An Exploration of the Social Conditions and Cultural Meanings of Light and Non-Drinking Practices in a Sample of Young Australians

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Contents

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Statement of Authorship

This thesis includes work by the author that has been published or accepted for publication as described in the text. Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no other material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

Gabriel Caluzzi

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Abstract

Since the turn of the millennium, rates of drinking among young people in Australia have steadily declined. More young Australians are delaying their drinking, abstaining, or drinking proportionately less than previous generations. This has occurred alongside rapid and significant social change, which may be linked to shifts in the cultural meanings of alcohol.

Recent empirical research examining declines in young people's drinking has predominantly used quantitative methods, focusing on changes in parenting styles, shifts in digital technology use and leisure, policy changes, demographic shifts, and changing social norms. However, there is little qualitative research exploring these factors, their interconnectedness, and the broader social shifts that might contribute to changing trends in young people's drinking. Informed by a social generations approach, the aim of this research was to explore the cultural meanings and practices of light and non-drinking among young people in the context of contemporary social conditions.

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 50 abstainers and light drinkers aged between 16-19 years from in and around Melbourne, Australia. Interviews explored these young people's social worlds, their values and attitudes, and the meanings they ascribed to their light and non-drinking practices. This interview data was then interpreted into several overarching analytical themes that became the basis for four publications.

The study identifies that social pressures and tensions in the lives of these young people gave alcohol use and intoxication various, sometimes contradictory, meanings. These meanings were explored across the four publications, which examined the role of risk and choice, health and wellbeing, time management, and notions of pleasure in relation to alcohol. This thesis provides insight into the complexity of these young people's light and non-drinking practices, suggesting the cultural position of alcohol in the lives of young non-drinkers and abstainers may usefully be understood in the context of broader social shifts.

Declaration for Thesis Based or Partially Based on Conjointly Published or Unpublished Work

This thesis includes 4 original papers published in peer-reviewed journals. The ideas, development and writing up of all the papers in this thesis were the principal responsibility of myself, the candidate, working within the School of Psychology and Public Health under the supervision of Dr Amy Pennay, Dr Sarah MacLean and Dr Michael Livingston. The inclusion of the co-authors reflects the fact that the work came from active collaboration between researchers and acknowledges input into team-based research.

The undersigned hereby certify that:

1. The author contributions statements listed within this thesis correctly reflect the nature and extent of the candidate's contribution, and the nature of the contribution of each of the co-authors;

2. The co-authors listed below meet the criteria for authorship in that they have participated in the conception, execution, or interpretation, of at least that part of the publication in their field of expertise;

3. They take public responsibility for their part of the publication, except for the responsible author who accepts overall responsibility for the publication;

4. There are no other authors of the publication according to these criteria; and

5. Potential conflicts of interest have been disclosed to (a) granting bodies, (b) the editor or publisher of journals or other publications, and (c) the head of the responsible academic unit.

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Terminology

Standard Drink:

According to the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council, a standard drink contains 10 grams of pure alcohol.

Single Occasion Risky Drinking:

For the purposes of this thesis, single occasion risky drinking was defined as more than four standard drinks on an occasion (in line with the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines at the time of the study).

Lifetime Risky Drinking:

For the purposes of this thesis, lifetime risky drinking was defined as more than two standard drinks per day (in line with the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines at the time of the study).

Abbreviations

ABS

Australian Bureau of Statistics

ESPAD

European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs

HBSC

Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Study

NDSHS

National Drug Strategy Household Survey

NHMRC

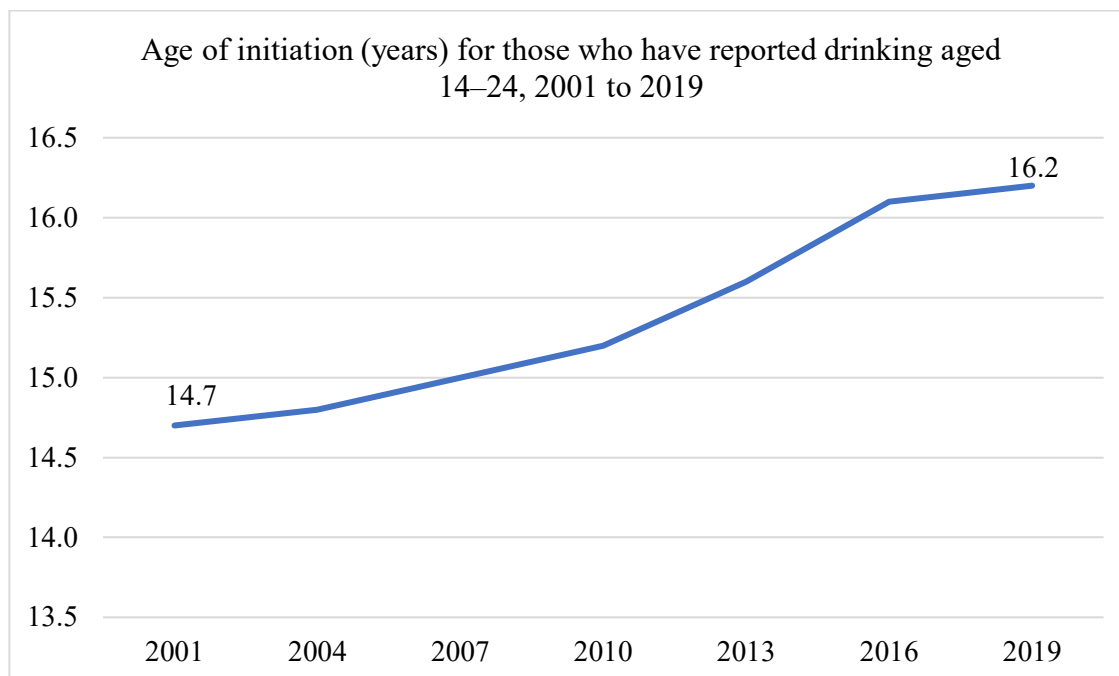National Health and Medical Research Council

Chapter 1

Introduction

Population-level data points to more young Australians abstaining from alcohol, delaying drinking and drinking significantly less alcohol since the turn of the millennium (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020). These declining trends in young people's drinking have been clear and consistent for nearly 20 years. While quantitative studies have identified some potential reasons for this decline, most literature has lacked any kind of big-picture examination that incorporates other changes to young people's lives. This is important because there have been significant social changes that have impacted the lives of young people since the start of the millennium. Indeed, changing drinking practices might reflect other social, cultural, technological and economic changes that influence the values and meanings associated with alcohol. In the context of rapid social change during the 21st century, young people may be finding new ways to navigate their lives with or without alcohol. Therefore, this thesis explores how contemporary social conditions might influence changing cultural meanings associated with light and non-drinking among a sample of young Australians.

Young people's alcohol consumption peaked in the early-2000s in Australia, but has declined markedly since then (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020). There has been a growing trend toward young people never having consumed alcohol and commencing alcohol consumption at a later age, along with declines in regular drinking and risky drinking. The average age of alcohol initiation (first full drink) among 14-24-year-olds increased from 14.7 in 2001 to 16.2 in 2019 (fig. 1, next page). The number of young people aged 14–19 abstaining from alcohol rose from 25% in 2001 to 56% in 2019, while the number of 14–19 year-olds drinking at single occasion risky drinking levels at least monthly dropped from 40% in 2001 to 20% in 2019 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020) (fig. 2, next page).

These findings draw mostly on National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) data, a representative population sample of more than 20,000 Australians undertaken every three years. Similar results have been found across other national population surveys (White and Williams 2016, Toumbourou, Rowland et al. 2018). Although it is important to note that many young Australians continue to drink heavily and exceed Australia's National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) guidelines for single occasion risky drinking, population data highlights substantial declines in young people's drinking in every measure since these declines began in the early 2000s.

Figure 1.

Age of initiation (years) for those who have reported drinking aged 14–24, 2001 to 2019

Source: NDSHS Data (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020)

Figure 2.

Abstention, single occasion risky drinking and lifetime risky drinking, 14-19 year-olds, 2001-2019 (percent)
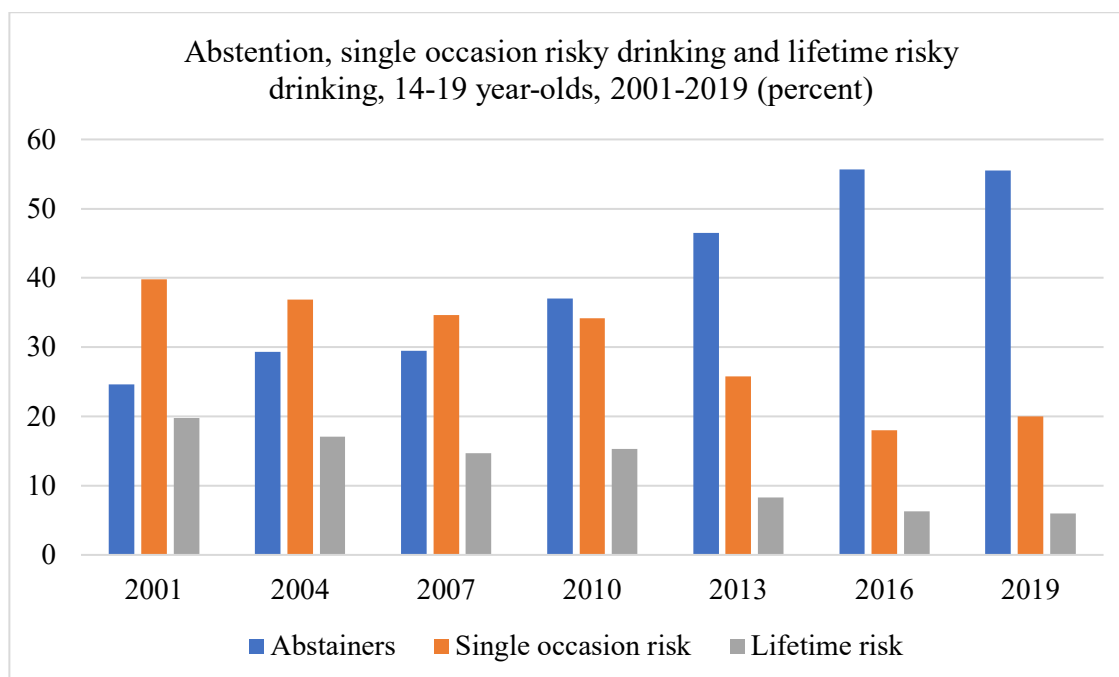
Source: NDSHS Data (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020)

These changes in young people's drinking are particularly notable as they have not been mirrored by an overall reduction in drinking for the general population (White and Williams 2016, Toumbourou, Rowland et al. 2018, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020). Trends in drinking among those aged 30 and over have remained relatively stable. Indeed, some sub-populations, such as those aged in their 50s and 60s have increased their drinking over the same period (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020).

Declining trends in young people's drinking appear to have occurred across cultural, socio-economic and demographic subgroups, across geographic regions, and do not appear to have been driven by increased substitution with other drugs (Livingston 2014, Pennay, Livingston et al. 2015, Livingston, Callinan et al. 2018, Toumbourou, Rowland et al. 2018). These broad trends point towards a generational shift in the way young people use and view alcohol.

These trends have also been mirrored in a number of other high-income countries in North America and Europe. For example, the U.S. has seen a significant decline in young people's drinking since 1999, Northern Europe since the early 2000s, and Western Europe from the mid-2000s (Vashishtha, Pennay et al. 2020). A growing number of studies from these countries (reviewed in detail in Chapter 3) have looked for explanations for these declining trends in young people's drinking with respect to changing parenting practices, leisure and technology, alcohol policies, demographic shifts, health and education, social norms, and drug substitution (Bhattacharya 2016, Pape, Rossow et al. 2018, Vashishtha, Livingston et al. 2019). However, the role of, and interrelationships between these factors and how they might be influencing drinking trends remains unclear.

Thus, the aim of this thesis is to qualitatively investigate the socio-cultural and contextual influences shaping the (non) drinking practices of a sample of light and non-drinking young Australians. More broadly, this thesis also aims to understand cultural attitudes towards alcohol for young light and non-drinkers in the context of significant social changes occurring over the last 20 years. This will help to better understand how these developments in young people's drinking practices relate to changing social conditions. This thesis also aims to shed light on the lived experiences of light and non-drinking young people in order to provide context and meanings to their drinking and/or non-drinking practices.

The research presented in this thesis is interdisciplinary. It uses approaches from public health, sociology, and a number of sub-disciplines including critical public health, health sociology, sociology of youth and social psychology. Different chapters present different approaches and frameworks, but ultimately the thesis is tied together by a 'social generations' framework (Mannheim 1952 [1927]). A social generations approach recognises the need to analyse the social, cultural, economic, environmental and political conditions young people live within, while also acknowledging the important role that young people themselves play in producing and shaping social change (Furlong, Woodman et al. 2011). In recognition of this, different chapters in the

thesis emphasise different structural, cultural, social and individual factors within the broader context of 21ˢᵗ century Australia. This generational approach will provide a way to understand how contemporary social conditions may have played a role in shaping young people's practices, including their drinking. Alongside a diverse literature around alcohol use and young people, this approach will be the basis for exploring the lives and practices of a sample of light and non-drinkers.

In terms of scope, this thesis forms part of a broader project examining declines in young people's drinking through mixed methods research. However, the contents of this thesis pertain solely to the qualitative component of the project. I also note that young people's drinking has declined across a number of age brackets ranging from young people in their early teenage years through to cohorts in their mid-late twenties. While I extrapolate as to how and why drinking practices may have changed for young people in general, the specific focus of this thesis is on young people aged 16-19-years old. As noted above, declining trends in young people's drinking have also occurred domestically and in a number of Western countries internationally (Vashishtha, Pennay et al. 2020). Although the data collected as part of this project may inform analyses for cross-national comparative research, the focus here is on young people in Victoria, Australia, rather than on comparing these young people with those from different countries. Indeed, this thesis is based on Australian data, and all research findings and implications should be understood within an Australian context.

This thesis has been structured as a thesis with publications. As such, the empirical chapters draw on different theories and have different focus areas. These chapters are in various stages of publication: three have been published and one is in press at the time of submitting this thesis. As each publication is its own entity and each chapter draws on distinct literature, references have been included at the end of each chapter. A bibliography of all these references can also be found at the end of the thesis.

Chapter 2 provides a discussion of social generations theory and how it has been used as an overarching way to tie together the theories and concepts central to this thesis. I highlight some of the social, technological, economic and cultural features that distinguish contemporary young people from previous generations, and how these might influence trends in alcohol use. This chapter uses excerpts and expands on concepts previously published as a book chapter titled 'Alcohol, Young Adults and the New Millennium: Changing Meanings in a Changing Social Climate' (see **Appendices**).

Chapter 3 presents a review of recent empirical literature on declining trends in young people's drinking. This chapter examines both quantitative and qualitative research from the last 10 years relating to declines in young people's drinking. It highlights key areas of research and some of the gaps in the literature.

Chapter 4 describes the methods for the thesis, including details about the sample, recruitment, data collection, interview design, analysis, ethical considerations and limitations of the study design. It also describes the epistemological and theoretical perspectives underpinning the research, and some reflections of my own experiences as a researcher.

Chapter 5 is a published paper focusing on the tensions between structure and agency, and how this influences young people's thinking around alcohol. This is presented in a paper co-authored by Amy Pennay and Sarah MacLean titled "Reflexive habitus and the new obligation of choice: understanding young people's light drinking and alcohol abstinence".

Chapter 6 focuses on the imperative for young people to be healthy, including different forms of physical, mental and social wellbeing, and how these different understandings of health influence perceptions of alcohol. This is presented in a paper co-authored by Amy Pennay, Michael Livingston and Sarah MacLean titled "*'No one associates alcohol with being in good health':* Health and wellbeing as imperatives to manage alcohol use for young people".

Chapter 7 takes a temporal analysis of how young people use and manage their free time, and by extension, how this may limit their ability to organise and attend drinking events. This is presented in a paper co-authored by Amy Pennay, Sarah MacLean and Dan Woodman titled "No time for a 'time out'? Managing time around (non)drinking".

Chapter 8 focuses on drinking environments and how young light and non-drinkers are able to reconfigure their light and non-drinking practices positively in these contexts. This is presented in a paper co-authored by Sarah MacLean and Amy Pennay titled "Re-configured pleasures: How young people feel good through abstaining or moderating their drinking".

Chapter 9 is a discussion that draws on my findings to highlight some of the key themes of the thesis, tying them in to my social generations approach. I conclude with implications of this thesis, areas for future research, and some final comments on the study.

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Chapter 2

Young People in the New Millennium: Situating Young People Within a Social Generations Perspective

It is important to situate young people's current drinking practices within the context of post-millennial developments. Therefore, I use this chapter to focus on the social conditions of contemporary young people, which I argue are integral to understanding other changes like trends in alcohol consumption in proceeding chapters. I discuss these changes using a social generations perspective, an approach that situates young people within the context of 21st century social and economic conditions. I also introduce sociological theories and concepts relevant to the thesis.

What do we mean when we talk about 'Youth' and 'Young People'?

As Threadgold (2020) notes "when we talk about 'youth' or 'young people' sometimes we seem to be referring to different phenomena, depending upon our political interests, theoretical perspectives and research methods" (p.4-5). Various terminology such as youth, adolescence, young people and young adulthood attempt to bring together loose concepts constituted by a range of biological, psychological, cultural and social factors. Indeed, age itself is constructed through competing discourses around economics, health, education and policy (Wyn and Woodman 2006). Discourses are ways of communicating ideas or sentiments, and analysing discourses can reveal how meanings are constructed on particular topics or concepts (Potter and Wetherell 2002). Analysing the language of popular media, educational systems, political actors, and everyday life can reveal how and why certain meanings are constructed. Thus, it is important to recognise which discourses are being enacted when discussing 'youth' and 'young people', and the various contexts that have shaped these discourses. For example, developmental models of 'youth' in neuroscience and psychology tend to depict youth as a particularly risk-prone and impulsive life stage, which has implications for how policies and education practices are shaped (Kelly 2012).

Youth has also often been defined and studied as a transitional period, a stage in part of the longer life course (Woodman and Wyn 2013). In many political and symbolic aspects, the end of secondary school education and turning 18 years of age is still considered the end of this stage (Woodman and Wyn 2013, France 2017). However, youth can also be a reflection of broader social and economic conditions. For example, changes in the labour market have meant that traditional transitions through education, work, family formation and home ownership have become protracted over a longer period. Therefore, in recognition that 'youth' is a term that has various psychological, biological and political connotations constructed alongside notions of normative transitions, throughout this thesis I prefer to use the term 'young people'. Indeed, my focus on being young as a site of struggle between normative transitions and less tangible

understandings of 'independence' and 'adulthood' is an important feature of this research, and one of the reasons I have chosen to focus on those close to age 18 (the symbolic age of adulthood). As I detail next, I also position this notion of 'young people' as relative to other societal conditions, such as precarious labour markets and political and social change.

A Social Generations Perspective

In this thesis I draw on a range of theoretical perspectives from sociological scholars to frame my findings. As an overarching theory that draws my work together, I suggest that social generations theory (Mannheim 1952 [1927]) is useful for understanding the shifting social and cultural position of alcohol for young people. Karl Mannheim's (1952 [1927]) theory of social generations states that generations are not simply characterised by belonging to a particular birth cohort, but are marked by shared sites of experiences and social conditions that influence values and actions, in turn forming new methods of self-expression and social movements. This makes the notion of social generations a valuable tool for understanding social phenomena, and how social generations can be understood as collective agents of change. For example, today's young people are experiencing increasingly non-linear and protracted life transitions into education, work and family formation. Because these transitions are less normative, young people's lifestyles and the way they 'do adulthood' becomes more open-ended (Woodman and Wyn 2015).

What are the Social Conditions for Young People Today?

Despite contested conceptions about whether we are living in 'late modernity' or 'post-modernity' (Macdonald 2017), we can conceive contemporary conditions as being embedded in neoliberalism; an ideology marked by economic, social, and cultural deregulation. Brought on by post-industrialism and a focus on technology and information, neoliberalism is an economic ideology that favours privatisation and competition (Phelan 2014). It has also developed into a social ideology through which we can understand social policies and cultural attitudes. For example, neoliberalism emphasises individualism (a discourse favouring personal freedoms), flexibility and choice, as well as personal responsibility (Giddens 1991, Rose 2009, Atkinson 2010). Within neoliberalism, individual autonomy is regarded as a way to highlight choice and market freedoms through consumption and various other 'technologies of the self' (Rose, O'Malley et al. 2006). Under these conditions, people are treated as self-governing individuals responsible for their life outcomes, despite their lives continuing to be shaped by structures such as class, race and gender (Furlong and Cartmel 2006). Neoliberal notions of freedom and autonomy also disguise the fact that there remain prescribed ways of being that pervade and govern the way people live their lives through subtle forms of governmentality. Governmentality here refers to decentralised technologies of governing – rather than the state simply governing citizens through laws and regulations, governmentality incorporates institutions such as families, education systems and discourses as informal apparatuses to govern populations (Rose, O'Malley et al. 2006).

The result of this is that while contemporary young people have access to more options than the generations before them (more technology, information, lifestyle alternatives, career choices, etc.), they increasingly have to negotiate choice and risk in everyday life (Giddens 1991, Beck 1992). At the same time, they also have to be 'responsibilised' citizens by self-managing risk, assuming responsibility for their actions, and following approved forms of conduct (Kelly 2001). This has led to what some authors describe as 'reflexive modernisation' – the idea that personal responsibility and notions of choice require people to deliberate about their lifestyles and personal biographies (Giddens 1991). What this period of reflexive modernisation means for young people born around the turn of the millennium is unclear. There is some suggestion that more contemporary young people live in preparation for the future by delaying or abstaining from hedonistic pleasure practices (Twenge 2017). Such theorising suggests that contemporary social conditions may be shaping generationally distinct lifestyles, including norms, values and dispositions.

Generational Identity Construction and Habitus

One of the ways generations can influence values, attitudes and practices is through habitus. 'Habitus' describes socially-ingrained dispositions and unconscious embodiments of social structures (Bourdieu 1984). As Bourdieu (1984) noted, different generations can produce their own habitus, which in turn produces different ways of being than previous generations. This notion of a generational habitus has been taken up in studies of the sociology of youth. Woodman and Wyn (2015) use habitus as "a tool for thinking about the subjective, embodied and affective dimension of generations" (p. 73). Other concepts like 'reflexive habitus' (Sweetman 2003) provide a useful middle-ground for thinking about how young people forge individual identities amid continuing structural pressures. For example, young people live within a context that seemingly encourages a myriad of choices and ways of living. However, they are still limited by, and required to negotiate, neoliberal structures that encourage them to be economically competitive and rational – 'entrepreneurial selves' capable of self-governing and maximising life through economically 'smart' choices (Kelly 2006). Thus, habitus is a valuable way to understand how young people exist within, and relate to, these contemporary discourses and social conditions. I now explore contemporary social conditions that relate particularly to this changing generational habitus.

Changes to Education and Independence

Movement away from manual labour industries in favour of knowledge-based economies has led to a growth of young people accessing, staying in and completing education. While it hasn't always been the case, this has made education up until the age of 18 the norm in Australia, and increased expectations of further education beyond secondary school (France 2017). Although there remain a range of different educational pathways, for many young people in Australia completing high school and anticipating further tertiary study has become an expected way to

'invest' in themselves and their future careers (Woodman and Wyn 2013). Indeed, this focus on education has been touted as a way to manage flexible and precarious employment conditions (Wyn 2017). However, the relationship between education and employment remains complex and unpredictable (Brown 2010), creating pressures as to how young people think about the future and encouraging them to take charge of their educational (and career) trajectories. For example, young people are encouraged to be studious, productive and responsible as a way to 'guarantee' their employment, requiring them to be 'lifelong learners' (Popkewitz, Olsson et al. 2006) both within and outside of formal education settings.

Emphasis on education may also preclude young people from being socially and economically independent. Leaving the family home is often considered a transitional marker towards adulthood, yet young Australians are moving out of their childhood homes at a later age and relying on their families for longer (Gilfillan 2019). Staying in the family home enables young people to continue further education, explore career options, save money, and maintain lifestyles that may be difficult on student incomes or part-time employment (Swartz and O'Brien 2017). Living in the family home also allows young people to receive increased social support in the context of precarity (Heath and Cleaver 2003). Indeed, staying in the family home as young people continue to study seems to have become increasingly accepted in Australia (Easthope, Liu et al. 2017). Although teenage years have been described as a period of independent life exploration (Arnett 2000), young people are still limited in how much they can realistically 'explore' while they remain financially and socially dependent on their families. As co-habiting with parents increasingly becomes the norm, the spaces and freedoms they might otherwise experience are subject to parental supervision and other forms of control.

<u>Changing Roles of Families and Parents</u>

The role of families and parents may be changing, particularly as intergenerational support becomes central to how young people navigate precarious social and economic conditions (Scott 2005, Wyn 2011). Indeed, neoliberalism has tended to shift the role of social welfare back onto parents, rather than the state (McDowell 2017) making parents the intermediaries for passing on notions of responsibility and success to young people (Dahlstedt and Fejes 2013). This is important as parental values are closely intertwined with the educational and career aspirations of the young people they raise. For example, parents who emphasise cultural and economic capital may encourage young people to stay in education for longer and focus on long-term social mobility (Savage, Warde et al. 2005). As young people increasingly rely on their parents for social and economic support, they are more exposed to their parents' values, meaning the support and influence of parents may be increasingly central to the way young people lead their lives.

Parenting styles are also connected to cultural shifts and changes in family formation. Parents are now raising fewer children and doing so later in life than previous generations, which may result in them spending more time devoted to their children's health and wellbeing (Bugental, Corpuz et

al. 2014). For example, over time in Australia, parents have allocated a greater proportion of their free time to actively spending time with their children and being involved in their leisure and recreation activities (Craig, Powell et al. 2014). Countries across Europe and North America have similarly reported greater communication between parents and their children since the turn of the millennium (Brooks, Zaborskis et al. 2015), where parents' increased spending of time with children has links to a number of positive social, psychological and educational outcomes (Craig, Powell et al. 2014).

There also seems to have been a shift away from authoritarian parent-child relationships towards more democratic relationships and positive parenting practices in both Australia and elsewhere (Campbell and Gilmore 2007, Trifan, Stattin et al. 2014). Indeed, through depictions of "good" and "bad" parenting in media, there are increasingly prescribed ways to 'do' parenting and teach young people to be responsible, self-governing citizens (Assarsson and Aarsand 2011, Dahlstedt and Fejes 2013). This discourse around 'good' parenting also means parents are increasingly pushed to cultivate their children through sport, music, and other activities as a way to promote middle-class values and get ahead in life (Lareau 2011). Greater time and effort to raise 'successful' children inevitably requires parents to play a more active role in managing their children's lives, including becoming more engaged with, and invested in, the health and educational outcomes of their children.

Changing Leisure and Technologies

Technological advancements have occurred at a rapid pace since the start of the millennium and have become integrated into many aspects of young people's lives. Young people aged 15-17 have the highest prevalence of internet use in Australia, reportedly using the internet for social media, education and entertainment purposes (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018). Their technology use provides new ways of doing leisure, interacting with friends, managing their image, and accessing information. On the one hand, technology is seen to be liberating in that it allows young people to be creative in new ways, connect with networks, and be more autonomous in online spaces (Boyd 2014). Technology also enables new and meaningful sources of virtual and social engagement. On-line gaming and networked media like Netflix and YouTube offer young people a plurality of options in their leisure time, allowing them to enjoy everyday pleasures that often have built-in social aspects (Itō, Baumer et al. 2010). These home-based forms of leisure give young people greater control and freedom over how they experience leisure (López-Sintas, Rojas-DeFrancisco et al. 2017).

On the other hand, technology reimposes traditional forms of neoliberal governmentality and surveillance (Rose, O'Malley et al. 2006). The idea that anyone (including parents, future employers, romantic interests and friends) can survey digital profiles encourages young people to be mindful of how they present themselves, both online and in person (Brown and Gregg 2012). Digital technologies also challenge notions of public and private spaces, heightening risks around

self-management and creating constant potential for monitoring (Burkell, Fortier et al. 2014). For example, the advent of digital technologies allows parents to monitor and communicate with their children at any time of day or night. Technology can also reinforce certain norms and power relations. Young women, for example, who don't present themselves according to prescribed standards online can be othered or pathologised (Brown and Gregg 2012, Hutton, Griffin et al. 2016). Indeed, online technologies can reinforce the same structural constraints and power relations that exist in the physical world (Hutton, Griffin et al. 2016, Goodwin and Griffin 2017).

Digital technologies are also changing how, when and where leisure can be experienced (Boczkowski 2010), disrupting traditional notions of leisure, work and free time. Indeed, digital technologies seem to add to the increasingly porous boundaries between work and free time (Frayne 2015). Here, the centrality of technology to young people's personal and educational lives provide new informal ways of learning in and building skills in their 'leisure' time, as well as new ways to multitask and do leisure in 'work time' (Sintas, de Francisco et al. 2015). Technology also creates new challenges to the way young people compartmentalise time and how they utilise their free time. Moreover, the use of technology as an immediate and accessible form of leisure may be symptomatic of broader changes in the way young people manage time and temporalities. Many young people are encouraged to think about the future and do work to get ahead in their free time (Batchelor, Fraser et al. 2020), which challenges traditional notions of leisure and 'free time'. This need to use time wisely highlights how, in many ways, 'free time' has increasingly become a continuation of work (Adorno [1969] 1991).

Changing Expectations Around Health, Wellbeing and Risk

Young people's health has become a prominent political and social issue (West 2017). Health and wellbeing – in a physical, mental and social sense – has become increasingly central to young people's lives and their practices in everyday life, and there seems to be an increasing burden on young people to self-manage this (Coffey 2020). Here, the advent of healthism – a discourse closely related to neoliberalism – creates cultural pressures around health, prescribing certain 'healthy' lifestyles and encouraging young people to be responsible for their health and wellbeing (Crawford 1980). For example, healthist discourse is apparent in digital technologies and platforms that promote health, beauty and image and encourage young people to self-monitor their health (Lupton 2013, Lupton 2016). These movements may have shaped how young people devote time to being physically healthy or pursuing particular bodily images, as well as how they understand health as a personal responsibility. Therefore, we can consider healthism as an important (and changing) part of how young people manage their health and wellbeing.

Moreover, a growing consumer culture that focuses on materialism, the social fragmentation caused by individualism, and a culture based on competition and performance are all important contextual factors for understanding young people's health (Eckersley 2011). These social forces can create stress and mental health issues that seem to affect young people generally, rather than

just 'at-risk' groups (Eckersley, Wierenga et al. 2005). On top of this, today's young people also face culturally-specific goals that challenge their wellbeing. For example, stresses around body image, academic performance, career success, unstable employment conditions, and economic independence are all associated with psychological distress for young people (Wyn, Cuervo et al. 2015, West 2017). Indeed, the emphasis on education and doing well at school as a way to secure the future seem to feed into this. Among teenagers there has been a trend of increasing worry about academic performance (Sweeting, West et al. 2010) and increasing stress linked to expectations of tertiary education (Wyn, Cuervo et al. 2015). Digital technologies like social media are also implicated in propagating standards of health, beauty and self-improvement, and inciting comparisons with peers, leading to heightened anxieties around body image and self-presentation in young people (Fardouly and Vartanian 2016). These social conditions are implicated in the changing role (and burden) of health in young people's lives.

As the neoliberal agenda pushes discourses of individuality and responsibility, young people are also increasingly having to negotiate risk. This notion of risk, Beck (1992) argues, means that societies and individuals are increasingly framed by risk – including both catastrophic risks, as well as ephemeral and 'everyday' risks. This discourse of risk is intertwined with the way young people are governed and required to self-regulate. As they are made to feel increasingly responsible for themselves and their life outcomes, so too are they personally responsible for the risks they choose to engage in (Lindsay 2010). For example, public health discourses use this notion of risk as a way to encourage moderation and self-control over hedonism (Coveney and Bunton 2003). Large scale declines in risky behaviours such as drinking, substance use and anti-social behaviour (such as crime) since the turn of the millennium (Aldridge, Measham et al. 2011, Farrell, Tilley et al. 2014, Vaughn, Nelson et al. 2018) suggests that the way risk has been pathologised may have influenced how young people engage (or avoid) potentially risky practices.

Changing Social and Cultural Norms

Another result of modernisation and technological advances is that world has become increasingly connected, globalised and culturally diverse. In Australia for example, nearly half the population is either born in another country, or has one or both parents born in another country (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017a). Transnational ties and identities have also led to young people taking on a multitude of social and cultural ideals, creating an increasingly cosmopolitan and 'global generation' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2009). This cultural diversity can enable new ways of thinking and can influence behaviours, consumption patterns, values, and ideologies (Clarke 2004, Berry 2008). Digital technologies and global connectedness have also transformed young people's civic engagement (Pathak-Shelat and Bhatia 2019), meaning that social and cultural movements, which were once restricted by time and space, are no longer so. For example, social justice movements around gender and racial inequalities, as well as environmental issues have

become global concerns. These movements, aided by digital communications technologies, have allowed young people to become collective voices of change. Indeed, as "global citizens" of an increasingly multicultural, educated and informed generation (Williams and Page 2011), young people are well placed to challenge traditional cultural values, norms and practices.

In the same way that contemporary conditions promote both individualism and plurality, so too may they challenge traditional assumptions around gender, sexuality, masculinity and femininity. The decline of the industrial economy in favour of a knowledge-based economy has meant that male dominance of the labour market has changed significantly (McDowell 2017), while individualistic 'choice biographies' (Du Bois-Reymond 1998) encourage young people to think about gender and sexuality in new and different ways. On the one hand, this means that young women are better able to engage in long-term education and build career trajectories, while feminist movements have created a dialogue for young women to challenge the traditional sexual and gendered order (Best and Lynn 2017). It also means young men are able to enact alternative, less hegemonic, performances of masculinity (Roberts 2013). However, although these social shifts suggest a movement away from gender traditions and heteronormativity, gendered norms and expectations continue to be shaped by established social and cultural mechanisms (Holland 2017).

Returning to Social Generations

Many of the changes discussed above highlight shared commonalities and experiences of change that support a social generations lens. These contemporary experiences provide context for how young people's lives differ from generations before them and are an important backdrop for understanding how values and actions might be shaped by social conditions. The concept of social generations within youth studies is not without criticism though. In treating social generations as a collective, concerns have arisen around intra-generational divisions (such as class, gender and ethnicity) and inter-generational interactions (such as familial support and social networks) being under-valued, resulting in a general homogenisation of the experiences of young people (Roberts and France 2020). However, social generations are only one element of social location and individuals' lives are still very much shaped by their immediate social contexts and other structural factors. By acknowledging that generational patterns are not deterministic of how young people lead their lives, social generational theory is useful for thinking about how their shared experiences of social change may be tied to changing modes of self-expression and social movements.

France and Roberts (2015) have suggested that the growth of individualism as a discourse goes against the idea of a collective social generation. They ask, if people are moving away from collective identities, how might they be part of a cohesive social generation? I suggest that although neoliberalism has enabled individualist discourse, it has also created sites of shared

experiences (e.g. increasing economic precarity) and new platforms to connect and share experiences across social and geographical divides (such as the internet and digital technologies).

