PRACTICES OF LEARNING, EARNING AND INTIMACY
IN WOMEN’S DRINKING BIOGRAPHIES

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the Faculty of Humanities

2017

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Word count: 68,638
Abstract

This thesis explores how women use and make sense of alcohol in their day-to-day lives. Drawing on 38 life history interviews with women born between 1939 and 1995, the thesis examines how women from different generations and social classes navigate a key contradiction underpinning the place of alcohol in British society: while on the one hand alcohol is highly visible and celebrated in popular culture, its use is also an object of moral regulation. The moral regulation of alcohol is gendered and shifts both over the life course and historically. Women’s alcohol use is particularly subject to moral judgement at specific points of the life course, principally when they are single young adults, and when they are pregnant or involved in providing care for children. Moral discourses on women’s drinking have changed considerably over the past 50 years in line with wider changes in women’s lives. Despite these changes, moral discourses surrounding the health and personal safety risks of drinking alcohol continue to position women as ‘maidens at risk’ or as ‘mothers in ruin’. The thesis investigates how women negotiate contradictory norms and expectations arising from popular cultural scripts that represent alcohol as pleasurable and moral discourses aimed at regulating their drinking. Through engaging interactional, relational and life course approaches to the study of social life, the thesis argues against the tendencies of existing perspectives on women’s alcohol use to interpret drinking as instrumentally driven toward intoxication, and as a site for the reproduction of dominant social norms through the construction of gendered and classed identities. I argue that existing approaches underplay the significance of personal relationships in providing contexts for women to experience and negotiate the meanings of alcohol across the life course. The opportunities, demands and practical constraints and requirements of ‘doing’ relationships shape how alcohol is encountered and how its meanings are interpreted and evaluated. The logic of women’s relationships to alcohol exceeds both an instrumentalist orientation to intoxication and the imperatives to reproduce dominant social norms of gender and class. Though the desire for intoxication and negotiations with gender and class scripts can at times play a part in how women use and make sense of alcohol, the uses and meanings of alcohol in women’s day-to-day lives are shaped and conditioned by their personal relationships. The thesis further argues that changes in the relative significance of personal relationships over the life course lead to changes in how women approach alcohol.
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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my committee, Professor Penny Tinkler and Dr Gemma Edwards, for their insightful advice and support throughout my PhD. Thank you as well to other friends and colleagues at Manchester. You have been a fantastic support. Morrin and Oman get a special shout out for just about keeping me sane, as does my grande amiga (so to speak), Annalise Weckesser.

I am grateful to the women who participated in this research for sharing the story of their lives with me, and for being so generous with their time.

I would also like to thank my parents and my partner, Nigel, and children, Adam and Dylan. Thank you for all your love and support. I look forward to being able to spend weekends with you again.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Mary Kathleen Fenton (1918-2008), who didn’t drink often but when she did was always up for giving us her rendition of Danny Boy.
Chapter One: A First Sip

In British society, women’s alcohol use has conflicting moral and cultural meanings (Ettore, 1997; Waterson, 2000). On the one hand, women’s drinking is an object of moral regulation, particularly when it comes to young women’s public displays of drunkenness (Patterson et al, 2016), and when drinking is seen to impinge on women’s responsibilities as prospective mothers (Waterson, 2000; Armstrong, 2003), or as mothers of young children. In public discourses, not to mention the representations circulating through the tabloid press (Patterson et al, 2016), women are often portrayed as “maidens at risk”\(^1\) or “‘mothers in ruin’\(^2\). On the other hand, drinking is celebrated in popular culture (Grube, 2004; Austin and Hurst, 2005; Grube and Waiters, 2005; Sumnall et al, 2011; Griffin et al, 2013; McCleanor et al, 2013; Watts, 2015), and is associated in varying degrees with pleasure, sociability and relaxation.

Drawing on life history interviews with 38 women born between 1939 and 1995 who reside in the North West of England, this thesis explores how women navigate the contradictory cultural and moral meanings of alcohol in their day-to-day lives in and through their personal relationships. Through engaging interactional, relational and life course approaches to the study of social life, the thesis argues against the tendencies of existing perspectives on women’s alcohol use to interpret their drinking as instrumentally driven toward intoxication, and as a site for the reproduction of dominant social norms through the construction of gendered (Measham, 2002; Emslie et al, 2015) and classed identities (Skeggs, 2005). I argue that existing approaches underplay the significance of personal relationships in providing contexts for women to experience and negotiate the meanings of alcohol across the life course. The opportunities, demands, practical constraints and requirements of ‘doing’ relationships shape how alcohol is encountered and how its meanings are interpreted and evaluated. The logic of women’s relationships to alcohol exceeds both an instrumentalist orientation to intoxication and the imperatives

\(^1\) My use of this term is inspired by Moore’s and Valverde’s (2000) analysis of discourses surrounding date-rape drugs in the 1990s. Certain public discourses and representations in popular culture position young women who are not accompanied by men as particularly at risk when drinking in the night-time economy (see also Demant and Heinskou (2011), Mackiewicz (2015), and Patterson et al (2016)).

\(^2\) As I discuss in Chapter Six, ‘mother’s ruin’ originally referred to gin. As Waterson (2000, pp. 3-4) points out, the term harkens back to eighteenth and nineteenth century “images of women consuming vast quantities of gin in an effort to terminate unwanted pregnancies” and “drunken mothers neglecting their children as their own gratification (Gutzke, 1984)”.
to reproduce dominant social norms of gender and class. Though the desire for intoxication and negotiations with gender and class scripts can at times be important, the uses and meanings of alcohol in women’s day-to-day lives are shaped and conditioned by their personal relationships. This thesis argues that changes in the relative significance of personal relationships over the life course lead to changes in how women approach alcohol.

This introductory chapter begins with an account of the wider context in which the study is situated: women’s increasing alcohol use over recent decades. The chapter then addresses how the thesis responds to gaps and deficiencies in existing approaches to the study of drinking practices and women’s alcohol use. Following this, it provides an overview of the study’s main contributions to knowledge. Next, the chapter outlines the study’s research questions. Lastly, a summary of the key arguments presented in Chapter Two through to Chapter Seven is provided.

**From moderation to a ‘culture of intoxication’? Women’s alcohol consumption in post-war and contemporary British society**

Women’s alcohol consumption has increased markedly over the past fifty years in the United Kingdom, though women still drink less on average than men (Plant, 2008, p. 156). Alcohol use is an element of many women’s day-to-day lives, with roughly 90% of British adult women drinking alcohol at least occasionally (ibid, p.159). The rise in the amount and frequency of women’s alcohol consumption is theorised by some public health researchers as being the result of “gender convergence”, that is, the increasing similarities between the lives of men and women (Bloomfield et al., 2001). A recent systematic review of 68 published studies using principally North American and European survey data on women and men from birth cohorts born between 1890 and 2000 demonstrate that the gap in female and male consumption has grown smaller over time (Slade et al, 2016, p. 10).³

³ The notion that when women are born is important in shaping the context in which relationships to alcohol are negotiated informed this study’s research design. As discussed in Chapter Three, most participants were born either toward the beginning of the post-war period or after 1970. This allowed for careful, contextualised comparisons to be drawn across different birth cohorts.
Nationally representative survey data on women’s drinking do not exist for the years prior to the introduction of the General Household Survey in the early 1970s. However, there is a small body of historical work on the impact of two World Wars on women’s access to pubs (e.g. Gutzke, 1994; Langhamer, 2003), and a very small body of work on women’s public drinking in the post-war period (e.g. Hey, 1986; Gutzke, 2014). Langhamer (2003) uses data from Mass Observation to argue that conditions on the Home Front during the Second World War provided opportunities for some groups of women to enter pubs and other licenced premises in increased numbers during the War years of 1939 to 1945. However, what happened next with regard to women’s use of licensed premises and women’s wider alcohol use is a matter of historical debate. On the one hand, Langhamer (2003, p. 437) states that:

…in the 1960s and 1970s the public house became a mainstay for the young in their leisure hours and began to make real and lasting inroads into young women’s cultural lives.

On the other hand, Gutzke (2014) emphasises how post-war pubs were unwelcoming places for women. Gutzke (2014, p. 64) uses data from market research to hypothesise that the wartime experience had the opposite effect on women’s pub-going in the years following the War than that suggested by Langhamer:

Instead of predisposing women, especially young ones, towards drinking in pubs, the war had an ironic opposite effect: it ingrained deep hostility in many juvenile and young women to ever frequenting drink premises thereafter.

According to Gutzke, women’s use of licensed premises began to increase slowly from the mid-1970s, with the introduction of wine bars and the eventual advent of pub companies (e.g. Pitcher and Piano, J.D. Wetherspoon), both of which sought to attract female customers.

Since the 1980s, women’s alcohol use has been affected by two further developments: the efforts of the alcohol industry to re-design alcoholic beverages to appeal to a younger market whose interest in drinking had subsided in the 1980s (Collin and Godfrey, 1997; Measham, 2004), and the rise of the ‘night-time economy’ (NTE) in the 1990s (Measham and Ostergaard, 2009). Intoxication through drinking ‘alcopops’ and other flavoured alcoholic drinks became widely understood by young people as another means

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4 See Shaw (2010) for an overview of the origins of the term “night-time economy”.
of reaching the “altered state” that had been previously sought through club drugs, like ecstasy (Collin and Godfrey, 1997; Measham, 2004). The industry’s efforts to engage younger consumers were largely successful, as evidenced by the increased consumption of alcopops and the corresponding halt in the upward trend of illicit drug use between 1995 and 2003 (Measham and Ostergaard, 2009). As sweet drinks, alcopops particularly appealed to young women drinkers (ibid). In the NTE, high volume, single session (or “binge”) drinking became a norm for young women as well as for young men (Hollands, 1995). These developments have led scholars to characterise the contemporary drinking culture of young adults as a “culture of intoxication” (Measham and Brain, 2005), involving the determined pursuit of hedonistic pleasure.

Responding to gaps and deficiencies in existing approaches

Following Mary Douglas’ (1987) call for drinking to be approached as a socio-cultural practice, over the past twenty years several alcohol researchers have moved away from a “problem orientation” (Waterson, 2000) to alcohol use, which focussed on addiction and other negative issues associated with alcohol, towards a focus on drinking as a constitutive feature of leisure in the NTE (Jayne et al, 2011; Thurnell-Read, 2016). While such research makes important contributions to our understanding of drinking as a socio-cultural practice, this literature tends to focus on the present, and to consider the experiences of research participants at a particular point of the life course, that is, young adulthood (Emslie et al, 2015, p. 438). Moreover, the focus on the NTE has meant that drinking across other sites, like the home, has been largely neglected in this literature (Holloway et al, 2008).

In addition to paying limited attention to how relationships to alcohol change over the life course and beyond the ‘binge drinking’ of young adults in the NTE, the literature often makes questionable assumptions about the nature of drinking alcohol. A contemporary “culture of intoxication” (Measham and Brain, 2005) is argued to be characterised by “determined drunkenness” (ibid; see also Griffin et al, 2009), that is, by an instrumentalist orientation towards intoxication as part of a hedonistic pursuit of

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5 See Lyons et al (2014) and Emslie et al (2015) on the drinking practices of early midlife women in the west of Scotland for examples of the relatively small number of publications that depart from the focus on young adults in the literature.
pleasure; a pursuit that has also been described as “calculated hedonism” (Szmigin et al, 2008). When social norms became part of the analysis, this is often in relation to “doing gender” (Measham, 2002) and/or reproducing norms of social class (e.g. Griffin et al, 2009; Skeggs, 2005). Alternative meanings of drinking alcohol are underplayed, culminating in a focus on drinking as strategic action directed toward intoxication and the reproduction of social norms.

With respect to the interdisciplinary research on women and alcohol beyond the field of alcohol research discussed above, a “problem orientation” (Waterson, 2000, p. 2) has remained to a great extent intact in the assumptions and approaches of this literature. While the literature provides a number of interesting conceptual and empirical insights, its object of investigation is more often than not defined as alcohol misuse as opposed to alcohol use. Though clearly alcohol use can cause a good deal of individual and collective damage, and therefore alcohol misuse is a valid and important topic of research, most women do not see themselves as ‘binge drinkers’, ‘alcoholics’, or as otherwise having a drinking problem. Defining the object of investigation as misuse at the outset of the inquiry limits the capacity of research to develop an interpretive account of how drinking is understood by research participants. Developing an interpretive understanding hinges on the ability of the researcher to see the world through participants’ eyes; this is more difficult if the starting point is a “definition of the situation” (Thomas, 1923; Goffman, 1959) that participants do not share. Moreover, like the wider literature on alcohol, there is in general a lack of attention to how women’s ways of thinking about and using alcohol change over the life course, and across generations.

In response to these gaps and limitations in the existing literature, this thesis explores the place of alcohol in the day-to-day lives of 38 women born between 1939 and 1995 from working class and middle class backgrounds. Life history interviews, several of which drew on the techniques of photo and object elicitation to anchor and enrich the accounts provided, were conducted with women to construct their ‘drinking biographies’, that is, their narrative accounts of their experiences and understandings of alcohol starting with childhood and ending in the present day. The inclusion of participants from different birth cohorts allowed for qualified, contextualised comparisons to be drawn across generations, as well as for an exploration of some differences across social classes. The
research design enabled the researcher, in a dialogue with participants, to construct an account of how ways of accessing, experiencing and evaluating alcohol shifted as women grew older, a topic that has thus far been largely neglected in existing research. Lastly, unlike much of the existing ethnographic research on drinking, this research was not limited by a conventional focus on practices within licensed premises. The home, which has increasingly become an important site for drinking alcohol (Holloway et al, 2008), was both the site in which most of the interviews were conducted and a recurring place in participants’ accounts, alongside other ‘off-license’ drinking places, like workplaces and parks.

**Research questions**

The following questions guided the research undertaken for this thesis:

1) What meanings do women from different generations and social classes attach to their drinking?

2) How have their experiences with alcohol shifted as they have progressed through the life course?

3) What moral frameworks and cultural scripts do women draw on as they narrate their experiences and recollections?

4) How might access to these moral frameworks and cultural scripts vary by generation and/or social class?

To address these questions, I conducted life history interviews with 38 women born during the early years of the post-war period, principally in the 1940s, and women born in later decades, primarily in the 1970s and early 1990s. The interviews were loosely structured, consisting of primarily open-ended questions that asked women about different points of their lives, starting with childhood and ending with the present. They were first asked about their overall memories of a given time, and then about their specific memories about what role, if any, alcohol played in their day-to-day lives at that point in time. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, photographs and objects provided by a subsample of participants facilitated more detailed and vivid accounts of their past and present routines involving alcohol.
Key contributions: Negotiating drinking in and through personal relationships across the life course and generation

A key contribution of the thesis is to extend the “relational turn”, as practised by sociologists of personal life (e.g. Smart, 2007; May, 2011), and interactionist sociologists (Becker, 1953; Goffman, 1959, 1967), to the empirical domain of women’s relationships with alcohol across the life course. By employing a relational perspective, this thesis aims to critique the instrumentalist assumptions of existing approaches. Characterisations of contemporary drinking cultures as “cultures of intoxication” (Measham and Brain, 2005), where the pursuit of “determined drunkenness” (ibid) is a constituent feature are flawed because they overemphasise the instrumental nature of drinking practices. Drinking practices are also directed toward and shaped by relationality. Drawing on relationality as it is understood in the sociology of personal life directs attention to how the uses and meanings of drinking are “constructed in relationships with others, and in relation to others and to social norms” (May, 2011, p. 7). Negotiating a relationship to alcohol occurs in the context of ‘doing’ connections with others, as well as in response to wider social norms. Furthermore, when social norms are invoked in much of the literature this is usually in relation to “doing gender” (Measham, 2002) and/or class (e.g. Skeggs, 2005; Griffin et al, 2009), that is, the construction of gendered and classed identities. I argue that complying with dominant social norms of gender and class is only a part of what drinking means in women’s lives. Localised relational norms which are often oriented toward practical considerations, such as looking out for friends on a night out, or waking up early to care for young children, are as important – if not more important – to shaping how women approach alcohol compared to a hedonistic desire for pleasure or an imperative to reproduce classed femininities. An interactionist approach draws our attention to how women creatively negotiate social norms and expectations, while a relational approach highlights how these negotiations take place within the conditions of possibility and constraint afforded by personal relationships.

In terms of its empirical contribution, the thesis investigates key relational contexts that were found to shape how women use and make sense of alcohol in their day-to-day lives. I argue that intergenerational family stories provide some participants with narrative orientations that highlight the negative and possibly addictive nature of alcohol. Within the “mnemonic community” (Misztal, 2003) of their families of origin, some participants
“inherited” narratives (McNay, 2009) about alcoholic relatives, typically grandparents. Their narratives communicated empathy towards the situation of their parents as children. Drawing on McNay (2009), I argue that these participants have taken on their parents’ childhood memories as facets of their own pasts. Experiences in families of origin also emerged as important in another respect: family rituals, principally celebrations at Christmas, were the site where most participants encountered alcohol for the first time. The taste and scent of drinks served at Christmas were part of what these family rituals “felt” like (Mason and Muir, 2013). In narrating memories of first tastes of alcohol, sensations like the chalky taste of advocaat and the scent of cherry brandy transported participants to moments in their childhood. Recollections of tastes and scents are sensory vehicles for reconnecting oneself to particular memories of the past, and the people who inhabit those memories. It is the relational context of the family – that is, connections to parents, siblings, and other relatives – that gave memories of first sips of alcohol their power and potency.

Moving beyond families of origin, intragenerational relationships were also crucial to how drinking was negotiated and made sense of in day-to-day life. In parallel with Becker’s (1953) arguments concerning the importance of social connections to how one learns to smoke marijuana, I argue that the adolescent leisure practices played out in friendships groups provide contexts for encountering, learning about, and developing sensory connections to alcohol. Attempts to access alcohol, and if successful the occasions on which it is consumed, are productively regarded as a part of how young people ‘do’ friendship. Focussing on how young women “do gender” (Measham, 2002) through drinking in the night-time economy, or on how pre-drinking rituals among young women preparing for a night out are centred on the aim of achieving intoxication (Hughes et al, 2007; Wells et al, 2009), ignores how these practices are also relationally driven: friendship groups provide the conditions of possibility for drinking practices, and are vital to how the pleasures of drinking are experienced and how risks are mitigated.

Relationships with colleagues were also crucial in furnishing some of the women with access to a narrative of ‘earning’ a drink, that is, to understanding themselves as ‘deserving’ a drink as a reward for socially valued paid labour. Being employed in a socially esteemed form of paid work meant being surrounded by others who felt entitled to ‘let off steam’ after work. Along with the pay cheque that provided disposable income
to be spent on alcohol, employment in particular kinds of professional roles also meant immersion in a milieu in which alcohol was viewed as pleasurable and as a form of reward. Becoming better acquainted with colleagues through after-work trips to the pub provided a context in which some of the women further developed an interpretation of alcohol as glamorous, and could imagine themselves through popular cultural references, as, for example, a character in Sex in the City.

Alongside relationships with friends and colleagues, relationships with intimates were also critical in shaping and providing a context for how women negotiate the contradictory cultural and moral meanings of alcohol. Motherhood and its precursors, namely preconception care and pregnancy, introduced heightened normative expectations around abstaining from drinking or carefully controlling whatever drinking did occur. Moreover, the practical requirements of being the primary caregiver for young children, like waking up early in the morning to feed, clothe or otherwise care for them, meant that several of the women renegotiated their approach to alcohol following the birth of children. In a number of cases this involved drinking less, or planning their drinking so that it did not conflict with their caring responsibilities as mothers. Drawing on Jamieson’s (2011) “practices of intimacy” approach, I argue that these practices are productively regarded as part of women’s wider repertoires of ‘doing’ intimacy.

In relation to historical time and generational differences, the thesis explores how women born early on in the post-war period narrated different kinds of experiences with respect to drinking in the contexts of adolescent leisure, workplace cultures and intimate relationships than those born later on. While most of the women born after 1960 recalled gaining access to pubs and other drinking spaces as ‘under-aged’ teenagers, alcohol did not figure in any significant ways in the adolescent leisure routines of the cohort who were born in the 1940s. Drinking was also not part of socialising with colleagues during the first few decades of their careers. Drinking to excess while attempting to form an intimate connection with prospective male partners was similarly not narrated as part of the 1940s cohort’s range of experiences with alcohol. Moreover, while members of the second and third cohorts often told drinking stories, that is, narratives of drinking to excess that were often inflected with humour and irony (Griffin et al, 2009), such narratives were generally not part of the first cohort’s repertoire of stories about alcohol, and where they did feature humour was not drawn on in the telling.
Drinking emerges as a deeply moral and relational matter for the women whose narrative and lives are discussed in this thesis. Whether it is in relation to accounting for familial histories of alcoholism or heavy drinking, or narrating the self as an ‘under-aged’ teenager trying to gain access to a nightclub (Chapter Four), or rehashing experiences of after-work trips to the pub with workmates as a reward for paid labour (Chapter Five), or sharing ways of avoiding or side-stepping drunkenness as a mother of young children (Chapter Six), navigating moral discourses and cultural scripts around alcohol is a process that is shaped by the conditions of possibility and constraint embedded in women’s personal relationships. Changes in the relative significance of relationships over the life course in turn lead to changes in how alcohol is used and valued.

According to the alcohol researcher Robin Room, alcohol is to social science what dye is to microscopy: it illuminates the structure of social life (Room, 1975; cited in Waterson, 2000, p. 2). This study uses women’s lived relations and practices around alcohol as a lens through which to view their wider leisure routines, work lives and personal relationships, and how these three strands of biography shift as women ‘travel through’ the life course. As previously stated, the thesis compares the experiences and perspectives of women belonging to one of four birth cohorts: those born in the 1940s, the 1960s, the 1970s and the early 1990s. The thesis thus offers sustained reflection on the roles of generation and socio-historical context in shaping women’s drinking practices and experiences with alcohol across the empirical terrain of adolescent leisure, employment and intimate relationships.

An outline of the thesis

Chapter Two: Understanding the role of alcohol in women’s lives

This chapter provides an exploration of existing understandings of patterns and practices of alcohol consumption in the United Kingdom (UK). It first establishes a wider context for the current study by examining population-wide patterns of consumption, followed by age and gender specific patterns. The chapter then examines and critiques the contributions of ethnographic, qualitative and historical literature to understandings of women’s relationships to alcohol. I argue that while offering a number of conceptual and empirical insights, attempts to analyse drinking as a socio-cultural practice tend to adopt
a ‘snap shot’ approach, and are primarily centred on the study of young adults’ ‘binge drinking’ in the night-time economy. I critique two tendencies in the alcohol studies literature: the conceptualisation of drinking as an instrumental practice directed toward intoxication (Measham and Brain, 2005; Hughes et al, 2007), and the focus on drinking practices as means of reproducing dominant social norms through the construction of classed and gendered identities (Measham, 2002; Skeggs, 2005; Emslie et al, 2015). While intoxication is often a desired outcome, its pursuit can be for relational reasons as much as for hedonistic pleasure. Negotiating social norms around class and gender through fashioning identities can be a part of what is happening when women drink. However, I argue that existing approaches overstate the centrality of social norms and underestimate the extent to which drinking practices are made possible and shaped by personal relationships. The chapter then explores how historical studies have been focussed on women’s drinking in licensed premises, and have for the most part neglected the post-war period. The field of women and alcohol has typically conceptualised its object of investigation as alcohol misuse rather than alcohol use. I argue that that this would have been an inappropriate starting point for this research. Here, I explain how relational, interactional, and feminist perspectives inform the approach adopted in the thesis.

Chapter Three: Researching women’s drinking biographies

This chapter discusses the methodology, methods and techniques used in the study, both in terms of the rationale behind their selection and how they were implemented. I examine how the method of life history interviewing enabled the construction of narratives that give insights into how women experienced and made sense of the place of alcohol in their day-to-day lives across the life course, with photos and objects helping to create richer, more nuanced accounts in some of the interviews where the technique of photo and object elicitation was used. The chapter also provides definitions of key terms and concepts used in the thesis, such as life course and generation. It considers the sampling techniques used, and the social characteristics of the study’s sample, and how the data were analysed using thematic analysis, and a process of abduction.
The thesis then traces women’s narrative accounts through contexts that emerged as important in my analysis of interview data. These are: familial stories of alcoholic relatives, adolescent leisure practices, workplace cultures, and intimate relationships.

**Chapter Four: Learning to drink**

Drawing on Becker’s (1953) use of the concept of milieu, this chapter investigates drinking as a socially learned practice involving sensory connections developed in social encounters. As I explore, learning to drink is a process that unfolds in changing social and historical contexts. How girls and young women learn to drink is not static but continually shifting. Moreover, individuals’ relationships to alcohol are themselves dynamic: they tend to shift as people grow older and progress through the life course. Learning to drink moderately and responsibly is a project that most participants aspired to, and several participants presented themselves as having achieved. The chapter first considers a subsample of participants’ narratives of disruption and discontinuity in the face of family histories of alcoholism and heavy drinking, followed by their own continuation of their parents’ moderate practices. I draw on Misztal’s (2003) insight that families are “mnemonic communities”, that is, they are constituted through the sharing of memories and “family stories” (Thompson, 2005). McNay’s (2009) notion of “narrative inheritance” is used to make sense of stories about alcoholic or heavy drinking grandparents. I then explore how, though alcohol was largely absent from most participants’ childhoods, it was frequently narrated as having formed part of families’ Christmas celebrations. The sensory dimensions of certain drinks consumed at Christmastime, like the chalky taste of advocaat, can become part of what Christmas “feels” like (Mason and Muir, 2013).

The chapter then investigates participants’ experiences of learning to drink as young women. Key generational differences emerged between the place of alcohol in the leisure practices of women born in the early decades of the post-war period versus those born later. Goffman’s (1959, 1967) notion of “impression management” is used to conceptualise the practices and strategies of the women principally from the 1970s and 1990s cohorts to gain access to alcohol as girls and young women. While gaining access to alcohol and the spaces in which it was consumed were part of attempts to ‘pass’ as older for the women born after 1960, participants born between 1939 and 1948 tended
not to discuss having felt a similar desire to use alcohol in this way in the 1950s and 1960s. Alcohol and drinking spaces were not seen as exciting, perhaps in part because pubs were male dominated spaces that were often unwelcoming to young women for much of the post-war period (Gutzke, 2014).

Lastly, the chapter investigates processes of re-learning and un-learning to drink, that is, participants’ accounts of passively or actively changing their relationships to alcohol at particular points in the life course. I argue that a life course perspective demonstrates that approaches to alcohol are far from static, but rather shift in relation to changing relational circumstances. Through an in-depth analysis of the narratives of two midlife participants, I explore how the women re-fashioned their ways of using alcohol at different points in their lives in accordance with changes in their personal relationships. Taken together, the arguments concerning narratives of intergenerational disruption and continuity, generational differences in adolescent leisure, and re-learning across the life course demonstrate how learning to drink is a social process embedded in the ‘doing’ of relationships across shifting historical contexts.

**Chapter Five. Earning a drink: the alcohol-work connection in women’s drinking biographies**

This chapter investigates how the context of collegial relationships can became important in shaping experiences and practices of drinking, and in providing a framework for evaluating the meanings and purposes of alcohol. For women who had worked in professional roles, drinking with colleagues provided opportunities to bond with colleagues and to shift the identity of these relationships. In some cases, such experiences brought changes in what alcohol meant to the women, as they came to see alcohol as a reward for paid or unpaid labour. However, access to post-work drinking cultures varied according to generation, type of employment and caring responsibilities. Participants in the first cohort and working-class participants in the second cohort tended not to have access to post-work drinking cultures. This chapter thus explores the intersections between employment biographies and drinking biographies, arguing that literature on drinking as a “time out” (Brierley-Jones et al, 2014; Emstlie et al, 2015) from the perceived stresses of paid and unpaid work should more thoroughly attend to alcohol’s status as a reward for work that is understood by wider society to be valuable.
Chapter Six: Practices of intimacy and the moral regulation of women’s drinking

Next, I investigate the place of alcohol in women’s intimate relationships, including relationships with children (born and unborn), romantic partners, and friends. The notion of ‘mother’s ruin’ – that is, the idea that women are judged for their drinking because of their perceived value to society as mothers or potential mothers – maintains analytic purchase as a means for understanding double standards in how women are evaluated differently from men. However, the chapter explores how Jamieson’s (2011) “practices of intimacy” approach gives greater insight into how women themselves understand how their intimate relationships shape their drinking. Rather than focussing on how women “perform” traditionally acceptable femininities (Lyons, 2009; Hunt et al, 2013) by constructing identities as “good mothers”, the chapter instead pursues a relational approach. I explore how navigating the potential threat to one’s moral reputation of drinking while pregnant or while looking after children is relationally driven. A relational approach is extended to how women negotiate discourses of personal safety as part of their practices of intimacy within the context of friendship groups. Lastly, the chapter argues against the notion of young women’s drinking as instrumentally driven (Measham and Brain, 2005) by first considering how drinking to excess on dates was constructed by members of the second and third cohorts as providing a ‘short cut’ to intimacy. Secondly, the chapter contends that spending time together before nights out can be a part of friendship groups’ rituals for sharing advice, resources and support, and it is not solely, or even principally, oriented to intoxication, as argued in the literature on “pre-drinking” and “pre-loading” (Hughes et al, 2007; Wells et al, 2009).

As discussed above, the study responds to gaps and limitations in much of the existing scholarship; it is to this topic that I now turn.
Chapter Two: Understanding the role of alcohol in women’s lives

This chapter explores the vast body of research making up the interdisciplinary field of alcohol studies. While much of the quantitative research on alcohol offers useful insights into patterns of consumption, it is of less value in understanding practices or the cultural meanings people assign to alcohol (Holmes et al, 2017). Though ethnographic and qualitative research has partially addressed this gap, this literature tends to maintain its long-standing focus on public drinking spaces, on excess drinking (often ‘binge drinking’), and on particular points of the life course, usually young adulthood. Taken together, these foci result in domestic drinking sites, day-to-day drinking that may or may not be excessive, and drinking across the life course remaining under-researched and under-theorized topics of investigation. Moreover, the literature on drinking as a socio-cultural practice tends to understand drinking as a strategic action, oriented toward either intoxication (e.g. Measham and Brian, 2005; Smizgin et al, 2008), or toward reproducing dominant norms of class and/or gender (e.g. Skeggs, 2005; Emslie et al, 2015).

The chapter is divided into four parts. It first examines patterns and practices of alcohol consumption in the United Kingdom (UK) over the post-war and contemporary periods, both for the population as a whole and then in relation to gender and age differences, to establish the wider context of the study. Following this, it turns to ethnographic and qualitative research on drinking as a socio-cultural practice, exploring the empirical insights as well as the gaps and limitations of these recent efforts to recast alcohol consumption as a dimension of leisure practices in order to move away from a previous focus on alcohol as a social problem. Next, I hone in on research on women and alcohol in the UK, exploring the contributions and limitations of both historical and social science research on the topic. Lastly, I explore the theoretical perspectives that underpin the conceptual and methodological approach of this study, namely the sociology of personal life, symbolic interactionism and feminist theory.

Establishing the context: Patterns and practices of alcohol consumption in the United Kingdom over the post-war and contemporary periods

Over the post-war and contemporary periods, significant changes have occurred in relation to how much the UK population as a whole drinks, and the types of drinks that
are consumed. In what follows, I outline the data on these two points for the population as a whole, and then examine data on age and gender differences in order to establish the study’s wider context. As Plant (2008, p. 157) points out in relation to primary sources, statistical data about patterns of alcohol consumption in the UK come primarily from one of three places: officially recorded levels of per capita alcohol consumption; data generated by Her Majority’s Customs and Excise; and thirdly, detailed surveys of drinking habits.

The UK population as a whole drank on average considerably less in recent centuries than it did prior to the industrial era (Withington and McShane, 2009). The twentieth century itself was a time of great fluctuations: per capita alcohol consumption fell from over 11 litres per head per annum in 1899 to less than four litres per head per annum during the First World War (Plant, 2008, p. 157). The second half of the twentieth century did, however, bring a return to increased consumption: the same figure rose again to eight and a half litres in 2005. In their brief overview of changes in English drinking habits since 1550, Withington and McShane (2009) report that:

the general decrease in alcohol consumption that has largely characterised England during the industrial era (i.e. between 1750 and 1950) has reversed since 1957: the consumption of beer has increased from 151.6 pints per head per annum in 1960 to 175.1 in 1995 (with a peak of 217.1 in 1979); cider from 2.9 pints per head per annum to 15.3; spirits (at 100% alcohol) from 1.25 to 2.25 pints per head per annum; and wine from four pints to a remarkable 25.5 pints per head per annum.

Thus, the post-war period has witnessed a return to a trend of increasing consumption. This does not, however, mean a return to the levels of alcohol consumed before or in the early years of industrialization, but rather simply that consumption began rising again from 1957 from previous levels. However, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) data suggest that for particular segments of the population like young people this pattern of increase levelled off in the early 2000s (Measham and Ostergaard, 2009).

In addition to changes in the types of alcohol consumed in the post-war decades outlined in the quotation above, another major change was afoot at the level of population-wide practices: the rise of the off-trade, including more recently supermarkets. In 1970, roughly 90% of alcohol sales occurred in licensed premises and 10% occurred in ‘off”
licensed premises. By 2006, these figures had shifted to roughly 60% and 40% respectively – marked changes that indicate the increased popularity of drinking in domestic settings (Beer and Pub Association, 2007; cited in Smith and Foxcroft, 2009, p. 81).

There is strong evidence of increased alcohol consumption in the UK over recent decades. In 1997, 8.2 litres of pure alcohol per capita were consumed in the UK. In 2001, this figure increased to 9.1 from 8.4 the previous year. It rose again to 9.6 in 2002 and 2003. In most other countries for which the same statistics are provided (both EU and non-EU) the volume either stayed relatively the same, decreased or rose only slightly over the same period of time (cited in IAS, 2011; taken from World Advertising Research Centre, 2004).

Considering in greater detail data from the past twenty years, the UK population has the highest percentage of people who drink within the time frame of one year in the European Union (EU). In other words, when asked ‘have you drunk alcohol in the past 12 months?’ more people living in the UK responded ‘yes’ than in any other country in the EU. This means that the UK has the lowest proportion of non-drinkers in the EU; that is, the lowest proportion of people who abstain entirely, or at least who abstained for a given year between 1997 and 2000. The Institute of Alcohol Studies (IAS) describes the UK as a “relatively moderate consumer [of alcohol] compared with other Western European countries” in relation to the total volume of alcohol consumed (p. 3). The wine producing countries, particularly France, have historically had higher levels of both consumption and alcoholism (p. 3). However, whilst consumption has stabilized or declined in most of such countries, as well as elsewhere in Western Europe, it has continued to increase in the UK, thereby making the UK “one of the heaviest alcohol consuming countries in the world” (p. 3). The UK ranks among the highest 15 EU member states surveyed in terms of the average number of drinks consumed per day and the average number of times in which ‘binge drinking’ occurred, but that it ranks amongst the lowest in terms of the number of days in which alcohol is consumed. This demonstrates a pattern of ‘binging’, of drinking to or beyond the threshold of intoxication. Measham and Ostergaard (2009) note that this pattern maps onto the cycle of weekly life in the form of weekday restraint and weekend excess. It is relatively similar to the pattern of other Northern European countries, such as Finland, Denmark
and Ireland, and contrasts sharply with the drinking patterns of some Southern European countries, such as Italy and Greece.

Another claim regularly made about the UK is that the practice of ‘binge drinking’ is more popular than in most other countries and that it has increased in popularity over recent years, particularly amongst young people. Whilst the definition of binge drinking has shifted over time (Berridge et al., 2009), the current definition used by research organisations like the IAS and the British government is high volume, single session drinking, that is, when an individual consumes over a given specified amount within a limited number of hours. In its report, the IAS (2011) defines binge drinking as the “consumption of 5 or more standard drinks in a single drinking occasion” (p. 8). In its 2007 National Alcohol Strategy, the government defines binge drinking as essentially drinking too much alcohol over a short period of time, e.g. over the course of an evening, and it is typically drinking that leads to drunkenness […] Trends in binge drinking are usually identified in surveys by measuring those drinking over 6 units a day for women or over 8 units a day for men. In practice, many binge drinkers are drinking substantially more than this level, or drink this amount rapidly, which leads to the harm linked to drunkenness […] (p. 3).

Compared with other European countries, where small amounts are consumed on a regular – often daily – basis, in 2002 38% of people aged between 18 and 64 in the UK were found to binge drink at least once a week (cited in IAS, 2010). Indeed, binge drinking accounted for 40% of all drinking occasions. This is in sharp contrast to Italy and France, where only 11% and 8% respectively of the population binge drink once a week (ibid). However, these figures have recently decreased. A recent ONS Opinions and Lifestyle survey found that the proportion of adults in England, Scotland and Wales claiming to have binged on their heaviest drinking day during the week before they were interviewed fell to 26.8% in 2016 (ONS, 2017, p. 3). This was the lowest proportion since the survey began in 2005. The survey also found that patterns of binge drinking were similar across England, Scotland and Wales. Within the English regions, binge drinking was most common in the north (ONS, 2017, p. 2).

Thus, we can see from the above data that alcohol consumption for the UK population as a whole has risen since the first decade following the War; 40% of alcohol is now purchased for consumption away from licensed premises; there is a much wider variety
of types of alcoholic beverages available, including drinks created with a younger, female market in mind; drinking at least once a year is a near universal experience for adults in the UK; a pattern of weekday restraint/weekend excess is the norm for many drinkers; and that roughly a quarter to a third of the adult population engage in ‘binge drinking’ at least once a week.

