

‘Running the Tightrope’: Negotiating Femininities in the Night Time Economy in Newcastle

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**Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
School of Geography, Politics and Sociology
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August 2015**

‘If she wants to dance and drink all night, well there’s no-one that can stop her...’

- Against Me! (2007) *‘Thrash Unreal’*

Abstract

This project explores young women's understandings of what it means to be (in)appropriately feminine, the ways in which the boundaries of femininities are negotiated through women's embodied practices in the Night Time Economy and the types of behaviours and identities that are enabled or constrained as a result.

Within the academic literature, appropriate femininity has traditionally been associated with passivity, respectability and control. Yet understandings of the meanings and scope of femininities and the implications for the lived experiences of women are more contested in contemporary research, where it is useful to imagine women as negotiating a plurality of 'femininities' whose importance shifts across contexts. Within a supposed 'post-feminist' society, some women may arguably be able to claim new feminine identities drawing on elements of empowerment, independence and agency. However, it is important to consider how far traditional understandings of femininities may continue to impact on young women's experiences and the extent to which women even consider being 'feminine' to be important.

This research contributes to an emerging field of literature exploring the ways in which women manage some of the tensions and contradictions inherent in understandings of appropriate femininities in contemporary spaces. Adding to recent work on the ways in which embodied experience shapes and constructs identities in the Night Time Economy, this research uses semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 26 young women aged 18-25 to demonstrate some of the ways in which young women define and manage the boundaries of femininities - both on a 'girls' nights out' with female friends and when engaging with the Night Time Economy more widely - in the post-industrial city of Newcastle, UK. The research also examines the ways in which class, sexuality, age and 'Geordie' identities are implicated in such processes, impacting upon the extent to which different women can engage in traditionally non-feminine behaviour without damaging their claims to respectable feminine identities.

Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) whose generous funding support made this PhD possible. I would also like to sincerely thank both of my supervisors, Professor Diane Richardson and Professor Janice McLaughlin, who provided invaluable support and guidance throughout the entire process.

The postgraduate community at Newcastle University has remained a fantastic source of support throughout my PhD, offering guidance, advice and fresh ideas for the project, as well as comfort and reassurance when required and some new – and I hope lifelong – friendships. Thank you to colleagues within the postgraduate community who took part in pilot interviews and focus groups and offered feedback and comments. I would also like to thank the staff in the wider Sociology department, the Geography, Politics and Sociology school and the office and support staff.

I would not have been able to recruit my participants without the support of all who helped in some way to publicise or promote the project. Special thanks go to all the staff at local universities and colleges who allowed me to talk to their students about the research, and to all those who helped to circulate information on the project through social media, email and displaying flyers in shops, bars and leisure venues.

Thank you also to all of my family and friends who kept me smiling throughout the PhD journey. Thank you to Hannah for assistance with all the printing and binding.

And most importantly, a huge and sincere thank you to all of the young women who so kindly gave up their time to take part in my research interviews. You have all shaped and made this project what it is and all contributions have been invaluable. Extra thanks to the participant who – through snowballing study information – secured additional friends and family members to take part in the study. I am very grateful to all participants and appreciate the insight into your lives and nights out that you all offered me and the warmth, humour and thoughtfulness which were brought to the interviews.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Introduction

This thesis outlines the findings of a qualitative study exploring the ways in which the boundaries of ‘appropriate’ femininity might be understood and managed by young women in the Night Time Economy (NTE). Specifically, the project explores the management of these boundaries on a night out in the post-industrial cityscape of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, North-East England. The project explores young women’s understandings of what it might mean to be (in)appropriately feminine, the ways in which the boundaries of femininities are negotiated through women’s everyday, embodied practices on a night out, and the types of behaviours and identities that are enabled or constrained as a result. This chapter outlines the aims of the study and research questions, followed by an overview of the theoretical and research context and background, outlining some of the key debates around contemporary femininities and the main themes explored in the research. The chapter then goes on to situate the study in three ways. Firstly, the research is situated within the current research landscape by highlighting some of the gaps in the literature which the project has sought to address. Secondly, the study is geographically situated within Newcastle, with a brief reflection on some of the historical, social and economic contexts that continue to shape the city in which the research was based. Finally, the research is situated more specifically through an overview of the nightlife venues and ‘areas’ within the city centre, in order to assist the reader in contextualising the city’s NTE when reading the data analysis chapters. The chapter concludes with an overview of the structure of the remainder of the thesis.

Aims, Context and Background

This study aims to contribute to contemporary understandings of (in)appropriate femininities through examining what young women aged 18-25 understand to be (in)appropriate behaviours, practices and ways of looking and being in the NTE. The project has sought to address the following research questions:

1. How do young women conceptualise (in)appropriate behaviour, dress and practices in the NTE?
 - What kinds of drinking practices and behaviours do young women identify as (in)appropriate in the NTE?
 - What types of dress and appearance do young women identify as (in)appropriate in relation to women's participation in the NTE?
 - What - if any - risk management practices and safekeeping measures do young women identify as important for women in the NTE?

2. What does this tell us about the boundaries of (in)appropriate femininities and their negotiation through women's everyday, embodied practices in the NTE?
 - To what extent are these understandings of the boundaries of (in)appropriateness concerned with the negotiation of the boundaries of contemporary femininities?
 - To what extent are there blurrings, tensions or contradictions regarding these boundaries and how might such tensions be practically managed and negotiated?
 - How do processes of othering operate to reinforce the boundaries of (in)appropriate femininities within the NTE?

3. What (in)appropriately feminine identities are enabled or restricted through the negotiation of these boundaries?
 - How are the boundaries of femininities affected by class and regional (Geordie) identities?
 - How are the boundaries of femininities affected by age?

- How are the boundaries of femininities affected by sexuality?

The key focus of this study centres around what young women understand to be the boundaries of appropriate behaviour, dress and practices in the NTE, the extent to which these are concerned with femininities and how these might be negotiated through everyday embodied practices. Understandings of what is considered appropriately feminine - and indeed who can and cannot claim feminine identities - are heavily mediated by markers of identity such as age, class, regional identity and sexuality, and processes of 'othering' have long been used to position some women's behaviours and bodies as beyond the boundaries of respectable femininity (Skeggs, 1997). It is important to understand the ways in which these processes might continue to shape both the ways in which the boundaries are managed and the types of feminine identities that can be embodied successfully. Drawing upon elements of a symbolic interactionist framework, this study of the everyday practices of young women within the NTE has provided an opportunity to explore in more detail the ways in which femininities might be negotiated and the ways in which the shifting boundaries of appropriateness might be managed.

It is widely recognised in academic literature that gender is performative; bodies become gendered through the continued 'doing' of characteristics associated with masculinity or femininity, creating the illusion of gender as natural and stable (Butler, 1990). As Skeggs argues, 'women are not feminine by default...femininity is a carefully constructed appearance and/or form of conduct' (1997: 107). Bodies are heavily implicated in these processes; as 'what it takes to exhibit (or suppress) a body as male or female is part of the experience of femininity' (West and Zimmerman, 2009: 118). In these processes of constructing female bodies, only certain manifestations of femininity have traditionally been deemed appropriate, whilst others have been seen as inappropriate. However, feminist literature has long identified various contradictions within young women's performances of appropriate femininity. These have become particularly salient in recent years, where supposed 'new' femininities advocating agency and empowerment (see McRobbie, 2007) may continue to sit awkwardly alongside more traditional notions of femininity as associated with passivity, respectability and control (Holland *et al.*, 2004). The picture regarding the appropriateness – or otherwise – of particular performances of femininity has arguably become even more complex with the emergence of claims – often disputed by feminist

researchers - that we now live in a so-called 'post-feminist' society (Valentine *et al.*, 2014) where feminism is constituted as no longer relevant for women. At the same time, a recent revival of feminism that challenges the concept of post-feminism is evident in the emergence of new feminist movements such as Feminista, nationwide Slutwalk campaigns and books on feminism and gender equality aimed at a popular audience (Walters, 2010; Banyard, 2011), as well as a revival of interest in the term 'sexism' (Valentine *et al.*, 2014). Many current conceptualisations of femininity describe elements of empowerment, sexual agency and independence, with young women granted access to the pleasure-seeking, assertive definitions of sexuality traditionally reserved for men (McRobbie, 2007; Baker, 2010). However, these should not be unquestioningly accepted as positive new subject positions. For example, whilst they appear to mark a stark contrast to more traditional understandings of femininity, it is important to consider any continuities with conceptualisations of femininity as more passive and restrained, and to explore any ways in which these traditional conceptualisations may continue to limit the abilities of young women to redefine femininities (Raby, 2002; Griffin, 2004; Attwood, 2007; R. Gill, 2007). As a result, contemporary femininity can be theorised as a space for hedonism and fun, yet also regulation and insecurity (Skeggs, 1997: 116). There may also be variation regarding the extent to which different women are able to draw on these new femininities. Some women may arguably be more able than others to claim new feminine identities drawing on empowerment, independence and agency, and even then, any claims to gender equality may represent part of a 'post-feminist' masquerade or illusion. For example, McRobbie argues that 'gender retrenchment is secured, paradoxically, through the wide dissemination of discourses of female freedom and (putative) equality' (2007: 723).

