

**The role of the media in shaping young people's drinking cultures, practices and related  
identity making: studies of multiple media platforms**

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## **Abstract**

This PhD submission presents a series of peer-reviewed journal articles (and other supporting publications) that synthesise an original programme of research that examined the ways in which the media platforms (magazines, television, marketing, Social Network Sites (SNS)) young people (11-21 years) engage with portrayed alcohol, its use and related practice. Young people's own perspectives, interpretations and experiences were also explored, in order to better understand the role of the media in shaping young people's drinking cultures, practices and related identity making, in ways that are gendered. The underlying theory is presented, the methodological approach employed critically reviewed, and researcher positionality considered. Published findings are then presented that highlight how entertainment media, marketing and peer content on SNS act as important sources of information through which young people learn what is socially acceptable and normative drinking practice for men and women, and how to 'do' and perform gender through alcohol-related practice. The research found that although mediated gendered norms around alcohol are reflected and reproduced in young people's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours, young people also appropriated and rejected alcohol-related messages within their own identity making. The use of the media and social media platforms (e.g. SNS) in disseminating health messages on alcohol to young people and young people's acceptability of such approaches is also addressed. How the research has contributed to knowledge and the implications of the research for public health, gender studies and policy are also considered. The articles presented in this PhD, supporting documents, conference presentations and public engagement, provide a coherent, significant and novel multi-disciplinary contribution to knowledge on the role of the alcohol, media, and alcohol marketing in young people's drinking cultures, and practices, and in shaping their identities. All the research conducted for the publications was undertaken during employment at the Public Health Institute, Liverpool John Moores University.

## **Acknowledgements**

The body of work presented in this thesis has been produced in collaboration with a number of colleagues. Firstly, I am most thankful to Professor Harry Sumnall for his supervision and ongoing support, guidance, encouragement and friendship. Also thanks to Dr Sian Lincoln for acting as the internal expert reviewer and to Dr Ivan Gee for his support and input as internal advisor. In addition, I would like to thank Gill Elliott, Emma Begley and Kim Ross-Houle for their support and contribution to data collection. Further thanks to Dr Andrew Kirton and Professor Fiona Measham for their collaboration and all those participating in the peer review process for their valuable and constructive feedback. Also thanks to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Alcohol Research UK for the funding which made the research possible, and most importantly to all the young men and women for their willingness to share their experiences. Finally, a big thanks to my family and friends (particularly Emma for the desk companionship) for their encouragement and the light relief, with special thanks to Alan (and of course Alf!) for the much needed reassurance, unconditional love, belief and support.

## Chapter 1: Peer-reviewed journal articles submitted for the PhD

### 1.1 Lead authored articles

1. **Atkinson, A.M.** Sumnall, H.R., and Measham, F. (2010). Depictions of alcohol use in a UK Government collaborated online social marketing campaign: Hollyoaks ‘The Morning after the night before’. *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy*, 18(6), 454–467.
2. **Atkinson, A.M.**, Kirton, A.W., and Sumnall, H.R. (2012a). The gendering of alcohol in consumer magazines: An analysis of male and female targeted publications. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 21 (4): 365-386.
3. **Atkinson, A.M.** Bellis, M. and Sumnall, H.R. (2012b). Young people’s perspective on the portrayal of alcohol on television: findings from a focus group study. *Addiction, Research and Theory*, 21(2):91-99.
4. **Atkinson, A.M.**, Ross-Houle, K.M., Begley, E., and Sumnall, H.R. (2016). An exploration of alcohol advertising on Social Networking Sites: an analysis of content, interactions and young people’s perspectives. *Addiction, Research and Theory*, 25(2), 91-102.
5. **Atkinson, A.M.** and Sumnall, H.R. (2016). ‘If I don’t look good, it just doesn’t go up’: a qualitative study of young women’s drinking cultures and practices on Social Network Site’. *International Journal of Drugs Policy*, Dec, 38, 50–62.

**Table 1: Contribution to submitted work**

<b>Article number</b>	<b>Author status*</b>	<b>Summary of contribution</b>
1-5	Lead	<p>I had overall responsibility for the research conducted as part of the manuscripts and overall responsibility for all manuscripts. This included overall research design, data collection (including content analysis, surveys, and qualitative interviews), data analysis, project delivery and project management. The research funding secured for articles 2-5 was secured in collaboration with Professor Harry Sumnall. Research assistant support for data collection was received from Gill Elliott for article 3, and by Kim Ross-Houle and Emma Begley for article 4 and 5.</p> <p>I was principle author on all articles and had full responsibility for designing, drafting and editing all manuscripts, with support and input from Professor Harry Sumnall. Co-author input from Dr Andrew Kirton and Professor Fiona Measham was received for article 2. Draft editing support was provided by Kim Ross-Houle and Emma Begley for article 4.</p> <p>The peer review process for article 1-4 consisted of the manuscript being assessed for suitability by the editor and then being double blind peer-reviewed by independent and anonymous expert referees. For article 5 the review process was single blind. The manuscript was initially assessed by the editor for suitability and then sent to a minimum of two independent expert reviewers to assess the scientific quality of the paper.</p>

## 1.2 Supporting evidence - additional peer reviewed journal articles, reports, book chapters, conferences and public engagement

### 1.2.1 Peer reviewed journal articles, reports and book chapters

1. **Atkinson, A.M.** and Sumnall, H.R. (2017). 'Isn't it mostly girls that do pre-drinks really?' Explanations for pre-loading in young men and women's accounts of social drinking occasions in public drinking environments in the UK. *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy*, doi.org/10.1080/09687637.2017.1377154.
2. **Atkinson, A.M.** and Sumnall, H.R. (2010). Alcohol and Drug Depictions in Magazines Consumed by Young People, *Sucht Magazine, Special Edition - Club Health* (5), 23-24, 2010.
3. **Atkinson, A.M.**, Elliott, G., Bellis, M., and Sumnall, H.R. (2011). Young people, Alcohol and the Media. Final Report. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
4. **Atkinson, A.M.**, Elliott, G., Bellis, M., and Sumnall, H.R. (2011). Young people, Alcohol and the Media. Findings: Informing change. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
5. Jones, L., Hughes, K., **Atkinson, A.M.**, and Bellis, M.A. (2011). Reducing harm in drinking environments: a systematic review of effective approaches. *Journal of Health and Place*, 17(2), 508-518.
6. **Atkinson, A.M.** Sumnall, H.R. and Bellis, M.A. (2012). Substance use among 15-16 year olds in the UK: Key findings from the 2011 European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD). Centre for Public Health, Liverpool John Moores University.
7. Gunby, C., and **Atkinson, A.M.** (2014). Response -Drinking stories: The importance of gender, narrative and epistemology. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 25 (20), 361–362.
8. **Atkinson, A.M.** Ross-Houle, K.M., Begley, E., and Sumnall, H.R. (2015). Constructing alcohol identities: the role of Social Network Sites in young people's drinking cultures. Final Report. Alcohol Research UK.



9. **Atkinson, A.M.** Ross-Houle, K.M., Begley, E., and Sumnall, H.R. (2015). Constructing alcohol identities: the role of Social Network Sites (SNS) in young peoples' drinking cultures'. Alcohol Insights. Alcohol Research UK.
10. Ross-Houle, K., **Atkinson, A.** and Sumnall, H.R. (2016). 'The Symbolic Value of Alcohol Consumption: The importance of alcohol consumption, drinking practices and drinking spaces in classed and gendered identity construction' in Thurnell-Read, T. (Ed). *Drinking Dilemmas: Space, Culture and Identity*. London: Routledge.

### 1.2.2 Conference presentations

1. **Atkinson, A.M.** (2015a). (*Oral presentation by invitation*) Constructing alcohol identities: the role of Social Network Sites (SNS) in young peoples' (YP) drinking cultures. *Research in Focus Seminar*, 21<sup>st</sup> January, 2015, LJMU.
2. **Atkinson, A.M.** and Ross-Houle, K.M. (2015b). (*Oral presentation*) Constructing alcohol identities: the role of Social Network Sites (SNS) in young peoples' (YP) drinking cultures. *Club Health Conference Lisbon, 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> June, 2015*.
3. **Atkinson, A.M.** and Ross,-Houle, K.M. (2015c). (*Poster presentation*) Constructing alcohol identities: online alcohol marketing and young peoples' drinking cultures. *Club Health Conference Lisbon, 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> June, 2015*.
4. **Atkinson, A.M.** (2015d). (*Oral presentation by invitation*) The role of social networking sites in young people's drinking cultures, *Society of Addiction Annual conference. Recent findings from research funded by ARUK, York, 5-6<sup>th</sup> November, 2015*.
5. **Atkinson, A.M.** (2014). (*Oral presentation*). Constructing alcohol identities: the role of gender, media and space in young peoples' drinking cultures. Faculty of Education, Health and Community Annual Conference, 2014
6. Sumnall, H.R. and **Atkinson, A.M** (2011). (*Oral presentation by invitation*). Alcohol, media and celebrity. *Alcohol Concern Annual Conference, London, October, 2011*.

7. **Atkinson, A.M.** and Sumnall, H.R. (2013). (*Oral presentation*) Young people. *Alcohol and the Media: previous findings and future research. ARUK symposium*, London, 29<sup>th</sup> August, 2013
8. **Atkinson, A.M.** (2012a). (*Participation by invitation*) Young people, alcopops and TV culture (Daphne Project). *Round table expert discussion University of Central Lancashire*, 18th May 2012.
9. **Atkinson, A.M.** (2012b). (*Oral presentation by invitation*) Young people, Alcohol and the Media. *Faculty of Applied Social Science Faculty Seminar Series*, LJMU, February 2012.
10. Sumnall, H. and **Atkinson, A.M.** (2011). (*Oral presentation by invitation*) Young People, Alcohol and the Media. *Launch of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation research report*, London, September 2011.
11. **Atkinson, A.M.** (2011a). (*Oral presentation by invitation*) Young people, alcohol and the media. *Centre for Young People's Research*, University of Salford, May 2011.
12. **Atkinson, A.M.** (2011b). Youth and Alcohol Research. BSA Working Group on Alcohol Committee meeting. *British Sociological Association Annual Conference 2011*, London School of Economics, April 2011.
13. **Atkinson, A.M.** (2010a). (*Oral presentation by invitation*) Young people's perspective on alcohol depictions in popular magazines (with an emphasis on celebrity alcohol use). *Club Health Conference: Media Influence on Nightlife, Brussels, October 2010 (presentation supported by the British Sociological Association Early Careers Award)*.
14. **Atkinson, A.M.** (2010b). (*Oral presentation by invitation*) Alcohol, Young People and the Media. *Joseph Rowntree Foundation Project Advisory Committee*, October 2010.
15. **Atkinson, A.M.** (2010c). (*Oral presentation*) Media representations of alcohol and drinking: An analysis of men's and women's targeted magazines. *Club Health Conference 2010*, Zurich, June 2010.