Others also point to unresolved conceptual issues around where generations might start and end, what drives the emergence of social generations, and how generational orientations are carried through the life course (Goodwin and O'Connor 2009, France and Roberts 2015). Woodman (2017) suggests that one way to gauge generational change is to compare salient features of young people's lives to that of their parents', where vast differences indicate a distinct social generation. As I have highlighted, changes to education, family, leisure, technology and health are part of this shift. However, Mannheim's broader point emphasised that generations represented continuous, rather than staggered, change. This means social generations theory remains a valuable tool for understanding processes of change over time.

How I have Used Social Generations Theory in this Thesis

Changing transitions through life, changing social roles, and changing expectations of young people can have very real impacts on behaviours and practices. For example, conventional life course drinking patterns – ranging from experimentation, to excess and stabilisation – have been associated with particular life stages, but as life stages become non-linear and protracted, so too may these associated drinking norms (Martinic and Bigirimana 2019). A social generations approach provides context for the lives of contemporary young people, providing meaning and insight into how practices, values and lifestyles may be changing. Concepts like 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1984) are a valuable way to understand how young people may enact collective ways of being and be disposed to certain ways of thinking through shared socio-historic conditions. Drawing on the works of Giddens (1991) and Sweetman (2003), in Chapter 5, I show how habitus is closely connected to neoliberal discourses of risk, choice and individualism. This chapter gives an insight into how young people who abstain or drink lightly produce knowledge, values, lifestyles and practices around alcohol. In Chapter 6, I draw on Crawford (1980) to show how contemporary discourse around health, in particular, has shaped the way young light and non-drinkers construct and self-manage their health in relation to alcohol. In both chapters, I highlight the various generationally distinct features (such as contemporary discourses, technologies and social structures) that tie into my sample's values and attitudes towards alcohol.

Against the backdrop of neoliberalism and a culture increasingly centred around image, performance, and risk-management, declines in drinking might also be part of a broader change in the way young adults are 'doing' or 'performing' young adulthood. In what Threadgold (2018) describes as a position of 'struggle', young people are told to study and work hard while constantly navigating risk and precarity. They also struggle for autonomy against numerous economic limitations to their independence. Thus, the meanings and values associated with 'youth' and alcohol (such as autonomy) may be changing from previous generations. For example, in Chapter 7, I draw on Adorno's ([1969] 1991) work to highlight how institutional

pressures have influenced how young light and non-drinkers manage time and temporalities. Here, I highlight how perceptions of 'free time' seem to be shaped by economic rationales and a need to focus on the future for my sample of young people. In Chapter 8, drawing on the work of Coveney and Bunton (2003), I examine how contemporary public health discourse might be reshaping notions of pleasure in social settings, encouraging forms of responsibilisation and self-government for young light drinkers and abstainers. Here, a social generations approach enables the location of young people within this range of structural pressures to better understand how these might directly or indirectly influence their perceptions of autonomy and, in turn, their drinking practices.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined some of the developmental, economic and political discourses that construct 'youth' and justified my use of the term 'young people'. I have outlined the framework for my thesis through a social generations approach, and detailed some of the social conditions of contemporary young people that make them distinct from previous generations, including changes to education and independence, family and parental roles, leisure and technology, health and wellbeing, and perceptions of risk and social change. These, I argue, contribute to a distinct social generation whose values, practices, dispositions and lifestyles may be changing as a result.

I have also used this chapter to introduce some of the concepts that appear throughout the thesis, including neoliberalism, governmentality, individualism, risk, responsibilisation and healthism. These concepts and discourses are central to this thesis, and I refer to them throughout my findings in later chapters. I have also highlighted some of the criticisms and values of a social generations perspective, and have detailed how social generations theory is used as an overarching approach to draw together the social theories I use throughout this thesis.

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Chapter 3

Declining Drinking Among Young People: Reviewing the Empirical Literature

The declines in young people's drinking observed in Australia have also been reported across many other high-income countries and regions over a similar time period, including New Zealand, North America, and Northern and Western Europe (Clark, Fleming et al. 2013, Kraus, Leifman et al. 2016, Johnston, Miech et al. 2018, World Health Organisation 2018, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020). These global trends have inspired a significant amount of research exploring various hypotheses that might explain or inform the trends. Research has focused on factors such as parenting, leisure and technology, policy, demographic shifts, shifts in health and conscientiousness, and changing social norms as drivers for the declines (Bhattacharya 2016, Pape, Rossow et al. 2018, Vashishtha, Livingston et al. 2019). Given that declines in alcohol consumption have occurred amid a number of broader social and economic changes (explored in Chapter 2), it is unclear how much shifts in young people's drinking can be attributed to any one factor. As I will argue in this thesis, many of these factors seem to be interrelated and reinforcing. Moreover, it is difficult to disentangle whether these interrelated factors might have paralleled, rather than driven, declines in young people's drinking.

Given this, the proceeding sections of this chapter will explore some of the recent empirical literature attempting to explain declines in young people's drinking. In doing so, I will focus on the factors which have been examined largely through quantitative approaches, as well as some more recent qualitative research. As drinking among young people has declined both in Australia and a number of other high-income countries, I draw on both Australian and international research examining declining trends in young people's drinking.

Parenting

One of the factors with the strongest empirical support for reducing young people's drinking is changes in parenting (Vashishtha, Livingston et al. 2019). Young people commonly learn about alcohol from their parents or carers, with whom they also often share their first drinking experiences (Guerin and White 2020). Parental attitudes towards alcohol, parental modelling of alcohol, provision of alcohol, alcohol rule-setting, permissiveness towards alcohol, and positive parent-child relationships, have been well-documented to influence young people's alcohol consumption (Ryan, Jorm et al. 2010, Sharmin, Kypri et al. 2017, Yap, Cheong et al. 2017). In the context of declining consumption by young people, it has been suggested that changes in family cohesion, improvements in parent-child relationships, reduced supply of alcohol from parents to children, and increased monitoring through technology may have contributed to declining alcohol use among young people (Pennay, Livingston et al. 2015, Bhattacharya 2016, Pape, Rossow et al.

2018, Vashishtha, Livingston et al. 2019). Changes in parenting over time, such as greater awareness of the health effects of alcohol, and efforts by parents to actively manage or reduce their children's alcohol consumption, may have influenced abstention rates or delayed initiation of alcohol, subsequently leading to lower levels of drinking in young people.

A number of studies have focused on changes in parental permissiveness around alcohol using repeated waves of cross-sectional student survey data. For example, research from Sweden found declines in young people's drinking were associated with more restrictive parental attitudes towards providing alcohol (Carlson 2019), while Finnish and Dutch studies have shown that fewer parents have allowed their children to drink since the early 1990s and 2000s (de Looze, van Dorsselaer et al. 2017, Raitasalo and Holmila 2017). However, this may also be mediated by social class, where higher parental education level is associated with reduced permissiveness (Pape, Norström et al. 2017). A Swedish latent class analysis using European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) data (Raninen, Livingston et al. 2018) suggested a shift towards stricter parenting practices explained large changes in drinking among young people, but also highlighted how permissiveness still varied substantially between parents. The evidence here generally suggests that parents' attitudes towards alcohol have become less permissive during the decline but does not explain how permissiveness might be tied to other changes in parenting and social norms.

Two studies have drawn on Dutch school survey data to assess changes in communication between parents and children. The first found that parents had an increased awareness over time of the harms of alcohol, had developed greater alcohol-related communication, and set stronger rules around alcohol – all which acted to decrease or postpone drinking (de Looze, Vermeulen-Smit et al. 2014). The second found that the percentage of parents who set strict rules around alcohol had increased and partly explained the decline in drinking (de Looze, van Dorsselaer et al. 2017). For both studies, the authors pointed to media and social norms campaigns that emphasised risk information (such as brain damage to young drinkers) that targeted parents, rather than young people themselves. However, more detailed research is needed to assess how parents communicate and set rules about alcohol.

Two Australian studies have used repeated waves of cross-sectional survey data to assess changes in parental supply of alcohol over time. Both showed that parental supply was associated with increased drinking, and that parental supply of alcohol decreased over time (Kelly, Chan et al. 2016, Toumbourou, Rowland et al. 2018). There is some evidence from qualitative interviews with Australian parents that parental supply of alcohol continues to occur (despite policy guidelines discouraging it), with Gilligan and Kypri (2012) suggesting there may simply be less pressure on parents to supply alcohol to their children. Despite declining rates of parental supply, it remains a main source of supply for young Australians (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020) so it is important to understand if and how this may have changed.

Several cross-sectional studies in Iceland, Finland and Sweden have also shown increases in parental monitoring over time (Kristjansson, Sigfusdottir et al. 2016, Larm, Livingston et al. 2018, Raitasalo, Simonen et al. 2018, Larm, Raninen et al. 2019). Larm, Raninen et al. (2019) suggest that while parental monitoring had increased, this may be an indirect result of digital technologies which enable young people to spend more leisure time in domestic environments where they might be indirectly monitored by their parents. Larm, Livingston et al. (2018) also note that monitoring generally increased among both drinkers and non-drinkers alike. The evidence here points to an increase in parental monitoring that parallels declines in drinking, but also a clear interaction with digital technology that should be examined in more detail.

Cross-sectional and qualitative research also points towards changes in parent-child relationships. Clark, Fleming et al. (2013) used longitudinal youth surveys in New Zealand to show how perceptions of parent-child relationships and family cohesion had improved alongside declines in alcohol use. Raitasalo, Simonen et al. (2018) used Finnish ESPAD data to show that young people being monitored by parents when they went out in the evenings had also increased, suggesting that parental interaction and relationships had changed (although the mechanism through which this reduced drinking was unclear). While quantitative studies cannot unpack how these relationships have changed, some qualitative research suggests that young people may be developing relationships with their parents based on approval, communication and expectations that act to reduce drinking (Törrönen, Roumeliotis et al. 2019, Scheffels, Buvik et al. 2020). However, improving parent-child relationships may also simply be part of longer-term trends, as evidenced by active child-care time increasing over the past 50 years (Pape, Rossow et al. 2018). Given most research into parenting has been quantitative, more research is needed on how young people experience parental relationships and how this may mediate their drinking.

Leisure and Technology

With the advent of digital media and the internet since the early 2000s, one of the reasons proffered for declines in young people's drinking is the rise of technology (Bhattacharya 2016, Kraus, Room et al. 2019). For example, in Australia 98% of 15-17-year-olds use the internet, largely for social networking and entertainment purposes (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018). The research linking technology to alcohol tends to focus on this use of digital media as a diversion to drinking (e.g. through media streaming and gaming), but also how technology has created new ways to socialise without the need for alcohol, as well as new ways to think about the consequences of drinking in terms of risk and embarrassment (Bhattacharya 2016). Some recent qualitative research shows that these mechanisms resonate for young people (Törrönen, Roumeliotis et al. 2019). However, digital media has also been linked to greater exposure to alcohol industry marketing, pro-alcohol messages, and as an enabler of heavy drinking (Griffiths and Casswell 2010, de Bruijn, Engels et al. 2016). Technology also crosses over into other explanations for declines in drinking, such as parental monitoring (through keeping in contact

with young people via smartphones), alcohol advertising (through shifts to digital platforms), and broader changes to how young people interact and spend their leisure time.

There is some evidence that social media may mediate drinking practices. A cross-sectional Swedish study highlighted how certain behaviours (such as online presentation and sociality) were more predictive of drinking than others (such as consumption of news and playing games) (Svensson and Johnson 2020). Qualitative interviews with Swedish teenagers also highlighted how social media provided diversions and new pressures around self-censorship in how young people presented themselves, but also created new private spaces that allowed (and encouraged) them to share their drunken antics and stories (Törrönen, Roumeliotis et al. 2020). Thus, the relationship between social media and alcohol is complex, driven by how young people use social media and wish to present themselves, rather than simply by the platforms themselves.

Several studies using long-running repeated cross-sectional data have also examined how digital technology may have reduced face-to-face peer interactions. De Looze, van Dorsselaer et al. (2019) used Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study data between 2002-2014 from countries across Europe and North America to show that declines in face-to-face contact with peers was associated with reduced drinking, but that this was not a result of increased electronic media communication. Another study from Norway found that leisure time has become increasingly home-oriented since the early 2000s (Rossow, Pape et al. 2020), while a New Zealand study suggested the growth of social alternatives to drinking may have reduced frequency (but not necessarily intensity) of drinking sessions over time (Jackson, Denny et al. 2017). The direction of these relationships (whether young people are socialising differently due to their non-drinking or vice-versa) is unclear. The idea that young spend more leisure time in the presence of parents is supported by some quantitative research (Kim, Evans et al. 2019) but conflicts with others (Raitasalo, Simonen et al. 2018). There may be some young people who drink less because they socialise online and/or in the company of their parents, but this doesn't seem to be universal and should be further explored.

Some Swedish studies have explicitly focused on gaming as a leisure substitute for drinking. A cross-sectional study focusing on the role of internet activities in non-drinking found gaming increased the likelihood of non-drinking (mostly among males) (Larm, Raninen et al. 2019). Raninen, Livingston et al. (2018) also found that some non-drinkers were characterised by frequent gaming, but this made up only a very small percentage of the total sample. Given some of the qualitative research highlights how gaming has increasingly become a way to perform masculinity (Törrönen, Roumeliotis et al. 2019) it is possible that gaming may have substituted drinking among subgroups of young males, but this seems unlikely to explain the broader declines in drinking.

Policy Changes

In the alcohol policy literature, it is fairly well established that implementing and enforcing restrictive policies is an effective way to reduce drinking, especially among young people (Toumbourou, Stockwell et al. 2007). Taxation measures, outlet density, advertising exposure and legal purchasing ages, for example, have been associated with reductions in drinking among young people (Babor, Caetano et al. 2010). However, studies from Sweden and Finland have also shown that changes to alcohol price and taxes over time did not influence trends in young people's drinking in those countries (Lintonen, Karlsson et al. 2013, Trolldal, Landberg et al. 2020), suggesting the changing affordability of alcohol has not driven the decline. Young people are also the target of secondary supply and legal purchasing age laws designed to reduce underage drinking. From an Australian perspective, it is possible that an increasingly comprehensive set of policies and regulations has contributed to declines in teenage drinking by reducing young people's access to alcohol (Vashishtha, Pennay et al. 2021). However, given the magnitude and consistency of the declines and the fact that other countries have seen similar declines during a period of relative alcohol policy stability or even liberalisation (Room, Greenfield et al. 2020) it may be that alcohol policies directed at young people has accelerated or supported declines, rather than driven them.

Several studies have used international data to examine policies at the national level. For example, two studies using international ESPAD and HBSC survey data found that higher prices, higher legal drinking age, and stronger alcohol controls were associated with lower levels of regular drinking among young people (Gilligan, Kuntsche et al. 2012, Bendtsen, Damsgaard et al. 2014). Another study using HBSC data found greater government spending on health and families in countries where drinking declined (Vieno, Altoè et al. 2018). On the other hand, Kážmér and Csémy (2019) also used HBSC data between 1994-2014 to show that a recent and significant decline in young people's drinking in the Czech Republic had occurred despite no particular policy changes in the period of the decline. Public health spending and national policies seem to influence norms and drinking trends at the country level, but differences between countries suggest they are unlikely to have been a key driver for declines in young people's drinking.

Enforcement of and changes to legal purchase age laws may have also influenced young people's drinking trends. The minimum legal age of drinking in the Netherlands increased from 16 to 18 in 2014, and there is evidence that ID-checking compliance rates among vendors also increased during this time, reducing the acceptability of supplying minors with alcohol (Schelleman-Offermans, Roodbeen et al. 2017). There is also some qualitative work that shows young people themselves may adapt to and normalise non-drinking in line with national legal purchase ages (Scheffels, Buvik et al. 2020). Age restrictions on alcohol purchase and vendor compliance may set social norms around underage drinking but are unlikely to have driven declines in Australia or

other countries where underage purchase laws pre-empted the decline and have not changed over the period of the decline.

A recent Australian trend analysis showed how taxation of alcopops (premixed spirits predominantly consumed by younger Australians) in 2008 was associated with a reduction in their consumption, although some of these reductions occurred well after the implementation of the tax (Mojica-Perez, Callinan et al. 2020). Findings from Germany also highlight how the introduction of alcopop-specific taxes have led to substitution of alcopops with spirits and beer (Müller, Piontek et al. 2010). Targeted taxes may work to reduce consumption of certain youth-oriented drinks but are likely to encourage young people (and potentially the alcohol industry) to adapt through alternative beverages.

The effects of reducing access to alcohol has also been assessed by several quantitative studies. In a Finnish study, one of the strongest factors associated with declines in young people's drinking was that alcohol had become more difficult to obtain (Raitasalo, Simonen et al. 2018). Similarly, Johnston, Miech et al. (2018) used longitudinal survey data, finding that perceived availability of alcohol declined substantially between 1996 and 2017 among young people in the U.S.. However, a recent Australian study found that declines in young people's drinking were not associated with the introduction of secondary supply laws, and that most laws were put in place after declines had occurred (Vashishtha, Pennay et al. 2021). Reduced perceptions of availability of alcohol seems to have a stronger association with the declines, but it is also unclear if this is a result of alcohol being more difficult to access, or if fewer young people are actively seeking to obtain alcohol, or both.

Several studies have looked at the impact of community-based interventions and policies. A quasi-experimental Icelandic study used cross-sectional survey data, finding that communities with programs that increased parental monitoring and engagement with sport also saw sharper reductions in young people's drinking than those that did not have these interventions (Kristjansson, James et al. 2010). This study provided clear evidence for the effectiveness of community-based interventions through changes to parenting and leisure. Other studies from the Netherlands and the U.S. have found that communities with stronger declines in young people's drinking had a more integrated approach that framed alcohol as a safety problem (not just a health problem) and more strictly enforced underage drinking laws (Flewelling, Grube et al. 2013, de Goeij, Harting et al. 2017). These studies show how community-based initiatives aimed at reducing young people's drinking can be effective, but these are unlikely to have contributed substantially to declines in drinking at the population level.

Two Australian studies examined shifts in exposure to alcohol in the media. White, Azar et al. (2017) compared survey data alongside data measuring television advertising exposure, showing both that young people's exposure to advertising increased their likelihood of drinking, but that overall exposure to advertising had decreased over time. Azar, White et al. (2014) performed a

content analysis of alcohol-related newspaper articles showing that alcohol in media articles reflected greater disapproval of drinking over time. This media shift in both exposure and positive framing of alcohol may have reduced some of the cultural value of alcohol in Australia. However, neither study accounted for the exposure to and interaction with online advertising, which is an emerging area for alcohol advertising (Carah, Meurk et al. 2018). Examining how young people perceive and engage with alcohol promotion across different media could be fruitful.

Demographic Shifts

Although declines in drinking in Australia have occurred across demographic subgroups (Livingston 2014), it is possible that changing demographics may also indirectly influence social norms. Migrants from cultures that drink little alcohol may influence broader drinking norms indirectly through acculturation (Amundsen 2005). For example, young migrants and second-generation young people from regions where drinking and intoxication are less common (such as Asian, African, Middle Eastern and Latin American countries) are less likely to drink (Di Cosmo, Milfont et al. 2011, Szaflarski, Cubbins et al. 2011, Chan, Kelly et al. 2016). In Australia, research by Chan, Kelly et al. (2016) showed that parental factors that reduced drinking were also mediated by ethnic background. Parents born in Asia or Africa were more likely to monitor and disapprove of their children's alcohol use in Australia. Using repeated cross-sectional student surveys of young people in Oslo, Rogne, Pedersen et al. (2019) found that the growing proportion of immigrants and children of immigrants in Norway accounted for one-fifth of the decline in heavy episodic drinking in Oslo. However, they noted this may not be the case for cities where there had been less immigration from low-drinking countries.

In contrast, two Swedish studies – one cross-sectional and one time series analysis – found that changes in demographics have not driven declines in young people's drinking (Svensson and Andersson 2016, Kim, Evans et al. 2019). Research from Australia and England also support this, highlighting how (although non-drinking was higher among ethnic minorities) subgroups based on health, race, employment, education status, and socio-economic status all experienced declines in drinking (Livingston 2014, Fat, Shelton et al. 2018).

There is also evidence in recent qualitative research that norms around alcohol at the micro level can be shaped by family background and religion (Hardcastle, O'Connor et al. 2019, Törrönen, Samuelsson et al. 2020). Qualitative studies have shown that young people from non-Western backgrounds can draw on their cultural or religious norms as a reason for not drinking (Nairn, Higgins et al. 2006; Romo 2012). An Australian study by Hardcastle, O'Connor et al. (2019) showed that cultural and religious values were key motivators for young people to abstain. These cultural values may also influence social norms. For example, a Danish study found that high proportions of non-Western students in classrooms were associated with non-drinking among ethnic Danish students (Hoffmann, Pisinger et al. 2020). This suggests that trends in drinking could be indirectly influenced by population changes, although declines have occurred in a

number of countries with varying levels of immigration (Pape, Rossow et al. 2018). Thus, changing norms around alcohol itself are more likely than demographic changes. I do note that many of the quantitative studies I refer to fail to capture details about cultural and religious affiliations, which may be important for understanding cultural shifts, and it is plausible that demographic shifts may have played an indirect role in reducing some young people's drinking.

Health and Education

It has been suggested that young people today are more conscious of their health and their education, which could be a reason for declines in drinking (Bhattacharya 2016). Health has been explored as a key reason in qualitative research for abstaining, limiting or reducing drinking among young people (Nairn, Higgins et al. 2006, Herring, Bayley et al. 2014, Supski and Lindsay 2016) and emerging health and fitness trends might compete with drinking practices (Törrönen, Roumeliotis et al. 2019). However, there are also growing concerns about levels of obesity, physical activity and mental health (West 2017) highlighting that the health risks directly associated with alcohol may be changing, rather than all aspects of health. An increased focus on education has also been cited as a reason for reduced drinking (Romo 2012, Bartram, Eliott et al. 2016) and young people with clearer educational trajectories are less likely to drink (McDade, Chyu et al. 2011, Clark, Fleming et al. 2013). With more young people staying in education for longer and greater focus on health in everyday life, this may have made drinking less important.

Recent qualitative research from Sweden showed how concepts of physical and social health were both important in influencing young people's drinking practices, where the need to be physically healthy was reported as a motivation to avoid heavy drinking (Törrönen, Samuelsson et al. 2020). Other qualitative work on young Australians has emphasised how the negative health consequences of drinking such as brain damage, liver damage and weight gain provided recourse for non-drinking (Hardcastle, O'Connor et al. 2019). In contrast, a cross-sectional analysis of Australian data showed that younger people were less likely to reduce their drinking for health-specific reasons than other lifestyle reasons (Pennay, Callinan et al. 2019). Similarly, quantitative research from England has shown that non-drinking among young people increased across health-based subgroups (based on smoking, weight, diet, physical activity and mental health) (Fat, Shelton et al. 2018). Such quantitative research does not unpack shifting cultural values around health and how this might influence drinking at the population level. However, the evidence here suggests a movement towards more young people framing drinking as a risk to health and lifestyle, rather than an overall increase in health consciousness.

There is also some suggestion that young people have become more conscious about their futures. Using a large sample from seven U.S. surveys between 1976 to 2016, Twenge and Park (2017) found that the declines in drinking alcohol had occurred alongside reductions in sex, dating, going out unsupervised and driving. They theorised this was part of an increased focus on education and long-term goals (and delay of 'adult' or risk-related activities like drinking). While this conflation

of adult and risk activities looks past the fact that young people may be performing adulthood in different ways (Månsson, Samuelsson et al. 2020), it does suggest young people may be more future-oriented. Quantitative studies from Norway and Sweden both suggest that there has been a general increase in engagement with school and a reduction in antisocial behaviour (Larm, Åslund et al. 2018, Rossow, Pape et al. 2020). Increased educational conscientiousness may be a mechanism for reducing alcohol consumption, but more work unpacking why and how this may be connected to broader structural shifts in young people's lives is essential.

There is also research from Australia and Israel suggesting conscientiousness as a protective factor is less important than risk factors based on family, school and peer relationships (Sznitman, Zlotnick et al. 2016, Hodder, Campbell et al. 2017). For example, Hodder, Campbell et al. (2017) used repeated cross-sectional data over the period of the decline to show that risk factors (such as use of alcohol by parents and peers) were more predictive of drinking than protective factors (such as self-efficacy and school participation) and that many protective factors had remained unchanged or even declined between the two time points. In general, changes in conscientiousness may have reduced drinking but these changes need to be understood in relation to other (potentially more important) contextual factors.

Changing Social Norms

Social and cultural norms associated with drinking and intoxication are liable to change over time, which can lead to changing trends in consumption. For example, it has been theorised that changes in young people's drinking could be a generational response to the excesses or conservatism of their elders (Room, Greenfield et al. 2020) and there is age-period-cohort research from the U.S. that shows restrictive social norms around alcohol are associated with reduced drinking among young people (Keyes, Schulenberg et al. 2012). There has also been a growth of information and increased media attention focusing on alcohol's harms to young people in recent years (de Looze, Vermeulen-Smit et al. 2014). Such changes could result in shifting attitudes towards young people's drinking. For example, in Australia there seems to have been an increase in general concern about young people's drinking over time (Livingston and Callinan 2017) which could act to reduce alcohol use and heavy drinking. Other changes in social norms, such as changing gender norms, could also be implicated in declining drinking trends (Törrönen, Roumeliotis et al. 2019).

There is some evidence that the acceptability of drinking and non-drinking among young people is changing. Recent research from New Zealand using repeated cross-sectional data showed that the strongest contributor to reductions in heavy alcohol use was a decreased acceptance of alcohol use among young people (Ball, Edwards et al. 2020). Similarly, qualitative research from Norway highlighted how underage drinking in particular seemed to be less acceptable among young people (Scheffels, Buvik et al. 2020). There is also evidence that some young Australians have made attempts to limit their drinking due to concerns around unwanted emotional, social and

physical aspects of drunkenness (MacLean, Pennay et al. 2018). Moreover, qualitative interviews from Sweden suggest an increasing acceptability of non-drinking in social contexts among young people (Törrönen, Roumeliotis et al. 2019). Although these are mostly small-scale qualitative studies, they highlight how sociocultural norms could be shifting. The notion that norms towards young people's drinking have become more restrictive, while norms around non-drinking have eased over time is plausible, but more research is needed.

Key findings from the U.S.-based Monitoring the Future survey (Johnston, Miech et al. 2018) also showed an increase in perceived risk associated with drinking after 2003, matched by declining drinking trends. The authors noted that disapproval of heavy drinking had moved in parallel to perceived risk, which they attributed to public service campaigns from the 1980s (particularly around drunk driving) although there is limited evidence to confirm this association. Similarly, an Australian study using NDSHS data between 2001 and 2013 found significant increases in perceptions that heavy drinking was a serious societal problem, as well as greater support for low-risk drinking guidelines (Livingston and Callinan 2017). These authors noted these attitudes may have set social norms that discouraged young people from drinking, although their analysis was largely descriptive. Large scale international studies have highlighted that declines in alcohol use occurred alongside other 'risk' behaviour such as drug use and violence (de Looze, Raaijmakers et al. 2015, Twenge and Park 2017). This, coupled with policy efforts to frame alcohol as a risk to both health and safety, may indicate increasing perceptions among young people that alcohol is a risky substance. There is a clear need for qualitative research to explore how perceptions of risk might influence drinking practices.

Drug Substitution

There have also been other theories for the decline in young people's drinking revolving around drug substitution (Bhattacharya 2016, Vashishtha, Livingston et al. 2019). Other drugs may compliment or substitute alcohol use, and understanding this relationship is important amid declines in young people's drinking. There is some research from the U.S. and Finland to suggest that cannabis has increasingly become young people's first drug of choice and that cannabis use has increased amid declines in drinking for young people (Lanza, Vasilenko et al. 2015, Keyes, Rutherford et al. 2019, Raitasalo, Karjalainen et al. 2021). Within Australia, there has been some shift towards initiating substance use with cannabis before alcohol, but alcohol continues to be the first drug used by the majority of young Australians, with delays in age of initiation occurring across both substances (Livingston, Holmes et al. 2020). Other studies from the Netherlands, New Zealand and Sweden show that alcohol consumption has declined in young people along with that of cannabis (Verhagen, Uitenbroek et al. 2015, Gripe, Danielsson et al. 2018, Ball, Edwards et al. 2020). More broadly, the decline in drinking has tended to occur along with declining use of other substances in a number of countries, reflecting an overall downward trend of substance use by young people (de Looze, Raaijmakers et al. 2015). In Australia, illicit drug use is generally in

decline among young people (with fluctuating trends for cannabis use) and experimentation tends to be happening later in life (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020, Guerin and White 2020). This suggests that drug substitution hasn't occurred in Australia, although it alludes to context-specific norms in some countries that may be changing the relationship between alcohol and other drugs for young people.

Reviewing the Literature: Where to Next?

Given the international literature on declining drinking among young people, I have identified six key focus areas: parenting, leisure and technology, policy changes, demographic shifts, health and education and changing social norms. These broadly cover most published studies examining why young people's drinking might be declining. These explanations also seem to be closely interlinked. For example, policy changes may reflect changing social norms, which in turn may influence parenting practices. Given that the findings presented in this review have largely drawn on repeated waves of cross-sectional survey data, the direction of these relationships are unclear (e.g. changes in parenting and leisure may be a result of reductions in drinking or vice versa).

Some of the more recent qualitative studies have highlighted the interconnections between these themes. Törrönen, Roumeliotis et al.'s (2019) interviews with 49 young Swedes used a pragmatist approach which identified parenting, technology, health and changing social norms as social mechanisms that could all act to reduce drinking. Although these social mechanisms acted differently for different young people, they were all linked together to changing the cultural meaning of alcohol, which made it a less central rite of passage into adulthood. Work by Scheffels, Buvik et al. (2020) using interview data with 95 young Norwegians similarly pointed towards the interrelationship between parenting, policy and norms. They suggested that each was intrinsically tied together, resulting in a normalisation of non-drinking among young people in Norway. What is evident from both of these studies and the broader empirical literature is the value of looking beyond isolated factors for changing trends in drinking.

Taking this as a starting point – that there is no single factor driving young people's drinking down, but rather a mix of interrelated factors – I examine how these factors might come together to shape young people's drinking practices. Given declines in drinking have occurred amid a number of rapid social changes (reviewed in the previous chapter), research must now look at the link between social context and meaning in terms of young people's relationship with alcohol. As such, this thesis will unpack how abstinence or light drinking might tie in with broader, less quantifiable changes in young people's lives.

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Chapter 4

Methods

As highlighted in Chapter 3, the qualitative literature examining declines in young people's drinking is scant – particularly in an Australian context. This study is an attempt to address that, as well as a way to understand young people's drinking in the context of broader social changes occurring since the turn of the millennium. Therefore, this research is interdisciplinary, examining declining trends in young people's drinking from a public health perspective, as well as changing meanings and practices associated with drinking alcohol from a sociological perspective.

This chapter outlines the methods for the research conducted for this thesis. I outline my research design and identify my epistemological and theoretical perspectives and how this informed my research process. I describe the sample and data collection process, before detailing how I approached analyses. I also provide a reflexive account of my role in the research process and reflect on some ethical considerations and limitations of my approach. Finally, I describe some personal reflections from the research experience.

Research Design

<u>Qualitative Research</u>

This study is part of a broader mixed-methods project looking at declines in young people's drinking in Australia. This research in this study represents the qualitative component, which is an exploration of the social conditions and cultural meanings of light and non-drinking practices through qualitative research methods. Qualitative research is a form of social enquiry that can be used to understand how people make sense of their experiences and the contexts they live in (Denzin and Lincoln 2008, Holloway and Galvin 2017). Thus, it tends to be less focused on finding a particular 'truth', and more about understanding how particular individuals or groups interpret things (Denzin and Lincoln 2008). Qualitative research is useful to understand a phenomenon, to provide new ways of examining things, to develop theories of complex problems, to detail a phenomenon that may be difficult to convey quantitatively, and to provide context to/contextualise quantitative research (Corbin and Strauss 2008, Liamputtong 2013).

Qualitative research has an extensive history in sociology (Kirk and Miller 1986, Tesch 1990). Indeed, the complex subject matter of sociological investigations makes qualitative methods appropriate for examining how meanings are made and actions interpreted within a social context (Marvasti 2004). Qualitative research can be used to understand complex behaviours by examining economic, political, social and cultural factors, and can refine hypotheses from quantitative data (Baum 2016). This makes it a valuable tool for providing context to and explicating the meanings of practices and actions.

Interviews

For this study, I used interviews to collect the data. Interviews involve an interactional dialogue exploring a particular topic or theme between two or more participants, either in face-to-face settings or through another medium (Mason 2002). Qualitative interviews assume that through interaction, participants' feelings, thoughts, intentions, and experiences can be understood (Patton 2002, Creswell 2008). They are a co-constitution of knowledge between participants, who describe their attitudes and understandings of the world, and researchers who interpret this information. Interviews can range from structured, to semi-structured, to unstructured. Structured interviews represent a more quantitative approach (characterised by closed questions and rigidity) and semi-structured and unstructured interviews represent more qualitative approaches (characterised by flexibility and more open-ended questions) (Edwards and Holland 2013). For this research, I used semi-structured interviews which followed an interview guide (which I describe later in this chapter).

Epistemology and Theoretical Perspective

This research takes a constructivist-interpretivist approach. Understanding contemporary young people as a social generation within a sociohistorical context recognises that their interpretations of the world are "culturally derived and historically situated" (Crotty 1998, 67). This means that young people can be understood as actors within a dynamic social world, with a variety of influences determining their daily lives that may not be directly observable (Marsh and Stoker 2010). For example, cultural and economic shifts may play a large role in shaping contemporary young people's lives, but it may be difficult to draw links between these macro-level shifts and the individual experiences of young people. Thus, the goal of a constructivist approach is to explore how young people make sense of their lives and the world around them. Constructivist approaches examine social contexts (e.g. how people live and work) and processes of interaction (e.g. how people talk about a subject) as a way of gauging this meaning (Creswell 2003). A constructivist approach also acknowledges there is no universal truth, but rather multiple realities based on contexts, experiences and ontological understandings of the world (Patton 2002).

A social constructivist approach also relies on researcher interpretation, acknowledging that researchers inevitably contribute to the process of making sense (or interpreting) the meanings others present about the world (Creswell 2008). My own personal background, assumptions and experiences will shape this interpretation (as I describe in greater detail later in this chapter). Therefore, all findings reflect a co-construction of subjective knowledge between myself and the young people I engaged with. Indeed, these young people had a variety of subjective experiences, so it was important that my interpretations reflected their lived experiences as closely as possible (Gray 2014).

I note that there is an epistemological problem when examining the relationship between young people and alcohol. As a researcher, I can only access young people's recollections, opinions and

views. This makes it difficult to gauge the various social and physiological effects that are a part of drinking or non-drinking experiences (Demant 2009). Indeed, there are numerous influences that discourage or encourage drinking that participants may not be able to convey. Thus, as a researcher interviewing young people within a specific situation, I acknowledge that the constructions and meanings ascribed to alcohol by participants may reflect interview contexts. This may predispose them to certain presentations of themselves through the interview process, certain meanings, and certain ways of thinking about alcohol.

