



1 Article

2 'Hidden habitus': a qualitative study of socio- 3 ecological influences on drinking practices and social 4 identity in mid-adolescence

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13 Academic Editor: name

14 Received: date; Accepted: date; Published: date

15 **Abstract:** This study explored mid-adolescents' views and experiences of socio-ecological influences
16 on their drinking practices in order to help inform the development of interventions to reduce
17 alcohol-related risk. We conducted 31 in-depth interviews with young people aged 13-17 in North
18 East England. Verbatim interview transcripts and field notes were coded systematically and
19 analysed thematically, following the principles of constant comparison. We adopted Bourdieu's
20 idea of social game-playing and elements of his conceptual toolkit (particularly habitus, capital and
21 field) during analysis. Analysis yielded three intersecting themes: (1) 'drinking etiquette': conveying
22 taste and disgust; (2) 'playing the drinking game': demonstrating cultural competency; (3) 'hidden
23 habitus' – the role of alcohol marketing. Our work demonstrates that there is a nexus of influential
24 factors which come together to help shape and reinforce mid-adolescents' behaviour, norms and
25 values in relation to alcohol consumption. Drinking practices are not just formed by friendships and
26 family traditions, these are also subject to wider cultural shaping including by the alcohol industry
27 which can encourage brand identification, and gear specific products to add 'distinction'. However
28 young people are not inactive players and they use aspects of capital and social games to help
29 cement their identity and present themselves in particular ways which in turn are influenced by
30 age, gender and social status. Guided by promising work in the tobacco field, interventions which
31 focus on critical awareness of the framing of alcohol products by key stakeholders, such as
32 policymakers, commercial industry and public health professionals, and by wider society may
33 facilitate behaviour change among young people.

34 **Keywords:** Adolescents; alcohol; identity; marketing; Bourdieu; qualitative.
35

36 1. Introduction

37 Alcohol use is the leading cause of death and disability adjusted life years in both 15-19 year-olds and
38 20-24 year-olds globally [1]. Whilst underage alcohol use—particularly frequent, high-intensity use—
39 increases the probability of short and long term negative consequences relating to physical health [2-
40 6], it also carries concomitant social risk, ranging from the personal (e.g. regretted or unprotected
41 sexual activity, poor school attendance and attainment) to the societal (e.g. disorderly city centres,
42 productivity losses) [7-10]. Such alcohol-related consequences appear most clearly within a subset of
43 risky drinkers within a broader trend of declining adolescent alcohol consumption, a phenomenon

44 previously described as ‘more alcohol down fewer throats’ [11-14]. Whilst reported falls in
45 consumption are to be welcomed, there remains a critical need to develop a richer understanding of
46 young people’s evolving drinking practices in order to inform the development of early interventions
47 to reduce alcohol-related risk linked to those that drink. Exposure to (and engagement with) alcohol
48 marketing has been consistently associated with early initiation of drinking and regular use of alcohol
49 amongst young people, as well as the development of pro-drinking attitudes and social norms [15-
50 17]. A recent systematic review identified a majority of evidence that linked industry-driven alcohol
51 marketing (Price, Promotion, Product and Place) to key drinking outcomes (initiation, continuation,
52 frequency and intensity) in young adolescents (aged 9–17 years), with evidence strongest for
53 promotional activity [18]. However, null results or negative associations were also found, and a field
54 of highly variable and inconsistent exposure and outcome measures hampered the ability to conduct
55 data pooling.

56
57 Marketing is embedded in a rich milieu of other social and cultural influences on behaviour and it is
58 increasingly recognised that behavioural drivers work together to *collectively* influence young
59 people’s drinking practices. Whilst there are a number of conceptual lenses that could be drawn upon
60 to make sense of why people act the way they do, one way in which to interpret young people’s
61 drinking practices is by adopting Bourdieu’s theory of practice [19,20], a theoretical framework which
62 rests upon three core concepts. *Habitus* is an embodied history of shared tastes, habits and
63 dispositions [21] or, put another way, a matrix of ‘generative principles’ which provide a practical
64 logic that an individual draws upon with little active conscious intent [20]. *Habitus* is flexible, with
65 tiny adaptations made through interactions with others; and cumulative, whereby our reactions in
66 the present are rarely exactly the same, due to our experiences in the past [22]. *Field* is used to describe
67 a person’s objective position in social, physical and digital space. In other words, field constitutes the
68 ‘arena’ or context in which interactions, transactions and events occur [23]. Fields may be inter-
69 related, in that a person’s position in one field can be advantageous in another; and each has a
70 practical logic (*habitus*) that a person must master to be comfortable in that social space [23]. This
71 means that if we cross into a field in which we do not immediately ‘fit in’, we may try to adapt and
72 make changes to our *habitus*. Finally, *capital* denotes three types of materials or assets, with exchange
73 value, that an individual possesses relative to others: social (constituted by networks), cultural
74 (knowledge of what holds distinction), and economic (accumulation of wealth) [24-26]. Symbolic
75 capital is the result of elevation of certain combinations of capital above others once they have been
76 legitimised [27,28]. Taken together this triad generates practices (behaviour).

