the context of highly gendered risk, and the pleasures of collective beauty work conducted in a cultural context of women's continued objectification and arguably, subjectification (Gill, 2007b). There were diverse accounts of women's support and comradery in the NTE both within friendship groups as well as between women who do not know each other. The former has been discussed previously by feminist writers such as McRobbie (1978) who wrote of young women's friendship as a source of protection in patriarchal structures; as it relates to women's safety, this is clearly the case with the current participants and women's solidarity was functional in certain respects. The compliments shared between women who do not know each other can also be understood in this way, as a kind of psychological and emotional protection in a context where appearances are important and there is a shared desire and anxiety about looking good.

Riley et al. (2016) set compliments in the wider context of post-feminist sensibility. In their exploration of the 'post-feminist gaze' the authors argue complimenting can be understood in light of both objectification and misrecognition (Skeggs, 2001); women's value is tied to their appearance and successful achievement of a feminine appearance is dependent on other women's validation. In this way, though complimenting can be a source of pleasure, the authors claim this simultaneously folds 'participants back into a regulatory framework in which they were valued through their appearance' (Riley et al., 2016: 106). This is related to one of the more surprising findings of the study regarding the status of beauty work, which was discussed in complex and often contradictory ways. Objectification and beauty work have been central to feminist critique of culture in the last 50 years and this analysis contributes to understandings of contemporary young womanhood as it relates to these issues.

While my findings do not support an analysis which suggests the strangle hold of a highly sexualised femininity (Bailey et al., 2015) or the necessity of achieving a hyperfeminine look (Riley et al., 2016) there are a number of expectations around appearances in the NTE and these act as forces shaping the experiences of young women and through which they must navigate. What my analysis contributes is that it is a sense of fitting in that many young women pursue in terms of their appearance and that friendship groups can negotiate at the collective level how to engage with prevailing beauty norms. Furthermore, like so many other features of the NTE, the norms relating to appearance are diverse and context specific and there are undoubtedly elements of personal choice and preferences operating in the young women's cultures described. There was a wide range of perspectives on the relative importance of beauty work on nights out such that generalising about young women's relationship to norms around appearance is difficult. In terms of norms being regulatory (Riley et al., 2016), or the achievement of femininity being closely tied to women's self-worth and value (Skeggs, 2001), my research suggests a much more complex and diverse picture of young women's relationship to beauty work, which future research can explore. Throughout this research the status of the NTE as a distinct social arena with its own cultural meanings has been emphasised; as such, discussion of beauty work should tread cautiously when extrapolating from this context to reason around women's day to day navigation of beauty norms and practices, or indeed to their deeply held and personal sense of value and worth.

There is another dimension to women complimenting each other which has received little attention, namely, young women's decision to externalise their thoughts and feelings about other women's appearances. Given the overarching importance of connection in young women's accounts of pleasure, the compliment-laden interactions they describe can also be understood as an expression of their desire to simply connect to those outside their peer group. Though this takes a gendered form- focussing on women's desire to be beautiful as an understood source of anxiety and pride- the desire to reach out to others and initiate talk is something that is common throughout the NTE; many participants spoke about

starting conversations with men as well as with women. Where this 'reaching out' does take the form of complimenting women, it may be the case that interacting with men is avoided (consciously or not) due to the often highly charged sexual atmospheres in clubs within which any interaction may be taken as a sign of (hetero)sexual interest. Given the how strongly sexual harassment emerged as a theme in the data, this is entirely possible but something the current research cannot determine. This is a particularly rich area for further study as at present there is a dearth of research focussing on heterosocialty in the NTE.

While post-feminist research highlights the new and subtle ways in which gender inequality operates, with particular attention to cultural/discursive modes, my findings suggest a long standing gender inequality as at the root of young women's experience, that of sexual harassment/violence and its anticipation. The focus on harassment also returns attention to the material (rather than discursive) basis of women's experience; if there is a feminist priority in research in this field, my analysis suggests sexual harassment should be it. The anticipation and experience of sexual harassment is woven into young women's NTE experience and can impact decisions made across the board- who to go out with, where to go, how to behave, how much to drink, how to get home. Furthermore, given that the participants of this study did not normalise nor make acceptable the unwanted attention they often received, interventions should prioritise men's conduct instead of focussing on how women might be complicit in the gender order, for example through their participation in beauty work which I have argued, is less about attracting men than it is about participating in beauty cultures with other women in a context specific way. In contrast to research which focuses on women's negotiation of femininity and intoxication, my analysis suggests maintaining physical safety is a more pressing concern for young women; in detailing women's experience (and inequality) in the NTE, safety work (Vera-Gay, 2018) rather than beauty work should therefore be in focus.