Knowledge practices within fields such as public health, sociology and epidemiology also tend to simplify complex issues as a way to create ordered, useful statements (Law, Mol et al. 2002). I also recognise that young people's relationship with alcohol is complicated. Although I draw meaning and make inferences from my data, I do not intend to over-simplify this relationship. In the published papers we have noted counter-examples and narratives that don't fit within, or challenge broad themes of analysis as a way to highlight these differences.

Process

Sample

Fifty teenagers aged 16-19 years old were recruited from Melbourne, Victoria (table 1, next page). The sample size was aimed towards diversity and theory development rather than representativeness. Trotter (2012) notes that reaching the ideal sample size when interviewing tends to be an iterative process, rather than a specific number. This process involves determining when data reaches redundancy or saturation, where research questions have been explored in detail and few new themes or ideas emerge. The point at which saturation is reached tends to depend on both the relative homogeneity of the group and how broad the domain of enquiry is (Guest, Bunce et al. 2006). The sizeable pre-selected sample size of 50 participants was chosen in recognition of the likely heterogeneity of non- and light-drinking populations, the diversity of lifestyles, and complex reasons for drinking in particular ways. Repetition of themes in responses during the latter stages of interviewing suggested that I was reaching data saturation.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited through several methods, including word of mouth, online advertising in social media, university careers pages, and online bulletin boards, as well as snowball sampling through participants. I initially relied on careers pages, jobs boards and through word-of-mouth. However, uptake was slow, and it was difficult to reach potential participants in the younger age bracket through these platforms. In consultation with my supervisors, we decided to advertise on social media. This involved creating a Facebook page with details of the research and paying to have it appear as a sponsored advertisement in users' newsfeeds. The advertisement specified participants aged 16-19 years who identified as either non-drinkers or light drinkers. I also specified the age range and area that the advertisement would target (e.g. I chose a 100km radius

Table 1. Demographic Data

	Total number	Percentage
Drinking Status		
Abstainer	25	50%
Light drinker	25	50%
Age		
16	10	20%
17	29	58%
18	6	12%
19	5	10%
Gender		
Male	24	48%
Female	26	52%
Region[1]		
Inner metropolitan Melbourne	16	32%
Outer metropolitan Melbourne	29	58%
Regional Victoria	5	10%
Current Education Status		
High school or equivalent	39	78%
University	11	22%
Background		
Born in Australia	36	72%
Born overseas	14	28%
Language Spoken at Home		
Spoke only English at home	28	56%
Spoke a second language at home	22	44%
Religion[2]		
Identified with religious group/community	17	34%
Employment Status		
Working part-time or casually	21	42%
Not employed	29	58%
Total		
	50	100%

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[1] Regions were defined according to ABS definitions Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2020). "2016 Census QuickStats." Retrieved November 6, 2020, from
https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/2GMEL?opendocument.
[2] I highlight some of the issues with religious affiliation in the *Limitations* section below

from the university). The advertisements were split between Facebook and Instagram. In the four months the advertisements were running, I was regularly contacted by potential participants and able to recruit a demographically diverse sample.

Potential participants who contacted me were given several screening questions via email designed to assess their eligibility. These questions measured frequency of alcohol consumption, average quantity of consumption, and maximum consumption in a session, over the past 12 months. Given my focus was on light drinkers and abstainers, participants were eligible if they abstained or drank within the NHMRC guidelines for low-risk single occasion drinking over the past 12 months. This meant drinking less than four standard drinks at any one time, and at a frequency less than monthly. Seven participants who had consumed more than four standard drinks on an occasion in the past 12 months but had reduced their drinking in the two months prior to screening were also considered eligible.

These low-risk categories deserve some comment. The most recent NHMRC draft guidelines released in 2020 suggest that people under 18 should not drink at all (National Health and Medical Research Council 2020). I note that this has shifted from the time of data collection, when the guidelines recommended "For young people aged 15−17 years, the safest option is to delay the initiation of drinking for as long as possible" (National Health and Medical Research Council 2009). Moreover, in Australian drinking guidelines, 'risk' is a loaded term that has become conflated with harm and public health discourses (Keane 2009). Using the low-risk guidelines provided a systematic and practical threshold for screening out heavier drinkers but was not a deliberate attempt to engage with or adopt public health rhetoric.

Prior to each interview, I emailed participants the participant information statement (PIS). Once I met participants in person, I also offered them a hard copy of the PIS to read over. Participants were encouraged to raise any questions or issues they had and were then given a consent form to sign before the interviews started. At the end of each interview, participants were reimbursed $40 cash for their time and any travel expenses accrued.

<u>Interview Guide Development</u>

An interview guide was developed in order to make the data collection process more systematic and comprehensive, and to avoid logical gaps (Patton 2002). It was developed according to pre-identified themes in the literature, input from other researchers (e.g. my supervisory team), and comparisons with similar interview guides used by collaborating researchers (e.g. a team in Sweden who had engaged in similar research shared their interview guide). Because obtaining good data in interviews relies on a mix of well-chosen open-ended questions and probes that provide more specific detail (Merriam and Tisdell 2015), questions were designed to draw out

elaborate and detailed responses, and possible probes were listed and used when relevant. Participants were also encouraged to digress using examples and stories.

Two pilot interviews were conducted prior to official interviewing in order to determine ambiguous questions, incorrect wording, or where questions failed to yield useful data. All interview questions were also reviewed and included suggested questions from two of the supervisors (AP and SM).

The final interview guide was divided into nine general themes. The general format of the interview began by asking the participant to describe themselves and building rapport through storytelling, then moved towards reflecting on broader themes, such as school and work, family, peers and relationships, gender norms, digital technology, conscientiousness and the future, perspectives on public health approaches to alcohol, and reflections on declining trends in young people's drinking.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study ran from January to July in 2018. Each interview lasted approximately 45-50 minutes. Interviews were semi-structured, allowing for flexibility in wording, order and focus of interview, and encouraging participants to share their views and ideas in detail and at their own pace (Merriam and Tisdell 2015).

I conducted all interviews in person in public libraries, universities, cafes, food courts, parks, and participants' homes. Because interview sites produce 'micro-geographies' of power relations between the participant, the researcher, and the broader sociocultural context of the site (Elwood and Martin 2000), I encouraged participants to choose where the interviews took place. Although participants were reminded that privacy and noise were practical considerations, convenience was also emphasised. By giving participants choice over where the interviews were held, I hoped to convey a sense of ease and openness. Indeed, I hoped that this would provide a relaxed, naturalistic setting for discussion, shifting the tone of the interview towards a "conversation with a purpose" (Dexter 1970, 136). This also increased convenience and accessibility for the participants, as many were under 18 and restricted in terms of time, resources, and capacity to travel long distances. Some minor issues occurred because of the settings, such as interruptions and environmental noise that reduced recording quality. On one occasion, the closing time of a library required an interview to be slightly shortened, and another time a participant's mother accompanied them and sat nearby at a food court (although out of hearing distance). These issues were minimal and I do not believe they compromised the overall quality of the data.

I was in contact with participants via text messages prior to each of the interviews. This allowed them to communicate with me informally and let me know if locations and times needed to change. At the time of the interviews I was 25 years old and considered myself a younger researcher, and even though I wasn't a research 'insider' to their worlds (Greene 2014), I felt I

was able to form a mutual connection with participants both prior to, and during interviews. I also felt meeting and talking to participants before each of the interviews conveyed authenticity and potentially put their minds at ease. Interview skills such as active listening and engagement during face-to-face interviews also allow researchers to form an 'alliance' with participants (Grafanaki 1996). Through building rapport before interviews, emphasising a conversational tone, and by closely engaging with the participants as they talked, I felt I was able to achieve this alliance. Participants seemed comfortable talking to me about their personal and social lives, and upon debrief, none withdrew their data or came back to me with concerns. Indeed, most seemed invested in the research and being able to tell their stories.

After recording the interviews, all the files were transferred across to my password-protected computer. Copies of the audio files were then sent to a transcription company that transcribed all the interviews and deleted the recordings. The transcriptions were then checked for accuracy against the audio recordings including sections where background noise made the interviews unclear, where the participants used colloquialisms or unclear terminology, and where they placed emphasis on words in their speech.

Analysis

Many of the questions in my interview guide were designed deductively in order to examine commonly cited influences on youth drinking identified in the quantitative literature. It is common for qualitative analysis to build on quantitative work by assessing, developing or qualifying statistical hypotheses (Patton 2002). However, qualitative researchers tend to generate meaning through interpretations of the data, making the process largely inductive (Creswell 2003). The gap in the qualitative literature about the place of alcohol in the lives of young non- or light-drinkers, and how that might link to broader sociological changes in youth cultures also meant that an inductive approach to generate new theories and test pre-established theories (Gray 2014) was appropriate. Thus, my analysis, like many approaches to qualitative research, can be described as an "interaction between the conceptual and empirical world, deduction and induction occurring at the same time" (Bechhofer 1974, p.73) where, even though the original questions and themes were designed deductively, most broad themes in the data were explored inductively.

To do this, I used a framework method (Richie and Spencer 1994). This involved familiarising myself with past research and identifying a priori research questions (i.e. those identified in quantitative research), applying these to the interview guide, grouping data into themes and topics during coding, and inductively reinterpreting overarching themes (e.g. healthism and time use). Thus, the analytical themes and conceptual frames I applied in the findings were not pre-designed but were an organic result of my own reading of the data. This also meant at times I took different approaches to the data (e.g. constructivist or phenomenological) depending on what I wanted to examine.

Analysis of the interviews was organised using NVivo 11 software (QSR International, 2012). After uploading the interviews into NVivo, I linked all interviews to participant demographic details (i.e. age, gender, drinking status, geographic region) and began a close reading of several interviews. As Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest, I used this as an opportunity to familiarise myself with the data and begin generating initial codes. These codes ranged from explicit observations (e.g. how participants spent their time and described their experiences with alcohol) to more implicit observations (e.g. personal values and meanings associated with alcohol). There were also codes for key quotes and narratives. Most excerpts in the data came under multiple codes to reflect these different observations. From these initial interviews, a set of codes was developed, and all interviews were read and coded according to this set (new codes were also added when they didn't fit into this pre-existing set).

After coding, thematic analysis was used to organise sets of codes into overarching themes, and these themes were recorded in a separate document with key excerpts. Thematic analysis is flexible to theoretical perspective, research question, sample, data collection method, and approach (Clarke and Braun 2017) and can be seen as a process within other analytic traditions. For example, I have also used a phenomenological approach grounded in experiences of social realities (Gray 2014) in aspects of this thesis as a way to focus on the lived experiences of the young people in my sample. Thematic analysis is considered a flexible method rather than a prescriptive methodology, making it highly compatible with both critical (i.e. constructivist) and experiential (i.e. phenomenological) approaches to qualitative research (Braun and Clarke 2020). Therefore, I considered it a useful (and accessible) way to analyse the large dataset. Rather than attempting to analyse the complete data set all at once, I focused on analysing particular themes to explore their detail and complexity.

Reflexivity

In using thematic analysis, I explored implicit ideas, assumptions and concepts within the data through my own subjective lens. Therefore, it is important that I reflect on and acknowledge my own philosophical and theoretical assumptions. Thematic analysis, as with other qualitative research, relies on interpretations of the data, including epistemological and ontological assumptions. Braun and Clarke (2020) describe this as a particular form of thematic analysis – *reflexive* thematic analysis. This approach acknowledges that ignoring bias is essentially impossible. Instead, they advocate that researchers embrace their own subjective skills through organic coding and interpretation. Indeed, the researcher's own views are an inherent (and potentially valuable) part of the analysis.

The embodied aspects of the researcher's own experiences are often separated from accounts of research (Harris 2015). This is particularly true for illicit drug use, where researchers face potential personal and professional repercussions for disclosing their own use (although this is less contentious in relation to legal drugs like alcohol) (Ross, Potter et al. 2020). My attitudes

towards alcohol have been shaped by the experiences and social context I was raised in. My family and close friends all drink alcohol, and regular drinking was the norm in my family home. I started drinking alcohol semi-regularly when I was 15-16 years old and have continued to drink regularly since I was 18. I consider alcohol a relatively normalised substance, and when asked by participants about my own drinking (as I was on one or two occasions) I was happy tell them. However, I am aware that my own experience and attitudes towards alcohol may have meant I approached and talked about alcohol as normative, and I did my best to avoid this by closely adhering to the interview guide.

There are also ethical issues to reflect on when talking to young people under the legal age of alcohol purchase about their drinking. The legal age of alcohol purchase is 18 in Australia, and having the majority of participants younger than this may have influenced how freely they talked during the interviews. My approach was to ensure confidentiality and to reinforce to participants that they did not have to talk about anything they felt uncomfortable sharing. Upon reflection, I also think there was an implicit understanding with participants that drinking at 16 and 17 years old was still a relatively common practice, and not necessarily a matter of legal judgement. This likely played into how comfortable they were talking to me about their experiences with, and knowledge of, alcohol. Only at one point can I remember a participant feeling uncomfortable talking about one of their friends having a fake ID to purchase alcohol, which I was happy not to pursue in the interview.

Because internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation are key to acknowledging the researcher's active position, it's also important for me to detail my own personal characteristics and emotional responses (Berger 2013). There are a number of other subject positions that I held as a researcher that may have influenced the interactions between myself and participants, including being older than participants (although only by a few years), being Caucasian, straight, male, middle class, and having no outwardly obvious religious affiliation. Making these details of myself explicit is important for other readers and researchers to understand how these characteristics may have influenced how I interpreted the data (Creswell 2008).

It also may have influenced how comfortable participants were talking to me about certain topics. For example, because I was quite young, I felt comfortable adopting some of the same idioms many of the participants used. However, my subject position as a white Australian male may have made it harder for participants to open up about their experiences of ethnicity (Berger 2013) and femininity (Broom, Hand et al. 2009), particularly in relation to sensitive topics. At times I believe this was advantageous as young people were willing to spend more time describing their cultural values and traditions to me as a cultural outsider. At other times, I felt there may have been assumed knowledge around things such as social media platforms and high school. While I found the interview guide useful for unpacking some of the social and cultural expectations around gender, I also remember some of the young women dismissing their emotional

experiences with alcohol without providing much detail. Alternatively, my subject position may have encouraged more in-depth dialogue with the young men in the study, but also increased the likelihood of them performing masculinities through conversation during the interview (Pini 2005). A few of the young men opened up about their experiences of romantic relationships in detail, for example, in ways that the female participants generally did not.

My appearance, the degree of formality or informality I adopted, the emotional aspect of my responses (e.g. friendly, curious or surprised) and my own personal qualities could have also influenced participants' responses (Baxter and Eyles 1997). Prior to and during interviews, I emphasised the informality of our interactions, and I often came to interviews dressed casually (for example, I often showed up to interviews having ridden my bike or dressed to go to the gym afterwards). This casual dress style may have also obscured any obvious class differences (Manderson, Bennett et al. 2016). To reflect my appreciation of their honesty and trust, I also used gestures (e.g. smiles, nods) as participants responded to interview questions. My emphasis on rapport may have also been a disadvantage at times, as it meant I was rarely seen to challenge participants on their narratives and potentially avoided honing-in on uncomfortable topics; however, I felt this 'rapport-centred' approach was still best given the young age of many of the participants.

In terms of broader research assumptions, this project was framed around understanding the social and cultural influences around why more young people are abstaining or drinking minimally, meaning the data and findings reflected the values of young light and non-drinkers who were willing to be interviewed and communicate their experiences. It also meant there was an explicit focus on exploring themes related to explanatory factors for declining trends in drinking (e.g. health, technology, parenting, etc.). From a public health perspective this meant examining topics focused on changes linked to reductions in drinking, while from a sociological perspective there was an emphasis on examining how structural shifts informed micro level values and attitudes towards alcohol. These research perspectives influenced the way I conducted the research, analysed the data, and interpreted the findings of this thesis.

Ethical Considerations

The National Statement on Human Ethical Conduct (National Health and Medical Research Council 2015) proposes that researchers have a responsibility for the basic ethical values of merit, integrity, justice, beneficence, and respect. Using these principles, a number of steps were taken to ensure an appropriate standard of ethics was upheld.

Integrity requires transparency and commitment to appropriate ethical methods. This was achieved through consistent communication with the research team, ensuring no conflicts of interest arose during the research, and through ethics approval from La Trobe University's Human

Ethics Committee[2]. As part of these requirements, all original recordings of interviews, along with completed transcribes are currently being stored on both a password-protected computer (accessible only by myself) and on a password-protected network drive (accessible only to investigators on the project). Hard copies of consent forms, verification of reimbursement forms, and follow-up locator forms were stored in a locked filing cabinet at La Trobe University for the duration of the research, accessible only by me. In publications the interview data has been de-identified through the use of pseudonyms and removal of any other identifiable information in transcripts. The findings of this study have only been communicated through peer-review publications, presentations, academic conferences, and the final thesis document.

Respect involved ensuring informed consent from participants through clear discussion of research aims and purpose, confidentiality details, how the data would be used and disseminated, and potential risks. Information on La Trobe University's counselling and support services was also offered to participants during debriefing.

Merit, beneficence and justice require an evaluation of potential harms and benefits, and efforts to not misrepresent or treat a given population unfairly. The merit of the research lay in both its novel approach to exploring the broader social influences around why some young people are choosing to abstain or drink minimally, and the potential implications for improving social and health policy. The potential harms of this research were low as there was no risk of deception, confidentiality and privacy was strictly managed, and participants were made aware of their rights and access to services. Through heterogeneous sampling and by not using personal identifiers, the risk of identification and misrepresentation was also reduced.

Limitations

As recruitment was largely achieved with self-selection through advertising on social media, this may have drawn a potentially 'digitally homogenous' sample. Although this was a possibility, the mainstream nature of social media (particularly among young people) makes it a broadly representative method of recruitment (Frandsen and Ferguson 2014). It also meant that there was not an overreliance on snowball recruitment, producing a potentially more diverse sample overall. The limitation of self-selection bias remained, but I hoped that this would also source participants who were more willing to provide 'thick' (Geertz 1973) detailed responses.

Another potential limitation was inaccurate self-reporting of alcohol consumption, which may have meant participants consumed more alcohol than the thresholds I set. This could have been due to recall bias (participants not remembering how much they had drunk) or social desirability bias (participants giving responses believed to be 'more desirable' for the researcher to hear). Participants may have also been deliberately misleading for the reimbursement offered. While I

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[2] The ethics application for this project was approved by the Human Ethics Committee at La Trobe University, and later amended and approved on 28th November, 2017

can never be certain that all the information participants provided was entirely accurate or true, I hoped that both the screening questions and details given during the interview would provide a consistent summary of participants' drinking patterns. Only one participant who was screened as being a low-risk drinker described multiple instances of drinking above the low-risk threshold in their interview. Their data was subsequently withheld from the analysis and replaced with data from one of the pilot interviews.

I note that the participants were all in some form of education at the time of being interviewed. Thus, I may have missed out on hearing from more marginalised young people not in education or training. I highlight that given time and resource restrictions the research focus was on diversity rather than representativeness. Participants also came from diverse cultural backgrounds and although the sample was a close representation of people from Melbourne born overseas, it may have over-represented those who spoke a second language (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020). The majority of participants who were born overseas or spoke a second language were of Asian background, with representation from African, Middle Eastern and European background. Although being born in countries such as India, China and Vietnam is common among Melbourne residents (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020), the diversity of the sample suggests a potential overrepresentation of non-Anglo and non-European young people. I note here and throughout the findings that the cultural diversity of the sample may have been linked to young people's status as light and non-drinkers. However, I this diversity also provided a range of cultural perspectives on alcohol, which were often important in how young people supported their (non)drinking. Indeed, having greater representation from Anglo Australians may have resulted in overlooking some of the significant cultural shifts that have, and continue to occur in Australian society, and how these might be important in understanding changing attitudes towards alcohol.

Another limitation was in the data I collected around religious affiliation. One of the questions in the interview guide asked if participants were part of any religious groups of communities. In total, 17 considered themselves to be part of religious groups of communities (predominately denominations of Christianity), which is in line with broader trends among young Australians (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017b). However, their religious involvement varied. For example, while a few participants actively practiced and went to religious gatherings on a regular basis, some considered themselves to be religious solely through their parents, while several others attended religious youth groups. This made it difficult to capture clear "yes/no" religious affiliations demographically. However, I was still able to analyse discussions of religion in relation to young people's identities and attitudes towards alcohol.

More generally, as the aim of this research was to focus on the experiences and practices of light drinkers and abstainers, I acknowledge that this research may not be representative of the diverse range of alcohol attitudes and practices of the broader population of young Australians. As with most qualitative research, the intention was to build theory rather than infer causality (Gray 2014).

Given the young age of many of the participants, it may also be that their attitudes towards alcohol were still taking shape. Although many young people try alcohol before turning 18 (the legal age of purchase) (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020), the participants in this sample may have had limited experiences with alcohol simply due to their age. Therefore, I am aware that the attitudes and opinions of participants may have been shaped by their lack of experience, rather than any firmly established values or attitudes towards alcohol.

Personal Reflections

Given the importance of my own role as a researcher, I believe it is important for me to include some personal reflections from my experiences talking to young people. The first detail that I think is important is that the participants were included in the sample because of their drinking status, but many other elements of their lives differed. While the findings reported in this thesis reflect broad commonalities, they do not capture how each participant was unique in their personalities, their family relationships, their social lives, and their cultural beliefs. Some were confident and outgoing, others driven by their aspirations for the future. Some were withdrawn and reluctant to discuss their core values, while some seemed to say things that contradicted their values. On the one hand, I feel this was incredibly valuable as it allowed me to unpack a diverse range of views and attitudes. I was able to meet and interview 50 young people who were willing to tell me about their lives, values and experiences in close detail, and this led to an incredibly rich and detailed dataset. However, I also acknowledge the diversity of all the participants will never truly be reflected in the findings. Their lives and relationships with alcohol were complex, and many could have been closely analysed as case studies. At times reducing them to common themes felt like a disservice to this complexity. However, this was an inevitable result of conveying a large amount of data in an accessible format. Where possible I have tried to highlight patterns in the data, how they reflected a majority or minority sentiment, and where there may have been alternative narratives that challenged them (Neale, Miller et al. 2014).

This also reflects on my skills as a researcher. In qualitative analysis, it is the skill, sensitivity and integrity of the researcher (rather than any particular analytical tool) that act as a measure of quality (Creswell 2003). At the beginning of my PhD, my qualitative skills were limited to an understanding of theory and I had no previous experience of collecting qualitative data. Although my interview guide was detailed and had enough prompts that I could rely on it to create a flowing interview, I still had some apprehensions due to my inexperience. My task was to talk to young people and elicit as much detail from them as possible about what were sometimes very personal topics. Fortunately, many participants were happy to share their personal stories and views in the interviews without needing much prompting. This built up my own confidence as a researcher. For participants who were shy or less talkative, I was able to rely on the interview guide to prompt some reflections. I do note that for some participants I had to accept responses

that were brief and not necessarily insightful, but I considered this an inevitable part of the process and am still appreciative of each participant's time.

Prior to the interviews I explicitly told participants I wanted them to feel like they were having a conversation with me rather than being interviewed, and after the initial pilot interviews I felt confident in my ability to sustain a relaxed and flowing interview. My use of an interview guide was still invaluable as it meant that each interview followed the same basic lines of enquiry and covered the same topics (Patton 2002). However, I have no doubt my own interview skills grew during the course of data collection. My ability to hone-in topics and read social cues improved over the six-month period of data collection. Looking back on the data as a more experienced researcher, I can see there may have been missed opportunities to examine certain topics in more detail and be more flexible in my approach, but I also accept this was a relatively unavoidable part of the research training inherent in conducting a PhD.

Interviews can be difficult, challenging and highly emotional for both the participant and interviewer (Creswell 2003). Although there was an ethical framework in place, I was also fortunate enough to not experience any serious ethical challenges during data collection. There was only one occasion where a participant became distressed talking about a family member's drinking. This occurred about halfway through the interview, at which point I paused the recording and offered to discontinue the interview. The participant took some time to regain composure and wanted to go on. Weighing up the situation, the participant's state, and being aware of making them feel embarrassed or uncomfortable, I decided to continue the interview and shift the topic focus away from alcohol and family. They were able to complete the interview and the participant declined my offer to provide details of support services during the debrief. I insisted if they had any concerns around privacy or their mental health to contact me, but this never happened. This was the only occasion I saw a participant being visibly affected during the interview, and fortunately this was only a passing moment. In contrast, I felt that the majority of participants viewed the interviews as positive opportunities to share their values, opinions and experiences. Most also seemed interested in the research itself and were invested in the findings, which I also found personally motivating and rewarding.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided a detailed overview of the methods used in this thesis in order to better understand the factors influencing young people's light or non-drinking practices. To foreground this, I have described my epistemological and ontological stance, and how that informed the study methodology. I have highlighted some of the strengths and limitations of the research, and some of my personal reflections from data collection. Most importantly, given the qualitative nature of the research, I have attempted to be transparent and reflexive about the processes of data collection and analysis, and how these were shaped by my own subjective views, values and assumptions. While each of the proceeding chapters present manuscripts with

their own methods sections and different approaches to analysis of particular themes, this chapter has provided a broader overview of the research process.

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Chapter 5

Reflexive Habitus and the New Obligation of Choice: Understanding Young People's Light Drinking and Alcohol Abstinence

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Author Contributions

GC collected and analysed the data, conceived the idea and led manuscript writing. AP and SM provided critical feedback, suggested revisions and refined the theoretical contribution.

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Reflexive habitus and the new obligation of choice: understanding young people's light drinking and alcohol abstinence

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how young people construct drinking and non-drinking as a choice by drawing on the concept of reflexive habitus – how individuals in contemporary society habitually negotiate choices around consumption, lifestyle and identity. We explore accounts of non-drinking choices through semi-structured interviews with 50 young people aged 16–19 from Melbourne, Australia, who either abstained from alcohol or drank minimally. Participants were encouraged to discuss how they had decided to either not drink or drink only lightly, and why they thought consumption practices among young people have changed. Their accounts centred on themes of (a) reflexively managing risk and health through non-drinking, (b) attempting to perform autonomy and self-expression through drinking choices, and (c) cultural politics: thinking reflexively about alcohol's role in society. Participants were conscious that consuming alcohol might influence their wellbeing, social functioning, and their sense of individuality, and were critical of constructions of alcohol as an expected feature of socialising. The growing pluralism of lifestyle choices and increasing structural and discursive pressures on young people may have encouraged a more reflexive habitus, in turn necessitating active choice-making about consumption practices that appears to be at odds with the cultural logic of heavy drinking.

Introduction

Rates of alcohol use by young people in Australia have steadily declined since the early 2000s (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW] 2017; Livingston 2014; Toumbourou et al. 2018). These changes have occurred among both young men and women, across geographical regions and socio-economic status groups, and have been driven largely by young people either drinking less than previous cohorts, beginning to drink later in life, or choosing not to drink at all (AIHW 2017; Pennay, Livingston, and MacLean 2015). For example, abstention in 16–17-year-olds increased from 23.3% in 2001 to 57.7% in 2016, while for 18–19-year-olds it increased from 12.9% to 23.1% over the same period (AIHW 2017). Similar trends have been observed in northern Europe,

the United Kingdom and North America (see Pape, Rossow, and Brunborg 2018). Because alcohol consumption has been a common social practice among young people in Western countries since the late 1980s–1990s (Measham 2008), the growing number of those who choose not to partake in drinking or only drink small amounts challenges the view that alcohol is an expected part of socialising for young people. Changes in substance use, economic conditions, exposure to advertising, migration trends, and parenting have all been explored; however, the driving factors of these changing trends remain unclear (Vashishtha et al. 2019). Indeed, changes may be due to a complex and interwoven set of social mechanisms related to broader habits, practices and discourses (Törrönen et al. 2019).

How young people drink reflects both the broader social and cultural positioning of alcohol, as well as their choices around consumption practices contribute to their social identities. These meanings and choices are intertwined, reflecting the dual (but sometimes competing) nature of collective and individual identities. For example, drinking alcohol is a highly socialised practice tied to expectations around collective acts of sharing, reciprocity and conformity (Cherrier and Gurrieri 2013) and is embedded in the way young people both form and maintain their social groups (Järvinen and Gundelach 2007; MacLean 2016). Young people's drinking is also tied to broader social rituals and rites of passage (Beccaria and Sande 2003), and choosing not to drink can impede social involvement (Nairn et al. 2006). Supski, Lindsay, and Tanner (2017) describe these symbolic meanings as an apparent binary between either choosing to drink – which is associated with inclusion, collective fun and excitement, and making the most of youth – or choosing not to drink – which is associated with exclusion, being seen as uptight or boring, and wasting important youthful opportunities.

However, patterns of drinking are not fixed, with trends changing and potentially weakening the symbolic value of alcohol and its perceived necessity as a rite of passage to adulthood (Törrönen et al. 2019). Recent work by Hardcastle, O'Connor, and Breen (2018) suggests some young people actively take pride in their resistance to the dominant drinking culture, which contributes to a sense of autonomy over their identities. It also appears that young people may be able to achieve a sense of authenticity by not drinking (Conroy and de Visser 2015) and actively challenge reductive stereotypes that portray young people as heavy 'binge' drinkers and young non-drinkers as socially dull (Herring, Bayley, and Hurcombe 2014).

Notions of individual choice are evident in these studies; however, abstention and light drinking are also no longer a minority activity for young people, which suggest a broader social change. Therefore, we sought to explore how young people conceptualise their abstaining or light drinking, particularly concerning how and whether these practices are a consequence of individual choice and the extent to which they appear socially or structurally governed. We use the concept of reflexive habitus to examine how this might be linked to changes in young people's drinking practices.

Reflexive habitus and young people

For many young people, late-modernity provides a plurality of options, possibilities and risks, and emphasises individualism and self-fulfilment over collective ways of thinking and living. The extension of time spent in education, globalisation of information and

ideas, democratisation of culture, and destandardisation of lifestyles has opened up new career opportunities (while closing some traditional pathways) and new forms of resources and ways to access them (Woodman and Wyn 2013). This plurality can lead to young people seeing themselves as flexible choice-makers and as individuals responsible for their successes and failures, despite structural limitations and discursive contexts (Furlong and Cartmel 2006; Wyn and Woodman 2006). Therefore, young people are compelled to forge distinct choice-based identities, while also facing a number of constraints to their autonomy.

Bearing these contemporary conditions in mind, our article explores changes in young people's social practices and engagement with alcohol by drawing on notions of 'reflexive habitus' (Sweetman 2003), which incorporates both reflexivity (Giddens 1991) and habitus (Bourdieu 1984). Reflexivity understands individuals as being obliged to carve out meaningful identities through considered lifestyle and consumption choices. In contrast, habitus describes the unconscious embodiment of social structures and 'fields' of social, physical, or digital spaces that individuals belong to (e.g. cultures, networks, occupations). Reflexive habitus combines these concepts, proposing that contemporary fields and structural pressures around individualism, consumption choices and lifestyle practices require continuous reflexive engagement (Sweetman 2003). While reflexive habitus can be viewed as a social resource (i.e. the ability to be reflexive can be seen as a measure of opportunity and privilege), it can also be a way to negotiate personal and social risks through self-regulation (Adkins 2002; Threadgold and Nilan 2009). Therefore, it allows us to examine engagement with both risk and choices around, alcohol at an individual level, as well as the undeniable importance of social and structural influences on practice.

Reflexive habitus and drinking choices

Alcohol consumption or non-consumption can be thought of within the context of increasing pressure on young people to reflexively manage their biographies – even in day-to-day decisions around what to wear, what to eat, and how to behave. Therefore, reflexive habitus is particularly relevant to alcohol use as a diversity of choices and lifestyles (e.g. through new technologies, leisure pursuits, and patterns of time use) among young people become increasingly accepted, new fields of governmentality and technology emerge, and cultural pressures and risk continue to be an everyday feature life (Beck 1992).

Changing drinking practices may also reflect the evolving role and influence of key fields (Bourdieu 1984) young people occupy (e.g. familial, educational, cultural, digital) and how they reflexively choose to navigate and move between them. For example, fields can be constituted in relation to a range of discourses that compete with alcohol, such as health, sport, career performance and religiosity (Fry 2010). Thus, drinking alcohol and the identities and practices associated with it may no longer be the default, but rather one of many choices to be made as young people are increasingly required to reflexively manage their lives.

Method

This article draws on data collected as part of a broader project examining the factors influencing declining drinking trends amongst young people in Australia. Specifically,

we wanted to understand how young people constructed forms of light and non-drinking as a choice, and what influenced these choices. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 50 young people (26 females, mean age = 17.2; 24 males, mean age 17.0) aged 16–19 years old (mean = 17.1) from inner and outer metropolitan suburbs of Melbourne, and nearby regional towns. Given declines in drinking have been starkest among 16–17-year-olds (AIHW 2017) the majority of participants we recruited (*n* = 39) were in this age group. Participants were screened and deemed eligible if they drank within the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council's guidelines for low-risk single occasion drinking, defined as less than 4 standard drinks on a single occasion (where one standard drink is equivalent to 10 g of pure alcohol). Several participants had previously consumed more than four standard drinks on a single occasion but had not done so recently and were included in the study. Twenty-five participants considered themselves abstainers at the time of interviews (having either never drunk or only drunk a small amount with family), while the other 25 considered themselves light drinkers who drank small amounts less than monthly. All participants were in secondary school, university, or an equivalent educational program to secondary school. Fourteen participants were born overseas, and 22 spoke a language other than English at home. This is broadly in line with demographic census data of Greater Melbourne, although speakers of a second language at home were slightly overrepresented (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2019). Participants were from a mix of suburbs that differed in terms of socio-economic advantage and came from a combination of dual and single-parent families.

Participants were recruited through online advertisements and word of mouth. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in a setting of the participant's choice where they were encouraged to share their thoughts, experiences and stories at length. The semi-structured interviews drew on a range of themes covering social life, family, leisure time, school, health, drinking experiences, attitudes towards alcohol, and reflections on declining trends in young people's drinking. Examples of questions included 'What social activities do you normally do for fun?', 'Why do you think you don't drink?' and 'Why do you think more young people are drinking less or not drinking at all nowadays?'. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and later coded using NVivo 12, which allowed for us to keep track of prominent themes and explore overlap between codes. Ethical approval for the project was granted by the Human Ethics Committee at La Trobe University (approval number HEC17-002). Participants have been allocated pseudonyms to disguise their identities.

We took an interpretive-constructionist approach to better understand how our participants constructed their views on alcohol, and how these processes were connected to their lived contexts and interactions (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2017). Discourses and decision-making processes around drinking less or abstaining were identified inductively through thematic analysis – a flexible theoretical perspective useful in exploring implicit ideas, assumptions and concepts (Clarke and Braun 2017).

Findings

This paper is structured around three different, but often overlapping themes: how awareness of harm and health created a sense of ambivalence towards alcohol, how a belief in

individual freedom facilitated identity choices that did not entail drinking alcohol, and how drinking was challenged and critiqued as a cultural norm.

Reflexively managing risk and health through non-drinking

Participants contemplated their drinking choices around a consistent theme of managing risk. Alcohol was both a pleasure product and a potential source of harm, and discourses of harm were a common feature of the explanations many provided as to why they avoided alcohol or only consumed it within certain contexts deemed to be safe. These harms included immediate physical harms (such as falling over or getting into an altercation), socially regrettable behaviour, impaired cognitions and judgement, long-term physiological harms, and the potential to become addicted.