77
78 Bourdieu also presents the inter-related idea of ‘game-playing’ as a functional metaphorical tool
79 [19,20]. To succeed in a given field requires the ability to ‘fit in’ and achieve a sense of belonging or
80 acceptance by a particular group. To do so, Bourdieu suggests that individuals participate in ‘social
81 games’. Like all games, the ability to play involves acquisition of knowledge, and a commitment to
82 the logic and rules of the game, termed ‘*Illusio*’ by Bourdieu [20]. For the most part, game-playing is
83 relatively unconscious, as an appropriate *habitus* predisposes actions to be sensible and logical [29].
84 Further, the earlier a person learns the rules of the game, the more able they are to act without
85 deliberate intent and without awareness of game-playing. However, participation can involve a level
86 of sacrifice and discomfort, at least until socialized properly into the ‘correct way to play’.

87 Adolescence is a time of rapid physical and emotional development – where identity is still being
88 shaped [30,31]. The act of fitting in amongst preferred peers can therefore take a huge amount of
89 physical and emotional effort and involves the legitimizing and exclusion of certain types of people
90 and / or behaviours. It is not easy to be the one who stands out, particularly during adolescence. This
91 means that image and presentation of self is critical [32]. Game-playing offers people a practical sense
92 of how things should be done, described by Bourdieu as ‘legitimate culture’ [20]. In the context of
93 young people’s drinking practices, it could therefore be assumed that adolescence represents ‘field’
94 with alcohol consumption just one of the ‘games in play’. Thus, habitus may reflect the lexicon of
95 influences upon young people’s drinking practices; meanwhile capital represents the resource a
96 young person could have to enable or facilitate alcohol consumption, such as parental supply (social
97 capital) or disposable income (economic capital).

98
99 Aspects of Bourdieu’s theoretical framework have previously been applied to the study of young
100 people’s alcohol use [33,34]. Most recently, Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, field and capital have
101 been used to explore the attitudes and beliefs of UK young adults (aged 18-20) around alcohol use,
102 particularly in relation to the role of peers [35]. Study authors demonstrated that friends were integral
103 in drinking experiences, and drinking with friends was equated with fun and enjoyment. Critically,
104 however, wider cultural norms played the predominant role in shaping behaviour, via the
105 internalisation of widely accepted practice and the subsequent externalisation of norms through the
106 habitus.

107
108 Previous work in this area only partially links together the role of alcohol marketing and social game-
109 playing with other influential factors within underage drinking practices. Data from Lunnay et al.
110 was collected in Australia and relates to females only [33], whilst MacArthur et al. did not identify
111 alcohol marketing as an important facet of habitus [35]. Further, the latter also focused on young
112 adults aged 18-20, and there are differing and important intervention considerations between groups
113 under and over the UK ‘legal’ age of purchasing alcohol. Therefore, our paper aims to adopt
114 Bourdieu’s idea of social game-playing and elements of his conceptual toolkit (particularly habitus,
115 capital and field) to enhance understanding of the wider drivers of mid-adolescent (aged 13-17)
116 drinking practices with a view to aiding the development and implementation of effective
117 preventative interventions in the UK.

119 2. Materials and Methods

120 2.1. Sampling and Participant Information

121 Our approach to data collection, coding and analysis was guided by COREQ (COnsolidated criteria
122 for REporting Qualitative research) [36]. Data were derived from qualitative enquiry situated within
123 a broader research project focused on understanding the influence of the commercial environment
124 on mid-adolescent drinking beliefs and behaviours [18,37,38]. 31 in-depth interviews were conducted
125 with young people aged 13-17 who were current users of alcohol at the time of the study. These
126 interviews were conducted between May 2009 and March 2010 and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes.
127 Most interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis, whilst six interviews (involving 12 young
128 people) were carried out in dyads, at the request of participants. During one interview a youth worker

129 was present at the request of the participant. Sampling continued until no new issues or perspectives
 130 emerged from the interviews and there were indications of 'data saturation', later confirmed during
 131 data analysis. To achieve maximum variation in young people's perspectives, participants were
 132 purposively recruited on the basis of age, sex and socio-economic backgrounds, and were recruited
 133 from a range of different settings (high schools, vocational/further education colleges, youth centres
 134 and youth offending teams in North East England). All participants were white British individuals,
 135 reflecting the predominant demography of the study area. A summary of participant characteristics
 136 (by age, gender, level of deprivation and interview structure) is presented in Table 1 below. The Index
 137 of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2015 area-level measure of socio-economic position was used as an
 138 ecological proxy for individual socio-economic position. Participants were not asked for postcode
 139 data therefore the postcode of the recruiting site was used. IMD scores were subsequently converted
 140 to quintiles, where '1' indicates 'most deprived'.

141
 142

Table 1: Characteristics of Interviewees

		N (31)	%	N of interview dyads (12):
Age	13	1	3	0
	14	6	19	6
	15	8	26	4
	16	7	23	0
	17 ¹	9	29	2
Gender	Female	16	52	9
	Male	15	48	3
IMD quintile	1	20	64	
	2	4	13	
	3	3	10	
	4	4	13	
	5	0	0	

143 ¹ one participant turned 18 between recruitment and interview

144

145 2.2. Data collection

146 A semi-structured approach was undertaken, with a topic guide used to inform but not direct the
 147 interviews. This topic guide was developed iteratively throughout data collection and covered a
 148 range of issues including experiences and reasons for drinking alcohol; social networks, peer groups
 149 and drinking contexts; tastes and preferences; awareness of and / or engagement with alcohol
 150 products and marketing techniques; access to alcohol and the importance of price; and risk and
 151 vulnerabilities. All interviews were conducted by the first author (SS), who at the time of the study
 152 was a PhD student (educated to Masters Level) and classed as a young female (aged 24 years). As
 153 part of her doctorate, the interviewer received detailed training in qualitative interviewing and
 154 analysis.

