
DRINK AND THE LIFE CYCLE: SECOND ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM OF THE WARWICK DRINKING STUDIES NETWORK

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SUMMARY

Drinking alcohol plays an important role in the discursive construction of a wide range of identity formations, including those organised around race, ethnicity, social class, gender, sexuality, occupation, generation, community, and region. Drinking also constitutes a socially complex activity, carrying a huge range of different meanings for different individuals and groups of people, for governments, public service institutions, businesses, and regulatory bodies. Drink and the Life Cycle was an interdisciplinary, one-day symposium that explored the significance of drinking alcohol for different groups of people, at different stages of life, in historical, contemporary and cross-cultural contexts.

The symposium was held at the Institute of Advanced Study at the University of Warwick on 7 March 2009, under the auspices of the Warwick Drinking Studies Network, and it was co-organised by Mark Hailwood (University of Exeter), Deborah Toner (Institute for the Study of the Americas) and Matthew Jackson (University of Warwick). The programme was comprised of two panels in which general discussions followed the presentation of three research papers, and the symposium was brought to a close by Gill Valentine's (University of Leeds) plenary lecture: "Generational Patterns of Alcohol Consumption: Continuity and Change". With the support of the Arts Faculty Roberts Fund, University of Warwick, we were able to waive the registration fee for all participants, and the symposium was attended by 25 delegates from across the United Kingdom and Europe. The full list of participants can be found at the end of this report.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Several important aims were met through this symposium. Firstly, we aimed to capitalise on the early success of the Warwick Drinking Studies Network, which was founded in 2010 as an interdisciplinary research network for scholars working on any aspect of drinking and drinking cultures. In this respect, we hoped that the symposium would not only attract new members to the network, but also advertise the network's achievements to date and its future activities, and provide a forum in which members could forge or solidify mutual intellectual interests. Several of the speakers at the symposium, including Chris Hackley (Royal Holloway, University of London), Shaun Mudd (University of Exeter), Nicolas Pillai (University of Warwick), and Gill Valentine (University of Leeds) were new members, and this symposium afforded a valuable opportunity to explore their research interests with other new and more established members of the network. Moreover, the symposium gave us the opportunity to report some recent

successes of the network and to forge new connections. For instance, four senior members of the network based at the University of Warwick (Beat Kümin, History; Hilary Pilkington, Sociology; Rebecca Earle, Comparative American Studies; and Dieter Wolke, Psychology Department/Health Sciences Research Institute, Warwick Medical School) have recently been awarded an Incubation award from the Institute of Advanced Study to develop a collaborative and multidisciplinary research initiative in the field of “European Drinking Cultures: Practices and Policies in Comparative Perspective”. In addition, the symposium organisers recently convened two panels at a conference hosted by the Centre for the History of Retail and Distribution at the University of Wolverhampton, entitled 'Food and Beverages: Retailing, Distribution and Consumption in Historical Perspective' (7-8 September 2011), and will be editing a special edition of the peer-reviewed journal *Brewery History*, comprised of papers that were presented during this conference.

Our second major aim in hosting the Drink and the Life Cycle symposium was to create an effective forum for the cross-disciplinary interrogation of a single organising research theme: the significance of alcohol for people of different ages, generations, and stages of life. Among the issues that we hoped to address within this larger problematic were: the rituals involving alcohol that mark important life stages (birth, marriages, funerals) in different social contexts; generational differences in drinking behaviours; generational attitudes towards drinking; the role of age/generation in the marketing of alcoholic drinks; the role of age/generation in anti-drinking and responsible drinking campaigns; the relationship between drinking, age and health; how age affects the material culture of drinking; and cultural representations of drinking and different life stages/generations. Most of these issues were explored through the seven presentations and additional discussions that comprised the symposium, and our interdisciplinary approach allowed for numerous and illuminating points of comparison across disparate social contexts. Our speakers hailed from a wide variety of disciplinary backgrounds, including Classics, History, Film Studies, Human Geography, Anthropology, and Marketing, while their presentations discussed alcohol's relationship to age, generation and the life cycle in Ancient Rome, the United States in the mid-twentieth century, and England, in the seventeenth, nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

PANEL 1: SHAUN MUDD (UNIVERSITY OF EXETER), RUTH CHERRINGTON (CLUB HISTORIANS), CHRIS HACKLEY (ROYAL HOLLOWAY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON).