Age differences

Most of the survey data described and analysed in the quantitative alcohol studies literature relate to adult drinkers and young people. However, there are a very small number of studies on children. Moreover, the drinking habits of older people have started to attract increasing interest from drinking researchers and policy makers because of a purported rise in the volume and frequency of their drinking. The following section is divided by the age of the population under consideration: young people and older people. I do not provide an overview of the data on adults as adults are the population considered in the first part of this section. Whilst the boundaries between age groups are somewhat malleable, young people are variously classed as anywhere from 12 to 24 (but often the label refers specifically to 12 to 16 year olds); adults are generally considered to be from 18 to 64; and older people are typically 65 and over.

Young people

A substantial body of research into the drinking practices of young people exists, much of which draws from the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and other Drugs (ESPAD). ESPAD has been administered to representative samples of 15 and 16 year olds in the UK and other European countries every four years, beginning in 1995. Nationally representative, quantitative evidence about the drinking practices of teenagers for before the mid-1990s is considerably scarcer. In relation to alcohol, ESPAD asks respondents whether they have consumed alcohol in their lifetimes, the past year or the previous 30 days, and whether they have experienced drunkenness within the above three timeframes. It also asks how easy different types (beer, wine and spirits) of alcohol are to obtain, and where alcohol is purchased and consumed.

Based on ESPAD results, it is clear that a substantial proportion of 15 and 16 year olds in the UK drink alcohol. In 1995, 56% of boys had consumed at least one drink 40 times or
more in their lives. This figure fell to 41% in 1999 and rose back to 47% in 2003. For girls, the figure was in 39% in 1995, 43% in 1999, and 39% in 2003. Around one third of all respondents had consumed 20 or more drinks within the past 12 months: 34% of boys and 30% of girls in 1995; 39% and 30% respectively in 1999; and 31% and 31% in 2003. According to ESPAD findings, a higher than average proportion (i.e. higher than most other participant countries) of 15 and 16 year olds engage in ‘binge’ drinking, defined as five or more drinks in a row. For girls, the percentages who had binged in the previous 30 days was 20% in 1005, 27% in 1999, and 29% in 2003, whilst for boys the corresponding figures were 24%, 33%, and 26%.

**Older People**

There has been considerable interest in recent years in the press and amongst policy makers about the drinking patterns of older people. Are older people in the UK actually drinking more than in previous decades? Once again, issues around definition and measurement need to be taken in account before any general statements can be made. The category of ‘older people’ has different meanings in the literature and beyond. For the Office of National Statistics and charities like Age UK, it refers to anyone aged 50 and over. In other contexts, the term is more or less synonymous with pensioners, which means either aged 60 and up for women and 65 and up for men. (Though, of course, the age at which British women are entitled to a state pension is set to rise.)

According to Smith and Foxcroft (2009, p. 19), between 1998 and 2006 the proportion of women in Great Britain aged between 45 and 64 and 65 and over who drank at least one day a week stayed roughly the same, with slight rises in the early 2000s. For women aged between 45 and 64, the proportion was in the low 60 percentile range, whilst for women aged 65 and over it was considerably lower in the low 40 percentile range. For older men, the corresponding figures were 77% and 65% (1998) and 76% and 67% (2006) (Smith, and Foxcroft, 2009, p. 18), again showing little change.

Where there is evidence of older people drinking more than older people did in earlier decades it is in relation to the proportions who drink more than the previous government guidelines of 21 units a week for men and current guidelines of 14 units for women.

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6 The suggested limit for men was decreased to 14 units a week in 2016 (CMO, 2016).
Whilst in 1988 24% of British men aged 45 to 64 and 13% of men age 65 and over drank more than 21 units a week, in 2006 these figures had risen to 34% and 21% respectively. The corresponding figures for British women drinking more than 14 units a week are 9% and 4% (1988) and 21% and 10% (2006) (Smith and Foxcroft, 2009, pp. 34 - 35). Thus, it is not the case that all older people are drinking more than previous generations of older people drank, but rather that a higher proportion are more likely to drink in excess of government guidelines. However, it must be noted that a proportion of this increase is down to changes in the methods used to calculate alcohol units (see Lader and Goddard, 2006 and Smith and Foxcroft, 2009, pp. 33 - 34).

Plant (2008) also presents evidence of increases in the amounts that some older women drink. Drawing on ONS data, she shows how between 1998 and 2004 the percentage of women aged 45 to 54 who reported drinking five or more days a week rose from 15% to 19%, whilst the corresponding figures for women aged 65 and over rose from 14% to 17%. Plant further notes that older women are more likely than younger women to spread their drinking out over more days in the week than younger women, who are more likely to ‘binge drink’ (p. 159).

Gender differences

National data on gender differences in alcohol consumption were first produced following the introduction of the General Household Survey (GHS) in 1972. For the years prior to this, we must rely on local studies. However, for the years after 1972, we have access to nationally representative surveys based on self-reporting, principally the GHS and the ONS Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, and can piece together at least a partial picture of gender differences in drinking practices for the British population as a whole. The picture is partial because whilst data were collected on how much alcohol men and women each claim to have consumed within a given space of time, the level of detail (how often, where, what was consumed, etc) offered by these sources is variable.

The limitations of the sources aside, they reveal that there are clear gender differences in drinking. The gap between men’s and women’s alcohol consumption has narrowed over the past three decades, though men still drink more than women on average (Plant, 2008). The gap has narrowed the most between men and women in their late teens and
early twenties. Notably, however, professional women in their fifties drink more on average than young women. In surveys compiled by the European Commission between 1997 and 2000, 5% of women drank everyday compared to 9% of men, and 51% of women drank at least once a week compared to 74% of men. Women reported that 22% of their drinking occasions involved binge drinking compared to 40% of men’s (European Commission, 2003; cited in IAS, 2010). More recently, an ONS Opinions and Lifestyle Survey conducted in 2016 found that men were more likely to be drink than women. While 62.8% of men had drunk alcohol in the previous week, this figure was 51.3% for women (ONS, 2017, p. 5). In relation to binge drinking, in 2016 28.2% of men stated they exceeded 8 units of alcohol on their heaviest drinking day, whereas the proportion of women who claimed to have exceeded 6 units of alcohol on their heaviest drinking day was 25.3% (ibid).

In her review of the changing role of alcohol in women’s lives, Plant (2008) states that women’s consumption of alcohol increased considerably in the closing decades of the twentieth century in the UK. However, she further notes that for most age groups women still drink less than their male counterparts of the same age. Whilst the overwhelming majority of women drink (an estimated 90% of adult women), the small minority who do not drink state that they abstain for religious reasons, poor health or because they dislike the taste (Heath, 2000; cited in Plant).

In relation to gender differences in drinking tastes, the ONS Opinions and Lifestyle Survey asks a representative sample of the British population about practices around alcohol, including how much they drink, where they drink or purchase alcohol, and what types of drink they prefer. The 2006 Omnibus Survey (Lader and Goddard, 2006; cited in Holloway et al. 2009) found that men drink on average 16 units per week, whereas women drink on average seven units. Men’s units consisted of the following mix: 66% beer/lager/cider, 18% wine, 13% spirits, 2% alcopops, and 1% fortified wine. Women’s units consisted of: 43% wine, 25% spirits, 23% beer/lager/cider, 6% alcopops, and 3% fortified wine. In their review of drinking trends in the UK over the past 30 years, Smith and Foxcroft (2009, p. 83) echo Plant (2008) when they state that a number of different surveys demonstrate a pattern of increased alcohol consumption amongst women, such as the GHS, Opinion and Lifestyle Survey, and Health Survey for England (HSE). Results from these surveys show “a general upward trend of women’s drinking across all age
groups, with the possible exception of very recent drinking among 16 to 24 year olds” (Smith and Foxcroft, 2009, p. 83).

**Implications for this study**

The above outline of patterns and practices of alcohol consumption in the UK over the post-war and contemporary periods for the (adult) population as a whole, younger people, older people and in relation to gender differences provides a context in which to situate the findings of this study. Patterns and trends of interest in connection with setting a context for this research include:

- **The rise in the consumption of women of some age groups since at least the early 1970s**: Women in the 18 to 24 and over 50 age ranges have been found by some studies (e.g. those reviewed in Plant, 2008) to drink more than other groups of women, and more than previous generations. This study explores how women born after 1960 have fashioned their relationships to alcohol in notably different circumstances than women born in the 1940s, specifically with regard to adolescent leisure (Chapter Four), work-based socialising (Chapter Five), the formation of heterosexual intimacies and motherhood (Chapter Six).

- **The rise of domestic drinking**: This transition has occurred during the period in which my research is set. The home has become a key site for drinking, with consequences for the experience of drinking for women. As I discuss in Chapter Five, drinking in the home after work held particular meanings for some of the women in the sample who regarded themselves as having “earned” a drink.

- **The rise of wine drinking**: Again, this is a development that occurred over the late post-war period into the contemporary and which is strongly associated with women. In Chapter Five, I explore some suggestive interview data about the connections among social class, occupation and wine drinking at home.

While the quantitative data addressed above provide a useful background for the current study and wider research on alcohol, ultimately quantitative data can only tell us so much about the role of alcohol in people’s lives (Holmes et al, 2017). To better understand the
personal and cultural meanings of alcohol, social scientists have turned to ethnographic and qualitative methods, as I discuss below.

**Researching drinking as a socio-cultural practice**

Over recent decades, sociologists, cultural criminologists, geographers and other social scientists have taken an increasing interest in drinking as a socio-cultural practice (Thurnell-Read, 2016). This literature traces itself back to Mary Douglas’ (1987) call for researchers to investigate “constructive drinking”, that is how drinking is a constituent part of the cultural life of various groups and societies (Thurnell-Read, 2016). As Jayne et al (2008, p. 249) argue, prior to the emergence of this literature alcohol studies have been overwhelmingly dominated by a focus on medical issues and a pathologizing of alcohol as a social problem, or as a legislative, crime or policy issue.

Douglas posited the “imperative to move beyond the limiting pathologizing of alcohol consumption” and “[advocated] the need to address the everyday social relations and cultural practices bound up with drinking” (ibid, p. 249). Following Robert Hollands’ (1995) influential study of Newcastle’s nightlife, this body of research typically came to centre on the rituals and practices surrounding drinking in the night-time economy (NTE) (Thurnell-Read, 2016). Hollands (1995) explored the significance of ‘going out’ to contemporary youth cultures. This study helped to spark extensive interest in risk-taking in the NTE and how changing drinking cultures were part of the transformation of post-industrial urban space in cities like Newcastle and Manchester (Hollands, 2016; Thurnell-Read, 2016; Fenton, 2017).

While the literature inspired by Douglas (1987) and Hollands (1995) has made important contributions to the conceptualisation of drinking as a socio-cultural phenomenon, signalling a shift away from an exclusive focus on alcohol as a social problem, taken as a whole it tells us relatively little about drinking in domestic settings (Holloway et al, 2008); about drinking at different points of the life course before or beyond young adulthood (Emslie et al, 2015); or about more mundane, day-to-day practices of drinking that do not involve ‘binging’. With respect to the first and third issues, as mentioned, the literature on drinking in the NTE emerged during a time of urban regeneration and widespread attempts to reconstruct city and town centres as sites of leisure. It also
occurred alongside, and arguably helped to fuel, public debates about binge drinking. As Holloway et al (2008) argue, public debates on binge drinking have led to a neglect in discussions of drinking in domestic settings, even though this drinking can often occur at riskier levels. The same authors note in a later publication (Jayne et al, 2009) that with respect to gender:

…the omission of an analysis of private drinking spaces is particularly significant. Feminists have long argued that the public/private dichotomy is a gendered one and, as with other dichotomies, though powerful as an idea is not a split which is sustained in practice (WGSG, 1997). This generalised argument is appropriate in the case of alcohol, where public drinking spaces have traditionally been coded as male, with respectable females being relegated to the home. However, though powerful in terms of the way men’s and women’s behaviour is judged, these public drinking spaces have never been exclusively male and are increasingly designed to attract women ([Chatterton and Hollands, 2003] and [Malborn, 1999]). Moreover, although there is little empirical research into the links between public and private drinking environments, it would be unwise to conceptualise these as independent spheres (Bird and Sokolofski, 2005).

The above passage makes a few different points. At first glance, the neglect of domestic settings in this literature is not only problematic from an empirical standpoint; it also appears to demonstrate a bias toward a focus on men’s experiences. However, given public drinking spaces increasingly started to attract women from the mid-1970s onward, this does not apply to the literature on the NTE, which as mentioned emerged as a sustained, collective discussion among social scientists after 1995. Nevertheless, I would argue that a focus on public drinking spaces, though perhaps not biased in relation to gender, is biased with respect to age, as it is mainly young adults who participate in the NTE.

A further issue with the literature focussed on ‘binge drinking’ is the historically situated and potentially regulatory nature of the term. As Berrridge et al. (2009, p. 599) point out, how alcohol use and misuse are conceptualized has changed significantly since 1950. More specifically, Thom (1999, cited in Berrridge et al., 2009, p. 599) has demonstrated two major shifts which occurred between 1948 and 1990. Firstly, a shift occurred from a model of alcoholism as a moral failure stemming from a lack of willpower toward a disease model which viewed alcoholism as a medical condition. Secondly, there was a
shift away from a disease model to a public health model which in turn redefined the problem in epidemiological and public health terms are arising from levels of alcohol consumption in the population as a whole and, at an individual level, as a result of life-style and “risk behaviour” (Berridge et al., 2009, p. 599).

Berridge et al. (2009) further note that since the 1990s alcohol issues have been increasingly conceptualised within a criminal justice framework with the introduction of surveillance, harm reduction and community safety approaches (p. 599).

In other words, we might say that the concepts underlying various attempts to measure who drinks, and how much and how often they drink, are shaped by historically and culturally specific normative beliefs about drinking. Supposedly neutral, descriptive concepts like binge drinking can be normative and regulatory in character, forming part of the gendered moral discourses that the women discussed in this study are tasked with navigating (see also Measham and Ostergard, 2009; Lyons et al, 2014).

**Drinking as strategic action directed toward intoxication**

In addition to a recurring focus on the public drinking in the NTE among young adults, the literature often adopts a questionable understanding of drinking as instrumentally geared toward intoxication. In an influential article, Measham and Brain (2005) labelled contemporary drinking culture as “new culture of intoxication”, characterised by routine “determined drunkenness” on the part of young adults who were hedonistically seeking pleasure through over-indulging in alcohol. This was followed a year later by the term “controlled loss of control” (Measham, 2006), a label intended to highlight the strategic nature of “determined drunkenness”. That is, young adults sought to “lose control” but were careful in how they did so. For example, on night outs one member of a friendship group may remain sober, or drink less, to look after friends. This was followed a few years later by Smizgin et al (2008) who described these practices as “calculated hedonism”.

**‘Doing’ gender and class in the alcohol studies literature**

Alongside the focus on drinking as instrumental action geared toward the hedonistic pursuit of pleasure, this literature has attended to drinking practices as sites where
normative femininities and masculinities are reproduced. Measham (2002) influentially argued that “doing” drinking and drugs in the NTE meant “performing” gender. Along similar lines, in an influential study Griffin et al (2009) explore the narratives of women and young men aged 18 to 25 (n=89), generated through gender and class specific focus groups, on ‘losing control’ and ‘passing out’ on nights out. The authors discuss how in narrating their stories the young women expressed far more “hesitation” and “ambivalence” than the young men (p. 466), suggesting that, as argued in this thesis, they are navigating morally charged and highly gendered terrain. Griffin et al (2009) argue that:

….drunken women are still constituted as sexually ‘loose’ and unfeminine. The female ‘binge drinker’ is a particular signifier of female fecklessness and lack of self-control, and is generally marked as white, working class and heterosexual.

As Skeggs has argued, this figure “has been highlighted as a significant threat, not only to the state of the nation, but also to herself” (2005: 967). In popular cultural discourse, the classed and gendered discourse of “ladette culture”, which is generally represented as an unfortunate consequence of feminism, has been constituted as a cause of “binge drinking” amongst young women (Jackson and Tinkler, 2007).

In this thesis, I argue that localised relational norms are as important in shaping women’s drinking practices as the more abstract cultural codes outlined above by the authors. While women sometimes in a sense “perform” normative femininities across domains such as dress, demeanour and beverage choice, I argue throughout this thesis that approaches to alcohol are more richly understood when viewed through a relational lens.

**Researching women and alcohol**

**Historical approaches**

While there were no national data upon which to compare women’s and men’s drinking practices until the introduction of the General Household Survey in 1972, there is evidence of women’s increased presence in public drinking spaces over the course of the twentieth century. A key theme in the historical literature on this topic focuses on how the two World Wars changed women’s relationship to public drinking. Gutzke (1994) argues that the First World War precipitated significant changes in women’s drinking
habits, providing the conditions in which women in large numbers could return to public houses for the first time in over a century. According to Gutzke, “respectable” Victorian women rarely drank in pubs. In both the years immediately preceding as well as the early years of the War, pubs in several parts of the country were very inhospitable places. Gutzke explores how the Liquor Traffic Central Control Board, or CCB, sought to improve conditions in pubs so that they were fit for use by a wider section of the population, including women. By mid-1916, “respectable” women (i.e. women who were not prostitutes or “slum dwellers”) began frequenting the pub “in numbers unequalled in history” (p. 375). Similar patterns of use persisted in the inter-war period. After the war, brewers and others involved in the pub trade attempted to maintain women’s custom by taking such measures as redesigning pub interiors to make them more welcoming to female patrons.

Similarly, in her examination of women’s participation in public drinking spaces on the Home Front during the Second World War, Langhamer (2003) contends that women’s reports to Mass Observation and other sources from the time paint a picture of wartime as a period during which women made significant recourse to the public house as an arena for leisure and during which their alcohol consumption increased markedly (p. 424). She therefore asks whether historians need to reassess their understanding of the pub as a “predominantly masculine institution and alcoholic drink as a gendered form of consumption” (ibid). Whilst some women did frequent pubs prior to the Second World War, Langhamer maintains that the war years were important for opening up the pub to a wider range of female patrons. For some women, the “context of war reconfigured the work-leisure relationship.” This was particularly true for the women who “felt closest to the war effort,” like those serving in the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force. Such women saw pub-going and related leisure practices as rewards for their service (ibid).

Whilst pub use amongst women (particularly young working class women) rose considerably during wartime, this was less true of rural areas, where inter-war patterns of use remained intact; “the increase was confined to urban and industrial areas” (p. 430). (These regional differences continued into the post-war period.) Why did young women use pubs in increasing numbers during the War? Langhamer cites a number of reasons, including: their increased spending power; their relocation to a new area where they were
“freed from the neighbourhood and familial controls of pre-war years” (e.g. “constraints” like devoting time to childminding or housework); and the disruption to their existing leisure networks as a result of relocation. Pub-going provided them with opportunities for socialising and friendship. However, most young women were unlikely to go into pubs on their own, but rather with friends or boyfriends. Furthermore, rising rates of pub use amongst young women were also the result of disruptions to pre-war “methods of partner-finding” (p. 432). Drawing on oral history evidence, Langhamer shows how some women sometimes chose pubs “according to the type of man they wished to meet” (p. 432).

The increase in young women’s pub-going continued into the post-war period, but not everywhere. Langhamer gives the example of a Welsh mining village, where women’s participation returned to pre-war levels. The question is further complicated by the fact that Mass-Observations pub counts for the years immediately following the war categorize the age of patrons as over forty or under forty, making it impossible to know for sure how many young women were among the patrons counted. However, by the 1950s “advertisers actively targeted the young as a lucrative potential market for drink and this included young women.” Moreover, in the decades that followed “the public house became a mainstay for the young in their leisure hours and began to make real and lasting inroads into young women’s cultural lives” (p. 437). It is interesting to note, however, that in making this statement, Langhamer cannot (or at any rate, does not) point to any historical studies in support of her claim, as there do not appear to be any.

In her exploration of pub culture historically up until the 1980s, Hey (1986) argues that women’s presence in pubs has often been met with hostility and resistance amongst some male pub-goers because it breaks the taboo against un-bonding. Hey quotes Stolenberg to explain the concept of un-bonding:

male bonding is institutionalized learned behaviour whereby men recognize and reinforce one another’s bona fide membership in the male gender class…male bonding is how men learn from each other that they are entitled under patriarchy to power in the culture. Male bonding is how men get that power and male bonding is how it is kept. Therefore men enforce a taboo against un-bonding (quoted in Brake, 1980: 151).
Hey makes her case through drawing on evidence of how women’s participation in pub life breaks the taboo against un-bonding found within a number of ethnographic studies, including Whitehead’s (1976) ethnography of pub life in Hertfordshire, Mass Observation research (Harrison, 1943), and Leonard’s (1980) research into hen and stag parties, and on the basis of her own participant observation.

The thesis that women are marginalized within certain types of pubs receives further support from more recent studies of masculinity and pub culture. Leyshon (2005), for example, explores performances of “hegemonic masculinity” amongst young men drinking in the backrooms of rural British pubs, which involve “bodily management practices” that emphasise their abilities to hold their drink, and the use of phallocentric, sexist and homophobic language. Their conduct relegates young women and other young men to the margins of the pub. The performances of hegemonic masculinity described by Leyshon are not perceived as rebellious, but rather occur with the consent of the landlord and the complicity of older male patrons.

To my knowledge, no histories of women’s drinking in the post-war period similar to the accounts offered by Gutzke and Langhamer for their respective periods have been published, beyond Gutzke (2014). In this study, Gutzke looks at how the alcohol industry responded to the prospect of women as potential customers. He shows how brewers failed to entice women to visit pubs for much of the post-war period because of most pubs’ unwelcoming, masculine atmosphere and sexist advertising of their main product. This state of affairs started to change slowly, first with the advent of wine bars in the 1970s, and later with the growth of pub companies (e.g. The Pitcher and Piano, Wetherspoon’s), which first emerged in the 1980s, and which made attracting a female clientele a high priority. While Gutzke’s account offers an insightful examination of the practices of the alcohol industry, it gives relatively little attention to the voices or experiences of women living through this period and encountering the changes he describes (Fenton, 2017, p. 310).

There are also a small number of ethnographic studies of women’s participation in the pub in both historical and contemporary contexts. Whilst Hey (1986), Leyshon (2005) and others provide insightful accounts of the logic behind women’s marginalization within specific kinds of pub cultures (i.e. “patriarchy” and “hegemonic masculinity” in
rural pubs), important gaps remain in our understanding of women’s drinking in both the post-war and contemporary contexts. Firstly, as mentioned above, historians have not addressed the topic in the depth or detail that they have for both sets of war years. Moreover, they have not used the methods of interpretive sociology to examine women’s reasoning behind changes in their drinking practices. What is particularly productive about Langhamer’s approach is her tacit use of Weber’s notion of *verstehen*: she accounts for women’s increasing participation in pubs and dance halls in terms of what such participation meant to them. (Langhamer may not be aware of this parallel between her work and interpretive sociology; however, her later work on love in twentieth-century England (Langhamer, 2013) suggests a strong understanding of sociological frameworks.) Some of the women discussed in her study, in particular the RAF pilots, felt that they had earned the right to drink in pubs because a drink in a pub is a reward for a hard day’s work. What would a study of the post-war or contemporary periods reveal about changes or continuities in this belief? Has a drink retained its status as a reward? If so, what forms of labour enable one to earn a drink? Does reproductive labour (e.g. housework, child rearing, caring for one’s elderly parents) count? These questions are addressed in Chapter Five.

Historical studies of women’s domestic drinking are considerably rarer. Gilbert Murdock’s (1998) study of the “domestication” of alcohol consumption in the United States is one of the few exceptions. However, as Corzine (2010, p. 845) points out, her study ends precisely at the point when the phenomenon of domestic drinking took off as a widespread social practice, that is, in the early 1940s. Another key study is Rotskoff (2002) on how alcohol figures in heterosexual relationships in post-war United States. According to Corzine (2010, p. 861), this is “arguably the most complete monograph on the topic of gender and alcohol, devoting considerable attention to the problematic culture of alcoholism.” Similar studies of the connections between heterosexual relationships, domesticity, and drink in the context of post-war Britain have yet to be identified.

This section has explored how historical contributions to the understanding of women’s relationships to alcohol have typically focussed on drinking in pubs and on the effects of the two World Wars, with Langhamer’s (2003) work identified as a particularly useful contribution for this thesis given this study’s interpretive approach. Experiences of
drinking in domestic settings, and the post-war period remain significant gaps that this study attempts to begin to address.

**Women and alcohol in contemporary British society**

The literature making up the interdisciplinary field of alcohol research typically conceives of its object as alcohol consumption – that is, whether or not individuals, groups and/or a population drink(s), and if so, how much, how often and what they drink. Within the subfield of women and alcohol, Ettorre (1997) has attempted to refine how women’s alcohol consumption is conceptualized with the notions of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ drinking. In using these terms, Ettorre states that she is not “imposing moral standards on women’s drinking” but is rather referring to the nature of women’s experiences with drink, that is, whether women themselves conceive of their drinking as a source of pleasure or as a problem (1997, p. 5). For Ettorre, positive drinking is “primarily about moderate drinking”, about “not [needing] to drink in excess to feel good” but instead knowing when one has had enough (p. 6). Ettorre gives the following examples of positive drinking:

A single, working-class mother works all week to support her three young children. On Saturday evenings, she goes to a pub or a bar with women friends to have a few beers. She finds the experience ‘good’, beneficial or enjoyable for her because it gives her a chance to see close friends she otherwise would not meet. The alcohol helps to liven things up and keep the conversation flowing. A single businesswoman, a woman of colour, after coming home from a tiring workday, occasionally has a glass of wine with her evening meal. She enjoys the taste of good wine and is invited every year to attend a wine-tasting event at her local business association. A young unemployed woman spends weekends at her male friend’s apartment. Every Friday evening, they watch television together and drink a few glasses of rum and coke. A middle-aged housewife drinks a few cocktails, beer or wine with her husband during the week. She enjoys these moments because she is able to relax and be most herself. A lesbian goes every

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7 This literature crosses over with the field of alcohol studies discussed above, but also maintains a distinct tone and set of concerns. Some of its chief contributors (e.g. Martin Plant) were or are specialists in addiction research, while some others (e.g. Jan Waterson) were based in Social Work departments. A number of the leading contributors to the alcohol studies literature are cultural criminologists (e.g. Fiona Measham) and geographers (e.g. Gill Valentine, Mark Jayne).
Sunday with her partner to have a special lunch with her mother. They drink wine and enjoy each other’s company for a few hours (p. 7).

According to Ettorre, all of the above are examples of positive drinking because the women experience drinking as pleasurable, and know how to control their drinking. Whilst alcohol may be a “drug”, the women in these examples have effectively “[developed] boundaries” (p. 8).

By contrast, negative drinking is when people are unable to control their drinking, and this ‘loss of control’ brings about a number of problems in their lives. In short, their drinking is a source of pain and turmoil. Ettorre uses the same set of examples to illustrate the distinction between positive and negative drinking:

A single, working-class mother works all week to support her three young children. She is unable to cope with the stress both of working and taking care of her children. Every evening she buys at least four bottles of strong beer which she drinks after she has put her children to bed. When in her bed, she cries herself to a state of tiredness and keeps telling herself that beer helps her to sleep. A single businesswoman, a woman of colour, finds it difficult to cope with hidden racism she experiences at her workplace. Every day, when she comes home from work, she has a bottle of wine with her evening meal. She often goes to her local business club at the weekends to drink cocktails, but she returns home intoxicated. A young, unemployed woman finds it difficult to cope with her situation and uses most of her money to buy bottles of rum which she drinks alone in the evening. When she is drinking on weekends at her male friend’s apartment, he often complains that she drinks too much. A middle-aged housewife hides a few bottles of Scotch in her house every week. Neither her husband nor her children know that she is drinking during the day. She feels ashamed […] (pp. 10-11).
Thus, negative drinking involves drinking to excess on a regular basis in order to, as Ettorre puts it, “medicate” feelings’ (p. 10). It also entails others criticising one’s use of alcohol, as some of the examples above illustrate. According to Ettorre, such “failures” to control one’s drinking have different consequences for women than for men. Women experiencing negative drinking are likely to be judged and to be seen by others as falling short in their “attempts to reflect satisfactory female images or to embody femininity” (p. 6). When men face difficulties controlling their drinking they are understood to be struggling as people, but when women struggle with alcohol they “appear to have failed as women” (p. 6).

Whilst I agree with Ettorre that drinking can be either a negative or a positive practice from the point of view of the drinker or others evaluating the drinking, I argue that this way of describing the object of study is morally charged from the outset. Though Ettorre adopts the point of view of women’s experiences, it gives women a rather limited and bifurcated choice. Presumably women (and men) can have both a negative and positive relationship to drink. Moreover, their orientation to drink may also change over time. It is not necessarily a fixed relationship. Furthermore, though it is clearly not Ettorre’s intention, the distinction between positive and negative drinking may nevertheless set positive drinking up as a standard against which negative drinking is judged by the researcher. It is worth considering the extent to which Ettorre inadvertently adopts a moral framework. For example, would drinking alone when a woman had not earned a drink through paid labour constitute negative drinking if the woman was herself unsure how she felt about it? Though I would argue that ‘value free social science’ is neither possible nor desirable, I would rather have evaluations of whether their relationships to drinking are positive or negative – or both or neither – come from research participants themselves rather than having evaluations embedded in how I conceptualise the object of investigation.
While the literature on women and alcohol has made important contributions to the understanding of women’s lived experiences of drinking, the “problem orientation” noted by Waterson (2000, p. 2) remains to a large extent intact. For example, in a recent edited collection on women and alcohol (Staddon, 2015) eight out of thirteen chapters are explicitly about alcohol misuse, addressing issues of domestic abuse (Galvani and Toft, 2015), misuse in the contexts of ethnic (Serrant, 2015) and sexual (Moon and Staddon, 2015) diversity, and support and treatment for alcohol issues in different contexts (Fernandez, 2015; Lewis, 2015; Staddon, 2015; Bogg and Bogg, 2015). While this research is clearly important in drawing attention to double standards and other issues relating to the genesis and treatment of women’s alcohol misuse, for a study of the day-to-day drinking practices of women who do not identify as having a drinking problem, this literature does not provide an appropriate starting point, working as it does with a particular ‘definition of the situation’.

There are strong reasons for regarding alcohol consumption, particularly at high volumes, as an individual and collective problem. For one thing, alcohol consumption is linked with an increased risk of developing a range of cancers (CMO, 2016, p. 4). Moreover, as Plant (2008) outlines, there are also gender specific barriers faced by women in relation to accessing treatment that require continued empirical investigation and monitoring. It is, in short, easy to see why a perspective that sees alcohol use as problematic from the outset of the investigation maintains strong purchase in the field of women and alcohol. Nevertheless, a focus on alcohol use as misuse at the start of an inquiry can construct the object of investigation in a way that may preclude the development of an interpretive understanding of the place of alcohol in the everyday lives of women who do not see themselves as necessarily having a ‘drinking problem’. It assumes a position of epistemological authority; a position that risks undermining the creation of an interpretive account. For these reasons, the approach of this study was to allow women to articulate for themselves whether or not they currently view, or have in the past viewed, their drinking as a problem.
Clearly one may argue that drinking alcohol can be a problem regardless of whether those who drink understand it as such. However, this is a study of interpretive meaning: it is interested primarily in what participants think and say, in the meanings they construct. The point of this research was not to evaluate women’s drinking, to determine whether it was problematic or otherwise. As previously discussed, the point of the research was to better understand how the women themselves construct and narrate the experience and meanings of alcohol use in everyday life across biographical and generational time.

While alcohol use was not constructed as a ‘problem’ by the researcher from the outset of the investigation, it nevertheless emerged as one in one form or another in several of the interviews. As discussed in Chapter Four, experiences of alcoholism or heavy drinking in the familial past were discussed in around one fifth of the interviews. A small number (n=3) of participants spoke of drinking too much when they were alone as responses to stress or loneliness. Though these experiences tended to be limited in duration, it is clear that alcohol can hinder and not help underlying problems, as well as present new problems in its own right. Among the second and third cohorts, stories of drunkenness were common. While these were often narrated with humour and only a mild, if any, sense of regret, we can see how such stories may have unfolded quite differently, and could have resulted in injuries or other problems worse than a hangover. In short, though it was not the intention of this research to cast alcohol use as a problem, or as a form of pleasure, both of these readings of it emerge in participants’ accounts. That said, defining alcohol use as inherently problematic – as misuse – would not have been appropriate for this research.

I now turn to how the “relational turn”, as developed in the work of sociologists of personal life (e.g. Smart, 2007; May, 2011; Jamieson, 2011), symbolic interactionism and feminist theory provided a set of assumptions and concepts suited to the task of making sense of how women narrate their day-to-day experiences of alcohol, and how they navigate cultural scripts and moral discourses⁸ around alcohol.

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⁸ The meanings of the terms cultural scripts and moral discourses are discussed in Chapter Three.
Theoretical perspectives and resources

The relation turn and the sociology of personal life

The relational turn, as developed in the work of sociologists of personal life (e.g. Smart, 2007; May, 2011; Jamieson, 2011) directs attention to how social life is navigated in and through personal relationships. In May’s (2011, p. 7, emphases original) terms, one’s “sense of self” is “constructed in relationships with others, and in relation to others and to social norms.” Thus, while wider social norms (e.g. around class and gender) matter, their influence can be attenuated by the more immediate contexts of our connections with others. As Roseneil and Ketokivi (2016, p. 144) note:

The foundations of the ‘sociology of personal life’ (May, 2011; Smart, 2007) were laid by British sociologists studying families in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Janet Finch (1989), and later with Jennifer Mason (Finch and Mason, 1993), approached family relationships through the notion of ‘family responsibilities’ which were seen developing in open-ended processes, not according to pre-existing rules, but rather through explicit and implicit negotiation between individuals within given social and economic contexts. Finch and Mason argued that commitments between, and expectations toward, kin are actively created in particular relationships, although moral frameworks and accumulated commitments constrain negotiation.

Among its other currents, the relational turn foregrounds how social processes unfold in, and are conditioned, by relationships. In this thesis, I extend this approach to analysing how women negotiate alcohol over the life course. While there are socio-cultural norms – and the cultural scripts and moral discourse through which such norms are expressed – with which women engage and which to an extent constrain negotiations, rather than having the quality of “pre-existing rules”, these scripts, discourses and the norms underpinning them are flexible and open to interpretation. Navigating scripts and discourses is a process shaped by, and toward, the conditions of possibility and constraint afforded by personal relationships.⁹

⁹ Following Morgan (1996), I do not view personal relationships as inherently positive.
Carol Smart’s 2007 book *Personal Life* offers a detailed articulation of, and sustained reflection on, the project of the sociology of personal life. To unpack the relational turn as it has emerged in the sociology of personal life further, it is worth considering in greater depth the core concepts underpinning Smart’s (2007) synthesis of the field. The core concepts of particular interest to this thesis are: memory, biography, embeddedness and relationality. In what follows, I first briefly address the origins of the sociology of personal life.\(^\text{10}\) I then explore each of the above core concepts in turn, and situate them in relation to my study.

The sociology of personal life emerged over the course of the 1990s and early 2000s out of two key developments: the rejection of ‘the family’ as the central means of constituting the object of inquiry by several sociologists writing on matters of kinship, intimacy, relationships and relatedness, and the critique of the individualisation thesis\(^\text{11}\) as it has been advanced in the works of Beck (1992), Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1992, 1995) and Giddens (1992) (Smart, 2007). As Smart (2007) points out, with concepts such as ‘families of choice’ (Weston, 1991) there was a growing recognition among many sociologists that ‘the family’ is too narrow and normative a label for sociological investigations of intimacy and relationships. The nature, meaning and value of the nuclear family, with its gendered division of labour, had already been called into question by second-wave feminist critiques dating from the 1960s. Research on friendships, same-sex intimacies and other forms of connections sought to challenge the primacy of ‘the family’ in relation to what matters to people. In terms of its ongoing critique of the individualisation thesis, sociologists of personal life (e.g. Jamieson, 1998, 1999) called for empirically grounded research that took seriously how people’s life projects remained to a great extent “embedded in culture and history” (Smart, 2007, p. 26), including relationships with wider kin.

\(^{10}\)As Smart (2007, p. 28) notes, the term ‘personal’ is used “in contradistinction to ‘individual’” because of the approach’s challenges to the understanding of the individual promulgated by the individualisation thesis. The latter tends to see individuals as “atomized or disconnected” (ibid). By contrast, “‘the personal’ designates an area of life which impacts closely on people and means much to them, but which does not presume that there is an autonomous individual who makes free choices and exercises unfettered agency” (Smart, 2007, p. 28).

\(^{11}\)For a discussion of the individualisation thesis as it relates to family life and intimacy, and some of the critical sociological responses to it, see Smart (2007, pp. 7-26).
Smart (2007) outlines how the cultural turn\textsuperscript{12} has influenced the sociology of personal life, and highlights the significance of the overlapping concepts of memory, biography, embeddedness, relationality and the imaginary as objects of analysis. As discussed further in Chapter Three, memory is inherently social. Drawing on Misztal (2003), Smart (2007, p. 38) argues that:

> While the definition of memory as the capacity to remember requires an individual to do the remembering, it is clearly impossible for anybody to remember everything. This means that it requires processes of selection which in turn require the means by which to select. These means are acquired interactively or socially, and the development of memory thus becomes laden with values that guide our selection. [...] Individual memory is formed and shaped by others around us…

Moreover, memory is strongly linked with emotion (Misztal, 2003; cited by Smart, 2007, p. 39), and as Smart puts it, “feelings influence what we recall (and what we forget).” The selective nature of memory is a theme that is threaded throughout this thesis. Participants craft a version of events that is guided to a certain extent by their own narrative ambitions; weaving memories into narratives that are oriented toward a presentation of their lives that is intelligible and acceptable to themselves and to their real and imagined interlocutors (Summerfield, 2004; Tinkler, 2013).