16. **Atkinson, A.M.** (2010d). (*Oral presentation*) Gender differences in media representations of alcohol and drinking: An analysis of male and female targeted magazines. *British Sociological Association Annual Conference*, Glasgow Caledonian University, April 2010.
17. **Atkinson, A.M.** and Sumnall, H.R. (2010) (*Oral presentation*) Alcohol, Young People and the Media. *Joseph Rowntree Foundation Project Advisory Committee*, April 2010.
18. **Atkinson, A.M.** and Sumnall, H.R. (2009a). (*Oral presentation*) Alcohol, Young People and the Media. *Joseph Rowntree Foundation Project Advisory Committee*, November 2009.
19. **Atkinson, A.M.** (2009). (*Poster presentation*) Alcohol on Television: an analysis of alcohol representations in TV programmes viewed by young people. *Society of Addiction Annual Conference*, York, September 2009.
20. **Atkinson, A.M.** (2008). (*Poster presentation*) The media, binge drinking and moral panics: an analysis of the popular British press' portrayal of binge drinking. *Club Health Conference 2008*, 23rd-25th June 2008.

### **1.2.3 Public engagement**

1. **Atkinson, A.M.** (2017). Gender Dilemmas: negotiating femininity and masculinity in contemporary nightlife. *Art exhibition with Q and A, Club Health conference*, 24<sup>th</sup>- 26<sup>th</sup> May, 2017, Dublin.
2. **Atkinson A.M.** (2017). (*Oral presentation by invitation*) Young women, post-feminism and drinking culture: a sign of empowerment? International Women's Day 'Wonderful Women' event. Merseyside People's Assembly Against Austerity and The Homeless Period hosted event, Liverpool Guild of Students, 8<sup>th</sup> March 2017.
3. **Atkinson, A.M.** and Sumnall, H.R. (2017). (*Oral presentation by invitation*) Young women, drinking culture and post-feminism: a sign of empowerment? *Women Hayman's Green Women's Group*, 31st January, 2017, West Derby, Merseyside.

4. **Atkinson, A.M.** (2017b). Gender Dilemmas: negotiating femininity and masculinity in contemporary nightlife. *Art Exhibition. ROAD Studios Liverpool Biennial programme, Carlisle Buildings, Victoria Street, Liverpool, Friday 26<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> August 2016.*
  
5. **Atkinson, A.M.** (2016). Post-feminist 'facade': young women's negotiation of night life drinking spaces and the hypersexual self. *Photography Exhibition. ROAD Studios Liverpool Light Night programme, Carlisle Buildings, Victoria Street, Liverpool, Friday 16th May, 2016.*

## Chapter 2. Introduction

Young people's alcohol consumption is a source of public health and policy concern both nationally and internationally (Department for Children, Schools and Families, et al., 2008; Department of Health, 2007; 2011; Donaldson, 2009; Home Office, 2010; 2012; 2016; WHO, 2014). A reduction in the proportion of young people (aged 11-15, 16-24) in the UK self-reporting drinking, binge drinking, drunkenness and the number of units drunk has recently been observed (Fuller, 2015; Health and Social Care Information Centre, 2015; 2016), with a growing number of abstainers and occasional drinkers (Fuller, 2015; Health and Social Care Information Centre, 2015; 2016). Alongside such downward trends, more 'extreme' drinking, heavy episodic drinking, determined drunkenness and a culture of intoxication continues to be a normal aspect of some young people's social lives (Fuller, 2015; Griffin et al., 2009; Health & Social Care Information Centre, 2015; 2016; Measham, 2004a,b; 2006; Szmigin et al., 2008). Thus, although alcohol use contributes towards health and social problems, for many, drinking and related leisure activities continue to provide social and cultural pleasures, social cohesiveness, sociability, and a way of shaping identity (Griffin et al., 2009; 2012; Measham & Brain, 2005; Niland et al., 2013; 2014; Szmigin et al., 2008; Thurnell-Read, 2016).

Over the last two decades changes in young women's alcohol consumption have been observed, with a notable convergence between the sexes and a relative increase in young women's frequency and level of alcohol consumption, and self-reported drunkenness (Atkinson et al., 2012a; Fuller, 2015; Hibell et al., 2012; Griffin et al., 2012; Mäkelä, et al. 2006; Measham & Østergaard, 2009; Slade et al., 2016; Wilsnack et al., 2000). Despite evidence of convergence, gender pervades experiences of drinking and intoxication, and public drinking spaces are highly gendered and provide important sites for gender performance and a space in which gender relations are played out (Atkinson et al., 2012b; Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016; Bailey et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2012; Lavery et al., 2015; Lyons et al., 2016; Measham & Østergaard, 2009; Ross-Houle et al., 2016; Thurnell-Read, 2016). Society (including the media) tends to respond differently to men's and women's drinking, viewing women's drinking as unfeminine and as more problematic than men's, with the drinking behaviours of white working class women in particular, being perceived as relatively problematic, judged moralistically and creating societal anxiety (Atkinson et al., 2012a; Griffin et al., 2012; Lyons & Willmott, 2008; Measham, 2002; Measham & Østergaard, 2009; Nichols, 2016; Patterson et al., 2016; Ross-Houle et al., 2016). In contrast, alcohol use, public drinking, intoxication and the behaviours that surround drinking act as markers of masculinity, with non-drinking often being perceived as symbolising weakness, homosexuality, and femininity (De Visser et al., 2007; 2009; De Visser & Smith, 2007; De Visser & McConnell, 2012). The importance of alcohol-related practice to young people's social lives, peer groups and gendered

identity making practices thus has implications for alcohol-related behaviours and potential impact on health (Atkinson et al., 2012a; De Visser & Smith, 2007a; b).

Multiple interrelated reasons may help explain trends in young people's alcohol use and the role of alcohol use, culture and leisure spaces in their identity making practices. These include peers, family, policy, popular cultural context and fashions, as well as marketing, advertising and media messages (Babor et al, 2010; Borsari & Carey, 2006; Bremner et al., 2011; Brody, et al., 2000; Fossos & Larimer, 2007; Fuller, 2015; McCreanor et al., 2008; Measham & Østergaard, 2009; Purves et al., 2015; Smith & Foxcroft, 2009; Spijkerman, et al., 2007; Velleman, 2009; Yanovitzky & Stryker, 2001). The media is of great importance in the lives of young people (boyd, 2007; Drotner & Livingstone, 2008; Miles, 2000; Ofcom, 2008; 2009; 2010; 2013), in which representations of alcohol are ubiquitous and present in many forms ( e.g. film, television, magazines, news media, online/social media), and in ways that are gendered in nature (Atkinson et al., 2011; 2015; 2016; Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016; Babor, 2017a; Baillie, 1996; Lyons et al., 2016). An association between individual exposure to alcohol advertising, young people's attitudes towards (e.g. positive expectancies) alcohol, and their subsequent drinking practices (e.g. initiation into drinking, heavier drinking among existing drinkers) exists and depictions of alcohol in edited films and television programmes have been shown to increase contemporaneous drinking (Alcohol Focus Scotland, 2017; Anderson et al. 2009; Babor et al., 2010; 2017a,b; BMA, 2009; Burton et al., 2016; Ellickson et al., 2005; Engels, *et al.*, 2009; Gordon et al., 2010a,b; Grube & Waiters, 2005; Jernigan et al., 2017; Robinson, *et al.*, 1998; Smith & Foxcroft 2009; Stautz et al., 2016; Synder et al., 2006; Tanski et al., 2014; Van den Bulck, *et al.*, 2009). However, cumulative media effects are likely (Babor et al., 2010; Gerbner, 1986; Gordon et al., 2010a,b), and the association between alcohol-related media messages and young people's alcohol-related attitudes, beliefs and behaviour should not be treated as straightforwardly causal (Baillie, 1996; Hansen, 1988; Kotch, *et al.*, 1986; Robinson, *et al.*, 1998; Rychtarik, *et al.*, 1983; Sobell, *et al.*, 1986; Westgate & Holiday, 2016).

Whilst young people are consumers and receivers of media and marketing messages around alcohol, more recently they have also become producers of mediated alcohol content as they engage with social media as part of their everyday lives and identity performance (Lincoln & Robards, 2016; Mendelson & Papacharsi, 2010). SNS provide further opportunity for alcohol, brands, the consumption of alcohol, related behaviour, leisure and intoxication to become valued aspects of young people's peer groups and identities, and an additional context in which the predominantly positive and social aspects of drinking experiences are extended and enhanced (Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016; Atkinson et al., 2016; Lyons et al., 2014; 2015; 2016; Niland et al., 2014; Ridout, 2016; Tonks, 2012).

If the media plays an influential role in young people's relationship with alcohol, then some media platforms may also provide a useful means of delivering preventive actions on alcohol (e.g. health messaging, brief intervention) to young people (Atkinson et al., 2010; Atkinson et al., 2016; Baillie, 1996; Bennett, *et al.*, 1991; Boots & Midford, 2003; Egger, Donovan, & Spark, 1993). Although underused, as an extension of peer networks, social media, may also provide an interactive and novel means of engaging young people with public health messages, intervention and prevention in addressing alcohol use as part of multi-component approaches (Atkinson et al., 2015; 2016; Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016; Ridout & Campbell, 2014; Ridout et al., 2016).

There is a lack of qualitative research exploring the role of the media in shaping young people's alcohol-related experiences. This thesis illustrates how the original research I have conducted explored the alcohol-related messages young people are exposed to and engage with through their use of both traditional (e.g. TV, magazines) and new social media (SNS), and their role in shaping young people's drinking cultures, practices and identity-making in ways that are often gendered. The publications presented explored young people's experiences as both consumers (e.g. television, magazines) and producers (e.g. SNS) of media content, acknowledging their own creation of alcohol-related content on SNS, and their recent role in co-creating online alcohol marketing. Overall, this programme of research expands on current research by providing new research on:

- the ways in which alcohol, drinking and related practice is represented in traditional media (e.g. television, magazines) and social media (e.g. SNS) engaged with by young people, including the gendered nature of such content.
- the extent and nature (e.g. gendered) of alcohol marketing on traditional media platforms (e.g. television), and the recent use of SNS as an extension of the alcohol industries' multi-platform marketing.
- how young people perceive and engage with media representations of alcohol and alcohol marketing in both traditional and social media, and the gendered nature of engagement.
- the role of media depictions of alcohol and alcohol marketing in young people's drinking cultures, practices and in their gendered identity making practices.
- the potential use of the media and social media platforms such as SNS in delivering health responses to alcohol targeting young people.

The remaining sections of the thesis are organised in the following way. Chapter 3 critically discusses the methods and theory employed across the body of work and considers researcher positionality. Chapter 4 examines findings that explored the depiction of alcohol, drinking and related

practice in traditional media (television and magazines (non-marketing and marketing orientated)) representations engaged with by young people, and young people's interpretations and perspectives. Chapter 5 provides insight into the role of social media such as SNS in young people's drinking cultures, exploring alcohol marketing on SNS as a relatively new marketing platform, young people's interaction with SNS marketing and their own display of alcohol-related content on SNS. Chapter 6 explores the use of the media in public health responses to young people's drinking, and the role of online platforms such as SNS. Chapter 7 provides an overview of how the research has contributed to knowledge, public health and gender studies, and Chapter 8 discusses the implications of the research for policy. Chapter 9 reflects on the researcher's contribution, personal development and discusses future research.

The work summarised in this submission has been supported by colleagues from LJMU with funding from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Alcohol Research UK. All publications have been produced during my employment at the Public Health Institute (PHI; formerly the Centre for Public Health), Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) and have not been submitted for any other degree award. The candidate was principle author for all articles submitted.