155

156 All participants were approached face-to-face, no young people approached for interview refused to
 157 take part and there were no drop-outs during the interview process. Interviews took place at the

158 recruiting site or a nearby public coffee shop. All young people consented to their interview being
159 audio recorded. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, either by the researcher who conducted the
160 interview (SS) or by a research administrator at the university, with observational field notes
161 maintained in a research diary. Ethical approval for the study was provided by Newcastle University
162 (REF 000125/2009, 27/04/2009). No relationship between the interviewer and participants was
163 established prior to study. All participants received a study information leaflet, which included
164 details about the interviewer's credentials and reasons for conducting the study. Participants
165 provided written informed consent before taking part and anonymity was assured.

166 2.3. Data coding and analysis

168 Data collection and analysis took place concurrently, in order to continually re-evaluate emergent
169 findings. Verbatim interview transcripts and field notes were analysed thematically [39], following
170 the principles of constant comparison [40] to enhance internal validity [41]. A computer program
171 (Microsoft Excel) was used to assist with the organisational aspects of data coding and analysis.
172 Transcripts were first coded line by line and then systematically indexed into data tables to generate
173 descriptive themes. Descriptive themes were then compared to identify patterns, similarities and
174 differences in the data in order to generate analytical themes. We adopted Bourdieu's idea of social
175 game-playing and elements of his conceptual toolkit (particularly habitus, capital and field) during
176 analysis. Coding and analysis were undertaken by the researcher who conducted the interviews (SS),
177 with transcripts reviewed by a second researcher (JS). To maximise analytic potential, emergent
178 themes were discussed and challenged within the entire study team, a process described by Barbour
179 as pragmatic double coding [42]. Analysis of transcripts yielded three intersecting themes: (1)
180 'drinking etiquette': conveying distinction and disgust; (2) 'playing the drinking game':
181 demonstrating cultural competency; (3) 'hidden habitus' – the role of alcohol marketing. The findings
182 presented below include quotations to provide rich description and faithful accounts of the views
183 and experiences of young people in this study. All data were coded anonymously to ensure that
184 participants were not identifiable from their accounts.

186 3. Results

187 3.1. 'Drinking etiquette': conveying distinction and disgust

188 Drinking practices were used by all interviewees to demonstrate 'who they were' as well as to mark
189 out others as being different to them. Whilst some values and behaviours drew young people in this
190 study together, others pulled them apart, leading to the social authorisation of certain practices but
191 not others, and resulting in the distancing of people and / or associated behaviour. Doing so enabled
192 young drinkers to display a sense of expertise and pride in their own drinking practices, as well as
193 imply lack of taste, and even disgust, in the behaviours of others. Here, two predominant approaches
194 to alcohol use emerged - drinking to establish maturity and drinking to lose control. For some young
195 people in our study, it was not acceptable to be 'out of control' and they negotiated the boundary or
196 'edge' of alcohol consumption so as not to become 'too drunk', become an embarrassment or miss
197 out on enjoying their evening ('drinking to get drunk... that's not really what I want to do... not your entire
198 life focused on getting drunk or whatever, it's sort of something that happens rather than something that you
199 set out to do...' - Female, aged 16). These young people demonstrated 'distinction in restraint', taking

200 pride in being able to recognise their limits and control the effects of intoxication (*'My dad, well, what*
201 *he does say is I'm quite good with alcohol he says I'm self-regulating now...'* – Male, aged 17). As such, they
202 deliberately chose drinks which were not overly strong and did not result in immediate and obvious
203 drunkenness, a practice referred to in the wider literature as the 'intoxication tightrope' [43],
204 'controlled intake' [44], 'just the right buzz' [45] or 'calculated hedonism' [46]. Moreover, some young
205 people described reining in their alcohol consumption by only spending a certain amount of money,
206 planning ahead for how to get home or by looking after their friends (*'I tend to bring about £10 with*
207 *me. If it's a party then maybe £15... that's a way of limiting myself to not actually drink as much...'* - Female,
208 aged 17).