Like memory, biography is central to the methodology and substantive concerns of this thesis. Smart (2007, p. 41) argues that

> …as social and cultural historians have shown, a few lives – purposively selected – can capture a complex picture of social change [...] these stories, whether they feature employment, migration or other large-scale movements, can be located in an understanding of local and dominant economic systems at the same time as they are situated in time. But perhaps more significantly, they can offer the experience of living through certain times; they can deal with the meanings that individuals attribute to events and relationships and they can explain, to a degree, motivations, desires and aspirations.

In other words, the sociological exploration of biographies – of lives lived and lives-in-process – enables an investigation of the situation of people within their synchronic and

\textsuperscript{12}By the ‘cultural turn’, Smart (2007, p. 32) is referring to the “recognition of the embeddedness of culture” in diverse areas of social life, such as “work-place practices or most particularly social class”.

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diachronic contexts. It provides the possibility of both an understanding of the systems and structures with which people navigate, and how the experience of these changes over time. Moreover – and in Smart’s evaluation, more importantly – attention to biographies can enable a rich and nuanced understanding of the meanings people attach to their situations and experiences.

Unlike memory and biography, ‘embeddedness’ is “more of an emergent and descriptive theme than a methodology or field of enquiry” (Smart, 2007, p. 43). It is an antidote (or “counterweight”) to ideas of individualism and liquidity circulating in various versions of the individualisation thesis. As a descriptive theme, embeddedness reminds us that individual lives are caught up in webs of relationships, which include connections with the deceased (p. 45). The notion of embeddedness includes a strong temporal dimension. As Smart puts it, where lives have become “interwoven and embedded (at a material, emotional and metaphorical level) it becomes impossible for relationships to simply end” (ibid). Rather, they carry on, and can acquire what Smart refers to as a ‘sticky’ quality: in other words, it can become difficult “shake free from them at an emotional level and their existence can continue to influence our practices” (p. 45).

Lastly, relationality, or ‘relationalism’, is a core concept in Smart’s book that has strong resonances in my research. The questioning of ‘the family’ as the dominant focal point for research on relationships in sociology echoed a similar development in anthropology, in which kinship came to be reconstituted as ‘relatedness’ from previous understandings of it as formal structures (Carsten, 2004; cited by Smart, 2007, p. 46). Relatedness directs attention to how individuality is formed and developed through our ongoing connections with others, and to how the others to whom we relate do not necessarily need to be our blood relations (p. 46). In Smart’s terms, this latter move “expands the range of significant others that anthropology or sociology can grasp as formative in the lives of ordinary people” (2007, p. 46). In their work on family obligations and negotiations, Finch and Mason (1993, 2000) shifted the term ‘kin’ to mean “people who define themselves as related” (Smart, 2007, pp. 47- 8). They found that the “static model of fixed relationships” assumed in social policy did not match people’s practices in contexts of negotiating obligations and exchanges because what tends to matter to people in such contexts is “‘persons’ not positions’” (p. 48). In other words, it is a “history of interaction and reciprocity” that generates “feelings of affection or obligation towards certain
individuals” (ibid). Put slightly differently, what this work on relationality highlights is that it is our ongoing, cumulative relationships with others we define as significant that can be crucial in shaping our practices. In the analysis that follows, I develop this point in relation to women’s drinking practices.

**Symbolic interactionism**

The theoretical perspective conventionally labelled “symbolic interactionism” originates in the work of George Herbert Mead (e.g. 1934), whose own work is rooted in pragmatism and social behaviourism, and in the work of Mead’s student, Herbert Blumer. Blumer coined the term in his 1931 book of the same name. In brief, this perspective is concerned with how humans create and assign meaning through acts of interpretation and communication. Reality, such as what drinking alcohol “means”, is negotiated in social interaction. Goffman and Becker, whose ideas are discussed in Chapter Four, similarly see the social reality as constituted by acts of communication and interpretation. This approach draws attention to how humans creatively negotiate meaning in social encounters, an emphasis I take up repeatedly in my analyses of participants’ narratives. For example, in Chapter Four I argue against a reading of midlife women’s drinking as regressing to an earlier phase of the life course (Emslie et al, 2015), in favour of an approach that attends to how the meanings of midlife are open to various interpretations and are not fixed.

**Feminist theory**

Lastly, the approach of the thesis is also strongly informed by feminist theory. Feminist theory is diverse and protean, but in general terms it is concerned with relations of power, including epistemological relations of power, and with gender inequality.¹³ There is a strong methodological commitment in feminist qualitative and ethnographic research to taking women’s voices seriously, which we can see in Ettorre’s work discussed earlier. One implication of adopting a feminist perspective in this research is the need for ongoing attention to how women negotiate the meanings of their drinking and navigate

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¹³ Feminist traditions vary on the significance they attach to gender as a social difference and form of inequality, with intersectional feminists making the case for continual attention to how other forms of social difference and inequality, like class and race/ethnicity, interact with gender (e.g. Hill Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1993).
conditions that are structurally unequal. As we will see in Chapter Six, while women exercise agency and reflexivity in how they negotiate with discourses around alcohol and motherhood, they are doing so in the context of a gendered division of labour that means that they have greater levels of responsibility for the care of their children.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has addressed how patterns and practices of alcohol consumption over the post-war and contemporary periods for the UK population as a whole, and with specific reference to age and gender differences, establish a wider context for this research. Attempts to reconstitute alcohol use as a socio-cultural practice and move away from an understanding of it as principally a social problem were considered next. Though it offers useful conceptual and empirical insights on the NTE, domestic drinking, the life course, alcohol in everyday life and the regulatory nature of the concept of ‘binge drinking’ were identified as gaps and shortcomings. I also questioned the literature’s understanding of drinking as strategic action geared toward the hedonistic pursuit of pleasure and the reproduction of dominant norms of class and gender. The chapter then explored deficiencies in the historical literature on women’s drinking, which has been largely fixated on the pub and the First and Second World Wars. Lastly, I argued that the literature on women and alcohol has retained its problem orientation and focus on misuse, which is clearly an inappropriate lens for a study that seeks to understand how women themselves define the uses and meanings of alcohol. Instead, I considered how the conceptual resources of the relational turn as practised by sociologists of personal life, symbolic interactionism and feminist theory are better suited to the task.

Having analysed the gaps and limitations of existing approaches to understanding women’s relationships to alcohol, I now turn to consider the research methods that have been used to generate women’s drinking biographies.
Chapter Three: Researching women’s drinking biographies

This chapter explores and provides a rationale for the study’s methodology and research design. The study was based on 38 drinking biographies, that is, narratives generated through life history interviews, a sub-sample of which used photo and object elicitation techniques. In this chapter, I first remind the reader of the study’s research questions, and then discuss my reasons for selecting the above methods and describe how they were used. This is followed by a discussion of the study’s conceptual architecture, including key terms and concerns like the ‘life course’ and ‘generation’, providing an explanation of how these are operationalised in the study. I then turn to the sampling techniques utilised in this research, and provide an overview of the social characteristics of the sample with respect to age, social class, education, occupation and religion. Next, I reflect on the ethical issues raised in the process of doing the research, and how I attempted to address these. Lastly, I address how data were analysed through thematic analysis and a process of abduction.

Research Questions

As discussed in Chapter One, the research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1) What meanings do women from different generations and social classes attach to their drinking?
2) How have their experiences with alcohol shifted as they have progressed through the life course?
3) What cultural scripts and moral discourses do women draw on as they narrate their experiences and recollections?
4) How might access to these cultural scripts and moral discourses vary by generation and/or social class?

As explored below, these questions are not just about experiences and practices – the world of doing – but also about how people make sense of and evaluate experiences and practices by drawing on existing cultural scripts and moral discourses. My use of the
term ‘cultural scripts’\textsuperscript{14} is inspired in part by the notion of “sexual scripts” (Gagnon and Simon, 1973), and also by the wider literature on how positive messages about alcohol circulate through popular culture (e.g. Austin and Hust, 2005), including social media (e.g. Griffin et al, 2013). The former is a symbolic interactionist approach centred on studying the significance of meanings and symbols to sexuality. I have emphasised the cultural or symbolic dimensions of scripts (i.e. as opposed to using the term ‘social scripts’) because positive images around alcohol tend to circulate through popular cultural representations, such as in advertising, television and film. These are in turn negotiated in social encounters. For example, in Chapter Five, I discuss how participants working in professional roles drew on the popular cultural reference of \textit{Sex in the City} in re-imagining their post-work drinking practices.

With the term ‘moral discourses’, I am referring to the ways in which textual and visual constructions of women’s drinking tend to evaluate their drinking in moral terms, that is, as a failure in their ability to perform normative or acceptable femininities (see also Day et al, 2004; Lyons et al, 2014; Emslie et al, 2015). As I discuss in Chapter Six, such discourses can become particularly potent in women’s lives if they are trying to conceive, are pregnant or are involved in providing care for young children. Moreover, young women using alcohol in the NTE are often constructed as either “maidens at risk” (Moore and Valverde, 2000), or are shamed for public displays of drunkenness in public health campaigns (Brooks, 2011) and in the press (Patterson et al, 2016).

\textbf{Constructing ‘drinking biographies’ in theory and in practice: methodology, methods and their implementation}

\textit{Life history and oral history interviewing}

Methodologically, drinking biographies are key to this study. By drinking biography, I mean the participant’s narrative account of her life-long relationship to alcohol, whether this is her own consumption of alcohol, or her memories and reflections on the drinking of others. In interviews, I attempted to guide participants in an open-ended fashion
through talking about their memories of alcohol in childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, and so forth. This was accomplished by asking a general, open-ended question (e.g. “Please tell me about your childhood”), and then asking specifically for memories about alcohol in that phase of her life. Rather than having pre-set phases or ‘life stages’ in mind\(^{15}\), I was guided to a great extent by the participant’s own periodization of her life. Asking questions like “What happened next in your life?” was one way I attempted to give participants the opportunity to verbally construct their own timelines.

Drinking biographies were constructed using a composite of life history interviewing and oral history. As Jackson and Russell (2010, p. 172) point out, oral history emerged to record dimensions of social life that are typically left out of conventional written records. Some approaches to oral history involve exploring an interviewee’s recollections of a particular set of experiences in detail. For example, there are several oral history studies of people’s memories of living through the Second World War. Here, the focus is more on the topic under investigation and generally speaking there is less of a focus on the interviewee’s life history. While part of the broad movement of oral history, life history interviews focus on the research participant’s life story. Using this method usually involves asking interviewees a series of primarily open-ended questions about their lives. As Jackson and Russell (2010, p. 172) discuss, the method is used when the researcher wants to assemble an in-depth understanding of someone’s past from that person’s own point of view. The interview schedule can vary with respect to how flexible it is, but typically in life history interviewing the interviewee sets the agenda, and it is their words and meanings that the interviewer wishes to capture.

Life history interviews can be an excellent means to elicit narratives that cover a wide temporal span, and that explore change within a given lifetime (to date) (Miller, 2000; Bryman, 2008, p. 440). This method gives the researcher/interviewer the opportunity to construct a dialogue where it is possible to explore a given event or experience in the participant’s life in detail, and also to construct accounts of events, experiences, and so forth in sequence. However, as I will discuss later, the quality of narratives in terms of their richness and detail is shaped by the participant's ability to remember the past in

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\(^{15}\) Models of pre-defined life stages project a normative understanding of how the life course should unfold, and contain heterosexist assumptions with regard to childrearing (see Simpson, 2016, p.19).
detail and her willingness to share memories with the interviewer. As I discuss below, remembering everyday routines from past decades can be a considerable challenge for participants, and establishing an interpersonal context in which participants feel comfortable emerged as crucial, particularly when participants viewed drink as a potentially sensitive topic, a point I take up further in the section on ethical reflections.

Why narratives?

Narratives are central to this study. Narratives provide a particular construction of social reality, or what Etherington (2004, p. 81) calls the “the social reality of the narrator”; these are the stories of individuals’ lives told in words and/or images. As Mason (2002) points out, the interview is a “situated encounter” and consists of a “conversation with a purpose”; in my case the purpose was the generation of narratives about past experiences of using alcohol. In this research, although some participants were asked to choose photos and objects, words were the primarily vehicle for expressing meaning. In research on narratives, such as this study, how people convey their narratives can be as important as what they say (Bryman, 2008, p. 556-7). Close attention is paid to the tones of voices, the ordering of events, the positions of pauses, the use of devices like irony, among other things. For example, in Chapter Four, I discuss how one participant (Jill, 1st cohort) narrates her memories of visiting her grandparents, who were heavy drinkers, as a grown woman. I use a close reading of this passage from her interview to argue that Jill has “inherited” her narrative point of view (Misztal, 2003) from her parents, an interpretation that came from listening carefully not only to what she was saying, but how her tone of voice changed as she mimicked her grandparents’ words and gestures.

Memories are not simple acts of recall. They are partial, selective and can tell the listener a good deal about not only the past but the priorities and concerns of the interviewee in the present (Misztal, 2003; Smart, 2007). Narratives are constructed from the position of hindsight, and this matters (Summerfield, 2004). For example, in Chapters Four and Five Margaret is looking back fondly at her youth from her current position as someone who is now 40 years older and who has recently experienced a significant change in her private life. Her experience and (re)construction of the past in the present of the interview encounter is not a neutral relaying of the original experience, but a layered version of it (Summerfield, 2004).
While memories, like the narratives in which they are conveyed, are always partial and selective – and always in varying degrees crafted to be intelligible and acceptable to narrator and the interlocutor (Summerfield, 2004; Tinkler, 2013) – they give insights both into the terrain of lived experience but also how research participants negotiate with cultural scripts and moral discourses. While the interviews occurred with one individual at a time, the narratives that are constructed are inherently relational (Mason, 2004). This point also applies to memories: these too, more often than not, involved connections with others. When memories were about the family members who are now deceased, the act of remembering could become a particularly emotive process, as I demonstrate in Chapter Four with the example of Jane’s memory of her first sip of alcohol.

Narratives draw on culturally available discourse to make sense of and evaluate memories and experiences (Lawler, 2002; Mason, 2004; Summerfield, 2004). As Lawler (2002, p. 242-3) points out, narratives are:

… a central means with which people connect together past and present, self and other. They do so within the context of cultural narratives which delimit what can be said, what stories can be told, what will count as meaningful, and what will seem to be nonsensical . . . Narratives . . . neither begin nor end in the research setting: they are part of the fabric of the social world.

Thus, in constructing narratives participants are engaging in acts of story-telling that tell us about the wider cultural narratives that are accessible to them. In Chapter Six, I use the example of Jill reflecting back on herself as a young woman in the pub, and the codes of conduct that applied to her behaviour in that setting, versus her later narrative about her experiences as a small business owner socialising with other small business owners at banquets, where a different code of conduct applied, and excess drinking was deemed acceptable. I argue that not only can narratives enable us to produce an understanding of the cultural scripts and moral discourses used by the narrators; they are also valuable in enabling us to analyse how these scripts and discourses shift as they are applied to different settings and different points of the life course.
Why photo elicitation?

In roughly one third of the interviews, one or a combination of photo and object elicitation techniques were used in an attempt to gather richer data. It has been argued that interviews involving photo elicitation rather than spoken words alone “elicit more concrete information, act as a trigger to memory and are likely to evoke a more emotional many-layered response in participants” (Collier and Collier, 1986; Samuels, 2004; cited in Croghan et al, 2008, p. 346). As Prosser and Schwarz (1998, p. 124; cited in Croghan et al, 2008, p. 346) point out, discussing photos in interviews enables the researcher to explore the meanings participants attach to photos. Two forms of photo elicitation were used in this research: participants were asked to choose a few photos from each period of their lives (e.g. childhood, adolescence, etcetera) that they felt represented that time of their life to them. “Times of life” were not defined, but rather participants were free to operationalise this term as they saw fit, though examples similar to the above (i.e. childhood) were provided. Secondly, participants were asked to provide photos in the week leading up to the interview that they felt reflected their day-to-day routines around alcohol, such as if they were buying alcohol at the supermarket or pouring a drink at a given time.16

On balance, photo elicitation achieved its desired aims of supporting participants to remember elements of their pasts in greater detail. For example, after looking at photos of members of a youth group to which she belonged as a teenager in the 1960s, Paula’s account of her youth become more detailed and vivid than it had been in the interview up to that point. She remembered a “troubled” girl who also belonged to the group, and her own feelings about young people she knew who she thought of as “troubled”.

As mentioned, the intended purpose of the photos was to trigger memories about particular points in the participants’ pasts to allow for more detailed and vivid accounts to emerge of these points in their lives. The photos therefore did not need to involve alcohol in any way, which was made clear to participants. Nevertheless, several participants chose photos taken during celebrations or holidays when drink was at hand. In her interview, Jackie (1960s cohort) principally chose photos of her with her “main”

16 No one remembered to do this.
friend on holiday in their twenties. After analysing her interview as a whole, these choices enabled me to make sense of Jackie’s drinking biography. As I discuss in Chapter Four, this friendship was important to how Jackie used and made sense of alcohol during much of her twenties. Her selection of photos helped me in reaching this interpretation.

While the use of photo elicitation was on the whole effective in enabling more detailed, nuanced accounts to emerge, some of the talk-alone interviews provided richer data than photo interviews. For example, Emily (1970s cohort) had a large box of photographs at her disposal during our interview, as her mother had recently assembled this for her in the run up to her fortieth birthday. We started the interview by looking at photos, but quickly realised this was unnecessary. Her memories from of the years in question were already detailed and vivid, and the photos were not adding anything.

**Why object elicitation?**

Objects were used in a subsample of the interviews to anchor participants’ accounts in the material realities of their day-to-day lives and to evoke sensory memories (Parkin, 1999; Hecht, 2001; Pink, 2006). Participants were asked to choose a few objects from their day-to-day routines around alcohol, such as a bottle opener, a favourite glass or a bottle of their favourite drink. Objects were discussed in roughly one third of the interviews; in most cases this crossed over with the interviews in which photos were also used. Unlike the photos, which were of earlier points in their lives, objects tended to be from present-day routines, and were therefore more useful with respect to discussions of the present than the past. More often than not, participants choose their favourite wine glass or a bottle of an expensive wine (e.g. champagne) that they had been saving for a special occasion. For example, Hannah (1960s cohort) chose a bottle of champagne that she was saving for her wedding anniversary.

Like the photos, through engaging with objects participants became more descriptive and vivid in their accounts than might otherwise have been in the case. In a few interviews, participants had not chosen objects in advance but instead invited me into their kitchens, as the interview was taking place in their homes. On balance, these are some of the richest moments in these interviews. For example, while looking around her kitchen and
garage to show me her wine collection, Andrea (1960s cohort) became notably reflective about her current practice of drinking as soon as her visiting grandchildren have gone to bed, a point I take up further in Chapter Five.

**Why not ethnographic methods?**

While ethnographic methods are particularly well suited to observing and developing an understanding of practices, like drinking practices in licensed premises, and have been used widely to this end, the key aims of this research were to generate understandings of life course and generational changes in women’s relationships to drinking alcohol, and to analyse how such experiences and practices involving alcohol are narrated. Participant observation could partially achieve the latter aim, assuming women were engaged in conversation, but it would have necessitated a ‘snap shot’ approach to the other issues. In other words, I would have been limited to exploring experiences and narratives at a particular point of the life course. A longitudinal design, that is observations over a lengthy period of time, was not a possibility in the context of this doctoral study because of limitations of time. Furthermore, ethnographic methods would likely have meant perpetuating the literature’s aforementioned focus on drinking in licensed premises and other nominally public drinking spaces (i.e. privately owned, but opened to the public, usually with age restrictions), as it would have been challenging to gain access to domestic sites. Instead of using ethnographic methods, I assembled a methodology that moved away from taking ‘snap shots’ of people, typically young adults, drinking in public spaces, usually the night-time economy.

**A note on interviewing about alcohol**

Alcohol is often viewed as a sensitive topic, and therefore face-to-face interview and survey methods are regarded as potentially problematic (Lader and Goddard, 2006; Smith and Foxcroft, 2009). As Mason (2002) argues, establishing a comfortable, open rapport is vital to creating a context for the co-production of knowledge. I took a few measures to minimise potential issues arising from the perception of alcohol as a sensitive topic. First of all, as discussed below, only women who were not receiving medical treatment for problems with alcohol use were included in the sample. This criterion was clearly stated on the participant information sheet used in recruitment.
Secondly, the participant information sheet also used phrased like “socialising with alcohol in day-to-day life” to “how you spend your leisure time” to help distance the research from health research. I clearly framed the research as being about women’s everyday lives and how they spent their leisure time, rather than using any health- or medical-related language, in the participation sheet and in my discussions about the research with participants, both before and during the interview. The efforts to frame the research topic in a way that enabled participants to feel at ease appear to have been largely effective. As the data discussed in Chapters Four to Six demonstrate, the majority of participants were notably forthcoming and detailed in their accounts of their experiences with alcohol.

**The study’s underlying conceptual architecture: Key terms and concepts**

In what follows, I provide definitions of key terms used throughout this thesis, and explain how they are operationalised and/or explored in the chapters that follow. The terms are: life course; cohort and generation; age and ageing; historical context; temporality; and spatiality. With respect to the first four sets of terms, I draw extensively on Jane Pilcher’s (1995) well-known text *Age and Generation in Modern Britain*.

**The life course**

As Pilcher (1995, p. 2) notes, in contemporary British society “children’s lives are organized in a radically different manner from those of adults.” While these differences are usually taken for granted and written off as the result of “natural”, biological distinctions between children and adults, we know by looking at other societies and historical periods that these arrangements are by no means “natural” or inevitable (Pilcher, 1995, p. 3). The term “life course” attempts to capture how different points of the temporal trajectory between birth and death are socially constructed. As Pilcher (1995) explains:

The life course perspective is more of a way of conceptualizing the human span of life than an explanatory theory. None the less, it has become increasingly influential as a way of approaching the sociological study of age. The characteristics of the life course approach are best illustrated by comparing it with a previously dominant conceptualization of the span of human life: the life cycle.
The concept of the life cycle describes the developmental stages that individuals undergo over time. As they grow older, individuals progressively develop in physical, psychological, and social terms and so move, in a sequence, through a fixed number of stages through the life cycle: infancy, childhood, youth, adulthood, and old age. As a concept, the life cycle has its roots in the disciplines of biology and developmental psychology (Pilcher, 1995, pp. 17-18).

Pilcher points out the weaknesses of the notion of the life cycle: in addition to its failure to give due consideration to social contexts, it has “universalistic, deterministic […] and ahistorical tendencies” (p. 18). As mentioned, cross-cultural and historical research have demonstrated that different points on the trajectory between birth and death are enacted in distinct ways across cultures and time periods. The concept of the life course was thus developed as way to draw attention to and more fully capture the social, cultural and historical shaping of these different points, and to allow for “flexibility and variation in stages reached, their timing and sequencing” (Pilcher, 1995, pp. 19-20).

The life course is a useful tool for comparing changes in the social organisation and cultural meanings of different points of the trajectory between birth and death across time. In this study, adolescence in particular emerges as having distinct meanings for different generations: while those in the first cohort were not typically keen to participate in ‘adult’ forms of leisure, like going to the pub, those born after 1960 often could not wait to ‘pass’ as older and to gain access to adult drinking spaces. To elaborate, the life course emerges as significant in the analysis of interview data in two respects in Chapter Four: firstly, for the majority of participants born in the 1970s and early 1990s, adolescence was a time for experimenting with alcohol. Memories from adolescence form the basis of women’s recollections about first encountering alcohol. While several tasted alcohol for the first time in childhood, such experiences were for the most part fleeting and understood by participants as largely inconsequential: it was trying alcohol as a teenager with friends that left lasting impressions and an imprint of how drinking biographies were narrated.

Secondly, at later points of the life course participants typically renegotiated their relationships to alcohol. In some cases, this was in response to starting full time work, where they became friends with colleagues over post-work drinks, a set of experiences which are addressed in detail in Chapter Five. Pregnancy and motherhood also produced
a change in context that led to the renegotiation of drinking practices. The life course emerges as an analytical backdrop for developing the argument that relationships to alcohol are not static, and are not learned at one point in the life course and then reproduced as women age in an unchanging manner; they are renegotiated within the context of changing personal relationships.

As Pilcher (1995) discusses, the life course approach also has its critics. As Murphy (1987; cited in Pilcher, 1995, p.21) argues, there are few straightforward rules for analysis beyond the maxim that “no potentially important factor be ignored” (Pilcher, 1995, p. 21). Moreover, Jones and Wallace (1992, cited in Pilcher, ibid), further point out that with its focus on individuals it risks losing sight of structural inequalities affecting social groups. In this study, I have tried to work against the latter tendency by contextualising participants’ biographies with respect to how they belonged to other social groups, such as social classes and occupational groups, beyond age and generation. Nevertheless, the wider point that we can take from Jones and Wallace’s critique about what is in effect the approach’s tendency toward what is known as “methodological individualism” (Weber, 1922), that is, the positioning of the individual at the centre of the perspective’s conceptual universe, is worth bearing in mind as a limitation to the approach. However, as discussed, it is important to remember that though interviews may consist of individuals’ narratives, these narratives are inherently relational (Mason, 2004), and draw on cultural narratives (Lawler, 2002) and public discourses (Summerfield, 2004) that are shared.

**Cohort and generation**

According to Pilcher (1995, p. 22), the terms “cohort” and “generation” are interchangeable: the former is the sociological version, and the latter is the popular, or “folk”, version. Both terms refer to a group of people born at a similar point in history. As Pilcher explains,

Sociologically, the concept of cohort is a way of contextualizing the lives of individuals; first, within the specific interval of historical time into which they are born, grow up and old; and, second, within the company of their coevals (other individuals of the same, or similar, calendar age). As a consequence of their cohort’s location in historical time, individuals and their coevals share an
exposure to certain experiences and opportunities and are excluded from others (1995, p. 22).

Pilcher goes on to argue that sociologists have not been attentive enough to the significance of generation in shaping people’s experiences of the social world, despite the term’s wider popularity.

In this study, most participants are drawn from one of four cohorts, which have been labelled according to the decade in which most members of this cohort were born:

1) The 1940s cohort: Women born between 1939 and 1948 (n=9), the majority of whom (n=7) meet the definition of ‘Baby Boomers’ as they were born shortly after the end of Second World War.

2) The 1960s cohort: Women born between 1956 and 1965 (n=6). Only one of these participants (Andrea, who was born in 1956) born before 1960.

3) The 1970s cohort: Women born between 1968 and 1982 (n=14), who are in popular parlance part of ‘Generation X’, depending on the parameters used to define this term.

4) The 1990s cohort: Women born between 1989 and 1995 (n=9), who fall under the category of ‘Millennials’.

I had originally intended for all participants to have been born in one of the 1940s, 1970s or 1990s to enable more clear-cut comparisons among the study’s ‘generations’. However, when women who had been born between 1956 and 1965 volunteered to participate in the study, it seemed nonsensical to refuse their offer. As discussed in Chapter Four in relation to Margaret’s account of entering a pub for the first time in the mid-1970s and Jackie’s narrative on re-learning to drink because of perceived bodily changes, the experiences and accounts of these women were in some instances distinct from those in the other cohorts, coming of age as they did, and navigating further life course transitions, in somewhat different historical contexts than their older and younger counterparts.

For all participants, belonging to a particular generation emerged as an important factor in shaping the opportunities and constraints around using and making sense of experiences with alcohol. On the whole, the first cohort had limited access to, and often

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17 Participants’ cohorts are given in parentheses after their names.
reported having little desire to access, alcohol, both as young women but also well into their thirties in some cases. Alcohol was a far less pervasive component of women’s day-to-day lives in the early decades of the post-war period, and beyond family celebrations drinking was largely restricted to traditional pubs until the mid-1970s (Gutzke, 2014).

**Age and ageing**

As we can see in the above examples of Margaret and Jackie, combining the concepts of life course and generation draws attention to how people age in specific historical contexts. Margaret became a teenager at a particular point in history, the mid-1970s, when traditionally masculine pub culture had slowly started to change (Gutzke, 2014). Her early experiences of drinking occurred in and were facilitated by that context. In the example of Jackie, she happened to be close to reaching the age of 50 when the interview took place and had become more conscious of her health over recent years; the issue here is more directly about age, but also about the narrative resources she has access to to describe her experience. In Margaret’s case as well, while the experiences described took place in the mid-1970s, the interview was held in 2015; she is narrating her past from the position of hindsight, and her narrative is inflected with the concerns of the present and with a measure of nostalgia.

Moving onto the issues of age and ageing, as Pilcher points out, in Western cultures age is expressed chronologically and “used to prohibit, compel, or permit individuals to participate in certain activities” (1995, p. 3). She further notes that chronological age should be “recognized as merely one way of conceptualizing time and of measuring age” (p. 3). In other societies and historical periods (e.g. pre-industrial Europe), the clock and the calendar were not nearly so important, or widely used, and in the former case it has a very recent history indeed. In this study, chronological age was key in determining the kinds of experiences participants had with alcohol, and the nature of their day-to-day lives more widely: childhood and adolescence consisted of notably different routines than young adulthood, both with regard to alcohol and beyond. However, what chronological ages meant tended to shift depending on when a participant was born. Perhaps most strikingly, participants from the 1940s cohort had very different experiences of leisure at the ages of 14 and 15 than most participants from the 1970s and 1990s cohorts. While the majority of the latter two cohorts remember routinely trying
and often managing to access alcohol at these ages, members of the 1940s cohort recounted having little interest or opportunity to do so, but instead tended to participate in forms of structured leisure (e.g. youth groups) or forms of commercial leisure, like dancing in dance halls or roller-skating.

**Historical context**

This study centres on narratives reflecting back on the past, as well as accounts situated in the present. By post-war period, I refer to the years starting with the end of the Second World War in 1945 until the mid-1970s. While in some cases the end of the post-war period is given as 1973, when economic expansion ceased, other sources give the year 1979, when Margaret Thatcher was elected and a neoliberal model of economy and society became government policy. With the term contemporary period, I refer to the period starting around the mid-1970s to the present. In various ways, the shifting historical contexts against which drinking biographies were narrated mattered. I will illustrate this point with the example of how those growing up in the 1960s had different experiences of education and paid employment than those growing up in the 1990s. As discussed in Chapter Four, several members of the first cohort were expected by their parents to leave school aged 15 and find paid work. For Belinda, this was experienced as a hardship, as she had hoped to continue her studies. While this was in part about shifting ideas about youth, education and when teenaged children’s contributions to the household economy should commence, it was also made possible by the widespread availability of jobs for men and unmarried women. Such a context did not exist in the 1990s when most members of the second cohort turned 15, and in all cases bar one, stayed in school for at least another year, with several staying in education well beyond this point. As this example suggests, the wider economic context, which like other kinds of contexts shifts over time, is an important backdrop to participants’ experience of the life course.
Sampling and recruitment

Sampling

Owing to the focus on women’s changing day-to-day routines around alcohol in British society over the post-war and contemporary periods, the population in this research is women born in Britain between roughly 1940 and 1995. The vast majority of participants were born in and currently reside in the North West of England. In sampling from this population, two forms of diversity were actively sought: age and class diversity. The former is because the project is interested in life course and historical change: speaking to women from different temporal phases of life (namely, early adulthood, mid adulthood, and later life) and who had ‘came of age’ at different points in post-war or contemporary history was key. Women receiving medical treatment for alcohol problems were not included in the sample for ethical reasons, as there was a concern that the interview may become a pseudo-therapeutic encounter, and the researcher has no relevant training should this have occurred.

The attempt to construct a sample that is diverse in relation to social class was a response to arguments in the literature and survey evidence that drinking practices vary by social class (Smith and Foxcroft, 2009). As explored in the previous chapter, although working class women drink on average less than their middle class counterparts, media reporting and visual representations often focus on the purported transgressions of working class drinkers (Day et al, 2004; Skeggs, 2005; Emslie et al, 2015). As I discuss in more detail below, convenience sampling and snowballing were used.

Age diversity

To gain an understanding of how relationships to drinking are (re)negotiated at various points of the life course, and how the contexts and character of such negotiations might have changed historically, women were interviewed from three major points of the life course: young adulthood (i.e. 18-25 year olds, born in the late 1980s to early 1990s); mid adulthood (i.e. 30-49 year olds, born primarily in late 1960s to early 1980s); and later life (i.e. 50 and over, born before 1965). Initially, these points were more narrowly defined with wider gaps between age groups (i.e. 18-25 year olds; 35-40 year olds; and 60 plus
year olds). However, the practicalities of recruiting volunteers to donate their time to participate in a research study meant that women who fell out of the desired age ranges were included. Specifically, six women born between 1956 and 1965 took part. Community groups were approached in order to recruit participants from beyond the researcher’s extended network, including an exercise class and an organisation explicitly for retired people whose members are over 65.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early adulthood (18-26)</th>
<th>Mid-adulthood (30-49)</th>
<th>Later life (50+)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 participants</td>
<td>14 participants</td>
<td>15 participants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Age profile of the sample at time of interview*

As discussed further below, multiple attempts were made to recruit more 18 to 26 year olds through community groups. However, these attempts were unsuccessful. Eventually time constraints meant that the period of fieldwork had to end with fewer of these participants included in the sample.

**Class and occupational diversity**

The class composition of the sample is displayed in Table 2. In categorising the sample by social class, I am taking into account multiple potential indicators of class position, where such information could be gleaned: parents’ level of education and occupations; the women’s education and occupations (past and present); and their partners’ level of education and occupation. Rather than giving participants a survey to fill in at the outset, I gleaned as much information about the above factors through subtle and sensitively phrased questions about their parents and their partners. As discussed earlier, establishing an open and comfortable rapport was crucial because of the potential perception of alcohol as a sensitive topic. I did not feel asking a serious of close ended questions, particularly those related to educational attainment and household income, was an effective way to generate a comfortable atmosphere.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Working-class (W-C) background residing in a W-C household</th>
<th>W-C background attending or graduated from University (18-26) or residing in a professional/managerial household in adulthood</th>
<th>Middle-class background residing in a professional/managerial household in adulthood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1940s cohort (aged 65 – 75)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960s cohort (aged 49 to 58)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970s cohort (aged 32-46)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s cohort (aged 18-26)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2: Participants’ social class*

With respect to the level of education completed by those in the sample, generational differences emerged, reflecting the lack of opportunities for post-secondary education available to girls and women in the 1950s and 1960s. A few participants, such as Belinda (born 1939) and Ellen (born 1946), reflected on this in their interviews, lamenting the fact that they had been prevented from further study by their parents. In Belinda’s case, she believes this was because at the time her father thought that advanced study was not appropriate or necessary for young women. Ellen was unable to complete secondary school as she was required to contribute to her family’s finances by finding paid work.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Sixth Form/College of Further Education</th>
<th>Undergraduate Degree</th>
<th>Post-graduate or Professional Degree (e.g. Teaching qualification)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1940s cohort</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(aged 65 to 75)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960s cohort</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(aged 49 to 58)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970s cohort</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(aged 32-46)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1990s cohort</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>(aged 18-26)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Highest level of education completed by cohort

Four members of the 1940s cohort had qualified and worked as secondary school teachers. In three of such cases, they had returned to education to study for their degrees when their children were older. Despite generational differences in access to higher education, the education profile of the 1990s cohort is nevertheless less diverse in relation to education, and skewed toward those with postgraduate or professional degrees. Three of the women were post-graduate students, and two had completed a post-graduate teaching qualification. All participants in the 1990s cohort were recruited informally through the researcher's extended network of colleagues and friends, as
efforts to recruit young women through community groups were unsuccessful. More specifically, attempts were made to recruit young women through an exercise class and a sports team but in both cases women who had expressed interest in participating in the research never returned the researcher’s emails or telephone calls.

The sample was notably diverse in relation to the ranges of occupations, past and present, represented. Several participants chose to periodize their lives according to their work histories. As a result, it emerged that a number of participants had quite varied work histories, changing jobs on a regular basis and in a few cases changing careers at one or more points in their lives. The occupations and/or sectors represented in the sample for those participants who had not yet reached retirement (n=28) were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector/Occupation</th>
<th>Non-retired Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time University Study (including UG and PG)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At home with young children</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Education (Teacher or Teaching Assistant)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Administration</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health professional</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil service (officer-level)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catering</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Fellow</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4: Sector/Occupation of non-retired participants*

However, it is important to note that the above is just a snapshot of occupations at the time of interview. Several women had held jobs in other areas. For example, two of those at home with young children had previously worked for large media organisations. Some of the above participants (n=5) worked part time.

There was similar employment diversity among those who were retired (n=10): four had spent the majority of their careers as secondary school teachers; one had worked in
human resources; one in accounts; one ran a corner shop with her husband; one had worked on an assembly line; and three had worked in office administration. Several participants from the sample as a whole had worked in pubs at some point in their lives, and one participant had worked in a nightclub. Though not initially sought, the level of diversity in relation to employment has proved to be useful giving nuance to the analysis of the relationship between work and alcohol presented in Chapter Five.