### **Chapter 3: Methodology, theoretical approach and researcher positionality**

A mixed methods approach, incorporating analysis of media content and qualitative research with young people (aged 11-21), was used to explore the way in which alcohol, drinking and related practice were presented by the media, marketing and SNS that young people engage with, and their role in shaping young people's drinking cultures, practice and identity making.

Any study of media and marketing depictions and their influence on young people must begin by establishing what media platforms young people use. Carefully selecting media content for analysis was therefore a crucial element of the studies (Hansen & Gunter, 2007). A variety of existing data sources (ABC, 2009; BARB, 2009; NLT, 2005; 2008; NRS, 2009; Ofcom, 2008; 2013; 2014) and a survey questionnaire of young people (n=194) were used to explore what types of media young people consume. Based on these analyses, the research focussed on television programmes, magazines and a number of Social Network Sites (i.e. Facebook, Twitter) popular among young people. Alcohol marketing within such content was also analysed, and for the analysis of alcohol brand marketing on SNS, alcohol brands popular with young people were selected for analysis by examining existing data on young people's consumption choices (Alcohol Concern, 2012; 2013; Trading Standards, 2013).

Whilst selecting a sample of media and marketing content for analysis based on young people's consumption choices was useful in providing a sample that was more representative of young people's media use, a number of other media platforms (e.g. radio, news media, other SNS such as YouTube) and content were not analysed, and as such the findings do not relate to the entire media environment young people engage with. As such, reference to 'media' in this thesis is defined as television, magazines, the SNS Facebook (and linked Instagram photos) and Twitter, and alcohol marketing on these platforms. Once a sample of media content (e.g. SNS, SNS brand marketing, television programmes, magazines) had been selected, both a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of alcohol depictions was conducted to establish the way in which alcohol, its use and related practice was represented. A combination of pre-determined and emerging codes were employed and both the extent and nature of alcohol-related depictions in media young people engage with were examined (Krippendorff, 1980; Boyatzis, 1998).

Semi-structured group interviews with peer groups of young people (aged 11–21 years) were then conducted to explore young people's drinking practices and the way in which young people respond to, interact with, use, and draw upon media depictions of alcohol within their own drinking cultures, practices, and identity making. Group discussions were used to reflect the real life group dynamics, experiences, shared knowledge and meaning within the group and how consensus was achieved, whilst acknowledging how different groups (i.e. females and males) may construct different knowledge and express multiple meanings on the same issue (Eder & Ferguson 2003; Heath et al. 2009;

Griffiths & Casswell 2010; Lunt & Livingstone 1996). Although interviews were based on a predetermined, semi-structured interview schedule, emerging patterns and themes were identified from the transcripts and coded using an inductive thematic analysis approach in NVivo (version 10) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A representative selection of media depictions and marketing analysed in the content analysis was presented to participants to help guide discussion. A (social constructionist) informed thematic analysis was chosen as an ‘accessible and-flexible approach to analysing qualitative data’ that is ‘compatible with a constructionist paradigm’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006:2, 5). However, within the thesis papers in which gender was explored in more detail (Atkinson et al., 2016; Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016; 2017), the analysis was similar to discourse analyse, in that the way in which gender was mobilised and constructed, and the gendered power relations present in participants talk within the context of the focus group was explored, recognising how language is constitutive of meaning and how meaning is socially constructed (Braun & Clarke, 2006:9; Lyons et al., 2016).

### **3.2 Theoretical position**

Across all publications, media depictions of alcohol (and products/brands), alcohol use and related behaviour, alcohol marketing, and self/peer displays of drinking on SNS, were positioned as cultural resources through which young people learn what are socially acceptable and normative drinking practices for men and women. Young people were positioned as using consumption (e.g. branding), leisure and lifestyle (i.e. drinking) in their construction and performance of identity in a media saturated environment (Butler, 1999; Giddens, 1984; 1991; McCreanor et al., 2005a; 2005b; 2013; Measham & Østergaard, 2009; Miles 1998; 2000; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Whilst identities are fluid and shifting, based on an individual’s means to consume, it was acknowledged that they are also structured by cultural tastes and access to economic and cultural resources (e.g. consumption practices and leisure), and as such lived experiences of gender, age, and class (Bourdieu, 1984; Hutton et al., 2016; Giddens, 1991; Miles, 1998; 2000; Skeggs, 1997; 2004; 2005; Warde, 2006; Wetherell, 2009). This meant that consumer items and associated leisure activities (e.g. products/brands, drinking practices, intoxication and participation in drinking spaces) are seen as creating, signally and reinforcing gendered identity (Atkinson et al., 2012a; De Visser and Smith, 2007a,b; De Visser et al., 2009; De Visser and McDonnell, 2012; Griffin et al. 2009; 2012; Guise & Gill, 2007; Lyons & Willott, 2008; McCreanor et al., 2008; 2013; Measham, 2002; Skeggs, 1997; 2004; Stead et al., 2011; Szmigin et al. 2008, Thurnell-Read, 2012; 2013).

Media and identity theories that highlight the importance of the media and marketing as not only reflecting society but helping to shape it (Giddens, 1984; 1991; Miles, 2000) were merged with gender theories (Butler, 1999; Measham, 2002; West and Zimmerman, 1987) that position gender (i.e. difference between males and females) as a performance that is enacted and accomplished by

individuals through repeated action. By doing so, it was theorised that by presenting norms of what is gender appropriate drinking practice, the media, marketing and self/peer displays on SNS, provide a guide through which young people learn how to accomplish gender identities through alcohol-related practice, thus influencing their alcohol-related behaviours. However, young people are not seen as merely copying mediated norms, but as actively reproducing, appropriating, rejecting and co-creating/producing (i.e. SNS) certain media messages. Thus, media representations are positioned as being open to interpretation by active audiences, who may reject, negotiate, modify, and actively re-appropriate representations according to their own everyday experiences, identity-making practices, and by social context (Buckingham, 1993; 1997; Byrant & Zillman, 2002; Fiske, 1989; Gauntlett, 2002; Hansen, 1988; Kehily, 1999; Morley, 1993). Thus, the theories applied in this thesis addressed the role of both structure (e.g. media, marketing, gendered norms) and agency (i.e. young people's practices), positioning mediated gendered and social norms around alcohol as macro structural influences on young people, whilst acknowledging the way in which young people actively reproduce, but also reject, these mediated norms within their own gendered action/agency at the micro level (i.e. within peer groups) (Giddens, 1991; Butler, 1999).

### **3.3 Epistemology**

A social constructionist approach was taken, in which meaning, norms and gendered identity are positioned as being created through social interaction and language, and reproduced through individual action (Braun & Clarke, 2016). This approach was appropriate for researching media influence in that it allowed for the study of mediated gendered and social norms as macro structural factors that influence individual agency (e.g. alcohol-related practice) and the importance of media language and imagery in constructing gendered norms around alcohol (Giddens, 1991; Baillie, 1996; Butler, 1991). Moreover, it allowed for the application of gender theory which positions gender as being socially constructed through repeated action (agency), which is influenced by mediated (structural) gendered norms of what it means to be a man and a woman and how one can 'do' gender identity appropriately (Butler, 1991; Measham, 2002; West & Zimmerman, 1987; Gauntlett, 2002). The methodology employed was thus influenced by the social constructionist approach, incorporating the study of media representations (i.e. language) and the use of focus groups to establish how young people create shared meaning and understanding at the micro level (e.g. peer groups, SNS, within a focus group) through interactions with their peers and group talk/language (Demant & Jarvinen, 2010, Lyons et al., 2016)

### **3.4 Researcher reflexivity and positionality**

It is important to reflect on how my own subjectivity and positionality informed the research process. With a particular interest and an academic background in sociology, gender and feminist studies, the research questions explored in the thesis were to some extent influenced by my assumptions and prior knowledge of how experiences of drinking are gendered and how women experience drinking in inequitable ways. Whilst my personal history as a female who has experienced inequities through gender and my own ideological outlook as a feminist was not projected onto participants or made obvious in the context of the focus groups, it did guide the research questions, theoretical underpinning and analytic interpretations and meant that a gendered account dominated the analysis. Moreover, as a white heterosexual woman from a working class background who has experienced social mobility through university education and my position as an academic, the role of other inequalities such as race and sexuality may not have been interpreted in the same way as that of gender and class. That said, the racial dimensions to young women's construction of femininity through their drinking experience and the heteronormative context of drinking establishments were explored. The data analysis and interpretation were also discussed, checked, reworked and reanalysed with colleagues to enhance the robustness, reliability and validity of the analytical procedure. However, an examination of drinking experiences with a primary focus on gender without incorporating the intersectional role of gender, class, race and sexuality, constructs only a partial account (Gunby & Atkinson, 2014). The decision to focus on gender and not class, race and sexuality in the sampling of research participants, may also reflect my status as a white heterosexual academic feminist, and this is something I aim to examine in future research by taking more of an intersectional approach.

My position as a female researcher conducting group interviews with young men around the gendered nature of media depictions and drinking will have also influenced the discussions. Young men's talk would have differed in the presence of a male researcher in that the presence of females can act to inhibit the free flow of conversation amongst men (Gunby et al., 2016). Although the research discussed how gendered identity making was at play within the context of the focus groups (Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016; 2017), as a female researcher there may have been elements of masculine identity performance within young men's talk around their drinking experiences that I did not recognise and interpret to the same extent as the performance of femininity.

It is also important to reflect on my position as both a public health researcher and a feminist scholar. Employing a sociological, gendered and feminist perspective within my work that emphasises how the unequal treatment of women drinkers by the media works in a way to reinforce wider gender inequality and stereotypes, may seem at odds with a public health approach that aims to address and reduce young women's alcohol use and related harm. Whilst the PhD acknowledges that the convergence in men and women's drinking and women's 'equal right to drink' may reflect the positive

changing social positions and economic dependence of women (Schmidt, 2014), it is as equally important to acknowledge the health implications of their increased alcohol use (Schmidt 2014; Slade et al., 2017). Moreover, the assumption that women's more equal participation in drinking, drinking spaces and their freedom of sexual expression in drinking spaces has been nothing but a gain for feminism, by reflecting progress based on women's rising economic and sexual freedom, and the right to choose, express and enjoy within neo-liberal discourses of individualism, choice and empowerment, is illusionary (Griffin et al., 2012). Not only has this discourse provided a justification for the rejection of feminism as outdated and unneeded among some young women (Griffin et al., 2012; McRobbie, 2007; 2009), but it disguises the continued sexual and gender double standards that women face in relation to their participation in drinking, the anxiogenic impact that such double standards have upon their wider well-being, and the continued unequal and patriarchal context of the night life environment in which women are expected to drink and dress sexually in ways that reduce them to the body, whilst at the same time placing their health and well-being at risk through the threat of unwanted sexual attention (Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016; Griffin et al., 2012).