> Practically I see my friends that do drink and they get really stupid. I think I need as many brain cells as I can get so I'd like to not be super stupid. A lot of them already have regrets, like bad stories have come out of them just saying things they don't mean. Some of them get really, really drunk, and then they'll nearly hits their heads on stuff and then it gets physically danger-ous and stuff like that and just people get dumb. (Lucy, 17, female)

> … sometimes it doesn't weigh out, like I could have fun, a little bit of fun, be funny, I could be extra confident or I could lose my life tonight, which one? Is it worth it? (Allen, 17, male)

The potential for health and harm was recognised as a fundamental and embodied part of both daily life and drinking, and something which required conscious management. Lucy uses some of her friends' heavy drinking as a counterpoint to reflect on her own choices. Engaging with the risks of alcohol constitutes an identity Lucy distances herself from for health and social reasons. Alternatively, Allen frames drinking within a risk-rewards scenario where the ultimate potential for harm – alcohol-related death – is com-pared to the relatively minor reward of having fun. Here, drinking created new tensions between pleasure, health and sociability, and encouraged moments of reflexive nego-tiation with discourses of risk.

Participants also reflected on the role of parents in their decisions around alcohol and their ambivalence towards drinking. Sometimes this took the form of observing parents' practices and learning from their experience of negative consequences. Others commen-ted on the importance of open and honest communication from parents in their consider-ation of these consequences.

> . … when your parents are really open and just, they're really open about not just doing it but the risks, the rewards[…] Maybe some of their best experiences in life have been drunk or high or whatever, but they're able to reflect back on it and say that was good, the next morning I woke up vomiting everywhere. There's a big balance. (Dean, 16, male)

> Well, judging by my parents' drinking habits I assume that alcohol for their generation is definitely still very prominent in their lives, but I feel like for my generation there is a lot more choice involved and there's a lot more information surrounding the risks of alcohol. (Ava, 17, female)

Dean describes discussions about alcohol with his parents as understanding the 'balance' between risks and rewards of drinking, and thus being able to make a reflexive decision about drinking. Similar accounts showed parent–child relationships

often took a harm-minimisation approach when it came to alcohol, which constructed young people as informed consumers expected to individually manage and minimise risk. On the other hand, Ava's quote highlights how the growing availability of risk-based information reinforced the potential for choice around alcohol, which is contrasted against the prominence of alcohol in previous generations.

Participants felt there was a strong cultural imperative to manage both physical and mental health, and were conscious of how their drinking choices fitted in a health-oriented habitus:

> I think it's something that people are a bit more aware of. I don't know if it's just me, as I've gotten older, or if it's society in general is a bit more aware of how important physical health – physical and mental health and things like that. (Jennifer, 17, female)

> My mum's mum smoked and she died when my mum was 19 or something. So I know it can affect and change people's lives pretty drastically if they do it. Same with getting liver – or whatever with the liver with drinking and stuff and killing your liver – it's got some pretty bad side effects. I'm aware of it. You're a lot more aware of it now than probably what you were a while ago. My parents wouldn't have been as aware of all the consequences in health – the bad health side effects and stuff of drinking or smoking and stuff because it was never really looked into as much as it is now. (Jordan, 17, male)

Jennifer's account suggests an aspirational awareness of how important physical health and mental health are. In contrast, Jordan highlights his sense of inter-generational learning, drawing parallels between the known harms of smoking and alcohol. The accounts here suggest that discourses of health provided a culturally sanctioned impetus to avoid drinking, and that this may create new moments of reflexive negotiation. The combination of aspirations and harms encouraged participants to be conscious of both future health and the immediate health risks of alcohol. The body here was reflexively seen as a product of health choices, which placed a responsibility onto young people to use alcohol in such a way as to safeguard their wellbeing.

The pervasive sense of risk around alcohol was reinforced by problematic representations of alcohol in the media. This gave participants a general sense of apprehension, which they differentiated from the experiences of previous generations:

> I guess in older generations, without Snapchat and like media and on the news and stuff, it wasn't as – like you didn't see as much of the effects of it, and all like the news about people dying with alcohol or being raped or whatever. Like when you're younger, now because of technology, you're a lot more open to the problems of the world and what's going on, and that includes like people getting hurt because of alcohol, or like people dying because of fights related to alcohol. It's – I might not focus on it, or not that much, but subconsciously I soak it all in that sometimes. Like there's a limit and there's a safe way to do it and this can happen if I do this. (Kristy, 16, female)

Kristy also goes on to discuss how new fields of risk have emerged around drinking and digital technology:

> … you got away with a lot more than we do now, because of also technology. Like if someone posts you're drinking something and that gets to the wrong people, you get in trouble – and they never used to have that. (Kristy, 16, female)

In Kristy's account, media portrayals of alcohol are an affective product of digital fields of information. The potential for surveillance also creates new harms that can shape and

constrain behaviour. The young people here discussed how technology and social media made them conscious of how they presented themselves online to family, friends, employers and the public. The influence of technology created new tensions around discipline, surveillance, and self-governance. These digital fields perpetuated risk, blurred private and public spaces, and encouraged reflexive non-drinking choices as a form of self-regulation and responsible care for one's body.

Attempting to perform autonomy and self-expression through drinking choices

Individualist values and aspirations were a key feature of many of the participants' accounts, despite differences in social and economic conditions and structural limitations. Taking up discourses of individual freedom and self-expression provided participants with a sense of autonomy and meant they felt they were able to express aspects of their identity through their non-drinking choices.

> I feel like in older generations, it was seen as cool to drink or like if you didn't drink, you weren't popular. I feel like that was more the older generation. Whereas nowadays it's more understanding and everyone is their person, and if they don't want to then they don't have to. (Tristan, 17, male)

> Free thought, individual thought. Everybody's like never really – they want to be themselves and they gain more – they're allowed to be themselves more now. Everybody can express themselves and really be who they are, it's not just like everybody's just trying to be this or trying to be that, everybody's trying to be themselves, find themselves. Our young generation, we're more aware, more self-aware. We're not as blind as back then, we believe what we believe, we look into what we want to look into, we express ourselves how we want to express ourselves. So like, if less people are drinking it's because less people want to. We're just doing what we want to do. (Allen, 17, male)

Both Tristan's and Allen's accounts emphasise freedom of thought, respect for expressions of individualism, and place a high value on unique identity construction. They suggest that the focus on individualism and choice encourages reflexivity around alcohol, in turn making it less 'cool', and increasing young people's need to construct distinct identities without relying on cultural norms or traditions. Allen's account in particular suggests non-conformity is desirable, where self-expression is more valued than 'going along with the crowd' and drinking. Here, reflexive habitus allows the expression of distinction and autonomy through what participants considered individualistic social practices like non-drinking.

In this attempt to gain a sense of autonomy, the role of drinking as an important rite of passage and part of 'a lifestyle' was also questioned:

> I don't think it's necessarily important. I don't think everyone has to do it, I don't think it's one of those – I don't think people should feel pressured to if they don't want to. But for me personally I feel like it's not super important, but it just represents being a teenager and exploring different things and that type of thing. (Greta, 16, female)

> I feel like if you're in that alcohol, drinking environment, it would be – sort of become part of your lifestyle and then that would affect what else you do. I feel, for example, if it was part of my lifestyle I wouldn't be that that motivated to, for example, have these health-related goals, or I wouldn't even go exercise as much. (Savanna, 17, female)

These accounts show how alcohol represents one of many paths to performing young adult selves and is linked to broader lifestyle choices. Greta describes alcohol as a way to explore different ways of performing teenagehood – one that is not 'necessarily important'. For Savanna, the decision to drink has to be reflexively negotiated as it is conflicted with the values guiding her lifestyle, where health and exercise were paramount. Although she constructs non-drinking as a choice, her perceived need to be healthy and maintain her fitness goals also seemingly constrain her choices around alcohol.

It was also suggested that the choice to not drink may have been made easier by the current social climate supporting difference and resisting peer pressure:

> I think it's just that it's not really a pressure thing anymore. There's a lot of stuff about – especially now, about people being able to choose for themselves and anti-judgement stuff. I think that helps. Because the general ideas tend to be that it's your choice. Don't judge other people for their decisions. Just let people do what they what to do, kind of thing. So I think there's a lot – because I haven't really experienced any, really peer pressure to drink or anything, and most of my friends haven't either. It's more of a – I don't know. It's just – yeah, I feel like it's just that kind of vibe. Especially now, there's just – yeah, I think it's – especially because there's so much stuff online about the peer pressure and things like that. (Jennifer, 17, female)

Jennifer suggests the increasing unacceptability of peer pressure has made non-drinking less of a social obstacle. She asserts that the ability to carve out socially acceptable non-drinking identities has increased, but also points to discourses of individualism and self-expression challenging cultural pressures around drinking. Here, non-drinking was culturally sanctioned and enabled young people like Jennifer to take on credible non-drinking identities. Accounts reported in this theme also show how individualism has produced a reflexive habitus wherein people can construct diverse identities and new forms of authentic non-drinking and self-expression.

Cultural politics: thinking reflexively about alcohol's role in society

The third theme that emerged around reflexive habitus was the way that it provided a link between individual-level social practices and broader cultural politics around alcohol use. Some participants internalised discourses (often public health-based) that were critical of alcohol use. They used this to reflect on and challenge the position and meanings ascribed to alcohol use within their broader social worlds.

> I get why people do it. It's understandable. It's a recreational activity. It's like hanging out. It's like playing video games with someone. It's the same as that, but I don't like it. Maybe it's just the culture being at college, but I don't really like it. (Zoe, 17, female)

> Because alcohol is really common, I guess people give it a pass, they don't think of it as a bad drug when it really is (…) I think that a society built around needing a drug, which alcohol is, to make friends is kind of sad in my head. But I understand it fully, it's just I'd rather be sober. (Sandra, 16, female)

Zoe associates drinking with other leisure time activities, suggesting it is interchangeable with recreational activities like video games. Sandra similarly says she 'understands' alcohol, but is critical of socially sanctioned reliance on it to build friendships and socialise. She categorises alcohol as a drug rather than differentiating it as a consumer product, and this directs her to object to societal normalisation of alcohol. These accounts are critical of

alcohol use and question discourses that normalise its place in certain contexts, highlighting how some young people reflexively challenge the dominant drinking culture through an embodied morality around alcohol.

Others were explicitly critical of the ubiquity of alcohol in Australian social life and the mechanisms through which alcohol use was normalised (such as advertising and cultural promotion):

> It's too much – it's promoted too much. Like it's promoted to the point where it's just like – it's kind of what the country stands for, that VB, picture of a typical Australia and they'll be drinking, they have a drink in their hand. So when you think about that as basically advocating – it's advertising it as a young age and advocating it as kids to grow up to want to be that. They make it almost like if you don't drink then you're not proud of your culture, you're not proud of Australia, you're not proud of being Australian […] That's not what Australia should stand for because Australia's a great place. It should stand for – they should represent it in a different way because it stands for so much more than that. Like diversity, all that stuff, that's the stuff they could be pushing, but they're pushing alcohol use. That just makes us look bad, like as a country and it just – it's a misconception of who we are, as people, as a nationality, that's how I feel basically. (Allen, 17, male)

Allen is critical of this process of cultural promotion, pointing to stereotypes in Australian culture which he asserts promote drinking from a young age and culturally delegitimises non-drinkers. His account links cultural fields and social practices, and while he challenges dominant cultural fields that normalise drinking, this also suggests young people's drinking choices are constrained by these cultural norms. For some like Allen, however, reflexive habitus here facilitated new ways of thinking critically about cultural norms and how these aligned with their values and beliefs.

Although not a common account, some participants saw alcohol as having a clear negative impact on society as a whole:

> … what I see in life and what I see in society, I see a lot of problems being caused by drinking, but I see no problems being caused by people not drinking. That would be how I would summarise it in its most concise form. (Erica, 17, female)

> I feel like, like I said before it's a stain on society to be honest. I just feel like it's a form of drug which is legal to profit the government, not the government but the businesses. (Joe, 17, male)

In both of these accounts, anti-alcohol sentiments are expressed that directly challenge the dominant structures that normalise consumption. Erica puts forward a strong public health-focused stance towards alcohol, one that ignores any positive aspects of drinking. In contrast, Joe is critical of structural forces that transform alcohol into a consumer product that prioritises profit over social harm. Here some participants aligned their drinking practices with their broader social and political values, creating new embodied practices of ethics and morality that problematised alcohol. This was also visible in other consumption practices – for example, several participants categorised themselves as vegan or talked about opting for plant-based diets. Similarly, reflexive habitus allowed young adults to engage in cultural politics and consider social implications and competing discourses of alcohol. While these accounts show how some participants thought critically about their practices within structures and competing norms around alcohol, it could also be argued that many of their challenges appeared to be influenced and constrained by public health discourses that they had internalised into their habitus.

Discussion

The purpose of this article was to understand how young people constructed drinking and non-drinking as a choice, and the key factors that influenced these choices. Because today's young people are regularly required to engage with choice and risk in everyday life, we suggest that reflexive habitus may be useful in understanding how and why more young people in Australia are avoiding, resisting or minimising their alcohol consumption. While there was no single collective reason as to why participants avoided alcohol, participants reflexively engaged with social, cultural and digital fields and discourses of risk when thinking about their social practices and consumption choices.

In this study, the potential for health and social risks was made salient by parents, the media, and the availability of information online, and these fields provided a compelling reason for young people to contemplate their choices around alcohol. The importance of health has been cited as a reason some young people choose not to drink (Nairn et al. 2006) and may have influenced drinking rates at a broader cultural level (Kraus et al. 2019). Physical and mental health emerged as something that participants believed could be controlled through a 'phenomenon of choices and options' (Giddens 1991, 8). The provision of health and harm-based information supported credible and consistent light and non-drinking choices and identities across situations. This contrasts with some previous research that suggests the context in which alcohol is consumed tends to override public health messages (Lindsay 2010) and that drinking or non-drinking identities are often complex and situation-specific (Banister, Conroy, and Piacentini 2019; Conroy and de Visser 2018). Light and non-drinking choices across social contexts also seemed to be aided by a reflexive awareness of technology and social media, which challenged the pre-existing 'excuse value' of being drunk with a new 'regret value' of being captured and displayed unwittingly (Brown and Gregg 2012). This aligns with research suggesting young people are conscious of a range of personal and social harms, which influences their habits and practices (Törrönen et al. 2019). It highlights the importance of fields such as parental influence and health-oriented goals as reinforcers to non-drinking, but also suggests technology has created new tensions and risks around surveillance, increasing the need to reflexively self-regulate through non-drinking as well as in other areas of young people's lives.

At the same time, autonomy and individualism were actively pursued by participants through non-drinking choices. Deviating from alcohol norms can give young people a sense of autonomy and individuality (Hardcastle, O'Connor, and Breen 2018; Herring, Bayley, and Hurcombe 2014; Pavlidis, Ojajarvi, and Bennett 2019). Although they came from different social and economic backgrounds, participants reiterated that light or non-drinking was a personal choice they had control over, and one which afforded them a sense of individuality (despite it becoming increasingly common). Similar to the sample in Supski and Lindsay's (2016) research, participants here did not belong to any distinct subculture, but rather made their own reflexive choices within mainstream culture. Previous research has suggested non-drinking requires culturally sanctioned reasons (Conroy and de Visser 2014). However here, many young people felt there was a greater social acceptance of non-drinking and that they could assume credible non-drinking identities, which influenced their choices and perceptions of autonomy around alcohol. Contrasting research on both drinkers (Borlagdan et al. 2010) and drug users

(MacLean, Bruun, and Mallett 2013) suggests that the pursuit of autonomy can also be a justification *for* drinking and drug use. These studies showed how peer pressure and marginalisation influenced young people's choices and how they felt able to enact autonomy; thus, it is important to recognise the social and structural factors that shape agency. Participants here drew on different fields relating to health, family, culture, school, leisure, and aspirations that supported their choices. This highlights the importance of these forces in shaping how young people construct their versions of autonomy, and how non-drinking choices can be a pragmatic response to a range of social pressures.

Participants also reflexively engaged with the broader cultural politics of alcohol use, challenging drinking at both the social and societal level. Young non-drinkers can choose not to drink for a range of moral or ideological reasons (Piacentini and Banister 2009), can take pleasure from light and non-drinking practices (Caluzzi, MacLean, and Pennay, 2020) and express concern about young people's alcohol consumption at a collective level (Pavlidis, Ojajarvi, and Bennett 2019). In this study we found that some participants demonstrated an embedded sense of morality and ethics around alcohol (e.g. thinking about alcohol's societal harms) and reflexively aligned their non-drinking practices with these broader social and political values. Similar to Yeomans's (2018) notion of 'ethical self-formation' through non-drinking, we note that this habitus and understanding of alcohol echoed prominent public health discourses that problematised alcohol. Notably, our research highlights how young people can draw on ethics and values to inform their non-drinking practices, as well as how perceptions of choice can be influenced by structures and forms of institutional knowledge (such as public health discourses).

Limitations

The cohort was quite young in age, and their views may shift over time as their circumstances change and as they engage more with alcohol. Indeed, the majority of participants were aged under 18 (the legal drinking age in Australia) which would likely influence their perceptions of autonomy and drinking choices. While we focused more explicitly on non-drinking choices, most participants saw alcohol as having both positive and negative effects and believed it could be consumed moderately and responsibly. Moreover, participants ranged in how reflective they were about their drinking and non-drinking choices, suggesting reflexive habitus should not be thought of as homogenous across a population.

How participants engaged with choice and developed their position towards alcohol was also likely to have been linked to their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. As noted, nearly half of our participants came from non-English speaking families, which is broadly reflective of Melbourne's population. While they mostly constructed light or non-drinking practices as an engagement with autonomy and choice, coming from backgrounds where alcohol was less tolerated or even forbidden, undoubtedly shaped their values, cultural identities and choices. Thus, we note the importance of cultural and familial fields in shaping notions of autonomy and choice.

We also note that drinking is strongly related to class-based values, resources and power relations. Although our participants' social and economic backgrounds varied, their socio-economic status was not measured. However, our participants all had access

to housing and were in some type of education. Their ability to reflexively think about self-expression and risk also highlighted elements of privilege. Therefore, our findings may not necessarily reflect the experiences of marginalised young people, where understandings of choice and autonomy would likely differ as a result of structural constraints and social inequalities.

Conclusion

In this research, we found the notion of reflexive habitus useful in examining how young people made light and non-drinking choices while also drawing on discourses and fields of influence. While individualism and active choice-making were prioritised, internalised public health messages and discourses of risk encouraged self-regulation and challenged the cultural logic of heavy drinking. Light and non-drinking practices also seemed to be made easier within a social climate that respected individual choice and promoted reflexive social awareness and ethical choices (e.g. veganism, environmentalism).

Given that declines in young people's drinking have occurred internationally, it is important to recognise what is distinct to Australia and what is common across countries. Drinking has declined the most in high-income western countries, where similar changes in gender roles, increased problematisation of alcohol, health promotion strategies and the ubiquity of digital technologies have been noted (Kraus et al. 2019). These commonalities are important to consider given that values around risk-management and health were central in this study. Similar values have been raised in research on young people's drinking in Sweden (Törrönen et al. 2019), suggesting some shared cultural values among young people across geographic borders. While this may have implications for understanding changing practices within a global youth culture, we note the influence of local context should not be forgotten. Namely, Australia has a demographic make-up distinct from other European and North American countries, and the influence of these different cultural and ethnic groups on Australians' broader societal values and attitudes towards alcohol is likely to be important.

Indeed, even within our sample there was no singular consensus or collective movement against drinking. What we detected was the activation of reflexive habitus as a means of negotiating risk and self-expression, which influenced practices of abstention or light dinking. Our findings suggest that encouraging young people to incorporate health into their identity choices and to critically engage with alcohol at a broader social level may construct non-drinking practices positively. Future research should closely examine the influence of new and changing fields on non-drinking (such as digital technology and cultural shifts), whether individualism as a rationale for not drinking will continue despite it becoming more common, and how transitions into independence (such as turning 18 and leaving school) influence perceptions of autonomy and drinking choices.

Acknowledgements

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Chapter 6

"No One Associates Alcohol with Being in Good Health": Health and Wellbeing as Imperatives to Manage Alcohol Use for Young People

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GC collected and analysed the data, conceived the idea and led manuscript writing. SM, ML and AP provided critical feedback, suggested revisions and refined the theoretical contribution.

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

SOCIOLOGY OF HEALTH & ILLNESS

"No one associates alcohol with being in good health": Health and wellbeing as imperatives to manage alcohol use for young people

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Abstract
Young people's drinking has declined markedly in Australia over the past 15 years, and this may be linked to changing norms and values around health. We take the view that healthism—a discourse that privileges good health and renders people personally responsible for managing health—has become pervasive, creating new pressures influencing young people's alcohol practices. Through interviews with 50 young light drinkers and abstainers, we explored these notions of health and alcohol. Although health was not the only reason that participants abstained or drank lightly, many avoided drinking to minimise health risks and to pursue healthy lifestyles. Their understanding of health came from multiple sources such as the media, schools, parents—and often reinforced public health messages, and healthist discourse. This discourse influenced how participants perceived health norms, engaged with health in everyday life and managed their alcohol consumption. Because the need to be healthy incorporated bodily health, mental health and social wellbeing, it also created tensions around how young people could drink while maintaining their health. This highlights the importance of health as a key consideration in the alcohol practices of light drinking and abstaining young Australians, which could help explain broader declines in youth drinking.

SOCIOLOGY OF HEALTH & ILLNESS

INTRODUCTION

Young people are often at the vanguard of social change. This includes changing practices and norms around health and, in turn, young people's drinking styles. Indeed, rates of drinking among young people have been declining in Australia for almost two decades, with more teenagers delaying their first drink, abstaining from alcohol or choosing to drink less than previous generations (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2017). It has been suggested that young people's current tendency to drink less is due to increasing awareness of the health effects of alcohol and greater general health consciousness (Bhattacharya, 2016; Törrönen et al., 2019). However, the link between health and drinking is complex as alcohol has a range of social and cultural values beyond its health effect. While some young people choose not to drink for health reasons (Bartram et al., 2016; Fry, 2010), other research has suggested that social contexts orient people towards having fun over worrying about health (Brierley-Jones et al., 2014) and that government health guidelines that designate "risky" levels of consumption have little relevance to the way people consume alcohol (Lindsay, 2010). Others have noted a middle ground, where "bounded and controlled intoxication and risk behaviour go well with mainstream values and ideals communicated in school and health discourses" (Kolind, 2011, p. 298).

The relationship between health and alcohol is a complex one, and undeniably entangled with broader changes in social practices and norms. In this research, we suggest that cultural pressures to achieve and maintain health have made being healthy an imperative in young people's lives. This may have played an important role in the shifting nature of alcohol consumption for some young people. We examine the impact of these growing pressures on drinking practices and norms through the lens of healthism.

Healthism and the responsibility of health

Healthism is a discourse that privileges good health and places it at the forefront of people's minds, prescribing certain ways to "be healthy" and medicalising unhealthy behaviour (Crawford, 1980; Lupton, 2013a). By encouraging "healthy living" in relation to diet, exercise and wellbeing, healthism can influence everyday practices through the ever-present pressure on people to achieve and maintain health. Healthism places the responsibility to manage health risks and lead healthy lives on the individual (Goodwin & Griffin, 2017), placing it within a neoliberal agenda that encourages people to govern themselves (Rose, 2009). The pressure to self-manage health is visible in messages and campaigns that emphasise the need to be healthy as a lifelong requirement of selfhood. Healthism can, therefore, be seen as part of broader public health efforts that encourage people to self-monitor and self-regulate their exposure to health risks, including disease, injury and death (Petersen et al., 2010).

While public health measures can overtly constrain certain actions (e.g. through legislating legal drinking ages), healthist strategies are less coercive. Instead, by fostering "informed" health choices they create new forms of voluntary self-discipline to achieve health (Lupton, 1995). This health information and messaging is passed on through a range of media, as well as through the family, education systems, and other advocacy/community organisations. Healthist discourse can also be influenced by technological, cultural and economic changes that prioritise certain understandings and embodiments of health. For example, technology and new media have changed the way people access and understand

health information, evaluate health risks, self-monitor, receive public health messages, and have created new forums for discussing health goals (Lupton, 2013b). We can see this in the growing online culture of self-improvement, which constantly pressures people to take up new diets and exercise routines—all for the sake of achieving health (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Lupton, 2016). Within this healthist discourse, failure to "be healthy" represents a moral failing of individuals (Crawford, 1980).

Young people, health and alcohol

Young people are often made to feel individually responsible for their health and wellbeing outcomes (Pavlidis et al., 2019). Increasingly diverse social practices and ways of forming "healthy" social identities may also challenge dominant drinking cultures in new ways (Caluzzi et al., 2020a). Digital information and health movements may also be more applicable to young people as technology and the Internet have become ubiquitous (Tilleczek & Srigley, 2016). Thus, while public health discourse around alcohol often focuses on the risks to health and wellbeing (Keane, 2009), healthist strategies that promote certain modes and ways to "be healthy" may also be important in influencing the position of alcohol for a growing number of young people.

Although healthism emphasises individual bodily health, young people also place importance on social and mental wellbeing, which tends to be more interactive and relational (Easthorpe & White, 2006). Research suggests that mental health is increasingly at the forefront of many young people's minds, particularly concerns around stress, anxiety and depression (Coleman & Hagell, 2015), and drugs and alcohol have become a growing concern for many young Australians (Bullot et al., 2017). Young people also face growing stresses around academic performance, unstable employment conditions and economic independence (West, 2016; Wyn et al., 2015). These physical, social and emotional components of health may give alcohol use and non-use paradoxical meanings. Alcohol use may enhance self-esteem and social interactions, or it may provoke social regret and damage relationships (MacLean, 2016). Young people may draw directly on physical health as a reason for non-drinking or may use drinking occasions as an opportunity to avoid thinking about health norms (Keane, 2009). And while diagnosed mental health conditions have been given as a reason for non-drinking (Frank et al., 2020), how young people, especially those who choose to drink minimally or abstain, understand the interaction between alcohol and their mental health remains unclear.

In this article, we take the view that healthism for young people has implications not only for physical health, but social and mental health too. We suggest that these holistic notions of health have contributed to a discourse that has changed the meanings associated with alcohol for some young people and may limit their heavy drinking. Of course, the degree to which young people are reflective of health and consider health guidelines is associated with social class (Kolind, 2011), gender (Rúdólfsdóttir & Morgan, 2009), friendship groups (Frank et al., 2020) and social context (Lindsay, 2009). Structural differences, time and resources all perpetuate health inequalities and access to health information. However, we suggest that health information and health-based messaging has become more pervasive which, along with more holistic understandings of health, may have allowed healthism to become a prominent influence in a growing number of young people's drinking choices.

METHODS

The data from this study come from a larger research project exploring the factors underpinning declining drinking rates among young people in Australia. In-depth interviews with 50 young abstainers

or light drinkers from Victoria were undertaken in 2018. These interviews aimed to better understand young people's broader social worlds and how this might influence their perceptions of alcohol and their drinking practices.

The sample comprised 50 young people aged 16–19 (female =26) from in and around Melbourne, Australia, who came from a variety of social and economic backgrounds (see Table 1). This age group was targeted as survey data had shown the largest declines in drinking and increases in abstention in this cohort (particularly 16- to 17-year-olds) (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2017). While several participants had experienced periods of homelessness and insecure living conditions, all were in some form of education at the time of interviews and had access to familial resources. Participants were recruited largely through online social media advertisements, as well as word of mouth and snowball sampling. As the study intended to examine factors influencing light and non-drinking, participants were screened to ensure they drank infrequently and less than the National Health and

TABLE 1 Demographic data

	Total number	Percentage
Drinking Status		
Abstainer	25	50%
Light Drinker	25	50%
Age		
16	10	20%
17	29	58%
18	6	12%
19	5	10%
Gender		
Male	24	48%
Female	26	52%
Region		
Inner Metropolitan	16	32%
Outer Metropolitan	29	58%
Regional	5	10%
Current Education Status		
High school or Equivalent	39	78%
University	11	22%
Background		
Born in Australia	36	72%
Born Overseas	14	28%
Language Spoken at Home		
Spoke English at Home	28	56%
Spoke a Second Language at Home	22	44%
Employment Status		
Working Part-time or Casually	21	42%
Not Employed	29	58%
Total	50	100%

Medical Research Council's guidelines for risky drinking which is less than four standard drinks on a single occasion (although it should be noted that a minority of participants had exceeded this on one single occasion, but had done so several months prior to the study and were thus still considered light drinkers).

Interviews were conducted one-on-one and in-person between January and June 2018. All were conducted by a younger researcher in the hope of developing a good rapport with young interviewees and therefore elicit detailed and honest responses. Participants were encouraged to pick a setting they felt comfortable in and could easily access, which included cafes, libraries, parks, universities, homes and shopping centre food courts. Interviews were semi-structured and followed an interview guide that explored several themes in-depth including leisure activities, school, family, social groups, technology, health and perceptions of alcohol. Participants were encouraged to tell stories and speak freely, and to treat the interviews informally. Interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, with the majority lasting between 45 and 50 minutes. At the end of each interview, participants were reimbursed with AUD$40 cash in recognition of their time and any travel expenses accrued. All interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder and later transcribed for analysis.

Prior to interviews, participants were provided with both a soft and hard copy of the Participant Information Statement and this information was reiterated by the researcher in person. They were also made aware of any potential risks associated with the research, steps taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of the data, and their right to withdraw their data at any stage of the research. All participants signed a consent form before being interviewed and a verification of payment form upon receiving their reimbursement. Institutional ethics was received through La Trobe University's Human Ethics Committee (Ethics ID HEC17-002).

Once transcribed, all interview data were inductively coded into themes by the lead researcher using NVivo 11 (QSR International). While health was established a priori as a theme we wished to explore, we were surprised with the strength of its salience for young people. Indeed, it was one of the prominent themes to emerge from interviews. Themes and subthemes were descriptive and often interrelated—for example, "health" and its subthemes were closely tied with "risks", "identity", "reasons for non-drinking" and "time management". Because we wanted to understand how participants formed a holistic idea of health and applied it to their non-drinking, we undertook thematic analysis to explore health as a concept. This allowed us to explore the data flexibly, organically, and without being bound by theoretical commitments (Clarke & Braun, 2017). After pooling key data and exploring similarities and differences among participants concerning health and alcohol, we discussed different iterations of the key themes and how they could best reflect the data. Conceptually our data were best represented by three themes; alcohol as a risk to health, alcohol's place within a healthy lifestyle and alcohol in health communication.

FINDINGS

Alcohol as a risk to health

Because healthism transforms health into a state of risk needing to be constantly managed, it encourages conscious self-regulation for the sake of health. This means that bodily and personal risks can be implicated and medicalised alongside more traditional understandings of disease and illness. This was particularly relevant for many participants who defined certain drinking behaviours as risky. The most prominent short-term health concerns reported by participants included alcohol

poisoning or getting sick, which were borne out in discussions of thresholds around safe levels of drinking. They talked about seeing friends vomiting or ending up in hospital as a way to emphasise the imperative of maintaining bodily control and noted how this could be affected by alcohol. Drinking heavily was linked to a youthful vulnerability that participants felt increased the chance of physical health risks (such as falling over) but losing control itself was also seen as a social risk that could affect the health of others. The salience of these risks was a conscious reminder to self-manage within drinking contexts.

> I think if you are only having a couple of drinks, I think that's pretty safe, just because you're not falling on the ground, hitting your head and stuff. When you're drinking a lot and you can't control what you're doing, it's pretty dangerous, because when you're our age, you're not that mature or anything. You could easily do something stupid.
>
> (17, M)

Risks were also highly gendered, with women's drinking especially related to issues of vulnerability. The passivity with which participants described young women's agency in relation to alcohol-related harms contrasted with men, who were constructed to have more control over these outcomes. Because healthist discourse emphasises responsibility for personal (immediate) health, it also amplified the gendered potential for risk:

> It's the sad reality; it is more dangerous for a woman to drink. Like a woman can't go out by herself and drink and be fully - and know that she's going to be safe, but a man can…
>
> (16, F)

Participants also discussed their concerns around the longer-term harms of drinking, which aligned with more traditional notions of illness as risk. The most salient long-term risks for this sample were around cognitive development, chronic health issues (such as liver damage and cancer), mental health issues and addiction. These risks were future-oriented and increased their sense of vulnerability to developmental, physiological and personal risks.

> I feel like the biggest risk is a life risk, especially being underage and not having your brain fully developed. There's always an issue there with the overall impending detrimental factors of alcohol on your development as a young adult.
>
> (17, M)

Thinking about their cognitive development reinforced many of the participants' light and non-drinking choices. In this sense, they felt not only that impairment constituted an immediate and short-term risk, but also that longer-term damage to the brain required their conscious management in the present. Thus, they drew on a discourse of developmental and neuro-vulnerability specific to them as young people to delay the onset of heavier drinking.

> I'd say probably not the best thing to do to your body if you're under 18, because like just - and I think brain damage, like liver damage and that sort of thing. I'd probably try to not go very heavily on drinking, until I'm at least 21 or something, just because later on down the track, you don't know what's going to happen.
>
> (16, M)

Participants often talked about the "liver" as a symbol of how alcohol affected health. Many participants confidently asserted that alcohol was not good for health, drawing on the liver to demonstrate a (limited) degree of medical-scientific knowledge that supported their decision to be wary of drinking too much.

> I think the biggest thing which people don't realise is like the effects of excessive drinking on like your actual body, on your liver, and your gut and everything like that. As you get older and, it's just really bad for you if you drink a lot sort of thing, long term.
>
> (17, F)

These notions of long-term health risks were more prominent among those who were already inclined to be more conscious of their health, such as those that competed in sport. On top of the link between alcohol and physical health risks, some participants referred to long-term mental and social health risks of heavy drinking to present a strong anti-addiction discourse. This addiction discourse was couched in stark contrast to the importance of self-regulating and managing risks as promoted by healthism. Indeed, alcoholism symbolised the ultimate loss of self-control. This addiction discourse framed drinking as detrimental to participants' futures, their personal lives, and the lives of their family and friends. Concerns around addiction and dependence were mentioned by more than one-third of participants as a key risk of drinking. Indeed, alcoholism was highly stigmatised and created sensitivity around how much and how often participants felt they could drink, and in what context (e.g. never alone), without being labelled a problematic drinker or an "alcoholic".

> The biggest risk, well, health-wise would be just not - would first be your mental state where you thrive on it, you can't go through the day without having it. Then that could lead to a number of things like liver cancer and stuff like that. But, yeah, I think being mentally ill, I guess in the ways of alcoholism, would be the first thing.
>
> (17, M)

Alcohol's place within a healthy lifestyle

As well as promoting risk management, healthist discourse was apparent in how participants talked about the ways drinking did or did not fit into their day-to-day life. This was discussed in several different ways. Physical health for many participants meant being mindful of lifestyle factors like diet and exercise. Most were conscious about how much junk food they consumed and took part in some type of recreational sport or exercise (some specifically for health reasons, such as going for runs or going to the gym to stay fit). Others who were less concerned about their physical health still suggested they were mindful of it ("I wouldn't say I'm a 'health' person but I am health conscious"—17, M). In this framing of physical health, alcohol was considered unanimously detrimental. Drinking was a barrier to achieving sport and fitness goals and considered a poor part of diet. While many participants still drank minimally, some participants were so conscious about staying physically healthy that they avoided alcohol completely.