Understandings of the meanings and scope of femininities and the implications for the lived experiences of young women appear highly contested in contemporary society, where it may be more useful to imagine women as negotiating a plurality of 'femininities', whose importance may shift across contexts (Laurie *et al.*, 1999). Living in a supposed 'post-feminist' society may impact upon young women's negotiations of femininities and the extent to which they even consider being 'feminine' to be an important aspect of their identities. For this reason, research into the ways in which the boundaries of femininity might be negotiated remains pertinent, and this study of the embodied, everyday practices of young women within the NTE has provided an

opportunity to explore in more detail the ways in which some of the conflicting conceptualisations of (in)appropriateness and femininity might be lived.

(In)appropriateness can be a difficult concept to work with, and the term is in no way used in this thesis to imply a moral or value judgement on behaviours that are/are not 'appropriate'. Haydock, in his work around gendered and classed drinking practices draws on the work of Douglas (1987) to position his preferred approach as 'not to judge any practice a problem unless it is deemed so by a participant, and then to treat this as an opinion' (2009: 150). I adopt a similar non-judgemental perspective, and use the term '(in)appropriate' not to problematise certain practices but rather to highlight those traits, behaviours and values that are considered characteristic – or not - of 'feminine' identities, explore the extent to which young women agree on these and understand where they consider the boundaries of normative feminine behaviours to lie. The idea of '(in)appropriateness' is used rather than 'acceptability' as I believe this implies a slightly more fluid boundary. To say something is inappropriate, I argue, is less strong than to label something as unacceptable, with 'inappropriate' suggesting dress or behaviour is unsuited to the situation, whilst 'unacceptable' implies a stronger sense of moral judgement.

The NTE marks an interesting space where tensions between traditional femininities and newer, 'post-feminist' identities may be played out (Tan, 2013). The term 'Night Time Economy' was coined early in the 21st century to reflect the expanding number of pubs, bars and clubs concentrated in city centres and predominantly targeting 18-24 year olds (Roberts, 2006: 332). The NTE is typically characterised by a concentration of venues in city centres and patterns of 'circuit drinking' that see young people moving between bars and consuming large amounts of alcohol (Roberts, 2006: 332). For this study, the NTE was adopted as the site through which to examine contemporary femininities in part because it has been theorised as an increasingly 'feminised' environment, where broader changes in women's social positions have allowed women to enter this traditionally male space (C. Jackson and Tinkler, 2007). However, it is important to consider the extent to which the mere increased presence of women in a space can be said to represent a 'feminisation' of that environment, particularly when women are entering the NTE in order to engage in traditionally male leisure pursuits such as public drinking, and when the spaces of the NTE may arguably remain highly

gendered and (hetero)sexualised in terms of norms and expectations regarding dress and behaviour.

The NTE has also been theorised as the site of a number of competing scripts surrounding the participation and presentation of women's bodies (Cullen, 2011). Participating in the NTE is recognised as an important component of the lives of many young women (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003) and they may be positioned as empowered consumers able to engage with these spaces in similar ways to their male peers. Yet arguably the complexity of discourses around contemporary femininities is epitomised within these highly gendered and heterosexualised spaces (see Laurie *et al.*, 1999; Valentine, 2001). By the heterosexualisation of space, I mean that such spaces are constructed as heterosexual through the normalisation and valuing of displays and performances of heterosexuality. For example, in venues outside of the gay scene, showing public signs of affection with a partner may be assumed a 'right' for heterosexuals but not for non-heterosexuals (Bettani, 2015). The spaces of the NTE have thus been conceptualised as a potential site of female agency and empowerment in which women can experiment with different feminine identities (Dwyer, 1999), yet also as key ongoing sites of regulation and control of female bodies (Tan, 2013).

Alcohol consumption is a good example of a site of tension, popularly portrayed as a threat to safety, health and – ultimately – femininity (Day *et al.*, 2004; Meyer, 2010), with research on the embodied drinking practices of young women suggesting that they are likely to limit the amount they drink 'in order to stay within the boundaries of traditional femininity' (Measham, 2002: 358). Yet more recently, alcohol consumption has been linked to the negotiation of pleasure and group identity and to conceptualisations of femininity as assertive and sexually empowered (Sheehan and Ridge, 2001). With drinking now portrayed as a means 'for women to accomplish a range of both traditional and non-traditional femininities' (Measham, 2002: 362), the need for further research in this area in order to untangle this complex and contradictory interplay of factors is further highlighted.

Similarly, the NTE is a space in which the 'rules' regarding appropriately feminine dress may be complex, contradictory and different to other everyday settings, with research suggesting the NTE may represent a space for the visual display of 'hyper-sexualised femininities' through clothes that are glamorous, revealing and erotic

(Buckley and Fawcett, 2002: 132). In young women's engagements with the NTE, some research suggests that sexualised dress and appearance may be harnessed as a perceived source of confidence-boosting 'power' over men (Waitt *et al.*, 2011), yet other contemporary research suggests that some women can continue to be scathing of a perceived 'overdone' performance of femininity (see Haydock, 2009: 211). Within the NTE 'young women remain concerned with maintaining appropriately feminine sexual respectability while representing themselves as sexually desirable' (S. Jackson and Scott, 2010: 96). In contrast to the emerging field of research on drinking and the NTE, women's dress and appearance in these spaces is relatively under-researched and warrants further investigation.

Finally, the meaning of 'appropriate' femininity has long been bound up with ideas of risk and respectability (Campbell, 2005), yet the spaces of the NTE are typically associated with abandon and hedonism. Further research into this area is important in order to understand young women's embodied management of risk within spaces in the NTE in light of arguments around the 'feminisation' of the NTE (Day *et al.*, 2004: 172) and examples of women supposedly reclaiming these public spaces and performing contemporary feminine identities drawing on empowerment, independence and sexual agency (Waitt *et al.*, 2011). Women have traditionally been expected to engage in an extensive range of safekeeping practices in public space, and been subjected to 'victim-blaming' if they are deemed to have failed to take appropriate precautions and then become victims of crime or sexual violence (Brooks, 2011). This may be particularly true in the NTE, which can be understood as a potentially high-risk space characterised by a multitude of pleasures and dangers (Hubbard, 2007; Eldridge and Roberts, 2008a).

Whilst these themes will be explored in more depth in a review of the literature in Chapter 2, this brief overview has begun to highlight several of the tensions and blurrings of boundaries of appropriateness that women may be expected to negotiate on a night out. The NTE thus clearly represents a pivotal and highly relevant everyday space in which to explore the dynamics of (in)appropriateness and femininities and examine some of the potential contradictions underpinning definitions of contemporary femininities. With much of the literature suggesting that young women must walk a fine line between 'new' femininities and more traditional notions of what it means to be feminine (Stepney, 2015), it is important to examine and understand the contemporary scripts of appropriate femininities to which young women have access and the ways in

which these are actually reworked through interactions and bodily practices in the highly gendered and (hetero)sexualised spaces of the NTE.