A gendered and feminist critique of the ways in which the media frames women's drinking as more problematic than men's may again seem at odds with a public health perspective that at times uses the gendered stereotypes that are promoted in the media as part of preventative efforts (Farrugia, 2017). For example, there are examples of public health responses that use gender stereotypes to shame and scare young women (and not men) into changing their drinking and sexual behaviour in night life spaces with the aim of improving health (i.e. reducing drinking and sexual assault) (Farrugia, 2017; Griffin et al., 2012). Whilst such approaches (Department of Health & Aging 2008, Davies et al., 2017; e.g. 'If you drink like a man you may end up looking like one') may have 'good intentions' to improve health, evidence of the effectiveness of such approaches and their acceptability by young people is limited and the way in which they constitute gender has been questioned and accused of reproducing, rather than reducing, a range of harms (Farrugia, 2017). Moreover, such approaches fail to recognise how gender transgressions may be a source of pleasure and humour for some young women, rather than regretful, and as such may fail to have the preventative effects intended (Brown & Greggs., 2012). Approaches that address drinking, sexual behaviour and sexual assault have also been accused of victim blaming and holding young women responsible in ways that young men are not, and as neglecting the wider environment in which women are targeted with cheap alcohol by the industry and expected to dress hyper-sexually in night life environments within the wider sexualisation of culture (Brown & Greggs. 2012; Farrugia, 2017; Griffin et al., 2012). Such approaches are also ethically questionable in the way they reinforce wider gender inequality, and how they can provoke anxiety among young women in relation to body image, thus impacting on their health and well-being beyond that of alcohol-related harm (Farrugia, 2017; Griffin et al., 2012). For example, this research found that (Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016) mediated gender stereotypes that judged their sexuality, attractiveness and weight led to anxiety

and unhealthy dietary patterns among some young women. This highlights how such approaches that reflect negative, moralistic and unequal media representations of women's drinking in an attempt to reduce drinking, may have unintended effects on young women's health and their wider wellbeing, and illustrates the value of a gendered and feminist critique to public health.

### **3.5 Limitations of the research**

A number of limitations of the methods must be acknowledged and addressed in future research.

- Although the role of class in young people's rejection of certain media messages and alcohol brands emerged within the research, the body of work would have benefited from exploring class (Bailey et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2012; Hutton et al., 2016; Nichols, 2016) in young people's experiences in more detail. Importantly, the interlinking role of gender, class, race, age, sexuality and locality within young people's alcohol-related identity construction is an important consideration for future research (Gunby & Atkinson, 2014).
- The sample of TV programmes and magazines engaged with by young people analysed was cross-sectional and cannot necessarily be regarded as representative of the media young people currently engage with (e.g. a number of 'lads mags' have since ceased publication). However, by selecting content for creation based on viewing and readership data (ABC, 2009; BARB, 2009) and a survey of young people's media use, the content selected was as representative of young people's TV viewing and magazine readership as possible. Similarly, both the analysis of marketing and young people's display of drinking-related content on SNS focussed upon a small sample of social media platforms (i.e. Twitter, Facebook, the display of Instagram photos on Facebook). However, social media provides a much more diverse landscape (Lincoln & Robard, 2016) and young people were using a range of social media platforms in addition to those studied (e.g. WhatsApp, Snap Chat).
- Marketing and young people's self-display of drinking on SNS were analysed separately, and although young people reflected upon examples of SNS content within the group interviews, analysis of content was based on the application of a research informed coding frame, and not young people's own interpretations. Future research would benefit from incorporating participatory methods in which young people are treated as co-analysts and are asked to navigate through and reflect upon their social media profiles and newsfeeds (Lincoln & Robard, 2016; Lyons et al., 2016; Niland, 2014).

- In terms of measuring user engagement with brand content on the SNS Facebook, the study used ‘likes’ as the main measure of interaction. This measure is likely to underestimate interaction as it fails to capture young people’s exposure to and engagement with marketing within their newsfeed as a result of algorithms and their friends posting. Again, techniques, such as the use of interviews in which young people navigate their SNS profiles and newsfeeds with the researcher would have allowed for these additional mechanisms of exposure and interaction to be captured (Lincoln & Robard, 2016; Lyons et al., 2016; Niland, 2014).
- Given the qualitative nature of the work it cannot be stated that the findings are representative of all young people’s drinking experiences, although the findings broadly reflect those of other international research (e.g. Bailey et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2012; Hutton et al., 2016; Lyons et al., 2014, 2015; Niland et al., 2014; Tonks, 2012). It is also difficult to make statements in terms of media ‘effects’, this would have required a different study design on a much larger scale, and was not the intention of the research. Instead the research highlights how young people interpreted media messages, not as passive recipients, but as critical readers of media content (Atkinson et al. 2011; 2012a, b; Morley, 1993).
- Whilst group interviews provided a way of gaining insight into young people’s shared experiences and understanding of drinking and the role of the media in their drinking practices, cultures and identity making, they tend to produce more positive and desirable accounts, meaning certain insights may have been omitted (Lyons et al., 2016). Future research would benefit from considering these methodological issues by comparing the findings of individual compared to group interviews.

## **Chapter 4. Findings- representations of alcohol in traditional media consumed by young people and young people's perspectives**

The extent to which the media influences young peoples' drinking cultures, practices and related identity making is ambiguous, yet a variety of media act as sources of information on what is regarded as socially acceptable and gender-appropriate (and inappropriate) drinking practices (Aitken et al., 1988; Baillie, 1996; Berkowitz, 2005; Gerbner, et al., 1986; Montonen, 1996; Perkins, 2003). The chapter begins by considering the role of television, exploring the ways in which alcohol and drinking are represented in television programmes viewed by young people, young people's interpretations and their influence, before presenting findings related to magazines.

### **Submitted articles:**

1. **Atkinson, A.M.**, Kirton, A.W., and Sumnall, H.R. (2012a). The gendering of alcohol in consumer magazines: An analysis of male and female targeted publications. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 21 (4): 365-386.
2. **Atkinson, A.M.**, Bellis, M. and Sumnall, H.R. (2012b). Young people's perspective on the portrayal of alcohol on television: findings from a focus group study. *Addiction, Research and Theory*, 21(2):91-99.

### **Supporting evidence:**

1. **Atkinson, A.M.**, Elliott, G., Bellis, M., and Sumnall, H.R. (2011). Young people, Alcohol and the Media. Final Report. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
2. **Atkinson, A.M.** and Sumnall, H.R. (2010). Alcohol and Drug Depictions in Magazines Consumed by Young People. *Sucht Magazine, Special Edition - Club Health* (5), 23-24, 2010.



#### **4.1 Television representations of alcohol and drinking**

Based on the premise that young people are exposed to a range of televised information on alcohol and drinking that influences their socialisation into alcohol-related attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours (Aitken et al., 1988; Baillie, 1996; DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989; Gerbner, et al., 1986; Giddens, 1991; Montonen, 1996; Perkins, 2003), a large number of studies have been conducted that provide evidence that alcohol use is a prominent feature of entertainment television (Blair et al, 2005; Coyne & Ahmed, 2009; Furham et al., 1997; Hansen, 2003; Mathios et al., 1998; McGee et al., 2007; Pitt et al., 2005; Thompson, 2005; Van Den Bulke et al., 2009; Van Hoof et al., 2009; Verma, et al., 2007). However, gaps in research exist and there is a lack of critical analysis examining the content and depiction of alcohol and drinking in programmes specifically viewed by young people. Reflecting the tradition of young people being treated as passive media consumers, there is also a lack of qualitative research exploring young people's own perspectives on these issues (Atkinson et al., 2011; 2012b).

Research designed, conducted, published (Atkinson et al., 2010; 2011; 2012b) and presented (e.g. Atkinson, 2009; 2011a) by the applicant combined an analysis of the depictions of alcohol and its use in television programmes (N=10) viewed by young people, with qualitative focus group research with young people (N=114) aged 11-18 years of age. A number of important findings emerged that not only confirmed findings of past research, but provided novel insights that addressed gaps in research by providing young people's perspectives. The findings of a content analysis (Atkinson et al., 2011) suggested some explanations for the high prevalence of alcohol and its use on television. Firstly, drinking was used instrumentally as a mechanism for instigating character interaction and conversation, to move a scene from one situation to another, and was used as a means of introducing new characters within public drinking environments. Secondly, alcohol use was used as a symbolic device to signify various narrative themes and to reflect a character's mood (e.g. celebration, romance, sexual facilitation, depression). Alcoholic beverages were also presented as symbolic of gender, which focus groups confirmed reflected and reinforced young people's perceptions of gender appropriate drinking practices, with young people reproducing these gendered norms through their own drinking choices. Thirdly, whilst consequence-free alcohol use was predominately portrayed, the effects of alcohol were used to introduce elements of drama and comedy. Both the positive (e.g. laughing) and negative (e.g. alcohol dependence) consequences and effects of alcohol use were shown, but as previous research (Hansen, 2003) in this area has suggested, alcohol and drinking were 'naturalised' within TV programmes, in that drinking was portrayed as a normal and most often unproblematic social activity. Alcohol dependence was the only content identified where alcohol featured as a storyline narrative itself and

was portrayed as socially unacceptable and associated with stereotypes such as homeless people using a certain degree of negative labelling (e.g. ‘alchies’[alcoholic]; ‘tramps’ [homeless people]).

Young people both reproduced and rejected the way in which alcohol was represented on television. They showed a high degree of awareness of the prominence of alcohol use on TV and were aware that TV’s focus on the more extreme effects of alcohol use (e.g. violence and addiction) for dramatic effect and that the exclusion of the subtler and more common effects (e.g. hangovers) provided a skewed representation. As such, the more negative representations of alcohol were rejected by young people and viewed as irrelevant to their own experiences. However, television depictions reflected and reinforced alcohol use as a normalised, gendered and consequence-free activity among young people, with such representations being reproduced through their own attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. Television also reinforced particular stereotypes of problematic alcohol use and the idea that problematic use and effects are experienced by particular social groups. This worked in a way to further reinforce the perception that negative outcomes of use are unrelated to young people’s own experiences, whilst reproducing negative stereotyping and young people disassociating themselves from certain alcohol brands that were regarded as being consumed by these social groups. Overall, participants felt that skewed depictions of alcohol on television should be addressed and that television should provide a more balanced view of alcohol use, showing both the positive side of drinking and the possible negative effects without an overemphasis on the latter (Atkinson et al., 2011; 2012b).

#### **4.2 Magazine representations of alcohol and drinking**

Like television, magazines propagate many modern life-styles and are infiltrated with images and messages relating to leisure and consumption practices such as alcohol use (Antilla & Kuussaari, 2005; Burton, 2005; Elliott, 1994; Gauntlett, 2002; Turner, 2004). Only a limited body of research has focussed on magazine representations of alcohol and drinking, examining the extent and nature of alcohol adverts in youth-targeted magazines and the stereotypical nature of masculinity and femininity presented within alcohol depictions (Ellickson et al., 2005; Garfield et al., 2003; Gill, 2007a; King et al., 2009; Minkler et., 1987; Nelson, 2006; Nelson & Young, 2005; Törrönen & Roumeliostis, 2015; Törrönen & Simonen, 2015; Törrönen et al., 2015). There is no other UK research focussing on the representations of alcohol and drinking in magazines read by young people, and research considering young people’s own perspectives and use of such messages within their own practices. In the same manner as the study of television, research designed, conducted, published (Atkinson et al., 2010; 2011; 2012a) and presented (e.g. Atkinson, 2010a, c, d) by the applicant combined both a content analysis of the depictions of alcohol and its use in magazines (N=13) targeted at men and women that are read by young people, with qualitative focus group research with young people (N=114, 11-18 years). The

research aimed to gain insight into young people's perspectives, experiences and understandings of the ways in which alcohol, drinking and related practice is portrayed in magazines, and the reproduction and rejection of the gendered norms around alcohol presented within the media by young people.