While the sample was diverse with respect to age, and somewhat diverse in relation to class, education and employment/occupation, it is not diverse in terms of ethnicity, sexuality or (dis)ability: all but one participant identified as heterosexual; all but one identified as White British; and no one discussed having a disability. The homogeneity of the sample with respect to ethnicity is a particular limitation because it is known that ethno-cultural background can be important in shaping people’s relationships to alcohol (e.g. Valentine et al, 2010; Serrant, 2015). Emslie et al (2015. p. 444) point out it is “rare to find work on drinking which includes heterosexual, gay and bisexual respondents and this should be rectified.” The same point applies to how disabled people experience drinking cultures.

Religion

Religious diversity was not sought in the sample. Participants were not asked about their religious affiliation (if any), as it was expected that if this was important to them this was likely to become clear over the course of the interview. While most participants discussed celebrating Christmas, a point I discuss in Chapter Four, few discussed religious-themed celebrations beyond this. The only exceptions were Jane (1940s cohort), who referred to her involvement in a Christian organisation as a young woman (see Chapter Four), and Mary (1940s cohort), whose husband’s father was a Methodist, and had signed the pledge of behalf of his entire family.

Fieldwork

After two pilot interviews in 2012, one with a relative through marriage and the second with an acquaintance, the vast majority of interviews were conducted between December 2013 and May 2015. Thirty-eight interviews were held in total, including the two pilot
interviews. The majority of participants were recruited through advertising with community groups, namely an exercise class held in a South Manchester suburb, an organisation for retired people located in a different Manchester suburb, and a community Facebook social group. A small number of participants (n=6) were recruited through snowball sampling. Interviews were in most cases conducted in participants’ homes, often the kitchen or the front room.

**Ethical reflections**

This research followed the guidelines outlined in the University of Manchester’s School of Social Science’s ethics template. Potential participants, all of whom were over the age of 18, were given an information sheet which informed them that if they were to take part in the research their details would be kept confidential; embarrassing or sensitive questions would not be asked in the interview; and that only women who were not receiving medical treatment for issues related to alcohol use would be included in the study. Before each interview, participants were reminded that their details will be kept confidential, and were given the option of choosing a pseudonym or having a pseudonym chosen for them by the researcher. Thus, all of the names that appear in the thesis are pseudonyms, and identifying details (e.g. names of pubs and workplaces) have been omitted. Embarrassing and/or sensitive questions were not raised by the researcher.

However, following a university’s ethical guidelines in the ways discussed above is only part of what it means to conduct ethical research. Despite this study’s focus on the day-to-day routines of self-defined non-problematic drinkers, alcohol nevertheless emerged as a sensitive topic for some participants over the course of providing their narratives. This sensitivity typically stemmed from one of two reasons: the participant had an ‘alcoholic’ in her immediate or extended family; or at one point in her life, the participant had drunk more than she thought she should and in a context that she deemed inappropriate, usually drinking on her own. In what follows, I illustrate the above with two examples of each scenario, and how I attempted to manage the situation in an ethical fashion. It emerged early on in Mary’s (1940s cohort) narrative that her stepfather had been an alcoholic. Mary mentioned her stepfather’s drinking at a quite few points during the interview, linking it to her own experiences and perceptions of alcohol. It was clear that some of her memories of her childhood were very unpleasant. Along similar lines,
Margaret (1960s cohort) brought up that her mother had experienced points in her life when she drank excessively. In both cases, I avoided asking participants directly about the family member’s drinking to avoid upsetting them, and instead focussed on developments in their own lives. If they wanted to speak about the influence and significance of the family member’s drinking, they were free to do so, but were not guided by me in that direction.

With respect to the second scenario, Phoebe (1940s cohort) adopted a confessional tone at one point in the interview when she told me about how the stresses of a full-time job as a secondary school teacher, and unspecified difficulties at home, led her to drink a glass of a strong liqueur before bed every night to “put herself down” and “shut the noise out” for a period of time in her forties. Similarly, Jill (1940s cohort) recalled a few times when her husband had been away with work after they had home-brewed wine and she drank what she regarded as too many glasses while home alone after the children had gone to bed. Her bodily demeanour and facial expressions changed while she was telling me about this time in her life; I picked up the sense that she felt ashamed of herself. In both cases, I did not interrupt or otherwise stop participants from speaking, as this would have been insensitive. However, I also did not ask questions specifically about the scenario in order to avoid causing distress.

**Analysis**

Interviews were transcribed, and analysed using thematic analysis. In thematic analysis, interview transcripts are read carefully (often multiple times) to identify and refine themes, that is, recurring concepts or ideas. In Ezzy’s (2002, p. 88) terms, thematic analysis:

…aims to identify themes within the data. Thematic analysis is more inductive than content analysis because the categories into which themes will be sorted are not decided prior to coding the data. These categories are ‘induced’ from the data.

While the general issues that are of interest are determined prior to the analysis, the specific nature of the categories and themes to be explored are not predetermined. This means that this form of research may take the researcher into issues and problems he or she had not anticipated.
Consistent with the above description, I had general ideas about what I would learn through conducting the interviews prior to starting the research. After some of the interviews had taken place, I also had a sense of some of the key themes that appeared to be emerging. However, reading interview transcripts – along with listening to audio recording of interviews – and identifying recurring ideas and patterns were the key ways in which the data was analysed.

Interview transcripts from interviews using photo and object elicitation techniques were analysed in the same manner as those where these techniques were not used, as the purpose of using photos and objects was to anchor and enrich verbal accounts. An ethic and practice of thinking with concepts emerged as the analysis and writing were underway that broadly conforms to the technique of “abduction” (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p. 156), which consists of putting data and theory into a dialogue with one another. This involved ‘thinking with’ concepts from sociological research broadly aligned with this study’s interpretive approach. To give examples for each of the body chapters, in Chapter Four this involved drawing on Becker (1953) on marijuana use as a social practice that is learned, as well as Goffman’s dramaturgical approach (1959), including the idea of impression management. In both cases, the concepts and my empirical data were put into dialogue with one another. How far did either conceptual account go in enabling me to make sense of the empirical material? I attempted to identify ways that the concepts and relevant empirical examples from the other authors did not fit with the data I had collected, as well as ways in which they did. Thus, drawing on the example of Becker (1953), it is worth noting that learning to find drinking alcohol pleasurable is, for the most part, not as intricate a process as learning to ‘get high’ on marijuana; while the former is still a social process, there are limits to the ability of Becker’s writing to help with analysing my data.

To give a further example of how a concept and related empirical material were used to think with the data, in Chapter Five the notion of ‘earning a drink’, drawn from Langhamer’s (2003) study of women’s pub-going on the Home Front during the Second World War, emerged as key. However, here again there are limits to how well the concept worked to explain cases. I found it was important to undermine a potential line of argument after one was posited; to ask, what are the differences between the examples or cases this helps to explain, and those that it does not? In analysing the data that would
eventually become part of Chapter Five, a key distinction was that the idea of ‘earning a drink’ through paid work made sense in relation to participants who had spent a number of years in professional roles working alongside men, but tended not to make sense of the experiences and practices of women who were or had been employed in largely feminised occupations like childcare, education and retail. Moreover, working class participants from the 1970s cohort (n=4), who were all located in the latter category, shared other similarities with one another and differences with the women who had worked as professionals, for example, they drank considerably less at home. Here, the tactic of what appeared to be undermining the original conceptual premise (that is, that a drink is a reward for paid labour) actually ended up providing further support, as the cases that did not ‘fit’ did not fit for reasons largely spelled out in the original study: it was socially valued labour aligned with male privilege that was seen as deserving of alcohol as a reward (Langhamer, 2003). In this way, empirical data and conceptual interpretations were put into an ongoing dialogue with one another.

At the stage of analysis, it had not been anticipated that the relational turn as pursued by sociologists of personal life (e.g. May, 2001; Smart, 2007) would become critical to the overarching arguments of the thesis. It was not until the writing process was underway and Jamieson’s (2011) practices of intimacy approach was identified as particularly useful in analysing the data that make up the bulk of Chapter Six that the wider research in this field (e.g. Mason and Muir, 2013) began to be drawn on in the process of abduction.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological approach and data collection techniques used in this study. ‘Drinking biographies’ were constructed through a composite of life history and oral history interviews, a proportion of which used photo and/or object elicitation techniques. These biographies consisted of narratives, involving memories of experiences with alcohol. While memories are partial and selective, they can reveal a great deal about experiences and the moral frameworks and cultural scripts through which these experiences are made intelligible and evaluated. Convenience, snow ball and quota sampling techniques were used. The sample was recruited primarily through advertising with community groups in Greater Manchester. It is diverse with respect to
age, consisting of three main birth cohorts: younger women (n=9) in their early to mid-twenties, who were born in the late 1980s to early 1990s; women in their thirties and forties (n=14), who were born between the late 1960s and early 1980s; and older women (n=9), who are over the age of sixty, and the majority of whom were born in the 1940s. A further six women who were born between 1956 and 1965 were also included in the sample. Age diversity was central to the research design, as it enables the analysis of narratives from women positioned at different points in the life course, who have experienced ‘living with drink’ across different historical moments.

Having explained how participants’ drinking biographies were constructed and analysed, I will now explore how participants narrated their experiences of ‘learning to drink.’
Chapter Four: Learning to drink

As Howard Becker (1953) established in relation to marijuana in his well-known article on becoming a marijuana user, one must learn how to drink alcohol in order to find drinking pleasurable or otherwise worthwhile; in other words, in order to develop a sensory connection to alcohol. While the techniques and processes involved in learning to find alcohol pleasurable are perhaps not as intricate as those outlined by Becker in the context of marijuana use, drinking nevertheless involves socially learned practices and sensory connections developed in social encounters. As I explore in this chapter, learning to drink is a process that unfolds in changing relational and historical contexts. How girls and young women learn to drink is not static but continually shifting. Moreover, individuals’ relationships to alcohol are themselves dynamic: they tend to shift as people grow older and progress through the life course. This chapter argues that changes in the relative significance of personal relationships over the life course shape how women’s approaches to drinking are learned, re-learned and un-learned.

While public health discourses and social science research often highlight family life as a key site for ‘learning’ beliefs and practices around alcohol (Foxcroft and Lowe, 1991; cited in Jayne and Valentine, 2015, p. 87), several participants in this study offered their own, different accounts of intergenerational familial learning. In these narratives, participants stressed disruption and discontinuity in the face of family histories of alcoholism and heavy drinking, followed by their own continuation of their parents’ moderate practices. This chapter first explores how participants articulate the place of alcohol in their families’ stories in relation to intergenerational dynamics and family rituals. I draw on Misztal’s (2003) insight that families are “mnemonic communities”, that is, they are constituted through the sharing of memories and “family stories” (Thompson, 2005). McNay’s (2009) notion of “narrative inheritance” is used to make sense of stories about alcoholic or heavy drinking grandparents. With respect to the latter theme of family rituals, though alcohol was largely absent from most participants’ childhoods, it was frequently narrated as having formed part of families’ Christmas celebrations. I explore how the sensory dimensions of certain drinks consumed at Christmastime, such as the scent of cherry brandy or the chalky taste of advocaat can become part of what Christmas ‘feels’ like (Mason and Muir, 2013).
The chapter then examines participants’ accounts of their experiences of learning to drink as young women. Here, significant differences emerged between the place of alcohol in the leisure practices of women born in the early decades of the post-war period versus those born later. I employ Goffman’s (1959, 1967) notion of “impression management” to conceptualise the practices and strategies of the women from the second and third cohorts to gain access to alcohol as girls and young women. For these participants, gaining access to alcohol and the spaces in which it was consumed were part of their attempts to ‘pass’ as older, and to push away from their own and other’s images of themselves as children. By contrast, in their interviews participants from the first cohort tended not to discuss having felt a similar desire to enact codes signalling adulthood through accessing alcohol and the spaces in which it was consumed as young women in the 1950s and 1960s. In addition to having access to wider forms of leisure, a lower school leaving age and pressures to contribute to the household economy from the age of 15 meant that they took on some of the key responsibilities associated with adulthood at a younger age than those born in later decades. I argue that accessing adulthood through the consumption of drink and its spaces and atmosphere was perhaps less appealing for these women because adulthood signified responsibility. The dominance of pubs – male dominated spaces that were often unwelcoming to young women for much of the post-war period (Gutzke, 2014) – meant that drinking spaces were generally seen as less desirable or exciting spaces to attempt to access and in which to spend time socialising as young women growing up in the 1950s and 1960s.

Lastly, the chapter investigates processes of re-learning and un-learning to drink, that is, participants’ accounts of passively or actively changing how they used alcohol. Here, I consider in depth the narratives of two participants who had recently renegotiated their approach to alcohol in their late forties. Rather than understanding midlife women as engaged in “identity work” (Emslie et al, 2015, p. 444), where their “performance” of gender is at the forefront of the analysis (West and Zimmerman, 1987; cited in Emslie et al, 2015, p. 437), I argue for the value of interpreting their narratives through a relational lens.

Throughout the chapter, we can see how the women looked back on their pasts from the vantage point of the present, and narrate a version of events that is intelligible and
acceptable to themselves and to their imagined and real interlocutors (Summerfield, 2004; Tinkler, 2013). Taken together, the arguments concerning narratives of intergenerational disruption and continuity, generational differences in adolescent leisure and re-learning across the life course demonstrate how learning to drink is a social process embedded in specific and shifting relational and historical contexts. Ways of narrating relationships to alcohol are similarly socially as well as historically situated: in most cases, they reflect a desire to construct oneself as a moderate, responsible drinker in the present. However, what moderation and responsibility meant could vary according to generation and historical context.

**Narrating family histories around alcohol: Learning in and from intergenerational patterns of disruption and continuity**

Families are “mnemonic communities”: they are brought into being through the creation, telling and re-telling of memories (Misztal, 2003) and “family stories” (Thompson, 2005).\(^{18}\) Family members transmit and reproduce shared – if sometimes contested and always in one way or another edited – versions of the past. As McNay (2009) points out with her notion of “narrative inheritance”, children often inherit their parents’ narratives, and experience their parents’ childhood as dimensions of their own pasts. Moreover, connections across generations are made and remade over time through acts of memory, memorialisation and storytelling (Mason and Muir, 2013; Misztal, 2003; Smart, 2007; Thompson, 2005). Cross-generational stories involving alcohol are no exception. In a number of narratives, alcohol and alcoholism emerged as elements of stories participants tell themselves and others about their families. Some participants\(^{19}\) (n=6) offered accounts of how relationships to alcohol were transmitted in response to the previous generations’ conduct. While public health discourses and some of the alcohol studies literature supports or tacitly assumes a model of intergenerational transmission, a number of participants in this research offered accounts of what might be termed

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\(^{18}\) I would like to acknowledge and thank Professor Jennifer Mason for bringing the concepts and literature related to family memories and family stories to my attention during our joint teaching of her module on the Sociology of Family Life and Intimacy at the University of Manchester.

\(^{19}\) The participants discussed in this section are diverse with respect to class background. For those in the 1940s cohort, Jill, Mary and Paula are from working class backgrounds, though Mary and Paula were socially mobile, and ended up in middle class household as adults. Jane is from a middle class background, and was the only participant from the first cohort to attend university as a young woman. Jenny and Cara (1970s cohort) are both from middle class backgrounds.
intergenerational rejection’ as well as a narrative of continuity: stories of one generation rejecting the practices and beliefs of the previous generation, usually an ‘alcoholic’ grandparent, followed by the participant’s own adoption of the parent’s narrative point of view and practices of moderation. In other words, a pattern of intergenerational transmission was resumed with the participant having adopted her parent’s moderate approach to alcohol. These accounts can be interpreted as part of wider practices of storytelling about families.

Participants’ accounts of intergenerational learning

In Jane’s narrative, the ‘alcoholic’ was her maternal grandfather. Jane (1940s cohort) discusses how her mother was affected by her own father’s alcoholism:

I think the thing was my granddad – my mother’s father – had been an alcoholic and I think my mother was…desperately worried not to get involved with alcohol…absolutely. And one of the reasons she married my Dad I think was cuz he wasn’t a heavy – or even a particularly bothered – drinker. He’d have a drink of beer occasionally and that would be it. And like I say perhaps a bit of sherry at Christmas. But by the time you’d drink the end of the sherry it would be absolutely awful because it had been there for months!

In both the above passage and elsewhere in Jane’s interview, her grandfather’s alcoholism has a lot to answer for. It is called on to explain why her mother rarely drank, and is even identified as a contributing factor in her mother’s choice of husband. Jane states that before she entered a pub for the first time at the age of 17 with other members of the Christian organisation where she volunteered a part of her expected the pub’s other patrons to look deviant:

I got the impression that people who went to the pub had horns and a tail. […] My mother especially [gave me that impression]. She wasn’t sort of over the top about it; it was just one of these things, ‘Uh’, you know if you drank beer ‘Uff, not a good idea…’ And I can understand why, you know.

Jane later half-jokingly remarks that she was “amazed” that the other patrons did not have “horns and tails.” While Jane stresses the discontinuity between her grandfather’s and her mother’s drinking, her own moderate drinking throughout her life can perhaps be partially attributed to her own lack of exposure to or experience with alcohol growing up. However, as discussed later with regard to other participants, relational contexts beyond
families of origin, including workplaces and friendship networks, were undoubtedly important in shaping Jane’s ways of using and thinking about alcohol.

Like Jane’s account of why her mother strongly disliked alcohol and pubs, Jill’s (1940s cohort) story is also told from the point of view of someone looking back from a distance, removed from the emotional turmoil and damage caused by the alcoholism. In her interview, she mentions on a few different occasions that her father’s parents were heavy drinkers, who “worked to go to the pub”, which sits in sharp contrast to her own parents’ moderation and respectable conduct:

Mum and Dad were never – never went to the pub. My grandparents did, me Dad’s mum and dad. They worked to go to the pub. That was their life. It revolved around them… ‘going for a Guinness’ – me Grandma Kerry – ‘going for a Guinness’ – I remember that – me Grandad Kerry – and he always had a bottle of rum in the house….I can remember when I was about – when I grew up and I was about 19, 20 and I went to see them ‘a little totter up’ [inaudible, likely mimicked filling up a glass]. I can smell – and rum reminds me of him. But my Mum and Dad…um, no… - me Dad liked a whiskey, but he didn’t have – we never – I can never remember…bottle of wine or bottle of spirits. Christmastime: Avocar, Baby Shams…at Christmas but that was about it.

In the above passage, Jill revisits a memory of going to her grandfather’s house. The smell of rum emerges as constitutive of her overall memory of her grandfather. As we will see later in the chapter with Jane’s memory of the first time she tasted alcohol, a bottle of wine brought home by her brother from Germany, the sensations of taste and scent can transport people to a specific moment in the past; memories of taste and scent can become embedded in our memories of and connections to intimates.

While Jill is somewhat sentimental about the memory of her grandparents, expressing fondness for her grandparents’ almost childlike manner (“going for a Guinness”, “totter up”), in her interview she makes recurring attempts to recuperate her family’s moral reputation. Like Jane’s, Jill’s account suggests a pattern of intergenerational disruption, followed by her own adoption of her parents’ more moderate and respectable approach to alcohol and choice of venues in which to socialise. She is particularly emphatic about her mother’s respectability, such as in the following passage:

79
Jill: I can’t remember them drinking in the house. I can remember them going to parties. Coming home a little bit squiffy...and laughing and – yeah, I can remember that. And as you get older, when you’ve got your own family, you talk more don’t you, you talk about things. They used to tell about the parties they used to go to. And there were no different than we were. They used to go to house parties.

Interviewer: They preferred that to the pub?

Jill: Yes, yeah. I think my dad used to go to the Conservative Club on a Friday night...Um, because as [her granddaughter] will tell you we are Daily Mail readers… [giggles]

Interviewer: They preferred the Conservative Club to the Labour Club –

Jill: Yeah, it wasn’t me dad’s scene. It certainly wasn’t me mum’s. No, definitely not. And it was a man’s thing. It wasn’t something that me mum…went to. And I know they had a concert room and they had like an artist on a Saturday but I can’t remember me mum going there very often…no, no.

Unlike her heavy drinking grandparents, her parents emerge in this and in other parts of the interview as exercising moderation and respectability in both their approach to alcohol and their choice of where to socialise with alcohol. Similar to Jane, she also adopts a narrative position that is notably empathetic with her parents’ points of view and actions, as suggested both in the statement “They were no different than we were” and by the manner in which she conflates herself with her parents when says ”we are Daily Mail readers.”

Like Jane and Jill, Paula (1940s cohort) had a parent who held strong negative feelings about pubs and the people who frequented them. Paula’s mum grew up in a pub run by her parents. Paula states that her mum never liked the pub “atmosphere”, and rarely drank. As in Jane’s and Jill’s narratives, a pattern of intergenerational disruption emerges in Paula’s account, though Paula never states that her grandparents were alcoholics. Also in line with Jane’s narrative, Paula developed a more moderate approach to alcohol, not avoiding it almost entirely as her mother had, but nevertheless drinking sparingly throughout her adult life. In her interview she was only able to remember having been drunk on one occasion. She remarks that does not like feeling dizzy, and never developed a taste for alcohol. This is in spite of having a husband who is a wine and whisky aficionado. On the day of her interview, the corridor of her home was filled
with several boxes of both; her husband’s recent purchases. Looking at the boxes, Paula remarked that she has never shared his interest.

In Mary’s (1940s cohort) and Cara’s (1970s cohort) narratives, the ‘alcoholic’ is their step-father; despite that similarity these stories differ in several respects. Cara makes little of her stepfather’s heavy drinking in relation to her own drinking. However, at a few points in the interview she expresses concern about the impact that it has on her mother, and notes that her own partner went through a phase of drinking heavily when he began spending time with her stepfather. By contrast, Mary directly attributes the ‘fear’ of alcohol that she felt growing up to her stepfather’s alcoholism, setting his alcoholism up as the ‘problem’ that explains her approach to alcohol in early life:

Interviewer: When you were growing up do you remember there being – so you mentioned women and girls couldn’t go to the pub - but in the house do you remember there being beer or spirits?

Mary: Well, our problem was this: that my stepfather was alcoholic. So, he would go to the pub every night, certainly at the weekend and he’d come home and was quite often violent, but we were certainly frightened, so I – as a result – was frightened of alcohol.

Interviewer: Yeah, it put you off?

Mary: Yeah.

Shortly after this passage, Mary goes onto explain how at the age of 22 she married a man whose father had “signed the pledge” as part of the Temperance Movement, and as a consequence she was rarely able to have alcohol in their marital home, and missed out on opportunities to go to events (she gives the example of a jazz concert) that were held in pubs.

Like Mary, Jenny (1970s cohort) is explicit about how her relationship to alcohol sits within a family lineage of both addiction and moderation. Jenny attributes her own approach to alcohol to her parents’ response to “a few family members having drug addictions.” However, unlike Mary’s account, she draws on a discourse of genetic inheritance when she suggests that addiction, or the tendencies that give rise to it, can be a hereditary condition:

My parents have always looked on it as being a bit ‘You don’t drink during the day. You don’t drink by yourself’…It’s kind of from them, really. Um…I’ve also
grown up…with…with a few family members having drug addictions. So I’ve been a bit worried about drug addiction myself. I’ve always stayed a bit more on the side of being more cautious about it because I don’t want to start to become reliant on it.

In this excerpt, Jenny posits that her own moderate drinking is a result of both her parents’ “rules” concerning alcohol and her own “worry” that she was susceptible to addiction. Earlier in her interview, Jenny states that the lack of wine in her house growing up explains why she rarely drinks wine or has it in her own home as an adult:

Interviewer: And did your parents tend to have wine with meals at all?
Jenny: No, so I think that’s part of the reason why that I don’t really drink wine.
Interviewer: Right….You didn’t see it around the house?
Jenny: No. So my parents aren’t big drinkers. Um…my dad and my mum tend not to have much alcohol at…um…so we never really had wine with our meals unless it was a very special occasion…um…but I think it was maybe once or twice – I don’t think I’ve ever had it at their house…so it’s not…They just don’t drink it, really. Um, they’ll have a drink or two at Christmas but I’ve never ever seen them inebriated [giggles]. I’ve never seen them drunk in my life.

While the above excerpt starts out as being about wine, Jenny goes onto to make a general assertion about her parents’ approach to alcohol when she states that they are not “big drinkers”. Again, we can see here how a narrative of resistance and rejection in relation to the practices of “family member” who are ‘addicts’ sits alongside and is indeed recuperated by a narrative of continuity and adoption: like Jill, Jenny positions herself alongside her moderate and respectable parents.

To a certain extent, the narratives discussed above can be read as attempts to account for the participants’ own moderate orientations to alcohol through establishing family histories of alcoholism met with moderation by subsequent generations, though in some cases (e.g. Jenny’s and Mary’s) this is more explicit than it is in other cases. Paula and Jane are less direct about the influence their mothers’ dislike of alcohol and pubs has had on them beyond their youth. Moreover, Paula is notably clear on her own dislike of the taste of alcohol; she has never developed a taste for it and in her mind this is more a result of her response to its sensory properties, that is, both the way it tastes and the way it makes her feel dizzy, than it is down to her lack of exposure or experience of it growing up. For Jill, what emerges as important is that her parents were moderate and
respectable, restoring her family’s moral reputation from the threat of her paternal grandparents’ heavy drinking.

While approaches to alcohol are likely the result of complex intergenerational patterns of partial and selective acts of rejection and adoption, and intragenerational relationships are also crucial (see Chapters Five and Six, along with the remainder of this chapter), what emerges from the narratives is that telling the story of alcoholic relatives is part of participants’ repertoires of family stories. In other words, these are stories involving memories that have been shared across generations that construct the familial past so as to emphasise the family’s current respectability and to recuperate its moral reputation from the spectre of addiction and morally suspect behaviour. Participants are working to establish themselves as moral subjects. For example, behind Jill’s fondness for her grandparents, there is a hint of condescension in her mimicking of their words and her attention to their childlike demeanour. Elsewhere in her interview, the negative impact of their heavy drinking on her father’s childhood suggests a picture of reckless parenting. Participants are constructing and re-telling their familial pasts from the point of view of someone who has learned to drink moderately and respectably.

The mnemonic community of the family (Misztal, 2003) provides a context for learning how to make sense of, speak about and morally evaluate one’s own and others’ drinking, as well as to how to approach alcohol in practice. McNay’s (2009) notion of narrative inheritance is a particularly powerful tool for conceptualising the role of memories concerning the place of alcohol in familial pasts. The fact that those who discussed alcoholic relatives in their interviews made up the majority of the study’s most moderate drinkers is not surprising and can be interpreted in a few different ways. Firstly, they ‘inherit’ narratives that characterise alcohol and the spaces in which it is consumed, namely the pub, as something to avoid or carefully manage. As McNay (2009) points out, one can feel as though something that occurred in a parent’s childhood is a part of one’s own experience. In this sense, they have adopted the points of view of their parents on their grandparents’ conduct. We can see this quite explicitly when Jane says “I can understand why, you know” about her mother’s views on people who went to the pub.

20 Mary and Paula were among the lightest drinkers in the 1940s cohort, which was by far the lightest drinking cohort overall, and Jenny was the lightest drinker in the 1970s cohort. Jane had been a light drinker throughout much of her life, but at around the time of her retirement in her early sixties had started drinking a bottle of red wine over the course of a week.
Secondly, it makes sense that participants who view alcohol and pubs as morally suspect were also the people more likely to disassociate themselves from them, and to construct themselves as light drinkers. Most other participants did not share this narrative agenda, or the moral orientations underpinning it. While the majority of participants presented themselves as sensible and on the whole moderate drinkers, it was really only in relation to pregnancy, providing care for young children and when they were responsible for driving a car that these other participants felt the need to distance themselves from less moderate forms of alcohol use.

However, in relation to familial influences on how alcohol is approached in practice, it is worth noting that most participants generally reported having very limited contact with alcohol during their childhoods. While throughout this thesis there is a recurring emphasis on differences in the meanings and experiences of using alcohol between those born in the early post-war period and those born later on, the vast majority of participants from across the cohorts had limited recollections of alcohol being present in their homes when they were children, except at family celebrations like birthdays and Christmas. Indeed, while alcohol was largely absent from most participants’ memories of their childhood homes, it did make an appearance, almost ubiquitously, at Christmastime. Jenny goes so far as to say that for her Christmas and alcohol go hand in hand:

I think the first taste of alcohol would have been probably around Christmas – I always think of Christmas and alcohol – because my parents used to give us a glass of cherry brandy or a glass of sherry just before bed on Christmas night in the hopes that we’d sleep. [laughs]… um…and so a really sweet alcoholic drink was a really big treat…maybe once a year we had it…

She remembers tasting cherry brandy – “a sip” – for the first time at the age of five or six.

As mentioned, the association between alcohol and Christmas also crossed generational boundaries. Jenny recalls drinking the cocktail ‘Snowball’ from the age of 12: “…we used to have a little of advocaat with lemonade in it at Christmas Eve. They would let us have that. And that was like a treat. I remember that”. Jenny and Jill, like other participants across all four of the study’s cohorts, characterised Christmastime as a time of exception in their family homes, as alcohol did make an appearance and was a part of
family celebration rituals. Later in her interview, Jill emphasises the exceptional nature of drinking at Christmas:

Interviewer: So you mentioned that you started drinking that when you were about 14, 15...
Jill: Well, when I’m saying drinking it I’m only saying maybe once – I’m not talking…regular. It would be Christmas. It would be…if it was a Christmas meal or if it was Christmas Eve or it was New Year’s Day and we were out at me Grandma’s. We used to play cards…and, you know, the children were allowed a little bit of Babycham…but that’s all I’m talking about. I’m not talking about a regular thing.

Thus, while alcohol was not a regular feature of any participant’s childhood (beyond Mary’s experiences with her stepfather), Christmas was a time of exception. First sips of particular kinds of ‘festive’ drinks at Christmastime were part of, in Mason and Muir’s (2013) terms, how families “conjured up” Christmas, sets of traditions that are re-enacted and renegotiated in personal narratives, like those assembled for this study. As Mason and Muir (2013) point out, multi-sensory encounters are key constitutive features in the experience and narrative retelling of Christmas; taste and scent, for example, are crucial to what Christmas ‘feels’ like.

While in the majority of cases memories of first tastes of alcohol occurred at Christmastime, this was not always so. Jane tried alcohol for the first time when she was around 12 years old and her older brother returned from a trip to Germany with German wine. In recounting the memory, she begins to cry, and then laughs at herself for crying. Immediately after laughing, she tries to say the name of the type of wine, and is barely able to do so because, in colloquial terms, she is “choked up” and finds it difficult to speak. Tears of sadness were a rare occurrence in the interviews. As the interviewer, it was not a response that I had expected; I had already completed several interviews by the time I spoke to Jane, and no one had cried.

Jane’s strong emotional response to the memory of the first time she tasted alcohol was, in a way, not really about alcohol. It was about remembering a distinct moment in time when her family was together, her parents were still living and she and her brother were young (12 and 14 respectively). He had been away, had returned home and her family was reunited. In this memory, alcohol was something foreign and novel – a German wine
– that was shared and tasted together, a souvenir from his journey. Jane recalls what the wine tasted like: “Just like lemonade really [...] it was quite a sweet wine.” Jane’s charged response can perhaps be read as a testament to the power of sensory memories to temporarily transport us to a past moment in time, and to our connections to those with whom we shared that moment. It is not possible to know how important her recollection of taste was to her response. Her description of the taste is notably vague, though it is important to note that she was in the process of recomposing herself following the tears.

Moreover, in life history interviews memories become cumulative as the interview proceeds. As Smart (2007, p. 39) points out, “what is recalled may come with layers of meanings and significance, of emotions and desires, which go beyond the rational or conscious.” In Jane’s case, the memory was (re)constructed and articulated after Jane had told me about a Friday night family ritual from her childhood of drinking Dandelion and Burdock and eating crisps (a “treat”) purchased from the corner shop. While it was not so much her connection to the drinks themselves in her memories of drinking Dandelion and Burdock and German wine that was powerful but rather her connections to the people she was with, the recollection of the sensations of tasting the drinks nevertheless became a potent means of transporting her to these past moments.

Jane’s memory of the first time she tasted alcohol is instructive here. It is not a sensory connection to alcohol per se that was developed in childhood for anyone interviewed in this study; rather alcohol formed a part of family rituals for marking specific occasions, most notably Christmas. Specific kinds of drinks, like cherry brandy and advocaat, are sensory vehicles for reconnecting oneself to particular memories of the past, and the people who inhabit those memories. However, for the vast majority of participants, experiences with alcohol beyond family celebrations did not begin until they reached adolescence or young adulthood.

**Alcohol in the transition from childhood to adulthood**

Relationships to alcohol are not just the stories we tell ourselves and others about alcoholism in our familial pasts. Ways of relating to alcohol are constituted in practice. While methodologically this study is principally an analysis of narratives, narratives can inform their readers about the terrain of lived experience; they can tell us in a situated
and partial manner about people’s past experiences and about what matters to people as they navigate wider cultural discourses that are available to them (Lawler, 2002; Mason, 2004). Moreover, though a number of participants’ narratives emphasised an intergenerational familial lineage, including patterns of both rejection and continuity, intragenerational factors, such as experiences with workplace cultures, partners, friendship groups, and so forth, also emerged as significant, providing contexts for learning to drink in particular ways and learning to enjoy certain types of drinks. As previously mentioned, most participants only remember having very limited exposure or experience with alcohol in childhood, beyond Christmastime. For most of the women born early on in the post-war period, alcohol was largely absent from their adolescent family and leisure routines as well, until they entered their late teens. However, for many of those born after 1960, alcohol and the spaces it was consumed were an important part of their adolescent leisure practices; they were viewed as a way to bridge the gap between childhood and adulthood, to attempt to ‘pass’ as a young adult. After considering how we might conceptualise learning to drink as a social practice, and not just a matter of, or even primarily about, transmission or inheritance across generations, I contrast the place of alcohol in the adolescent leisure routines of the study’s older and younger participants, and suggest some reasons for why their experiences are so notably different.

**Learning to drink alcohol as a social practice**

If cross-generational rejection and transmission within families is only part of the story, how are we to conceptualise the intragenerational connections that also emerge as critical to how people learn to use and enjoy (or not enjoy) alcohol? Howard Becker’s (1953) work on marijuana offers as a productive alternative to the focus on learning through parenting and socialisation in childhood in the literature (Jayne and Valentine, 2015, p. 86-7). As Jayne and Valentine (ibid) point out:

> There is also a long tradition of social sciences research concerned with alcohol consumption, children, young people and adults with academic attention since the1970s being concerned with families as ‘the primary context for the socialisation of drinking behaviour in young people’ (Foxcroft and Lowe, 1991: 227) and consequently a major influence on understanding the development of
lifelong drinking careers (Conway et al., 2002; Lowe et al., 1993; Ritson, 1975; Yu, 2003).

While we have seen above how in some cases families of origin can provide relational contexts where narrative frameworks for assessing the uses and meanings of alcohol are shared and appropriated, approaches to alcohol are also crucially shaped by relationships beyond families of origin.

For Becker, learning is a social practice, and one that is not necessarily limited to early life; one becomes (or does not become) embedded in social networks and milieu where knowledge about how to use and experience alcohol, and to evaluate its effects, is shared. Rather than seeing marijuana use as the outcome of a particular constellation of psychological traits motivating the individual to smoke marijuana, Becker instead works from the foundational assumption that:

…the presence of a given kind of behaviour is the result of a sequence of social experiences during which the person acquires a conception of the meaning of the behaviour, and perceptions and judgements of objects and situations, all of which make the activity possible and desirable. Thus, the motivation or disposition to engage in the activity is built up in the course of learning to engage in it and does not antedate this learning process. For such a view it is not necessary to identify those ‘traits’ which ‘cause’ the behaviour. Instead, the problem becomes one of describing the set of change in the person’s conception of the activity and of the experience it provides for him [sic] (Becker, 1953, p. 235).

Becker’s conceptualisation of smoking marijuana as a social practice is a productive alternative to approaches that see drug or alcohol use as expressly learned in childhood not only because it inherently emphasises horizontal relations (or “webs of connectedness” in Davies’ (2015) terminology), but also because it highlights the importance of developing a sensory connection to the substance being consumed. We can see the gradual development of a sensory connection in how several participants from across the cohorts, such as Jane and Cara, started drinking very sweet tasting drinks to start off with, such as sweet white wine, cider and alcopops, and eventually “graduated”, or learned to enjoy, less sweet drinks, like red wine.21

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21 As previously mentioned, some of the study’s lightest drinkers, such as Jenny and Paula, never made this transition.
Among this study’s second and third cohorts, alcohol was principally accessed within the context of friendship groups. Here, the young women learned from friends ‘how to’ drink, often a case of the ‘blind leading the blind.’ As we will see in the final section of the chapter, sometimes this sensory enjoyment is refused or unlearned later on in life. It is, in short, subject to the social milieu – with both its spatial and symbolic dimensions – in which the practice is occurring. Moreover, as explored in the final section of this chapter, access to and the relative significance of different kinds of relational contexts can change as the life course progresses.