It is important to recognise that different women are likely to engage with the NTE in different ways, and that of course even individual women may participate in the NTE in a range of diverse ways with, for example, different groups of friends, family or partners. Appreciating the range of ways in which women may conceptualise their engagement with the NTE according to factors such as time, space, context and company, this study has sought to understand the ways in which women engage with the NTE both more generally, and also in a more specific grouping on the 'girls' night out'. For the purposes of this project, this represents a specific kind of engagement with the NTE which – whilst of course still subject to diversities, nuances and variations – can be identified by some common characteristics (which were later confirmed in the way in which the participants interpreted and defined the girls' night out). The girls' night out necessarily includes only female participants, usually an existing friendship group, who will stay together for the whole night. The collective element of the girls' night out is important, as will be highlighted in later chapters. The night typically commences with communal drinking at one of the women's homes whilst the group get ready for the night out together. This process can typically be identified as an important and distinct characteristic of the girls' night out, as will be shown through data analysis. The night then involves further drinking in bars and usually in a club in the city centre. It was felt to be important to pay attention to the girls' night out as a specific type of engagement with the NTE for numerous reasons. Firstly, this encouraged women to talk more specifically about these types of nights whilst still allowing for comparisons to be made with other types of nights out when the young women discussed these. Secondly, exploring the girls' night out also offered a useful way in which to explore group processes, interactions and collective identities, allowing findings to pull together what is distinctive about the girls' night out and the ways in which it is used in the collective construction of feminine identities. Finally – and crucially – although some research has been done on the NTE more generally, as will be outlined in the next section, very little research has been done specifically on the girls' night out. This provided an opportunity for this study to engage with some of the subtleties and distinctions that may apply to the girls' night out whilst also considering women's broader engagement with the NTE.

Situating the Project: Gaps in the Literature

In recent years, there has been an expansion of research into the field of the NTE in general, in particular concerning women's drinking practices and their engagement with these leisure spaces. However, there are still notable gaps in the literature; Lindsay (2006) recognises that there is a lack of in-depth, localised, qualitative research on women's drinking practices. Day's argument that 'there is a scarcity of feminist literature on women's alcohol consumption' (2010: 242) also highlights the gap that continues to exist around in-depth feminist work in this area. This study has worked towards addressing these concerns through adopting qualitative, in-depth interview-based research with young women that was clearly localised and geographically situated within Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and drew on feminist theoretical and methodological frameworks. In particular, 'the connection between femininity and alcohol consumption is an under researched area' according to Lindsay (2006: 32), and this is supported by Lyons and Willott who agree that little research has looked at the patterns and context of women's drinking and the *meanings* they give to it (2008: 695). This research contributes to addressing this gap through focusing on the contextual factors surrounding women's drinking and participation in the NTE, the meanings they attribute to such practices and the ways in which this links back to femininities. Haydock also argues that research on the NTE frequently fails to focus on how young people themselves negotiate drinking, and this project works towards meeting his calls for future research to explore the way in which practices within the NTE actively construct - rather than simply reflect - gender (2009: 20). However, it is recognised that whilst these criticisms are still relatively recent, the picture around alcohol research may be starting to change slightly even over the last few years. For example, Griffin *et al.* note that several recent studies have begun to explore women's relationships with drinking and the NTE, yet they also argue that few have actually considered women's drinking 'in relation to post-feminism and the contradictions of contemporary femininity in any depth' (2013: 187). This study has specifically sought to focus on such potential contradictions and their negotiation within a 'post-feminist' society.

In addition, a number of studies have been carried out in Australia (for example Sheehan and Ridge, 2001). Whilst these offer a useful contribution to the literature, there are considerable differences between the UK and Australia which may mean it is not easy to make comparisons. Lindsay (2012a) argues that drinking in general is more

strictly regulated in Australia than the UK, with recommended alcohol intake levels much lower and youth drinking less accepted. Similarly, some interesting research has been done in Australia concerning women's appearance management and dress on a night out (Waite *et al.*, 2011) but again, this cannot necessarily be applied to a UK context. Research on dress and appearance management in the UK is relatively limited compared to the emerging body of research starting to emerge around drinking practices, highlighting the contribution this study can make in this area. Similarly, research around risk, femininities and the NTE has tended to focus more on risks to physical safety (see for example Sheard, 2011) rather than using a broader definition to include risk to reputation, another area this study sought to address.

Existing research on the NTE also often fails to draw upon the ways in which sexuality might impact upon understandings of the boundaries of (in)appropriate femininities and the creation of different identities (Haydock, 2009). For example, whilst some work has been done around sexuality and risk (Mason, 2001; Corteen, 2002), this has tended to focus more generally on public space rather than the NTE more specifically, which may present its own unique set of dangers and threats. Furthermore, Peralta argues that little research has been carried out on gay individuals and drinking (2008: 375). Certainly, much of the existing work around drinking, nightlife and sexuality has been more quantitative and US-based, often problematising consumption levels in gay communities compared to straight ones and associating gay and lesbian drinking practices with social isolation and 'coping' mechanisms (Hughes, 2003; Amadio, 2006). This is problematic as it suggests a pathologisation of non-heterosexual engagement with the NTE, which must be addressed through additional research into the nuances around drinking, NTE participation and sexuality. In terms of UK-based research, there are some gaps around how sexualities, femininities and the NTE intersect. For example, whilst the work of Brooks (2011) is extremely useful in understanding the ways in which young women's safety concerns are negotiated in the NTE, she researched predominantly heterosexual women, and acknowledged that 'a more diverse sampling frame... may produce different findings' (2011: 638). Similarly, Stepney's (2014) work on drinking with female undergraduates involved only one participant who identified as non-heterosexual. Emslie *et al.* explicitly argue that '(i)t is rare to find work on drinking which includes heterosexual, gay and bisexual respondents and this should be rectified' (2015: 8). This study has sought to address this issue and ensure a more diverse sample was achieved through targeted recruitment of non-heterosexual women.

On a related note, whilst research has been done on the dynamics of femininities and ageing more widely, particularly in terms of dress and appearance (Twigg, 2012), there is very little research on the dynamics of ageing and femininities in the spaces of the NTE or ageing femininities and alcohol consumption (see Emslie *et al.* (2015) for an exception). Whilst it is acknowledged that this study builds on much previous research on the NTE in terms of engaging with the younger people who form the target market of the majority of NTE venues (Roberts, 2006), this project has offered an opportunity to explore the ways young women might problematise midlife or ageing women's identities and bodies within the spaces of the NTE. This remains a relatively under-researched area, and one that was felt might yield interesting findings around ageing, motherhood and engagement with the NTE.

As J. Gill *et al.* (2007) argue, a large amount of other research also focuses primarily on only student populations (although see Sheard (2011) for a notable exception). This is supported by Lindsay, who argues that little research in this field has included young working populations (2003: 3). For example, in Brooks' (2008) research on young women drinkers in Scotland, only one participant was working-full time. Likewise, Stepney's (2014) research on women, friendships and drinking focused exclusively on undergraduate female students. This has already been recognised as a problem as students are often in quite different circumstances to their peers who are not in higher education (Haydock, 2009: 137). Student and non-student spatial and temporal patterns of engagement with the NTE may differ (Holt and Griffin, 2005) and research suggests that female students typically drink more alcohol than their peers who work (Kypri *et al.*, 2005). This research has engaged with both students and non-students in order to provide a broader and more nuanced picture of women's practices and experiences in the NTE. This is particularly useful in the study site of Newcastle, where there is a large student population, dedicated student nights are common, and there may be tensions and contrasts in students' and non-students' behaviours and practices. Holt and Griffin call for a greater recognition in research into the NTE of 'the difference in status and power between students at a large British 'red brick' university and the local people living in the often run-down, student-dominated residential areas adjacent to it' (2005: 259).

I would argue that this broadening in terms of participants also allows for a greater reflection upon nuances of class and local identities and how these might impact upon

the boundaries of femininities, particularly in post-industrial cities such as Newcastle, where the 'Geordie' is widely recognised as a working-class, regional identity associated with the local area (Nayak, 2003; 2006). This is of course not to deny the existence of middle-class Geordies. Yet according to Alexander, local identity is often particularly important to white, working-class young people in the city, for example through 'a strong identification and pride in their local area' (2008: 184). Prior research has focused on the performance of post-industrial masculinities within Newcastle (Nayak, 2003), and it was felt that it would be original and useful to explore this from a different angle by looking at contemporary femininities and how these are negotiated within spaces that may 'remain highly masculinised in terms of the male domination of space and the policing of compulsory heterosexuality' (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003: 148). The next section will expand further upon the salience of the study's location in Newcastle and the ways in which this may impact upon research findings in a post-industrial cityscape attempting to rebrand as a 'party city'.