The first panel raised interesting questions about the level of socialisation into drinking practices that young people have experienced in different historical and contemporary contexts, and also highlighted the importance of perceptions and representations in shaping the ways in which societies as a whole understand the drinking behaviours of different age, social and gender groups. Shaun Mudd's paper, “Age and Alcohol in Ancient Rome”, presented an analysis of the legal prescriptions in Ancient Roman society that purportedly forbade all women and, to more varying degrees, slaves and young men, from consuming wine, while establishing wine consumption as the preserve of adult men, especially elite adult men. Mudd highlighted the inconsistencies in Roman law regarding the extent of these prohibitions and also cautioned against assumptions that any version of this law was effectively enforced. Indeed, he argued convincingly that the surviving evidence that describes these legal prescriptions reveals much more about the moral ideals of elite Roman society than social practices of alcohol consumption. Thus, a clear picture emerged of the different roles that wine consumption was expected to play in the different life stages of an elite Roman man. The transition from childhood to youth took

place in the mid-teenage years, and was marked by an initiation ceremony that involved the first wearing of the toga virilus. During childhood, boys could be given small quantities of diluted wine during meals to encourage the development of moderate consumption habits. However, many sources attest to an expectation that the period of youth, during which time the faculty of reason necessary for maturity was developed, would also be marked by exuberant and excessive behaviour regarding wine consumption. Meanwhile, the stage of maturity, typically reached in the mid to late twenties when a man married and when he started a career in politics or business, was viewed as a time of greater balance between mental and physical faculties that would be matched by moderation in patterns of consumption. Many Roman texts actively encouraged old-age men to drink more wine, since it was thought that this would fortify their declining physical and mental faculties.

Ruth Cherrington also mapped the typical socialisation procedures involved in teaching young men from a particular social group the approved models of drinking within that social group. In her paper “Learning to Stand Your Round and Become a Man: Intergenerational Drinking Behaviour in Working Men’s Clubs”, Cherrington outlined the place of youth in the early years of the Working Men’s Club movement in nineteenth-century England, before explaining the mechanisms that helped to transmit the formal and informal rules and regulations about drinking in Working Men’s Clubs that were passed from older to newer generations of club members. With remarkable similarity to present-day concerns about binge-drinking teenagers, Victorian-era advocates of the rational recreation movement hoped that incorporating sporting and educational facilities and activities in the life of Working Men’s Clubs would help to keep youth “hooliganism” to a minimum. So, although they could not become full members of the club until they reached the age of eighteen, many young men frequented clubs with their fathers and older brothers, taking advantage of the boxing lessons and other opportunities provided in these venues. Cherrington also argued that many fathers gave a membership subscription to their sons as an eighteenth birthday present, thus indicating that this signalled an important rite of passage to manhood and acceptance as a full member of the club society. Playing by the rules of rounding and respectable behaviour were also crucial aspects of club society to which young men had to be socialised by the older members of the group.

The final paper of the session argued that, in contemporary Britain, the processes of socialising young drinkers into acceptably moderate patterns of alcohol consumption that both Mudd and Cherrington observed in previous eras had all but disappeared. Chris Hackley, in a paper entitled “Young People, Extreme Drinking and the Spectacle of Alcohol Marketing and Consumption”, presented the findings of a four-year study into the attitudes and practices involving alcohol of young people aged eighteen to twenty-five in three different regions of the UK, alongside an investigation into the representations of young drinkers and different types of alcohol in 216 advertisements.¹ In contrast to the picture of controlled socialisation of young drinkers by older generations indicated by Cherrington and Mudd in their respective investigations into Working Men’s Clubs and elite society in Ancient Rome, Hackley argued that young peoples’ attitudes towards, and experiences of, drink in contemporary Britain were overwhelmingly shaped by their peers. Moreover, he suggested that this had led to a normalisation of extreme drinking amongst young people in their practice of “calculated hedonism”: a conscious decision to engage in extreme drinking and drunkenness with an awareness—and often a clear acceptance—of the wide risk parameters involved in such behaviour. For instance, many of Hackley’s respondents reportedly viewed solitary drinking as inappropriate and indicative of alcoholism, even where the amount of alcohol consumed was

¹ Hackley’s research was conducted in collaboration with: C. Griffin, I. Szmigin, A. Bengry-Howell, and W. Mistral.

very low, whereas group drinking was viewed as socially acceptable and, in this group context, even the consumption of very large quantities of alcohol was often viewed as largely unproblematic. Furthermore, key to this process of normalising extreme drinking patterns were the drinking narratives exchanged within peer groups. In these narratives, experiences involving vomiting, light-headedness, memory loss, and painful hangovers were used as a yardstick to measure the extent of fun that had been had, rather than as an indication that too much alcohol may have been consumed.