209
210 For many young people, drinking practices were used to demonstrate taste, maturity, autonomy from
211 the crowd and prestige. Cheap wine and cider were associated with younger drinkers or individuals
212 from a lower socio-economic status, whereas cocktails, champagne, white wine or expensive brandy
213 and whisky were described as mature or 'sophisticated' drinks (*'it's a charva [individuals from a lower*
214 *socio-economic status] drink. You can tell when I would go into a shop and buy a bottle of Bellabrusco it's*
215 *like 'oh that's for the kids'...' - Female, aged 16). At this stage of life, participants did not often readily*
216 *reflect on or identity with typical class labels. However, this does not mean it was not of importance*
217 *in drinking practices. One label they did reflect on was 'charva' and there was an awareness that*
218 *being seen as a charva can have negative connotations, with use of this label evoking disgust and*
219 *contempt. Nevertheless, others appeared to embrace this identity, meaning that, in certain fields,*
220 *charvas did fit in and belong to particular social groups, with the 'rules of the game' shifting in*
221 *different contexts. For these young people drinking to lose control held distinction, and there was*
222 *prestige and status in product strength (and volume consumption) over product style. Strong*
223 *products were specifically chosen to achieve this goal ('The night's better when you're not sober so you*
224 *start the night not sober so it's better from the start' - Female, aged 17). Consuming 'weak' products was*
225 *felt to defeat the principal objective of drinking and represented a 'waste of money' ('it doesn't get you*
226 *pissed or nowt [nothing] and you just think, well I've wasted my money on something what's not going to get*
227 *us pissed.'* - Male, aged 15). Thus, this grouping of young people drank primarily to get drunk and it
228 was important for it to be obvious that they were drinking alcohol. Economic capital was critical here
229 and recognising the importance of price or knowing where it is easiest to access alcohol were 'learned'
230 drinking behaviours (*'At a pub and club it's really fast pace getting the alcohol so they just don't bother*
231 *[with ID]. So you go when it's busy and they won't bother, while [in] a shop there's loads of people looking at*
232 *you and someone might recognise you' – Female, aged 17). These young people appeared to be interested*
233 *in cheap or easily accessible alcohol, and were willing to take advantage of 'freebies', discounts or*
234 *special offers ('I don't go out on weekends, I go out during the week so I go out on Monday and Thursday...'*
235 *everything is cheaper, but if I went out on a Saturday then I'd probably have to buy different types of drinks,*
236 *because I wouldn't be able to afford it because they're double the price' – Female, aged 17). Further, some*
237 *interviewees were relatively indiscriminate about the type of alcohol they consumed, especially if*
238 *others were purchasing alcohol. For example, previously scorned drinks and brands became*
239 *acceptable if they were a free and convenient source of alcohol ('I wouldn't dare touch that, we wouldn't*
240 *drink that... it tastes horrible... Unless someone else bought it... Wouldn't drink it unless I got it for*
241 *nowt...Wouldn't waste me money...'* - Male, aged 14).

242

243 3.2. 'Playing the drinking game': demonstrating cultural competency

244 For young people in our study, drinking alcohol required them to learn and understand distinct 'rules
245 of play' and involved the acquisition, maintenance, development and mobilisation of resources or
246 capital ('I guess it's like drinking etiquette' – Female, aged 17). Those who chose to remain outside the
247 boundaries of acceptable practice (for example, drinking alone or abstaining without good reason
248 e.g. being the designated driver) risked exclusion ('[drinking alone is] lonely, desperate, because I do it
249 socially, I'd never do it just by myself... drink, because it's nice in an atmosphere with friends' - Female, aged
250 17). If their drinking behaviour was deemed unacceptable, young people could find themselves
251 'frozen-out', side-lined and lacking in credibility. These transgressions were often managed within
252 the group ('we do tend to emphasise to each other that you should know your limitations so if someone doesn't
253 know his limits then we would be he's not really that cool to hang out with... I guess there is a borderline
254 between funny and embarrassing... like the new people who come in sometimes they go over the top of it and
255 then they know that that's not really the way to go, so they kind of buckle down next time' - Male, aged 17).
256 Further, the earlier in their drinking 'career' that interviewees discussed learning the 'rules of the
257 game', the more likely it was that drinking practices became normalised and acceptable. Knowing
258 how to 'play the game' demonstrated cultural competency, a vital commodity in adolescence. Thus,
259 some younger interviewees in our study described the process of 'learning' how to drink: 'I didn't like
260 it at first 'cos I was sick all over and my ma found out... but as I got used to it I was alright... I just love the
261 buzz of getting drunk now' - Female, aged 13. Doing so took perseverance and commitment, with some
262 young people describing the need to learn to like the taste of alcohol despite describing the initial
263 taste of alcohol as 'horrible' or 'disgusting'. They employed a number of practical strategies to help
264 manage this, such as experimenting with different drinks and masking the taste of alcohol with more
265 palatable products ('I like the orange one 'cos it tastes like Irn Bru...' - Male, aged 14), a finding which
266 accords well with other studies of alcohol use in mid-adolescence [47], and which reinforces
267 explanations of the alcohol industry's introduction of 'alco-pop' products to the market [48]. Young
268 people also projected any adverse effects experienced, such as vomiting, onto particular products,
269 and described simply learning not to drink that type of alcohol again. Peers were an integral part of
270 the game - alcohol was used to cement friendships and offered young people a sense of 'community'.
271 Thus, interviewees discussed sharing values, traditions and rituals with others in their social
272 network, which seemed to denote acceptance and belonging ('What we basically do is we go in, we get
273 changed, we meet each other, go on Facebook and talk to each other, we meet each other, we get wor [our] money,
274 we go out, sometimes...not all the time, sometimes have a little drink and we just dance about, talk, tell jokes,
275 take pictures and then go in...we don't talk to anyone, we don't give grief to anyone, we don't cause trouble, we
276 just stay in one drinking place. Like if we don't drink we just go down the park and we just play in the park' -
277 Female, aged 13). Thus, the value derived from a night out was extended both retrospectively and
278 prospectively, through sharing stories, high levels of planning, getting ready together and use of
279 social networking sites to validate and re-live experiences, a finding which accords well with other
280 literature [49]. Extending the night in these ways heightened the experience of drinking alcohol for
281 young people ('you know when you go on Facebook and that, you gan [go] on the next morning and people's
282 put 'oh I had a good night last night but hangover now'...Loads put photos on there' – Male, aged 15).