Situating the Project: Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Newcastle-upon-Tyne is the largest city in the North-East of England, with a historical local economy traditionally based around heavy industry and manufacturing (Hollands and Chatterton, 2002). This industrial legacy has clearly impacted on the city's sense of identity and current economic situation, although in a post-industrial context the city has now transitioned and attempts have been made to rebrand it as a 'party city' (Buckley and Fawcett, 2002). There has been heavy investment in particular areas such as the Quayside and in building a national reputation around the city's NTE in order to pull in visitors from other parts of the UK, including stag and hen parties (Hollands and Chatterton, 2002; Nayak, 2006).

According to Roberts (2006), around 80,000 revellers could be present in the city centre on a Friday or Saturday night almost 10 years ago, and although no more recent statistics could be sourced, this figure is likely to have increased considerably. Newcastle also has a high student population, 17% of the city's population in term time (Newcastle City Council, 2011: 2). This group can be seen as a key player in the local economy in terms of consumption. Indeed, part of the city's allure for students may be its nightlife, as it was voted number one for student social life and nightlife in the Times Higher Education Student Experience Survey in 2013 (Gibney, 2013). 50% of

participants in a local student survey reported binge drinking more than twice a week, and other research suggests students are likely to drink heavily (Piacentini *et al.*, 2012) and more than their non-students peers (Kypri *et al.*, 2005). Although it should be noted that binge drinking may also take place in student accommodation or in other spaces and does not necessarily require engagement with city centre venues, there is evidence that this considerable student population shapes the NTE in the city in particular ways. For example, student nights are common throughout the week, often featuring heavily discounted drinks and facilitating competition between clubnights and venues.

However, Newcastle can be seen as a city of extremes where despite its attempted reinvention as a cosmopolitan party city, there are pockets of deprivation and significant differences in health outcomes and life expectancy across the city (Public Health England, 2014). Overall, poverty rates and unemployment levels are higher than the national average (Public Health England, 2014). Newcastle also has one of the highest rates of binge drinking in England, with about 30% of adults estimated to regularly binge drink (defined here as drinking more than double the daily recommended allowance in a single session) (Newcastle Partnership, 2008) and hospital stays for alcohol related harm are well above the national average (Public Health England, 2014). Such figures can be interpreted as part of a bigger picture of poor health outcomes in a city where life expectancy overall is below the national average and 38% of the population live in areas of high deprivation (Public Health England, 2014). Such distinctions highlight that the experiences of students may be very different compared to those of some local young woman, and also that even amongst local women, experiences may vary considerably. These points further emphasise the salience of class considerations and the importance of ensuring some diversity in the sample and moving beyond research focused primarily on student populations.

The location of the research project within Newcastle has also offered an opportunity to build on past research on the city's NTE undertaken by Hollands (1995), and later Hollands and Chatterton (2002), exploring youth cultures and identities in Newcastle's NTE and the regulation and control of nightlife in a space 'beset by problems of visible decay, social polarisation, and deprivation from its industrial past' (2002: 291). Buckley and Fawcett agree that Newcastle continues to be somewhat 'tied to its past in terms of its regional identity, sitting as it does in the midst of the now decaying remnants of what was a massively productive industrial landscape' (2002: 131). The regional, North-East

identity of the 'Geordie' is traditionally associated with working-class values such as a history of heavy industry, strong local communities and regional pride (Barton, 1990), and prior research by Nayak (2003; 2006) has explored the ways in which the Geordie identity continues to be relevant and meaningful for local young men. Nayak (2006) found that white, working-class Geordie young men are required to renegotiate their identities in a post-industrial city where they lack positive identities shaped by industrial production and must negotiate the shift towards de-industrialisation marked by changes in the local and global economy. In a shift from identity formation through production to identity formation through consumption, he argues young male Geordies are redefining themselves through patterns of leisure consumption, largely the embodied rituals of supporting football, drinking and going out (2003: 7). The young men can be seen to be enacting a spectacular 'Real Geordie' masculinity defined by embodied excess and a 'work hard, play hard' ethic on a night out (2003: 13). Winlow and Hall agree that in the North-East of England young people experience pressure to consume in the NTE and the weekly 'big night out' often serves as a form of respite 'to soothe the pains of daylight frustration and prepare workers in these low paid consumer industries for what lies ahead the following week' (2009: 103). In these post-industrial communities, the industrial work that traditionally forged shared communities has been replaced by alienating and isolating work that is seen to have value only in the sense that it funds more pleasurable activities such as nights out. Similarly, Hollands and Chatterton (2002) argue that a typical night out in Newcastle often draws on notions of escapism, local pride and the idea of partying as a key part of the Geordie identity.

It is likely that local young women have been affected differently by the processes of de-industrialisation and it was felt to be important for this project to examine contemporary feminine identities within this context. Media representations of both Geordie young men and women have seen a recent resurgence with the MTV show 'Geordie Shore', a reality television show following the exploits of a group of Geordie young men and women in Newcastle. This is one of a number of 'structured reality' television programmes drawing upon classed and regional identities (Woods, 2014). Such shows typically depict 'excessive' classed and regional femininities (Woods, 2014: 197), focusing largely on the cast's heavy drinking and hyper-sexual behaviour. Like other regional, working-class feminine identities such as the 'Essex Girl', the Geordie woman may be associated with taking pride in the performance and display of an exaggerated and sexualised femininity (Woods, 2014). This is reinforced more

widely in other media and popular depictions, where Newcastle is renowned for the supposed performance of a particular type of ‘hyper-sexualised femininity’ where women’s ‘ability to wander out on freezing nights in skimpy clothes is the stuff of legend’ (Borland, 2009), with one commentator on a snowy Geordie night out remarking that ‘it seemed that the possibility of a coat ruining their revealing outfits was more frightening than freezing to death or having a painful skid on the slippery pavements’ (Bazley, 2010). The ‘typical’ Geordie woman’s outfit has been depicted as ‘glamorous in nature, combining ostentation in terms of glossy and clingy materials with the erotic display of limbs and cleavage’ (Buckley and Fawcett, 2002: 132), which may parallel Nayak’s (2003) depiction of white ‘spectacular’ Geordie masculinity as a similar corporeal embodiment and visual display of exaggeration and excess. However, it is important to understand the meanings of such depictions of Geordie identity to young women in Newcastle, including the extent to which they might buy into or reject such identities, and the extent to which they even feel they are relevant or something that they can relate to.

Situating the Project: Mapping the City Centre

The study can also be situated more literally, in terms of mapping the spaces of the NTE within the city centre. Arguably, the majority of the city centre’s nightlife spaces consist of more ‘mainstream’ rather than ‘niche’ venues (see Lindsay, 2006) catering to a general, largely heterosexual clientele. As Lindsay (2006) describes, such venues typically consist of strongly heterosexualised and more ‘commercial’ venues including large, popular nightclubs or ‘megaclubs’. This is supported by Hollands and Chatterton (2002), who argue that Newcastle’s nightlife is characterised by a narrow consumer base and a dominance of chart-based clubs and mainstream bars. However, even within the city centre, differentiations can be made in terms of the types of bar, pub and club venues and the city itself can be divided into a number of distinct areas. Whilst it is important to note that these areas may not be neatly geographically bounded and some of the associations made between particular areas, venues and clientele may be partly drawn from assumptions or stereotypes, it is still both possible and useful to imagine the city as an intersecting web of overlapping areas targeting different clientele, for example through branding, price, location or promotions. Figure 1 broadly illustrates a possible way of labelling the city centre which has proved helpful for understanding the data obtained in this study. Whilst this may appear to present a somewhat simplistic

view of the NTE in the city, the stereotypes, assumptions and generalisations highlighted by the research participants themselves will be explored in much more depth in the analysis chapters, suggesting there is some merit in demarcating the city in this way as it often mapped onto the ways in which young women conceptualised city spaces and areas.