**Learning to drink in adolescence**

As discussed above, differences across the four cohorts in relation to alcohol in childhood were limited. For most participants, beyond the sharing of family stories about alcoholic relatives, the family home and childhood experiences were not narrated as central or even all that relevant to the repertoires of knowledge and practices that they subsequently developed around alcohol. Childhood was a time of life that had little to do with alcohol for most participants, beyond its near ubiquity at Christmastime. However, when we consider the experiences and meanings of alcohol for participants once they reached adolescence, a significant division emerges between the narratives of women from the different generations: for most of the older women, alcohol played all but a minor role in their adolescent leisure practices, while for many of the women in the 1970s and 1990s cohorts it was a constituent feature of their leisure practices from around the age of 14 or 15 into adulthood. Though the latter cohorts may have only succeeded in negotiating access to alcohol on intermittent occasions (with some gaining access far more regularly), the majority of participants from these cohorts devoted considerable attention and energy to the pursuit of gaining access to alcohol, and crucially alcohol held significant meaning and currency for them as a means of enacting codes signalling adulthood.

In what follows, I contrast the place of alcohol in the adolescent leisure routines of participants born between 1939 and 1948 with those born after 1960. I demonstrate how the former cohort had access to a wide variety of commercial and non-commercial leisure

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22 By adolescence, I loosely mean the ages of 12 to 15. Most members of the 1970s and 1990s cohorts first experimented with alcohol at the age of 14 or 15.
opportunities and spaces, and how trying to access alcohol in or beyond ‘the pub’ was not seen by most participants as either a practical or desirable way to spend leisure time until they reached their late teens. Even at this point, pubs were usually entered with a male partner or mixed gender group (for example, in the context of a double date). I argue that accessing alcohol and the spaces in which it was served in order to symbolically enact adulthood was not seen as desirable not only because these spaces were seen as masculine and ‘old-fashioned’ but also because many of the responsibilities associated with adulthood were already available to them. Many participants left school at 15 and were expected to make financial contributions to their households. Leisure was narrated as having been a time for socialising and having fun; accessing alcohol to cultivate a presentation of self that would be accepted by others as older was not part of what ‘having fun’ meant to these women.

For most of those born from the late 1960s onward, at the age of 14 the markers of adult independence still felt like a long way off. In their narratives, several participants relived how they had wanted to feel grown up. As Natasha (1990s cohort) recalls, “I wanted to be 19, not 15.” Accessing alcohol, the spaces it which it was consumed and displaying their bodies in a particular fashion was a means of laying claim to a young adult subjectivity and presentation of self. In some cases, achieving access to alcohol and its spaces required enlisting a varied repertoire of practices and what Goffman (1959) called “techniques of impression management.” With this term, Goffman (1959) is drawing on his dramaturgical approach, which uses metaphors of theatricality to understand social life. Social life is composed of a “front stage” and a “back stage.” Front stage sites are those spaces where people they are being watched for their performance of certain bodily gestures, speech and general demeanour, whereas back stages spaces are where people are less likely to feel as though they are being watched as there are fewer formal or informal rules governing conduct. As discussed below, when trying to gain access to alcohol, several participants born after 1960 narrated how they managed their appearance so as to appear older.

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23 See Langhamer (2000) for a detailed consideration of women’s leisure in England during the middle decades of the twentieth century.
On not learning to drink: Adolescent leisure in the 1950s and 1960s

Participants born in the first two decades of the post-war period had a notably different experience of making the transition from childhood to adulthood than those born in later decades. Firstly, in their interviews they described how as teenagers in the 1950s and 1960s they had fairly extensive opportunities for structured leisure and a wide set of commercial leisure activities and facilities, including roller-skating rinks and dance halls. As discussed below, structured leisure typically included ongoing involvement in Church or community organised youth clubs, and for some also access to workplace social clubs when they began working for large employers upon leaving school at 15 or 16. Alcohol was largely absent from these sites of leisure, or its presence was secondary to staple activities, such as sports, games and trips to seaside resorts like Blackpool. Secondly, the majority of these participants left school at the age of 15, and were expected to enter full time work and contribute to the household economy. Thirdly, they grew up in a context in which most drinking spaces, particularly pubs, were seen as masculine domains, and not seen as desirable places to spend time. For the most part, drinking in licensed venues did not become something young, unmarried women could engage in in large numbers until the slow growth in wine bars starting in the 1970s, and continuing in the 1980s with the gradual growth in pub chains, like Pitcher & Piano; in the main, the traditional pub appears to have remained an unwelcoming place for women throughout much of the post-war period (Gutzke, 2014).

With respect to structured leisure, most participants born in the 1940s belonged to youth groups. For example, as previously mentioned, Jane was part of a Christian organisation, where she chaperoned children from poor backgrounds on trips to the seaside. She met her husband through this organisation. Though her first time in a pub was while on a trip to the seaside with other chaperones, drinking was on the whole a minor part of her ongoing leisure activities with other members of the organisation. Paula similarly went on trips with her youth club, but again alcohol did not feature in any significant as part of their socialising. Belinda left school at 15 at her father’s insistence to take up full time employment. She worked for a large manufacturing company, one of the largest

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24 This could be linked to the fact that most participants in the older age group were recruited via a community group for retired people, which was in part about getting people with shared leisure interests together. They therefore had a history of participating in organised leisure that is likely to be unrepresentative of the wider population of women born over the same decades.
employers in her area. Her employer had its own social club, where she often played as part of a team in various sports and games. In her interview, she does not recall ever drinking while at the social club.

Even for those whose leisure was not organised through clubs and groups, drinking did not play much of a role in their leisure practices until they were in their late teens. For example, Jill describes going once a week roller-skating and to the Palais de Danse, a place she loved, where alcohol was off limits:

…if you wanted a drink there was what they called the Julep Bar. And you could have a soft drink and we had an orangeade or whatever…I can’t remember what it cost to get in…but if I had five shillings to go out with, I was well off! […] They had Palais all over the country […] when you danced the floors you used to spring. It was brilliant.

While Jill regularly danced at her local Palais de Danse and went roller-skating, pubs were a far less frequent hangout. She recalls going to one for the first time after she had started working full time at the age of 17:

Interviewer: Do you remember who you probably were with the first time [you went to the pub]?
Jill: Yeah, I think I was with the girls from [name of workplace]. They corrupted me. […] it would be – The [name of pub] in [name of town]. ‘Oh, you’ve never lived. Come on! Come on!’ And I can’t even remember what I must have drank… I can’t even remember. It must have been something like a beer, you know, like half a mild…or something like that, which I totally detest and I don’t think I finished it. […]
Interviewer: And do you remember feeling comfortable in the pub or…or how would you describe --?
Jill: It was comfortable because we were youngsters, we were teenagers and we were altogether and it was just a laugh. You know, we enjoyed it… Um, but I wouldn’t have gone anywhere on my own. I would have had to have been with a group of people before I’d go.

While she continued going to Palais with this same group of friends, Jill did begin going to the pub regularly until she met the man who would soon after become her husband the following year:
I met Tom – it would have been Christmas ’65 because we were married July ’66…so erm, yeah and it was then that I started going to the pub because Tom used to go to the pub because men – boys – it was the thing wasn’t it? They were always drinking.

Access to the pub and to alcohol for Jill was something that was aligned to the transition into serious courtship and marriage, a theme that is discussed in detail in Chapter Six. This is also reflected in her half-joking description of her single co-workers as “corrupting” her.

Another participant from the 1940s cohort who had limited connections to organised leisure as a young woman is Ellen. She describes going to listen to “gigs” at night with friends and a group of “lads” in the early 1960s in Manchester, before becoming pregnant at 16. While she drank half pints of beer, she states that alcohol was peripheral to these events, and that for her and her friends going out was about dancing and enjoying the music. Thus, for these women, alcohol was narrated as largely peripheral in their adolescence and in their transitions to adulthood. For Jill, this was clearly linked with gender: in her eyes for her generation, drinking and the pub was the domain of men.

**Coming of age with alcohol in the 1970s and beyond**

Structured leisure was not nearly as integral to the leisure practices of women in the 1970s and 1990s cohorts. While five of the six participants born between 1956 and 1965 (i.e. the 1960s cohort) discussed having access to youth centres and other forms of organised leisure between the ages of 12 and 16, they engaged with these resources in a more uneven fashion than most members of the 1940s cohort. For example, Dianne (born 1963) regularly went to her local youth centre on a Thursday evening, and spent weekends working in the kitchen of a pub from the age of 13 onwards. She tried cider at the park once when she was 15, and became very ill afterwards: “That’s all I can remember: sick, sick, sick.” She recalls how she “hated” lying to her parents: “To be honest with you, the lying to my parents about it was the worst thing – the guilt of lying to your parents.” After this experience, she does not remember drinking again until she was 18.
For most members of the 1970s (n=12 out of 14) and 1990s cohorts (n=9 out of 9), attempts to gain access to alcohol and, when successful, drinking were at times key components of their weekly routines of socialising with friends. Negotiating access to alcohol often involved developing a varied repertoire of practices, which included: creating, buying or borrowing fake identification; spending time, often staying overnight, at the house of a friend with ‘easy-going’ parents; stealing spirits from parents’ alcohol cabinets or cupboards; and standing outside off-licenses and asking strangers to buy them cider, lager or alcopops. Negotiating access to alcohol often created moral dilemmas, as well as the excitement of transgression. Passing as older, even with the help of fake ID, is an exercise in “impression management” (Goffman, 1959, 1967), and necessitated the careful planning of make-up, hairstyles, clothing, and footwear on nights out. It also involved coordinating in advance which friend would enter the pub/club first, usually the ‘oldest looking’ and/or the tallest. Some participants describe having to ‘ditch’ a friend who could not pass. The youngest participant, Joy (born 1993), recounted using social media to find someone from her extended network who looks like her and asking to borrow her identification: “You had a panic at the weekend trying to find fake ID. And if you didn’t find it you’d be devastated.”

Gaining access to alcohol could be as much about negotiating access to particular kinds of spaces and atmospheres as it was about a hedonistic desire for intoxication. In their interviews, Kate and Kim, who are both from the 1970s cohort, recalled how “a lad at school” had made fake National Union of Students (NUS) cards, which could be purchased for a small amount of money. They successfully used such cards on several occasions from the age of 15 onward to gain access to bars and night clubs. Like several participants, they describe the feel or atmosphere of the place as a major attraction.

The desire to both look older and to experience the excitement of drinking, and perhaps more importantly the excitement of the atmospheres in which drinking occurs, are recurring themes across most of these narratives. Margaret (1960s cohort) is one of the oldest participants in the sample to connect drinking alcohol with trying to look older as

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25 It became much harder to create fake NUS cards in the early 2000s when the cards started to be issued in plastic rather than laminated cardboard. This ‘upped the ante’ for those in the 1990s cohort when they looked to procure fake ID. While Joy took to social media, Natasha describes buying fake ID over a website. Joy recounts the story of a friend who went as far as to falsify the date of birth on her passport, and was taken to a police station as a consequence.
a girl and to portray it as an exciting experience. She describes going away on holiday and staying at her friend’s aunt’s house when she was 14 in the mid-1970s:

We were foot loose and fancy free. We went – she looked a bit older than me. [She] got into the supermarket and got a bottle of cider and we went and sat in the park and thought we were really grown up because we’d stolen this cider, you know…and funnily enough they let us in the pubs locally. And so we were in the pubs with some older cousins of hers, and it was fantastic. I remember getting quite tipsy and loving it because I was young and, you know, feeling really grown up.

As far as Margaret can remember, this was her first visit to a pub. Unlike Jill, for whom the pub held relatively little appeal, she describes its “atmosphere” as “just buzzing”:

It was just buzzing - fantastic atmosphere. Of course [there were] a lot of young people and they were very lax with their licensing laws. It felt great. Like a magical place funnily enough, you know, cuz we were young with grown up people and we really felt we’d arrived kind of thing.

Like all narratives about the past, Margaret is adopting the point of view of hindsight in the above passage. The use of the term “young people”, for example, is telling as it suggests an adult subjectivity reflecting back on a past version of the self. Margaret later suggests this herself when she posits that her memory “made it a magical place”:

Margaret: Funnily enough we’ve been back to the same pub since because it kind of stuck in my memory as this magical place: The Moon in [name of town]. We went back – the two of us – on holiday and it wasn’t magical, it was this…horrible little you know – spit and saw dust type place.

Interviewer: Time hadn’t been kind?

Margaret: No, no and I think really it was my memory of it because it seemed a magical place.

Revisiting the site of her memories of herself as a 14 year old drinking in a pub for the first time foregrounded for Margaret how she was seeing the past through a nostalgic lens.

Participants trying to gain entry into pubs in the 1990s and early 2000s were less likely to be served, and as mentioned, had to develop strategies for ‘passing’ as older. In the narratives of Natasha and Anna, who are both from the 1990s cohort, gaining access to pubs, bars and nightclubs, bouncers or other door staff required convincing door and bar
staff that their presentations of themselves as 19 year old young women was authentic. Drawing on Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical approach, the entry point into pubs, bars and nightclubs becomes a “front stage”, a place where “impression management” becomes paramount. In Anna’s account of going out into Manchester with a group of friends for her sixteenth birthday, gaining entry does not require extensive impression management techniques but instead becomes humorously easy: they merely turn the six in the candle from her birthday cake upside down so that it appears she had turned 19, and she and her friends are allowed into the nightclub. However, for Natasha going out in a small market town in a largely rural country in the East of England, the task of managing impressions required careful manoeuvring, such as spending hours in advance applying make-up, doing hair and trying on various outfits, and just prior to attempting entry, choosing which friend to pair up with to maximise one’s changes of success. I discuss these rituals further in Chapter Six.

While clubs and bars were seen as desirable places to spend time when this was possible, finding alcohol in the home, either one’s own home or the home of a friend, was usually far easier. In their interviews, Kim and Cara, who are both from the 1970s cohort, describe “raiding” her and friends’ parents’ alcohol cabinet at age 14. This typically involved drinking colourless spirits, like vodka, and re-filling bottles with water. In her interview, Cara expresses embarrassment when narrating these practices, and when recalling an occasion when she made herself ill by drinking half of a bottle of vodka:

   The other thing we used to do is mix drinks, so we’d make what we’d call a ‘Sh*t Mix’ [laughs]. Sorry! [laughs] Erm, and that was basically raiding your mum and dad’s cabinets. On those occasions that’s when I’d say I drunk too much. It’s awful isn’t it? I can’t believe I’m admitting it!

As Griffin et al (2009) note, humour and a confessional tone are recurring features of young women’s drinking stories. The authors also note that in their study hesitation and guilt were expressed by the young women, but not the young men they interviewed, suggesting these features of narratives are perhaps gendered. With regard to the current study, it is important to note that the narrative is being relayed from the perspective of hindsight. Cara’s confessional tone and reflexive speech (“It’s awful isn’t it? I can’t believe I’m admitting it!”) seeks to construct her present self as a responsible moral subject, and as no longer the immoderate fourteen year old making a ‘Sh*t Mix’. As with the narratives on family stories of alcoholic relatives earlier in this chapter, she is
attempting to recuperate her moral reputation in her present exchange with an interlocutor, who she perhaps perceives may otherwise judge her for her past conduct. The term ‘Sh*t Mix’, with its vulgarity and implied poor taste (literally and culturally), appears to put her moral reputation at particular risk in the above passage.

Similarly, several participants discuss using parks. Natasha (1990s cohort) recalls the excitement of drinking in the local park with her friends:

Dad wasn’t keen on my going out so at that point I started sneaking out and doing naughty things and telling them I was going to places when I wasn’t actually going there and I would go and drink in the park and that sort of thing….it was exciting because it was something I knew I shouldn’t be doing.

Natasha’s mention of her father’s disapproval is revealing. For her, drinking is in part about having fun with her friends, and in part about transgressing the boundaries set by adult authorities, principally her father. In addition to experiencing friendship through their drinking, we can see how the young women were also attempting to negotiate a new level of autonomy and independence from parents by defying their authority and engaging in what they perceived as a “grown up” practice.

Participants also discuss their mobility through different kinds of spaces, particularly in relation to what has been called “pre-drinks”. Natasha notes that before a pub crawl, made possible by fake ID and extensive appearance management, from the age of 15 she and her friends “used to go around to people’s houses for pre-drinks and steal their parents’ alcohol and we’d put it plastic bottles and mix it altogether…it tasted foul but made us feel good.” When asked why she thought she and friends went to such lengths to drink, she replied: “I wanted to be 19, I wanted to be older.” Along similar lines, Joy (1990s cohort) insightfully notes: “At that age you’re afraid to look silly. Drinking alcohol you could do whatever you wanted.” Thus, in contrast with the first cohort, alcohol was heavily implicated in the friendship rituals and leisure practices of young women coming of age in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Asking adults to buy alcohol on one’s behalf at an off license, or trying to buy it oneself were also recurring experiences. Cara describes dressing up:

26 I discuss the ritual of pre-drinking further in Chapter Six.
I remember I used to [giggles] the thing that we used to do was dress up, erm, in like your mum’s clothes! [laughs] Get the car keys and erm I remember there were certain shops around the area that I grew up in where it was notoriously easy to get to buy alcohol. […] They must have laughed their heads off! The glasses, the car keys. “Hello!” [laughs] But they didn’t care. I think they just turned a blind eye. They must have known. […] I remember one occasion, we called ‘Deidre’. We still laugh about it today. We dressed up as Deidre Barlow! [laughs]

As Cara points out, adolescent drinking was not about enjoying about the taste of alcohol but rather enjoying alcohol’s perceived effect on other senses:

I think for me when I turned 14 that’s when I kind of, erm, not the taste of alcohol which I wanted to try – I wanted to get drunk. I wanted to experiment and get drunk, basically.

She later remarks that “Anything that was remotely sweet was what we go for.” While this and other accounts can be read as instances of “determined drunkenness” (Measham and Brain, 2005), the story is also about relationality and playfulness. By dressing up as a soap opera character, the pair was engaging in a prank, one that they still reminisce about to this day.

As we have seen above, while accessing alcohol and the spaces in which it was consumed were not an important part of the 1940s cohort’s adolescent leisure routines, it was a key constituent feature of the practices of most members of the 1970s and 1990s cohorts and some of those from the 1960s cohort. Indeed, one of the two people in the 1970s cohort who did not drink as an ‘under-age’ adolescent, beyond small amounts at Christmas and other family celebrations, was Jenny, whose narrative is discussed earlier in the chapter in relation to her fear of ‘inheriting’ an addiction. Not only were there significant divergences in relation to accessing and using alcohol in adolescence, but pubs and other drinking spaces were not portrayed as glamourous and exciting in the accounts of the 1940s cohort. As discussed, Margaret (1960s cohort), who entered a pub for the first time in the summer of 1975, is one of the oldest participants to describe the experience as “exciting.”

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27 Deidre Barlow was a character on the ITV soap opera Coronation Street, famous for her large framed eye glasses.

28 The other participant was Emily, who lived in a semi-rural area. In her interview, accessing transport was narrated as an impediment to getting together with friends on weekends.
Re- and un-learning to drink in adulthood and later life

The life course perspective adopted in this study throws into relief how people re-fashion their ways of using alcohol at different points in their lives in accordance with changes in their personal relationships. As we will see in Chapter Five when I discuss Kim’s, Kerry’s and Lisa’s narratives, several participants born in the 1970s drank heavily on weekends in the night-time economy at particular points in their teens and twenties, and barely drink in their thirties. Women in midlife\(^{29}\) were found to again renegotiate their drinking in line with changes in their lives. As we will see with the examples of Jackie and Dianne, who are both from the 1960s cohort, personal relationships were key to this process.

Unlike the women from the 1940s cohort, participants born in the 1960s (n=6) were young women during a time when alcohol was becoming more easily accessible for consumption beyond traditional pubs, and when pubs themselves were slowly changing and becoming more accessible and desirable places for young adults to spend time (Langhamer, 2003; Gutzke, 2014). As discussed further in Chapter Six, having children often meant renegotiating drinking in order to be able to meet the practical demand of waking up early to care for young children (see also Emslie et al, 2015). However, once children were more independent relationships to alcohol were often again refashioned. In what follows, I explore in depth the narratives of two participants: Jackie and Dianne. At the time of their interviews, Jackie was 49 and Dianne was 51. Through an analysis of these narratives, I argue that rather than focussing on how these women were negotiating norms of femininity through their drinking, a deeper and more sophisticated understanding of the women’s narratives is achieved through attending to the relational reasons for shifting their approaches to alcohol.

In their study of the drinking of women in early midlife\(^{30}\) in the west of Scotland drawing on focus group interviews, Emslie et al (2015) focus on the women’s “identity work.” They argue that:

\(^{29}\) See Wray (2007) for a discussion of the multiple meanings people attach to the term “midlife”. While Emslie et al (2015) address women in “early midlife”, which they define as ages 30 to 50, for the purposes of this analysis, I am referring to women in their forties and early fifties. The sample consisted of ten women who were between these ages at the time their interviews took place.

\(^{30}\) As stated, the authors define ‘early midlife’ as ages 30 to 50.
In this study, meanings attached to drinking alcohol by women in early midlife were inextricably bound up with gendered identity. Respondents described adopting a range of positions at different times, from ‘girly girl’ to ‘playing the lad’, through their choice of alcohol, drinking vessel, drinking companions and clothes, while distancing themselves from ‘pariah’ femininities (e.g. ‘ladette’, ‘butch’: Schippers, 2007). [...] women’s lives, and their drinking at this stage of the lifecourse, were centred on ‘idealised’ notions of femininity (e.g. orientation to others’ needs, domestic chores, childcare). Our data suggest that alcohol played an important role in providing ‘time out’ from mundane aspects of day-to-day existence for many women in early midlife. In addition, the accounts of mothers of young children suggested that (excessive) drinking transported them temporarily back to ‘carefree’ youth, reliving a time before the responsibilities of paid work and parenthood. [...] We conclude that drinking – sometimes excessively – is closely tied to the performance of ‘idealised’ femininity (manifested most obviously in appearance), but simultaneously represents transitory relinquishing of traditional female responsibilities at midlife (Emslie et al, 2015, p. 443).

Thus, for the authors, drinking is about constructing and reconstructing identities through practices like dressing up and choosing beverages that are understood as feminine (e.g. wine, and not beer in a pint glass). What makes early midlife women’s use of alcohol distinctive is that engaging in such practices is also about temporarily escaping from the responsibilities of work and family life. Particularly when children are young, drinking provides a way to, as it were, pretend that one is young and “carefree” again.

While elements of the above analysis were supported by the findings of this research,31 I argue that the authors – like much of the wider literature (e.g. Measham, 2002) – overstate the significance of gender norms to women’s drinking practices. The latter are also shaped by the conditions of possibility and constraint afforded by personal relationships. Moreover, with respect to the life course, the idea that acting carefree means acting younger involves attaching a normative content to midlife, that is, a set of assumptions about how women in midlife “should” behave. As Wray (2007) argues,

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31 For example, several of the women discussed a preference for wine and other beverages understood to be feminine and of ‘performing’ femininity through dress and appearance on nights out. On this latter point, see Natasha’s narrative in Chapter Six.
what midlife means is negotiated, and should not be understood as fixed by conventional definitions of the lifecycle. In what follows, I use the examples of Jackie’s and Dianne’s accounts of re-learning to drink in their late forties to substantiate my critique and to illustrate how relationality is central to how women approach alcohol in midlife, as it is at other points of the life course. I further argue that life history interviewing and the life course approach, as opposed to the focus group methodology used by Emslie et al (2015) or the ethnographic methods used elsewhere in the alcohol studies literature (e.g. Hollands, 1995), allows for a richer understanding of the layering of experiences over the life course.

Jackie grew up in a town near Manchester in a working class household, not far from the suburban area where she eventually settled in her thirties. Dianne grew up near the suburban area where she still resided at the time of her interview. Like Jackie, she was also from a working class background. The women’s class positions at the time interview would in general terms fit the description of middle class. Neither of the women went to university. Jackie completed A levels and then worked in a series of office-based administration roles, while Dianne left school at 16 and worked in insurance, initially as an apprentice and later as an employee. She left the insurance company when she was in her mid-thirties and was pregnant with her second child. Dianne eventually retrained as a Teaching Assistant in her early forties when her third and youngest child was about to enter primary school.

In her discussing her childhood, Jackie describes her now-deceased parents as having been very light drinkers who were “active” and “outdoorsy”, and who spent much of their disposable income on camping trips and an annual trip abroad. She has limited recollections of alcohol being present in the family home, even at Christmastime. Like most of the other participants born in the 1960s and afterward, Jackie started drinking with friends from school at around the age of 14 or 15, buying cider or lager from an off license with friends and either drinking it in the park or at parties. While at college, she

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32 Other midlife women in the sample were also renegotiating how they used alcohol. For an example, see Kerry’s narrative in Chapter Five. I have chosen the cases of Jackie and Dianne because they illustrate the point I would like to make about relationality in the most explicit and detailed manner. However, relationships were similarly important to how other women were “re-learning” to use and evaluate alcohol.

33 Both lived in homes that they co-owned with their husbands in an area that had over recent decades come to be seen locally as a middle class suburb. Jackie’s husband was a skilled tradesman, and Dianne’s was in a technical managerial role.
drank in the student union bar. However, none of these experiences are narrated as having been particularly memorable for Jackie, and in her interview she does not recall, or at any rate does not choose to share, details of specific occasions. It is not until she moves onto her memories of going out with a woman she describes as her “main friend”, Jessie, in her early twenties that her account becomes more detailed and vivid. The significance of her friendship with Jessie to how Jackie narrates her drinking biography was also evident in the photographs she chose for the interview: several of these were photos of herself and Jessie on holidays in Greece.

After starting full time work in a series of office-based administration jobs, Jackie regularly spent Friday and Saturday nights going out with Jessie to pubs followed by a nightclub in a specific area of the town where they both lived. However, when they reached their late twenties Jessie met a man and her priorities shifted, resulting in changes in their weekend routine:

When she got with her boyfriend she tended not to go out as much. Quite often I’d phone her and she’d say ‘Hmm….I haven’t got much money’ or ‘I’m doing my ironing’, you know. Erm…you know so…hmm…I think I started drinking in the house at about that time maybe. You know, you always have a bottle of wine in the fridge? Yeah, I suppose from my late twenties. I think, you know, I think looking back I probably – although I was never a massive boozer – I did start doing the, you know, drinking a glass of wine every night. I used to go the gym quite a lot then, and was getting in quite late, and having my tea quite late. And you think ‘I need something now as a reward’ and then I started drinking quite a lot of wine in the house.

Jackie later explains that her weeknight drinking was usually limited to one glass of wine with a meal because “it makes the food taste nicer.” However, on weekends she would often drink considerably more:

I’d probably have a bottle of wine in the week, you know, like one glass a night and then at the weekend, you know, if I was going out I’d probably have a few glasses before I went out. If I wasn’t going out I’d still – you know – Friday and Saturday night – I don’t think I ever drunk a bottle just to myself but quite easily

34 See Chapter Five for an analysis of alcohol as a reward for paid or unpaid work.
drink a bottle over two nights, if I was staying in, just cuz you know I was staying in really! […] You think everyone else is out drinking and I’m at home.

Thus, changes in Jessie’s situation meant that Jackie’s use of alcohol shifted. She described feel annoyed that others were out having fun, and drinking on her own at home was a way to compensate herself for being “left behind.” We can see here how her relationship with Jessie provided a context for her to drink socially. When that context was taken away, her use of alcohol changed its meaning; it was no longer about having fun with others, but about redressing a perceived imbalance in what she was entitled to expect from her time away from work.

Jackie’s relatively heavy use of alcohol, namely wine, on weekends continued well into her thirties, until she became more conscious of the impact of alcohol on her fertility. She met her partner when she was 37. Not long after moving in together a year later, they decided to try to start a family:

It took a while for me to get pregnant – I was 39…but then I had a miscarriage, and I was really depressed for quite a while and I was drinking quite a lot then in the house, you know. And then…and then I was started thinking about – [exhales loudly] you know, I wasn’t getting pregnant again and I just thought, you know, it’s not doing me any favours drinking like this – you know, when you’re trying to get pregnant. I started really looking into it and I kind of went quite the opposite, you know, when I read how damaging alcohol can be if you’re trying to conceive and also, you know, you don’t know if you’re pregnant do you when you’re first pregnant, and how damaging that can be to baby. I just kind of pretty much stopped drinking. It was just like I had to make a decision, and I wasn’t really going out much either.

She notes that this was partially due to her sadness following the miscarriage. Following her decision to live more healthily she had a second miscarriage. Eventually, her partner suggested they try IVF:

Even though I’d got pregnant, Andy said ‘Why don’t we try IVF?’…and then, I thought ‘Well if I’m investing so much, you know, money and energy and everything into it’, you know, I really started to look after myself, you know, eat healthily and take lots of vitamins and drank very, very little. And then I had two rounds of IVF that didn’t work, and the third lot worked.
Jackie re-evaluated her use of alcohol following her first miscarriage, and stepped up her efforts to “look after” herself following the couple’s decision to try for a baby using IVF.

After having her son, she did not return to drinking regularly, though in her account this is because of her age as well as the practical requirements of caring for a baby:

I’d say since having Nicolas, I don’t drink much really. I’ve… I’ve just kind of thought I’m too old for it. I think as you get older your hang overs get worse don’t they? And…you know…I think when he was first born we’d sometimes still get invited to parties and go and then the next day – or during the night – if he was crying, you know, you have to get up and you’re just shattered. I wanted to spend quality time with him, you know, after everything that had happened, and I didn’t want to be, you know, feeling rough all the time.

Following her son’s birth, Jackie only drank lightly, if at all. Seeing herself as an “older mum” means she partially accounts for this through her age. However, she also tries to preserve her energy in order to spend “quality time” with her son, placing greater value on her time with him than on the time she would spend with friends on nights out.35

Jackie’s age relative to other mothers she knows is a recurring theme in her narrative. Once her son started school, she started to be invited on nights out. However, while she enjoyed going out in her twenties and thirties, in her forties she evaluates the experience very differently:

Most of my socialising now tends to be with the mums at school. I think I’m probably the oldest mum there actually. They do go out quite a lot but half the time I make up excuses because…ah… I don’t enjoy it as much. […] Now you go into the pubs and its quieter [than it used to be] and everyone looks dead young [laughs] you know…and I just think you force it a lot of the time. You’re not having such a great time as like to let on really. And then you come home and if you’re feeling rough the next day – I feel now – when I have a hangover – I feel really depressed. And I don’t know if that’s just the alcohol, you know, making me feel depressed or…just the fact that I’m fed up because – you know, so many times I do go out even though I don’t want to go out but Andy [says] ‘Come on you need to go with your friends. You need to still go out.’ So I’ll go out,

35 The act of guarding the quality of time spent with children through not drinking or minimising drinking is discussed further in Chapter Six.
reluctantly, have a *rubbish* night, spend a load of money and then feel rough the next day and I just think to myself ‘Why I have done it?’ You know. I feel rough. It’s ageing you – all this booze is ageing you – ageing your face and your body. Mmm…there’s just no benefits to it! [laughs] And I do just get so down about it. And I just think ‘No, I’m not doing it again.’ I’m not going to say I’m never going out again, but you know when you just don’t fancy somewhere and you do just get talked into it? Not so long ago there was some mums’ school do and we went to [name of hotel] and there was a tribute band on […] I just really didn’t fancy it. [noise signalling disbelief] It was just awful! It was just a room full of women all getting dead excited over this tribute band and I just sat there and was like ‘I don’t want to be here.’

We can see in the above passage how Jackie’s priorities have shifted markedly both in response to having a child and as a result of seeing herself as older. She rejects the women-only, friendship based socialising described by Emslie et al (2015) in their study. She regards herself as more attuned to what she perceives as alcohol’s negative effects on her body, and is also more aware of alcohol’s negative effects because of her experience with trying to conceive. Here we can see how a shift in relational priorities – that is, in which relationships matter and which do not or do not matter as much – provides a context for un-learning to drink, that is, for learning to no longer find alcohol pleasurable.

There is another layer to how relationality can be understood in and through Jackie’s account that speaks to the strengths of the life course approach adopted in this study. As mentioned, in her narrative Jackie attends to a particular construction of her childhood and what her now deceased parents were like. In discussing how she recently started to become more active, she states:

I think because of me upbringing – you know we were always out walking and cycling. I’ve tried to keep doing it, you know, over the years but now that I’ve got Nicolas I’m trying to sort of – you know Andy’s not very outdoorsy but a lot of the time I have just go – you know – with Nicolas. I mean I even go camping with him on me own, you know, walking and we go on bike rides with [name of group]. I don’t know if you’ve heard of them – we’re going on one tomorrow. I enjoy that more. I enjoy being out with those people…I’ve just recently joined this walking group […] I just prefer doing that. I don’t mind getting up early on a
Sunday morning and going out on a nice long walk in the countryside. Whereas if I’m out, you know, boozing, I’d just never do it. And I just think I’m never going to stop drinking but I do think there’s a lot more negatives to drink than positives these days. […] I mean I’m 50 next year so I suppose you know when people – I don’t know – I mean I don’t think my mum would have been going out boozing with her friends when she was fifty. I just think now people have more money don’t they and they expect to go out.

We can see in Jackie’s narrative how different kinds of personal relationships provide both conditions of possibility and constraint for encountering and evaluating alcohol. At a few different points in the interview, including the above passage, she orients to a recollection of her childhood as time of ‘outdoors’ adventure, and of her parents as active people who lived to go for long walks and to cycle. Thus, we can see how when she describes herself as drinking less in order to be able to pursue these interests, she is also orienting to a version of herself that is cast in their shadows or rather, her interpretation of who they were as people, and what kind of person and what kind of parent she wants to be. As Smart argues (2007, p. 45), individual lives are “embedded in a web of relationships” which include “people who have gone before.” In other words, the connection between Jackie and her parents is “sticky”: her parents continue to influence her behaviours despite the fact they are no longer living (ibid). To focus on Jackie’s performance of gender norms when she occasionally goes out into the night-time economy with the “other mums” would be to miss how her changing approach to alcohol is embedded in her wider relationships. Methodologically, the “snapshot” provided by a focus group interview or an ethnographic observation might also miss how her narrative is textured by her desire to recreate her parents’ way of life now that she is a mother herself.

Dianne’s narrative also demonstrates how approaches to alcohol are renegotiated in midlife, though in a very different way. While Jackie aspires to a version of herself as “active” and “outdoorsy” as a way of living up to her memory of her parents, Dianne orients to an idea of herself as “young at heart”:

36 Jackie’s parents died in the same year as one another. She did not go into detail about the circumstances of their deaths in the interview. However, she remarked that their deaths were a particularly sad time for her.

37 This is one of several examples of the cumulative and layered nature of the narratives woven in life history interviews. See my discussion of Jane’s story of the first time she remembers tasting alcohol earlier in this chapter for a further example.
I’m very, very young at heart. Very. Even though the age I am – I don’t act my age and I don’t – I don’t know whether you think I look it but I don’t really…I’m very, very young minded. So, I mean a lot of my friends - I mean even my friends now are – I’ve got friends 20 years younger than me that I go out with, socialise with.

Throughout her interview, Dianne’s presentation of self (Goffman, 1959) is largely consistent with the image of herself as lively, youthful person. On the one hand, she appears to accept the idea that there is a way women in their early fifties should behave (“I don’t act my age”), but chooses to ignore this prescription because her perceived “internal” age is younger than her chronological age.

After trying alcohol for the first time in the park at the age of 15 and “hating it” (as described earlier in this chapter), Dianne did not drink again until she was 18. Throughout her late teens and twenties she went out regularly with her older sister and their mutual friends at the weekend and with friends she made in the office where she worked on Friday lunch times, as well on some weeknights and on special occasions. Once she had her first child at the age of 33 in the mid-1990s she stopped going out and drinking regularly for a period of around 15 years:

Once my children came I stopped all that. I didn’t go out as much. I did go out but not as much. The whole ethos of drinking just wasn’t – I just wasn’t interested in it because of the whole – you know the most important thing is your children wasn’t it – the fact that you can’t lie in bed the next day and sleep your hang over off can you? So, I actually didn’t really bother with the drinking. I used to have a drink in the house – a couple of glasses of wine when they’d all gone to bed on a Friday night maybe but I really didn’t bother much while the children were young.

Thus, over the course of these years she drank relatively limited, as going out was

…too much effort. It was too much effort to have worked that day to have come home, sort the kids out, make sure their bed, to make sure whatever needed to be done – it was just too much to do before you went out the door – before you even walked out the door – it wasn’t worth it. And I’d be shattered before I walked out the door.

While she did have the occasional glass of wine, unlike Jackie she says she was not tempted to drink more than this, stating that drinking at home is “not the same, it’s not
the same social thing is it – ‘Oh go on have another!’ ‘Oh yeah, go on then.’ […] At home I’d only have a couple. That’d be it.”

Dianne’s approach to alcohol shifted again when she reached her late forties, and her youngest child started to become more independent:

Every weekend. I go out every weekend. […] Up to [my youngest child] being 10, I didn’t really bother going out much really. But probably in the last three […] probably when [my young child] was in Year Six, I started to accept invitations going out – where I didn’t go ‘No, I can’t make it’ or ‘No, I don’t well’ or I’d say ‘Yes’ and then make an excuse not to go and – but once [my youngest child] […] became that little bit – because she’s quite independent really – and my husband doesn’t go out at night. He hates going out drinking at the night, hates it. […] So he would be in. So – and of course the whole ethos of the – I don’t have to worry about getting any children ready or sorted – I can just say ‘Right’ and make tea and go upstairs and get ready to go out – I don’t have to make sure their bed – so it’s a lot easier now to go out. That’s why I enjoy going out now, I enjoy the looking forward to it because I don’t have much to do – other than run the home like you do – I’ve not go three young children to sort out before I walk out the door.