Content analysis (Atkinson et al., 2011; Atkinson et al., 2012a) provided evidence that alcohol and drinking were prominent in magazines read by young men and women, with alcohol use being portrayed as a frequent and natural part of social interaction for both genders. Of significance, was the finding that the treatment of alcohol-related behaviour was highly gendered with differences in how alcohol, its use and related behaviour by men and women, were presented. Similar to representations on television, alcoholic beverages were presented as highly gendered consumer products, with the gendering of alcoholic drinks influencing young people's beverage choice with the majority rejecting drinks associated with the opposite sex in their performance of gender (Atkinson et al., 2011; 2012a; Wearing & Wearing, 2000; Forsyth et al., 2007; Gilbert, 2007). Reflecting findings of other research (Törrönen & Simonen, 2015), alcohol use (particularly wine and cocktails) in women's magazines was framed as an important aspect of women's leisure practices, fun and pleasure and drinking was depicted in a glamorous and luxurious manner. However, women's alcohol use was also depicted as problematic, with disapproval and concern, and as harmful to femininity (e.g. related to vulnerability, lacking self-control, sexually promiscuity, weight, and appearance). Female drinkers were framed as self-governing subjects with the responsibility of regulating their drinking in accordance (Atkinson et al., 2011; 2012a; Patterson et al., 2016; Törrönen & Simonen, 2015), whilst men were framed as free to engage in hedonistic leisure as a symbol of masculinity (Atkinson et al., 2012a). Focus group discussions showed that whilst some young people were critical of and rejected such depictions as reflecting society's unequal attitudes towards women more generally, many, including young women, reproduced judgemental views of women as transgressing stereotypical gender-appropriate behaviour through their displays of public drunkenness (e.g. 'out of control') and sexual agency (e.g. 'whore') in nightlife spaces (Atkinson et al., 2011; 2012a; Patterson et al., 2016). With reference to such images, many self-monitored their own drinking, related behaviours (e.g. sexual expression) and appearance (e.g. weight, dress), and as such reproduced mediated gendered norms around drinking through their own practices (Atkinson et al., 2011; 2012a).

Men's magazines portrayed beer consumption in particular as a key aspect of masculinity, and with other aspects of masculine identity such as football fandom and spectatorship, pub culture, and male bonding, in ways that reinforced the cultural history of a mutually reinforcing relationship between sport, beer, and gender (Atkinson et al., 2012; 2012a; Jones et al., 2010; Mean, 2009; Weed, 2007; Wenner & Jackson 2009a, b). Both young men and women criticised and rejected depictions of alcohol signifying drinking to masculinity, yet acknowledged that in real-life drinking situations, men feel pressured to drink, and through gendered associations, magazines add to society's expectations that to

be perceived as masculine, young men should consume alcohol, particularly beer, with many prescribing to such expectations (Atkinson et al., 2011; 2012a). When women were portrayed as drinking in men's magazines they reinforced existing unequal gender relations through being labelled unfeminine and deviant with reference to the 'ladette', as vulnerable, out of control, emotional, sexually objectified and presented as more readily available to men when drunk (Atkinson et al., 2011; 2012a). Young people, particularly young women, rejected the way in which alcohol was associated with sexual encounters and women's sexuality in men's magazines, and felt such depictions were problematic by suggesting women are more willing to have sex when intoxicated and having potential implications for sexual consent (Atkinson et al., 2012).

Whereas television programmes tend to target a wider audience of both males and females, magazines are highly gendered and by targeting men or women, they act as important spaces for the construction and reproduction of normative conceptions of femininity and masculinity (Evans et al., 1991; Gauntlett, 2002; Gill, 2007a; Jackson et al., 2001; Schirato & Yell, 1999). As such, the ways in which magazines represent alcohol, its use and related leisure not only reflects and reinforces social norms regarding alcohol use, but contributes towards shaping and regulating young readers knowledge on what is regarded as gender-appropriate practices (Gill, 2007b; Törrönen et al., 2015). The research (Atkinson et al., 2011, 2012a) showed that by presenting particular gendered representations of alcohol, drinking and related leisure, magazines created 'ideal' drinking practices for young men and women, and these contributed to differential expectations regarding men's and women's alcohol-related behaviours, which were reproduced through young people's own practices and in their accomplishment of gendered identities (Currie 1999; Goffman, 1976; Skeggs 1997; 2004; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

### **4.3 Alcohol marketing in television and magazines consumed by young people**

Television and magazine content is not only formulated based on the assumed expectations of audiences, but texts are constructed with reference to the expectations and economic interests of advertisers (Törrönen & Simonen 2015). Both television and magazines continue to provide platforms for the alcohol industry to market its brands and products (Atkinson et al., 2011; Babor et al., 2017a; Hansen, 2003; Ofcom, 2013; Winpenny et al., 2014). Although the data reported in the publications included in this thesis (Atkinson et al., 2011; 2012a,b) were not intended to provide an in-depth analysis of alcohol marketing and its effects, content analysis, focus group (Atkinson et al., 2011; 2012a) and survey (N=941) (Atkinson et al., 2011) data showed that despite regulations to restrict under-18s exposure, young people were frequently exposed to alcohol adverts through television (both pre- and post the UK broadcasting watershed), and to a less extent, magazines. Survey data showed that, regardless of age, 60% of young people reported being exposed to alcohol adverts on a daily basis

through television and 25% through magazines (Atkinson et al., 2011). On both media platforms, alcohol was presented as a key aspect of friendship, leisure and social interaction, and in a gendered manner, which were reproduced in young people's discussions of alcohol brands (Atkinson et al., 2011, Atkinson et al., 2012a). Direct advertising did not feature in youth targeted media, yet young males were targeted with alcohol marketing more indirectly through the alcohol industry's successful attempts at linking its products with youth orientated leisure such as football in youth magazines (Atkinson et al., 2012a). Young people had high recognition and awareness of alcohol brands and of particular significance was alcohol brand sponsorship of sports (e.g. football shirts, match billboards), which young people felt reflected the cultural association between sports viewing and alcohol use (Alcohol Focus Scotland, 2017; Burton et al., 2016; Hastings et al., 2009; 2010; Wenner & Jackson, 2009a,b). However, some felt that alcohol was not an appropriate sponsor for an activity deemed healthy in terms of exercise. Such cultural and gendered associations are an important part of the overall alcohol marketing mix and are an important means through which young people were exposed to, and influenced by, alcohol marketing (Atkinson et al., 2011; 2012a; Burton et al., 2016).

#### **4.4 Summary**

This chapter summarised research that explored the ways in which alcohol, its consumption and related behaviour was represented in media and alcohol marketing engaged with by young people. Although young people showed critical awareness and rejected certain depictions of alcohol, certain norms around alcohol use were reproduced in their accounts and experiences. The research thus confirms that the media is an important source of information through which young people learn what is socially normative and acceptable (and inappropriate) drinking practices (Aitken et al., 1988; Atkinson et al., 2011; 2012a, b; Baillie, 1996; DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989; Gerbner, et al., 1986; Giddens, 1991; Montonen, 1996; Perkins, 2003), and is novel in highlighting how this process is gendered (Atkinson et al., 2011; 2012a, b; Ross-Houle et al., 2016).

## **Chapter 5. Findings-The role of Social Network Sites in young people’s drinking cultures, practices and related identity construction**

Young people’s drinking cultures have become virtual as they now routinely display, share (e.g. drinking photographs) and discuss (e.g. comments) alcohol-related experiences on social media such as Social Network Sites (SNS) (Goodwin et al., 2016; Lyon et al., 2014; 2015; 2016; Moewaka Barnes et al., 2016; Niland et al., 2014). It is within such online spaces that they are also exposed to, interact with, and co-create, new forms of alcohol marketing (Brooks, 2010; Carah, 2014; 2015; Griffiths & Caswell, 2010; McCreanor et al., 2013; Nichols, 2012; Winpenny et al., 2013) and where they display, share and discuss alcohol consumption and related practices (Atkinson et al., 2015; 2016; Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016; Cover, 2012; Goodwin et al., 2016; Lincoln & Robard 2016; Lyons et al., 2014; 2015; 2016; Moreno et al., 2009a, b). A body of research (e.g. Carah, 2014; Lyons et al., 2015; 2016; McCreanor et al., 2008; 2013; Niland et al., 2014; Nichols, 2012; Winpenny, 2014) has begun to explore these practices yet there remains a lack of research from a UK perspective. This chapter draws on research designed, conducted, published (Atkinson et al., 2011; 2015; 2016, Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016) and presented (e.g. Atkinson, 2015a, b, c, d; 2014) by the applicant which has addressed this gap in research, and presents the first published studies of young people in the UK. It will begin by discussing the ways in which SNS have become an important aspect of the alcohol industry’s multi-platform marketing strategies and young people’s engagement with, and perceptions of, such marketing (Atkinson et al., 2015; 2016). It then discusses the ways in which SNS form an extension of young people’s drinking experiences and identity performance through the display of drinking behaviours on social media (Atkinson et al., 2015; Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016), and the novel nature of the research in beginning to address the ways in which the display of drinking on SNS is gendered (Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016).

### **Submitted article:**

- 1. Atkinson, A.M.,** Ross-Houle, K.M., Begley, E., and Sumnall, H.R. (2016). An exploration of alcohol advertising on Social Networking Sites: an analysis of content, interactions and young people’s perspectives. *Addiction, Research and Theory*, 25(2), 91-102.
- 2. Atkinson, A.M.** and Sumnall, H.R. (2016). ‘If I don’t look good, it just doesn’t go up’: a qualitative study of young women’s drinking cultures and practices on Social Network Site’. *International Journal of Drugs Policy*, Dec, 38, 50–62.

### Supporting evidence:

3. **Atkinson, A.M.** Ross-Houle, K.M., Begley, E., and Sumnall, H.R. (2015). Constructing alcohol identities: the role of Social Network Sites in young people's drinking cultures. Final Report. Alcohol Research UK.
4. Ross-Houle, K., **Atkinson, A.** and Sumnall, H.R. (2016). 'The Symbolic Value of Alcohol Consumption: The importance of alcohol consumption, drinking practices and drinking spaces in classed and gendered identity construction' in Thurnell-Read T (Ed) *Drinking Dilemmas: Space, Culture and Identity*. London.
5. **Atkinson, A.M.** and Sumnall, H.R. (2017). 'Isn't it mostly girls that do pre-drinks really?' Explanations for pre-loading in young men and women's accounts of social drinking occasions in public drinking environments in the UK. *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy*, doi.org/10.1080/09687637.2017.1377154.