Policy implications and further research

As has been noted throughout this chapter, the findings of this thesis can contribute new perspectives to understandings of young women's drinking in the NTE. In terms of policy, if the priority is reducing alcohol-related harms, my findings accord with the wealth of research that shows pricing is key; it has been consistently demonstrated, not just in the UK but globally, that the most cost-effective methods of reducing alcohol-related harms are those relating to pricing policies and restrictions to alcohol availability and marketing (Chisholm et al., 2018; Public Health England, 2016b). While use of the term 'cost-effectiveness' risks collapsing the social into the economic (a common critique of neo-liberal sense making), used in this very limited way it may prove useful, given that we have a publically funded health care system in the UK.

In the context of an ongoing reluctance to introduce supply side controls, the UK Government has in recent years attempted to use education and information to discourage the drinking practices associated with young adults. However, my data suggest that scare tactic public service announcements and appeals to rational, 'moderate' consumption are, with this group at least, unlikely to result in behaviour change.[41] Not only do these messages miss the mark in terms of identifying young people's priorities, they do not take into account the rich and pleasurable subjective states pursued and, more importantly, achieved in the NTE. They also fail to acknowledge that young adult drinking cultures are a product of a wider social reality within which heavy drinking is normalised; what constitutes rational should be understood in light of this fact.

[41] Indeed, a review of policies to reduce alcohol-related harm showed 'information and education' increased awareness but were deemed insufficient to bring about lasting behaviour change across groups (Public Health England, 2016b).

A desire for mutuality, intimacy and a sense of connection is not, I have argued, specific to the NTE, but finds articulation there and alternatives to this are unlikely to emerge from policy enactments. However, future research can explore how new media and technology are implicated in the changing nature of young adulthood, and what this means for social interactions.

In terms of the gender specific findings my thesis presents there are a number of possible directions for future research. The culture of sexual harassment in the NTE is a priority in this regard and an in-depth account of young men's pulling cultures would seem vital as a basis to develop interventions to challenge this. Additionally, to better understand these young women's communities of practice, both in terms of femininity and intoxication, research should explore how women in other locations, social groups and age ranges understand and pursue pleasure in the NTE. Replicating this study with a group of young men would also help contextualise the women's perspectives on nights out. The relationship between women's beauty work in the NTE and their daily beauty practices and beliefs, was also highlighted in my analysis as requiring further research.

Limitations

This thesis has focused on the pleasures young women experience in the NTE in England's North East region. It has presented an in-depth analysis of data drawn from a sample of women living in that region, but does not claim to be exhaustive in its conclusions. Though it was not intended to study students exclusively, due to various recruitment decisions, a distinctly student experience emerged in discussions. Given the homogenous demographic groups considered here, future work can expand on this thesis' findings by employing its methodology to focus on other groups of young adults, including those of different genders, ethnicities, sexual orientations and class backgrounds. Research with those in other age brackets will also support the contextualisation of the findings presented here.

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Appendix A

Information sheet

Gender, Pleasure and the Night Time Economy

This sheet tells you all about the research and can help answer questions you might have about it. Once you've read the sheet, or talked about it with one of the researchers, you can decide whether you'd like to participate.

What are you trying to find out?

This research looks at how young women and men understand their experiences in bars and clubs (known as 'the night time economy'). The city is known to be good night out but as well as the fun to be had there are risks too. Research has shown that women and men approach going out drinking differently. This research wants to explore that further and see whether the pleasures and risks of the night time economy are experienced in the same way by young people or whether women and men have different experiences.

What will happen as part of the research?

The research uses focus groups of between 6-8 people. During the focus group the researcher will ask questions about your experiences of going out. As well as answering the questions that have been asked you'll be encouraged as a group to talk amongst yourself as you might have lots of different ideas, perspectives and experiences to talk about. Focus groups will take around 1 hour. The researcher will make an electronic recording of what is being said and will be writing down notes too when the group is chatting. This is to help them remember what was said and anything interesting that might have happened. If we're chatting and you'd like to have a break or leave the focus group, that's totally fine, just let the researcher know.