> Me, I'm really into my fitness and keeping myself fit for sport and stuff so I've never really been in contact [with alcohol]. I'm being surrounded by it but I've never actually had it myself or tried it myself.
>
> (17, M)

There were some notable differences in the way that young men and women talked about physical health. For example, several young women participants talked about how they might put on weight by drinking or how they counted calories in alcohol.

> I don't even know what's in alcohol but I know it's not the best stuff for you and I would never - I know that no one associates alcohol with being in good health, like no one has ever said alcohol will make you lose weight. Because I know my friends who used to be - with like a six pack have pot bellies now because they drink so much. That's definitely - yeah, I've never associated alcohol with good physical health.
>
> (17, F)

This interplay between health, alcohol and body image was a stronger focus for young women in our sample. Young men were less likely to talk about weight or body image in relation to alcohol, highlighting the gendered aspects of healthism.

Health was also talked about as something that needed consistent work or maintenance (i.e. there was always room to be healthier) and the majority of participants discussed health as a key measure of success in life, reiterating this constant and pervasive need to "be healthy". Some participants suggested that alcohol was a potential obstacle to their educational success and career aspirations. This highlighted the link between being future-oriented, being healthy and avoiding drinking:

> I think I've been happy with how I'm going at school and how my life is right now and to bring a factor in like alcohol and disrupt that and I'm sort of - not scared, just wait it out, wait 'til my high school is over, because it's going well and now I'm getting results that I'm happy with. I've got friends that I'm happy with. I don't want alcohol to affect that.
>
> (17, M)

We also note that there were a group of participants who identified as religious and talked about how this fitted into their lifestyles. Some of these religions strictly forbade drinking, and participants acknowledged this was part of the reason they did not drink (although they still described non-drinking as their choice). However, a few participants also constructed their ideas of healthy lifestyles around their religious identities:

> So being Adventist you really care about your health. Health is a really important thing in your life because God gave you a body - we believe like it's a gift. So in order to help people to the best of your ability and achieve things in your life, you don't want to harm your body in anyway. So it makes sense not to drink.
>
> (18, F)

Several participants also drew parallels between drinking and other drugs and grouped them as oppositional to maintaining a healthy lifestyle. For example, one participant uses the term "clean" to describe his health behaviours, providing a sense of morality to good health.

> Yeah, I consider myself healthy. I don't drink, I don't smoke, I don't do any sort of drugs. I try to keep myself clean of all that stuff because I know that can affect your health dreadfully.
>
> (17, M)

This grouping of alcohol and other substances also highlighted how being healthy was constructed as being responsible and being informed. In contrast, heavy drinking and drug use were sometimes considered manifestations of irresponsible or uninformed lifestyle choices.

> If you don't drink, I just feel like you're a lot more responsible and you know what you're doing… Because a lot of people who drink, smoke and then drugs and stuff, like they do all that sort of stuff together. Whereas for us that don't drink, we know all these consequences that can happen from any of that sort of stuff.
>
> (17, M)

One of the complexities of alcohol was its potential benefit to social wellbeing. While alcohol was considered physiologically unhealthy, some considered it socially pleasurable and a facilitator of fun, which was also important to their wellbeing and their social lifestyles. Alcohol was tied to contexts such as birthdays and celebrations, and in these social contexts, some degree of drinking was considered acceptable and even healthy, but something which still had to be consciously managed.

> I think it can help to strengthen relationships or friendships if people start drinking together, that can kind of be a bonding experience. But I think sometimes it could also be the other way round.
>
> (17, F)

In contrast, drinking alone, drinking to the point of becoming sick, or drinking as a coping mechanism was considered problematic. Some participants reflected on the social benefits of alcohol, but also noted its ability to cause mental and social problems. Thus, how alcohol could be incorporated into everyday lifestyles was a complicated balancing act.

> They're depressants, so they magnify feelings of depression if you drink while depressed while alone. Obviously if you're social, it's different.
>
> (19, M)

Participants described how the effects of alcohol could vary depending on their current mental health state, and alcohol was described as both a depressant and a social enhancer that depended on the participant's mood and the social context. Indeed, while some participants noted how drinking could potentially help with anxiety or shut out some of the stigma they felt was associated with mental health conditions, there was a general concern about how alcohol interacted with pre-existing mental health conditions (particularly among those taking medication).

> After I was placed on medication, I was - it's more of a worry what the alcohol and the medication mixed would do to my body…So I tend to avoid it even more so now.
>
> (17, M)

While alcohol was perceived as potentially beneficial to mental health for some participants, others described having panic attacks, getting depressed, being wary of drinking to self-medicate or having to rely on alcohol in social situations.

Alcohol in health communication

As healthist discourse draws on elements of risk and self-management to foster "informed" health choices, it was important to examine which institutions articulated healthist discourse, and what messages were most salient to young people. Participants discussed how they came to understand the link between alcohol and health through a combination of media, schooling, parenting and health policy. For example, participants talked about using online resources to acquire information about diet and exercise and described the "negative publicity" in news linking alcohol to bad behaviour, disease, developmental issues and acute harms.

> Every day there's new news of things that people did while they were drunk or there's people getting hurt or dying and car accidents.
>
> (17, F)

Participants' widespread use of the Internet meant that this information was constantly accessible, reached a wide audience, and was sometimes an unavoidable and embedded part of engaging with health information.

> Like it's just having it out there in the news and like being taught about it; it might not have a great effect straight away, but it is subconscious. Like I remember like what's good and bad about it even if like I'm not trying to.
>
> (16, F)

Several participants who specifically noted this link between health information and behavioural change over time, by drawing parallels between drinking and smoking as health-harming behaviours that had become increasingly recognised ("now like the risks are more apparent and things like that, kind of like the same thing with smoking"—17, F).

Participants also recalled a mix of risk-based messages (which explored the health risks of drinking) and harm minimisation messages (which encouraged "responsible" or "controlled" drinking) within schools. Approaches within schools were described inconsistently, ranging from general health information to in-depth explorations of the health risks of alcohol. Some participants also questioned the scare tactics schools used and suggested the classroom environment created a barrier to taking in health messages. However, schools enabled a general healthist discourse by laying a foundational knowledge of "how" to be healthy, and by encouraging personal responsibility to manage potential health risks associated with alcohol.

> I think most schools have it [health class]. And you know, they educate young people. And even if people are educated and they still want to drink underage they'll do it responsibly.
>
> (16, M)

Parents also played a role in promoting the healthy practices valorised in healthism by transmitting what participants considered healthy dietary knowledge and encouraging participation in competitive sport. Once again, the moral association between health and cleanliness was evident.

> Our family's pretty big on sport and fitness, so I think I was influenced to just eat clean and things like that.
>
> (17, F)

Yet parents varied in the way they discussed health and alcohol. Some parents discussed the chronic health risks of alcohol, and several participants reported that these had been highlighted through family illnesses. However, most parents were reported to take a harm minimisation approach by encouraging waiting until 18 to drink, providing small amounts of alcohol, monitoring and communicating with their children on a night out, and reinforcing their need to be responsible. The emphasis on young people needing to be responsible for their health (while also being neuro-vulnerable) was reinforced by school and the media.

> I know just from doing things at school and the media and parents or people that - especially at this stage, when your brain is still growing and developing, that it's terrible for your brain.
>
> (16, M)

Several participants also suggested that parents themselves were better educated about health than previous generations, and more aware of parental role modelling through their actions and attitudes towards alcohol. Indeed, although most did not overtly manage their children's health, parents' practices acted as reminders that the potential for health risks required continuous monitoring.

> They have not really had a conversation, but it kind of comes up within conversation. They'll go "it's okay if you drink, it's okay if you blah blah blah". Just be safe, make sure you're with someone safe. If it's your first time, make sure there's at least one or two sober people there.
>
> (16, M)

There was also some different messaging and communication about alcohol depending on parents' cultural backgrounds. For example, parents who had Middle Eastern, African and South-East Asian backgrounds, or who were Christian or Muslim, tended to have a stronger stance against alcohol and intoxication:

> I know that a lot of my Australian friends, their parents are like yeah, go out and drink, have fun, just be safe, make sure you have a designated driver and stuff. Not that it's encouraged, but it's not like don't go drinking or something. Ethnic parents, a bit more strict on that.
>
> (18, F)

In contrast, some participants talked about having less traditional authoritarian relationships with their parents, which they felt allowed more candid conversations about alcohol. These conversations informed the young people here how to best manage their health, but also reinforced notions of risk, responsibility, and prescribed ways of behaving.

DISCUSSION

This research highlights how healthist discourse has become integrated into the daily lives of some young people, making health an important consideration in the alcohol practices of our sample of light drinking and abstaining young Australians. The need to be healthy was not universal among participants and varied according to context and experiences. Most participants constructed physical

health as having a straightforward relationship with alcohol (i.e. through diet, exercise and avoidance of unhealthy substances); however, for some participants, mental health and social wellbeing were equally important in their considerations around alcohol. Research from Denmark and Sweden has also highlighted the importance of physical, mental and social health and wellbeing on abstention and light drinking choices (Frank et al., 2020; Törrönen et al., 2020), suggesting similar healthist discourses and understandings of health exist in other countries. In this study, participants navigated these complex understandings of health and wellbeing, which encouraged new ways of thinking about their relationship with alcohol.

Healthist discourse constructs health as a risk requiring constant management, and our participants viewed themselves as vulnerable to acute short-term health risks like being sick, alcohol poisoning and injury. The emphasis on personal responsibility meant that these ever-present risks encouraged young people to reflexively manage their drinking within social situations (see also Caluzzi et al., 2020b). This discourse of risk obligated participants to remain in control of their bodies and be self-reflective, which also reinforced gendered vulnerabilities and risks. Recent findings by MacLean et al. (2018) suggest that even among regular or heavy drinkers, young people draw on a mix of social, gendered, contextual and relational cues to manage their desired drunkenness so they do not overstep boundaries of drunken bodily comportment. This may indicate young people who are more conscious of managing their bodily health may draw stricter boundaries around their drinking practices. It also highlights how losing control in itself, while in previous research was a key motivator for heavy alcohol use (e.g. Fry, 2010; Lindsay, 2009), may be becoming a significant and avoidable risk for young people (e.g. Scheffels et al., 2020).

While young people's concern about the acute health risks of drinking is not new, our participants were also concerned with other longer-term risks such as brain development, chronic health conditions (often symbolised by the liver) and alcohol addiction. Researchers have suggested that greater information linking alcohol to brain damage has increased concerns around youth drinking (de Looze et al., 2017). Indeed, this focus on cognitive development may indicate the increasing use of neuroscience in social policy as a way to optimise and responsibilise young people, while simultaneously constructing them as vulnerable (Broer & Pickersgill, 2015). Long-term risks from drinking have been viewed as less tangible and salient for young people in previous research (Lindsay, 2010; Supski et al., 2017); however, here, long-term health risks were a concern for some participants, particularly those who were future-oriented. Because disease and chronic illness were seen as preventable through health choices, this made participants feel they would have to continually manage their drinking as they got older.

Fear of addiction has also been raised by young non-drinkers in other studies, where drinking and has been regarded as a 'slippery slope' to alcoholism (Herring et al., 2014). Healthism moralises and medicalises behaviours that are deemed unhealthy (Crawford, 1980), and we saw this in our participants (e.g. distinctions being drawn between drinking alone vs. drinking socially, non-drinking being the more health-responsible choice). Among our participants, the only "healthy" reason to drink was to reinforce social connections or enjoy social experiences. In contrast, the stigma and loss of control associated with alcoholism made it a physical, mental and social health risk that was antithetical to achieving health through self-regulation.

As part of a "healthy lifestyle", participants tended to draw on ideas of physical health (such as diet and exercise) wherein alcohol was framed as being wholly negative. These health goals have previously been provided as reasons for non-drinking (Bartram et al., 2016; Nairn et al., 2006; Romo et al., 2015). Our participants drew on sport and health goals to reinforce the physical health consequences of drinking, highlighting the importance of these goals as motivators for managing drinking. We note several young women talked about alcohol in terms of calories and weight gain, highlighting evidence

of gendered health concerns in relation to drinking. Healthism has been argued to support notions of "ideal femininity" through diet and bodily discipline, morally shaming women who do not perform femininity this way (Cairns & Johnston, 2015). Recent research has echoed our findings, suggesting that young men and women's different types of physical capital (e.g. muscularity, slenderness) can influence how women in particular think about alcohol (Törrönen et al., 2020).

Young people may understand the health consequences of drinking but still view it as a social practice, rather than a health practice (Supski et al., 2017). Our participants similarly saw social benefits in drinking and recognised its links to events like birthdays and celebrations. Indeed, these multiple meanings—physical health and social wellbeing—meant that some were content to participate in these social settings while consuming little to no alcohol. While some research suggests that light and non-drinkers emphasise maintaining control and other positive alternatives to intoxication in drinking settings (Caluzzi et al., 2020a), other research suggests that heavier young drinkers emphasise losing control, but still manage this within certain spaces and contexts (Lindsay, 2009). This hints to lighter and heavier young drinkers self-managing their drinking in different ways. Although we cannot draw any conclusions from our sample of entirely light and non-drinkers, Törrönen et al.'s (2020) comparative research showed how heavier drinkers may still use healthist discourses, albeit in other ways, for example, by counterbalancing episodes of heavy drinking with healthy diet and exercise regimes.

Being healthy was understood as a continuous effort and something that demarcated success, highlighting how healthism fitted within broader neoliberal discourses that promoted health and productivity. Some participants drew on their religious identities to construct their notions of a "healthy lifestyle", while others described their pro-health practices as responsible, informed and "clean" in contrast with heavy drinking and substance use. This illustrates how healthism continues to construct good health as morally good and poor health as a moral failure (Crawford, 1980). Many other participants had educational and career trajectories that they drew on to limit their drinking. Positive educational expectations for the future can encourage healthy behaviour in young people (McDade et al., 2011), and some researchers suggest that contemporary young people who are more socially supported are also more future-oriented in the way that they think about health (Twenge & Park, 2017). The mechanisms through which our participants linked healthy lifestyles to other domains such as education and careers suggest that the importance of maintaining health had a strong future orientation. This may have encouraged both the short-term and long-term health perspective we saw in our participants.

Healthist discourse was facilitated by media and online technologies, school, and families. Participants described negative publicity about alcohol in the media and supplementing and building their knowledge of health through the Internet. The presentation of alcohol in Australian media news has become more disapproving over time (Azar et al., 2014), and the Internet now allows young people to engage with health as they choose to (e.g. by searching for fitness or diet information) (Kivits, 2009). Similarly, participants reported that media and online technologies were a consistent source of both health promotion and risk promotion material. The link between alcohol, health and social networking sites also promotes public performances of health and drinking – often in ways that intensify healthism (Goodwin & Griffin, 2017). Although this was not highlighted in our data, further research should look to unpack this link.

Health education in schools was understood as promoting a general form of healthism through teachings on diet, exercise, risk and personal responsibility. Health education in schools plays an important role in regulating young people's behaviour, monitoring their health practices and bodies, and setting pro-health norms (Fitzpatrick & Tinning, 2014). Indeed, schools were described as foundational for communicating about healthy lifestyles and the health risks of alcohol. Engagement with health curriculums is likely to align with engagement with school in general (Kolind, 2011).

Therefore, it may be that the young people here who were able to take in and incorporate health information from school were those more engaged with the curriculum.

Parents generally acted as health promotion intermediaries, while reinforcing a discourse of youthful vulnerability and personal responsibility around alcohol. Changes in parenting have been suggested as a key reason for declines in youth drinking (Vashishtha et al., 2019), and parents have been identified as important mediators for passing on harm information about drinking (de Looze et al., 2017). In this research, many parents encouraged participants' sporting achievements took a harm minimisation approach by encouraging communication, personal responsibility, controlling alcohol supply and encouraging the delay of their children's drinking. Similar to other studies (Gilligan & Kypri, 2012; Holdsworth et al., 2017), many parents here emphasised safety over prohibition. We note that the cultural backgrounds of parents also mediated this dialogue, where ethnicity and religiosity were implicated in stricter anti-alcohol attitudes. This is echoed in some other recent research on young Australians and parental attitudes towards alcohol (Chan et al., 2016), although more research on how parental ethnicity and religiosity mediates young people's drinking is an avenue for further research.

LIMITATIONS

While health was important in our sample of explicitly light and non-drinking young people, it may be less important for heavier young drinkers. Moreover, our sample does not represent the full range of backgrounds and experiences of young Australians. While there appeared to be some gender and cultural differences in the way participants performed and understood health, given our sample size and recruitment, any close examination of these social differences is not possible within the scope of this research. Declining drinking trends have been broadly consistent across socio-demographic groups (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2017) suggesting that diffuse discourses like healthism may have impacts beyond demographic divisions. However, participants were able to draw on school, parents and digital resources to build their knowledge of health. Therefore, elements of class and demographics may still be an important component in the transmission of health information and healthist discourse.

CONCLUSION

As part of the neoliberal push towards personal responsibility and risk management, healthism has medicalised and moralised certain unhealthy behaviours (such as excessive drinking by young people). It has also created contradictions and tensions around how young people manage physical, mental and social health. A persuasive healthism discourse was evident in reflections about drinking from low and non-drinkers in our study sample. This discourse may have influenced how some young people engage with health and alcohol. We note that healthism has impacts beyond physical health; it has perpetuated discourses of addiction, neuro-vulnerability, (gendered) risk, substance use stigma and moral responsibility. It also constructed the future as something that could be controlled (or potentially damaged) through health choices. The growing importance of health and wellbeing in many aspects of young people's lives, in combination with the pervasiveness of healthism, may have indirectly encouraged a growing number of young people to drink less or abstain from alcohol.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION
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Chapter 7

No Time for 'Time Out'? Managing Temporalities and (Non)Drinking Practices

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GC collected and analysed the data, conceived the idea and led manuscript writing. DW added conceptual ideas. AP, SM and DW refined the theory, provided critical feedback and suggested revisions.

Article

No Time for a 'Time Out'? Managing Time around (Non) Drinking

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Abstract

Young people's drinking represents a nexus between time, temporalities and social practices. While drinking and intoxication have previously been considered a way to achieve a youthful sense of 'time out', young people's drinking is declining in Australia and other high-income countries, suggesting alcohol's centrality in young people's leisure time has diminished. Drawing on interviews with light and non-drinker teenagers from Melbourne, Australia, we develop Adorno's concept of 'free time' to show how young people's time use practices – including how they incorporate alcohol into their lives – are more than ever shaped by social and economic pressures. We framed participants' discussion of time and its relationship to drinking as a) using free time 'productively', b) being opportunistic around busy schedules, and c) the importance of using time for restoration. These framings suggest fragmented and pressure-filled patterns of free time may challenge drinking as a 'time out' practice for young people.

Keywords

Adorno, alcohol, time, young people

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Introduction

Young people face tensions to both plan for the future and enjoy the present, requiring them to actively manage their time, including their 'free time' (Wyn, 2009). In this article, we examine how the relationship between free time and (non)drinking practices may be changing for young people due to the demands of education and work. Specifically, our focus is on patterns of time use and temporalities among teenagers in late high school and early tertiary education.

Social practices such as drinking alcohol have commonly been considered an important part of youth leisure time and a way to achieve a collective 'time out' from responsibilities such as work and education (Measham and Brain, 2005; Wyn, 2009). Indeed, drinking is a highly temporal practice connected to certain times, days of the week and other temporal practices (e.g. the end of the working week) (Andrade, 2019; Meier et al., 2018). Moreover, drinking practices occur within temporalities – multiple ways of articulating the past, present and future. For example, in lives often defined by building and managing the future, drinking and intoxication can be important for how young people share, stop and subvert time by living in the moment (Batchelor et al., 2020; Wyn, 2009). Because practices are experiences of time (e.g. using time, making memories and thinking about the future) (Shove et al., 2012), drinking presents an important nexus between time, temporalities and social practices.

Trends in adolescent drinking have shifted markedly over the past 20 years in Australia and many other high-income countries. Among 14–19-year-old Australians, abstention (never having had more than a sip of alcohol), increased from 25% in 2001 to 56% in 2019, while single occasion risky drinking (consuming more than four drinks on an occasion) halved from 40% to 20% (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020). Since the early 2000s, more young people in Australia report abstaining from drinking, delaying their first drink, or drinking proportionately less than previous cohorts at the same age. Similar declines have also been observed in the UK, Northern Europe and North America (Vashishtha et al., 2020).

Given the marked changes observed in youth drinking in epidemiological data, the 'time out' benefits previously associated with alcohol use may have diminished or changed in nature for young people. We investigate whether this is the case through an exploration of the nature of free time with a sample of young non- or light-drinkers. We conceptualise free time as discretionary time outside of work and other daily requirements, which provides opportunities for rest, interactions and self-realisation (Chatzitheochari and Arber, 2012). However, the quality of, and control over, free time also reflects constraints of gender and class. For example, women are still expected to be carers in their free time to a greater extent than men (Bittman and Wajcman, 2000), while pastimes such as sport continue to be largely male-dominated (Boiché et al., 2014). Working unsocial hours (such as weekends) and control over work time is also unequally distributed across social classes (Fagan, 2001). Similarly, how young people use their free time and share time with friends is challenged by increasingly non-standard patterns of work and study (Woodman, 2012).

The pressure to manage free time is compounded by shifting work–life balance, even among young people (Woodman, 2012; Woodman and Cook, 2019). Here, we use the concept of 'work' not only to describe paid employment but also education and training.

All of these types of work are similarly organised and coordinated by institutions that demand time, create responsibilities around time management, and promote future-oriented temporalities. This means that young people have to 'work' before they even begin paid employment. They are expected to use their time strategically to develop skills and experiences to compete now and in the future in a flexible economy (Woodman and Wyn, 2015). This requires balancing the demands of work and uncertain futures, with free time as a way to enjoy experiences in the present (Woodman, 2003). Indeed, young people have reported using alcohol for just that reason – to take a break from these responsibilities as they carve 'time out' spaces for drinking (Fry, 2011). This generates temporal windows for consumption such as abstaining from alcohol during the week and drinking on weekends (Andrade, 2019; Winlow and Hall, 2009).

Because time is closely tied to the demands of social institutions, it needs to be located within a particular social and historical context. For example, the contemporary permeation of market forces into all aspects of life has led to increased educational requirements and competitiveness in the job market, while reducing job security and fostering flexible employment practices (Woodman and Wyn, 2015). These flexible and competitive labour conditions have also changed how young people think about time and the need to manage time in new ways (Woodman and Cook, 2019). How this relates to alcohol is the focus of this article.

Adorno on 'Free Time'

Although work and free time have largely been constructed as opposites with clear temporal boundaries, Adorno ([1969] 1991) suggested that this was a misleading division. In his seminal critique of consumer culture and capitalism, he argued that 'free time' was a hybrid – neither completely removed from nor completely devoted to formal work. Indeed, work shaped how free time was used in everyday life. Because of the increasingly heavy demands of work under conditions of late-capitalism, Adorno suggested that people were required to use free time to escape, recuperate and enjoy themselves as a reward, and as preparation for the next working day. Free time provided compensation for the monotony and restrictive nature of work, and could be filled with distractions and minor pleasures such as the consumption of goods and entertainment. Within this framing, hobbies and pastimes were 'organised freedoms' that provided moments of pleasure but were still attached to economic and cultural imperatives (e.g. purchasing and consuming goods or improving one's health and competencies). This commodification of time meant that free time was a resource closely linked to the economics and the demands of work, where it was not only a reprieve from work but also an extension of it. Indeed, although the economic conditions of late-capitalism outwardly create more spaces and potentialities for free time, they also create a value system that coerces voluntary actions and priorities through the perception of time as a resource to be 'spent' wisely (Noonan, 2009). This investment is sometimes a type of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2010), in which people invest time and are necessarily invested in chasing a future that may not arrive.

Adorno's framing remains valuable as it identifies a blurring of boundaries and competing temporal demands that have intensified in the decades since (Rosa, 2013). For example, competitive employment conditions may instil young people with a need to use free time

efficiently and participate in forms of non-standard work and self-commodification to be 'job-ready'. Contemporary research on young people's time management has used notions of 'precarious leisure' (Batchelor et al., 2020) to describe how economic precarity has contaminated other spheres of everyday life. Batchelor et al. (2020) highlighted how educational and labour market changes influenced young people's 'free time' by encouraging productivity, requiring them to juggle work responsibilities, and fragmenting shared temporal rhythms.

We also note that Adorno's broader point about free time being a continuation of work has taken a literal turn with the mass uptake of digital technology, allowing work to bleed over into personal time in new and subtle ways (Frayne, 2015). For example, technology breaks down work boundaries as emails and instant messages create an ever-present need to be available (Gregg, 2011) and allows people to consume media seamlessly around routines (Drake and Haynes, 2011).

Drinking Alcohol as a Temporal Social Practice for Young People

Young people are often imagined as having more free time than other age groups. However, with more young people staying in education for longer and greater competition in the job market, they face an imperative to use their free time to cultivate skills, experiences and personal competencies for the future. In their work with young drug users, Järvinen and Ravn (2017) describe time as a relationship between self and society (i.e. how personal time use fits within broader collective rhythms of society). They suggested the impetus to use time to be industrious meant that those who were disengaged with institutions through substance use were seen to be 'wasting time'. Kolind's (2011) work on young drinkers highlighted the importance of class, suggesting that young people who aligned their time with expectations of dominant institutions (such as school) were more likely to have structured and future-oriented patterns of time use that precluded drinking. Recent work by Batchelor et al. (2020) showed how drinking and intoxication remained important 'time out' practices, but ones which were calculated against temporal anxieties about the future.

Adorno's concept of free time could suggest that drinking alcohol may act as a pleasurable form of compensation for work (e.g. having a glass of wine at the end of the day). However, it might also suggest that alcohol should be avoided as it may interfere with both work and free time. We propose that for young people, the lack of temporal boundaries around work increasingly makes demands on the mental and emotional energies previously available for free time. As a consequence, alcohol may not provide a valued distraction or sense of renewal. This has important impacts for how young people today think about alcohol, signalling that alcohol use may no longer enable a valued 'time out' from everyday pressures and commitments. We suggest that young people's time use – and by extension, how they incorporate alcohol into their lives – is more than ever constricted by social and economic pressures.

Methods and Data

This article is based on 50 semi-structured interviews conducted in 2018 with young abstainers and light drinkers from Melbourne, Australia. The broader aim of the research was to investigate changes in young people's drinking practices related to declining

trends in alcohol consumption. Participants were regarded as abstainers if they had never tried alcohol, or if they had tasted alcohol but did not drink regularly. Participants were considered light drinkers if they drank on occasion but did not drink more than four standard drinks (where one standard drink equates to 10 grams of alcohol) on a single occasion (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2009). Several participants who had drunk slightly more than this but had since reduced their drinking were also included as light drinkers. Ethical clearance was provided for this project by the La Trobe University Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number HEC17-002).

Participants were recruited through social media, online advertisements, word of mouth and snowball sampling. The lead author's details were made available, and all potential participants were required to contact him for screening. The final sample included 26 females and 24 males aged 16–19 years old, with an average age of 17.1 and an even split of 25 abstainers and 25 light drinkers. We note that although the legal purchase age for alcohol in Australia is 18 years, the average age at which young people have their first full drink is 16.3 years (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020) and the majority of our sample had tried alcohol before. Participants came from a mix of inner and outer suburbs around Melbourne. At the time of the interviews, all participants were in some form of education – either high school or equivalent, or university. A total of 21 participants were employed casually or part-time. In terms of cultural background, 14 participants were born overseas, 22 spoke a second language at home, and 17 considered themselves religious (predominately denominations of Christianity), although how often they practiced and attended religious ceremonies varied. Almost all participants lived in family homes with their parents, although several lived on college campuses, in shared houses or with a partner. Participants were from a mix of suburbs that differed in terms of socio-economic advantage and came from a combination of dual and single-parent families.

All interviews were conducted in-person and one-on-one by the lead author, who was 25 years old at the time. Because the presence of an adult can discourage younger participants from talking about their experiences with alcohol (Katainen and Rolando, 2015), having a younger interviewer may have enabled participants to feel the researcher was 'like them' and allowed them to more openly discuss their drinking practices (Wilkinson, 2017). To minimise 'micro-geographies' of power relations (Elwood and Martin, 2000), participants chose interview settings where they felt most comfortable, which included cafes, libraries, parks, food courts, universities and homes. The interviews followed a semi-structured format with a range of open-ended questions and probes. Participants were encouraged to think about alcohol's place in their broader social worlds. We kept the tone of the interviews conversational to draw out candid responses and narratives. Interviews began by asking participants to talk about themselves and proceeded to cover a range of interconnected themes including work, study, family life, social life, technology use, health, drinking experiences and attitudes towards alcohol. Example questions included 'What do you like to do in your free time?', 'Could you reflect on a typical social event?' and 'What is your idea of success in life?'. Interviews lasted between 30–90 minutes, most often just under an hour. All were recorded and transcribed, with participants given pseudonyms and identified only by age and gender for anonymity. Transcripts were later coded inductively using NVivo 11.

Discussion of time use emerged regularly in participants' descriptions of how they managed different facets of their lives (e.g. social life, school, work, technology use). While we initially intended to examine leisure as a separate concept, we found that there was much crossover between discussions of leisure, work, study and social interactions, where time (and the management of time) acted as the unifying theme. This was particularly clear in tensions between education workloads or extracurricular activities and free time. This affected collective social rhythms and attitudes towards drinking as a social practice. Adorno's ([1969] 1991) concept of free time and the broader commodification of time supported our understanding of how young people in our sample structured and managed time. This view of time as a resource linked to temporal and economic demands allowed us to understand social practices (like drinking) as temporal practices which are synchronised, mediated and at times avoided. Using this to conceptualise the link between time and practices, the meanings ascribed to free time were grouped into three (sometimes conflicting) framings; free time as productive, free time as opportunistic, and free time as restorative. Although responses and narratives were diverse, the findings and excerpts provided below represent some of the more common sentiments.

Findings

Free Time as Productive

Although Adorno ([1969] 1991) argued that people could not be expected to be productive in their free time in the industrial sense (i.e. producing goods), he noted that pastimes often had a functionality to them (e.g. improving health or skills) that represented the broader commodification of time. Many participants in our study reported pursuing forms of self-commodification to build skills, knowledge and experiences that could be valuable in the labour market. They often talked about putting in time towards studying, exercise, learning and pursuing personal development goals, and blending work and free time through group study sessions and extracurricular activities. This goal to be productive both permeated and limited the way participants socialised around alcohol. Many participants talked about attending parties (where most drinking occurred) as a way to spend time with close friends, or their preference for minimising drinking to enable the development of better connections with friends. For example, Sarah states:

> I used to go [to parties] a lot, but this year I've changed a lot. This year I definitely go less. Only if it's really necessary to go. If it's a birthday party – like I used to go to just a random party for no purpose, but now I would only go to a party if it's like my close friend. (Sarah, 17, F)

Sarah is in her final year of high school and is focusing on her studies, socialising less because of it. She limits herself to one or two drinks when she goes out and describes the need to have a 'purpose' when going out to parties, such as sharing time with close friends. Indeed, these discretionary practices – picking social events with close friends and avoiding becoming intoxicated – can be considered a productive way to build intimacy (Caluzzi et al., 2020a) and compartmentalise 'time with friends' (Noonan, 2009).

Many other participants' attempts to use their time productively were oriented towards education and future careers. Roughly half of the participants also engaged in various forms of part-time or casual employment. This tended to involve doing paid work during holidays or over weekends, which both condensed free time and sometimes clashed with designated drinking times. Some considered paid employment a productive use of time and a routine which at times overrode the value (and temporal consequences) of drinking.

> *I know I can still have a good time without it [alcohol]. I can still go to a party, have a great night, get some great photos and go home. I'm not hungover the next day and I can work that early shift, unlike everyone else. (Ellen, 17, F)*

Ellen has developed a clear career trajectory and wants to study psychology at university. She describes herself as being very busy with extracurricular activities and work, where her ability to go out and not drink gives her an economic edge over others. Ellen also talks about using her time efficiently and being busy in positive ways, which ties into her non-drinking. This 'busyness as a badge of honour' (Gershuny, 2005) suggests both a fear of wasting time and a status associated with being productive. Ellen also comes from a Christian family and her parents both discourage alcohol and encourage her to focus on school and extracurriculars. Her story, like those of many other participants, highlights the intergenerational transmission of values. Not only do parents' cultural and religious values shape how young people think about alcohol (see Caluzzi et al., 2020b), but parents are also a key source of material support and encouragement for their educational aspirations (Wyn, 2011). For Ellen and many other participants, parents reproduced cultural imperatives around being productive and thinking about the future. In certain ways, parents have been co-opted into the challenge of managing individualised insecurity for their children, an additional aspect of the (classed) intensive parenting demands facing contemporary families (Faircloth and Lee, 2010) that extends into youth (Woodman, 2011).

Because being productive was associated with securing the future (i.e. health, experience, personal development were all things that could help in the future labour market), free time spent on parties and drinking were sometimes described as a distraction from the need to focus on the future. While most participants attended parties and many drank alcohol, this was something they needed to manage among other practices competing for time.

> *At this stage of my life I've got too many important things going on to be waking up the next morning just feeling sick. That can wait until I've finished school and stuff like that. Do you know what I mean? Like you go out on a Saturday night and if you drink too much then you wake up Sunday and you're feeling sick then how are you going to study and do all the stuff that you have to do on Sunday? So it just seems a bit pointless to me at this point in time. (Lucy, 17, F)*

Lucy is in her final year of school and talks about juggling part-time work, study, sport, family time and socialising. Her focus on the future highlights the relationship between practices and temporality, and how certain practices (e.g. studying) compete for free time

and shape temporal rhythms (Southerton, 2013). For Lucy, the need to work hard at her education and meet her other obligations creates time pressures that seemed to reduce the value of social practices like drinking in the present. It is important to note like Ellen and Lucy, many participants referenced the after-effects of drinking (i.e. hangovers) as a barrier to productivity, taking up extended periods of free time without providing any (or few) benefits. This highlights how sequences of related practices (in this case, being hungover the next morning) can make a particular practice more temporally demanding (Southerton, 2006). As many participants were future-oriented in how they managed time in the present, this encouraged thinking about how to manage and contain 'unproductive' time when going to parties, drinking and recovering from the effects of alcohol.

Free Time as Opportunistic

In the same way that Adorno understood free time as an extension of the demands of paid work, the rise of non-standard work patterns to accommodate 'flexibly' competing responsibilities has contributed to the blurring of work and non-work time (Gregg, 2011). Indeed, the increased temporal flexibility associated with neoliberal labour produced a similar logic in the way participants reported managing their free time – a logic which encouraged flexibility, immediacy and efficiency, even in time not taken up by work and study. Their free time was often fragmented and unstructured, and they described temporal (often self-imposed) restrictions such as schoolwork, employment and parental expectations around which they had to flexibly organise their time. Because these restrictions and requirements fluctuated, much of their free time was opportunistic, such as taking advantage of weekends and holidays or having unplanned meetups with friends. Commonly this also meant taking advantage of digital technology (such as gaming, streaming and social media) as a flexible approach to communicating and spending time with friends. For some participants, gaming and chatting online also provided alternative social practices to going out and drinking:

> *Instead of, yeah, we don't go out, we can just – everyone could just come over to a mate's house, or we can just stay in our own houses and just connect online and just play games. We'll just Skype or something, just to talk to everyone. (Andrew, M, 18)*

Andrew's family moved to Australia from Malaysia and his parents place a lot of emphasis on him succeeding academically. He drinks very little and only started when he turned 18 and his parents allowed this. Although many of his friends drink, he reports wanting to keep his drinking minimal. Andrew's story may be indicative of how changing parent-child relationships and new ways to perform masculinity through gaming have been implicated in reductions in young people's drinking (Törrönen et al., 2019). For Andrew, socialising through video games allows for an accessible alternative to drinking. Although gaming as an alternative to going out was only spoken about by some of the young men in this sample, other forms of technology (e.g. smartphones) allowed young people to flexibly connect in different ways. Engaging with digital media also required less time than coordinated social events like parties,

which require scheduling and occur during particular time frames (such as weekends) (Southerton, 2006). Here, technology enabled forms of interaction, communication and entertainment in ways that demanded less free time and organisation than other in-person activities (like drinking events).