283

284 Friendships could also shield interviewees from adverse or unwanted consequences of drinking.
285 Thus, it was expected that friends would protect and support each other. For both genders, this meant

286 looking after friends who were drunk. For girls, it also meant that they would not let each other go
287 home alone or with a stranger. Whilst, for boys, this tended to mean sticking together when coming
288 into contact with the police or other groups of young people (*'Well even if my pals were getting chinned*
289 *[assaulted] and I had been drinking, like other people had started chinning one of my pals, then I would just*
290 *gan [go] over and I would end up fighting, sticking up for my pals...my pal, the one I gan over to the town*
291 *with to his da's [dad's], me and him we're just like that and he knows I've always got his back if someone's*
292 *going to hit him. I divvent [don't] like fighting and that but I mean if my pals going to get chinned I divvent*
293 *want my pals getting chinned, I divvent want them getting touched so I stick up for them'* - Male, aged 15).
294 Further, friendships and social networks offered a 'micro economy' to allow young people to
295 effectively pool limited resource. Young people took turns to purchase alcohol or 'subbed' each other,
296 pooled money together and 'pre-loaded' before going out for the night. Whilst interviewees gave a
297 number of reasons for pooling resources - suggesting that this represented a cheaper and fairer
298 system and thus stopped arguments, that alcohol lasted longer that way, and that it enhanced
299 drinking as a social experience – predominantly there seemed to be a reciprocal understanding i.e. 'if
300 I pay this time, they'll pay when they have money next time', which also helped to cement
301 relationships (*'we'll buy wor [our] own but then if someone hasn't got money...like my pal... if he hasn't got*
302 *money and that...and I've got money and I get drink I'll give him basically half and stuff 'cause he knows for a*
303 *fine fact...well I know for fine fact that I'd get it back when he's got money and I haven't'* - Male, aged 15). In
304 addition to peer networks, young people drew on their parents when developing new drinking
305 practices (*'Dad told me how to make Moscow Mules...'* - Male, aged 15). Young people regularly
306 discussed drinking with their parents, suggesting that their parents encouraged them to drink
307 sensibly, and to try alcohol at an early age, in order to eradicate the mystique around drinking
308 alcohol, and as a 'least worst' strategy in comparison to smoking and drug taking, findings which
309 accord well with other studies of parental influence on adolescent alcohol use [50,51]: *'they basically*
310 *told me just...what's out there and they tried to introduce me at a young a...just saying no you can have a sip*
311 *of my wine or whatever so that...the first time you do it, it wouldn't be like something new that you just go out*
312 *and do it loads because you've never done it before'* – Male, aged 17.
313

314 3.3. 'Hidden habitus' – the role of alcohol marketing.

315 Alcohol marketing was a key external factor which shaped young people's drinking behaviour, built
316 up outcome expectancies and reinforced particular identities (*'I go with my dad to the rugby a lot... we*
317 *usually have a pint after the match... You often see adverts for alcohol where there are men drinking in the*
318 *stadium, it has that whole macho culture'* - Male, aged 17). This quote shows how sponsorship of sporting
319 or cultural activities was a key feature of marketing reach; and interviewees frequently recited
320 advertising campaigns or slogans (*'somebody does something bad and it says "have you got your WKD*
321 *side?"'* - Male, aged 14). Meaning was attached to certain products, brands or consumption patterns
322 which denoted affiliation to a particular social group or rejection of another (*'whenever anybody says*
323 *Baileys I always think of The Mighty Boosh. There's an episode, old Greg, he's like "you're having Baileys from*
324 *a shoe. That always makes us laugh. I've always wanted to try that.'* - Female, aged 16). Certain drinks were
325 described as 'macho' (and at times linked to sport), whilst others such as alcopops were described as
326 a drink for 'wimps' or girls, and likened to soft drinks (*'Some drinks the guys would never go near like*
327 *WKDs, Apple Sours because it's quite feminine for them, they'd go for the hard tequila...show off...all about*

328 image, because they'd get taken the mick out of if they had something that was colourful...it's more manly to
329 have a drink in your hand I think than to just take little shots.' - Female, aged 17). Interviewees also tended
330 to suggest that boys appeared to drink at a higher volume or intensity to girls, and that girls and boys
331 tended to 'act differently' (i.e. louder, immature or more confident) when drunk ('But I think the lads
332 drink much more...much quicker. By the end of the night we've all drunk our drink and then like girls they've
333 barely drank any 'cause they just sit there and do nothing. Sit there in shame or something' - Male, aged
334 16). Highlighting 'unacceptable' behaviour at times led to criticism of their own younger selves; with
335 previous behaviour being portrayed as 'childish' in comparison to their current approach ('I think the
336 novelty's worn off...it's not so much of a...oh let's get drunk for the sake of going and getting drunk, it's a lot
337 more like alright I'm going out so I'll have a drink because it's nice when I'm going out but I'm not going to do
338 it just for the sake of getting drunk...') - Male, aged 17). Older young people described themselves to
339 have developed greater tolerance levels towards alcohol, and as now able to drink at an increased
340 volume without obvious effect or intoxication.