## 5.1 Alcohol marketing on Social Network Sites

Research (Atkinson et al., 2011, 2015; 2016) conducted exploring the use of social media (i.e. SNS such as Facebook and Twitter) by alcohol marketers in promoting brands (N=5) consumed by young people and young people's (N=70) engagement with SNS alcohol marketing, confirmed that SNS form an important aspect of the alcohol industry's multi-platform marketing strategies, adding to the overall marketing mix (Nichols, 2012). Alcohol marketers used a variety of creative strategies on SNS to advertise brands and to engage large numbers of consumers (Nichols 2012; Carah 2014; 2015; Winpenny et al, 2014). Young people reported little direct formal engagement with alcohol marketing on SNS (e.g. 'likes', side bar marketing), yet reported frequent exposure to, and engagement with, alcohol marketing practices as part of their everyday SNS use. They interacted with, and were influenced by SNS alcohol marketing in two main ways. Firstly, in keeping with traditional marketing objectives, marketing on SNS aligned particular brands with certain cultural and lifestyle connotations

(e.g. gender, nationalism, music, sport, celebrity), with the meanings and aesthetics of branding then being used symbolically and reproduced by young people to reflect and perform their identities both on and offline in ways that were aged, gendered and classed (Carah, 2014; McCreanor et al. 2005a; 2005b; Miles, 1998; 2000; Ross-Houle et al., 2016). Secondly, through the use of SNS as a marketing platform, a recent shift in marketing techniques and influence was observed (Atkinson et al., 2015; 2016). SNS provided a new means for encouraging consumers to act in certain ways; to make and co-create content, which alcohol marketers not only monitor but respond to (Atkinson et al., 2015; 2016; Carah, 2015). This shift from passive consumers to co-producers of content is exemplified through the use of participatory or 'engagement' marketing strategies (e.g. 'real world' tie ins/events based marketing (i.e. sport, music events, competitions, recipe suggestions)) that work in a way to embed brands into the users everyday lives, social networks and identity making through producing content that is more meaningful and in some cases content that marketers are restricted from producing (Atkinson et al., 2015; 2016; Carah 2014; 2015; Carah et al., 2014; Lobstein et al., 2017; Moor, 2003; Moraes et al. 2014; Nichols 2012; Purves et al., 2015). Such techniques also hold an advantage in that they maximise audience reach through user's social networks (e.g. viral spreading through 'likes', 'shares' and 'tags') and collect qualitative information on consumer tastes and preferences to inform future marketing (Atkinson et al., 2015; 2016; Carah, 2014; 2015; Lobstein et al., 2017; Moor, 2003; Nichols, 2012). Such engagement marketing techniques were found to be incorporated into the marketing of local venues and events in the night time economy (Atkinson et al., 2015; 2016; Carah, 2013; Lobstein et al., 2017).

The research (Atkinson et al., 2015; 2016) also found that young people were sceptical of and rejected direct advertising on SNS (e.g. side bar adverts), but were less critical of engagement techniques that embedded alcohol brands within their cultural spaces and practices (e.g. music events), and techniques such as competitions which they engaged with for self-gain (e.g. prizes of branded alcoholic products, entry to venues/events). They found such marketing informative and enjoyable, particularly in a localised context, with local night life economy marketing appearing to be more meaningful and relevant and valued as an informative source of information on local events and drink promotions, particularly by young women. Young people's engagement with local marketing was significant in that it led to further interaction with brand marketing and led to them documenting their participation in branded events (e.g. sponsored music events) and nightlife venues on SNS through photographs, thus co-creating venue and event marketing and endorsing venues, events and sponsored brands to their peers (Atkinson et al., 2015; 2016; Carah, 2014; 2015; Moor, 2003).

Despite young people using the symbolic meaning of brands as part of their identity-making practices and interacting with 'engagement' marketing strategies in ways that embedded brands and alcohol related nightlife events into their everyday lives, friendships and identities, the research



(Atkinson et al., 2016) found that some were critical consumers and distanced themselves from certain brands, marketing practices (e.g. directly 'liking' or interacting with brand content) and declared resistance to marketing influence through connotations of immaturity (Atkinson et al., 2015; 2016). This showed how marketing strategies are dependent on young people negotiating brand material as part of their own cultural practices and peer groups, and how young people are active rather than passive consumers who may accept or reject brands within their own identity making (Atkinson et al., 2015; 2016; Purves et al., 2015).

## **5.2 Young people's self-display of drinking behaviour on Social Network Sites**

Any consideration of the media's role in, and influence on, young people's drinking cultures, practices and identity making must consider recent developments in social media which has positioned young people as both consumers and producers of mediated alcohol content. SNS are now a normal aspect of young people's everyday lives where they construct, share and reflect on their online presentations of the self and where they display, share and discuss their alcohol consumption and related practices (Atkinson et al., 2015; 2016; Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016; Cover, 2012; Goodwin et al., 2016; Lincoln & Robard 2016; Lyons et al., 2014; 2015; 2016; Moreno et al., 2009a, b). However, there is a lack of research focussing on the ways in which young people display their drinking behaviours on SNS in the UK. There is also a lack of research exploring the way in which online displays of drinking are gendered and reflect the gendered nature of drinking cultures and practices, and wider social norms of what is regarded as acceptable behaviour for men and women (Atkinson et al., 2016; Brown & Gregg, 2012; Lyons et al., 2016). The research (Atkinson et al., 2015; Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016) presented here has addressed these gaps in research, providing insight into the gendered nature of drinking practices among young people (N=70) in the UK on SNS.

Drinking experiences and intoxication had a significant role in group bonding and friendship for both young men and women and SNS had become an inherent part of these experiences. SNS also had an organising role in planning a night out drinking with friends, and provided a means of extending the pleasures of drinking with peers (Atkinson et al., 2015; Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016). Although young men did display drinking behaviours on SNS, such display appeared to be more meaningful to young women, enhancing shared fun and pleasure through creating lasting memories and humorous group drinking stories (Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016; Griffin et al., 2009; Lyons et al., 2016; Niland et al., 2013; 2014). SNS provided young women with the opportunity to create and display their active social lives, popularity, appearance/attractiveness and feminine identities to a peer audience, thus gaining attention,

peer group interaction, and appraisal (Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016; Goodwin et al., 2016). However, whilst taking advantage of and enjoying these opportunities, the research found that the societal restraints and restrictions placed on young women's drinking-related behaviour and participation in public drinking spaces have now transcended to their decision making practices when displaying drinking behaviour on SNS (Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016). Young women were concerned over their self-image and appearance on SNS, and the interpretations of others (e.g. peers, employers family), and as a result managed and edited what content they displayed. This was an anxiogenic decision that involved controlling what content was displayed in relation to traditional notions of 'respectable' and acceptable femininity (e.g. passive sexuality, self-control, a focus on appearance/beauty/the body) (Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016). A number of impression management techniques were used (e.g. pre-empting photo taking during pre-loading (Atkinson & Sumnall, 2017), 'untagging' photos so that photos did not appear on their profiles, use of Snap Chat for photo sharing) to restrict certain content being uploaded, which led to certain aspects of drinking experiences (i.e. intoxication) being omitted. As a result an overly selective and positive depiction of their drinking, experiences of nightlife and related femininity was presented (Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016; Bailey et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2012; Lyons et al., 2016).

### **5.3 Summary**

This chapter highlighted how the research has contributed to understanding the role of social media in young people's drinking cultures, practices and related identity making. It provided the first UK systematic analysis of SNS alcohol marketing, user interaction, and young people's own experiences and perspectives, and the first UK account of young people's own display of drinking behaviour and the gendered and commercialised nature of such practices.

SNS were found to form an important aspect of the alcohol industry's multi-platform marketing strategies (Atkinson et al., 2016; Babor et al 2017a; Lobstein et al., 2017; Nichols, 2012) and alcohol brands were a key component of young people's identity construction with the symbolic value of brands being used and re-appropriated in the representation of self both on- and offline (Atkinson et al., 2015; 2016; McCreanor et al. 2005a, b; Purves et al., 2015). SNS also provided a space in which the gendered dynamics in the uses, meaning and experiences of drinking were reinforced and reproduced (Alhabash et al., 2015; Boyle et al., 2016; Griffiths & Casswell 2010; Lyons et al., 2014; McCreanor et al. 2008, 2013; Nichols, 2012; Purves et al., 2015; Ridout, 2016; Westgate & Holliday, 2016). The management of SNS content by young women led to an overly positive image of drinking that disguised the pressure and dilemmas in femininity experienced by young women, the normalisation of certain drinking practices and the perception of drinking as a predominantly positive and relatively risk free behaviour (Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016).

## Chapter 6. Using the media in health responses to young people's alcohol use

Given the importance of the media to young people, media platforms may offer an additional way of delivering health responses to young people's alcohol use. In this chapter research designed, conducted and published by the applicant (Atkinson et al., 2010; 2011; Atkinson et al., 2015;2016; Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016) is discussed that explored the extent to which media engaged with by young people featured health discourse on alcohol, and young people's acceptability of using media platforms to disseminate such information. The potential and limitations of media based campaigns, including the use of social media, are considered drawing on the wider literature and through a case study analysis of an alcohol health campaign that tried to connect with youth culture through both traditional (e.g. television) and new media formats (e.g. Internet) (Atkinson, et al., 2010).

### Submitted article:

1. **Atkinson, A.M.**, Sumnall, H.R., and Measham, F. (2010). Depictions of alcohol use in a UK Government partnered online social marketing campaign: Hollyoaks 'The Morning after the night before'. *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy*, 18, 454–467.
2. **Atkinson, A.M.**, Kirton, A.W., and Sumnall, H.R. (2012a). The gendering of alcohol in consumer magazines: An analysis of male and female targeted publications. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 21 (4): 365-386.
3. **Atkinson, A.M.**, Bellis, M. and Sumnall, H.R. (2012b). Young people's perspective on the portrayal of alcohol on television: findings from a focus group study. *Addiction, Research and Theory*, 21(2):91-99.
4. **Atkinson, A.M.**, Ross-Houle, K.M., Begley, E., and Sumnall, H.R. (2016). An exploration of alcohol advertising on Social Networking Sites: an analysis of content, interactions and young people's perspectives. *Addiction, Research and Theory*, 25(2), 91-102.

**Supporting evidence:**

5. **Atkinson, A.M.**, Elliott, G., Bellis, M., and Sumnall, H.R. (2011). Young people, Alcohol and the Media. Final Report. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
6. **Atkinson, A.M.** Ross-Houle, K.M., Begley, E., and Sumnall, H.R. (2015). Constructing alcohol identities: the role of Social Network Sites in young people's drinking cultures. Final Report. Alcohol Research UK.

**6.1 Educative health discourse on alcohol in the media and young people's perspectives**

The research presented in this thesis (Atkinson et al., 2010; 2011, 2012a, b; 2015, 2016) found that whilst the alcohol industry has taken advantage of the opportunities afforded by traditional and new media (e.g. SNS) to promote their brands, there is a relatively low representation of alcohol-related health information or preventive campaigns in media used by young people (Atkinson et al., 2011; 2015; 2016). Young people reported that parents and the family were their main sources of factual information on alcohol (there was a lack of recall of school alcohol education), yet did express using Internet sources for alcohol advice and suggested television might be a useful means of targeting young people with alcohol health messages through youth programmes in particular. The effectiveness of media based approaches in light of wider factors (e.g. peers, family) was questioned and older participants felt that population-based approaches were unfair as not everyone required information or advice on alcohol. Despite young people's suggestion of the use of 'edutainment' approaches, which involves the deliberate placement of educational messages into television programmes such as Soap Operas (e.g. Grange Hill, Hollyoaks; Atkinson et al., 2010; Boots & Midford, 2003; Caswell et al., 1988; Egger, Donovan, & Spark, 1993), they felt the primary purpose of TV was to entertain. Moreover, unlike other health behaviour approaches such as smoking cessation support and campaigns against drink driving, there is a lack of evidence to suggest that mass media based campaigns for alcohol use are effective in supporting behaviour change (Babor et al., 2010; Batton et al., 2016; Boots & Midford, 2003; The Lancet, 2010; Wakefield et al., 2010).