Online socialising was not only a substitute for in-person events – it also enabled them. Technology like social media also created opportunities for participants to mobilise their social networks by organising meetups and finding events to attend. This was important as socialising (and drinking in particular) was still considered a temporally and spatially shared activity. For example, Kylie talked about being part of a large Snapchat (a picture-based instant messaging app) group which allowed her and her friends to organise spontaneous social events:

> *Yeah, I'd say – just kind of be like, 'so, is anyone doing anything this week, if I do this do you guys want to come over?' Or like, 'I have a free house, do you guys want to come over and chill for a little bit?' (Kylie, 17, F)*

Kylie is nearing the end of high school and trying to find a balance between going to parties and focusing on school. For Kylie, digital technologies have allowed an adaptive and opportunistic approach to socialising. She and her friends use Snapchat to organise informal, ad hoc social events. These opportunistic catchups sometimes involved drinking, but the often-last-minute nature of organisation meant alcohol was often not central to the event (as this required coordination and organised drinking spaces).

Participants also used social media to organise or receive invites to parties and drinking events. However, most participants described dynamic periods of assessment and schoolwork around which they had to carefully plan their lives, which at times limited their attendance at social events. This need to balance time made it easier to spend time with friends casually than regularly attending larger social events.

> *We do go to some parties, gatherings, every now and again. I don't often go too often. I tend to go to one, take a break, a few weeks or so, then go to another one. Sometimes we'll just go out to eat, no studying. Sometimes we'll just study. Yeah, we don't really have planned meet-ups, unless it's like a party or a gathering that we plan to go together. (Brendan, 17, M)*

Brendan has a group of friends with whom he often studies after school and on weekends, and he describes most of his socialising as opportunistic and unplanned. This contrasts with the organisation associated with drinking events like parties, which require coordination and synchronisation with friends (Ander and Wilińska, 2020). For Brendan, there is a clear blurring between work and free time as he talks about studying with friends as a social activity and his irregular attendance at parties. Because practices need to colonise certain timeslots to become habitual (Shove, 2012), the fragmented temporal rhythms many participants alluded to seemed to prevent drinking practices (which often occurred at parties) becoming regular routines. These temporal rhythms were fragmented by the demands of competing practices, time pressures, and sometimes parental restrictions, which encouraged an opportunistic approach to socialising that challenged practices like drinking.

Free Time as Restorative

The third framing of free time we describe as restorative, which included a mix of solitary and social practices. We found that these practices often fitted within Adorno's ([1969] 1991) notions of free time as compensatory and/or distracting from the various demands of work. Solitary practices were often immersive, such as watching movies or TV shows, listening to music, playing sport, catching up on sleep, reading and playing videogames – many of which could be done from the comfort of their bedrooms. On the one hand, these could be considered temporal autonomous spaces (Clancy, 2014) – they allowed young people a degree of creative control over time and distanced them from the realities of work. However, they were inevitably still driven by the demands of work (and the requirement to recover from it). For example, many participants talked about needing to relax and have downtime as a way to recover from the pressures of school and employment, or as a form of procrastination until they had to work again. Here, although drinking alcohol was also seen as a way to relax in certain social situations, drinking alcohol seemed to still constitute a communal 'time out' associated with the ending of the standard working week (Measham and Brain, 2005). Indeed, drinking alone, during the day or on weekdays was seen as especially problematic ('I feel like if you drink by yourself or alone, it's seen as a sad sort of thing to do at this age' – Dean, 17, M).

Participants discussed a range of social practices that were often consumption-based (such as eating out, having coffee catchups, going shopping or going to the movies) which provided a sense of intimacy with their friends. Among these, parties were important and were closely associated with drinking alcohol and celebrating the weekend. Weekends and parties provided opportunities to synchronise time with peers, make new friends, and build upon old friendships. They also allowed participants to catch up in an environment removed from weekday institutions, which for some provided a renewed sense of energy and a way to switch off from work.

> *When you're at school everybody's just like drained and that sort of thing, but then when you go to a party everyone's dressed up and they're drinking and everyone's having fun. (Lucy, 17, F)*

Lucy's quote highlights the value of parties and drinking, which provide a context removed from school. Time designated to parties and drinking allows young people to engage with the present and avoid thinking about the future and other responsibilities (Batchelor et al., 2020; Woodman, 2003). The value of parties is that they also allow groups of young people to synchronise and enjoy their free time together. While parties provided a way to break up the monotony of work, they still needed to be managed among other priorities:

> *You can go out, have a few drinks and relax, like you don't have to spend the whole time studying. So I think it can provide a bit of a break. You can sort of have a bit of a breather, a bit of stress-free time. But I don't think it really gets in the way unless you prioritise it over other things. (Anna, 17, F)*

When she's not focused on school, Anna spends a lot of time caring for her younger sister who has autism. Her family is also Christian, and she does not feel like she has many

opportunities to drink due to her family responsibilities. Anna is not against parties and drinking, which she thinks can provide a sense of relaxation and 'stress-free time'. However, she suggests that other things should be prioritised. This was commonly endorsed by participants – parties and drinking (at least in moderation) were often viewed positively but became problematic when they took up too much time. Indeed, such 'time outs' still seemed to be shackled to the management of longer-term futures. Conversely, for some participants, parties did not always act as a 'time out'. Here, socialising and interacting with (potentially drunk) people took mental and emotional energy.

> *Like sometimes when I'm at a party I kind of just like don't feel it and like, I just can't like, be bothered talking to people, or it just doesn't feel nice [. . .] sometimes you just aren't in the mood for a party. (Erin, 17, F)*

Erin does not like staying out too late or drinking, preferring to spend time in smaller groups of friends in more relaxed settings. As well as (and sometimes instead of) parties, Erin and many other participants described going to gatherings or 'gaths'. Gatherings were small, casual social events that required less organisation than parties. These could involve dinners, sleepovers and group meetups. These were described as an easy way to spend time with friends, where the casual nature of gatherings also meant fewer pressures around socialising and drinking than larger parties. Although going out to parties was still important for many participants, effort that goes into a 'night out' with alcohol can intensify and extend social events (e.g. through planning, meeting up and organising transport) (Borlagdan et al., 2010). This meant that restoration through solitary practices and relaxed social events that required little pre-planning were constructed as particularly valuable.

Discussion

Adorno's ([1969] 1991) theory of free time and overarching logic, based on the commodification of time, provides a valuable framework for understanding the link between time, temporalities and the social practice of (non)drinking for our sample. For our participants, free time was a resource managed relative to work commitments (including education and training). It was bound by institutions and economic rationales that created pressures around making the most of free time. This was not an intensification of separate spheres of work, study and leisure – 'work hard and party hard' (Woodman, 2003) – but a cultivation of free time. Unlike feminist theories of transformative temporalities, which propose a future unconstrained by the past (Grosz, 2005), here we saw a youthful temporality cemented in managing the present as a gateway to the future. The pressures these young people faced required a balance of time devoted to being productive and recovering from the pressures of work. While social practices like drinking could provide 'time outs', they were challenged by dynamic workloads and a conscious focus on the future. These tensions led to many of the young people opportunistically 'fitting in' free time, which was sporadic and often could not involve drinking alcohol (which was restricted to more organised social events). Here, the concepts of freedom and time were shaped by social contexts, economic and institutional demands, and an increasingly unclear temporal boundary between work time and free time.

The blurred liminal spaces between work and free time transformed free time into 'a burden to be filled' through productive efforts (Noonan, 2009: 387). Although this did not preclude drinking, it meant that present-centred activities like drinking and intoxication were often subordinated because of their significant time commitment (e.g. a night out and being hungover) and potential impacts on the future. Young people's drinking has been described as a form of 'calculated' or 'bounded' hedonism (Brain, 2000) where cultural imperatives and institutional pressures bind how often and how much young people drink. Here, we suggest these young people were also closely bound by temporal imperatives. They adapted their lifestyles, routines and temporal orientations in ways that meant taking 'time outs' through alcohol use was secondary to focusing on the future. Contemporary research highlights how young people can reframe light and non-drinking practices positively as a way to enhance productivity, liberate time and secure life stability (Caluzzi et al., 2020a; Conroy and De Visser, 2018). For our participants, these values similarly encouraged light and non-drinking practices as a means of having more free time to pursue future-oriented goals.

Drinking also has strong associations with collective rituals, expectations and spaces (Cherrier and Gurrieri, 2013). However, such collective practices require synchronicity, planning and time commitment, and were challenged by participants' work commitments and fragmented temporal rhythms. Here, technologies created new individual and collective practices that were less time-intensive, and these acted to substitute, enable and discourage drinking practices in different ways. Moreover, social drinking events tend to be constrained to certain times and spaces, and the management of these spaces has historically been central to how young people's drinking is governed (Jayne et al., 2011). However, the management of time both internally (through temporal anxieties about the future) and externally (through work, education and parents) acted as a similarly powerful force for governing these young people's drinking practices.

While alcohol has traditionally been associated with 'time outs' from everyday pressures (Fry, 2011; Lindsay, 2009), its value as a tool for restoration was also questioned by participants. In the same way that heavier drinking samples report norms around not drinking alone and not losing control (Fry, 2011; Harrison et al., 2011), so too did our sample construct drinking too much, alone or outside of 'party' contexts as problematic. While some appreciated opportunities to socialise in drinking contexts, institutional time (such as education) tended to challenge social time (such as parties). This problematised the time-intensiveness of alcohol and drinking events, encouraging smaller social 'gatherings' where there were also fewer expectations that the activity should include drinking. Although gatherings and parties still featured in the way many young people spent their weekends, the nature of these social practices seemed different to the hedonistic 'time outs' described in earlier literature on the place of drinking in young people's lives (Fry, 2011; Lindsay, 2009).

We note some contextual factors that may have influenced our findings. Our data reflects a young urban sample of light and non-drinkers in a western context, and while there have been similar declines in adolescent drinking in other high-income countries where these findings might resonate, more research is needed in other countries where there could be important cultural or contextual differences. Many of the young people in

this study also chose not to drink for a variety of personal reasons. Most were below the legal age for purchasing alcohol, lived with parents, some were religious, and all were enrolled in education. Age, family, culture, religion and school can all act to reduce young people's drinking (Törrönen et al., 2019). Indeed, we note that many non-drinking subject positions identified in previous research, such as healthy, sporty, academic, and religious (Supski and Lindsay, 2016), were also supported within these temporal imperatives towards the future.

These elements could suggest limited or constrained autonomy, where free time may have been just as much externally managed as it was self-directed. The ability and material support to focus on education, work and the future also highlight elements of social status. Drinking practices and attitudes can reflect the ability to succeed in educational institutions and highlight class differences (Andrade, 2019; Kolind, 2011), and indeed many participants drew on their planned educational trajectories to challenge drinking practices. Because all of our participants were in some form of education or training, it is likely we did not capture the voices of more marginalised young people whose use of free time would likely differ. Moreover, our explicit focus on light and non-drinkers undoubtedly influenced our findings. Heavier drinkers may have discussed different temporal meanings associated with their drinking practices.

Conclusion

Time and temporalities are central components of alcohol consumption, yet rarely have these been applied to young people's drinking practices. This is important as young people as a generation face pressures to manage their time according to social and economic imperatives, which also creates new challenges and values around social practices like drinking. Thus, this research adds to the body of work examining the link between time, temporalities and drinking practices. Here the logic and technologies of neoliberalism seemed to maintain youth temporalities that were future-oriented and emphasised spending time in the present wisely. Indeed, these young people used time as a resource to secure their futures. By 'investing' in their future, they aligned free time with broader economic imperatives, where drinking was closely tied to (and bounded by) the pressures of work and this commodification of time.

Adorno ([1969] 1991) argued that the logic of late-capitalism subjected free time to the same economic pressures as work. We suggest that the commodification of time and the blurring of temporal boundaries between work and free time Adorno identified over 50 years ago are now more relevant than ever to the lives and social practices of young people. This has created new pressures and sometimes contradictory imperatives for how young people should manage their time. It may also provide some hints into why patterns of alcohol consumption are changing for young people in Australia and many other countries. It is unclear whether and how our findings apply beyond young people with limited independence, for example, whether these temporal pressures are echoed by young adults, or whether they begin to ease, and at what point this occurs. Future research should incorporate longitudinal methods to gauge how management of time and drinking practices change as young people gain more independence and autonomy over their time.

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Chapter 8

Re-configured Pleasures: How Young People Feel Good Through Abstaining or Moderating Their Drinking

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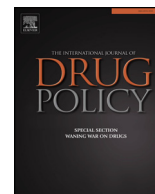
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GC collected and analysed the data, conceived the idea and led manuscript writing. SM and AP provided critical feedback, suggested revisions and refined the theoretical contribution.

Research Paper

Re-configured pleasures: How young people feel good through abstaining or moderating their drinking

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ABSTRACT

Background: Alcohol use has strong associations with the pursuit of pleasure, yet trends in young people's drinking have been declining in Australia for more than 15 years. Therefore, it is important to examine how the increasing number of young people who drink lightly or abstain think about pleasure and alcohol, and how this might reflect changing practices around drinking for pleasure.
Methods: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 50 young people aged 16–19 from Melbourne who abstained from alcohol or drank within Australian guidelines for risky drinking. Participants reflected on how they socialised whilst drinking lightly or without drinking at all, and how they experienced pleasure in this context. These responses were analysed thematically.
Results: Four key themes emerged; authenticity, intimacy, control, and vicarious pleasure. Some participants felt that by not drinking, they were enacting authentic or better versions of themselves, whilst developing a stronger sense of intimacy with their sober friends. Others described the displeasure of potentially losing control of their emotions and bodies in social situations and were able to instead experience enjoyment vicariously through their friends' drinking.
Conclusion: Drinking has long been regarded as a way to build a connection with others, relax and feel a sense of pleasure. However, it is important to recognise that avoiding drinking and drunkenness provides an alternative means by which some young people pursue feelings of pleasure and enjoyment. In a time of declining drinking rates, participants here drew on notions of authenticity, intimacy, self-control, and vicarious enjoyment to construct light or non-drinking as a pleasurable pursuit, and a positive part of selfhood.

Background

Declining trends in young people's drinking have occurred and continued in Australia since the early 2000s, particularly amongst teenagers. For example, between 2004 and 2016, 16 to 17-year-old abstention from drinking increased from 23.2% to 57.7%, and monthly risky drinking (defined as drinking 4 or more standard drinks on a single occasion) decreased from 22.7% to 13.3% (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2017). This declining trend has been driven largely by young people delaying their first drink, choosing to abstain from alcohol, or drinking less both in terms of quantity and frequency (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2017). The larger number of young people who are drinking less means that light drinking and abstention are no longer minority practices. A growing body of research has begun exploring the factors influencing an apparent shift in young people's drinking cultures (Bhattacharya, 2016; Pape, Rossow, &

Brunborg, 2018). Yet alcohol remains a central component of how young people socialise in group settings, where those who don't drink are often required to justify their choices (Hepworth et al., 2016; Supski & Lindsay, 2017).

Young people drink for a range of reasons; it can be a way to enact friendships and intimacy (MacLean, 2016), feel a sense of belonging and autonomy (Borlagdan et al., 2010), to transgress societal norms (Beccaria & Sande, 2003), to lower inhibitions (Measham & Brain, 2005), and for affective sensations (Zajdow & MacLean, 2014). For some young people, drinking constitutes a pleasurable activity that brings them together, allowing them to socialise and break away from the stresses of everyday life. On the other hand, those who drink lightly or abstain in alcohol-centred social situations tend to face a number of challenges stemming from social expectations to drink and negative stereotypes of non-drinkers (Piacentini & Banister, 2009). Yet some draw a sense of self-determination in their ability to rebel against

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dominant drinking culture (Herring, Bayley, & Hurcombe, 2014), use this resistance to form a positive part of their self-image (Romo, 2012), are better able to build friendships based on intimacy and compatibility without alcohol (Graber et al., 2016), and find increased self-esteem, agency and a higher quality of social life through non-drinking (Conroy & de Visser, 2018). The act of drinking or not drinking also ties in with how young people attempt to be authentic to their broader image, style and social identity (Johnson, 2013).

Alcohol environments remain a commonplace site of socialisation for both drinkers and non-drinkers (Fry, 2010) and alcohol remains closely tied to a number of symbolic pleasures (MacLean, 2016). This means that light and non-drinkers risk various displeasurable social consequences (such as exclusion and a negative self-identity), potentially requiring them to actively re-negotiate identities and friendships in the process (Conroy & de Visser, 2014). Yet a growing number of young people are increasingly recognising social and health benefits of social non-drinking (choosing to not drink during social situations where others are) (Conroy & de Visser, 2018) and given that light drinkers and abstainers are no longer the minority in this age group, it is important to understand whether and how these young people are able to feel and construct pleasurable non-drinking experiences.

The pursuit of pleasure(s)

In their seminal work, Coveney and Bunton (2003) pointed out that the history of modern public health is tied to movements designed to transform the meanings of pleasure. For example, public health initiatives in the 18th and 19th centuries were closely linked to religious movements that attempted to reshape habits through discourses that equated sobriety with being civilized, and drunkenness with depravity. They used these discourses as a backdrop to provide a typology of different (and competing) pleasures, including carnal pleasure (hedonistic, immediately gratifying and a site for shared transgressions), disciplined pleasure (through moderation, restraint and control), ascetic pleasure (abstinence in order to pursue higher goals), and ecstatic pleasure (collective rituals often tied to mind-altering substances). Moreover, Coveney and Bunton noted how these different forms of pleasure emerged through different systems of thought and forms of expressivity over time, the pursuit of which remains closely tied to constructions of social and cultural identities.

Carnal pleasure is embodied in drinkers' pursuit of pleasurable bodily sensations (Fry, 2011). Drinking also provides ecstatic pleasure as it offers an escape from the everyday, and a symbolic sense of togetherness, exhilaration and transcendence (Pettigrew, Ryan, & Ogilvie, 2001). Yet the pursuit of pleasure through substance use has historically (and continues to be) pathologised within public health as some kind of bodily, psychological, or social deficit (O'Malley & Valverde, 2004), conflated with poor decisions and 'risky' behaviours (Coveney & Bunton, 2003). Instead, such discourses promote disciplined pleasure through integrated "moderation, restraint and tempered practices" that attempt to downplay immediate gratification in favour of rationalising and controlling pleasure (Coveney & Bunton, 2003, p. 171). Indeed, this gap between understanding alcohol consumption as a risky behaviour, and the everyday experiences of drinkers who drink for carnal and/or ecstatic pleasure has long created a problem for public health and education campaigns that attempt to reduce young people's drinking (Harrison, Kelly, Lindsay, Advocat, & Hickey, 2011; Keane, 2009). Competing pleasures around both excess and moderation mean that pleasure is often seen as acceptable only when done so responsibly (O'Malley & Valverde, 2004), leading to practices of calculated hedonism that structure choices around when, how and where to drink (Szmigin et al., 2008) and symbolic boundaries around 'unacceptable' forms of drunkenness (MacLean, Pennay, & Room, 2018; Zajdow & MacLean, 2014).

Neoliberalism and pleasure

Lupton (1995) suggests that pleasure is an unconscious and emotional drive that overrides public health imperatives, but also notes that public health has succeeded in creating health-conscious, self-regulated, and civilised subjects; therefore, the meaning of pleasure should be understood within the context of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is a guiding social ideology that individualises and internalises health responsibility onto informed citizens (Bergmark, 2004; Rose, 2009) through prescribing how they should conduct themselves, live their lives, and exercise consumer-based lifestyle choices (Goodwin & Griffin, 2017). Current consumer culture encourages young people to construct identities through leisure and consumer practices (Furlong & Cartmel, 2006) and prioritises and commodifies moments of pleasure (Measham, 2004). However, the neoliberal ideal of self-management means that carnal pleasure and the pursuit of hedonistic consumption practices is at odds with many valued everyday activities. For example, most young people's lives are bound by elements such as school, work, sports, parents, as well as informal controls which stipulate that pleasure can only be pursued through forms of "calculated hedonism" (Featherstone, 2007).

Neoliberal discourses encourage individuals to bear the burden of responsibility for what happens in their lives, meaning that young people are required to carve out moments of pleasure without disrupting future life opportunities through education or employment commitments. Gender, race, class and social position also influence these boundaries of acceptability. For example, women drinking for pleasure and to intoxication has been portrayed as disruptive to traditional ideas of femininity and sexual responsibility (Rúdólfsdóttir & Morgan, 2009), thus highlighting symbolic boundaries around gendered aspects of drinking for pleasure. Similarly, young people's drinking has historically been subject to societal scrutiny, conveyed via images of drunkenness and danger (Measham, 2008). Such actions of young people have been understood to not only pose a threat to public health, but also to notions of public safety and order, creating tension and ambiguity around how young people engage in pleasure-seeking practices such as drinking.

Within discussions of youth, pleasure is a dichotomy whereby the negative 'youth-at-risk' (whose practices attract policing and regulation) are differentiated from the practices of 'entrepreneurial youth' (who enact commendable self-regulation and economic savviness) (Kelly, 2006). These portrayals underpin neoliberal discourses that place young people within a world that 'empowers' them to take on the responsibilities of their health, image and future; in doing so, implicitly endorsing the pursuit of forms of pleasure that entail self-governing. Because pleasure is closely linked to displays of social status and taste (Bourdieu, 1984), this pursuit of self-governing pleasure also remains closely tied to social location. For example, at-risk youth tend to have less access to cultural resources and opportunities than their entrepreneurial counterparts (Kelly, 2006) and are therefore more likely to engage in heavy drinking without structural obligations and prescribed everyday activities (such as school, employment, and extracurricular activities) (Brain, 2000). In this respect, the pleasure of alcohol consumption is intertwined with social context in a way that can promote heavy drinking through offering an immediate embodied sense of pleasure, but also moderate drinking through the pleasures of self-control and engagement with its more distal advantages (e.g. improved health and reduced productivity).

Because pleasure-seeking has become a normative way to achieve meaning and fulfilment within the current culture of experiential consumption (Fry, 2011) and is important for youth identity construction (Goodwin & Griffin, 2017), we consider pleasure as having a strong symbolic value for how young people construct a positive sense of self and engage in social settings. These individual and collective identities play an important role in how young people maximise a subjective sense of pleasure, where changes to the pursuit of pleasure might reflect

Table 1
Demographic Data

	Total number	Percentage
Drinking Status		
Abstainer	25	50%
Light Drinker	25	50%
Age		
16	10	20%
17	29	58%
18	6	12%
19	5	10%
Gender		
Male	24	48%
Female	26	52%
Region		
Inner Metropolitan	16	32%
Outer Metropolitan	29	58%
Regional	5	10%
Current Education Status		
High school or Equivalent	39	78%
University	11	22%
Background		
Born in Australia	36	72%
Born Overseas	14	28%
Language Spoken at Home		
Spoke Only English at Home	28	56%
Spoke a Second Language at Home	22	44%
Employment Status		
Working Part-time or Casually	21	42%
Not Employed	29	58%
Total		
	50	100%

broader changes to social norms and the reputability of certain practices. Therefore, we suggest that changes in young people's drinking provides evidence for new internalised forms of self-regulation and disciplined pleasures that reward light drinking and abstinence. These new pleasures are also likely made possible by a more heterogeneous drinking culture (Törrönen, Roumeliotis, Samuelsson, Kraus, & Room, 2019) allowing the emergence of new ways for young people to engage in pleasure whilst also constructing positive social and cultural identities. In this paper we explore how young people enact pleasure and a positive sense of self through light drinking and abstinence.

Method

To explore how young people perceived and pursued pleasure through light and non-drinking practices, 50 young people aged between 16 and 19 years old were recruited for interviews from around Melbourne, Victoria (see Table 1 for demographics). This age group was chosen as it reflects a period where initiation into drinking is common (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2017). Participants were recruited through online advertising and word of mouth. They were identified as light-drinkers and abstainers based on self-categorisation and previous drinking experiences; however, it should be noted that there was no clear demarcation between these groups, as many were in their early stages of establishing drinking patterns (e.g. many had previously tasted alcohol, but not consumed a standard drink and were considered abstainers for the purpose of this research). Potential participants were screened in line with the National Health and Medical Research Council's risky drinking guidelines (National Health & Medical Research Council, 2009). Those who had drunk 4 standard drinks or less on an occasion were eligible for inclusion in the study, although several participants who had consumed slightly more than this on a single occasion but had not done so since were also included. Ethical clearance was provided for this project by the La Trobe University Human Research Ethics Committee.

All interviews were conducted one-on-one and were done in person, and participants were informed of their right to skip questions or

withdraw entirely if they so wished. Interview locations were selected by the participants based on where they felt most comfortable and included libraries, universities, cafes, food courts, meeting rooms, and within participants' homes. They were encouraged to use the questions to discuss their ideas and retell narratives. Early questions in the schedule were intended to explore participants' social worlds and build rapport, whilst later questions were structured around themes of alcohol, family, friends, technology, health, future aspirations, and reflections on youth drinking culture. Interview length ranged from 30 min to 75 min, and all interviews were recorded and later transcribed verbatim. All participants have been given pseudonyms in the following sections for confidentiality.

Analysis

Given declining trends, our focus was to move past the previously understood status of young people's drinking as normative and entrenched (see also Conroy and de Visser (2014)) towards exploring the lived experiences of light and non-drinkers, and how they understood alcohol and gave meaning to their practices. Most previous qualitative research has emphasised the normality of drinking and framed analyses around the challenges non-drinkers face (e.g. Herman-Kinney & Kinney, 2012; Piacentini & Banister, 2009; Supski & Lindsay, 2017), rather than the positive pleasures they find in their practices. Therefore, the epistemological approach we used for this paper was subjectivist-phenomenological. Phenomenology uses personal experiences as an insight into prevailing cultural understandings and has a grounded approach that focuses on the internal logic of a subject (Gray, 2014). This allowed us to thematically understand how our participants subjectively understood and felt pleasure, based on their own beliefs around drinking, and how this was tied to experiences within their social realities.

Transcripts were entered into NVivo 12 software (QSR International) and the data was used inductively to explore the potential benefits participants saw in light and non-drinking. This was done using thematic analysis which allowed us to identify, analyse and describe patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes are well-suited to phenomenology as they can capture beliefs, constructs, identity development techniques, and emotional experiences – all essential elements which make a particular phenomenon possible (Saldaña, 2013). Through an iterative process involving inspection of the data, discussion, and a more explicit focus on the positive experiences of drinking lightly or abstaining, several themes were identified around the pleasures of these (non-) drinking styles and how they linked to young people's sense of self. These highlighted some of the reasons offered for drinking lightly or not at all, as well as how pleasures in drinking situations were experienced and perceived. Themes tended to overlap into multiple categories of pleasure, creating feelings of positivity around participants' identities.

Authenticity through moderation

The first theme that was identified was the importance of authenticity, and how participants felt this was best achieved through light and non-drinking. Authenticity for young drinkers and non-drinkers has been conceptualised in terms of both drinking performance (whether the act of drinking is in line with an individual's broader social identity and performances) (Johnson, 2013) and honesty of identity (how much drinking practices are part of an independent, accurate and consistent identity) (Bogren, 2006), and both of these conceptualisations were represented in the data. Many of those who were able to socialise without alcohol gained a sense of disciplined pleasure that some participants likened to ascetic pleasure, and a sense of empowerment, and the pursuit of their "best" or most "honest" selves. They discussed alcohol as something needed to artificially enhance confidence or social skills, and by doing so, felt that their choices to drink lightly or abstain

enabled them to achieve a more authentic or superior way of being than those pursuing transformative and transgressive carnal pleasures of intoxication. As Gina explained:

Yeah, it's not - it's really not being the best of who you can be as a person, I don't think, when you're drunk, when you're tipsy. (Gina, 17, abstainer)

Some talked about differentiating themselves by not drinking, describing feeling "unique" or "different". Others indicated that maintaining sobriety was a disciplined pleasure that was harder to attain, and therefore more rewarding than giving in to the more accessible carnal pleasures of drinking. For example, participants would often describe themselves as having "stronger" characters ("*you're not easily influenced and you don't feel like you have to adapt to others*") by resisting pressures to drink, and this positive feedback reinforced their non-drinking.

They also talked about how people "changed" when they were drinking ("*you're not yourself when you're drunk*"), and how this transformative effect was often negative, dangerous, and a false representation of people's "true" selves. However, this transformative effect could also improve aspects of sociability, as Chelsea notes some of the difficulties of maintaining authenticity through non-drinking:

Yeah because people change when they're not sober, even if it is a few drinks. Like maybe they're funnier with a few drinks, but when they don't have the drinks, that's who they really are; that's them, even if they aren't funny. (Chelsea, 16, abstainer)

Light drinkers and abstainers in the study tended to regard others who relied on alcohol to ameliorate self-consciousness or to enhance sociability as weak. In this way, alcohol was framed as a social-performance enhancing drug – one which produced a false or inauthentic identity. This transformation could also lead to socially inappropriate performances of aggression, silliness or sexuality ("*they're either being really stupid or they're just kind of all over you*" – Duncan, 17, abstainer). Participants felt these socially inappropriate performances risked stripping away the more transgressive and carnal pleasures of drinking.

Participants were also aware of the potential benefits of losing inhibitions ("*drinking brings positive benefits, it relaxes [people] and they have a great time*" – Owen, 17, abstainer), but they preferred the more disciplined pleasure of being oneself through sobriety. Even if these came at the cost of social anxiety, being comfortable in their own skin without alcohol was an important part of constructing a positive, authentic sense of identity:

I know it eases people's social anxieties and makes it easier to communicate and stuff, but I think that I'd rather be socialising with people as my true self if that makes sense, even if that includes the anxiety that comes with meeting new friends and stuff. (Chelsea, 16, abstainer)

Similarly, Stephen recounts a discussion with his father about alcohol:

…Something my dad said ages ago that stuck with me was the question he asks himself is: 'Does it make me a better version of me? Does it improve who I am as a person and if it does, why does it do that?'. It never does. If it did, then it just means that you have your own issues that you need to confront and if you're using alcohol or drugs as an escapism. (Stephen, 16, abstainer)

Once again, drinking was seen as a problematic obstacle in being a better version of oneself, which also requires disciplined forms of reflexivity and self-scrutiny. Alcohol was viewed as a form of escapism and a psychological crutch, echoing rhetoric that positions alcohol use as a personal flaw and does not acknowledge the pleasures of intoxication. Within this framing of pleasure, reaching a higher form of authenticity through discipline was positioned above (and sometimes completely ignored) the immediate carnal pleasures of alcohol.

Whilst participants acknowledged the possibility of maintaining authenticity through drinking, most of the young people here felt that youthful drinking styles were closely associated with drunkenness and an inevitable loss of this.

Sober intimacy

Whilst some were wholly critical of alcohol, many of the young people we interviewed recognised drinking as a useful tool for socialising, connecting, building confidence, and some mentioned the positives of having shared "crazy" experiences to bond over. Interestingly, several participants countered this by emphasising that alcohol-fuelled environments did not provide "quality time" to build friendships because the intoxicative effect of alcohol detracted from people's ability to remember a night out coherently. Social events were therefore better embodied through the heightened awareness and memory associated with being sober, and the ability to better absorb moments of intimacy ("*It's a lot better waking up, remembering everything that's happened*" – Laura, 17, light drinker). This suggested a rejection of the fleeting intimacy alcohol provided through carnal and ecstatic pleasures, instead favouring disciplined pleasures of enjoying a sober night out and the ascetic pleasure of pursuing a deeper level of intimacy without alcohol. Indeed, many also criticised alcohol-affected socialising through alcohol, regarding it as a poor means of developing a strong foundation for making friends:

…It can be a lot more fun knowing that someone is not under the influence of alcohol because then you can't tell if they're having fun with you or with the alcohol. (Fiona, 17, abstainer)

I can definitely see now people that drink they open up a lot more connections because they can associate with others that have got smashed. They can associate with them and they can talk about it, be like 'Oh that night was so crazy, we got absolutely destroyed'. So I can see that those connections haven't been possible for me, but it doesn't really faze me. I don't know if I'd want to associate with someone like that and just talk about how we got destroyed, I don't see how that's an achievement. (David, 17, abstainer)

This was in part a practical strategy for producing intimacy, as participants were more likely to spend time with friends in non-drinking environments. But participants also produced a clear symbolic boundary between drinking a little bit to help socialise, and getting drunk, losing control and "changing" from authentic identities. Many participants suggested that alcohol changed the way people acted and empathised, which created a barrier of drunkenness between themselves and others. This intoxication made people seem "annoying", "careless" or "trashy" and made it difficult for light and non-drinkers to develop a sense of intimacy with their heavier drinking peers:

I'd probably obviously prefer the non-drinking mates because I can relate to them more. There isn't like a barrier or something between us, yeah. (Remi, 17, abstainer)

As Duncan also notes, this was again closely tied to notions of authenticity:

It's really awesome just to meet new people that…that's what I like about parties. But it's just when people aren't themselves, it's really hard to talk to them or interact with them. (Duncan, 17, abstainer)

Thus, the drinking and intoxication of peers were often seen as barriers to enacting close friendships and meeting new people, suggesting a rejection of intimacies produced through such carnal and ecstatic pleasures. Many still socialised around alcohol and noted there was still an element of possibly "missing out" by not going to alcohol-centred events. There was also a recognition amongst many participants that drinking seemed to generate a different (if less authentic) type of intimacy.

Several heterosexual young men pointed out that drinking could also be "confidence booster" for approaching and socialising with the opposite gender, but some were also quite wary of being drunk or inappropriate:

I mean if I did go to the party that's coming up and there was someone who was actually interested, then possibly, yeah. I mean I wouldn't want to get shitfaced and then make a mistake on the night, and so that's why I have that limit. (Marcus, 17, light drinker)

The benefit of 'drunken' intimacy was also that its collective nature allowed people to transgress everyday social divisions:

It's nice to see popular people getting on with the not-so-popular, all just together, because they don't think about that sort of thing when they're drunk. (Duncan, 17, abstainer)

Alternatively, some participants pointed out that being a light or non-drinker at social events with alcohol made them part of a more intimate, almost subcultural collective with others who similarly weren't drinking to intoxication. This provided some common ground for meeting people and creating new or stronger friendships based on being able to "relate" to others' non-drinking with more collective forms of moderation. For example, Geoff states:

I'm sort of better friends with - it might just be a coincidence but I'm usually better friends with the people who don't [drink]. I guess because they're easier to hang out with when you're not drinking. (Geoff, 19, light drinker)

Similarly, Lynley notes how she actively moved away from her heavier drinking friends, reflecting on the aimlessness associated with regular heavy drinking:

I branched out to new friends which are much more supportive and real. The friends that - they're still just going out and drinking. They don't really have any life goals or anything at the moment so I'm not really friends with them as much. (Lynley, 18, light drinker)

This description of non-drinking friends as "easier", "real" and "more supportive" again suggests that friendships not based on alcohol are more intimate and ascetically pleasurable for some young people who do not drink heavily. It was common for many participants to distance themselves from peers who regularly went out and consumed alcohol and pursued what was framed as a more intoxication-orientated and hedonistic lifestyle. This was strongly tied to their concept of pleasure as something that should be virtuous, long-term, achieved through mechanisms of internal accomplishment, rather than immediate, unabashed and pharmacologically enhanced (through drinking).