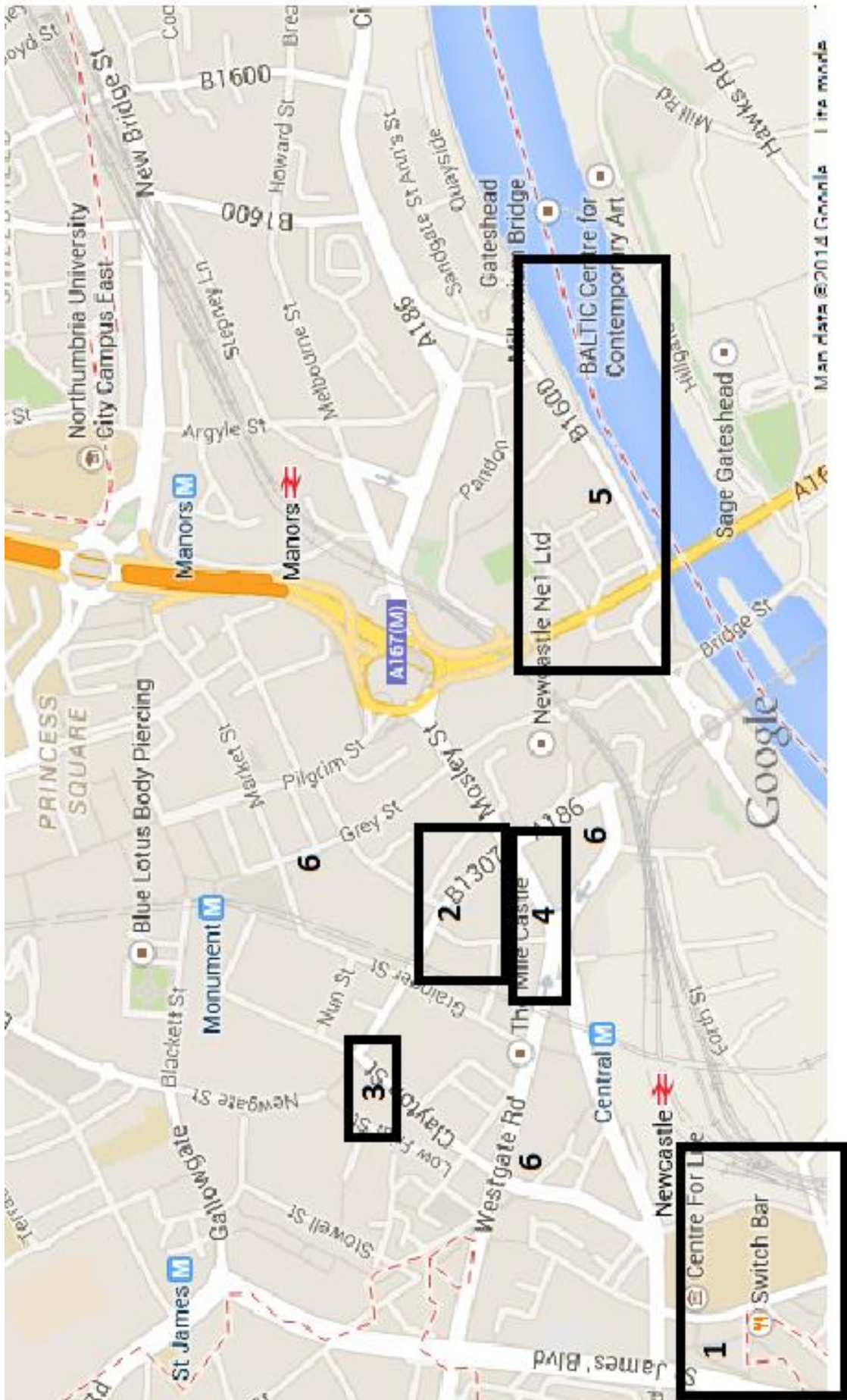


Figure 1: Map of Nightlife in Newcastle City Centre (Google Maps, 2014)

1. The Gay Scene

Newcastle's gay scene – colloquially known as 'the Pink Triangle' - is largely geographically-bounded and located slightly to the Southwest of the main city centre itself, close to Central railway station. The concentration of the gay scene in a tightly-bounded area on the edge of the city centre is interesting and suggests parallels can be drawn between Newcastle and other UK cities such as Manchester where Valentine (2001) argues gay nightlife and communities are confined to particular areas as an act of policing and control. The area consists of a number of bars and a large nightclub, Powerhouse.

2. The Bigg Market

The Bigg Market – located very centrally in the city - is one of the city's most (in)famous drinking areas. It represents a key site of historical importance as attempts were traditionally made to confine public drinking to this space (Hollands and Chatterton, 2002). This strongly heterosexualised area – populated by mainstream bars and clubs - is often the 'face' of the city's nightlife that is represented in the national press and media, where it is seen to epitomise a supposed 'crass and boisterous Geordie drinking culture' (2002: 302). The public space around the Bigg Market is a highly visible site of spectacle and display with its 'dense networks of these pubs [fun pubs and 'disco bars'] stretching across a tightly bound network of cobbled streets' (2002: 307). However, Hollands and Chatterton (2002) raise concerns over the more traditional Bigg Market's ability to move with the times, adapt and compete with other areas in the city centre which are attempting to rebrand as cosmopolitan and upmarket.

3. The Gate

Arguably, in recent years the Bigg Market area has expanded out slightly to the Northwest, with a proliferation of venues leading up to the Gate retail and leisure complex, which opened in 2002. The Gate is a modern, multi-use complex featuring a number of bars and restaurants, a casino and cinema. There are also a number of large bar and club venues just outside the Gate, including Tiger Tiger, Sinners and Sam Jacks. These tend to cater to student populations during the week and non-students at the

weekend, and venues such as Sam Jacks are typically promoted as welcoming stag and hen parties and offering additional entertainment such as podium dancers and a mechanical rodeo bull.

4. The 'Diamond Strip'

Although situated geographically close to the bottom or Southeast end of the Bigg Market, the bars on Collingwood Street project a very different image to that associated with the Gate and the Bigg Market. Locally known as the 'Diamond Strip' (conjuring up associations of affluence and status) this road, with its tight concentration of several late-night bars, is associated with more 'upmarket' drinking venues and is popular throughout the entire week with both students and locals. Several of the bars have doormen regulating entry, and although many are free to enter, they offer a more 'club-like' feel than some of the more traditional pub venues in the city, with loud music, DJs and dancefloors. Drink prices are generally high and the venues tend to have extensive cocktail menus.

5. Quayside

There has been heavy investment in the waterfront area of the city – the Quayside – which has been redeveloped in the last decade as a cultural and tourism hub with new bars, restaurants and leisure venues (Nayak, 2006: 816), including the Baltic Art Gallery and Sage concert venue. This also includes 'new upmarket, mixed-use cafe-bar venues' (Hollands and Chatterton, 2002: 308) in attempts to re-label drinking in Newcastle as a more cosmopolitan activity. This area, like the Diamond Strip, may arguably mark a distinct contrast with areas such as the Bigg Market and be associated with a 'better' type of clientele, according to some local people (Hollands and Chatterton, 2002). However, I would argue that this depiction of nightlife on the Quayside is now slightly outdated. The area has arguably seen a decline in its reputation for upmarket bars in recent years as the Diamond Strip has grown in popularity, although the reopening in 2014 of the large Riverside nightclub on the Quayside may be beginning to shift more custom back to the area.

6. Alternative / Other Venues

There is a small 'alternative' nightlife scene in the city, with 'alternative' taken to refer to non-mainstream bars and clubs including rock, indie, punk, underground and live music venues. These tend to be spread across the city centre rather than confined to one particular area, and include the Cut near the Diamond Strip, Legends nightclub on Grey Street (now closed but open when the research was undertaken) and the O2 Academy on Westgate road (admittedly part of a large national chain but arguably home to many 'alternative' gigs and clubnights). The city is also experiencing the emergence of an increasing number of self-styled 'taverns' or 'ale houses' selling craft beer and ales in upmarket surroundings, although these continue to sit alongside much more traditional pubs.