## 6.2 Case study: Hollyoaks, *The Morning after the night before*

Research conducted by the applicant (Atkinson et al., 2010) analysing the content of a government-partnered social marketing alcohol campaign aimed at young people, provided an example of the use of media such as TV, and the emergent use of the Internet and social media to target young people with preventive actions. The *Hollyoaks 'The Morning After the Night Before'* (E4, 2009) campaign was an extension of the UK government's 'Know Your Limits' (KYL) social marketing campaign, which predominately targeted young drinkers (aged 18–24) with the aim of reducing 'binge drinking' and the harmful consequences of alcohol use. Based on the KYL approach, internet-delivered episodes of a popular TV drama were targeted at young people to deliver 'responsible' and 'sensible' drinking messages.

Content analysis showed that the episodes portrayed young people's alcohol use in a manner supported by wider research, as an important element of adolescent fun, leisure and group identity (Atkinson et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2009). By portraying the short-term consequences of drinking (e.g. sickness, fights) and avoiding long-term (e.g. cirrhosis) and overtly negative effects (e.g. death, dependence), the episodes also depicted issues that are commonly discussed and experienced by young people (Atkinson et al., 2015; Coleman & Cater, 2005; Szmigin et al., 2008). However, whether the campaign can be regarded as social marketing is questionable as it fails to meet a number of criteria (Burton et al., 2016; Stead et al., 2007; Wong et al., 2014). Designed by Hollyoaks staff and not social marketers, there was no explicit or consistent message within the episodes, a lack of focus on the potential benefits of change and guidance on how to implement change, and no application of behaviour change theory or evidence based principles (Burton et al., 2016; Ridout, 2016; Wong et al., 2014). Analysis of viewer feedback data indicated a lack of awareness of the intentions of the campaign and little discussion of alcohol-related issues as intended. This was also a standalone campaign aired over a short period and its impact was not evaluated. There was also a lack of coherence between the depiction of alcohol in the online campaign and representations of alcohol within the terrestrial TV series. The campaign did not retain viewers over the course of the episodes and many viewers rejected the depictions portrayed as not being salient (Nichols, 2009), and identified with, or admired, the central (drinking) characters. Concerns were also raised over the unrealistic nature of the episodes, how such depictions might lead to young people drinking more, and the negative and stereotypical portrayal of young people in general (Atkinson et al., 2010). Moreover, such approaches resemble typical health focussed materials produced by the alcohol industry which focus on individual responsibility, which have been shown to be ineffective, dismissed by audiences (or used to legitimise their own personal use behaviours), and argued as ignoring competing factors such as marketing, and obscuring the role of

government, media, and alcohol manufacturers in changing drinking practices (Burton et al., 2016; Griffin et al., 2009; Wakefield et al., 2010).

### **6.3 The use of social media in public health responses to young people's alcohol use**

Despite the weaknesses in approach identified in the case study presented in Section 6.2, it has been suggested that social media may have a useful role in public health responses to young people's alcohol use, and may provide an additional means of engaging target audiences with health-orientated intervention and preventive actions (Atkinson et al., 2016; Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016; Ridout & Campbell, 2014; Ridout et al., 2016; Wong et al., 2014). Evidence of a link between online display of drinking, and self-reported drinking and problems, may suggest social media provides a means of identifying those who may be at increased risk of alcohol-related harms, creating peer-to-peer support to generate a culture of change regarding alcohol use (Carah, 2015; Ridout, 2016) and a role in providing brief personalized normative feedback interventions that may change social norms and reduce drinking (Burton et al., 2016; Moreno et al., 2012; Ridout & Campbell, 2014; Ridout, 2016; Westgate & Holliday, 2016; Wong et al., 2014). However, it is important to note that evidence of the effectiveness of social norms approaches is weak, with only a small effect of social norms information on drinking behaviour observed at long term follow ups, and with web-based approaches being less effective than those delivered in person (Foxcroft et al., 2015). Although social media may provide a way of reaching young people, applying social norms approaches to SNS must consider the social norms that develop online, their role in young people's general perception of peer drinking, and not just the extent to which young people display images of alcohol use online, but also their (gendered) nature, and how such displays are contrived as a result of impression management (Atkinson et al., 2016; Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016).

### **6.4 Summary**

The research presented in this chapter highlighted how the applicant has contributed to the field by exploring how both traditional and new media platforms might be used as a way of disseminating health messages around alcohol to young people, and by drawing on the wider research evidence, considered the potential and effectiveness of such approaches. Limited use of media used by young people for the dissemination of health information on alcohol or as a platform for preventive interventions was found and health information was swamped by pro alcohol messages within the media and marketing. The case study discussed is useful in providing further insight into the limitations, and opportunities, of such approaches (Atkinson et al., 2010; Babor et al., 2010; Burton et al., 2016; Foxcroft et al., 2015; Ridout et al., 2016; Wakefield et al., 2010).

## **Chapter 7. Summary and contribution to knowledge**

Each research publication (references provided in section 1.1) presented formed part of a collaborative research programme undertaken during my employment at the Public Health Institute, Liverpool John Moores University. The research presented shows how I have successfully managed and delivered a number of large scale research projects that were strong in both terms of quantity and quality. I believe that the research presented provides a significant contribution to knowledge by providing novel insights and addressing various gaps in research.

A theoretically informed, coherent and novel body of empirical research has been presented that explored of the role of the media and alcohol marketing in both traditional and new forms (e.g. SNS), in shaping young people's drinking cultures, practices and related identity making, in ways that are gendered. The research found that alcohol is presented in the media and marketing young people engage with, and in young people's own self display of drinking on social media, as predominantly positive, consequent free and gendered in nature. It is concluded that the media and social media thus provide a sympathetic environment for alcohol marketing, and a context in which health related information on alcohol is over shadowed by pro alcohol content. Qualitative research with young people showed that media, marketing and peer depictions of drinking in social media, provided an important source of information for young people to draw on in learning what is socially and normative drinking practice for men and women, and that they used such content as a reference point in their own gendered identity making. Media and marketing messages on both traditional and new platforms (e.g. social media) reflected and reinforced injunctive social norms (e.g. perceptions of socially acceptable and gender-appropriate drinking practices), and young people's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours through the normalisation and reproduction of certain drinking behaviours (Atkinson et al., 2015; Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016).

Of importance was how in recent years social media has begun to play a significant role in young people's drinking cultures, practices and related identity making. Research on SNS marketing influence is in its infancy but there is some evidence of an association between engagement with, and awareness of, alcohol marketing and advertising on social media and intentions to drink (Alhabash et al., 2015), alcohol use and related problems (Beullens & Vandenbosch, 2016; Hoffman et al., 2014; Jones et al., 2015; Lobstein et al., 2017; Marczynski et al., 2016) and heavy episodic drinking (Critchlow et al., 2015) and it is commonly theorised that engagement with SNS alcohol marketing may cumulatively contribute to the normalisation of certain drinking behaviour among young people (Atkinson et al., 2015; 2016; Griffiths & Casswell 2010; Boyle et al., 2016; Lyons et al., 2014; McCreanor et al. 2008, 2013; Lobstein et al., 2017; Nichols 2012; Purves et al., 2015; Ridout, 2016). Importantly, the influence of alcohol-related content (e.g. marketing and peer content) on SNS may be greater in that it is not only consumed

but produced by young people, thus making it more meaningful, whilst reflecting the gendered alcohol behaviours of peers (Atkinson et al., 2016; Ridout, 2016).

Given the importance of alcohol related practice to young people's gendered identity making practices, the ways in which the media depict and reflect drinking practices as highly gendered has a crucial role in the reproduction of gendered drinking practices and as such has implications for young people's health (Atkinson et al., 2011; 2012a, b; De Visser & Smith, 2007a; b; Patterson et al., 2016). Although young people reproduced social and gendered norms around alcohol through their own practices, they also rejected media messages through gendered, aged and classed connotations as active consumers and producers of content. With such findings in mind, the potential and limitations of using media and social media platforms such as SNS in delivering health responses to alcohol targeting young people have been explored and the limited evidence base of the effectiveness of such approaches has been considered (Atkinson et al., 2010; 2011, 2012b; 2015, 2016).

The research also provided novel insights that require further investigation, such as the gendered nature of pre-loading as a youth drinking practice and how this practice is influenced by social media (Atkinson & Sumnall, 2017), the value of local alcohol marketing to young people and its influence (Atkinson et al., 2016) and the importance of the notion of maturity/immaturity in young people's interpretations, acceptability and rejection of alcohol-related peer and media messages (Atkinson et al, 2016; Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016). Of particular importance, is the need for more qualitative research to advance understanding of how young people actually engage with, interpret and use media and marketing depictions of alcohol and their influence on behaviour. The research also highlighted how alcohol is one way through which young people perform gender identity and how media representations of men and women's drinking reproduce societal gender stereotypes that devalue women's role in society (Atkinson et al., 2012a; Patterson et al., 2016). Thus, the research has contributed to knowledge beyond the public health field, contributing to the field of gender and feminist studies both theoretically and empirically, presenting alcohol use as a useful case study to explore how gender is performed, and as representative of wider social anxieties around gender.

Gaps in research were addressed and contributed to knowledge by taking forward previous research and thus further enhancing the field:

- The analysis of media content presented is unique in that it focussed on the media platforms and content that young people report engaging with based on findings of a survey and analysis of secondary data on young people's media use. This enhances previous research, which has



tended to analyse alcohol depictions in youth targeted media, ignoring the way in which young people also engage with similar content as the adult population and as such limiting the extent to which previous analysis is representative of the alcohol depictions young people are exposed to and engage with.

- The research is novel in that unlike previous research, it focussed on a number of different media platforms rather than one media platform in isolation. This was important as it provided insight into the cumulative messages young people interact with across various media landscapes. Focussing on entertainment media, marketing and young people's self/peer display of drinking on SNS was also advantageous in that it provided evidence of how through social media, young people are ever more active in their media use, co-creating and producing content. Exploring various media also gained insight into how each platform reinforced alcohol as positive, consequent free and gendered, and how entertainment and self/peer content on SNS provided a sympathetic environment for alcohol marketing and an environment in health messages around alcohol are over shadowed by pro alcohol content.
- Through the use of qualitative research with young people, the work has advanced the field by going beyond the reliance on quantitative media content analysis in addressing the question of media influence. Moreover, it has moved beyond a focus on quantitative research aimed at establishing cause and effect which often ignores young people's own interactions and responses to media content (Baillie, 1996). The qualitative research conducted was the first to provide insight into how young people actively interact with and use media and marketing representations of alcohol within their own drinking cultures, practices and related identity making, thus moving beyond the framing of young people as passive recipients, to provide evidence of how they reproduce, re-appropriate, and also reject media messages of alcohol.
- The research filled an important research gap by being the first to explore the increasing importance of social media such as SNS in alcohol marketing and the importance of self/peer display of drinking to young people's identity making, in a UK context, through qualitative research. This extended current theory that frames young people as consumers of media, by providing evidence of young people as producers of mediated alcohol content through their social media use.