Following the focus groups pairs of individuals will be asked if they'd like to take part in a paired interview on a different day. This will be an opportunity for the researcher to ask some more questions about going out or to pick up on interesting things that they heard during the focus groups. Taking part in the focus group does not mean you have to take part in a paired interview and you will be given more information at the time if you'd like to take part in this second stage of the research.

Why do you want me to take part?

You have been chosen to take part because the research is specifically about young people who like to go out to bars and clubs and you are a young person who likes to go out to bars and clubs.

What if I don't want to take part?

You don't have to take part in the research. Just tell the researchers that you're not interested. It's not going to be a problem. It's up to you if you take part in the research.

What if I change my mind?

If, after a session, you change your mind about taking part, that's OK. You might have started off wanting to talk to the researchers, but you don't now. Or perhaps first of all you didn't want to talk to them, but now you do. It's fine, just let us know.

You said you're going to take notes/record the interview. Will you write down things that I say?

Yes, as well as recording the interview the researcher will also write things down during the session. Noting things down helps the researcher keep on track in terms of the questions they would like to ask and it makes sure is there is as much

information as possible when the listening back to the recording . What you say will be recorded/written down but your name won't be used when this is written up.

Will anyone know I've taken part in the research?

Everyone who takes part in the research will be anonymous- your real name won't be used when the research is written up. Instead you will be given a pseudonym (a fake name). The research is confidential so only those who are in the room will know who said what.

How do I know that you're going to keep my information safely?

The information you give the researcher will be kept safe by keeping it in an encrypted, password protected file. All data will be stored in this way for 5-6 years, in line with Northumbria University protocols – unless alternative retention and disposal arrangements are requested. At the appropriate date, all paper records will be shredded and this shredded waste placed into confidential waste sacks for disposal by the university contractor for such waste. At the same date, all electronic data will be deleted from the IT system.

What's going to happen after you've done all this research?

Once the conversations have been typed up by the researcher they will be analysed to look for answers to the question: are their differences in the way young women and young men experience the pleasures and risks of the night time economy?

This will then be written up by the researcher as their PhD. The idea is to spread the results as wide as possible so the full results will be published at the end of the research (around 2019). Before that, parts of the research will be written up as smaller articles and will be sent to journals and websites for publication. If you'd like to know the results of the study you can have access to this (there is a box below to tick if you'd like this).

OK, I think I want to take part

On the next page there's a consent form to sign. If you don't want to sign it, then you can just tell the researcher that you're happy to take part. They will make a note on the form for you.

You should keep this information sheet, just in case you have any questions.

I want to know more about the research

You can ask the researchers whenever you see them about the research. They will be happy to answer your questions. The researcher is Amanda McBride from Northumbria University and can be contacted by email:

amanda2.mcbride@northumbria.ac.uk

I want to complain about the research or report something about the research I'm unhappy with

You should tell a member of the research team. If you're not happy to do that, please tell the project supervisor Ruth Lewis (details below) and they will pass on your worry to a member of the research team at the university involved.

Ruth Lewis

Email: ruth.lewis@northumbria.ac.uk

Tel: 0191 2272940

Appendix B

Interview Schedule

Introductions:

Aim of focus group: establishing norms of going out (not highly personalised accounts)

Breakdown of this hour long focus group: 3 sections

- Do you like going out?

Part One: Going Out in the city?

Aim: to understand young adult awareness and engagement with the NTE in the city

Link to research on NTE, liminality, YA adult drinking cultures

- Can you describe the drinking scene in City?
- What's good about the city's drinking scene

Part Two: Gender

Aim: to understand young adult awareness and engagement with the gendered nature of drinking culture

Link to research on gender and alcohol, gender identity work, feminism

- How are nights out similar and different for women and men?

Part Three: Pleasure

Aim: to understand young adult experiences of pleasure and its contours in NTE.

Link to research on pleasure of alcohol use, public health/risk, identity work in 'risk society'/'reflexive modernity', friendships.

- Can you think back to a really good night out and tell me what makes it a good night?
- How do you feel before, during and after a good night out?
- How would the night be different if you weren't drinking?

Closing:

Summarise: each section, have I missed anything?

Thank you

Any action: questions etc.?