Several theoretical speculations made by Hackley in the closing stages of his paper were taken up in the ensuing discussion period. The potential to view the drinking patterns observed in his research as a form of resistance to, or subversion of, bourgeois cultural norms and neoliberal economic structures (building on the work of Jean Baudrillard and Guy Debord) was raised by Rebecca Earle. Hackley speculated further that, if this behaviour can be understood as a process of resistance, it should be understood as unconscious on the part of the participants, and as a dialectic process; in other words, as a form of resistance it never achieves its purpose because, ultimately, it conforms to the rules of the broader economic structure by leading to the increasing expenditure of money on alcohol. Another compelling issue raised in discussion by several participants (Saverio Stranges, Rebecca Earle, and Thomas Thurnell-Read) was the extent to which nostalgia and presentism affect the analysis of historical and foreign drinking practices and environments, and the way that one generation views the drinking habits of its successor. Mudd agreed that analysing Ancient Roman drinking culture was complicated by the available sources, which demonstrate a palpable reverence for the rules and regulations of ancestors that they idealised, and so their writings are often more like conduct manuals rather than descriptions of social practice. Cherrington also acknowledged that the importance of Working Men's Clubs to community identity and solidarity sometimes led to a romanticisation of the social activities that were practiced by their members.

PANEL 2: MATTHEW JACKSON (UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK), NICOLAS PILLAI (UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK), DOREEN JOY BARBER (INDEPENDENT)

Moving away from the focus of the first panel on young drinkers and their socialisation, Matthew Jackson opened the second panel with his paper "The Life Cycle in Print: Old Age Drinkers in Early Modern Ballads", which analysed representations of older drinkers, both male and female, in this popular print culture format that circulated widely in early modern England. Jackson pointed out that there was a general lack of historiography on older drinkers in this period, due in part to the very ambiguous category of "old-age" in early modern society, which could be applied to someone as "young" (in our modern view) as 35, and the consequent lack of meaningful quantitative data. Jackson therefore turned to ballad literature to analyse, more qualitatively, attitudes and beliefs surrounding the role of alcohol consumption for an older drinker. In some ballads, alcohol was lauded for its rejuvenating role in restoring strength and healthfulness, especially among older people who were viewed as physically weaker and humorally "colder" than younger people, in a striking parallel with the Ancient Romans' beliefs outlined by Shaun Mudd. However, Jackson argued that while narratives about the moral and social pitfalls of excessive and exuberant drinking were common in ballads dealing with young drinkers, these messages were particularly pronounced in ballads about older men, and even more so in those about older women. However, two caveats to this overall picture were extremely noteworthy: first, in ballads depicting groups of female drinkers, the oldest woman was often portrayed as the leader and authority figure in the group, indicating an age-based hierarchy operating amongst women drinkers; and, second, some ballads suggested that older

drinkers could legitimately break the rules about moderate alcohol consumption in the context of patriotic celebrations.

Nicolas Pillai's paper, "'A dry Martini you always shake to waltz time': Drinking with Nick and Nora in MGM's Thin Man Films", also discussed how representations of acceptable drinking practices changed as fictional characters became older and acquired greater responsibility. Pillai analysed a series of six comedic mystery films from the 1930s and 1940s, starring William Powell and Myrna Loy as Nick and Nora Charles, a married couple who solved crimes together. In the earlier films in the series, the couple are often seen drinking together and alcohol consumption typically functions as an impetus to fun and comedic interlude. In a notable scene from *The Thin Man* (1934), which Pillai showed, Nick and Nora consume numerous cocktails together, stimulating conversation and witty exchanges between the two, and, overall, the unreliable and cavalier characteristics displayed by the couple in this scene are presented as virtues. By the fourth film in the cycle, however, the couple had become parents and, consequently, they had acquired a permanent domestic base (complete with racially caricatured servant) in contrast to their more carefree lifestyle in previous films where they lived out of hotel rooms. Pillai showed a memorable and awkward scene from this fourth film, *The Shadow of the Thin Man* (1941), in which the child urges Nick to drink a glass of milk instead of a cocktail, which he does reluctantly after Nora joins the child in calling for Nick to forgo the alcohol. Overall, Pillai argued that the entrenchment of more conservative values surrounding marriage and domesticity in 1940s America had led to a re-casting of Nick and Nora as a more responsible couple. This was reflected in the marked change in frequency and tone regarding alcohol consumption from the earlier to the later films, changing from a fun, carefree, yet rather sophisticated practice enjoyed by both characters, to a more dangerous pursuit that both Nora and the child view as potentially threatening to domestic harmony. Although the incident in *The Shadow of the Thin Man* was still treated comedically, a clear moral message regarding the inconsistency of alcohol consumption with family life was nevertheless communicated.

