

“Creating better stories”: Alcohol and gendered transitions to adulthood

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Background

- Previous study looking at young adults and alcohol found
 - A norm for excessive alcohol consumption within young adulthood
 - Belief it was temporary ‘liminal’ behaviour
- Gender under-analysed in our previous study
- Lack of clarity around cultural trends of young adult drinking of both genders from statistics alone- tendency to stress gendered similarities

Research questions

- Convergence? What are characteristic differences as well as similarities?
- Temporary? How do drinking intentions change across the transition to adulthood?
- What do the findings mean for responses to young adult alcohol use?

Data collection

- Key informant interviews with 21 alcohol policy and practitioner specialists mainly in Scotland
- Eight focus groups with 50 young adults.
- Sampled for;
 - Age (16-18 and 25-30)
 - Gender
 - Trajectory to adulthood (higher education trajectory or not)

Key informant interviews

Purpose

- ‘expert’ thinking around key issues

Method

- 21 semi structured interviews
- range of organisations included

Key Informant findings

Key role in transition to adulthood

“how do you say to that young person who needs to belong to that social group, be an individual, step outside it? I don’t know if you can” (Community safety representative)

Young adults not homogenous group

~ gender ~ socioeconomic status ~ ethnicity
~sexuality

Risk = universal & identified by
gender

Key informant view of gendered risks

Young men

- violence

“particularly in Glasgow, drinking seems to be connected to that role of masculinity and what it is to be a man – you need to drink to do that”




Young women

- embarrassment, shame, guilt

“it can be about appearance and how they want to portray themselves and be seen”




Reinforcing gender stereotypes?



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New opportunities and challenges

➤ social media



Drinkaware social network application

➤ brief interventions

➤ young adult alcohol environments

What will this mean for different groups of young men and women?



Storyboards/
drawings of
drinking occasions
at 16-18 and 25-
30

*Alcohol
through our
eyes*



Findings: overview

- Understandings of alcohol use which are shared between genders
- Differences
 - Using alcohol to perform gender
 - Risk and safety
- Maturation and moderating consumption

Findings – gendered drinking styles

- On surface drinking styles similar – tendency toward excess – but with clear gendered enactments
- Women respondents described drinking as a group activity
- Both a performance of femininity and a safety adaptation

Female group drinking- ethic of concern

16 - 18

CLUB



Meanwhile outside....



Females 25-30 with degrees

Prohibition of lone female drinking

PS: *So why don't you like being in a pub on your own?*

L: *It's just like not cool [laughs].*

A: *Aye. I probably got that from my mum that women shouldn't be in a pub themselves, it doesn't look very nice if you're sitting in a pub yourself drinking.*