341

342 As well as criticising their own younger selves, interview participants felt that the drinking behaviour
343 of 'younger' young people was more likely to be influenced by external factors such as marketing ('I
344 would say if people are first starting to drink then it [advertising] would have more of an effect because they
345 won't really know what's out there...so they just see a poster...maybe I'll have one of those see what it tastes
346 like...' - Male, aged 17). In this way, alcohol advertising was often described as 'helpful' to new or
347 younger drinkers by drawing their attention to products in order to help them experiment with
348 alcohol ('I seen one of the adverts off Jack Daniels...I was like 'oh I wonder if I'd do that if I'm on Jackie D's'
349 and I just had to get a bottle of Jackie D's and nowt happened...I liked the taste of it and that. Same with
350 Southern Comfort. I've seen the advert for that and I was like 'oh' and decided to have a drink of it' - Male,
351 aged 17). Thus, to some degree, there was an underlying critical consciousness of alcohol
352 advertisements ('I don't particularly notice them. I'm not really into the real alcohol scene like knowing all
353 your brands and knowing all the sophisticated stuff. I'm not really into that...') - Male, aged 17), with some
354 interviewees seemingly 'cynical' in comparison to other people who were susceptible to such
355 influence ('They always talk crap' - Male, aged 16; 'No 'cause you can't taste the adverts' - Female, aged
356 17). Finally, advertising had a role to play in drawing attention to price related promotions and
357 special offers. Many practical decisions about what to drink appeared to be framed by the price of
358 alcohol e.g. sharing alcohol, cheap, high-strength products, buying in bulk, drinking 'house' spirits
359 and choosing to go to pubs and clubs on certain nights of the week ('I don't go out on weekends, I go out
360 on a Monday and Thursday then everything is cheaper...if I went out on a Saturday then I'd probably have to
361 buy different types of drinks because I wouldn't be able to afford it because they're double the price...' - Female,
362 aged 17). For example, one 15 year old boy commented on his reaction when he saw a supermarket
363 price promotion, 'You just ring up your mates and say have you seen this, it's went [gone] down cheaper'.
364 When asked if price was critical to his choice, he commented: 'Aye sometimes. 'Cause if I haven't got
365 enough I've got to get something else'; whilst some interviewees also articulated the influence of visual
366 promotions in pubs and clubs, often related to price ('if you were in a club and you had been drinking and
367 there's like advertisement that's saying it's cheap or something, I'd probably go for that...' - Female, aged
368 17).

369

370 4. Discussion

371 Different forms of alcohol consumption were used to help construct identity, cement young people's
372 place within their peer group and mark out others as being 'different' to them. Whilst some young
373 people reported that they drank to demonstrate maturity, others felt that they drank to lose control.
374 These findings are supported by other studies conducted with young people, especially with regard
375 to: established and embedded drinking norms or dispositions [52], the symbolic value attached to
376 drinking behaviour [53], the importance of 'belonging' to a particular peer group [35,54], the use of
377 alcohol to help construct particular forms of social identity [55], and the importance of the social and
378 cultural environment in shaping drinking practices [33,56]. In particular, the distancing or ridiculing
379 of those who transgressed the boundaries of acceptable behaviour was a recurring theme and this
380 has been reported in other work, particularly in the context of adolescent food and clothing choices
381 [57,58]. Alcohol consumption was used by the young people in this study – like fashion or a hairstyle
382 - as a shortcut to creating or conferring identity, with their choice of drink serving to demonstrate
383 'who they are'. Further, the 'othering' of different class, gender and age groups led to numerous
384 examples of 'banter' or derogatory language, such as 'wimp' and 'charva', reflecting previous work
385 with a focus on consumption practices and 'youth underclass' [59,60]. This finding also accords well
386 with recent work conducted with 14-16 year-old boys exploring race and what it means to be a white
387 working class male in South London [61]; as well as research conducted with working-class men in
388 Scotland demonstrating a gender and sexual identity hierarchy within drinking values and practices
389 [62]. Here, adult interviewees articulated that there was a 'proper' way of drinking, with women and
390 gay men having subordinate status, reinforcing hegemonic masculinity [63] or 'hyper-gender' roles
391 [64,65]. In our study, just one interviewee identified as gay. Research has highlighted that lesbian,
392 gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth use alcohol and drugs to a greater degree than
393 heterosexual people [66]. However, this aspect of use is under-explored and less understood, thus
394 further work with adolescents exploring the role of sexual identity in alcohol consumption is
395 warranted. It has been questioned whether social class remains a useful construct to draw upon [67].
396 For interviewees in this study, even at a young age, social class was frequently used to make value
397 judgements about others, coded in the way others talked, the things they wore, and in the way that
398 they drank alcohol. Class differences (even where not explicitly framed as such by adolescents in this
399 study) operated as useful cultural capital to help individuals to fit in, reproducing 'classed exclusion'.
400 However, in this study, exclusionary tactics, guided by stigma, taste and disgust, were used by both
401 affluent and deprived young people, suggesting that both groups can be thought to possess
402 'legitimate culture' within their own particular social space, and according to their habitus.