The final paper in this panel questioned the evolving relationship between locality, community, and the pub. Doreen Joy Barber, in a presentation entitled "Pints, Pensioners and Pub Quizzers: Age and Expectations in the Contemporary London Pub", discussed some preliminary findings of a survey and fieldwork undertaken in a selection of North London pubs. Barber had collated information from 58 respondents, most of whom were aged between 21 and 35, with several older respondents. Among the issues examined by Barber's enquiry were: the expressed motivations for going to a particular pub; the understanding of, and extent of affiliation to, a "local" pub; and the influence of age in shaping expectations about the services and environment a pub should offer. Barber acknowledged that the sample collected to date, with its limited age range, precluded any serious analysis of the latter issue; however, the extended responses obtained regarding the first two areas of investigation yielded some interesting findings. While the vast majority of respondents identified social factors behind their choice of pub, the specific pub chosen was often linked to a location that was reached most easily by all members of the chosen group. A centrally located pub (relative to either the work-places or the homes of the gathering group) could help to solve the problem of socialising with friends who lived in a dispersed pattern throughout London. However, spatial convenience was not always prioritised, as some respondents indicated that they would travel further to go to a pub with a good range and selection of beers, or a lively atmosphere. These observations also had ramifications for the issue of "local" pubs, as many respondents noted that since they did not like the pubs in their local area, they regularly went to a "local" that was outside their local community. Other respondents noted that their choice of pub could change depending on their central motivation on any particular occasion: in other words, pub A was good for having a meal with friends, pub B was best for a pub quiz, while pub C was better for a quiet drink.

These observations were pursued further in discussion. Thomas Thurnell-Read suggested that there could be a connection between Barber's observations in pub selection and the rise of a wider cultural emphasis on individuals' lifestyles and choices, superseding the communal and community roles of pubs. Barber agreed that this also resonated with the revival of tastes for real ales, as part of a paradoxical consumer attitude that demonstrated a willingness to buy an "authentic" experience of the traditional. However, Mark Hailwood and David Hitchcock both recommended a note of historical caution in assuming that these developments were necessarily new, citing the notorious example of Samuel Pepys, who vividly depicted his roving excursions around London in his seventeenth century diaries, visiting tavern A for female company, tavern B for food, tavern C for games etc.

Another line of discussion developed around the issues of representation and genre that emerged from the papers given by both Jackson and Pillai. Responding to David Hitchcock's question about how representative the *Thin Man* films were in portraying established tropes of alcohol consumption, especially by women, Pillai explained that early to mid twentieth century Hollywood films were typified by two broad tropes, comedic and melodramatic. In the more dominant melodramatic trope, drinking was presented as a problem, associated with violence or corruption, or signalling a serious dependency upon alcohol as a self-destructive coping mechanism. In the comedic trope, within which the *Thin Man* films could be located, women's drinking usually provoked a comedic or farcical situation, but was generally represented as unproblematic in any larger sense. Even though this trope was common, Pillai argued that the agency displayed by the character of Nora in the drinking scenes in the *Thin Man* films remained quite exceptional for its era. Rebecca Earle then connected these issues of genre and comedic or melodramatic tropes to the narrative tales portrayed in the broadside ballads that Matthew Jackson had analysed. In the ensuing discussion, Jackson, Mark Hailwood and David Hitchcock all noted that there were significant parallels between narrative tropes dealing with male and female characters, and secondly, that stock "old" age characters featured in these narratives. Jackson agreed that more scholarly analysis was needed to establish how the generic aspects of ballads could affect historical understandings of their narratives.

PLENARY LECTURE: GILL VALENTINE (UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS), "GENERATIONAL PATTERNS OF ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE."²

Valentine's plenary lecture opened with the observation that the growing concern in contemporary society about rising levels of alcohol consumption and the phenomenon of binge drinking was often assumed—without much salient evidence—to be connected to shifts in generational patterns of, and attitudes towards, alcohol consumption, thus connecting her presentation to discussions that took place earlier in the symposium about the lens of presentism affecting contemporary debates about drinking. The presentation summarised the findings of a research project that investigated three generations' attitudes towards drinking in the urban area of Stoke and the rural area of Eden, through a methodology that combined telephone surveys, in-depth interviews, and participant observation. The three generations were organised into an older group (aged 65 and over), a middle group (aged 35 to 54) and a young group (aged 18 to 24), and each was asked to answer questions regarding drinking practices in their youth.