Structure of the Thesis

This chapter has situated the study within the current research landscape and geographically, contextualised the study briefly within a supposed post-feminist society and begun to outline the key themes investigated through the research. The literature review in Chapter 2 will further situate the study and expand upon the key research themes of drinking, dress and risk management in relation to (in)appropriate femininities. The chapter will also reflect more broadly upon developments in ways of conceptualising gender, femininities, sexualities and the body, and expand upon the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the study drawn from feminist theory and symbolic interactionism. Chapter 3 outlines the methodological approach utilised, and outlines recruitment strategies used and key demographic information on the young women who participated in the study. In line with feminist methodological good practice, this chapter offers reflections on the research process and challenges encountered. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 discuss and analyse the key findings of the research. Chapter 4 introduces the data through a discussion of the value of the girls' night out and nights out more broadly, exploring the role of alcohol consumption and drinking practices in the construction of (in)appropriately feminine identities. The chapter will also show how processes of classed, aged and regionalised othering are used to position some women outside the boundaries of appropriate femininity through their drinking choices. Chapter 5 examines the functions of dress and appearance in constructing and

reinforcing the boundaries of femininities on a night out. In particular, the chapter will show how a somewhat exaggerated performance of femininity in terms of appearance and effort is expected and normalised, whilst at the same time a perceived ‘hyper-feminine’ appearance can be read as unattractive and potentially ‘slutty’. Again, othering is important and can be utilised to label different bodies in particular classed and regionalised ways. Chapter 6 explores the ways in which risk is conceptualised and managed by young women both on the girls’ night out and in the NTE more generally. The chapter also highlights some of the ways in which particular practices, behaviours, identities and even spaces were conceptualised as ‘risky’ or ‘high-risk’. Finally, Chapter 7 presents the main conclusions of the research through drawing together some of the key overarching themes that span across the three data chapters. This chapter also highlights some limitations of the research, touches on emerging findings that warrant further exploration and makes recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Introduction

As has been highlighted in Chapter 1, understandings of the meanings, definitions and scope of gender and femininities and the resulting implications for the lived experiences of young women are often contested, specifically in contemporary research. Further research in this area is required to contribute to an emerging field of literature on the ways in which embodied experience shapes identities in spaces such as the NTE, and the purpose of this thesis is to highlight the findings and conclusions from one study that has sought to address this. This chapter will provide an overview of the literature and existing research in the field in order to define key concepts and situate the project within the current landscape. Initially, this chapter will outline debates around the meanings of appropriateness, femininities and gender, before highlighting examples of recent sociological work that has begun to re-engage with the body as fleshy, material object. The chapter will then examine the contribution that symbolic interactionism can offer to understandings of everyday actions and outline the ways in which this theoretical approach has informed the project. Finally, the chapter will focus on the NTE as a specific site in which femininities are played out. This study is particularly interested in how women are expected to manage tensions around the meanings and negotiations of femininities in the NTE through drinking practices, dress and risk management, and an overview of previous research findings in these areas will be provided.

Key Concepts

Gender, Sex and Sexuality

The theoretical underpinnings of the study are informed by particular ways of understanding gender, sex and sexuality as socially constructed. Gender and sex have been theorised in numerous ways since the early 20th century, with an early biological focus on fixed distinctions between male/female and masculine/feminine (Richardson, 2015). These approaches, which saw gender as a biological ‘fact’ derived from one’s pre-given sex, began to be challenged in the 1960s through the emergence of the concept of the sex/gender binary, separating sex as biological from gender as socially

and culturally constructed. In this sense, gender can be distinguished from sex in that it concerns the social distinctions between what it means to be male and female ‘and the characteristics and identities embodied through membership of those categories’ (S. Jackson and Scott, 2010: 83), rather than necessarily pertaining specifically to the sexed body (although arguably it often does). Such advances in the ways in which sex and gender are conceptualised have been extremely useful in highlighting the socially constructed nature of gender and have relevance in shaping the current study, but can still be seen as subscribing to some essentialist notions by continuing to position sex as fully natural and biological and by retaining a dimorphic approach based on two sexes and two genders. For example, Colls critiques these approaches for reducing the sexed body to a ‘passive backdrop, or container, onto and into which a gendered identity can be projected’ (2012: 437).

Recent debates around gender have further unsettled the binary division of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ by challenging the biological fixity of the category of sex. Butler (1990) has been pivotal in advancing the argument that sex is socially constructed alongside gender, as we cannot understand sex outside of social constructions of gender. ‘Sexing’ the body thus becomes a social process shaped by prior, pre-existing understandings of gender (Hood-Williams, 1996). The dimorphic division of bodies into two supposedly natural and pre-determined sexes is further challenged by research exploring the diversity of bodies and the existence of intersex bodies which are often surgically modified at birth in order to fit into a binary gender category (Fausto-Sterling, 2000), and by research into trans identities and gender diversity (Monro, 2010). However, as will be outlined later in this chapter, such approaches may risk undermining the body’s fleshy materiality and bring bodies into existence only through language and discourse. In a balanced reflection that has informed the current study, Jackson and Scott recognise that sex is not entirely pre-social but is still based to an extent on features pertaining to the material body itself, where genitals represent a site of social difference and a method of categorisation (2010: 142); even if - as I would argue - the significance of genitals in attributing sex and gender is social rather than biological.

Understandings of sexuality have also changed over time, with the early 20th century characterised by more essentialist approaches that stipulated coherence between one’s gender and (hetero)sexuality (Richardson, 2015). In more recent years, queer theory has pushed for a move away from analysing gender and sexuality in relation to one another

and a consideration of the fluidity and complexities of these categories. These complex understandings of sexualities and genders have led to calls for more sophisticated theorisations of the multiple relationships between them. For example, Richardson (2007) recognises that the link between gender and sexuality is unstable and dynamic, claiming it can be conceived of in terms of the ‘patterned fluidity’ of a coastline. The relatively more stable category of gender is represented by the coast, and the less fixed category of sexuality is represented by the sea, with the coastline marking the shifting and dynamic boundary where the two interact. This relationship is affected, it is argued, by localities and histories, and varies at different levels such as the structural and the everyday. One aspect which is particularly salient for this project is Richardson’s analysis of the level of the everyday practices where the shoreline is constantly being remade, and where the tides might represent the ‘performative practices that give the coastline repetition and stability’ (2007: 471). This links to considerations of gender as performative and constituted only through repeated acts that create the illusion of fixity and permanence, as outlined in the following section. These ideas are highly relevant to a study concerned with the ways in which femininities are negotiated at the everyday level through performative practices.

Sex Roles, Masculinities and Femininities

It is widely recognised in sociological thought that bodies must be socialised into particular gender roles and embody the characteristics, behaviours and practices associated with masculinity or femininity (Rahman and Jackson, 2010) in order to be successfully read as male or female. According to Butler (1990), gender is performative in that bodies only become gendered through the continual ‘doing’ of masculinities or femininities. This is distinct from arguing that gender is performed, as the idea of a performance suggests that some true self exists prior to and behind the performance. For example, Goffman (1969) explores human interaction through theatrical metaphors and implies a distinction between the front stage ‘performances’ of individuals and the back stage ‘self’ where social roles can be dropped. In contrast, performativity actually brings gendered subjects into existence in a continual process that creates the impression that gender is fixed and natural and provides the illusion of a stable gender identity (Butler, 2004). This builds on the earlier work of West and Zimmerman, who see gender as merely a mundane and routine accomplishment created or ‘done’ in social situations

through behaving in ways that are deemed normal and appropriate for one's gender (1987: 126).

Again, dimorphic understandings of sex and gender have been challenged by work that attempts to deconstruct the binaries around gender and sex; Halberstam (1998) – for example - attempts to pry apart the associations between masculinity and male bodies. Her conceptualisation of 'female masculinity' outlines the history of how non-male bodies have subverted the gender binary of female/femininity and male/masculinity through 'doing' masculinity. Paechter (2006) also argues that the binary risks conflating masculinity unproblematically with maleness, male bodies or 'what men do' and positioning femininity as 'other'. She explores whether it makes sense to imagine 'masculine femininities' or 'feminine masculinities' and how this relates to lived bodies. However, she problematises Halberstam's (1998) formulation of 'female masculinity' for regarding masculinity as too singular, limited and fixed, arguing that it is more useful to think of all bodies as negotiating a *plurality* of masculinities and femininities that sit at differing distances from ideal or hegemonic masculinity or femininity, with individuals having a variety of these at their disposal which can be deployed at different times regardless of gender. This is supported by Monro (2010), who recognises that there are multiple and pluralistic masculinities and femininities and argues that it may be more useful to envisage sex/gender as a spectrum or continuum rather than binary. This could involve regarding gender and sex as groupings of multiple and overlapping masculinities, femininities and sexual orientations, which may be more or less 'appropriate' in different contexts. These fluid ways of theorising gender, masculinities and femininities tie into postmodern approaches that position individuals as negotiating, managing and presenting various different and flexible identities.