The displeasures of losing control

Participants drew on the idea of control as a key part of their choices around alcohol. Rather than discussing control as a positive way to manage and enhance the pleasures of drinking (see Szmigin et al. (2008)), they tended to talk about losing control as a displeasurable and undesirable aspect of drinking. This was often linked to a need to maintain control in order to manage themselves and their image in social situations, where they often wanted to feel "in charge" of their actions. Symbolic boundaries between what was and wasn't an acceptable level of intoxication led to negativity around uncontrolled drinking practices, which participants associated with being "sloppy", "aggressive", "emotional", "yucky", and doing stupid things. For example:

I try to do my best to look my best, but yeah maybe - that's another thing maybe that stops me at parties, because a loss of control of myself and how I then present myself; can be quite, maybe a bit scary in the back of my mind. (Jonathon, 17, abstainer)

I feel like at this age it's not the best because people do a lot of stupid stuff and you get remembered for that stupid thing you did. (Duncan, 17, abstainer)

Thus, not drinking acted as a way to protect themselves from the consequences of uncontrolled and unacceptable practices, and how that might reflect poorly on their image. Here, the immediate carnal pleasure of losing control was a potential risk in constructing a positive self-image, and maintaining control helped in managing self-presentations. Many still found pleasure drinking within a controlled limit to help socialise or relax, and several suggested that losing some control could be a positive for mental health. However, this was all done within a framework of seeking disciplined pleasure through the active curation of a positive self-image ("if you go to a party you want to like, look good… so you've got to like put in effort to your appearance and everything like that" – Annie, 17, abstainer). Participants also referenced social media as influencing their need to present themselves in a favourable way, which further amplified these positive identities based on self-control.

Because disciplined pleasure was linked to presenting a controlled self, it was often also tied to performances of responsibility and accountability, which participants felt empowered by. Rather than engaging in the carnal pleasures of excessive drinking and risking the uncertain effects of intoxication, these performances of control and restraint around alcohol acted as a positive mark of maturity. For some like Geoff and George, this was also closely linked to the rewards of being an authentic and best version of oneself:

I don't think drinking necessarily makes you mature. I feel like managing how you drink is what makes you mature. (Geoff, 19, light drinker)

I think drinking alcohol a lot to the point where you get drunk, which my friends don't do, it kind of makes you a weaker person because I guess you let yourself get to that point. So you don't have that. You can exercise that self-control to stop yourself. (George, 16, light drinker)

Ideas about "safe" drinking and "dangerous" drinking were also often linked to losing control. The effects of alcohol were seen to "mess" with the brain and limit the potential to make rational decisions and be conscious of surroundings, where losing control was tied to making regrettable, potentially risky decisions in social situations:

So safe drinking is being in control really. Like having enough self-control so that you don't do something regrettable, and dangerous drinking is like, you just - you don't have rational thoughts any more, or you don't have control of good judgement of your own self. (Mick, 16, light drinker)

Participants drew on experiences of friends and family being hospitalised or being designated as alcoholics to reinforce their stance that losing sobriety equated to losing rationality; rationality, in this sense, was viewed as a positive attribute. Although both young men and women were often concerned about losing control, there were differently gendered risks of intoxication. This meant that the young women here often had to be conscious about presenting themselves in a controlled way and potentially having to be "hyper-aware" of their surroundings so as not to get taken advantage of ("it's just a lot riskier for women to be out drunk than it would be for men. Men can maybe get in a brawl or a fight, but women can get raped" – Heidi, 16, light drinker). Alternatively, the young men tended to view control as important to avoiding potential conflict with other groups of aggressive and drunk men Thus, the potential displeasures of losing control were important reasons why participants chose to drink lightly or abstain, and how they constructed positive identities around this choice.

The vicarious pleasures of sobriety

Whilst some participants preferred to avoid alcohol-centred

environments such as parties and gatherings, many still participated and enjoyed doing so. Though many participants did not want to lose control themselves and had misgivings about getting drunk, many of these same participants talked about joining in the ecstatic pleasures and vicariously experiencing moments of carnal pleasure simply by being in the vicinity of the drunken antics of their friends. Many were able to be entertained by it without the negative consequences of being sick or doing something socially regrettable, noting that the drunken comportment of others was better experienced from a sober perspective:

> I think it's funny watching people being drunk when you're sober, more so than if you were drunk as well. (Katerina, 17, abstainer)

> …the best thing about [alcohol] is you get to see people do dumb things. Which is pretty entertaining sometimes. (Minh, 17, light drinker)

This vicarious performance of sobriety gave participants a sense of disciplined pleasure through the heightened control they had over their own bodies relative to their peers. Watching their peers doing "dumb things" while they were able to think clearly offered a form of entertainment, which introduced feelings of empowerment through the enhanced social and situational control participants had by drinking less than their friends. Whilst some participants recognised that they might be missing out by not drinking more and getting intoxicated with their peers, they were able to counter this with the logic that vicarious sober experiences of drunkenness were able to satisfy these feelings. For example, Gina notes how she is able to passively partake in drinking practices, socialise, and bear witness to drunken narratives without being drunk herself:

> Some people might think, "Oh, you're not drinking, you're wasting your years" and stuff, and I don't - you know, you won't have had all these experiences, but I think by having these passive experiences or going but not participating in that particular way, I think that I am experiencing it because I'm experiencing it from a sober perspective. (Gina, 17, abstainer)

Alternatively, Samantha describes a fun birthday party and feeling a sort of contact high she got from a close friend who had gotten drunk:

> So that was really fun having someone [drunk] and everyone else there was just having so much fun, so it sort of like rubbed off on me, having heaps of fun dancing. (Samantha, 17, abstainer)

In some cases, this new power dynamic also gave participants a renewed sense of responsibility to their heavier drinking friends. Whilst they often embraced this as part of the friendship, some also felt this led to frustration at having to look after others "when they could be responsible for themselves", and often drew boundaries around when intoxication went too far (i.e. when someone was sick or did something physically dangerous). However, it also reaffirmed their sense of responsibility in a positive way (i.e. through taking on the role of the caregiver), with many noting they preferred being there to look after their drunken friends. A few participants also felt that the ability to enjoy themselves despite the shifting power dynamic between intoxicated and sober peers reflected positively on their sense of maturity. As Harvey notes:

> People have actually said to me at parties and stuff, it's really great that I'm mature enough to try to have a good time without drinking. (Harvey, 16, abstainer)

Similar to achieving intimacy through collective experiences of not drinking discussed earlier, this vicarious pleasure also provided new moments of shared entertainment and shared pleasures as participants jointly reflected on their self-management with other sober peers:

> Because I can converse with [other non-drinking friends] and we can just like, we kind of laugh at them. We're just like, look at this,

look at these guys like getting all drunk and stuff. (David, 17, abstainer)

Thus, some were able to achieve a sense of ecstatic pleasure by passively participating and experiencing drunkenness whilst being sober, which they drew on to negate their 'fear of missing out'. These experiences were aided by other non-drinking friends who could share in the entertainment, leading to new moments of shared intimacy. These vicarious experiences gave participants perspectives as both insiders and outsiders to moments of heavy drinking.

Discussion

Competing pleasures that involve losing control and maintaining it have long been a dichotomy in public health discussions around substances and should be understood within a social and historical context. Individuals are required to navigate a consumer society based on "the individual's right — or even obligation — to search for pleasure" (Bergmark, 2004, p. 12) and a neoliberal imperative that internalises responsibility and encourages self-regulation. This means that the immediately embodied carnal and ecstatic pleasures of drinking and intoxication are juxtaposed against those of disciplined and ascetic pleasures that have been associated with performances of willpower, culture, and status (Coveney & Bunton, 2003). These disciplined and ascetic pleasures are disembodied from the concept of pleasure as hedonistic, emotional, libidinal and 'pre-discursive' (Lupton, 1995) and re-configured in a way that balances discursive pressures around bodily management, 'civilised' enjoyment, and the need for personal fulfilment. Indeed, for many of the participants in this study, light drinking and abstention were tied to how they re-configured pleasure as a way to achieve a sense of self-actualisation through discourses of health, wellbeing and risk management. They felt that their (non-) drinking choices allowed them to present their most authentic selves, connect with other non-drinkers on a "higher level", gave them a greater sense of control, and allowed them to find vicarious pleasure in the drinking of others. Whilst some participants preferred alcohol-free environments, many still attended parties and events where others were drinking and framed their non-drinking around the pursuit of different pleasures.

The notion of authenticity is not new to accounts of drinking. Authenticity, derived by participants in this study through light or non-drinking, has also commonly been reported as an important aspect of regular and social drinking for young people (Bogren, 2006; Johnson, 2013). For some drinkers, alcohol is used to break down inhibitions, increase confidence, engage with risk, and become a more desired, unrestricted and 'authentic' self through its effects (Lupton & Tulloch, 2002). However, for others, drinking can be viewed negatively as a form of escapism, or as a relied upon social masque to make up for weak character, lack of social confidence, and as a false form of pleasure (Bogren, 2006; Borlagdan et al., 2010). Because authenticity for young people means drinking in-line with their projected self-image and social profile, non-consumption can be seen as a more honest performance of one's broader identity (Johnson, 2013). Indeed, for many participants in this study, their non-drinking choices centred around being true to themselves – even if this came with social barriers (like not being as funny).

Self-authenticity is important to selfhood; for example, non-drinkers can feel a sense of their resilience by not drinking, where drinking is also seen as tainting the authentic self (Conroy & de Visser, 2015). Drinking can also create feelings of inauthenticity and fragmented representations of the self, where young light and non-drinkers place a high value in not drinking and 'feeling like you can be who you are' (Graber et al., 2016, p. 87). Social non-drinking can even promote self-esteem by encouraging social engagement without relying on alcohol as an intermediary (Conroy & de Visser, 2018). Similarly, participants here felt they were their best selves by not getting drunk, and in doing

so, were able to derive disciplined and ascetic pleasure in maintaining an authentic sense of self.

Public health discourses promote authenticity through ideals of health and order (Pennay, 2012), and heavy alcohol use was constructed by our participants as in opposition to this. Thus, many of the young people we interviewed could be seen as having an embodied morality around their own identities that helped them take pleasure in their light and non-drinking practices. The young people in our study may have tried to be socially authentic and 'true to themselves' by maintaining a consistent and ideal identity, both when they were and weren't in the context of alcohol-saturated recreational environments.

Participants in this study also suggested they were able to achieve a deeper level of intimacy with their peers without alcohol. Alcohol can play an important part in how young people connect and negotiate friendships through coming together, engaging with risk, de-stressing, losing inhibitions, and taking care of each other (Harrison et al., 2011; MacLean, 2016). It is a rite and a ritual for young people, who use drinking contexts as sites of shared values and norms (Beccaria & Sande, 2003). However, others have noted that alcohol-centred friendships may not reflect genuine friendships outside of drinking and work routines (Winlow & Hall, 2009), and drinking excessively has the potential to jeopardise friendships (Lindsay, 2009; MacLean et al., 2018). Indeed, young people can be aware that feeling connected and accepted within a social group outside of drinking is an important measure of social compatibility, where alcohol can create an artificial or false sense of closeness to some (although this may also feel very real and valued for drinkers) (Graber et al., 2016).

This was similar to how our participants felt, where alcohol was seen as both socially risky, and (when they weren't drinking in-line with their friends) a barrier to enacting shared feelings of closeness and intimacy. They often rejected the fleeting intimacy alcohol provided through carnal and ecstatic pleasures, favouring the disciplined pleasures of socialising while sober and the ascetic pleasure of pursuing a deeper level of intimacy without alcohol. Here loyal friends who respect choices around alcohol can be seen to play a key role in young non-drinkers' sense of care from their friends (Conroy & de Visser, 2014); the young people in our study likewise appreciated the respect they received for their (non-) drinking choices.

Alternatively, heavier drinkers may draw on different pleasures to frame intimacy and shared intoxication differently. This could also be linked to why we are seeing a more polarised drinking culture (Caluzzi, 2018) as young people find themselves either engaging heavily in, or avoiding altogether, drinking to get a sense of intimacy. Friendships are a central part of young people's identity construction, so declines in drinking rates may represent changes in collective traditions and new ways young people connect with each other and experience intimacy. Because the participants here were wary of friendships that relied on alcohol to achieve a false sense of intimacy, they seemed to appreciate moments of sober intimacy with their peers.

Similar to findings by Bakken, Sandøy, and Sandberg (2017) many of the young people here associated youthful drinking with hedonism and intoxication, and more controlled drinking styles with responsibility and disciplined pleasure. Thus, they were able to achieve a sense of maturity by both avoiding the potential displeasures of drinking and losing control, but also pursued a pleasurable sense of self-control by managing their self-image through drinking lightly or abstaining. Research by Fry (2010) has suggested that a loss of control, rather than excessive consumption, is the main problem light and non-drinkers have around alcohol, where the unappealing and unhealthy nature of the 'drunken body' validates their stance. This resonated strongly with the participants here, who embodied and consciously maintained presentations of self-control, and whose disciplined pleasures ran in opposition to the carnal pleasures of their uncontrolled drinking peers.

Maintaining control has been described as a negative motivation for not drinking (i.e. avoiding risk) (Herman-Kinney & Kinney, 2012). This was also true for many and was gendered in nature, as young women more often tended to cite control as a practical form of risk-aversion. However, our participants also gained a sense of disciplined pleasure through actively curating their image in a controlled way.

Previous research with drinkers has shown that losing control through alcohol use has been constructed positively, as it enables an escape from the constraints of civility and the management of the body (Lupton, 1995). Indeed, young people use alcohol in a nuanced way that balances formal structures, such as school, work and family (Brain, 2000) and manage pleasure through a 'controlled loss of control' in social contexts (Szmigin et al., 2008). Whilst some of our participants noted that there might be some emotional or psychological benefits to losing some control, this 'controlled loss of control' was not something they actively pursued. Neoliberal discourses implicitly endorse images of self-control and by extension, self-surveillance. Thus, it may be that by having to focus so much on how they present themselves in everyday life, some young people can achieve disciplined pleasure through performances and presentations of control.

A final theme that emerged was around how light and non-drinkers were able to gain a sort of vicarious pleasure in situations with heavier drinking friends. This provided them a sense of responsibility (i.e. as caregivers) and reinforced a self-concept of being mature. Yet it also gave them a sense of disciplined pleasure and empowerment (relative to their drunker peers) and allowed them to view their intoxicated peers as a form of entertainment. Stories are a valued part of drinking event and create a greater sense of cohesion, intimacy and bonding with peers (Fry, 2011). For our participants, the drunken antics of peers were witnessed, experienced, and reflected on, and being able to participate whilst sober allowed new ecstatic pleasures and enabled them to feel part of the story (albeit from a different perspective).

Others have suggested that the influence of drinkers in a group creates a 'contact high' that allows non-drinkers to share similar social experiences (Conroy & de Visser, 2015). Indeed, socialising without alcohol can facilitate enjoyment simply through enjoying the company of friends, and being able to take in a sensory and social experience (Graber et al., 2016). Interestingly, while this contact high resonated with some, the sense of pleasure our participants got often stemmed from a strong sense of embodied power and control they had relative to their drunker friends; they were able to watch the carnival without necessarily taking part in it. This experiential consumption through non-consumption suggests young people may be able to construct new pleasures within the context of a changing drinking culture.

Overall, the way these themes of authenticity, intimacy, control and vicarious pleasure were reconfigured tied closely to public health messages around health, wellbeing, risk management, and pleasure through moderation and discipline. The participants here were subject to neoliberal discourses that were likely to have influenced their thoughts and actions around alcohol, and how they incorporated or avoided it in their social worlds. It should be noted that the cohort was quite young, came from a culturally diverse range of backgrounds, were all in some form of education, and tended to come from relatively supportive and economically stable households. This meant that they were often subject to a number of constraints and pressures (i.e. school, parents, culture) that restricted their agency and/or were likely to have reinforced their light or non-drinking attitudes. These views are liable to change (or possibly be cemented) over time as they become older, more independent, and have more experience with alcohol.

Indeed, many of the participants lacked embodied experiences of heavier drinking on which to construct their notions of pleasure. How light and non-drinkers reconfigure pleasure after having had more drinking experience (such as ex-drinkers) may be different. However, similar ways of reconfiguring non-drinking as a positive part of selfhood have been echoed amongst older cohorts of young people (Conroy & de Visser, 2015; Graber et al., 2016), those who engage in temporary abstinence initiatives (Yeomans, 2018) and women who stop drinking later in life (Nicholls, 2019). This suggests that the pervasiveness of general and alcohol-specific public health campaigns in recent years

may have had an important role in changing perceptions of pleasure in relation to alcohol, the reputability of certain drinking practices and the cultural value around non-drinking; for example, the influence of healthism in promoting authenticity and control through health-orientated goals and order (Keane, 2002). This also reinforces the need to understand the mediating role of public health messages in constructing young people as neoliberal subjects, whose very concepts of pleasure may be malleable and adaptable to new social pressures.

Conclusion

Notions of pleasure and how it can be achieved are shaped by historical and social discourses, where the pleasures of drinking and intoxication have been viewed as an important aspect of youth culture (Measham, 2004). Yet neoliberal discourses of individual responsibility and public health discourses of risk have also long competed with these transgressive pleasures. Carnal pleasures like drinking have traditionally been seen antithetical to health movements, where attempts have been made to curb them or channel them into more productive pursuits through disciplined pleasure (Coveney & Bunton, 2003). Changing practices in light and non-drinking young people may therefore reflect discursive pressures that require them to self-govern through disciplined pleasures. However, the social pleasures of drinking collectively would suggest that amidst declining drinking rates, young people are also using new mechanisms to construct a sense of pleasure through moderation or abstinence in drinking environments.

Indeed, what we saw in this study was many of the same themes previously cited as reasons for engaging in heavy drinking (authenticity, intimacy and loss of control) were reconfigured by our participants as pleasurable reasons for light or non-drinking. Their reasoning tended to remove the embodied component of drinking pleasures in favour of disciplined, sometimes ascetic, pleasures which became a positive part of their selfhood. This highlights how social norms may have shifted away from the immediate bodily pleasures of intoxication to allow (and even encourage) pleasures around moderation and self-control with respect to alcohol use. Yet these offered a workaround to a youth culture that still seemed to normalise heavy drinking and its more carnal pleasures. This suggests that public health campaigns should recognise and promote the pleasures associated with light and non-drinking to support the continuation of the downward trend in young people's drinking.

Conflict of Interest Statement

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Acknowledgements

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Chapter 9

Discussion

Today's young people are living in vastly different social conditions than previous generations. Significant social changes have influenced young people's practices, patterns of time use, and lifestyles since the turn of the millennium. In such periods of rapid social change, new political and ideological movements and new generational styles can emerge (Mannheim 1952 [1927]). Young people especially, whose attitudes and ways of being are less fixed than they may be in older age, are better at moulding themselves to these changing situations through new ways of being (Mannheim 1952 [1927]). Indeed the young people in this study reported having to adapt to changing social roles and expectations (e.g. through education, work and independence from family) through complex life pathways and attitudes towards the future. This context is essential for understanding why certain practices might be changing. In this chapter I argue that Mannheim's (1952 [1927]) social generations theory provides a useful way of thinking about some of the distinct features of contemporary young people's lives that may have contributed to changing practices like drinking.

As discussed in Chapter 2, young people's life transitions have become increasingly non-linear, and earlier notions of 'youth' as a period of normative transition fail to capture this (Woodman and Wyn 2013). Extended education is becoming the norm; independent living is being delayed; young people are relying on their parents for longer; family formation is happening later in life; and traditions around gender roles are changing (Bristow 2016, Woodman 2017). There is now greater participation in, and time spent undertaking, education, which also leads to new challenges for a growing (and increasingly qualified) generation of young people trying to enter the workforce (Woodman 2012). This creates pressures and uncertainty for the future that young people have to navigate. Indeed, this is symptomatic of the push towards neoliberalism – a competitive labour market that emphasises individual responsibility (Brannen and Nilsen 2005, Furlong and Cartmel 2007). Neoliberal discourses suggest that those who can manage their lives and work hard to get ahead are rewarded for their efforts (despite starting from different positions of advantage and disadvantage). These lay the foundations for contemporary social conditions which pressure young people to be self-governing, responsible and autonomous as a way to be (economically) successful in life.

As well as the influence of changing economic and labour markets, new technologies have changed the way young people learn, interact and spend time. As digital natives (Prensky 2001), contemporary young people have grown up using digital technologies distinct from previous generations – technologies that have become deeply integrated into their lives. Indeed, some suggest that the effects of globalisation and communications technology have shaped an increasingly connected 'global generation' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2009), creating shared

sites of experiences and modes of thinking. This includes ways of doing leisure, organising and mobilising social networks, formal and informal modes of work, and ways of presenting oneself. More broadly, online technologies also connect, democratise ideas and contribute to new methods of civic engagement (Pathak-Shelat and Bhatia 2019). The flipside to this is that technologies also seem to perpetuate the same norms, cultural imperatives, risks and neoliberal discourses present in the real world (Silcock, Payne et al. 2016, Goodwin and Griffin 2017).

Alongside these rapidly changing social conditions, young people are growing up in a world challenging old traditions and more open to new patterns of living (Woodman and Wyn 2013). Traditional gender roles and ideas of masculinity and femininity continue to be reconfigured and challenged, while physical and virtual networks increasingly become sites of cultural connection and new ideas. The neoliberal emphasis on individualism also means that young people are made to believe they have more choice (and personal responsibility) to carve out distinct biographies, despite personal and structural obstacles (Furlong, Woodman et al. 2011). Indeed, these are some of the cultural contradictions young people face – their lives are complex and non-linear, open to new forms of self-expression and ways of being. Yet they are more than ever governed, institutionally-bound and culturally tied to neoliberal ideals that continue to shape expectations for how they should live.

What these broader changes in social conditions mean for changing practices like drinking alcohol is complex. In Australia, people drink for many reasons, including (but not limited to) autonomy, escape, pleasure, youthful rebellion, experimentation, social connection and shared experience (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010, Fry 2011). However, these meanings can be influenced by the social milieu of a certain time and place. Indeed, just as changing social and economic conditions can affect cultural styles and trends, so too can they influence how certain groups do or don't use alcohol. For example, the post-industrial era of the 1980s and 1990s created social and economic shifts that, it was argued, led to young people developing new patterns of leisure, new lifestyles, and new ways of consuming alcohol (Brain 2000). These shifts made alcohol a more 'fashionable' substance and intoxication a more acceptable state of being. Now, as we see an extended period of declining trends in young people's drinking from the early 2000s, it is important to once again look at the social conditions of the post-millennial era to explore the conditions which might elucidate changing drinking practices among young people today.

It is also important to look at the changing attitudes young people have towards alcohol itself. We know, for example, that the general Australian population has become more accepting of restrictive alcohol policies (Livingston and Callinan 2017) and alcohol and other drugs have become an issue of increasing concern for young people (Bullot, Cave et al. 2017). There seems to be a degree of stigma around losing control and drunken behaviour among young Australians (MacLean, Pennay et al. 2018) and, at a broader level, a growing normalisation of non-drinking (Caluzzi, Livingston et al. 2021). This may represent important social and cultural shifts in the

way society, and young people in particular, view alcohol. At the same time, there are undoubtedly going to be networks, sites and contexts that support heavier drinking among young people. Indeed, I am conscious of not homogenising young people's lives, experiences, and relationships with alcohol. Rather, I have attempted to highlight the social conditions which, in a general sense, may have changed or diminished some of the more positive values around alcohol's transformative effects, or made it a less central feature of young people's lives.

As I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, alcohol has multiple, sometimes contradictory meanings for young people. This is further muddied by the various individual, interpersonal and cultural values that challenge or enable drinking in different contexts. Thus, while I have attempted to highlight some of the contemporary social conditions shaping young people as a social generation and how this might be tied to changing patterns of consumption, I do not wish to assume the existence of any fixed or stable meanings. Rather, the aim of this research was to understand how a sample of young light and non-drinkers from Australia discussed their practices, values and attitudes towards alcohol. This also meant understanding the social contexts that these young people lived in, exploring similarities and differences between them, and looking at how this may have encouraged or discouraged drinking and/or certain drinking styles. Moreover, this research was an examination of young people's social worlds, an attempt to understand what made them a distinct social generation. In doing so, I hoped I would be able to understand how certain generational movements, ideas and lifestyles might be forged through changing social conditions, and what this might mean for the role of alcohol in young people's lives.

Chapter Summaries

One of the ways that contemporary social conditions were reported to influence drinking practices was through how participants discussed their constrained choice-making practices. I used reflexive habitus (Sweetman 2003) in Chapter 5 as a tool to explore both how young people drew on internal notions of choice and autonomy to inform and support their decisions, but also to consider the subtle ways these choices were externally shaped by institutional discourses. I highlighted some of the important influences that participants drew on directly as shaping their choices around alcohol, such as the media and parents, as well as some more structural discourses around risk, individuality, and a cultural politics of consumption. In this way, reflexive habitus was useful for thinking about the relationship between structure and agency, and how these were mediated by social context. Here, the conditions of late modernity were central; they created a plurality of life options and choices, which brought new risks and new possibilities (Giddens 1991). This made the young people here reflexive about their everyday choices, including their drinking practices. I also highlighted how they constructed agency that was in many ways constrained and shaped by their surroundings. Indeed, there was an obligation for them to be reflexive about choices and cautious of when and how they used alcohol. At the same time, it also

allowed them to be critical of the cultural logic of consumption and the structural forces that encouraged them to drink. Some were able to draw on their social and political values to challenge heavy drinking, signalling how younger generations may be well placed to question cultural elements "which in the course of development have somehow, at some point, become problematical" (Mannheim 1952 [1927], p.296).

Another way in which contemporary governing structures shaped accounts of drinking was through consistent reflections about the imperative to be healthy. Health has been proffered as a reason for changes in young people's drinking (Bhattacharya 2016) and in Chapter 6 I showed how healthism – including broader notions of wellbeing – had become a pervasive discourse in the lives of my sample of young people. Healthism employs many of the same techniques of governmentality, responsibility and individualisation symptomatic of neoliberalism. Not only was healthism a prominent discourse in the lives of my sample of young people; it was also entangled with notions of mental health and social wellbeing. Indeed, wellbeing and mental health have become central generational experiences, influenced by socio-material conditions and broader structural pressures that shape, make possible, and limit young people's potential for health and wellbeing (Wyn, Cuervo et al. 2015). However, despite an acknowledgment of these increasingly complex and holistic notions of health, healthism continued to prescribe certain ways of being and acting (Crawford 1980). It was enabled by parents and institutions like the media and education, all of which propelled this notion of personal responsibility for life outcomes (including health). Indeed, it seemed that contemporary social conditions transformed health into an important symbol for how these young people maintained a sense of control, stability and autonomy over their lives. This meant it interacted with how my sample tried to enact health through their drinking and/or non-drinking. Their focus on academic performance, sustaining good bodily and mental health, maintaining relationships, and being health-ready for the future led to many constructing themselves as vulnerable to the various harmful effects of alcohol.

The way these young people thought about and managed their free time was also closely tied to social conditions. I explored this in Chapter 7, where I focused on time, temporalities, and how the 'time out' meanings previously associated with alcohol may have changed. Drawing on Adorno's ([1969] 1991) notion of 'free time' as a liminal space between work and leisure, I looked at how patterns and meanings of free time use had, in many ways, become an adaptive response to the social conditions and pressures these young people faced. The institutions that dictated their working lives such as school, university and (future) labour markets meant that their time had become increasingly compacted and commodified. Moreover, their work tended to bleed over into their free time in ways that reflected the constant demands of these institutions and the increasing liminality of technologies that were integrated into their lives. These young people were under pressure to manage time in the present as a way to secure uncertain futures. Indeed, the competitiveness and uncertainty of their lives created imperatives to use time as a resource to invest in the future (rather than the present). This led to a cultivation of free time, where drinking

was often bound by a need to focus on education and the future. This view of drinking as not only a social practice, but as a temporal practice that had to compete with, and may have impeded, other practices and temporal rhythms (Southerton 2013) suggested a generational shift in the way time was valued and the need to actively manage free time.

Finally, I looked at how social changes – and the overarching neoliberal discourses that accompanied them – influenced how these young people framed their use or avoidance of alcohol in social contexts in Chapter 8. Here, I highlighted how notions of pleasure had long been shaped by public health efforts to manage populations and encourage self-discipline (Coveney and Bunton 2003). This resonated strongly for the young people here, where their pleasures often seemed to be constructed in line with neoliberal discourses, rather than as transgressive or hedonistic pleasures. In many ways, their pleasures were reconfigured as an adaptive response to broader values of self-control and moderation that public health discourses espoused. Notions of risk and personal responsibility might be considered 'generational virtues' here. The pressure to be good neoliberal citizens meant maintaining control over bodies, in social situations, as a form of distinction, and as a way to achieve a sense of autonomy. Indeed, the same competitiveness and performance pressures exemplified by contemporary socioeconomic conditions seemed to also trickle down into many of these young people's social practices and attitudes. Here, generations created sites for shared norms and values built around neoliberalism and self-governing, which these young people used to both support their (non-) drinking practices and create a positive sense of self among their heavier drinking peers.

Key Findings

Throughout the findings, the cultural contradictions of neoliberalism (e.g. the imperative for young people to enact prescribed forms of autonomy) were amplified by social and economic conditions. The young people in this study reported being open to new lifestyles, leisure pursuits and ways of being, but their practices were also closely governed by the structures and institutions that they adhered to. This created competing values around the need to demonstrate individual freedoms, as well as pressures to self-govern and take personal responsibility in life (Rose 2009, Atkinson 2010). Through a combination of 21st century technologies, discourses, cultural imperatives and economic rationales, these young people were adapting their lifestyles to contemporary social conditions in various ways. Many were hyper-aware of their futures and of managing risk, as well as the need to enact a sense of autonomy and individualism. This led to challenges and contradictions as to how young people felt they could drink alcohol, become intoxicated, and carve out times and spaces devoted to drinking. These tensions were present across all focused analyses, and as I discuss, contributed to generational pressures that influenced their values, attitudes and drinking practices.

Living for the Future

What was evident across analyses and themes was that the majority of participants in my sample were concerned about, and living in such a way to maximise their opportunities in, the future. They were focused on their education, their health and their self-image in ways that maximised their long-term life opportunities. Indeed, this temporal perspective encouraged them to manage the present to shape (and avoid disrupting) their futures. Here, the future was ingrained in their identities; not only were they defined by where they had been, but also where they were going (Giddens 1991). Some distinguished themselves through their trajectories and plans for the future, while others presented a controlled self as a way to be well placed for the future. There was a mix of post-material values (i.e. being able to have a fulfilling career and life) in this desired future, but also an acknowledgement of the importance of having stable work and economic security. These values around achieving a personally fulfilling life and career were threatened by a precarious and competitive labour market, influencing some of their attitudes and practices. For example, this precarity created a state of temporal flux that encouraged these young people to think about their prospective employability and wellbeing (e.g. Batchelor, Fraser et al. 2020) in ways that they felt limited how they could use, or even be seen using, alcohol. For many, heavy drinking was antithetical to a future characterised by productive efforts in their health, schooling, sport, and extracurricular activities.

On the one hand, there was an optimism to this future-orientation. Most of these young people believed that through hard work, education and self-maintenance (i.e. which was partly constituted through light or non-drinking) they would be able to control their lives going forward. However, at the same time there were several neoliberal discourses at play. This included a 'discourse of employability' (Frayne 2015) which involved sacrificing engagement and enjoyment of the present (such as through heavier forms of drinking) in favour of mobilising oneself to meet the goals of the future. The precarious situations they were in required building adaptable skills, competencies, and thinking about the future in particular ways. Parents also played a role in creating responsible future-oriented children by making education and employment central, while their support enabled the young people here to be 'slow life-planners' (Twenge and Park 2017) who felt comfortable delaying their drinking until they were older. Technologies also enabled this concern about the future by intensifying the way the young people engaged with their self-image and their online networks, limiting if and how they engaged with alcohol in social contexts. These factors all contributed to a future-orientation that encouraged certain expectations and forms of self-regulation in the present, which encouraged delaying drinking, or engaging in controlled forms of drinking to meet the demands of an unpredictable future.

How this future orientation intersected with social position is important to recognise. The ability to focus on the future reflected the cultural and economic capital many of the young people in this

study held, which was best highlighted by norms and expectations around education. Gender, ethnicity and other cultural values also played an important role in setting expectations and possibilities for the future. Earlier work (e.g. Goodwin, Griffin et al. 2016, Hutton, Griffin et al. 2016) has showed how class and femininity intersect with displays of drinking where, for example, projecting a fun, sexualised persona online may be more valued among working class women (Brown and Gregg 2012). For many of the young people in this research, their ability to live for the future and reflexively manage their image suggested they were able to make the most of their (middle-class) resources.

<u>Managing Risk</u>

Thinking about the future was closely tied to avoiding risks that might damage or disrupt it. Here, risk was not only a public health term that denoted the potential for harm (although that was relevant) but a way of thinking about the various personal, social, and cultural risks these young people were required to navigate. Indeed, as they worked towards a stable and fulfilling future, their choices, lifestyles and practices were often guided by concerns around managing risk. Perceptions of risk were both immediate (such as managing oneself in social situations and performing well academically) and far-reaching (such as chronic health issues and future employment). There were cultural risks around upsetting parents by drinking reported among those from non-Anglo backgrounds and/or considered themselves religious. New risks about presentation and surveillance were also prominent, where online visibilities and audiences amplified the 'neoliberal spectacle' associated with managing self-presentation (Goodwin and Griffin 2017). This concept of risk was also a central technology that contributed to the need to constantly monitor and regulate health (Lupton 1995). Although uncertainty was an inevitability of the precarious social conditions they were in, it encouraged these young people to engage with and attempt to minimise risk through their light or non-drinking practices.

The emphasis on risk challenged the logic of alcohol consumption (i.e. to have a good time and live in the moment) and at times encouraged participants to avoid drinking. Concerns around the potential harms of drinking sometimes outweighed the more transgressive and carnal pleasures associated with intoxication. Elsewhere, risk led to a pathologising of excess, addiction and otherwise undisciplined drinking behaviours. This reinforced a particularly individualised and often gendered sense of risk. While most participants felt it was their personal duty to manage risk, it was the young women were subsequently (required to be) more aware of how alcohol might affect their bodies, their behaviours, or otherwise make them vulnerable. The individualisation of risk seemed to reinforce traditional gender divides, creating extra burdens that young women had to consciously navigate.