² Gill Valentine's research was conducted collaboratively with S. L. Holloway and M. Jayne.

One of the key changes in alcohol consumption patterns, suggested by this investigation, was that drinking in the home, very uncommon amongst the older group, had increased markedly, with the middle group remembering lavish drinks cabinets' in their parents' houses in the 1970s, and the young group reporting that their parents introduced them to alcohol consumption at an early age and were generally relaxed about under-aged drinking as long as it was done at home or under supervision. Moreover, Valentine's young group of respondents reported that "getting drunk" was often the primary motivation for drinking, while this motivation was absent from the statements of the older and middle group respondents. Another key change related to gender, in terms of the frequency, amount and type of alcohol consumed by women as opposed to men. The older group claimed that women had started drinking much later in life than men, and drank very little; the middle group reported a clear differentiation in the types of drinks consumed by women (spirits and mixers) and men (beer, lager, or cider); and the young group reported a more equalised practice, with women being expected to keep up with the drinking of men in their social circles, although women were sometimes still known to drink more sweet drinks than men. Valentine also contended that changing parenting practices, both in terms of how parents consumed alcohol themselves and in their attitudes towards their children drinking, had fuelled a rise in consumption of alcohol amongst young people in more recent generations. Moving away from hierarchical authoritarianism as a style of parenting, towards a preference for discussion and compromise, had led parents to attempt to set controlled boundaries in which their children could drink legitimately and more safely than if they drank outside their parents' knowledge and sphere of influence. Another interesting facet of Valentine's investigation was a study of generational attitudes towards drinking amongst the Pakistani Muslim community within the larger framework of analysis. This revealed that a strict avoidance of alcohol was reported by both the older and middle groups, while there was increasing evidence that men in the young group were drinking alcohol illicitly and in secret. Moreover, amongst all age groups there was an increasing tolerance for other peoples' drinking, but the rigid control of Pakistani Muslim women's relationship to alcohol remained important.

Valentine concluded her lecture by summarising the policy implications of her research:

- alcohol and retail industries have driven change by marketing to new consumer markets
- initiatives to reduce binge-drinking need to tackle changing motivations for drinking
- there is a need to evaluate the effectiveness of parental strategies to instil sensible drinking habits amongst their children
- young people tend to rationalise excessive drinking with the assumption that they will cease such drinking patterns at a later stage

In the following discussion there was some disagreement as to whether alcohol consumption had markedly increased over time, as Valentine's research suggested. Saverio Stranges cited various studies that alcohol consumption had gone up over the last 50 years, while others mentioned NHS reports suggesting that consumption had peaked in the early 2000s and declined steadily over the last 10 years. A difficulty in reaching a firm conclusion was that each of these studies seemed to be based on different standards of measurement and lacked comparability. Valentine also pointed out that this lack of comparability in standards of measurement was a problem in comparing current consumption patterns with historical patterns.

Beat Kümin enquired about how Valentine's policy recommendations had been formulated and what relationship these bore to the overall goals of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which funded part of the research. Valentine acknowledged that the main aim of the Rowntree Foundation was to "address social evils" but emphasised that her research did not conceive of alcohol consumption per se as a "social evil", but that it was important for social scientists to

formulate policies supported by knowledge and understanding that could address some of the serious social problems that alcohol consumption could cause and has caused. In particular, she noted that medical professionals are gravely concerned about rising rates of liver cirrhosis amongst middle-aged and younger sectors of society, which have clear connections to patterns of alcohol consumption.

Other lines of discussion focused on the interpretation of statements made by respondents in surveys and interviews, returning to issues raised in a previous session about the extent to which nostalgia and presentism affect how generations view the drinking habits of their successors. Mark Hailwood, for instance, queried how far the older group's remembered perception of their drinking habits matched the reality, while Matthew Jackson registered some scepticism about drunkenness being the ultimate goal of drinking amongst the young generation. Citing the renowned anthropologist Mary Douglas's conclusion that drunkenness was always a means to something else, Jackson noted that in Chris Hackley's earlier paper, which made a similar observation about drunkenness being the end-point of young people's drinking, the drunkenness was actually a vehicle to the creation of the drunken narrative, with which one could achieve status and admiration amongst one's peers. In response, Valentine acknowledged the validity of these points, but indicated that the narrative evidence provided by older respondents could be ratified with other forms of evidence, and that "getting drunk" as the main aim of drinking still represented a shift in generational approaches to alcohol consumption.

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