Whilst such approaches are useful in unsettling gendered binaries, it is important to acknowledge that individuals are not entirely free to fluidly adopt multiple identities drawing on different elements of masculinity and femininity with no constraints. Rather, gendered and sexualised identities continue to be (re)produced in a society that privileges and values certain ways of 'doing' sexuality and gender. The institutionalisation of heterosexuality is a hugely convincing example of this, where heterosexuality is normalised and consolidated through routine, everyday activities (S. Jackson and Scott, 2010). Butler (1993), for example, argues that the constant

performance of (very limited) gendered identities helps to naturalise heterosexuality and establish it as the norm. This is supported by Plummer's exploration of sexual stories; a hierarchy of voices exists where some 'voices' (i.e. heterosexual, monogamous voices) are given much more space, credibility and power than others (such as the voices of sex workers or paedophiles) (1995: 30). In a world of 'gendered heterosexism', 'those stories that will be most readily said and heard will be those which facilitate standard gender divisions and the paramountcy of heterosexual relations' (1995: 31). In other words, individuals continue to be regulated to at least some extent by norms and institutions, and although women may make individual, negotiated choices regarding how they behave, act and display their bodies, I argue that this occurs within a pre-existing framework of social norms, constraints and ideas about how it is appropriate for women to behave (Green *et al.*, 1987). Whilst I recognise that there may be some variation in terms of the types of masculinities and femininities that are associated with certain contexts, this study is concerned with the boundaries in terms of what feminine subjectivities can be 'appropriately' negotiated, and by whom, so does not position women as entirely free to fluidly and unproblematically adopt a postmodern plurality of masculinities and femininities in identity construction. Rather, the types of feminine identity women can 'appropriately' embody continue to be subject to regulation and control through – for example – social norms, peer pressure or the demonisation or criminalisation of certain practices and ways of being. A recognition of this is important for the purposes of this study, as this allows me to argue that certain ways of doing femininities may be seen as more appropriate or valued than others in different contexts, as will be explained in further detail in the following section.

(In)appropriate Femininities

If bodies become gendered through the continual 'doing' of masculinity or femininity, then both men and women are required to adopt the potentially varying and contradictory norms around what it means to be masculine or feminine and engage in embodied daily practices in order to gender their bodies successfully. Crossley (2001) argues that women and girls are expected to act out the gender assigned to their biological body through the incorporation of femininity and supposed female dispositions into their embodied identities. Budgeon agrees that women are required to 'discipline and survey their own bodies by engaging in practices which produce their own 'docile' bodies according to the dictates of idealized constructions of feminine

embodiment' (2003: 39), drawing on Foucault's work on the way in which docile bodies are produced through disciplinary processes. Foucault (1977; 1978) explores how the 'docile' body is produced through engaging in disciplinary techniques shaped by various discourses or technologies of 'biopower' which focus on bodies. Although Foucault does not specifically address gendered differences in these disciplinary techniques, feminists have usefully developed his ideas to explain the ways in which women's bodies are oppressed, controlled and disciplined by cultural and social norms around female sexuality (McNay, 1992). Bartky (2003) extends his work to argue that women's bodies are expected to be more disciplined and controlled than men's, highlighting the importance of consideration of the role of the body in research on the ways in which femininities are negotiated by women in their everyday lives.

A key starting point of this study is the recognition that some ways of 'doing' femininity have traditionally been deemed more appropriate than others. The appropriately feminine body has been associated with passivity (Korobov, 2011), fragility and lack of agency (Wilkins, 2004). Skeggs' (1997) pivotal work based on interviews with working-class women around the ways in which gender and class are constructed also recognises the ties that have traditionally existed between femininity and respectability, where respectability can be associated with a control over one's sexuality and sexual behaviour, often embodied through marriage and motherhood (Lees, 1989). Crucially, these normative assumptions about what it means to be feminine can be understood as a form of social control where women are expected to collude in the privileging of masculinity and their own continued subordination (Holland *et al.*, 2004), and are expected to retain a degree of control over their bodies, sexualities and behaviour. As Bordo argues, the feminine body has traditionally been required to be a 'tight, controlled, 'bolted down' form... whose internal processes are under control' (1993: 190). Notions of control are pivotal in understanding the ways in which traditional understandings of femininities might play out upon female bodies and impact upon the everyday experiences of women.

At the same time, as Laurie *et al.* argue, 'there are multiple femininities and masculinities but...in different contexts particular masculinities and femininities become hegemonic or 'normal'' (1999: 4). Different types of femininity are regarded as more or less appropriate at different times and in different spaces, and that which is (in)appropriate may be continually in flux and require constant reflexive monitoring and

adaptation by women (1999: 4). This is supported by Jantzen *et al.* (2006), whose interviews with 22 women on the role of their underwear choices in identity creation and bodily presentation demonstrate that ‘real’ femininity is linked to the notion of wearing the ‘right’ underwear for the right occasion (2006: 184). The demands of different contexts may vary considerably; for example ‘old cotton briefs’ may be acceptable for playing sport but denote a unattractive and unfeminine ‘housewife’ identity in other settings. Similarly, the work of Dilley *et al.* (2014) explores the ways in which femininity might be displayed episodically (rather than continuously) through choices around footwear on ‘occasions’ and ‘non-occasions’. Again, this example demonstrates that being, appearing or feeling ‘feminine’ may take on different levels of importance in different settings.

Recent research has also begun to explore the relevance of supposed ‘new’ femininities of agency and empowerment (Stepney, 2015) in a ‘post-feminist’ society where it is argued that gender equality has been achieved, and it is these debates that form a key basis for the current study. Some contemporary theorists argue that despite common beliefs that women are now empowered in the UK in many areas of their lives, there are still huge gaps between female expectations of equality and the reality (Sieg, 2007), yet women are effectively silenced through the contemporary rhetoric of ‘social equality’ and trapped under illusions of ‘post-feminist’ equality (McRobbie, 2007). Hauge (2009) recognises that although young women engage in embodied practices in order to actively construct their identities, discourses still continue to play a key role in shaping what ‘ways of being’ are made (im)possible for them. In an illustrative example, research by Allan (2009) within a private, single-sex school suggests that upper-middle class young women do have access to discourses of the liberated post-feminist subject, yet continue to face competing discourses around respectability and behaving like a ‘lady’. Being powerful and ‘sassy’ in this environment was limited only to behaviour that still upheld and reinforced gendered and heteronormative ideals of middle-class femininity (2009: 148), suggesting pervasive traditional – and classed - norms around femininity may still impact upon young women’s subjectivities. Griffin *et al.* (2013) - in recent and pivotal work on the tensions of performances of femininities within the NTE - note that there are clearly contradictions inherent in contemporary femininity in a supposedly ‘post-feminist’ climate. With a rich method drawing on analysis of alcohol adverts and media, focus groups and interviews with 107 young adults and ethnographic observations in three very different UK locations, they describe contemporary

femininity as a ‘profoundly contradictory and dilemmatic space which appears almost impossible for girls or young women to inhabit’ (2013: 184). For example, although women may be encouraged to adopt a more sexualised way of dressing and behaving, further research is required in order to understand the extent to which this is genuinely empowering versus how far it limits women to narrow, heterosexualised identities performed for men. This study engages with these debates and recognises that such work requires both an acknowledgement of young women’s agency and choice, and a recognition of the wider constraints and discourses that may impact young women’s decisions. For example, for Gill, ‘choices’ to engage in cultures of sexualised hyper-femininity are always ‘made in a context in which a particular kind of sexualized (but not too sexualized) self-presentation has become a normative requirement’ (2007: 72). Set against this complex ‘post-feminist’ landscape, this study has aimed to explore the extent to which contradictions around the meanings of femininities exist, the ways in which they impact upon the lives of young women and the extent to which women have freedom and agency to adopt particular subject positions in light of potentially competing and powerful discourses.