Unlike Jackie, who described in detail how she did not enjoy going out with the “other mums”, Dianne looks forward to going out with her “mum friends” at weekend. With regard to the friend she goes out with the most often, she states:

We’re both the same. Now her children have grown up. My children have grown up. I don’t know if it’s a typically middle-aged woman who has been in most of her life looking after children has now got a free lease of life and is going out and sort of like starting back where she finished although – because I was 33 when I had my first child so I’d had a really good social life prior to that whereas [my friend] didn’t – she had her first child when she was only 20 I think […]

For Dianne, being a “middle-aged woman” means having her independence back. While going out involves drinking, it also involves other things, principally dancing: “I love dancing, love dancing. I love clubbing dancing. I may be a bit old for it, I don’t know, I don’t care, but I love going to clubs dancing. I just love dancing.”
While we can see above and at other points of her interview that Dianne believes a normative template for ‘acting your age’ exists, in her own words she does not “care”. Here, adopting the idea that drinking and going out in midlife is about regressing to an earlier phase of the life course, as argued by Emslie et al (2015), would be to ignore or downplay how women negotiate their own versions of what it means to be middle-aged.

While Jackie feels that the consequences of drinking heavily for the following day mean that drinking is “not worth it”, Dianne adopts the opposite position:

You don’t function the same do you? You’re tired and you don’t feel 100% but I still function, I still go out and do whatever needs to be done. […] I never, I never – my sister does this – but I never say the next day ‘Oh my God, what a waste of a day’ – no, I think I had a great night, I had a great time. She’s never going to remember the night she was sat in watching TV. You’re always going to remember the nights when you went out and had a really great time. So to me it’s worth it – if I’ve had a really good night the night before it’s worth it.

We can see how, like Jackie’s, Dianne’s shifting approach to alcohol is shaped by changes in her relational priorities. Throughout most of her thirties and forties, her relationship with her children took precedence. Their increased independence meant that she was free to go out again on weekends with friends.

However, Diane’s story is somewhat more complex than this. While her friendships are important to her, it slowly emerges toward the end of her interview that one of the main reasons she goes out at weekends with friends is because she is unhappy in her marriage. She broaches the topic hesitantly and carefully at first:

Erm….we’ve not got the best…if I’m being brutally honest we’re together for the children really. I, I – if I’m being really really honest about mine and my husband’s life I would…[...]– I’d rather be probably somewhere else – not with another person – but – you know – it’s all about your children isn’t it and staying together for your children and thinking ‘Right, OK’ - I know they’re older but I know they would be devastated if they left this – this is their home and its – so to be fair at the moment things aren’t good at all. […] So that’s one of the big main reasons I think I go out every weekend because I can’t bear to be sat in here with him. […] me and my husband don’t really socialise together at all. We don’t really do anything together.
Thus, relationships provide the contexts in which Dianne is renegotiating an approach to alcohol in midlife in multiple respects. Going out with friends is about experiencing and enjoying a renewed independence. It is also a temporary respite from a relationship she no longer enjoys or wishes to be in. If the analysis of Dianne’s approach to alcohol was to start and end with the normative behaviours she displays on, for example, the dance floor while out drinking with friends, or with her account in a focus group interview of how she likes to drink vodka, soda and lime as opposed to pints of lager, we would arguably have a thinner understanding of how she uses and evaluates alcohol. Moreover, describing her decision to start drinking more in midlife now that her children are older as being equivalent to enacting behaviours that belong to an earlier point of the life course means undermining her claim to legitimately participate in particular forms of leisure as a midlife woman.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that drinking is a socially learned practice shaped by relationality across shifting historical contexts. For some participants, the “mnemonic community” of the family (Misztal, 2003) provides a context for learning a particular normative orientation toward alcohol as something to be avoided or carefully managed. Though alcohol was largely absent from most participants’ childhoods, it was frequently narrated part of the ritual of a family, and the contributed to the sensory dimensions of what Christmas “feels” like (Mason and Muir, 2013). The chapter considered key generational differences in the role of alcohol in the leisure practices of women from the 1940s cohort versus those born after 1960. I argued that for the latter alcohol was sought in the context of friendship groups and as part of the pursuit of increased independence from parents. While intoxication was often sought, attempts to gain access to alcohol were also relationally oriented toward enacting the rituals of friendship. Lastly, I argued that a life course perspective shows how approaches to alcohol are renegotiated in midlife in line with shifting relational priorities. While women may “perform” gender (Measham, 2002; Emslie et al, 2015) when they drink, existing analyses are limited by their focus on the reproduction of normative femininities.

Having examined how participants narrate their familial stories and adolescent and midlife experiences with alcohol by foregrounding their personal relationships, I now
turn to another key relational context – or in Becker’s (1959) terms, milieu – that for some participants was important in forging a connection with alcohol: workplace cultures and employment biographies.
Chapter Five. Earning a drink? The alcohol-work connection in women's drinking biographies

This chapter concerns the multi-faceted connections between women’s ways of using and thinking about alcohol and their work lives. In this research and in the broader literature that draws on survey research (e.g. Plant, 2008; Waterson, 2000), types and patterns of work have been found to be important in shaping how much and how often women drink. More specifically, women in professional roles who work full time tend to drink more and more regularly than women in non-professional roles who work part time or who are not in employment (Waterson, 2000). However, it is not simply that women in certain professions drink more often or in greater quantities than women in other forms of work, though this may indeed be the case. Rather, I argue that the relationship between alcohol and work life runs deeper: according to a particular cultural script, a drink is earned through exerting effort. This chapter explores how some participants who worked in professional roles adopted this set of cultural meanings about alcohol, even after they left their roles. I argue that the context of relationships with colleagues provided the conditions for shifting their approaches to alcohol.

The chapter is divided into three main parts. After considering some of the key literature on earning a drink, I explore the place of alcohol in narratives about the early work lives of two participants. In Margaret’s and Emily’s narratives, using alcohol in the workplace toward the end of the workday, or as was more often the case, after work with colleagues, was central to developing and maintaining workplace relationships that had important consequences for the trajectories of their careers. For Margaret and Emily, socialising with alcohol was key to how these women forged relationships and (platonic) intimacies with colleagues in the early years of their respective careers in insurance and television production. Such opportunities to use alcohol as a part of a bonding process within the workplace tended not to be open to participants from the 1940s cohort, that is, those women born before 1950 who typically entered the labour market in the 1960s. I also consider some of the vicissitudes of the connection between earning and drinking, namely the manner in which working in the home counts as effort to be rewarded by alcohol for some participants, principally those who had previously worked in professional, often male dominated settings. Lastly, in the final section I consider the experiences and drinking biographies of those participants who did not see themselves as
earning a drink but rather for whom alcohol was principally about largely non- or extra-work socialising with friends.

**Earning a drink?**

Drinking may in some contexts be chosen by women (and men) as a practice to ‘soothe’ stress. The connection between stress and alcohol was first proposed by Pronger (1956), and has since gained considerable traction within sociological, psychological and epidemiological approaches to the study of alcohol consumption (Cooper, 1992). However, the relationship between paid employment and alcohol consumption is far more complex and multi-faceted than much of these literatures or media reporting suggests. Cultural logics underlying what people think drinking is for are critical. And drink is not solely for coping with stress. Rather, it can also be a way to reward oneself for paid or unpaid labour.

The notion that drink – or food – can be interpreted as a reward for labour is of course not new, or limited to the practices of women. The anthropologists Mark Nichter and Mimi Nichter (1991) argue that:

> Children subtly learned culturally acceptable patterns of behaviour involving time and resource allocation, investment and expenditure. In the course of learning facts and modes of classification in school, American children come to embody the cycle and structure of the work day and all it entails (Kelman 1976). Though a broad base of experience, children learn about appropriate cycles of control and release: day/night, weekday/weekend, work/vacation, and dieting/free eating.
>
> They learn that the day belongs to the workplace and the night to Michelob.

The cycle of effort and reward discussed above by Nichter and Nichter (1991) has historically been notably gendered. We can see this quite clearly in the example of dieting explored by the authors. In this chapter, I address how alcohol as a reward has also been shaped by occupational and class hierarchies. I argue that experience of collegial relationships in professional settings appears to be key to whether this reading of alcohol is adopted by women.

In her study of women’s pub going on the British Home Front in the Second World War, Langhamer (2003) posits that the reason some groups of women, namely those whose
employment was most closely linked to the war effort, like Royal Air Force (RAF) Pilots, drank in pubs more regularly than other groups of women was because they believed that they had earned the right to drink in pubs. The notion that ‘a drink is something that is earned’ has wide currency amongst the women I interviewed. I will therefore tease out this connection, exploring how the perceived entitlement to a drink after work has key limits and tensions.

It is clear from the literature and this study that feelings of entitlement are not distributed either randomly or equally amongst women, but are instead shaped by existing material and symbolic hierarchies. Langhamer’s (2003) study is instructive here, hinting at what appears to be a broader dynamic: forms of work considered most valuable in the immediate context of the war effort were crucially also forms of work coded culturally as masculine. Along similar lines, Waterson (2000) points to employment type and employment status as key factors in determining how much women drink. More specifically, women in professional and managerial jobs and women who work full time tend to drink more than women who are in other types of jobs and women who do not work or who work part time. Though, as Waterson argues, women in professional and managerial jobs are likely to have more extensive opportunities to drink, it may also be the case that there is a hierarchy at play, with those working full time and in professional occupations feeling like they are more deserving of a drink because the work they engage in is perceived to be more materially and symbolically valuable than other forms of work. Following Langhamer, this, in turn, may in some cases relate to the fact that some of the professions in question are coded as masculine.

Langhamer’s (2003) argument underscores the importance of public recognition and visibility in at least two ways: the RAF pilots she writes about were engaged in forms of work perceived to be of considerable public value, and the kinds of drinking practices she considers, namely, drinking in pubs and other public spaces, is in a sense a public act. Here, value and ‘public-ness’ are linked with masculinity and ‘men’s work.’ Much like the sales professional and businesswomen discussed by Waterson, Langhamer’s pilots were engaged in forms of work historically and symbolically linked with men. Significantly though, another, related factor that these forms of work share is their public visibility and perceived esteem.
Drinking ‘careers’: The place of alcohol in the early work lives of participants

Employment experiences emerged as crucial in the drinking biographies of several participants in this research. However, there were key generational differences. With few exceptions, participants who entered the labour market in the 1960s tended not to engage in alcohol based socialising with work colleagues, particularly once they were married. When asked about post-work socialising, with or without alcohol, Mary (1940s cohort), who worked in an office in Manchester city centre prior to getting married in her mid-twenties, remarked: “No, I don’t remember any of that. It wasn’t done. Especially if you were married. The men may have gone out after work to the pub, but we didn’t.” Other older participants, a number of whom started working full time from the age of 16, or even in a few cases, 15, described how the companies they worked for ran social clubs for employees. However, as discussed in Chapter Three, the events and activities organised – much like the structured forms of leisure organised by youth clubs and church groups they had engaged in previously – tended to involve very little, if any, alcohol. For participants in this research, it was only those who entered full time paid work starting from the mid-1970s that narrated having access to post-work socialising with alcohol.

Post-work drinking and socialising with colleagues over alcohol were regular practices for several women employed in professional or office-based administrative roles who entered the labour market from the 1970s onward (n=9). These practices usually became less frequent once the women married and/or started families in their mid to late thirties. However, other women employed in particular kinds of jobs did not discuss any, or reported very little, post-work drinking. For example, Kerry and Kim, who are both from the 1970s cohort, worked for several years in childcare. Neither could remember a single time they had socialised after work with colleagues. (As a childminder, Kim does not have ‘colleagues’ as such, but she did have other childminders she occasionally met up with.) Similarly, participants who worked in retail, such as Sandra and Jan, who are also from the 1970s cohort, stated that they rarely if ever engaged in alcohol-based post-work socialising. However, some of those who worked in education, such as Dianne (1960s

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38 Dianne discussed drinking after work and at Friday lunchtimes with colleagues regularly when she worked in a city centre-based insurance office throughout the 1980s and much of the 1990s. She had been
cohort) and Natasha (1990s cohort), did report occasionally socialising with colleagues, though this did tend to be for special occasions, and did not consist of routinized post-work pub-going. Thus, the narratives of participants in this study suggests that workplace cultures, including the kinds of and places of work, are crucial in setting up the conditions for alcohol-based socialising.

In what follows, I explore the narratives of two women who spent most of the first ten to fifteen years of their careers in professional roles working alongside men: Margaret (1960s cohort) and Emily (1970s cohort). I chose these two narratives because they are the most detailed examples of how participating in particular kinds of workplace cultures can shift how women use and understand alcohol. Thus, I am not claiming they are representative of the wider sample, which was varied with respect to access to and participation in workplace drinking cultures. As previously mentioned, drinking with work colleagues was not a feature of the early career experiences of the 1940s cohort, though Jill, Belinda, Phoebe and Pam all discussed drinking socially with people they met through their work later on in their careers once their children were older and no longer required as much of their attention. Margaret’s workplace, an insurance company, was largely made up of men, with a small number of women in secretarial positions. Emily’s workplaces, a large media organisation followed later on in her career by a string of small production companies and an eventual return to the media organisation, were more mixed with respect to gender. Both women left their respective jobs after having their first child in their thirties. Margaret never returned to working in insurance; Emily eventually returned to media production but on a part-time and ad-hoc basis.

**Margaret’s story**

Margaret’s narrative is instructive in terms of the key role played by alcohol-based socialising in her early work life. Margaret was born in 1961 in what was then Cheshire, near Manchester. She finished school at 15 and went straight into full time employment in 1976, working in Manchester city centre for a medium-sized insurance firm. The firm was mixed in relation to age and gender, with women primarily in administrative support working as a Teaching Assistant for around ten years at the time of interview. She occasionally socialised with colleagues from this role at weekends and special occasions like Christmas.
positions. She describes the culture of the firm, including the large drinks cupboard in the Director’s office, in detail in the following passage from her interview:

Margaret: …I was an office junior and it was a very, very boozy place [laughs]. I was kind of…I think that’s when I started drinking in a more serious way, shall we say […] – it was quite a sophisticated company…you know, they had all the spirits, and they had a drinks cupboard—

Interviewer: In work?

Margaret. In work [laughs]. It’s unbelievable! […]

Interviewer: Was it mainly men [who worked at the company]?

Margaret: It was mainly men in that particular role [the specific line of work she eventually progressed into] but the office was full of administrators, secretaries – the support staff were women. But it was quite inclusive – it was, you know, ‘Come in, have a drink’ after work. At four o’clock sometimes they’d start drinking.

Interviewer: Was that just on a Friday, or was it every day -

Margaret: A lot, a lot. So, a lot of them they’d go out at lunchtime and have two-three-hour boozy lunch, come back quite tipsy, start drinking again…[laughs] To be honest, as a young person exposed to that – it was fantastic fun…you know, it was amazing, and it was free and easy. It was kind of quite magical in a way. It’s silly now when you look back but it was magical […]

Similar to how she described the first pub she ever visited while on holiday as a 14 year old as “magical” in Chapter Four, Margaret looks back on her early years in the insurance industry through a somewhat nostalgic lens.

As mentioned, in Margaret’s workplace the drinks’ cabinet was located in the Director’s office. She describes his office in the following terms:

It was very plush actually. It was nice with a balcony, [name of Manchester landmark]. […] So you’d go in and – whatever you wanted to drink was on offer. The conversation was quite fruity as you can imagine but it was a very relaxed, funny atmosphere. It was really – anything goes kind of thing.

When asked if her male colleagues ever made sexual advances on her, she replies:

Margaret: A lot, yes, yeah. That was like half the thing really, but you kind of…deflected it somehow. It was part of just the joke. To me it was a joke. It was kind of ‘Oh here we go…’ but it’s a bit of fun really.
Interviewer: You never felt…?
Margaret: No, no. Threatened? No. [Drinking] meant that you could really open up more… and people were – you got to know a lot about people. I found out some secrets about people actually. Secrets that other people don’t know… that they kind of told me because I was younger I think… about having a love child […] and they were having an affair with someone in the office – this was what it was like – but this person didn’t know that he had this child but I knew it and for some reason people confided in me… through drink… so that was the culture of the place. You worked hard. There was a lot of stress – investigating insurance claims you got a lot of aggravation from people… so I think it was kind of their way of relieving stress… and it was also a social thing – inviting in people from other insurance companies.

Like all narratives about the past, Margaret’s narrative is situated in a present. She is looking back fondly at a time from her youth from the position of women in her early fifties, potentially glossing over (or not recalling) some of the negative side of post-work drinking cultures, and focussing on the time as one of openness and possibility. Drinking alcohol is presented as key to the creation of an atmosphere that is free from regular social constraints normally operating in the workplace, or in Goffman’s (1959) terms, as “backstage” space. Here, the term “fruity” is productive in conveying a sexually charged atmosphere, and also reminds us of Margaret’s youth. Looking back on this time from the vantage point of her fifties, during a point in her life when she was going through significant changes in her private life, Margaret’s narrative suggests a sense of the joy of feeling desired as a young woman.

Unlike several other participants, Margaret does not explicitly refer to popular cultural representations in her interview. However, her (re)construction of 1970s in-work and post-work drinking culture conjures an image of the 1970s as it is often portrayed in contemporary popular culture: sexually charged, and a time when sexual harassment and lewd jokes were rife but rarely labelled as such; as the time before “political correctness” (Forster and Harper, 2009). Interestingly, she describes this time in a near whimsical manner, positioning herself as in control and able to ward off older male colleagues’ advances because they were, in a sense, ironic and humorous. The opening of the drinks cupboard signalled a time away from the conventional norms governing everyday work life toward a different way of relating to colleagues and clients. The notion that ‘anything
goes’ suggests an atmosphere of opening, a relaxing of rules and boundaries. For Margaret, when conversations turned sexual this was part of the humour of the situation, and was not to be taken seriously.

Margaret goes on to describe how her career in insurance was to a large extent shaped by friendships forged over the Director’s drinks cupboard, as men in senior roles encouraged her to pursue a particular profession within the insurance industry, which few women had at that point entered. Moreover, once she was in the role, socialising with clients became a routine part of her job. Most of this socialising involved alcohol. Margaret in some respects appears to be a trailblazer: she was one of the first women in the country to be employed in her specific line of work within the insurance industry, and as such had access to what at that time may still have been a largely male dominated post-work drinking culture. Roughly half of the participants (n=6) from the 1970s cohort, who started working full-time in the 1990s and early 2000s, reported drinking with colleagues as key to their drinking practices. Here, those who were currently or had previously been engaged in office work (e.g. human resources, insurance) reported regular routines of post-work drinking, as well as Friday lunchtime trips to the pub with colleagues. Emily’s narrative echoes several of the themes that emerge in Margaret’s.

Emily’s Story

Emily was born in Lancashire in the mid-1970s, and grew up in a rural area on the western edge of what is now Greater Manchester. In 1997, in her early twenties, she began a nearly decade and a half long career in media, working for two large media organisations in Manchester city centre before moving to London in the late 1990s, where she worked for a number of small production companies before eventually being hired to work in the London office of one of the media bodies she had previously worked for in Manchester. In her interview, she describes how lunchtime and post-work drinking were regular features of her time working in Manchester city centre in the late 1990s:

Emily: Actually what is interesting is when I was in Manchester working at [name of media organisation], for those two years, we would go out and drink at lunchtime…and I never, ever really did that London, which is quite interesting, but that could also be to do with the fact that my department was News and Current Affairs and News was more macho than Current Affairs.
is more macho than Factual telly. You know, they kind of looked down on each other and yeah so Newsmen would drink...so that was quite interesting – I never really drank at lunchtime in London. […]

Interviewer: You mentioned that drinking is a good way to get to know people. So back to the [name of organization], the lunchtime drinking, was that your first time of ever going out and having a drink at lunch – yeah? And how do you remember feeling, like on a specific day when you did it?

Emily: [Laughs] It was probably on a Thursday or a Friday, um…but I remember walking down from [x] road to [x] road to [x] bar, that’s still there. So [name of bar] has obviously been there a long time cuz I was there ’97 to ’99 […] and I would go have a bottle of wine, with someone – so half a bottle of wine – and then go back and do my job. I do remember being a bit squiffy...But that wasn’t frowned upon then, you know - in that particular team in that office on a Friday one of the exec editors he brought a bloody drinks trolley out! And, you know – but it was so civilized in a way that, you know, at four o’clock, five o’clock, you know, and we’d sit in the comfy area, or if we were really working hard you could have your drink at your desk and you could have one, maybe you could have two bottles of beer and then you carried on and those who were not having to – because our program is on a Monday night so if on a Friday you were still working hard you might have to work at the weekend but the people who weren’t doing that partic– because it was on a rotation – they’d, they’d have their two beers and then they’d go out.

As we can also see in the above passage, as with Margaret’s office, alcohol was consumed in the workplace itself, though this was limited to Friday from four o’clock.

Moving onto to post-work socialising on a Friday, Emily describes some of her colleagues as “good friends” in the following passage:

Interviewer: And would they tend to go out together?

Emily: Yeah, yeah...you know [...] some of them did go out because they were good friends actually - they did go out, you know, for the whole evening but certainly quite a few - you know, I remember going out and staying out the whole evening when I could – but some of the guys and women would then start to peel off, you know, at eight o’clock or seven o’clock – so they’d come for the post-work drinks but some of them – again, there were a couple of gay guys who
didn’t have any kids. I was the young rookie in the office. I was easily the youngest. And some of these people were like early thirties and might have kids at home and stuff. But some of them were that age and didn’t have families. […] Interviewer: So do you remember going to [name of bar] and splitting a bottle of wine with a colleague. What did that feel like? Emily: Very sophisticated. Ha! [Laughs] And…I think probably at first I was like ‘Oh goodness, is this really…?’ I didn’t feel like we were being rebellious or a lout, you know, I was with someone who had obviously done it before and it was accepted…It wasn’t unacceptable behaviour… So I felt very grown up. Very…sophisticated. Very - you know, to be able to afford to do that – maybe I couldn’t – I don’t know – but I did do it – um…It felt like a luxury. It felt like another world. It felt like I just sort of started – this was it, this was my professional life and it was going to be like that forever and I thought ‘Bring it on. This is great!’

In a striking parallel with Margaret’s story, Emily describes drinking during the workday with colleagues as “sophisticated.” It did not breach rules of respectable conduct, as it was collectively legitimated. To the contrary, it was a “luxury”, something of high esteem and value. Like Margaret, she was the youngest in her office, learning “the ropes.” Drinking alcohol with colleagues becomes symbolic of a kind of growing up, and a way of performing belonging. She reflects further on the role of drinking as a means of weaving intimate connections with colleagues in the following passage:

I was young and I felt a lot younger than everybody else and, you know, a bit green – and it was a place professionally where I learned an awful, you know, about how to behave, how to hold yourself […] [Drinking at lunchtime] allowed you to build confidence. I mean, by no means was it an expectation for you to drink at lunchtime […] I think that when you do move away from your desk and are talking to people not just about the matter at hand – on a job – they get to know you a bit more and know what makes you tick and…know what you’re about…they just get to know you.

In this passage, drinking at lunchtime emerges as one of a range of practices used to foster a personal connection among colleagues.
Like Margaret, in the above account Emily is looking back from the position of hindsight, remembering the early years of her career in Manchester, before she moved onto London, with fondness and a measure of nostalgia. As with other participants, it is clear that drinking at lunchtime is a transitory stage in her career, that is, both their ‘drinking careers’ as well as their professional careers. While Emily did later go on to drink with the teams she worked on while employed on contracts with small production companies, drinking with colleagues was not a feature of her time at the London office of the large media organisation she had worked for in Manchester. As mentioned, both Margaret and Emily left their careers in insurance and media respectively to have their first child in their thirties. However, both retained an element of the cultural script that sees drinking as a reward for work after leaving paid employment. As discussed below in the section on earning a drink at home, Emily describes having a drink after her children go to bed as “one of life’s pleasures.” In other words, in Smart’s terms (2007, p. 45), relationships with colleagues were in a sense “sticky”: practices were picked up that continued once these participants had moved on from their workplaces. As we will see later on in the chapter, the notion of alcohol as a reward for work, whether paid or unpaid, was not an orientation shared by some of the study’s working class participants.

**Cultural scripts in narratives about post-work drinking**

While not explicitly referencing popular cultural representations of the 1970s in her narrative, Margaret’s presentation of the time as a moment of irony and humour chimes to an extent with the image of the decade in the wider cultural imagination. Perhaps the advances of older male colleagues are re-imagined as non-threatening in part because of the distance in time: looking back the past takes on a docile quality because, unlike the present, it is finished and one knows where it goes. In (re)constructing their memories of post-work socialising, other participants draw explicitly on key motifs and images from popular culture. For example, Violet (born 1970), who worked in Human Resources in a Manchester-based company draws on the popular television show, *Sex and the City*:

> In 2002, I started working at [name of company]. [...] This is when my drinking habits really began to change. I developed a taste for gin and tonic and cocktails. I used to go out with a group of friends from work. [...] We went out after work on Friday, though not every week – I had a mortgage and the commute back to [name of town] to consider. We used to have around four drinks. I remember at
the time *Sex and the City* was massive. Cocktails and going out with friends for nice drinks.

We see Violet draw on the popular cultural reference of *Sex and the City* to frame and make sense of her experience of post-work drinking rituals. Cultural references provide a script: they are shorthand for defining and communicating one’s drinking as glamorous and adventurous.

Access to cultural scripts, like access to moral frameworks for evaluating one’s own and others’ drinking, is in general terms shaped by generation and social class. References to popular culture, like the *Sex and the City* television series and films, and terms like “sophisticated” did not feature in the narratives of the study’s working class participants, except Jill (1940s cohort), who as discussed in Chapter Six presented herself as upwardly mobile. Moreover, as previously discussed, experiences of post-work drinking were not narrated as part of the ‘story’ of paid work for older participants entering the workplace in the 1960s, though as discussed in Chapter Four, a few participants, like Belinda (1940s cohort), did mention social clubs run by her large employer. Alcohol does not emerge as central in her account of the time she spent with colleagues. The notion of drinking with colleagues, or “friends from work” as they are framed in Violet’s account, as a glamorous or exciting prospect does not appear to be a narrative possibility in the landscape of Belinda’s story.

*Earning a drink at home*

The early career experiences of drinking after, and in a small number of cases, even during work, were not something most women could or would have chosen to sustain once they began to have children. However, that is not to say that ‘work’ ceased to be an important factor shaping their drinking practices. Working in or for the home – grocery shopping, cooking, bathing children, cleaning, and so forth – can entitle one to a drink as forms of paid labour do. The accounts of some participants suggest that the logic of drink as a reward for ‘work’ extends to alcohol consumed in the home.

Participants with young children were particularly likely to think of drink as a reward for domestic work (see also Emslie et al, 2015). In these accounts, drinking emerges both as a reward and as a means of dealing with the stresses of caring for young children. Emily,
who cares for her two young children full time, reflects on how drinking helps her to draw a boundary between her ‘work day’ and her time off when she remarks:

For me it’s like the end of the day working…so [having a drink] changes the mood of the house…so I’ll tidy up and turn down the lights and it’s like ‘It’s grown up again, this house’…Having a drink, you know, helps punctuate that […] To be honest, it’s one of life’s pleasures because of I don’t go out - I hardly ever go out now. And I look forward to it.

Similarly, Andrea (1960s cohort), whose occasionally cares for her young grandchildren on weekends, notes:

I find when the boys stay with us it’s really busy, it’s really hard work and when they get in bed it’s like ‘Give me a glass of wine!’ [laughs]…So…I don’t know. Is it self-medication? Maybe it is sometimes.

While Emily does not think of her drinking in the evenings after caring for her children as problematic, Andrea is less sure. She became notably reflective at this point in her interview, and expressed concern at the way her adult daughters where using alcohol at home in the evenings in ways she never did as a mother of young children a few decades earlier. Though this study has a small and non-representative sample, and therefore it would be inappropriate to generalise to population, the fact that it was women who had worked in professional roles alongside men who both drank at home and did not consider their home drinking problematic is a connection worthy of further investigation in future research. As I discuss below, this orientation to alcohol was not shared by the study’s working class participants.

**On not earning a drink: working class participants’ experiences**

Not all participants in this study viewed themselves as earning a drink through paid or unpaid work. Moreover, not all participants socialised with work colleagues outside of work, either with or without alcohol. The location and type of work appear to be important factors shaping who and who did not ascribe such meanings and uses to alcohol, as those who did not work in offices but rather in shops, schools or childcare settings more often than not did not draw any meaningful connections between drinking and work life. A link also emerged in relation to social class: though not universally the

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39 Andrea is from a middle class background. After graduating from university in her early twenties, she spent much of the following decade at home looking after her young children.
case, most of the women who did not conceive or practice drink as a reward were from working class backgrounds, while the majority of those who did envision drink in this manner were from middle class backgrounds, or had at any rate studied at university, embarked on professional careers and had become socially mobile. Moreover, as previously discussed, viewing a drink as a reward was also linked with whether participants had a routine of drinking in the home: while those who saw drink in this way generally did drink alcohol in the evenings on some weeknights and weekends at home, those who did not tend to drink in the home less often, except for special occasions (e.g. Christmas, family birthday parties), though their partners may have drunk in the home more regularly.

To a certain extent, some of the working-class participants who did not see drink as a reward match what Brierley-Jones et al (2014) describe in their study as "traditional drinkers.” Based on qualitative data from five focus groups with 32 men and 17 women aged 21 to 55 and working in professional, managerial and clerical occupations, and drawing on a Bourdieusian conceptual framework, the authors categorise their participants into one of three groups: “home drinkers”, “traditional drinkers” and "omnivores.” The vast majority of participants fell into one of the first two categories. What category a participant falls into is determined by four variables: 1) choice of the alcoholic drink; 2) the amount of alcohol consumed; 3) time of the week drinking occurred; and 4) the location or context of drinking. While recognising that a “degree of slippage” exists between each category (p. 1059), the authors devote the bulk of their analysis to contrasting the practices and identities of home drinkers and traditional drinkers. The former drink primarily wine at home in moderate amounts throughout the week, and the latter drink principally beer, lager or spirits in pubs or bars at weekends.

Of particular interest to this study, the authors argue that home drinkers use wine to “mediate” between different kinds of responsibilities:

The perceived respectability of wine arose in part from its association with the fulfilment of domestic and family responsibilities such as childcare and cooking at home. Wine drinking was embedded in home life, being used to mediate multiple identities and roles, signalling a transition from one task, or part of a day, to another, and was usually consumed after the completion of domestic responsibilities. As such, home wine drinking was a marker of liminal time—
space between ‘work time’ and ‘relaxation time’, between ‘family time’ and ‘my time’ (FG3, male, home drinker). Wine also marked transitions from ‘responsible parent’ to ‘autonomous adult’ and from ‘employee’ to ‘free agent’. Wine consumption delineated time periods within days or weeks. Thus, some reported having a drink as soon as they came home from work to mark the end of the working day, or on a Friday evening to mark the beginning of the weekend. In both instances, wine signalled the advent of liberty, an expression of free choice and identity as an individual […] (p.1060).

The above analysis is further borne out in my research, where some participants did indeed use wine to signal that their ‘work was done’. However, a missing piece in the argument is the notion that a drink is earned, and particular forms of work are more symbolically deserving of reward than others. Moreover, practices like those described above were bound up to a large extent with life course and time-specific arrangements, such as working in paid employment while also acting as the principal caregiver of young children. Relatedly, strong generational differences emerged in my research, with most of the older women not using, or not having previously used, alcohol in this way.

In what follows, I would like to move beyond a taxonomical approach (i.e. classifying people as “traditional drinkers”, etcetera) and a focus on the reproduction of normative femininities to explore the complex interplay of factors shaping lived relationships to drink. The narratives of Kim, Kerry and Lisa, who to an extent map onto the “traditional drinkers” category discussed by Brierley-Jones et al (2014), are presented through a life course perspective, which sheds light on the dynamic nature of factors, such as employment experiences, levels of disposable income, and caring responsibilities, that are key to shaping women’s relationships to drink. Kim, Kerry and Lisa are three of the four members of the 1970s cohort (n=14) who are from working class backgrounds and who live in working class households as adults. A further four women in this cohort are from working class backgrounds, but live in managerial and/or professional households as adults, while the remaining six members of the cohort are from and continue to live in middle class households.

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40 All three participants are from the 1970s cohort.
41 The fourth woman (Sandra) also did not discuss alcohol as a reward for paid or unpaid work.
Kim was one of two women who participated in this study who had her first baby aged 16. Like the other participant (i.e. Ellen from the 1940s cohort), the potential consequences of becoming a mother at a relatively young age were to a great extent offset by living with and being supported by her parents; she was able to continue with her studies. Indeed, she was even able to continue going out drinking with friends. For Kim and some of the other participants past periods of heavy drinking in the night time economy stand in stark contrast to their present relatively alcohol-free domestic life. On the years over her late teens and early twenties when she spent most Thursday through Sunday nights at bars and clubs in a nearby town centre, Kim comments:

I used to drink loads. I used to get really drunk, get up absolutely fine the next day, go out the next night and drink loads again. I don’t know how I did it! I can’t drink anymore; it makes me really ill. I only have one or two and I’m like ‘ugh’ [groan]. That’s why I don’t drink.

After a few years of heavy drinking in the night-time economy with friends on weekends from her mid-teens to early twenties, Kim worked in her own home as a childminder throughout her late twenties and early thirties. She attended university as a mature student in her twenties, living at home with her parents who continued to support her in looking after her young son. She reflects in the interview on how she was far from a “traditional” student while studying at university:

I never went out with anyone from uni – ever – because they all lived, like, near uni in the student accommodation […] and they all went out up there so I never went anywhere with them.

At 21, she became pregnant with her second child and moved in with her partner. It was at this point that her drinking habits changed:

Kim: You get your own place. Harder to have a babysitter. Costs more money having two children and…you’ve got to be more sensible, hadn’t ya? [Laughs] […] We used to go out but just not as often. […]

Interviewer: When you went out did you tend to drink the same things?

Kim: Yeah. I’ve never changed what I drink. [Laughs]

Interviewer: Did you ever find yourself drinking at home, like on the weekends maybe?

Kim: Erm, not very often. Only – even now I'll have a drink at Christmas and New Year and…Because of the kids I won’t drink, because of the kids.
Because I don’t want to be ill the next day when – I don’t want to be really drunk and not be able to look after them and then I don’t want to get up the next day and be like ‘ugh’ [groans] and the kids be like ‘Mum!’ [in a child’s voice]. ‘I’ve got to go away!’ [in own voice] [laughs]

Interviewer: And for you that excludes just having one or two?
Kim: I’ll have one or two, yeah. But literally – honestly – I have one or two and I can feel it, like, erm, I start getting belly ache and I feel a bit ‘ugh’ and I just know, just don’t, just don’t drink anymore.
Interviewer: So when did that start? […]
Kim: I think I had quite a break of where I really didn’t drink anything…at all. Probably just because I was busy working and had two kids and then I had Rosie…Rosie’s six now. I spent such a long time with no alcohol…that I just think my body can’t tolerate it the same now. I did say, like, last year, I was like ‘Oh, you know, I might have to start having a drink at the weekend just so my body can tolerate alcohol’ – you know, if I just have one drink at the weekend and then maybe when we do go out I can have a few and be alright.

In the above passage, Kim describes how her drinking practices changed substantially when she moved in with her partner and had her second child. She later notes in the interview that she never fully returned to her earlier routine of going out drinking with a group of friends. Moreover, unlike Emily, for whom to have one or more drinks at home in the evenings is a form of reward or compensation for the challenges of looking after a young child, Kim does not reward herself with alcohol, perhaps because she no longer perceives alcohol to be pleasurable.

Returning to Brierley-Jones et al’s (2014) use of type of drink as a means of distinguishing drinkers, Kim’s taste in alcohol is also quite important here. Drinking wine or beer in the home has emerged in many British households as a common practice (Holloway et al, 2008). However, Kim states that she detests both, and only drinks alcopops, spirits mixed with cola and shots. Consuming such drinks in the home on weeknights is less socially acceptable because they are strongly associated with ‘drinking out’ in bars and nightclubs. Interestingly, Kim laments the fact that she never built a sensory connection with the taste of wine:

I never liked [beer or wine] – wine especially. I can’t drink it – just [grimaces]….even just swallowing it I’m like eew [makes disgusted face]. [My
husband] always says ‘I wish you liked wine so I could get us a bottle of wine’. Don’t like it. I’m quite funny with what I drink. I don’t have a big, erm, list of what I drink…just a few things.

[…] Wine’s bitter and, ugh, I can’t, can’t drink it at all. […] I do actually wish thought that I liked wine cuz I think it’s quite… sort of a sophisticated drink when you got out to have a glass of wine, or when you have a meal, to have a glass of wine with a meal but I just don’t like it [giggles]. I can’t even bring myself to like it cuz it’s, it’s horrible.

Having children at a relatively young age influenced several participants’ drinking biographies. Kerry became pregnant at 19 and gave birth just after her twentieth birthday. Like Kim, she also has four children, though there is an age gap of roughly ten years between her third child and her fourth child. Prior to becoming pregnant for the first time, Kerry drank heavily at pubs and bars with friends at weekends. In fact, the freedom to go out drinking was part of her decision to leave education before completing a health and social care qualification, which would have enabled her to go on to train as a midwife. Despite returning to her job in a cotton mill six weeks after her baby was born, Kerry and her partner were barely getting by financially:

Even though we were both working we never had no money and we used to come up here [parents’ home], my Mum and Dad used to feed us our teas. Because by the time we’d payed the bills out […] buy the time we’d paid the mortgage and paid all the bills we’d nothing left over for nappies, nothing left over for food, so my Mum […] they basically bought her nappies and baby milk, and they feed us.