Because drinking could create moments of chaos and instability that were at odds with young people's need for control (both practical and symbolic), the times and contexts where these young people felt they could engage with alcohol were restricted. Indeed, the risks associated with

alcohol were antithetical to the neoliberal imperative to live responsible, self-regulated lives (Lindsay 2010). The increased problematisation of alcohol and the promotion of health may be shifting generational attitudes towards alcohol (Kraus, Room et al. 2019). However, in this study risk was more than the domain of health and alcohol; it was a cultural imperative, something that needed to be continuously managed and mitigated. Here, drinking or becoming intoxicated created an added sense of vulnerability to this notion of risk.

<u>Enacting Autonomy</u>

The importance of managing risk was also closely linked to the sense of self-control and autonomy many in the sample were trying to achieve. The majority of these young people were still very much dependent on their families for both economic and social support, and their lives were guided by the educational systems they were in. Along with the precarious conditions and futures they were trying to navigate, this created new challenges to how they enacted (a sense of) autonomy in their lives. Because identities and choices are constructed within structural and discursive contexts (Coffey and Farrugia 2014) this led to what often seemed like a constrained autonomy that closely aligned with neoliberal rationales and institutions. For example, many of the young people here adopted public health perspectives around risk, moderation, personal responsibility and health, while also managing their bodies, their time and their relationships in ways that supported/was supported by their light and non-drinking. Participants clearly drew on cultural, religious and moral values from parents who framed alcohol negatively, yet still talked about their (non)drinking as a personal choice. The persistence of gender norms around alcohol also meant young women drew on different cues around how to manage their bodies and maintain control, highlighting the distinctly gendered character of autonomy.

Yet autonomy was a central theme throughout the findings. If and how much young people drank was a facet of their lives they felt that had control over, and this enabled them to perform positive identity work. Alcohol was a way to engage with choices around pleasure, risk, sociality and self-control. The challenge is that within neoliberalism, while choice and market freedoms are central, these same 'freedoms' often prescribe certain ways of being and governing oneself (Rose, O'Malley et al. 2006). Indeed, the degree to which these young people's autonomy and drinking choices were shaped by institutions, social pressures and cultural imperatives was a recurring question throughout this thesis.

Although drinking has previously been understood as a means for young people to demonstrate autonomy and independence (Beccaria and Sande 2003, Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010, Zajdow 2010), for young people in my sample, concern to be seen as autonomous supported both their drinking and non-drinking practices. For these young people, light and non-drinking provided a sense of control over their lives, which were often otherwise governed by forces outside of their control. That is not to say these drinking or non-drinking 'choices' were not closely guided by their social context and structural pressures. Various 21st century technologies and conditions

seemed to intensify neoliberal and public health discourses, which in turn seemed to shape how these young people performed autonomy (or their versions of it). Their inability to be entirely independent in the short-term future due to their age, living situation, educational commitments and finances also exacerbated this struggle to achieve autonomy. As I (in Chapter 5) and other Australian researchers (e.g. Hardcastle, O'Connor et al. 2019) have noted, resistance to what young people still perceive as a dominant drinking culture can enable a sense of autonomy over their lives – something which many of these young were striving to achieve.

<u>Achieving a Sense of Individualism</u>

Autonomy was also paramount to how these young people enacted a sense of individualism. One of the key themes identified in both the sociological literature and in the findings was an acute focus on individualism, said to be a central feature of this current generation of young people (Gentile, Campbell et al. 2013). Here, I found there was an emphasis on personal freedoms and choice, and how these could be used to celebrate difference and build personally satisfying identities and lifestyles. Indeed, in many ways, this enabled the young people here to challenge cultural norms and traditions like drinking alcohol, and to recognise themselves as potential agents of change. However, this freedom that individualism enabled tended to be limited. For example, it was often about striving for distinction and doing identity work within a consumer culture that still prescribed ways of conducting oneself. Thus, individualism obscured the way actions were guided, or at least bound by resources, structures and neoliberal imperatives (Brannen and Nilsen 2005). Moreover, while it created sites for cultural and social distinction through lifestyle choices, individualism also reinforced a strong sense of personal responsibility for life outcomes.

This sense of individualism enabled some of the young people to express themselves through light or non-drinking, but also encouraged alternative activities to drinking that allowed for similar positive identity work to be done (e.g. through sports, music and other hobbies). Moreover, individualism seemed to create more heterogenous drinking cultures, wherein a mix of drinkers and non-drinkers seemed to socialise together. This challenged traditional notions of peer pressure and the need to drink in social contexts, providing recourse for these young people to not drink if they didn't want to. It also challenged and potentially fragmented notions of broader collective drinking cultures by allowing new positive social and cultural identities built around light or non-drinking. The flipside of this was that individualism made alcohol another commodity that people voluntarily consumed, meaning the issues and risks associated with drinking were similarly individualised (rather than seen as the responsibility of the alcohol industry, for example) (Room 2011). For those who did choose to drink, the onus for their behaviour and safety was squarely on their shoulders, which for many encouraged a sort of self-management around alcohol. This push for individual distinction (and by extension, personal responsibility) also created pressures to compete and perform in everyday life, where drinking alcohol was secondary. Indeed, and as I

previously discussed, many of these young people enacted individuality in a way that was economically minded and future-oriented. They were both distinguishing themselves as individuals who didn't need to take part in the seemingly dominant drinking culture, but also adhering to individualised notions of risk, responsibility and economic rationales. This created new positive non-drinking identities, but also encouraged new modes of self-governing.

Acknowledging the Sample

As I have highlighted in my methods and throughout the findings, the characteristics of the sample should be acknowledged. The young people who participated in this study were only self-selected according to their age and light or non-drinking practices (rather than any other attributes). Although the final sample was demographically diverse, they were not necessarily representative of the wider population of young Australians. Indeed, it is likely that some groups of young people were underrepresented in my sample, such as more marginalised groups. The majority of the young people in my sample were socially integrated and had a number of resources they could draw on (e.g. parental support and educational trajectories) that enabled them to be future-oriented and risk-averse, and to reflect on their own autonomy and sense of individuality. For young people without similar resources, these ideals may be less central or enacted in different ways. Thus, any findings and ideas that have been explored as part of this thesis should be understood in the context of this sample.

I also acknowledge that attempting to identify generational differences among these young people that were linked to their light and non-drinking is highly speculative. This was a small sample of young people, interviewed at a specific point in time, and I used this as a basis to theorise how social conditions may have been linked to their light and non-drinking. However, I have no way of knowing if the meanings and values of light and non-drinkers from previous generations (for example, the 1990s) would have been different. Indeed, they may have been similarly future-oriented and risk-averse. Moreover, although I have emphasised 21st century technologies and discourses as an integral part of unique social conditions, social conditions are constantly undergoing processes of change. Many of the changes to young people's work, education and living patterns I have highlighted were already happening in the 1990s (when drinking among young people was significantly higher). Given I only had a single time point to draw on, it is impossible to disentangle exactly how 21st century social conditions might have influenced cultural attitudes towards light and non-drinking among young people.

I note that some of the themes that I identified in the data, such as avoiding drinking or intoxication to enhance a sense of authenticity, have resonated in other samples of older participants (e.g. Emslie, Hunt et al. 2015). My focus on young people made the findings youth-specific, but that doesn't mean the meanings they gave alcohol were necessarily different from older light and non-drinkers. Indeed, I may have overlooked potential continuities and similarities in older people's lives, including their values and attitudes towards alcohol. Although I explored

cultural meanings in drinking practices from young people's perspectives, it would be useful to better understand how their reasons for light or non-drinking might be comparable or distinct from older populations.

Likewise, many young people still drink regularly and heavily in Australia, highlighting how contemporary social conditions have not reduced drinking among all young people. Indeed, the same social conditions that seemed to frame the light and non-drinking practices of young people from my sample could easily be seen to support heavier drinking. Alcohol has long been recognised as a way to manage stress, to escape and to avoid worrying about the future. Thus, the value of social context – including family, friends, education, resources – is still central in understanding how young people engage with alcohol. I have no doubt there were many important contextual factors at play (some that I may not have uncovered) that shaped the meanings and attitudes my sample had towards alcohol. While there are some signs that the acceptability and values around alcohol are changing at the macro level (Caluzzi, Livingston et al. 2021), this thesis has not been an attempt to homogenise the social worlds of young people through the lens of generational theory. Rather, it has been an opportunity to theorise the various, competing and sometimes contradictory links between social conditions and changing attitudes towards alcohol among young people.

Conclusion

A generational approach seeks to understand how knowledge and culture are transmitted between generations, and how this might lead to social change (Bristow 2016). In this thesis I showed how the prioritisation of largely neoliberal discourses emerged within perceived precarious social conditions, which encouraged certain ways of being and living that did not centre around alcohol. Indeed, it seemed that certain styles of regular drinking and intoxication were particularly challenged by these values. What all this means for the future of young people's drinking cultures is unclear. In a sense, many of the ideas and tensions that came up throughout this thesis are not new. Participants spoke of competing needs to focus on the present and the future, to engage with uncertainty while being risk-averse, to enact autonomy but continue to be self-governing, and to value individualism alongside personal responsibility. These values and attitudes echoed throughout the findings, and pointed to how this group of young people's lifestyles and (non)drinking practices seemed to be an adaptive response to the social conditions they were in. That is not to rule out the importance of local settings and material contexts – indeed, their social networks and living situations were often key reinforcers for the way they avoided drinking heavily or abstained from alcohol. However, all of these networks and influences were coloured by a backdrop of rapid social change and neoliberal discourse.

Large-scale trends of declining drinking – both in Australia and other western countries – suggest a generational shift in the way young people view alcohol, and a need to understand what might make contemporary young people's lives distinct (Livingston, Raninen et al. 2016, Pennay,

Holmes et al. 2018). This makes it important to examine changing patterns in young people's practices and lifestyles, including but extending beyond alcohol use, as responses to the social and cultural conditions that frame their lives. Indeed, this generational approach (Mannheim 1952 [1927]) has been a central approach to this thesis and understanding why a growing number of young people might be drinking less. Understanding changes from a generational perspective has enabled me to examine how young people might act as agents of change within a social context. For the most part, these were young people for who extended education was the norm, whose ideal futures were optimistic but not guaranteed, who were constantly connected to each other and the world through digital technologies, and who relied on families and social networks for guidance and support. They were using the resources they had available to navigate rapidly changing and somewhat uncertain social conditions. These conditions both provided opportunities for new ways of thinking, being, and growing up, but also set new limitations and discouraged certain lifestyles. This interrelationship between changing social conditions and life patterns highlights how the very experience of being young might be changing (Woodman and Wyn 2013) providing a fruitful way to assess the shifting relationship between young people and alcohol.

My interviews focused on the (non)drinking practices of young Australians, highlighting a range of personal, social and cultural tensions around drinking and intoxication. Indeed, their social location within a time, place and context (Mannheim 1952 [1927]) contributed to this, challenging the collectiveness and traditions associated with young people and alcohol in different ways. I suggest that it might be fruitful to follow how the alcohol industry might be responding to these shifts through marketing strategies and new products (such as low calorie and non-alcoholic drinks). It is also important to closely examine other related changes among young people, such as mental and physical health, the use of other substances or alcohol alternatives, the popularity of new ways of 'doing leisure', and other lifestyle changes that might distinguish young people from their earlier cohort counterparts. Indeed, given that traditional transitions into adulthood are changing, life course perspectives may be a useful approach to unpack the broad and interrelated assemblage of changes in young people's lives. Longitudinal qualitative studies that unpack how young people navigate contemporary social conditions over time, how this shapes their values and attitudes, and in turn, how their drinking practices might change or stabilise as they grow older are likely to be particularly valuable.

This thesis has shown the value in examining and understanding the context within which alcohol practices might be changing. For almost 20 years, we have seen a decline in drinking among young people in Australia. The majority of research examining this change has focused on isolated, quantifiable factors such as changes in parenting, time spent using technology and policy changes. However, I suggest that all these changes are interconnected as part of a myriad of social changes that have occurred since the turn of the millennium. Indeed, by exploring the meanings ascribed to alcohol by this group of young light and non-drinkers, this thesis aimed to understand changes to social conditions, and how this might influence young people's everyday lives and

practices. I have highlighted a range of ideological, technological, cultural and discursive social changes that together, have built the social worlds that these young people inhabited. These worlds were littered with contradictions, tensions and uncertainties. For many of the young people I talked to, abstaining and avoiding intoxication provided a sense of stability, a way to navigate towards an uncertain future, and to manage the various pressures and cultural tensions that pervaded their lives.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Published Book Chapter

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Caluzzi, G., & Pennay, A. (2019). Alcohol, Young Adults and the New Millennium: Changing Meanings in a Changing Social Climate. <u>Young Adult Drinking Styles: Current Perspectives on Research, Policy and Practice</u>. D. Conroy and F. Measham. Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan: 47-65.

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GC and AP conceived the idea. GC led manuscript writing. AP made revisions and provided feedback that shaped the manuscript.

3

Alcohol, Young Adults and the New Millennium: Changing Meanings in a Changing Social Climate

Gabriel Caluzzi and Amy Pennay

Since the turn of the millennium, significant declines in drinking have been observed among young adults (a term covering the transitional period from adolescence to adulthood) in many developed countries. Population shifts in drinking patterns often reflect broader changes in alcohol's position within society. Thus, examining periods of change in consumption is important for providing insight into broader social change. In this chapter, we argue for the importance of examining young adults' current drinking practices within the context of unique post-millennial developments.

Around the turn of the millennium, drinking rates among young people peaked across many developed countries as market conditions and the acceptability of drinking and drunkenness enabled 'cultures of intoxication' (Measham & Brain, 2005). The identity work, choice and self-expression that were provided through alcohol consumption have been well documented by researchers (e.g. Measham, 1996; Parker, Measham,

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& Aldridge, 1998). Around the same time, neoliberal discourses concerning 'safe alcohol consumption' placed responsibility back on the individual consumer, and public health concerns grew over young adults' heavy drinking styles. This created conditions that both promoted and punished excessive consumption (see Bauman, 1988). Since the peaks of the early 2000s, there has been a widespread decline in drinking among young adults (refer to Chapter 2 of this book). Emerging research has focused on isolated policy, parenting and recreational changes as triggers (Bhattacharya, 2016; Pape, Rossow, & Brunborg, 2018). However, it is important to recognise that declines have occurred amidst broader social changes such as growing economic precarity, the Internet boom, increasingly globalised communities and heightened anxiety over young adult behaviour in public discourse (Measham, 2008; Törrönen, Roumeliotis, Samuelsson, Kraus, & Room, 2019). Simultaneously, public health efforts have nudged young adults towards a drinking culture based on health, safety and 'sensibility' (Fry, 2010). In this chapter, we suggest that moderation and abstinence are becoming more mainstream as a consequence of new meanings ascribed to alcohol use, new salience of short- and long-term harms and more credible lifestyles and leisure activities for young adults to pursue without alcohol.

Understanding the Current Generation of Young Adults: A Social Generations Perspective

We understand young adulthood as a fluid concept constructed by a range of biological, psychological, cultural and social discourses. Young adults exist within socio-historical conditions that actively shape and are shaped, creating generations of shared experiences and social conditions (see Mannheim, 1952 [1927]). For example, today's adolescents are developing in a time where traditional transitions into work, family formation and home ownership have become protracted over a longer period, now commonly occurring anywhere from the late teens well into the thirties. Whilst young adults face contemporary conditions that affect all other

age groups, the way in which they manage transitions into new roles of independence and responsibility makes them more susceptible to social change and more likely to experiment with different ways of living as a response (Woodman & Wyn, 2014).

Sociologists have suggested young adults today are experiencing a number of unique conditions: precarious labour markets marked by job competitiveness, higher education levels, ubiquity of digital communications, greater pursuit of satisfying careers, difficulty building and maintaining intimate relationships, delayed family formation and a diversification of lifestyles (Furlong & Cartmel, 2006; Woodman, 2016). In particular, familiarity and incorporation of technology into the everyday lives of young adults has reshaped social worlds (e.g. the ability communicate and network) and economic worlds (e.g. the push for 'knowledge-based' economies based on digitally technical jobs).

Shared commonalities and experiences shape values and actions, in turn leading to new methods of self-expression and social movements among generations (Mannheim, 1952 [1927]). The concept of social generations is not without criticism though. In treating generations as a collective, intra-generational divisions (such as class, gender and ethnicity) and intergenerational interactions (such as familial support and social networks) can be under-valued. Thus, generation should be recognised as only one element of social location. Indeed, whilst social generations provide shared sites of experience and meaning, individuals within a generation can still have opposing reactions to shared social conditions. The divergence between light and heavy drinking young adults for example (see Caluzzi, 2018) highlights how social conditions are not deterministic of clear collective actions.

By accepting that generational patterns are not linear, universal or deterministic, social generations theory is useful for thinking about the diversity of lifestyles young adults can now lead and their shared experiences of fragmentation and social change. This approach is particularly relevant as globalisation and communications technology have forged a 'post-traditional cosmopolitan world' (Beck, 2000: 211) for young adults since the new millennium. From here, we will explore in more detail the generational changes that may be shifting the position of alcohol for young adults,

including the changing nature of family, leisure, digital technology and mental health.

Parental Influence on Young Adults' Drinking

One of the more consistent findings in research on declines in young adult drinking has demonstrated the importance of parents in monitoring, setting norms and building closer relationships with their children (see Pape et al., 2018). Parental permissiveness or strictness around alcohol is now recognised as key to the development and shaping of drinking norms and practices in later life (Raitasalo & Holmila, 2017; Yap, Cheong, Zaravinos-Tsakos, Lubman, & Jorm, 2017). Moreover, longer periods of economic constraint and delayed independence suggest that the role of intergenerational familial relationships has become increasingly important, even as children transition into young adulthood. Findings from the Australian Life Patterns Study and the Canadian Paths on Life's Way study indicate that since the late 2000s, family relationships have been the most significant influence on the lives of young participants (Wyn, 2011). Since traditional markers of independence (such as moving out) are also associated with increased autonomy, it stands to reason that delays in such transitions would also delay, or limit, consumption practices; for example, hedonistic consumption practices might become structurally bound by family, limiting in a practical sense the time and space young adults have to 'let loose' (e.g. Measham, 1996; Parker et al., 1998). Since alcohol use for many young adults remains opportunistic, it may be that longer periods of dependence and increased familial supervision might act as inhibitors.

The advent of social learning has also increased awareness of the role parents play in setting norms and expectations around alcohol use. Parental modelling is likely to influence age of alcohol initiation, and this has been suggested to influence children's drinking habits into adulthood (Pennay, Livingston, & MacLean, 2015). Thus, efforts have been made to delay initiation and increase parental awareness of how they set drinking norms through both formal policy (e.g. secondary supply laws and education campaigns) and informal depictions of the 'good' and 'bad'

parent (Assarsson & Aarsand, 2011). In addition, public health responses aimed at reducing consumption might be making parents more confident (or obliged) to develop stricter alcohol rules and expectations with their children (Hagell & Witherspoon, 2012). Family formation is progressively happening later in life, and parents are raising less children; this has been suggested to result in greater parental investment (Bugental, Corpuz, & Beaulieu, 2014). The amount of time parents spend with their children has increased and been linked to a number of positive social outcomes (Sani & Treas, 2016). Spending more time with their children, and encouraging engagement in sport, music and other activities, may be working as protective factors against heavy consumption. Indeed, it has been suggested that improved family cohesion, parent–child relationships, monitoring and discipline have potentially contributed to declining alcohol use (Bhattacharya, 2016; Pape et al., 2018).

Decreasing Risky Activities and Increasing Safe Alternatives?

There is good evidence to suggest that drinking is not the only young adult practice that has declined. Age of learning to drive, socialising independent of parents, attending parties, dating and having sex for the first time have also declined for young adults across gender, socio-economic status and ethnicities (Kann et al., 2015; Twenge, 2017). These have paralleled declines in drug use and 'delinquent behaviours' such as truancy, violence and crime (Farrell, Tilley, & Tseloni, 2014; Vaughn et al., 2018). Twenge and Park (2017) theorise that because more contemporary young adults live in contexts with access to resources and parental support, they are more carefully planning out their lives, whilst avoiding risk and delaying 'adult' activities. Indeed, young abstainers tend to be characterised by greater academic engagement, parental cohesion, less propensity for risk and having fewer substance-using peers (Vaughn et al., 2018). However, whilst Twenge and Park suggest young people are delaying the transition to adulthood, it should be noted that they are exposed to more adult information and imagery through digital media at a younger age than their generational predecessors and are demonstrating more forward planning

at a younger age (Wyn, 2016). Thus, it might not be that young people are transitioning more slowly into adulthood, but are choosing different lifestyles and pathways to perform adulthood. Indeed, it may be that many activities previously thought of as 'adult' (e.g. alcohol use, drug use and other 'risk' practices) have lost their connection to young adulthood.

The decline of not only drinking, but also other 'risky' behaviours suggests that risk-taking and experimentation are no longer key to young adults' achievement of independence, identity and maturity, and there may now be alternative avenues for developing identity and independence. In particular, digital media has been suggested to have profoundly shaped the way young people interact, process information and explore social identities (Prensky, 2001). The growth of online immersive entertainment through the Internet, smartphones, videogames, streaming services, mobile apps and social media has changed the communication landscape, providing new methods of socialisation and competing forms of immersion. Access to a wealth of global information also means this digital discourse empowers young adults to challenge the norms and agendas of older generations (Itō et al., 2010). It has even been suggested that the ubiquity of digital and social media has crossed traditional divides based on wealth, ethnicity and geographic location (Tilleczek & Srigley, 2016).

This cultural digitisation has complex impacts on communication. It offers new leisure activities that may be pursued at the expense of peer interactions and potentially drinking with peers, whilst simultaneously encouraging young people to connect with their social networks. The ability to socialise digitally can be done remotely and often at home, where parents can monitor behaviour. With the Internet increasingly being used to initiate and maintain social relationships, both romantic and otherwise (Tyler, 2002), the use of alcohol as a social lubricant may also be less necessary, and the imperative to find potential partners in licensed venues may have weakened. Social media sites in particular have become central to practices of performance, identity work and socialising (Goodwin & Griffin, 2017). Social media has been argued to encourage alcohol use by aiding event planning, enhancing sociability and setting positive alcohol norms through the sharing of photos and narratives (Supski, Lindsay, & Tanner, 2017), and there is some evidence to suggest a link between

increased social media use and drinking (Larm, Raninen, Åslund, Svensson, & Nilsson, 2018; Pape et al., 2018). Social media sites also regularly expose their users to alcohol advertising, thus actively shaping discourses around alcohol normalisation and brand engagement, and raising questions about the 'intoxigenic' nature of digital spaces (Griffiths & Casswell, 2010). However, the link between alcohol and social media is likely to be mediated by social networks, as well as how individuals wish to portray themselves. Young adults may be increasingly aware of the 'pedagogy of regret' that can accompany a night out (Brown & Gregg, 2012), with the idea that anyone (including parents, future employers, romantic interests and friends) can survey social media content. This encourages curated presentations of health, style and discipline, making social media's effect on alcohol consumption complicated.

In contrast to music, dancing, parties and other social activities where substance use acts a complement (Lee et al., 2018), alcohol-free leisure activities have also become more popular. Digital gaming, and the accessibility of TV shows and movies, now provides young people with alternatives to the night-time economy, a substitution that is arguably safer, more controlled and cheaper. There is some evidence to suggest that gaming is linked with less alcohol use in young people (Pape et al., 2018) particularly among those who play more over weekends (Twenge, 2017). Online gaming and increased access to networked media like Netflix and YouTube have become a meaningful, accessible and pleasurable source of social engagement in the modern age. As credible pastimes, these leisure activities are also sites for identity construction and communication, thus providing legitimate consumption alternatives that may be replacing or at least supplementing the role of alcohol.

The Link Between Mental Health and Alcohol

Despite general improvements to health, living conditions, life expectancy and population-level affluence, psychological concerns continue to impact on the well-being of many young adults. A systematic review by Bor, Dean, Najman and Hayatbakhsh (2014) showed that for young adults in the twenty-first century, internalising problems such as stress, anxiety

and depression had reportedly risen, particularly among females. Another review by Collishaw (2015) showed that these trends were part of longer-term increases in affective and emotional problems, beginning in a number of countries from the 1970s and 1980s. Despite previously identified associations between heavy alcohol use and worse mental health, increasing mental health symptoms have occurred at the same time as decreasing alcohol use among young adults. It could be that mental health problems are better reported and recorded. However, there is suggestive evidence that mental health symptoms are increasing among young adults at a population level (Collishaw, 2015; Mojtabai, Olfson, & Han, 2016). Because the relationship between alcohol and mental health is complex and often bi-directional (Hagell et al., 2012), it is important to explore the changing issues around mental health and its relationship with alcohol for young adults.

Whilst objective quality of life measures has improved, many other culturally specific goals continue to shape perceptions of happiness. For example, stresses around body image, academic performance, career success, unstable employment conditions and economic independence are all associated with psychological distress for young adults (West, 2016; Wyn, Cuervo, & Landstedt, 2015). And whilst more young adults receive education for longer, they are less rewarded for their efforts in a highly competitive job market. For some, such as sexual minorities, life satisfaction seems to have increased in countries where structural stigma has weakened (Bränström, 2017). But young adults remain part of a generation intuitively concerned about global political issues, including human rights issues and climate change (Williams & Page, 2011). Worries about precarious and uncertain futures, for both themselves and the world, mean that stress and anxiety are features of the lives of young adults.

The intersection between digital technologies and mental health is another important consideration. Elevated use of electronic devices has been associated with worse psychological health (Wang, Li, Kim, Lee, & Seo, 2019), where time spent on digital technology may come at the cost of key factors associated with mental health, such as reduced sleep and exercise. Digital technology has also been linked to loneliness, anxiety, social withdrawal and isolation (Li & Wong, 2015; Odacı & Kalkan, 2010),

and problematic use is now being recognised through Internet and gaming addictions (Faust & Prochaska, 2018; Young, 2004). Whilst quantity and quality of interactions with real-world friends is associated with better mental health, increased Facebook engagement risks the development of meaningful relationships and interactions and has been associated with poorer mental health and life satisfaction (Kross et al., 2013; Shakya & Christakis, 2017). Social media has become intertwined with new experiences of bullying and aggression and propagates standards of health, beauty and self-improvement that heighten anxieties around body image and self-presentation (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Livingstone & Smith, 2014). Despite these negatives, however, digital technology has also created more accessible spaces for interaction, meaningful leisure pursuits, and has provided new interfaces to support mental health. How technology influences mental health, and how that might then mediate alcohol use, thus remains a complicated issue.

Given the self-medicating properties of alcohol and its relationship with poorer mental health (Pedersen & von Soest, 2015), it might be expected that young adults would increase drinking due to the stresses of social change. On the other hand, alcohol use might be avoided given its potential for disrupting productivity and diminishing mental health. A recent Australian survey found that young adults considered mental health and alcohol and drugs the two most important societal issues (Bullot, Cave, Fildes, Hall, & Plummer, 2017). In this sense, young adults' relationship with alcohol is complex: whilst it can provide positive benefits to well-being by enhancing confidence, sociability and sense of belonging, it is also linked with a number of well-known negative mental health outcomes including depression, stress, anxiety and relationship breakdown (Newbury-Birch et al., 2009). The mounting evidence linking alcohol and mental health problems may be a connection that young adults are increasingly wary of. Now with new ways of socialising and immersion without alcohol, and greater emphasis on mental health awareness and self-care strategies, alcohol's previously established association with sociability and, by extension, social well-being may be changing. Thus, we may be witnessing a generation of young adults whose response to stress is to be more risk-averse, and more attuned with their own mental health needs.

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Changing Lives, Changing Drinking Cultures

Whilst we should not assume it has been denormalised, alcohol, like other goods, is a cultural commodity tied to social status, individualism, choice and identity. Evaluative judgements of good and bad taste reflect popular attitudes towards consumption, and performing a non- or light-drinking identity can also be considered a form of status. For example, young adults spend more time and money on dining out than previous generations (Zan & Fan, 2010), and recent subcultures of drinking alcohol based on taste, knowledge and food-pairing have emerged (Martinez, Hammond, Harrington, & Wiersma-Mosley, 2017), challenging traditional notions of youthful drinking as intoxication-fuelled or excessive.

As 'global citizens' of an increasingly multicultural and informed generation, young adults have also been characterised as being respectful of ethnic and cultural diversity and as having greater social awareness (Williams & Page, 2011). Heavy migration from lower drinking countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America has created culturally integrated and diverse communities. In the United States and Australia, immigrant groups from collectivist regions such as Asian and African countries report lower rates of excessive and recent drinking (Chan et al., 2016; Szaflarski, Cubbins, & Ying, 2011). Indirectly, it is hypothesised this may potentially diffuse out into young adults' drinking behaviour at the population level through acculturation and adaption to social networks (Amundsen, 2005). Although this is still speculative, not drinking for cultural reasons is seen as a credible alternative (Fry, 2010) and may be symptomatic of an acceptance of diversity, including choices around alcohol.

It is also important to remember that drinking status is not necessarily static. A recent Australian study showed over the past fifteen years more young adults tried to reduce or cease drinking—largely for health, lifestyle, financial and taste/enjoyment reasons (Pennay et al., 2018). The authors suggest that heavy and frequent drinking has become less acceptable. Alcohol can produce both positive and negatives outcomes, and being aware and ambivalent towards the negative effects of alcohol is not uncommon for both abstainers and heavy drinkers (de Visser & Smith, 2007). Young adults seem to demonstrate greater ambivalence towards losing control and greater stigmatisation of drunkenness (MacLean, Pennay, & Room,

2018). Thus, the changing boundaries of socially acceptable behaviour may have influenced the current decline in alcohol consumption just as it did with increases in the 1990s; just as social controls have shifted to reflect growing concerns over young adult behaviour, so too has the meaning of alcohol within their lives and the search for other alternatives.

What Does This Mean for Future Alcohol Consumption Trends?

There are two broad perspectives we might consider when thinking about recent changes in young adult alcohol consumption and what it might mean for future consumption. The first is that changes in drinking rates are a continuation of historical peaks and troughs of consumption (see Mäkelä, Walsh, Sulkunen, Single, & Room, 1981). The second is that the current reduction in consumption represents a unique historical and social phenomenon.

The first perspective sees drinking rates change over time through processes of normalisation (marked by the relaxing of formal and informal controls) and problematisation (marked by the tightening of alcohol policies and increased stigma). Thus, declines occur as a societal reaction to the excesses of previous generations, and increases occur through 'generational forgetting' (Johnston et al., 2018). In this respect, high rates of drinking in the late 1990s and the subsequent 'demonising' of young adult drinking might be seen as a precipitant to the current decline. The excesses of the 1990s saw an intersection of several public health concerns, including youth, drugs, crime and danger (Parker et al., 1998), allowing young adults to be pathologised and 'othered' as a risky subgroup. Focused sanctions and regulatory approaches that included taxes on pre-mixed drinks, lockout laws (i.e. legal restrictions on how late licensed premises can serve alcohol), secondary supply laws, minimum drinking ages and targeted education campaigns all highlight efforts to address 'moral panics' around young adult drinking (Cohen, 2011). However, formal policy and legislative responses tend to lag behind informal social responses (such as collective pressures by communities and the media) (Room, Osterberg, Ramstedt, & Rehm, 2009), and public health initiatives are as much symptoms of

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change as they are precipitators. Therefore, the problematisation of young adult alcohol use in popular media that occurred in the early 2000s may have encouraged a change in drinking styles and destabilised its normalised status, as it did with smoking in the late twentieth century (see Chapman, 2008). In this perspective, it stands to reason that young adult drinking will increase again when informal and formal controls relax in response to diminished public health concern. Whilst the rhetoric around risky young adult drinking is likely to have played a role in declining drinking rates, an apparent divergence between the drinking of younger drinkers and older populations (Livingston et al., 2016) suggests changes in young adults' consumption practices cannot simply be explained as a consequence of a historical trough. Deciphering whether and how alcohol regulations have contributed to young adult drinking is difficult. For example, from a UK perspective the Licensing Act 2003 (Mandatory Licensing Conditions) Order could be understood to have curbed the worst excesses of drinks promotions that characterised the preceding years (UK Government, 2010). However, assessing the global impact of alcohol regulations on young adult drinking practices, and whether there is impact in different cultural contexts, is difficult to meaningfully quantify.

The second perspective, that the current reduction in consumption represents a unique historical and social phenomenon, is therefore worthy of consideration. Declines might be part of a broader change in the way young adults are 'doing' or 'performing' young adulthood, and this may lead to a more sustained change. As we have argued, structural shifts in education and labour markets have forced young people to adapt to insecure and flexible labour, longer time in education, declining tradition, individualisation, growing diversity of information and choice and an expanding and globalised media. Young adults' struggle for autonomy may have restricted opportunities for consumption, including economic factors (i.e. purchasing power) and spatial restrictions (e.g. through spending more time in the family home). We note here that shifting circumstances for young adults make certainty with these arguments difficult; for example, the 'extended adolescence' thesis (e.g. Arnett's [2000] 'emerging adulthood' theory) would emphasise that extended time in the family home frees up young adults' disposable income resulting in delayed adult responsibilities (e.g. parenthood, independent living) for socialising. The practice of

being a young adult (and indirectly, the meanings attributed to alcohol) is distinct from previous generations. Because of the tangled and rapid nature of these social changes, what they mean for the future of alcohol consumption is unclear. Whether this constitutes a continuation of historical drinking trends or a turning point for the place of alcohol in the lives of young adults requires further investigation. To add to this complexity, there is some evidence of a growingly polarised drinking culture between heavy and light drinkers, rather than collective declines (Caluzzi, 2018). Thus, any theories raised are likely to be provisional at best and should remain open to new ideas, explanations and conceptual ways of thinking.

Conclusion

Alcohol has been historically (and for many continues to be) a means of experiencing pleasure, time-out, enhancement and excitement, whilst also providing a sense of belonging, celebration and adulthood (Beccaria & Sande, 2003). However, with competing discourses of commodification and risk, young adults are required to negotiate ambiguous cultural messages that endorse both excess and restraint. Today's generation of young adults more than ever have to adapt to neoliberal conditions that emphasise individual responsibility and restraint (Babor, 2010). Policy, regulation and media problematisation of alcohol use have coincided with a boom in new digital forms of consumption and alternative lifestyles, which is likely to have had a synergistic effect and reinforced changes in alcohol use. Whilst recent declines in consumption represent a positive public health development, alcohol use has long been tied to social benefits, so we should remain wary of the indirect effects on young adults. Declines in alcohol use and other behaviours deemed risky may be part of a shift towards actively meeting institutional requirements (e.g. school, university, unpaid work and flexible employment) at the cost of leisure times and a potential decline in social well-being. Neoliberal discourses seem to have created an environment that opposes 'letting loose' and drunken comportment in favour of alternative lifestyles, new forms of consumption and entertainment and new ways to achieve status and identity. Future

research should investigate how young adults reflexively build identities based on (non-)consumption, how activities and rituals may have changed and provided new ways of achieving adult identities, and the role of alcohol for young adults in the context of a globalised world of increasing precarity and pressure.

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From: Sociology
To: Gabriel Caluzzi
Cc: sociology.journal@britsoc.org.uk
Subject: Sociology - Decision on Manuscript ID SOC-Sep-2020-ARTC-237.R2
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Best wishes,

Prof Vanessa May
For the Editorial Team
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