L: *I don't think it is nice*

A: *I don't think it's nice either.*

L: *To be honest, I think women shouldn't*

PS: *Not very nice because?*

L: *We're all ladies.*

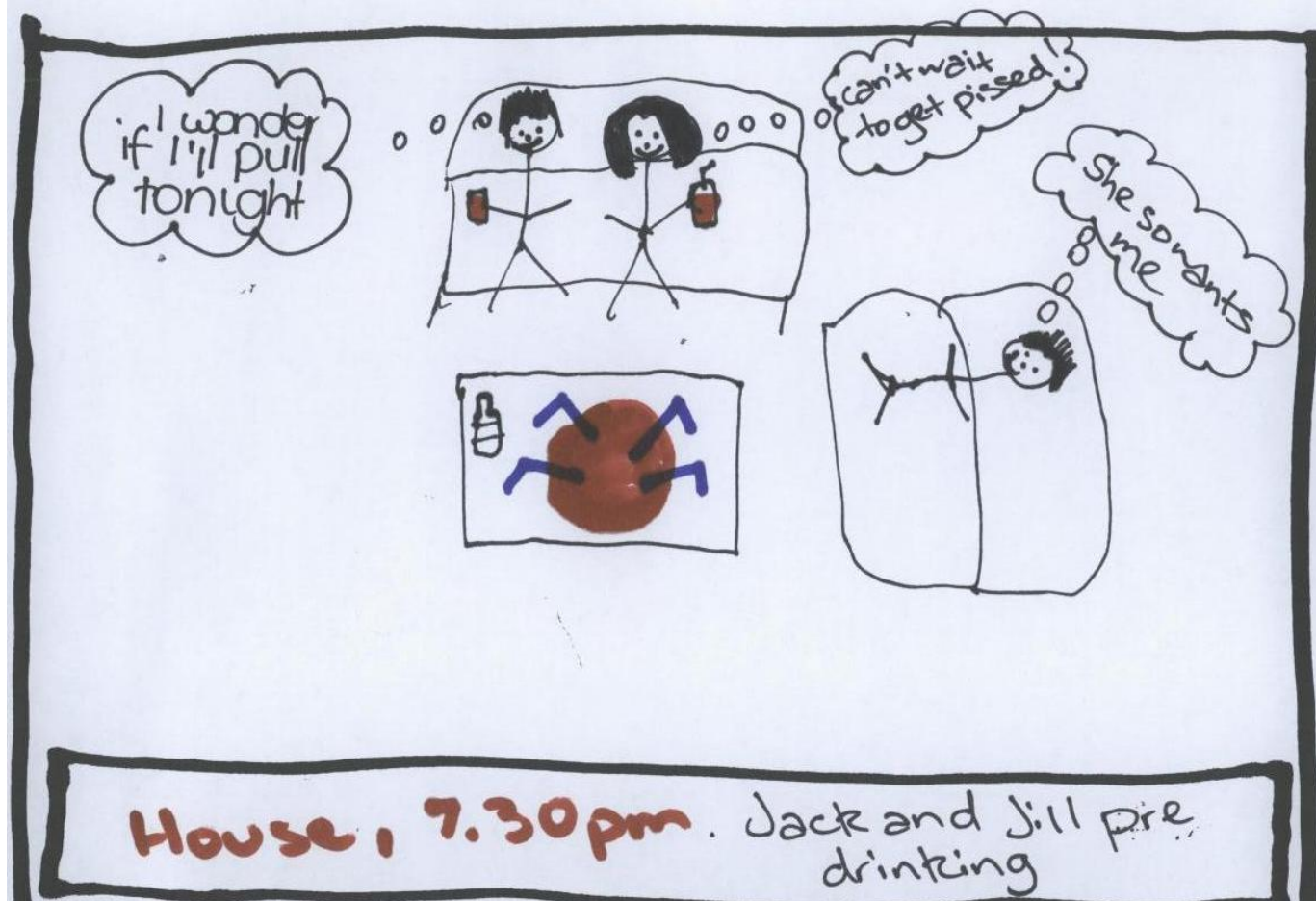
A: *Not very lady like [laughs].*

Female group, 16-18, not in education

Group solidarity as a safety strategy

I think guys are probably a wee bit more fearless, they've got less to worry about I think, if they are alone and drunk, they've got less to worry about than if a girl is alone and drunk.

Female, 16-18, not in education



What we'll do is, this is quite disgusting, but we'll get a big bowl and fill it with vodka and we'll put diluting juice in and water and ice and everyone gets a straw and drinks it. That's what we do before we go out. So we usually get totally ready and then we'll do that and then head straight out. Just so we're a kind of happy drunk. We're all at the same level of drunk as well, if that makes sense.

Female, 16-18, in education (and drawing)

Men's views

- Accounts of young men had a greater emphasis on the act of drinking over the achievement of group solidarity
- Group behaviours noticeably less well adapted to take account of risks
- Risks for young male drinkers considerable

It involves going to the furthest end of the public park and hiding in the darkness just so the police don't see you so you can sit quietly and drink. You can put all the laws in place you want but kids will find a way around it.