Kerry found a better paid job in a Chemist’s, and a few years later went on to have her second and third children. Throughout her twenties, she rarely drank at pubs, though did occasionally socialise in the home at weekends:

As for going out and anything like as I say when they was little there was just no money there to do anything like that. If we did do anything socially it would be either a friend’s house or they’d come to us…because there was never any extra money left over […]

This socialising did sometimes involve alcohol, though limited amounts as she did not want her children to see her drunk, a point that is discussed further in Chapter Six.
However, once her three youngest children were a little older, she began drinking again for a period, lasting from roughly her late twenties until her mid-thirties. During this time she worked at home, first as a childminder and later as a foster carer. Her drinking initially consisted of a Friday or Saturday night at pubs or bars, followed by a shift to drinking at her or friends’ homes because it was much cheaper to do so. Here, as in her earlier drinking, socialising with friends was at the forefront of why she used alcohol.

In relation to choice of drink, like Kim, Kerry associates wine with a vinegary taste, and stopped drinking it altogether a few years prior to the interview because she thought it was aggravating a medical condition:

I used to just take the edge off the wine taste [by adding lemonade] because I think it’s like vinegar [makes gagging noise]. Now I can’t drink it, wine. I won’t drink because to be honest it effects […] I get really bad cramps in my legs so I don’t touch the wine anymore. I’ve always suffered with really bad cramps in my legs anyway, but when I used to think ‘God, what’s triggering this?’ […] What do they call it? Restless leg syndrome. I just don’t know what to do with myself with my legs and certain things do trigger them off and I kept thinking to myself ‘What is it?’ There’s something triggering it off and that’s what I put it down to – the wine. And I think my Dad’s a bit the same – if he drinks wine, my Mum says his legs get like that. So I just avoid the wine altogether. Now I don’t even like the taste of it. I’m like ‘ugh’ [gag noise]. If I am going to have a drink it would be vodka and that what’s I tend to drink now, if I do drink.

Like Kim, Kerry did not develop an aesthetic connection to wine the way most participants in the second cohort had, and in particular those with experience of working in professional careers or office settings.

Throughout her interview, Kerry accounts for much of her past decision making in terms of her judgement of what was best for her children. Thus, she avoided being drunk in front of them because, in her words, “that’s not fair on them.” She switched from working outside the home to becoming a childminder so that she could be there when her children arrived home from school. Thus, when her eldest child was going away to university and her then youngest child was on the verge of leaving primary school, she was faced with what felt to her like an existential crisis:
I thought ‘What do I do? What do I do? Nobody wants me anymore!’ And hence I ended up having Annie. You know, I was fast approaching forty – you know, what do I do? Do I go out and get a job? Or do I go out and have another baby? And I thought ‘I’ll have another baby!’

It was at this point that her relationship to alcohol changed again, as after the baby was born she never fully returned to her habit of drinking socially with friends on weekends:

Even now - I don’t drink now. Very, very rare I’ll drink. Maybe Christmastime – mind you, I didn’t even drink at Christmas. […] I don’t – it just doesn’t – at all. […] I would say we go out maybe on a Friday night down to the club and to see his [husband’s] Dad and he’ll have drinks with his Dad, but I won’t because I’ll drive. I’ll have just a coke or an orange juice or whatever. […] I think it’s also I begrudge paying the price. [laughs] I think ‘Oh, that’s a bit dear!’ [laughs] I think ‘Oh, I could spend that on something else!’ I think that’s probably part of it as well as - I think ‘Oh god, then I got to get taxi fare. Oh, forget it – I’ll drive!’ […]

And then if I drive that’s it, I won’t touch anything at all – I won’t drink at all.

In addition to caring responsibilities, the cost of drink is quite important in shaping Kerry’s practices, a point further suggested by the fact that when she went out to celebrate New Year’s Eve a few months prior to the interview she took vodka in her handbag to avoid paying for drinks. The nature of her socialising with friends also changed from her previous phase of drinking socially in her late twenties to mid-thirties. She reflects on the loss of one close friendship with a woman she describes as her “drinking buddy” after she took the decision to have another baby. Other friends, however, appear to also have drifted toward no longer socialising with alcohol on as regular a basis:

I met up with two good friends I went to college with […] We got in touch, met up […] I said ‘Come on, it’s been a long time since we met. It’s been five years – the last time was her fortieth […] – I said we need to get together. ‘Yeah, yeah, yeah.’ So we all met up, not weekend gone the weekend before, and so we said ‘Right, what are we doing? Are we going for a meal, a drink, or what?’ And they said ‘uggghhh’ [exasperated]. So one of my friends said ‘Let’s just have drinks at mine then.’ ‘Yeah, alright then, okay.’ On the day I said ‘Have we decided what we’re doing yet?’ And she said ‘Well, get a bit dressed up just in case we decide to go out.’ […] So I drives over, gets there, ‘So what are we doing then?’ She said ‘I don’t know.’ She said ‘Do you want a drink?’ I say ‘Oh go on, I’ll just have a
brew’ [laughs]. And then the other friend who’s driving says ‘I’ve already got mine!’ I said ‘What are we like?!’ She said ‘I know.’ Because you see we didn’t really drink then at all. We just ‘I’ll have a brew and a good catch up and a natter.’

It was a good night really.

In tandem with the issue of cost, Kerry’s interests and priorities shifted in her mid-thirties. Now she finds “having a brew and a natter” just as pleasurable as she had previously found socialising with alcohol.

While Lisa had her first child at 30, and thus considerably later in life than either Kim or Kerry, she too describes herself as having lost interest in drinking alcohol in her thirties. Unlike Kim or Kerry, after completing a catering course and working at a hotel for a year, Lisa worked for a period of time in a professional, office-based setting: a city centre accountancy firm where she was training for a business administration qualification. She remarks that she “hated that job”, and that she never really developed a rapport with colleagues or felt that she belonged:

They were alright but it wasn’t really my cup of tea […] I never really settled there. Not as much as I did at the hotel, even though they [co-workers at the hotel] were older, and I never socialised with them, with these there was a lot of bitching. […] even I found the men were bitchy [giggles].

Though she occasionally went to the pub on Fridays after work, she notes: “I was forcing myself to like them and I didn’t really. There was only a couple that I liked and got on with.”

She left this job after 18 months, and worked at a sandwich shop for the next six years. Despite the shorter day of 9am to 3pm, she earned more money than she did at the accountancy firm, and more importantly for her, enjoyed the job:

I just loved it. I loved the atmosphere, and the doing all the time instead of….I just didn’t like office work, it just wasn’t me. And plus I’d grown up with being in the shop sort of industry? I suppose? […] And there were mixed ages in there and we just – I don’t know – we just all got on. […] There were no men at all ever worked there [laughs]. It was great!

She socialised regularly on Saturdays nights with workmates from the sandwich shop throughout most of her twenties:
We always went out there. [...] It was just literally go out, have a good time, and come home. It was ‘anything that is going I’ll have’ [laughs] I used to drink everybody under the table!

While she sometimes drank Lambrini (“Because it was cheap”) before going out or enroute on the bus, she generally did not enjoy the taste of wine and preferred lager, cider or mixed drinks. When asked what kinds of drinks she would order on nights out in her twenties, she remarks: “All sorts [giggles]. The top shelf! [laughs].” While like Kim and Kerry socialising with friends was the primary purpose of drinking, Lisa was also very mindful of working on a Saturday morning:

If I’d been out on a Friday night and I had got a hangover and I was working on a Saturday I used to feel so rough, erm, and I hated it because it was an eight-three shift on Saturday so I have done it where I’ve been out and not got in ‘til like three in the morning and then don’t know how I’ve got up for work – still been drunk I think – and it’s just the most horrendous thing so I never used to do it. [...] I have done it but learnt from that [giggles].

Thus, we can see here how her work life structured Lisa’s drinking routine. The importance of not having a hangover on a workday meant that only Saturday night was available to her for drinking.

After meeting her partner in her mid-twenties, she started spending weekends with him and his friends, first going on pub crawls on Friday nights and to local bars and nightclubs on Saturday nights and then eventually in her late twenties only socialising at home with a few drinks each. She notes that they became “fed up with going out”: “it was just natural if you know what I mean….we naturally got to that point where ‘I’ve had enough now’.” Despite the pattern of drinking in the home on weekend nights, she notes that she never drank in the week.

While it would be inaccurate and too simplistic to claim that participants from working class backgrounds did not view alcohol as a reward for paid and unpaid labour while participants from middle class backgrounds did adopt this view, life course trajectories and involvement in occupational and workplace cultures created a context in which some participants came to interpret and use alcohol as a reward while others did not. For Kim, Kerry and Lisa, alcohol was principally about developing, maintaining and enjoying
friendships that were either entirely unrelated to work, or were incidental to the nature of the type of work and the workplace itself. When Lisa socialised with friends she had made at the sandwich shop where she worked for most of her twenties, this was distinct in character and in its consequences from Margaret’s and Emily’s post-work pub going. Moreover, echoing Holloway et al’s (2008) and Brierley-Jones et al’s (2014) findings, practices of home drinking also appear to be linked in complex and contingent ways to class and occupational backgrounds.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to advance and explore key lines of enquiry into the relationship between drinking alcohol and women’s ‘work’ lives, broadly conceived. The connection between alcohol and work life is not simply a matter of work stress leading women, like men, to drink more than they otherwise would if they were in less stressful forms of employment. Rather, ‘work’ is linked with reward, and one of those forms of reward is alcohol. Importantly, it has been argued here that alcohol as a reward appears to extend to unpaid work too. Moreover, workplace cultures are significant in shaping whether and how drinking is part of workplace-based socialising, and in shaping several participants’ drinking biographies. The interview data analysed here suggest that it is primarily those who worked in professions conventionally coded as masculine whose drinking biographies were most acutely shaped by their work lives.
Chapter Six: Practices of Intimacy and the Moral Regulation of Women's Drinking

Previous chapters have shown that drinking can be about building and sustaining connections to others. However, at different parts of the life course women’s drinking is judged through the prism of their responsibilities to others, principally their unborn (and indeed, even unconceived) offspring, their children and their male partners. Moral discourses around alcohol are, therefore, gendered (Day et al, 2004; Lyons et al, 2014). In this chapter, I argue that though women's drinking practices are shaped by and evaluated within a gender order that remains to a large extent hierarchical (Lyons et al, 2014; Emslie et al, 2015; Patterson et al, 2016), popular notions such as drink being ‘mother’s ruin’, or a source of risk, do not adequately capture the complexities or qualities of how women negotiate their drinking in the context of their connections to their children (born and unborn), romantic partners, and friends. While popular and scholarly discourses about women’s drinking typically centre on the effects of alcohol consumption on women’s health (Mansson and Bogren, 2014) (and in particular, on their current or future reproductive health, Ettore, 1997; Waterson, 2000; Day, Gough and McFadden, 2004, and on women’s personal safety (Meyer, 2010), participants in this study couched drinking in terms of relationality, sociability and an intermittent release from responsibility. As this chapter explores, “practices of intimacy” (Jamieson, 2011) are key to the constitution of women’s relationships to alcohol.

In this chapter, I consider how useful the notion of ‘mother’s ruin’ is as a means of analysing women’s experiences with alcohol in the contexts of pre-conception care, pregnancy and motherhood. ‘Mother’s ruin’ is a long-standing motif for representing societal views on women’s drinking. It originally referred to gin. The term became synonymous with Hogarth’s 1751 painting Gin Lane, which depicts a chaotic street scene, at the centre of which is an intoxicated woman dropping a baby into a gin vault. As Waterson (2000, pp. 3–4) notes:

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When we speak of ‘mother’s ruin’ we tend to think of gin. Most commonly we think back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, recalling images of women consuming vast quantities of gin in an effort to terminate unwanted pregnancies….The other picture that springs to mind is that of drunken mothers neglecting their children for their own gratification (Gutzke, 1984).

Writing almost two decades ago in 2000, Waterson argued that much of the research on women and alcohol conducted up to that point was “problem oriented”, which was the “legacy of ‘mother’s ruin’” (p. 2). As discussed in Chapter Two, there is now a growing body of research that departs to a certain extent from the problem orientation of earlier work, attending to drink as a constituent feature of leisure in the night-time economy. However, gendered moral discourses on health and personal safety risks remain dominant in both popular and public health representations of drinking (Day et al, 2004; Lyons et al, 2014). Here, I use the notion of mother’s ruin as shorthand to capture societal views, including those espoused in scholarly as well as popular discourses, which see women’s alcohol consumption as posing a threat to their capacities as current or potential mothers.

While participants attached different meanings to their drinking than those displayed in policy and media discourses, their narratives attest to the fact that particular points of the life course involve a greater degree of moral regulation than others; this regulation is typically targeted at the body and embodied practices of care. Prior to trying to conceive a child, women are encouraged to avoid alcohol or to drink in moderation to protect their fertility as part of a regime of “pre-conception care” (Waggoner, 2013). Most participants avoided alcohol, felt watched if they did drink, and described ‘watching’ themselves during pregnancy. Motherhood subsequently introduced new demands, eliciting creative strategies for 'hiding' or minimizing rare instances of drunkenness from children's view.
Though motherhood and its precursors are particularly potent sites for the moral regulation of women's drinking, the chapter explores how women negotiate in relationally- and practically-oriented ways with moral discourses. Rather than focusing on how women “perform” traditionally acceptable femininities (Lyons, 2009; Hunt et al, 2013) by constructing identities as “good mothers”, the chapter instead adopts a relational approach. I explore how navigating the potential threat to one’s moral reputation of drinking while pregnant or while looking after children is relationally driven, and can be productively regarded as part of women’s wider ways of practising intimacy.

I extend the argument to how women negotiate discourses of personal safety that are targeted principally at young women, who are often represented as “maidens at risk” (Moore and Valverde, 2000; see also Brooks, 2011). As Bancroft (2012, 7.4) points out, intoxicated misbehaviour by women in public is a common meme throughout the British media. One student [in this study] noted that in the media there is what amounts to a risk calendar. On a Monday, it is common for students to read disdainful and prurient reports of binge-drinking females in UK city centres. These reports characterise young women under the influence of alcohol as physically at risk of attack, as having their femininity put at risk due to their drunken and dishevelled state.

The chapter contends that young women respond to these discourses as part of their practices of intimacy within the context of friendship groups. Lastly, I argue against the notion of young women’s drinking as instrumentally driven (Measham and Brain, 2005) in two respects. Firstly, drinking to excess in dating encounters was represented by some members of the second and third cohorts as pursued for relational reasons, as it was seen to provide a ‘short cut’ to intimacy. Intoxication was not being pursued as part of a hedonistic desire for pleasure. Secondly, I offer a re-interpretation of the practice of “pre-loading” and “pre-drinking” (Hughes et al, 2007; Wells et al, 2009). I contend that spending time together before nights out is part of friendship groups’ rituals for sharing resources and support. While an instrumentalist orientation to intoxication is clearly part of this ritual, such acts of sharing can also be seen as part of friendships groups’ ways of ‘doing’ intimacy.
After defining how the notion of practices of intimacy is being deployed in the chapter, I first look at how women negotiated moral discourses around drinking before and during pregnancy, and while caring for young children. The chapter then explores the meaning and significance of drinking in the context of the different generations of women’s intimate relationships beyond motherhood, first looking at the place of drinking in the formation of heterosexual intimacies, contrasting the narratives of younger and older women in the study, and then at the practices of intimacy undertaken by friendship groups while preparing for or on a night out together. In relation to the empirical data discussed in the chapter, alcohol played a minor role in the domestic lives of most participants from the 1940s cohort, who were raising children in the 1960s and 1970s. I therefore focus on the narratives of members of the 1970s cohort, several of whom became mothers in the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s. While I focus on the narratives of Cara, Kerry, Kim, Jenny, and Kate, discussions of alcohol in relation to pregnancy and childrearing also emerged in most of the other interviews conducted with other members of this cohort, and no major differences with respect to social class were discerned. In relation to the section on heterosexual intimacies, I draw in detail on the narratives of Jill (1940s cohort) and Cara (1970s cohort) because, as with Margaret’s and Emily’s narratives in the previous chapter, these were the clearest examples illustrating the points I wish to make. However, in this case they are generally speaking representative of the wider sample in the sense that ‘courting’ in the 1960s largely involved limited amounts of alcohol, while ‘dating’ and forging romantic connections in the late 1990s and early 2000s quite often did. Lastly, with respect to the empirical data discussed in the section on friendships, the theme of ‘looking after friends’ was most strongly articulated by members of the 1990s cohort, perhaps in part because they were temporally closer to these experiences than members of the 1970s cohort, and concerns about risks to young women on ‘nights out’ have permeated popular consciousness over

43 The children of the women in the first cohort were all over the age of twenty-five and had left home by the time of the interviews. The majority of these women did not discuss drinking regularly during their child-rearing years. Andrea (1960s) reflected in her interview on how she drinks more now when her grandchildren go to bed after she has been looking after them on the occasional weekend than she ever did as a mother looking after her own children. Jane (1940s cohort) also commented on drinking a glass of wine in the evenings of the days that she looks after her grandson, but noted that this was not something she did when her own children were growing up in the 1970s and 1980s.

44 All of the women in the first two cohorts had children, as did all of the women born between 1956 and 1965. Only one woman in the third birth cohort had children. Most of the other women in this cohort planned to eventually become mothers.
the past decade or so.\textsuperscript{45} Natasha’s and Anna’s narratives are generally speaking representative of the wider subsample (i.e. the 1990s cohort); these narratives were selected because they articulated this theme most explicitly and in greater detail.

\textbf{Negotiating moral discourses on alcohol through ‘doing’ intimacy}

This chapter draws on Jamieson’s (2011) notion of “practices of intimacy”, which is derived from Morgan’s (1996, 2004) “family practices” approach to the study of intimacy and personal relationships. For Jamieson, intimacy refers to “the quality of close connection between people and the process of building this quality” (2011, 1.1\textsuperscript{46}). She continues:

\begin{quote}
Although there may be no universal definition, intimate relationships are a type of personal relationships that are subjectively experienced and may also be socially recognized as close. The quality of ‘closeness’ that is indicated by intimacy can be emotional and cognitive, with subjective experiences including a feeling of mutual love, being ‘of like mind’ and special to each other. Closeness may also be physical, bodily intimacy, although an intimate relationship need not be sexual and both bodily and sexual contact can occur without intimacy. This is a broader definition than one which limits intimacy to deep ‘knowing’ of the other person; rather than placing particular emphasis on knowing (Morgan 2009), knowing is just one of a number of practices that may create intimacy (Jamieson, 2011, 1.1).
\end{quote}

In this approach, routine and mundane embodied acts of care are situated among the variety of practices that one may engage in as part of an intimate connection, practices which “enable, generate and sustain a subjective sense of closeness and being attuned and special to each other” (1.2). While practices of intimacy and family practices may ‘overlap’, intimates often include non-kin, such as friends and romantic partners. As we will see below in the discussion of alcohol, pregnancy and childcare, practices of intimacy can re-inscribe inequalities such as those of age, class and gender as well as subvert them and that attention to practices of intimacy can assist the need to explain continuity as well as change (1.2).

\textsuperscript{45} This is not to suggest that such concerns were not aired in the media and other domains in the 1990s or beforehand.
\textsuperscript{46} Articles in Sociological Research Online do not contain page numbers. I have instead indicated the paragraph number provided in the article. This also applies to the quotation from Bancroft (2012).
As part of her ongoing critique of Giddens’ (1992) notion on the “pure relationship”, with its emphasis on mutual self-disclosure and equality between partners (Jamieson, 1998, 1999), Jamieson’s approach highlights that “disclosing intimacy is not the only item in the repertoire of practices of intimacy and that gender inequalities can persist alongside intimacy” (Jamieson, 2011, 1.5). Contrary to Giddens (1992), “intimacy is not solely or perhaps even primarily practiced through self disclosure” (Jamieson, 2011, 2.2) but involves a “wider repertoire of practices”, such as giving, sharing, practical acts of care, and so forth. However, while each of the above practices “tends to produce intimacy” (2.2) in isolation none of these practices are sufficient on their own. To illustrate this point, Jamieson gives the example of two people living in the same prison cell who spend extensive time together and share detailed knowledge of one another but would resist the label of intimates (2.2).

For Jamieson, what is distinctive about sociological investigations of intimacy, as opposed to, for example, psychological approaches, is the focus is on “documenting” through empirical research “a repertoire of practices” that “cumulatively and in combination enable, create and sustain a sense of a close and special quality of a relationship between people” (2.1). The approach developed in this chapter is in keeping with Jamieson’s above description of sociological investigation: through a close reading of participants’ narratives, an interpretation is offered of how the women interviewed “conduct themselves within families, parent-child relationships, couples…and friendships” – or, in other words, relationships that are “experienced as and socially recognised as having a special quality of close connection” (2.1) – when alcohol was seen to impinge or otherwise become a part of doing these relationships.
Avoiding drink during pregnancy and while in charge of young children were recurring themes in the majority of the interviews conducted for this study. The narratives suggest that the women had internalised cultural scripts about the responsibilities involved in providing maternal care, including scripts about risk and pre-maternal care. Indeed, a sense of responsibility and embodied practices of care, in this case avoiding alcohol, involved the unborn as well as children. While only few participants\textsuperscript{47} discussed “pre-conception care”\textsuperscript{48} (Waggoner, 2013) in any depth, quite a few worried about what they had drunk before realising they were pregnant. For example, Cara (1970s cohort) discusses how she went out with friends and drank before she knew she was pregnant:

\begin{quote}
I wouldn’t – I didn’t drink at all [during pregnancy]. Before I knew I was pregnant, I remember going out with some friends […] and I remember having a drink and not feeling myself, thinking, you know, ‘I hope I’m not pregnant’ sort of thing. And then obviously as soon as I found out I was pregnant I was stressing like to the maximum about this, you know, this night out that we’d had and ‘Have I hurt the baby in some way?’ And then ever since then I think I had a glass of champagne at Christmas and that was it…because I didn’t see the point in risking it really.
\end{quote}

After finding out she was pregnant Cara feared that she might have “hurt” the “baby”, which at that point was unlikely. Inspecting and judging one’s actions around the time of conception and holding oneself responsible for potentially harming an unborn infant suggest that the ‘medical gaze’ has been internalised. Consistent with Armstrong’s (2003) argument about discourses around Foetal Alcohol Syndrome,\textsuperscript{49} risks that are of a social nature – that is, the outcome of a complex interplay of socio-structural and environmental factors – have been made the responsibility of individual women. Not surprisingly, these discourses that hold individual woman responsible for the health of the unborn have been internalised by most participants in this study. As Armstrong (2003) argues, women bear responsibility for risks to the unborn in ways that men do not.

\textsuperscript{47} As a further example, see Jackie’s account in Chapter Four of reducing her drinking while she was trying to conceive.

\textsuperscript{48} Pre-conception care refers to the notion that women should prepare their bodies for conception and pregnancy by avoiding alcohol, cigarettes and unhealthy foods that might reduce the likelihood of conception and a healthy pregnancy (Waggoner, 2013).

\textsuperscript{49} Armstrong (2003) provides an overview of epidemiological evidence that demonstrates that the likelihood of harming a foetus by drinking alcohol is influenced by an array of factors, including poor nutrition and exposure to stressors like poverty and poor housing, which is why FAS tends to be concentrated in marginalised populations. Despite this evidence, the risk of developing FAS was universalised to all women by medical scientists and clinicians acting as ‘moral entrepreneurs’.
A number of participants described feeling watched and judged by others while they were pregnant and alcohol was at hand. Kerry (1970s cohort) was 19 years old when she was pregnant with her first child. She describes how her Dad “went absolutely mad” at her when he found her drinking at a party:

It was New Year, and I was pregnant with x. He went absolutely mental at me, me Dad. He said [in angry voice] ‘What are you doing that for? You’re pregnant, blah blah!’ But I didn’t even – I was like 19 years old….At the end of the day you don’t think things like that – he said ‘You’ll be drunk, that baby will be drunk, blah blah!’….It was quite, you know ‘Maybe I shouldn’t have done that’ but obviously it’s not done her any harm. You know what I mean?

Kerry describes how she had worried about her unborn baby’s health and how she felt like she might have failed in her duty of care to her unborn child, but is able to reconcile herself with her actions in hindsight because of her young age and inexperience at the time, and because no damage was done. We can see here how Kerry partially adopts the moral standards used by her father to evaluate her actions, but stops just short of expressing shame. She recognises that drinking while pregnant was “wrong”, as her father so loudly proclaimed, but in her account she recuperates her past self’s moral character by providing explanations for her actions and inflecting them with the observation that her child was born without any issues.

In her interview, Jenny (1970s cohort) reflects on why she abstained from drinking when she was pregnant:

I did feel – both times I was pregnant – that people were very anti seeing a pregnant woman with a drink in their hand. I wasn’t as fussed about it …cuz I think you have to drink quite a bit of alcohol for it to be a problem – not just a small amount – I think a small drink is fine…But people are very, very socially against a pregnant woman with drinks. You do feel everyone looking at you…So I found that a bit uncomfortable…and that’s most of the reason I didn’t drink. […..]
I’ve heard of people having problems with pregnancy with alcohol abuse and problems with the baby but…it really is drinking to excess – it’s not just having a drink. And I think around the time I was pregnant with my first child – five years ago – it seemed that – it became like – the government changed its guidelines…around that time and before my mates said ‘Oh you’re fine having
one drink’ and then went teetotal and said ‘No, you shouldn’t have a drink at all during your pregnancy’….And millions of women beforehand had the occasional drink during their pregnancy and we’re fine. But suddenly because the government guidelines had changed the pressure was on you not to do it.

While she believes that drinking small amounts of alcohol – or, in her words, “just having a drink” - is unlikely to cause harm, when the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) changed its guidelines in 2008 to recommend that pregnant women avoid alcohol altogether, she felt pressure not to have an ‘occasional drink’. Though this was no particular hardship for her, her account of feeling judged at a wedding suggests a measure of resentment:

...if I had the toast I felt awkward...I don’t remember anyone looking at me funny but I felt like people were looking at me...and I know when I’ve...been around friends and heard them say ‘Have you seen people drinking?’ and ‘It’s shocking because they’re pregnant’ and all the rest...so you know that it’s in people’s minds. Even if it’s not you who has experiencing it you know that...certain people think that way and...it’s really hard sort of going out – I wouldn’t go out to a pub if I was pregnant and have a drink – I just wouldn’t do it...

As Armstrong (2003) argues, the risk of causing harm by drinking is universalised by medical discourses to all women. Health advice for pregnant women, like avoiding alcohol, permeates popular consciousness via the media and sets up normative standards that people, often strangers, use to judge pregnant women’s conduct (Armstrong, 2003). While she doesn’t remember anyone actually looking at her, Jenny nevertheless felt the weight of their gaze and avoided drinking in order to meet these normative expectations.

The negative association between drinking alcohol and being a ‘good mother’ – that is, practising motherhood’s embodied acts of care to align with normative expectations – continues long after children are born (see also Emslie et al, 2015, p. 441). Kerry (1970s cohort) states that she believes that “it’s not fair” on the children for them to see her drunk:
I’d never come home drunk to let them see me like that because I think that’s too embarrassing for them – it’s not fair. That’s something I’ve never done […] I might have come home tipsy but I’ve never been in a state where […] we’ve had to prop each other. I’ve never been in that state because I don’t think it’s fair on them to see that.

Kerry draws a distinction between being “drunk” and being “tipsy”: while it is doing her children a disservice or injustice by allowing them to see her out of control, being slightly drunk is not a problem, presumably because she maintains a stronger degree of composure and control in the latter scenario. It is interesting that she describes the act in terms of “fairness” for the children, as though being intoxicated in front of them would cause an imbalance in what they are owed, or what they should be able to expect, from her as a mother. Avoiding intoxication emerges here, and in other participants’ accounts, as part of mother’s wider practices of intimacy toward their children. As emphasised by Jamieson (2011), intimacy is not just a matter of mutual self-disclosure, of saying words, but can also include acts like re-calibrating one’s habits to adjust to the perceived requirements of those in one’s care.

In her interview, Kim (1970s cohort) draws a similar distinction, stating that she “doesn’t mind” her children seeing her “jolly” or “merry”, but rarely drinks beyond that point, either in front of her children or at all. Kim says she avoids drinking to the point of intoxication because it compromises her ability to look after her children the following day, thus attaching a higher value to the time she spends with them than the value she attaches to what would be ‘drinking time’ in the evenings. As Jamieson (2011, 2.3) points out,

in a Euro-North American context intimacy built through spending time together involves a sense of electing to do so and having taken for granted privilege in access to each other’s time perhaps including certain types of time: e.g. ‘undivided’, ‘quality’ and ‘on demand’.
Drawing on Jamieson’s (2011) framework, Kim’s decision to avoid intoxication in order to guard the quality of the time she spends with her children the following day signals a shift in the place of alcohol in her practices of intimacy. Like many instances of participants’ decision making around alcohol, the shift is less about perceptions of external pressures – moral or otherwise – and more about living up to internalised standards of what constitutes good mothering and in engaging in practices of intimacy. While participants are clearly aware that their mothering skills will be judged by others if they are routinely drunk or hung over, their decision making also reflects a desire to do what they think is best for their children. Notably, however, in this example Kim’s partner, the children’s father, feels free to drink as much as he likes, and does not, according to Kim, express concerns about the consequences for his ability to father the following day. Moderating alcohol use does not appear to be part of his repertoire of practices of intimacy. That said, it is important not to read Kim’s reasoning as purely normative in character: getting up early to care for her children is also a practical requirement that places limits on her freedom to use alcohol as she may otherwise have liked to during the evening.\(^{50}\) The gendered division of labour within her household means that her partner does not appear to have to contend with this particular practical requirement.

Kate (1970s cohort) describes a variety of strategies for avoiding letting her children see her drunk, such as arranging for them to stay with relatives or spending the time herself at a friend’s house. Echoing Kerry’s sentiments, she regards it as disrespectful to them to allow them to see her intoxicated, though like Kerry and Kim, ‘tipsiness’ does not breach normative expectations. Notably, Kate does not mention whether similar expectations apply to her children’s father, though as with Kim’s partner, this is arguably also about practical requirements and the gendered division of labour (i.e. in both cases it is the woman/mother who is expected to wake up early to care for the children), rather than simply a straightforward matter of double standards in normative expectations around alcohol use.

\(^{50}\) Emslie et al (2015, p. 442) note that some of their participants also claimed to adjust their drinking to meet the practical requirement of waking up early to care for young children.
While it is undoubtedly the case that many women feel judged for appearing to expose the unborn to harm, and that they are held more accountable and culpable for the health and welfare of the unborn (and indeed even the not-yet-conceived (Waggoner, 2013)) than fathers are, a focus on moral regulation as externally imposed only allows a partial understanding of the narratives assembled for this study. Discourses of risk and maternal responsibility were negotiated in complex ways. As discussed above, participants found creative strategies for avoiding or minimizing instances when their children might see them intoxicated. Moreover, a key limitation of using mother’s ruin as a lens for understanding women’s relationships to alcohol is that it fixes motherhood and its precursors as the focal point in women’s relationships to alcohol, unwittingly reinforcing the notion that women’s value resides in their reproductive and nurturing capacities. From women’s own readings of their lives and their ongoing relationships to alcohol, motherhood is only part of the story. As we will see in the following sections, practices of intimacy are also a useful lens for analysing how drinking is negotiated in the context of other types of intimacies, namely heterosexual romances and friendships.

From strangers to lovers? Alcohol and practices of intimacy in heterosexual relationships

Managing their drinking in the contexts of their connections to the unborn, children and friends demonstrates how women negotiate with discourses of risk and safety. Though such discourses have resonances with how heterosexual relationships are understood in wider popular culture as well as in much of the alcohol and related research literatures, participants in this study tended not to look at ‘courtship’ or ‘dating’ through these lenses. This is perhaps due in part because they were narrating their pasts from the position of hindsight and tended to highlight meeting and developing relationships with men who would go on to play ongoing roles in their lives. Short-lived encounters or relationships, which may have involved alcohol in ‘risky’ or less risky, pleasant or unpleasant ways, received less attention in their narratives. In what follows, I explore the place of alcohol in the process of forging intimate connections. The vast majority of

31 See Foshee et al (2008) and Halpern et al (2009) for two examples of the extensive, multi-disciplinary literature on dating, alcohol and risk, much of which centres on sexual assault and ‘date rape’.
32 See Langhamer (2007) on the nature and history of this distinction.
33 See Demant and Henskiou (2011) for an interesting analysis of how Danish young people interpret ‘risk’ as ‘taking a chance’ in relation to their experiences of drinking, dating and sex.
participants in this study only spoke of romantic connections with men. While I use the term ‘heterosexual’ to avoid universalizing different-sex partnerships in a heteronormative fashion, sexuality and sexual intimacy were not discussed in detail in the interviews, and therefore do not feature in any depth in the following analysis.

For some participants in the second and third cohorts, drinking alcohol was seen as helping to facilitate the forms of mutual self-exposure and self-disclosure that are central to Giddens’ (1992) account of intimacy. However, in some cases this was arguably as much down to the atmosphere of drinking spaces, and the kinds of behaviours enacted as customary in such spaces, than it was to the perceived effects of alcohol. For example, and as discussed below, Cara’s first date with her future partner took place in a loud themed bar near central Manchester. They left the quieter pub near their workplace because it was “dead.” Loud music and being surrounded by other people of a similar age who were drinking contributed to an environment where they felt less likely to be judged and more able to forge a connection, to “expose” and “disclose”, in Giddens’s (1992) terms.

To illuminate and contextualise some of the differences and similarities between how alcohol figured in the cultivation of heterosexual intimacies among the study’s older and younger participants, the following section contrasts the narratives of Jill, who was born in 1947, and Cara, who was born in 1980. Jill’s and Cara’s narratives are both also discussed in Chapter Four, in relation to the place of alcohol in their leisure practices as young women. Here, I would like to focus on how the women socialised with the men they would go on to marry in the earlier months of their courtships. As in Chapter Four’s discussion of learning to drink in the context of young women’s leisure practices and friendships, drinking was largely incidental to the formation and conduct – the making and the doing – of relationships for the older generation interviewed in this study, while it was central to bonding and often seen as enabling ‘shortcuts’ to intimacy by several members of the 1970s and 1990s cohorts. As discussed earlier in the chapter, these two narratives are the most explicit examples of differences in the accounts of those from the 1940s and 1970s cohorts. While they articulate these differences in the most

54 See Langhamer (2007, pp. 179-181) for an intriguing discussion of the class, gender and geographical connotations of the term ‘courting’ in mid-twentieth century England. As Langhamer observes, “the language of courtship was unstable and contested, contingent upon a range of factors including generation, geographical location, social background, and gender” (pp. 179-180).
The formation of heterosexual intimacies: Jill’s and Cara’s stories

Jill was introduced to her husband outside of her workplace on Christmas Day in the mid-1960s by a co-worker and friend, who was dating his brother. Thus, prior to meeting, though he was unknown to her personally, he was already part of her extended network and web of social connections. He was, in that sense, already what Strathern (1988) calls a “social person”: someone with faculties and relations that extend beyond him or herself. Jill was 18 when they met, and they married the following year when she was 19. Meeting one’s future husband through friends, colleagues or through a youth or leisure club at a relatively young age was a common experience among several of the older women interviewed in this study. For example, Belinda (1940s cohort) met her future husband, whom she later divorced, at work when she was a teenager, and Jane (1940s cohort) met her future husband through a youth group.

Perhaps unsurprisingly then, Jill and her partner’s one and only year of courtship consisted of double and group dating with their shared connections, as well as with other close members of their networks:

…we used to go out with his brother and his girlfriend – my friend from the Post Office…and we’d go – there used to be, erm…places where you could see, erm, pop groups. We’d go and see them or, erm, comedians or erm we’d got out – and we’d go out with his Mum and Dad. There used to be a big pub in [name of town] quite close to where we lived and on a Saturday night they had artists on. They had singers and erm comedians on, and we’d go down there on a Saturday and have a drink and erm…with his Mum and Dad and sometimes my Mum and Dad

55 See Langhamer (2013) for a detailed account of meeting partners and the drop in age at marriage in the middle decades of the twentieth century in England.
would come and we’d have a night out. But we still, y’ know, we went dancing. We did the usual things.

Thus, their intimacy was forged within a web of social relationships. Jill was not only getting to know her date, but also his brother and his parents. While pubs were important as a backdrop for their group dating, the drinking itself was mild and measured, at least for the women. When asked what she would drink at the pub, she replies:

Jill: Cherry Bee, that’s what I would drink.

Interviewer: And would you typically - …would you have rounds? So would you - someone went to the bar and bought –

Jill: Oh I never went to the bar! Umph [sound of disbelief], no! No.

Interviewer: [giggles] Would you have felt very funny –

Jill: Oh yeah, I think it would have been frowned upon. Erm…no, I don’t think I ever went to the bar. Susan and Malcolm would be there, so like they’d buy a round of drinks and then we’d buy a round of drinks or whatever. But we had to be back home by eleven o’clock. Umph – no later. My Dad would be there, stood at the gate.

She notes that her father’s surveillance continued after she and her partner were married, leading the couple to buy their first home in a nearby town rather than in the town where her parents lived.