## Chapter 8. Policy implications of the work

The research holds a number of implications for policy. By highlighting how young people were regularly exposed to alcohol marketing through their everyday media use, further evidence was provided of the limits of the current joint and self-regulatory marketing systems (e.g. Committee of Advertising Practice (Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP)) codes) in preventing young people from being exposed to alcohol advertising through the media (Alcohol Focus Scotland, 2017; Atkinson et al., 2011, 2012b; Winpenny et al., 2014). In the UK, both exposure and marketing content is regulated by codes of practice (i.e., CAP; Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice; Advertising Standards Authority; Office of Communications) and includes restrictions on alcohol marketing in programming with youth appeal and restrictions on the nature of marketing content (e.g. content should not encourage irresponsible drinking or link alcohol consumption to social or sexual success, masculinity or femininity). A relationship between marketing and young people's alcohol consumption does not necessarily suggest that limiting young people's exposure to marketing will reduce use, but does suggest that policies that reduce marketing exposure are worthy of consideration (Burton et al., 2016). However, with young people being vulnerable to the influence of alcohol marketing (Babor et al., 2017b), current codes are in need of amending to prevent youth exposure, content that is of youth appeal and the high levels of industry non-compliance (Noel et al., 2017a,b).

Recommendations include:

- Introducing a watershed for alcohol advertising (e.g. 9pm) on television (Alcohol Focus Scotland, 2017; Sweney, 2010), to reduce the high numbers of young people the research found being exposed to adverts. Although this would help limit youth exposure, it is important to recognise that in the digital age, young people are able to view programmes beyond watershed hours via platforms such as online 'catch up', which will limit the effectiveness of such policies.
- Adapting the rule, that marketing communications cannot appear in a media platform with more than a 25% under 18 audience (e.g., youth targeted media such as teen magazines and programmes). 25% still equates to a large number of young people and as the research found, led to large levels of exposure. Raising the measure would help limit the amount of young people being exposed to alcohol advertising.
- Extending the process of advert pre-clearance to additional platforms to limit the number of adverts that are found to be in breach of current regulatory codes. Whilst a process of pre-clearance for alcohol adverts broadcasted on television and radio is currently in place (BCAP),

codes are still breached, and as the research found, many adverts are of youth appeal. Pre-clearance does not apply to other media platforms such as social media, which remains relatively uncontrolled.

- Adapting the review process of assessing complaints of non-compliance to include representatives from the public health and substance use fields, and the vulnerable populations the codes aim to protect, to increase the objectiveness and reliability of the review process (Noel et al., 2017b). Review boards are currently made up of industry representatives and individuals with knowledge of the advertising sector, and as such are based on a conflict of interest and are prone to bias (Noel et al., 2017b).
- Implement additional penalties for non-compliance. Research (Noel et al., 2017b) shows that under the current review system, penalties for breaching the regulatory codes are more likely to be issued when complaints are made by industry competitors than public complaints, highlighting that the self-regulatory process has an inherent conflict of interest and providing further evidence for the need for independent health representatives within the review process. Moreover, penalties for non-compliance are not enforced other than removing individual adverts following the review board's decision, which can occur long after the complaint has been filed and as such extends the time period during which non-compliant adverts are broadcasted (Noel et al., 2017b). Thus, monetary penalties, as well as sanctions including bans for companies that persistently breach the codes, may be a suitable response.
- Regulating alcohol sponsorship. The research found that large numbers of young people are frequently exposed to alcohol marketing via the sponsorship of activities and events with large youth appeal such as football, in ways that were appealing to young people (Atkinson et al., 2011; 2012b; Atkinson et al., 2016). Based on evidence of a positive relationship between exposure to alcohol sports sponsorship and alcohol consumption among young people (Burton et al., 2016), the research supports calls for further regulation and bans on the sponsorship of sports such as football by alcohol brands (Alcohol Focus Scotland, 2017; Babor, 2017; BMA, 2017; Purves, et al., 2017; WHO, 2014).
- Strengthening the regulation of alcohol marketing on social media. Existing self-regulatory approaches designed to regulate the content of marketing on traditional media (e.g. television) cannot be easily applied to SNS marketing (Atkinson et al., 2016; Carah 2013; Nichols, 2012). They are based on the assumption that SNS marketing aims to influence consumer behaviour

solely through the symbolic meaning of brand content. Such techniques continue to be used, but as this research highlighted (Atkinson et al., 2016), marketing on SNS goes beyond the transmission of symbolic meaning and aims to instigate consumer interaction through event and engagement marketing techniques (Atkinson et al., 2016; Carah, 2014: 2015; Carah et al., 2014; Nichols, 2012). Approaches are therefore required that go beyond monitoring and regulating brand marketing content, to consider the mechanisms through which brands successfully attempt to stimulate and manage user participation, and how they respond to and use the existing social networks of SNS users to widen their reach and impact (Atkinson et al., 2016; Carah, 2013; 2014).

- Considering bans on alcohol marketing. Whilst the above suggestions may improve current approaches that aim to restrict the number of young people exposed to alcohol marketing and content of youth appeal and non-compliance, there is increasing evidence, including findings of this thesis, to support bans or partial bans on alcohol marketing, including marketing on social media and sponsorship (BMA, 2009; Hastings et al., 2009; 2010). Partial bans such as the Évin Law in France which prevents alcohol marketing on television, in cinemas, festivals, cultural and sporting events (sponsoring) and states what advert content can entail as opposed to what it cannot, are possible approaches to adopt. However, research (Gallopel-Morvan et al., 2017), shows that although restrictions on content and where alcohol can be marketed mean young people are exposed to less attractive advertisements by a limited number of platforms, they still report exposure to alcohol advertising via supermarkets, billboards and social media. As such, calls have been made for a complete ban on alcohol marketing including internet and social media marketing (i.e. in Finland there is a statutory ban on all digital media) (BMA, 2009; Hastings et al., 2009; 2010).

A number of policy implications also arise from the way in which alcohol is represented in the entertainment media young people are exposed to, suggesting that:

- Health and substance use professionals and academics may have a role to play in collaborating with media professionals in providing guidance on the creation of content (Patterson et al., 2016). However, research (Atkinson et al., 2011) conducted as part of this PhD suggests such collaborations may be difficult in that media professionals (e.g. journalists, TV producers) generally felt that although youth targeted media have responsibility to provide more accurate and healthier messages around alcohol to young people, it is not the role of the media to educate and entertainment would always be prioritised.

- The media can be used as a platform for disseminating health related messages around alcohol to young people. Whilst the research showed that young people were generally accepting of such approaches, they raised a number of limitations (e.g. undervaluing the entertainment value of the media). Moreover, the evidence base for the effectiveness of media based approaches remains weak (Babor et al., 2010). Approaches based on providing information and education (i.e. mass media, social marketing campaigns) may fill knowledge gaps and raise awareness of alcohol-related harm, but by relying on individual resources/agency they are less effective in changing behaviour (i.e. reducing alcohol use and harms) than other policy responses such as policies that focus on price (i.e. taxation, MUP), marketing regulation, alcohol availability, and brief interventions and treatment (Adams et al., 2016; Babor et al., 2010; Burton et al., 2016). However, campaign effects can be increased when featuring as part of comprehensive multi-component approaches (e.g. alongside school based approaches, marketing regulating, pricing) (Wakefield et al., 2010).
- At the individual level, there is also some evidence that enhancing critical media literacy skills among young people may mediate the influence of the media on their drinking related practices, although not in isolation (Babor et al., 2010). However, with the research finding media representations of alcohol to be gendered in nature and alcohol-related practice presented and perceived by young people as representing femininity and masculinity, approaches that aim to increase media literacy should consider the gendered norms within such content and provide skills to resist gendered connotations.
- Addressing the gendered nature of drinking in the media, which presents men's drinking as less problematic than women's (Atkinson et al., 2011; 2012a; Nichols, 2011; Patterson et al., 2016). This is important in that despite men continuing to be more likely to drink, more frequently and experience more alcohol-related harms (Slade et al., 2017), young men are being informed by the media that their drinking is relatively unproblematic, which may influence their decision making around alcohol consumption (Atkinson et al., 2011; 2012a; Nichols, 2011; Patterson et al., 2016). Such skewed reporting may also have implications for the uptake of policy approaches such as the recent introduction of equivalent low risk alcohol guidelines for both men and women (Department of Health, 2016; Patterson et al., 2016).

- Responses should not only consider the way in which media depictions promote drinking, but how they promote gendered stereotypes and the health and social implications of gendered depictions (e.g. body image, weight, anxiety). Despite the media presenting women's drinking as more problematic than men's and in ways that reproduce gendered stereotypes, figures show that drinking levels of men and women continue to converge, with evidence that girls in particular have begun to overtake boys with regards their frequency of drinking and self-reported drunkenness (Fuller et al., 2017). Thus, the co-existence of negative representations of women's alcohol use alongside increases in women's drinking, may debunk the assumption that negative depictions and treatment of women's drinking is a useful way of deterring women from drinking based on assumptions of regret and shame (see section 3.4).

## **Chapter 9. Researcher's contribution, personal development and future research**

The research demonstrates my own intellectual application of gender, media and identity theory to alcohol as a public health issue and my leading and significant role throughout all stages of the research process. I had input into the grant applications that funded the research and overall responsibility for project management and delivery, research design, literature reviews, data collection and analysis, and report and manuscript writing. I also presented the research at academic conferences and public lectures. Moreover, I also took my initiative and used creative and artistic methods to disseminate the research findings and increase public engagement, allowing the research to have impact beyond academia and policy. For example, as well as speaking at public lectures and community groups, I curated an art exhibition held in public art galleries entitled 'Gender Dilemmas: negotiating femininity and masculinity in contemporary night life'. This used a range of artistic techniques (e.g. photography, sculpture, installation, found items) to document the research findings and the wider field of research into gender relations in night life drinking spaces. The artwork presented was methodologically, empirically and theoretically informed and drew attention to public drinking environments as commercialised contexts in which contemporary femininity and masculinity are performed, positioned and reconfigured, and spaces in which patriarchal relations are maintained. This novel and creative approach to dissemination allowed the research findings to reach a wider public audience in a more accessible manner, with the aim of encouraging the audience to question the often taken for granted gendered aspects of drinking practices, environments and marketing

On a personal note, I feel that I have personally progressed intellectually over the period of publication, that my writing skills have developed over time and that the work presented shows that I

have begun to develop a specialism in the field. I have since conducted additional research into media representations of alcohol and drug use, exploring the way in which substance use is represented in Reality TV, and I am in the process of exploring the representation of drug consumption rooms in UK newspapers. There remains further questions to be explored that were beyond the scope of the PhD, which I hope to address by expanding on the strengths of the research presented, and addressing the weaknesses and considerations noted. Based on emerging findings related to gender, media and alcohol use, I am in the process of writing a grant application in collaboration with colleagues working in the field of both public health and gender studies. The research will explore the way in which the sexualised and gendered nature of local alcohol, venue and events marketing provides a context in which unwanted sexual attention is normalised within the night time environment, and young people's experience of unwanted sexual attention in this highly commercialised and gendered space.

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