403

404 What this and other studies indicate is that youth drinking can only be fully understood within a
405 wider social and societal context. Whilst industry-driven marketing is an important aspect of the
406 external environment for young people, it seems to be firmly embedded alongside other key
407 influences such as cultural and geographical traditions, peer groups and family-based drinking
408 practices. In our study, we saw an interplay between aspects of the internal and external world which
409 helped to build early social identity, drive learning and shape what individuals and others around
410 them do. Further, others have suggested that young people inhabit an 'intoxigenic' environment
411 where social, physical, cultural and commercial influences shape youth drinking but are not always
412 consciously recognised as doing so [68]. Such influences have also been described as 'affordances',
413 where properties in the environment have functional significance for individuals and provide

414 opportunities or settings for certain behaviours [69]. Our work suggests that young people are not
415 inactive players in this social world but rather that they actively seek out experiences which help
416 build specific identities that draw them together with some groups (e.g. desired peers) and
417 distinguishes or 'sets them apart' from others. Marketing appears to reinforce aspects of the
418 surrounding social ecology, by encouraging a link between alcohol and aspects of culture, identity
419 and personal reward [21]. Our work does not, and cannot, ascribe intentionality on the part of the
420 alcohol industry with regard to young people. However, marketing relationships specifically built
421 up with adults [70] seem to also impact on young drinkers and become part of the way they construct
422 their early identity, well before the age at which they can legally purchase alcohol [38]. Gender, class
423 and sexuality are just some of the aspects of identity that marketers can use to help sell more of their
424 product in the shorter and longer term. An analysis of internal alcohol industry advertising
425 documents demonstrated projected brand values of masculinity and bravado as well as other sexual
426 stereotypes [71]. Nevertheless, research relating to alcohol marketing continues to focus heavily upon
427 the effect of traditional advertising exposure [72]. However, this study adds to a growing body of
428 work indicating that future studies of alcohol marketing need to consider how an engagement rather
429 than exposure model of commercial influence may be key to understanding how industry contribute
430 to shaping and nurturing drinking behaviours [73]. Indeed the boundaries between commercial
431 marketing and user-generated content are increasingly blurred; trends such as real-world tie-ins,
432 interactive games and competitions reflect a dialogue and enduring relationship with consumers [74].
433 An engagement model of marketing extends to nightlife activity, often referred to as the 'P' for 'Place'
434 in the marketing lexicon. Historically, differences in the two core 'traditions' of youth research –
435 youth transitions and youth cultural analyses – have resulted in a fragmented, dichotomous youth
436 studies field. However, recently, Hollands has reflected on points of convergence, one of which is
437 around studies which have begun looking at the structuring of nightlife activity and what this can
438 tell us about where and how social inequalities and distinctions are displayed and acted out by young
439 people [75]. In particular, he notes the growing number of pubs and clubs owned by national /
440 multinational companies, resulting in corporate branding and theming, standardised, predictable
441 nightlife experiences and the policing of entry through 'style pickers' on the doors and gentrification
442 symbols, thus creating a socially differentiated market [76]. Hollands concludes: "Contrary to the
443 notion that nocturnal youth activity is simply a matter of personal taste and is freely chosen,
444 Chatterton and Hollands (2003:8) argue, paraphrasing Marx: 'youth make their own nightlife but not
445 under conditions of their own making'" (2015:77), resulting in the structured inequalities in
446 consumption we discuss in our study, verbal class-based conflict and distinctions, and involving
447 what Bourdieu [19], and others [77] have referred to as acts of 'symbolic' or 'structural' violence.

448

449 This study has some limitations which warrant discussion. Our research was conducted with one
450 sample of young people aged 13-17 within one geographical area of the UK, which is a part of
451 England with a strong industrial past and a traditionally heavy drinking culture, reflected in some
452 traditional gender views which may not be found in other cosmopolitan areas. Whilst interviews
453 were conducted in 2010, our analysis and subsequent findings resonate with other work in the field
454 of adolescent drinking. All participants in this study were current drinkers, since we wished to
455 understand the influence of contextual factors on drinking behaviour rather than the decision to drink
456 or not in the first place. Nevertheless, the absence of views from individuals who chose not to drink

457 alcohol is a limitation of our work on shaping influences, i.e. what makes the difference between
458 youth living ostensibly in the same external environment who do and do not drink? Bourdieu
459 suggests that, in order to fit in, one must be able to keep up with changes in the field. Further, that
460 falling behind may induce 'hysteresis', defined as a mismatch between habitus and field [19]. Such
461 mismatches can accommodate and allow for societal change. A recent trend of declining adolescent
462 alcohol consumption may be indicative of such societal change, and it may be of interest in future
463 work to explore non-drinking using this theoretical lens. A small proportion of the interviews were
464 conducted with dyads (two young people together) and this approach helped reduce the possible
465 power differential between young people and the adult interviewer. Most dyadic interviews were
466 conducted with younger interviewees in predominantly female same-sex pairs (see Table 1). We
467 considered whether dyadic interviews could lead to socially desirable responses, or boasting about
468 drinking behaviour in front of peers. Thus, in order to minimise socially desirable responses, young
469 people were probed about their responses throughout interviews, and data collected during dyadic
470 interviews was compared to that which was collected during one-to-one encounters, in order to look
471 for signs of hubris or exaggerated claims about drinking. Finally, as participants in this study were
472 predominantly recruited from transient settings and could not be re-contacted for a number of
473 reasons (e.g. no longer attending targeted youth groups, moving away to university), interviewees
474 were not provided with a verbatim transcript of their interview for review. Nevertheless, whilst so-
475 called 'member checks' are widely employed by researchers across numerous fields, the advantages
476 of its use in relation to verifying accuracy have been described as relatively small [78], and unlikely
477 to be relevant to research focused on theory development [79].