The couple’s courtship was deeply embedded in connections with others. Moreover, codes governed how she and other women were to handle themselves while in the pub. Perhaps most notably she was not to order her own drink at the bar and was only to order certain kinds of drinks. When asked if she ever ordered a pint, she replies:

I’d never order a pint – good God, no! Even now you look at a woman – I see – we’re in the pub on a Wednesday or a Thursday night when we go to the quiz, I see a woman with a pint, I shudder. I just think it’s so…No. It’s manly. And it’s just…it’s just not ladylike.

When asked whether her circle of female friends would have ordered half pints or pints, she states:
They wouldn’t have ordered - oh crikey, no! Bloody heck…no! They would never have had a pint! I think that’s just like from about 2000 or the 1990s that they started having pints. It’s definitely not my age group.

At a few points in her interview, including the excerpts above, Jill positions herself as a representative of her generation, dispelling myths about British women’s drinking to a younger, foreign-born interlocutor. She continually emphasises her own and other women of her generation’s moderation when it comes to drink, and how a code of conduct was not so much externally imposed by men or wider society but rather was the visible manifestation of a virtuous, self-possessed character. After stating that the men would try to “outdrink” each other at the pub, Jill is asked if the women ever tried this. She replies with an emphatic “no” and elaborates:

No, not in my social…set. Definitely not, no. In fact they’d tell each other ‘Did you not think you’ve had a bit too much to drink?’ You know, ‘You’re a bit squiffy!’ [replies in resigned, slightly repentant voice] ‘No, I’m not having anymore’ [laughs]…No, no, definitely not. In fact I don’t really think…I’ve ever seen – at that time …let me think about…I’ve never seen anybody roaring drunk like you do on the television all these youngsters out at weekend. None of my friends – I’ve never seen any of them like that…I might have seen my husband like that on occasion, when he’s maybe had nothing to eat and he’s been out for a drink but, erm, never then. More now, or later on in life, but never when I was a teenager. No.

Jill’s use of the phrase “social…set” is interesting here not only because of the pause with its implied moment of searching for the right word but also because it is suggests there is a group (a ‘set’ or ‘class’) which contained women who would engage in such behaviours, and that Jill and her friend were morally ‘above’ this group. Controlling their drinking in public space is one of the ways their moral superiority is demonstrated and embodied.
Later in her interview, Jill recounts drinking wine at the banquets of a small business owners’ association of which she and her husband were members in the 1980s and 1990s. She does not consider excess drinking in that context as problematic as she does in recalling herself as a young woman at the pub in the 1960s. In her interview, Jill uses a different set of moral standards to evaluate her conduct as a young woman than she uses to make sense of herself as a business owner socialising with peers. Her changing moral filter may in part be the result of her perceptions of what wider society would have thought of her drinking at the time that it occurred: attitudes to women’s drinking had softened by the 1980s (Gutzke, 2014). Moreover, she was older and in her late thirties by the time the banquets were held. Furthermore, socialising with members of the association was narrated as part of her story of her upward social mobility. As we saw in Chapter Five, participation in workplace cultures where alcohol was used to help facilitate bonds between colleagues in some cases resulted in shifts in women’s understandings of what alcohol was for; alcohol came to be seen as a reward for paid work. Like Margaret’s and Emily’s workplaces after or in-work drinking occasions, the association’s social events were mixed with respect to gender, and the association was a domain that is likely to have been previously primarily run by and for men.

Returning to how gender is narrated in her account of herself as young woman courting, when Jill is asked how she knew when to stop drinking in pubs in the 1960s, she replies: “Money. You couldn’t afford it! […] I would probably be able to afford one Cherry Bee and that would be what I’d – I wouldn’t have anymore. And most of us were the same”. Here, as in elsewhere in her narrative, buying drinks and drinking to the point of drunkenness are “manly” pursuits. Respectable feminine conduct in a pub setting – and as such on display – meant that women respected the reputations of their male partners by allowing them to pay for drinks and avoiding the bar area themselves, and by not drinking to excess. While it is perhaps tempting to see these as merely outdated, socially regressive norms, it is also the case that in performing such codes of conduct Jill was showing regard for her partner’s enactment of masculinity. As Jamieson (1998, 1999, 2011) argues in her ongoing critique of Giddens (1992), there is no inherent connection between intimacy and equality between partners.
By contrast, Cara’s account suggests a very different role for alcohol in the forging of romantic connections. Cara met the man she would eventually marry in 2002 when she was 22 and had recently returned to where she had grown up after four years of living away to study at University. Unable to find a permanent job, she was temping for an agency, and worked for several months in an office on the outskirts of Manchester city centre. She gives an account of her first date in the following passage:

…it took him ages to ask me out but I made it blatantly obvious that I really liked him but nothing happened but it was because he was leaving and he didn’t want to be rejected [giggles] so he wanted to wait until he was going to ask me out and obviously I was like “Yes, I’ll go out with you!” so from that point on – he asked me out and I said “yes” – we went for a drink that night. We went into town, and erm got really drunk.

Cara’s mention of rejection is telling. It suggests a charged atmosphere, in which both parties were putting something at risk in going out together for the first time. Drinking on a first date is a way to ensure that if things go badly one can ‘blame’ the alcohol for what in hindsight appear as embarrassing behaviours. She goes on to describe how they first went to a bar in the area near their office “which was awful”, and then caught the tram into Manchester, ending up spending much of the night in a large themed bar known for its shots and loud music. After this, they “went back to his flat”; she giggles a little nervously when she tells me this. When asked if drinking made their first date easier, Cara replies emphatically “Yeah, yeah. A lot easier.”
Becoming drunk together was regarded in hindsight as having achieved its desired effect. Cara notes that the two were “pretty much inseparable from that point on”, spending most evenings and weekends together. They moved into a shared flat within roughly three months of their first date. However, this was not solely the result of their newfound intimacy, but rather was also because neither had been happy with their living arrangements. While alcohol was key to getting to know one another, once Cara and her partner were on intimate terms drinking became less central, and indeed even incidental to their leisure practices. She states that once together they “rarely went out”, except occasionally to restaurants, where they had a drink or two, but were unlikely to drink like they had on their first date: “It was just that new initial meeting where it was all kind of new and scary and exciting [laughs]”. Cara explains that when she’s “in a relationship with someone it’s not really like about going out partying anymore.” In other words, alcohol was viewed as a route into intimacy: once intimacy is achieved it may be dispensed with, or used far more moderately, along the lines of what is conventionally labelled ‘social drinking’. It often amounted to sharing a bottle of wine with a meal.56

However, Cara’s use of alcohol as a shortcut to intimacy is not limited to her first date with a potential romantic partner. Rather, using alcohol to change one’s own emotional and bodily state in order to access an accelerated route to becoming familiar and comfortable with others is a strategy put to work in other contexts. Describing a recent evening meal with a group of mothers from the school her daughter had just started attending, Cara remarks:

On that kind of occasion I would get drunk normally – because I feel uncomfortable…and to feel more relaxed I would definitely, erm, have a drink…erm, so I suppose, yeah, I generally drink when I feel uncomfortable.

Thus, enlisting alcohol to facilitate the creation of a bond is by no means limited to dating encounters, but is a technique also used when getting to know would-be friends. In such cases, we can see how drinking to the point of intoxication is less about the hedonistic pursuit of pleasure, and more about feeling at ease with oneself and others in new relational contexts.

56 See Emslie et al (2015 p. 441) for an account of how some heterosexual couples use alcohol to demarcate their time together.
Drink, friendship and practices of intimacy

As explored in Chapters Four and Five, alcohol played a key role in the formation of friendships between young people and work colleagues respectively for several of the women interviewed for this study. One of the appealing qualities of alcohol was the way it allowed young people to, in Joy’s (1990s cohort) words, “act crazy” where otherwise they would have felt judged. Similarly, drinking together was thought to foster connections between work colleagues that were distinct from ways of relating to one another during workday hours, and to even enable a shift in the identity of these relationships. In Cara’s words, “you felt a bit more at ease with who you were working with. You became more friends rather than work colleagues”. In Chapter Four, I discussed how alcohol was largely absent from the leisure routines of the oldest cohort when they were young women. However, it played a prominent role in the teenaged years of most members of the other cohorts. Friendships with other young women were central to the organisation and experience of drinking. Exercising care for others when drinking was important to being a ‘good friend’. In what follows, I explore the significance of practices of intimacy and care in relation to ‘pre-drinking’ and in connection to how young women looked out for one another on a night out.
According to literature on young people’s drinking practices, over recent years the practice of small groups of friends getting together before going to bars and clubs – a practice known as “pre-drinking” or “pre-loading” (Hughes et al, 2008; Wells et al, 2009) – has become commonplace.\(^\text{57}\) Hughes et al (2008) claim that their survey of 380 young people (aged 18–35) in bars and nightclubs in a large city centre in the North West of England found that 55% of men and 60% of women reported pre-drinking before going to these venues (cited in Wells et al, 2009, p. 5). Wells et al (2009, p. 5) note that pre-drinking serves “social functions” by giving people the opportunity to “socialize with their friends before going out, which is often not possible in contemporary large, crowded bars and clubs.” The authors further point out that “pre-drinking also may serve to enhance group bonding, especially among young males” (ibid). However, instrumentalist reasons for pre-drinking are listed first in their consideration of the motivations for pre-drinking:

An important motive for pre-drinking prior to going to a bar appears to be economic; that is, to avoid paying the high price of drinks […] Intoxication is also a primary motive for pre-drinking […] Pre-drinking may be symptomatic of a ‘new culture of intoxication’ apparent in European and other countries whereby young people drink and use other drugs with the strategic and hedonistic goal of achieving drunkenness and other altered states of consciousness […] (Wells et al, 2009, p. 5).

Thus, while the authors recognise other motivations, their account is on the whole consistent with the emphasis of other accounts which emphasise “determined drunkenness” (Measham and Brain, 2005) and “calculated hedonism” (Szmigin et al, 2008). Pre-drinking emerges in the literature on young people’s drinking practices as an efficient means to achieve an end: the end of intoxication.\(^\text{58}\)

From the point of view of the younger women interviewed for this study the practice of pre-drinking was often about bonding and preparing for the night in terms of their appearance and demeanour. Natasha (1990s cohort) describes the ritual of pre-drinking with a group of close friends before going into town as a 15 year old:

\(^{57}\) See also Bancroft’s (2012) discussion of pre-drinking as a ritualised activity among university students, and Sheehan and Ridge (2001) on ‘binge’ drinking in the lives and friendships of girls and young women in secondary school.

\(^{58}\) See Bancroft (2012) for an example of a more nuanced take on young people’s pre-drinking and intoxication rituals.
We always had the music channel on the TV. [...] [We were] all cramped in one bedroom. [...] It would involve make-up, hair, trying on different outfits, borrowing clothes from each other…accessories, necklaces – that sort of thing. It would just be a whole room of clothes and jewellery and perfumes. It would be like a tart’s boudoir, basically! [laughs]

In Natasha’s narrative, pre-drinking occurs within her friendship group’s wider repertoire of practices of intimacy. Sharing clothes, jewellery and make-up, as well as advice on outfits and presumably other matters, were central to how Natasha and her friends prepared themselves for “going into town” on many Friday and Saturday nights. While alcohol - namely alcopops and bottles of Lambrini - were consumed as part of this process, the ritual was centred on friends pooling resources (i.e. clothes, jewellery, make-up) and supporting each other with advice and encouragement, and on enjoying each other’s company. In other words, in Natasha’s account pre-drinking emerges as part of her friendship group’s practices of intimacy, and is less focussed on drinking for its own sake.

However, there were limits to how much care was exercised toward friends when the quality of one’s own experience of a night out was at stake. As discussed in Chapter Four, gaining access to pubs, bars and clubs as an ‘underage drinker’ on a night out often required advanced planning and careful manoeuvring. In addition to restricting themselves to venues which they knew from past experience they were less likely to be asked to show identification, a further strategy adopted by Natasha and her friends when venturing into venues was to pair up with another friend. Rather than matching taller, older-looking members of the group with shorter, younger-looking ones to maximise the group’s chances of gaining entry as a whole, Natasha describes how they instead tried to pair up with whoever would maximise their individual chances of gaining entry. In other words, it was ‘each woman for herself’. This meant that occasionally some friends would gain entry while others would not. Natasha describes how one friend, who was “quite short”, was routinely refused entry:

We had this one particular friend – she was quite short – and she would always be left behind – bless her – and she’d always get quite upset because no one wanted to go in with her…because they you’d both get ID’d. […] A lot of the time she’d have to go home because she couldn’t get in anywhere.
Natasha expresses guilt and sympathy ("bles her"), suggesting that perhaps in retrospect she and the others had let their friend down, and did not adequately perform the role of friend. Here, we can see how there are limits to the logic and significance of practices of intimacy in shaping the young women’s experiences of alcohol. While friendships were crucial in providing the context for going out (no one reported going out on their own), and in providing support in preparing for a night out, in the case of Natasha’s friendship group gaining entry into venues with most members of the group was prioritised over individual friends who may have been left on their own.

Anna (1990s cohort) describes how she and her friends deployed a similar strategy for gaining access to bars and clubs when there were 16:

We’d plan it from the Monday in school. We’d be thinking about it all week. […]

We started by only going to [name of an area with clubs] because we discovered that we could get in there, so obviously we just kept going there because we’d get in.

In Anna’s account, staying safe, and keeping friends safe, emerge as having been key priorities at the time:

I don’t know, I look back on us and think we were really sensible because we’d know who the idiots were, we’d know to stay out of trouble….I think we were as aware of ourselves as drunk 16 year old girls could be. I think we were quite sensible. We never went off with anybody. We never left each other. […] Guys would approach us all the time and we’d be like ‘No thanks’ – probably a bit mouthier than that because […] we weren’t a timid group of friends, put it that way. […] You’d go ‘No thanks’ and if he persisted ‘She said no. Leave her alone’.

Staying safe, including safe from the unwanted attention of older men, was an important condition of possibility for having ‘fun’ on a night out with friends at this age. Staying safe meant staying together and it also meant speaking assertively to any stranger who might pose a threat to a friend. Here, we can see how exercising care for friends was central to the young women’s enjoyment of a night out.
Conclusion

The practices of intimacy approach (Jamieson, 2011) provides a useful lens for analysing women’s drinking, as their drinking is negotiated in the context of their unfolding relationships to intimates, namely their children, romantic partners, and friends. Rather than interpreting the experiences and narratives on pregnancy and motherhood as being principally oriented to reproducing or resisting dominant gender norms, I have argued that the women’s negotiations with moral discourses are productively regarded as relationally driven. While drinking during pregnancy was regarded by most participants as a ‘red line’, drinking to the point of ‘merriness’ around children was understood as a legitimate compromise.

I have also contended that drinking on dates with a prospective partner to the point of intoxication is not about the ‘determined’ pursuit of hedonistic pleasure, but can be understood instead as a way of becoming familiar with someone more easily than might otherwise be possible. While clear generational differences emerged in how alcohol figured in the courtship or dating practices of women born in the 1940s versus the women born later, in Jill’s case not paying for her drink and avoiding drunkenness were both part of a code of respectable femininity and a means of symbolically displaying regard for her date’s masculinity. In Cara’s case alcohol was an important part of an atmosphere in which she and her partner felt confident to ‘let go’ and to perform a less inhibited presentation of self. In relation to friendships, Natasha’s narrative highlights how preparing for a night out involved exchanges of resources, such as material objects like clothes and jewellery, information and support, and was as much, if not more, about practices of intimacy (sharing, listening, offering advice, etcetera) than it was about drinking alcohol. While Anna’s account, like popular discourses, highlights safety, what was key was that keeping oneself and one’s friends safe was a condition of possibility for a good night out, to maintaining a ‘fun’ atmosphere. Moreover, looking out for friends was part of ongoing exchanges of care and intimacy.
Practices of intimacy are central to the constitution – the making, the unmaking and the remaking – of women’s relationships to alcohol. While popular discourses emphasise heath and personal safety risks, in women’s lives alcohol is largely about sociability, intimacy and pursuing a temporary release from the responsibilities of work and family life (Emslie et al, 2015). Though efforts to morally regulate women’s conduct persist and drinking occurs within an unequal gender order in which women’s drinking is judged differently from men’s, the women interviewed for this study negotiated with this order, finding their paths around and through the pressures they felt and ultimately valuing or devaluing drinking in relation to their wider practices of intimacy.

Having analysed practices of learning, earning and intimacy in women’s drinking biographies, I now turn to the overarching lessons that can be gained from my analysis of the narratives, summarising the main points of the study and discussing its chief limitations.
Chapter Seven: One for the road

Women navigate the contradictory cultural and moral meanings of alcohol in the contexts of their personal relationships. Relationships with friends, colleagues and intimates have been found here to be key sites in which drinking practices are experienced, (re)negotiated, and evaluated. While drinking practices provide a space for ‘doing’, or constructing, gendered, classed and other forms of identities, they are also about developing, sustaining and navigating the pleasures, demands and practical requirements and constraints of different kinds of relationships. By focusing on relationships, this thesis has addressed a gap in the existing literature, where the relational logic of drinking across the life course has largely been neglected. Instead, the women and alcohol and alcohol studies literatures have favoured a focus on the social causes and consequences of alcohol misuse in the case of the former, and on the construction of identities and the instrumental nature of drinking in the night-time economy, principally among young adults, in the case of the latter. By pushing the field into engagement with the relational turn, this thesis has displaced the notion that women’s drinking can be understood solely through instrumentalist orientations, or as shaped principally by an imperative to reproduce dominant gender and class norms.

This chapter provides a synthesis of the key contributions of the thesis, and an evaluation of its limitations. The chapter first outlines two main contributions of the thesis. I begin by exploring its key arguments concerning personal relationships across the life course, and then outline its chief contributions regarding women’s drinking across generations and historical contexts. Lastly, the chapter critically reflects on two of the main gaps and limitations of the research, namely limitations stemming from the use of the life history methods and the lack of ethnic diversity in the study’s sample.

Key contributions of the thesis

‘Doing’ alcohol through personal relationships across the life course

In terms of its theoretical contribution, the thesis extended the “relational turn”, as practised by sociologists of personal life (e.g. Smart, 2007; May, 2011), and the conceptual resources of interactionist sociologists (Becker, 1953; Goffman, 1959, 1967)
to the empirical terrain of women’s day-to-day relationships with alcohol across the life course to address key gaps and limitations of existing approaches. I argued that characterisations of contemporary drinking cultures as “cultures of intoxication” (Measham and Brain, 2005) where the pursuit of “determined drunkenness” (ibid) is a defining feature are not only limited in their purview by a fixation on drinking at a particular point of the life course, but also overstate the instrumental nature of drinking practices. Rather than being principally oriented toward intoxication, I have shown that drinking practices are also crucially directed towards and shaped by relationality. In other words, the process of negotiating one’s ‘sense of self’ as a drinker is “constructed in relationships with others, and in relation to others and to social norms” (May, 2011, p. 7, emphases original). Across Chapters Four to Six of this thesis, we have seen that the uses and meanings of drinking are worked out as part of ‘doing’ connections with others, as well as in response to wider social norms. Relationality conditions how drinking is experienced, negotiated or refused; instrumentalist assumptions about alcohol use miss this point.

In addition to relationality, as discussed in Chapter Two Smart’s (2007) core concepts of memory, biography, and embeddedness have also strongly influenced the methodological and conceptual frameworks of this research. As we saw in Chapter Four, memory can be tied in powerful ways to families of origin. This emerged both in relation to Jane’s account of the first time she tasted alcohol, as well as in Jackie’s orientation toward a presentation of herself as an “active” and “outdoorsy” person who prioritises outdoors pursuits to nights out with the “other mums”; an image of herself as a parent cast in the shadow of her memory of her own parents. Biographical accounts provided in life history interviews demonstrate how women’s lives are embedded in their connections to others. As Smart (2007, p. 45) aptly puts it, certain relationships can become ‘sticky’: “it is hard to shake free from them at an emotional level and their existence can continue to influence our practices and not just our thoughts”. I argue that this idea has particular salience with respect to the analysis advanced in Chapter Five. Early career experiences of drinking with colleagues furnished some of the women who had worked in professional roles with an understanding of alcohol as a reward for work; an understanding that was later brought to bear when they later left paid employment.
In addition to overstating the instrumentality of drinking practices, I have argued that when relationality is invoked in much of the alcohol studies literature this is typically in relation to the construction of identities, with gendered and classed identities having received the most attention. In this respect, existing approaches tend to overemphasise the extent to which drinking is shaped by social norms of gender and class. ‘Doing’ femininity and/or a classed identity is only part of how alcohol is used and what it means. My findings suggest that although women may draw on gender and class scripts when they drink, they are doing far more than complying or resisting social norms around gender and class. Through my analysis of the interview data I have shown how the conceptual contribution of an interactional approach is to highlight how women creatively negotiate barriers to accessing alcohol, such as engaging in “impression management” techniques (Goffman, 1959, 1967) to gain entry into pubs and nightclubs. I have also demonstrated that the contribution of a relational approach is to direct attention to how negotiating with cultural scripts and moral discourses around alcohol occurs within the conditions of possibility and constraint afforded by personal relationships. For example, in the case of cultural scripts, in Chapter Five we saw how Margaret and Emily came to positively value alcohol as a reward for paid and unpaid work following their early career experiences of socialising with colleagues. In the case of moral discourses, we saw how Kim, Kerry and Kate discussed organising their drinking to meet the practical requirements of caring for young children.

In terms of the overall empirical contribution, the thesis has argued that personal relationships provide contexts for negotiating how alcohol is used and what it means, and that the relative significance of such relationships can shift as women progress through the life course. In Chapter Four, drawing on concepts from the sociologies of personal life and families, I contended that intergenerational family stories furnished some participants with narrative orientations toward the negative aspects and potentially addictive nature of alcohol. Beginning with Misztal’s (2003) insight that families are “mnemonic communities”, the relational context of the family emerged as particularly important for those participants who had “inherited” narratives (McNay, 2009), which came in the form of family stories (Thompson, 2005) about alcoholic relatives, usually grandparents. They expressed empathetic orientations toward the situations of their parents as children, and had in some cases, as McNay (2009) suggests, taken on parents’ childhood memories as dimensions of their own experiences. The inherited narratives
were also evaluative frameworks for assessing the uses and meanings of alcohol. These frameworks held that alcohol was something to be carefully managed, and avoided at specific times, particularly the daytime. Most of these participants were among the study’s lightest drinkers, in part because they had adopted the idea that drinking is a morally questionable practice.

Most participants first encountered alcohol during family rituals. Christmas and other family celebrations provided a ‘moral holiday’ from the normative expectation that alcohol is not to be consumed in the daytime, and that children are prohibited from drinking it. The sensory connections established to alcohol during family rituals were unlike the connections developed in adolescence or subsequent years; a taste of a relative’s drink was not about chasing independence, as it could be in adolescence, but rather about joining in with family celebrations. In narrating memories of sensations like the scent of cherry brandy and the chalky taste of advocaat participants were momentarily transported back to their childhoods. Memories of first sips were often narrated with flashes of emotion, usually joy but in at least one case strong feelings of sadness because the people remembered were no longer living. Recalling tastes and scents reconnected participants not only to particular moments of the past. Connections to parents, siblings, and other relatives are what gave memories of first sips of alcohol their emotive power.

In Chapter Four, I also extended Becker’s (1953) arguments concerning the importance of relational contexts to how one learns to smoke marijuana to how drinking is learned in adolescence. Friendships groups are crucial in providing contexts for early experiences with alcohol, and are productively regarded as a part of how young people ‘do’ friendship. Here, drinking was often oriented toward intoxication. However, the pursuit of hedonistic pleasure was not so much an end in itself but an expression of a desire to experience the autonomy of an older teenager, to feel “19 not 15”, as one participant put it. Drinking was also part of a wider ritual of group bonding, a point I took up further in Chapter Six. Exchanges of resources, like advice and material objects, and watching out for friends on a night out, are as much acts of friendship as they are about drinking. By focussing on how on pre-drinking rituals are oriented toward intoxication (Hughes et al, 2007; Wells et al, 2009), we miss how these practices are also relationally driven. Natasha’s narrative demonstrated that preparing for a night out can also centre on the
sharing of resources, like advice and material objects. Anna’s narrative showed how looking after friends on a night out is a one of the ways in which some young women mitigate risks posed by the undesired attention of older men.

As discussed in Chapter Five, colleague relationships provided a context in which some of the women who had worked in professional roles came to think of themselves as ‘earning’ a drink. In their narratives, Margaret and Emily discussed how their early career experiences of socialising with colleagues over alcohol were key to relationships they developed in the workplace; relationships that had important consequences for the progression of their careers in their respective industries. Through in-work drinking or trips to the pub with colleagues, they became immersed in a milieu that positioned alcohol as a reward for paid work. I found that this reading of alcohol’s cultural meaning was not shared by working class participants in the second cohort (n=4).

In Chapter Six, relationships with intimates were also found to be critical in shaping and providing a context for how women negotiated the contradictory cultural and moral meanings of alcohol. Some participants were reflective in response to moral discourses about drinking in pregnancy. On the one hand, they recognised that guidelines calling for total abstention from drinking were not scientifically sound, while on the other hand they largely chose to abstain to avoid any risk of harm and to comply with social expectations. I showed that they adjusted their drinking routines for relational and practical reasons, in order to meet the requirements of waking up early in the morning, and so forth. For Kim, this meant drinking far less, while for others (e.g. Kate) it meant advanced planning so that their children did not see them drunk. In short, women navigated heightened normative expectations and the practical requirements of caring for children in a variety of ways, such as avoiding or minimizing drunkenness, or ensuring children were looked after by others.

For some of the women from the 1970s and 1990s cohorts, alcohol was enlisted to provide a ‘short cut’ to intimacy with prospective male partners. Drinking alcohol was seen as helping to facilitate the forms of mutual self-exposure and self-disclosure that are central to Giddens’ (1992) account of intimacy. In some cases this was arguably as much down to the atmosphere of drinking spaces, and the kinds of behaviours enacted as customary in such spaces, than it was to the perceived effects of alcohol. Loud music
and being surrounded by other people of a similar age who are drinking contributes to an environment where the young women and their dates felt less likely to be judged and more able to forge a connection, to “expose” and “disclose”, in Giddens’s (1992) terms. Drinking to excess in such encounters also meant that if actions were retrospectively regarded at some later point as embarrassing the prospective partners could ‘blame’ the alcohol. However, once a level of emotional and sexual intimacy was established, drinking often became less of a focal point in the leisure practices of these couples. Though in most cases the couples continued to drink together, the perceived imperative to drink to the point of intoxication was no longer a factor. While women from the first cohort sometimes drank at pubs or in other settings in the context of their ‘courting’, this was narrated as mild drinking that was not intended to lead to intoxication. I argue that acts like allowing a date to pay for one’s drink and order drinks from the bar on one’s behalf can be seen as simultaneously demonstrating a compliance with gendered codes of conduct in the pub, and also about showing a regard for the date’s displays of masculinity.

In sum, negotiating the contradictory meanings of alcohol in British society is a process that occurs in the context of navigating the pleasures, demands and practical requirements of relationships with friends, colleagues and intimates. The life course is the backdrop against which changes in relationships to alcohol play out. Over the span of the life course, girls and women enter into new relationships which often contain novel possibilities for encountering alcohol in different ways. While childhood was a time of relatively limited exposure to alcohol for most participants beyond family rituals, for those born after 1960 adolescence was a time of experimentation with alcohol in the relational context of friendship groups. Depending on the nature of their work, relationships with colleagues in professional settings provided a context of learning that paid labour could mean that one had ‘earned’ a drink. It is not coincidence that it was principally in the early years of their professional careers that the women socialised with colleagues outside of work in pubs and bars: the practical requirements of ‘settling down’ and starting a family, including adjusting how they spent leisure time and their incomes, meant that such opportunities were in practice largely limited to women without long-term partners or children. The thesis has demonstrated that experiences with alcohol shift as women progress through the life course, and these experiences are mediated in important ways by their personal relationships. The relative significance of personal
relationships can shift over the life course, with consequences for how alcohol is approached.

I will now explore the contributions of the thesis in relation to the theme of generational and socio-historical changes.

*Generational and socio-historical changes in how women use and make sense of alcohol across the life course*

Rather than focusing on women’s relationships at a fixed moment of historical time, this thesis has sought to animate women’s negotiations with alcohol by exploring these across shifting socio-historical contexts as well as biographies. Women have complex personal and collective histories with alcohol; multiple meanings accrue over historical, as well as over biographical, time. In what follows, I draw out key generational differences with respect to practices of learning, earning and intimacy across women’s drinking biographies, and point to the wider changes in socio-historical context suggested by these generational divergences.

As I explored in Chapter Four, women in the first cohort came of age at a time when alcohol was generally speaking less available, and women’s drinking in public was less socially acceptable (Waterson, 2000; Gutzke, 2014). Not surprisingly then, this collective, socio-historical context has left its imprint on the women’s drinking biographies. When participants from the first cohort, such as Jill and Ellen, discussed using pubs from the age of 16 onwards, they tended to be in the company of men. In narrating her first time and one of the only times she could remember going into a pub at the age of 16 with a group of female colleagues, Jill jokingly remarked that the women had “corrupted” her. While the comment was made in jest, other elements of her narrative, which are discussed in Chapter Four, suggested a moral evaluation of public drinking as something to be controlled and monitored. As I have shown, these gendered ways of evaluating women’s public drinking were for most part far less evident in the narratives of women born after 1960, the majority of whom actively sought opportunities to drink with friends and prospective male partners.
By contrast, encountering alcohol in adolescence was an almost universal experience for women in the second and third birth cohorts. As I showed in Chapter Four, for several of these women, as 14 and 15 year old girls on the threshold of entry into young adulthood, considerable effort was invested in procuring fake identification and working up a presentation of self through styling hair, applying make-up and appropriating the fashion choices of young adult women in order to gain entry into pubs and night clubs. Here, a chief attraction was the atmosphere of such places, as well as the alcohol itself. Alcohol was also sought from parents’ cupboards and off-licenses, often for consumption in parks and alleyways or at the house of a friend with ‘easy going’ parents. In these accounts, drinking was narrated as pleasurable and as enabling one to act ‘silly’ without fear of judgement. Accessing alcohol was understood as a means of facilitating the transition into early young adulthood. Attempts to access alcohol and the spaces in which it is was consumed were thus simultaneously attempts to temporarily access the perceived glamour, sophistication and independence associated with being 19.

Chapter Five contributed the finding that, in line with Langhamer’s (2003) arguments, alcohol was often viewed as a reward for paid and unpaid labour. Here again, generational differences, as well as class differences, were key to who had access to post-work socialising over alcohol. Speaking about when she worked in a city centre office in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the study’s oldest participant, Mary, stated: “It wasn’t done. Especially if you were married. The men may have gone out after work to the pub, but we didn’t”. No other member of the first cohort could remember socialising with colleagues over alcohol until later on in their careers, after they had returned to work following starting a family. As I discussed in Chapter Five, professional women’s life-stage specific access to post-work drinking cultures, which appears to have started in the decades following the War, may help to explain why such women drink on average more than women who do not work in professional roles (Plant, 2008).

In relation to how practices of intimacy shape women’s drinking biographies across generations, members of the first cohort did not narrate having drunk regularly as mothers of young children. As Andrea (1960s cohort) and Jane (1940s cohort) both commented, they drink more now after they have looked after their grandchildren for the day they ever did as mothers of young children. While women in the second cohort minimised and side-stepped drunkenness, alcohol appears to be more implicated in the
‘doing’ of motherhood now than it was for previous generations (see also Emslie et al, 2015). It also appears to be more implicated in the conduct of heterosexual intimacies and female friendships, as I also showed in Chapter Six.

Tracing changes across generations also means tracing wider changes across the historical contexts in which members of different generations navigated the life course. As I outlined in Chapter Two, there is limited research on women’s drinking in the post-war period, and most of the research that does exist primarily focusses on drinking in licensed premises (i.e. Hey, 1986; Gutzke, 2014). While Langhamer (2003, p. 437) suggestively states toward the end of her article on women’s drinking in pubs on The Home Front in the Second World War that in

the 1960s and 1970s the public house became a mainstay for the young in their leisure hours and began to make real and lasting inroads into young women’s cultural lives,

Gutzke (2014, p. 64) argues the opposite about the post-war period. He further claims that the unwelcoming atmosphere of most post-war pubs and sexist advertising by breweries meant that most women avoided the pub. While this study is not generalizable to population, on the whole the findings support Gutzke’s claim that women’s alcohol use was far more limited in the 1950s and 1960s than it was subsequent decades, and his identification of the mid 1970s as a turning point in the social accessibility and the increased opportunities for women’s drinking in licensed premises. As I showed in Chapter Four, the narratives of women born after 1960 about pub-going in the mid 1970s contribute further evidence that the mid 1970s may have marked a turning point in pub culture in terms of how young women were received and how they experienced the atmosphere.

**Critical reflections on the study’s limitations and gaps**

This study used life history interviews to assemble narratives about the place of alcohol in participants’ everyday lives, starting with childhood and ending with the present. As discussed in Chapter Three, photos and objects were used in a subsample of interviews to anchor and enrich the accounts provided. There are a few limitations associated with life history methodology that are worth considering. Narratives are partial and selective accounts of the past (or present). They rely on human memory, which is equally partial
and selective. The partial and selective nature of narrative and memory has particular implications for a topic as morally charged as drinking alcohol. In British society, drinking alone and drinking in the daytime can be regarded with suspicion, as though the drinker in question may be an alcoholic. The application of these ‘rules’ varies with context; they generally do not apply to ‘special’ circumstances, such as holidays and celebrations like Christmas.

As I discuss in Chapter Three, attempts were made to put participants at ease by establishing an open, conversational rapport. Participants understood that I was not a health researcher, and was not interested in passing judgement on their drinking practices. The majority of participants responded favourably to these efforts, and were notably forthcoming and open about their experiences. Nevertheless, it is worth reflecting on the fact that accounts of lone drinking were relatively rare in the interviews, and emerged only in a few circumstances, such as when two participants from the first cohort adopted a confessional tone and discussed a time of their lives when they believe in hindsight their alcohol use had been problematic, and among those women who had worked in professional roles and who described having ‘earned’ a drink at home in the evening. In the latter case, drinking alone was not narrated as problematic. Similarly, few people discussed routinely drinking in the daytime, except when narrating drinking with colleagues at lunchtime among participants who had worked in professional roles.

Thus, while stories of drunkenness were common among the second and third cohorts, accounts of what are generally seen as problematic forms of drinking were rare. This is likely to be for two reasons: firstly, they are actually - for the most part - rare in the women’s everyday lives; and secondly, they were further minimised as a part of the women’s attempts to narrate versions of reality that are intelligible and acceptable to themselves and their interlocutors (Summerfield, 2004; Tinkler, 2013). As Lader and Goddard (2006) have demonstrated, people routinely under-report their drinking in survey research. This is more likely to be the case with socially stigmatised forms of drinking. While this was not a study of how much women drink, and therefore the inaccuracies of self-reporting with respect to the amount of alcohol consumed are of

59 Jackie’s account in Chapter Four of compensating herself with alcohol on weekends when she did not have anyone to go out at particular points in her late twenties and thirties is a third and final example.

60 As previously discussed, public displays of drunkenness were generally not seen as shameful or morally problematic among members of the second and third cohorts.
limited concern, the under-reporting of lone drinking is a key limitation in this research. One of the participants who did discuss drinking alone implied through her demeanour and the way she spoke about this time in her life that it was a source of shame. Other participants similarly characterised the practice of drinking alone (by others) as problematic in their narratives. In short, if drinking alone is seen by some participants and wider society as a potential sign of a drinking problem, then it is logical to think that it was under-reported in this study. This is not solely a methodological limitation, but rather strikes at the heart of the thesis’ central argument: negotiating relationships to alcohol likely also occurs outside of connections with others as well as within the contexts such connections provide. This point aside, the thesis has not sought to give an exhaustive account, as though women’s relationships to alcohol are finite in an empirical sense and knowable in their entirety. Nonetheless, drinking alone across the life course and generations, and how such experiences contribute to wider negotiations with the contradictory meanings of alcohol, is a topic worthy of further investigation; investigations that will likely require a different set of methods to the ones used in this study.61

Secondly, this study does not address how ethnicity might shape negotiations around alcohol. As mentioned in Chapter Three, only one participant identified as belonging to an ethnic minority category (i.e. mixed race). As Serrant (2015) demonstrates in her research on the experiences of Black Caribbean women with alcohol both in the Caribbean and in the UK, cultural backgrounds are important in informing approaches to alcohol. Yet, in most alcohol research these women’s experiences are “rendered invisible or silenced by authors resisting making any comment or conclusions on Caribbean perspectives due to small sample size” (p. 127). I regret that this study did not allow opportunities for exploring the experiences and perspectives of ethnic minority women. Reading Serrant’s chapter after fieldwork had been completed highlighted the importance of including such voices in future research.

61 Given their solitary nature, diary methods may offer a potentially productive starting point for such an investigation.
Conclusion: one for the road

Women ‘do’ alcohol in and through their personal relationships. Cultural scripts and moral discourses have distinct meanings and implications for women at different points of the life course, and they shift over time. In other words, the cultural meanings of alcohol and ways of negotiating these meanings in practice shift biographically and historically. Women navigate contradictory cultural scripts and moral discourses that on the one hand celebrate drinking and on the other hand continue to position women as ‘maidens at risk’ and ‘mothers in ruin’ in the contexts of their connections to friends, colleagues and intimates. The exchanges of knowledge, intimacy and care, as well as the practical requirements and constraints, encountered through the ‘doing’ of personal relationships are central to the making, remaking and unmaking of approaches to alcohol over the life course.
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