Male, 16-18, not in education

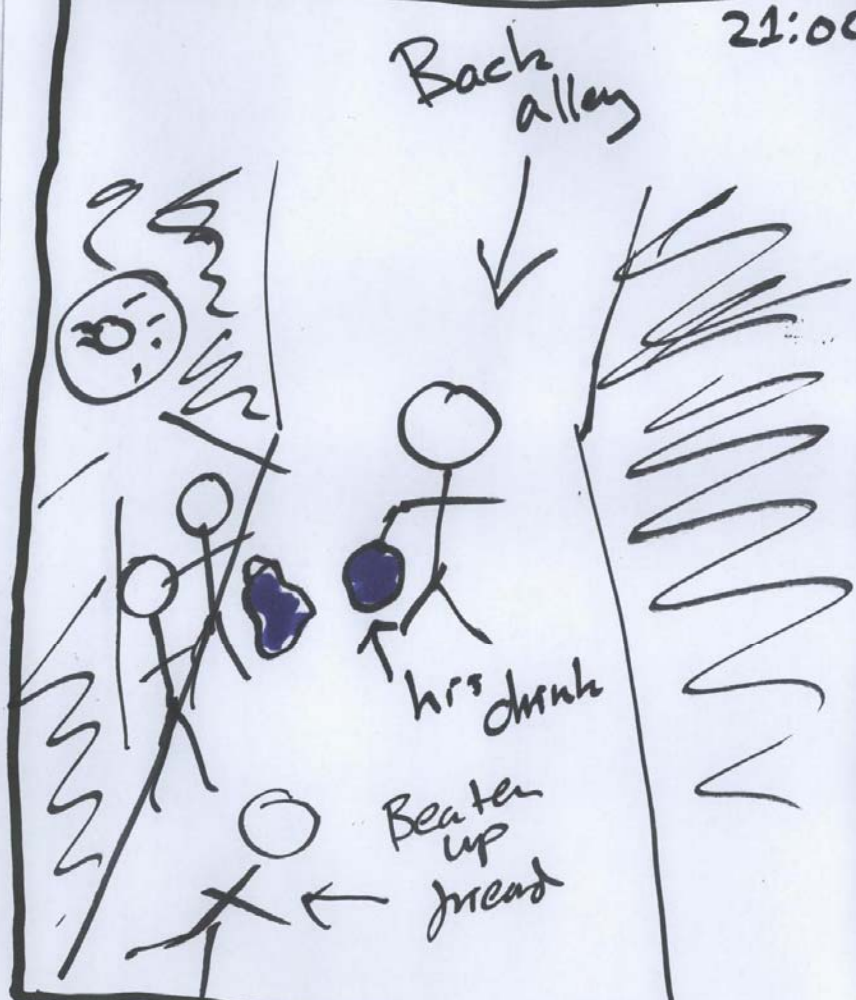
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FGG

Feeling of expectation - normal to drink

21:00



Moving on – the influence of personal growth

The wee voice in your head is no longer saying ‘you have to fit in.’ I am probably more secure in myself as a person and in my relationship with my friends that I don’t have to please them. I can, if I want to, go home and I don’t care what they think.

Female, 25-30, without degree

You want better stories to tell people than I got really hammered again

Female, 25-20 with degree

25-30. OLDER + WISER?



Whereas before it was binging, now maybe you'd have a glass of wine every night for like three nights in a row and then be like 'wait a minute, wait a minute, I didn't even notice I had that'

Although we have a different type of night out sometimes it we can get worse for wear. It looks the same as what it looked like at 16-18 in the end

Female, 25-30, with degree level education

That's all that happens when you are twenty-five, you just sit in the pub and talk.

Male, 16-18, in education



Implications

- “Personal connection/ growth” and identity based change was one of strongest drivers of moderation – greater than health concerns
- Consequently, strategies that intersected with personal growth trajectories are salient.
- Role for Brief Interventions as can be tailored to individual contexts and experiences

Remaining concerns

- From both key informant data and evidence for participants- young drinkers in informal spaces are a current safety concern
- Alcohol as an environmental issue





Full Report

www.gcph.co.uk/genderandalcohol