478

479 5. Conclusions

480 This study provides useful insights for future alcohol prevention policy and practice. All interviewees
481 were below the UK legal age of being able to buy alcohol. Nevertheless, they often described
482 themselves as 'well practised' in the use of alcohol and they often described 'learning' how to be so.
483 In some instances parents were clearly initiating or 'instructing' them, perhaps in an attempt to
484 mitigate the various physical and psycho-social risks to these young people whilst growing up,
485 particularly in public drinking environments. The finding that risky or heavy drinking or loss of
486 control due to alcohol can have a 'cultural logic' to specific groups of young people is important. This
487 has been recognised by other authors, particularly in relation to young adults, gender and alcohol
488 use [70]. Consequently, what may seem irrational in public health or health policy terms, could be
489 completely rational to individuals if it supports membership of specific peer groups. The data in this
490 study suggest young people achieved a sense of specific personal identity linked to different forms
491 of drinking, highlighting heterogeneity in attitudes and practices, and indicating that simple health
492 education to counter the negative influence of the alcohol environment on young people may not
493 achieve a substantial impact. Only a relatively small number of campaigns or intervention
494 programmes have reported positive outcomes in this area [80]. Previous work applying Bourdieu's
495 theory of practice suggests that population-level interventions that regulate alcohol consumption at
496 a higher system level, and thus disrupt the field, are likely to facilitate behaviour change among
497 young people by driving a response in habitus [35]. However, such high-level structural change
498 requires political will, if it is to be implemented, which is currently not found in England and Wales,

499 though is perhaps in Scotland. Data from this study and previous studies from the tobacco field, such
500 as the 'Florida Truth Campaign', suggest that intervention approaches which capitalise on 'cynicism'
501 regarding stakeholder messages and which focus on critical awareness of **how alcohol products and**
502 **use may be framed could** offer a promising alternative to individualized health-focused behaviour
503 change models in lieu of population-level change [81,82]. Whilst adverse health and social
504 consequences of early alcohol use remain important, it is the more proximal physiological and
505 emotional outcomes, such as anxieties surrounding weight and self-image, which are key to
506 adolescents a long time before chronic conditions such as liver disease become an issue. Time
507 perspective describes the extent to which people's value of a reward, such as better health, decreases
508 with delay of its receipt [83,84]. In other words, for adolescents, the positives of alcohol use in the
509 short term outweighs long term negative outcomes. This becomes particularly pertinent if we think
510 of alcohol consumption, 'going out' and engagement with urban nightlife as less of a youthful 'rite
511 of passage' and more of a permanent post-adolescent 'socialising ritual' [85]. Further, it is increasingly
512 recognised that adolescent health and lifestyle behaviours tend to cluster, rather than be experienced
513 in isolation, leading to a growing emphasis on multiple health behaviours [86]. Clearly there remains
514 a need for more work in this area including a focus on both young people themselves and **the nexus**
515 **of wider influential factors, including some which are commercial and some formed from friendships**
516 **and family traditions, which come together to help shape and reinforce adolescent behaviour, norms**
517 **and values in relation to alcohol consumption.**

518 **Acknowledgments:** We thank all young people who gave up their time to participate in the study and Jason
519 Scott, Kat Jackson, Kirsty Laing, Michelle Addison and Paul Whybrow for helpful comments on both study
520 design and earlier drafts of this manuscript. We confirm that everyone who has contributed significantly to this
521 work is listed here. This study was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) as part of a
522 doctoral studentship (Research Centre Grant, UKCRC, Res 590-25-0004). S.S., E.K. and J.S. are members of Fuse—
523 the Centre for Translational Research in Public Health, a UK Clinical Research Collaboration (UKCRC) Public
524 Health Research Centre of Excellence. S.S., E.K. and J.S. are supported by the National Institute for Health
525 Research (NIHR)'s School for Public Health Research (SPHR). S.S. is also supported by the Department of Health
526 funded Public Health Research Consortium (PHRC) and E.K. by the NIHR School of Primary Care Research
527 (SPCR). The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the funders,
528 UKCRC, the NHS, the NIHR or the Department of Health.

529 **Author Contributions:** SS, EK, RB, and JS conceived the study idea and devised the study methodology. SS
530 planned and conducted the interviews. SS and JS analysed the data with critical input from all authors. Steph
531 Scott led the writing of the paper, with input from all authors.

532 **Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funder had no role in the design of the
533 study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript, and in the decision
534 to publish the results.

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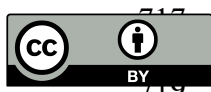
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