Furthermore, it is possible that not all young women are able to negotiate these contradictions in the same ways, as processes of othering may continue to exclude some young women from accessing respectable feminine identities (although of course they may not see themselves as ‘other’). I define othering - in line with Holt and Griffin (2005) - as a process whereby members of a relatively dominant group validate and reaffirm their own identities through the exclusion or devaluing of less powerful groups. Othering is frequently deployed along classed lines through processes of attaching negative values and categorisations to those perceived to be of – usually – a lower class, in order to attribute value to the middle-class, respectable self. In other words, it is recognised that some women are able to position themselves as respectable and feminine by distancing themselves from problematic, unfeminine or less respectable women (Walkerline *et al.*, 2001; Skeggs, 2005). Similarly, sexuality is clearly implicated in the performance of femininities, as appropriate constructions of femininity are closely tied to normative heterosexuality (Cullen, 2011). Age may also be implicated, as slim, fit and youthful bodies are valued in society and the ageing (female) body is typically associated with deficiency, asexuality or even pity or ridicule (Holland, 2004). Arguably, these hierarchies of bodily value may make it more difficult for the working-class, ageing or non-heterosexual body to claim respectable, feminine

identities. It is imperative that contemporary research recognises this and explores the ways in which intersections of different dimensions of identity shape the types of femininities to which young women have access in spaces such as the NTE. However, as outlined in the previous chapter, much research in this area has tended to focus on predominantly heterosexual, young, student populations, potentially missing opportunities to explore these variations and nuances. This study has sought to address these limitations through seeking sample diversity in terms of participant class, education, background and sexuality.

This section has set the scene for the research project by outlining important developments in the ways in which gender, sex and femininities are theorised and the implications of these for the project. The body is also both a contested topic for sociologists and feminist researchers and one that is central in the current project. The next section will explore debates in the theorisation of the body and highlight the ways in which the body has been conceptualised for the purposes of the study.

Sociological and Feminist Understandings of the Body and Embodied Practices

The Body

The lived, material body has traditionally been regarded as an ‘absent presence’ in the social sciences (Shilling, 1993). Even feminist theory - which is often credited with retaining a focus on corporeality - has been critiqued for traditionally ignoring embodied experience (LaFrance, 2007). Corporeality or materiality can be used here to refer to those aspects pertaining to the physicality of the body; the body that can be perceived, touched and smelled; that ages, changes and may become ill; that consists of an ‘inside’ of organs, capillaries and glands, and is more than an ornamental surface (Davis, 2007). Thus, a distinction can be made between the body as fleshy, material object/subject¹ and as abstract concept within sociological thought. Embodiment is a related concept describing the way in which individuals experience and use the body in their everyday lives, and the ways in which they are positioned as active subjects through everyday bodily practices yet also live within the body’s constraints and boundaries (Davis, 2007). In this sense, the body is conceptualised as constantly moving

¹ I use the term object/subject to reflect the body’s unique position as both

and fluid and we are always in a process of ‘becoming’ through our interactions with the world around us (Harrison, 2000).

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to investigate in detail historical feminist approaches to theorising the body, but many critics have differentiated between the radical feminist ‘body politics’ of the 1970s and 1980s and academic feminism at the time, where the theory of female embodiment was more marginal (Howson, 2005: 8). By the 1990s, dissatisfaction with structural analyses of women’s oppression and the ‘cultural turn’ led some feminists to turn to psychoanalysis and postmodernism as approaches to theorising the body (S. Jackson and Scott, 2010: 32). Yet psychoanalysis tends to draw more on sexual difference than gender identity, and focus on the importance of language and the unconscious, treating the body as a ‘sign’ detached from the frame of social context and lived experience (Howson, 2005: 140). This is echoed by Jackson and Scott (2010), who agree that it fails to explain lived experience and risks downplaying cultural and social contexts.

Postmodern accounts also risk privileging text and discourse over lived bodies (Budgeon, 2003). Butler (1990, 1993, 2004) remains one of the most widely cited postmodern feminist writers on the body, arguing that even the materiality of the body is constructed through discourse, as the gendered and sexed subject is only brought into existence through continued and ongoing performativity. In other words, there is no ‘outside’ to discourse and no way to understand the materiality of a body *beyond* language without using pre-existing signifying processes, meaning matter continues to be seen as ‘the effect of the particular and specific folding of discursive formations’ (Bray and Colebrook, 1998: 44). Rahman and Witz agree that postmodern understandings of the body such as these prioritise discourse over matter ‘by asserting the ability of discursive practices to form the objects of which they speak’ (2003: 244). Thus, whilst pivotal, Butler’s work retains a focus on how culture is imprinted upon the body’s surface rather than the fleshy reality of the body (Davis, 2007). Shildrick (1997) also draws on postmodern analyses to propose a feminist ethic based upon ‘reinscribing the feminine’ through deconstructing binary dichotomies. However, like much postmodernist work, she continues to privilege text, language and cultural constructions of bodies. Howson (2005) argues that for Shildrick, materiality is actually denied as Shildrick acknowledges the body but positions knowledge of it as coming only *after* reflexive thought. Shilling agrees that the physical body can never be fully understood

in many postmodern accounts as it remains ‘permanently deferred behind the grids of meaning imposed by discourse’ (1993: 80). Grosz (1994) has drawn on both psychoanalysis and postmodern thinking in her reconceptualisation of the body, yet remains critical of the popular notion of the body as signifier or vehicle of expression – as these position the body as too passive and deny materiality. She sets herself the challenge of dismantling the mind/body binary and explaining all that is normally associated with the mind (subjectivity, the interior, the private) in terms of the body, allowing the mind to be displaced. She proposes a framework which resists dualism and monism, but recognises that the interior and the surface ‘cannot be collapsed into one and...do not always harmoniously blend with and support each other’, like a Möbius strip (1994: 189). Whilst Bray and Colebrook (1998) argue that Grosz makes important steps towards viewing the body as more than a product of discourse, others argue that – despite popular belief to the contrary – Grosz disappears the body by focusing only on ‘addressing theoretical questions which have little connection with everyday experience’ (Howson, 2005: 121). Grosz’s work often remains psychoanalytically focused so loses materiality and continues to draw on text and language metaphors rather than the actual interactional elements of everyday practices (2005: 122).

These debates around discourse and materiality have prompted calls from feminist researchers to recognise embodied experience as a source of knowledge and engage in more sophisticated thinking around the relationships between the social, gender and embodiment (without ‘reducing’ the body back to a biological object) (Witz, 2000). In response to this, recent feminist and sociological work has begun to re-engage with understandings of the body as fleshy and material object and focus on embodied experience. Monro (2010), for example, argues that poststructuralist theorising around gender diversity now increasingly recognises the role of the body and corporeal, material experience. Barad (2003) is a good example, advocating a renewed focus on matter and calling for a move away from a focus on representations towards examining what it is that they actually represent. Barad calls for an understanding of materiality which prioritises neither material phenomena nor discursive practices but sees them as intertwined and ‘mutually articulated’ (2003: 822) in fluid and ongoing processes of ‘becoming’. Colls (2007), for example, explores the ways in which the fat body is lived, drawing on the dynamic ways in which the fleshy matter of fat hangs, moves with force and momentum and interacts with surroundings and clothing rather than merely the cultural meanings ascribed to fat as an abstract concept. Hauge (2009) also challenges

the idea of the body as passive and demonstrates the ways in which considering embodied and lived experiences can contribute to our understandings of gendered and sexualised identities. Drawing on 18 interviews with young women in Norway across a period of 2 years, her research explores the ways in which teenage girls manage the transition from gendered child to gendered *and* sexualised adolescent and negotiate the tensions of hetero-femininity through bodily practices. This may include - for example - shifting from physical play as children to being less mobile in the playground as adolescents. Hauge's (2009) work is valuable as it recognises the important roles of *both* discourse and practice in constructing appropriate feminine identities and the ways in which they interact. These ways of understanding bodies and experiences have relevance for contemporary research that seeks to avoid reducing the body to merely a product of discourse.

Research that places embodied practices and everyday, lived experience at its centre clearly offers a welcome contribution to sociological knowledge and an enhanced understanding of the ways in which discourses are (re)interpreted, negotiated and lived by agentic subjects. This study aimed to build on this body of knowledge, drawing on elements of a symbolic interactionist approach in order to contribute to understandings of the ways in which young women's embodied, everyday practices and interactions constitute feminine subjectivities and identities.

Symbolic Interactionism

In contrast to the US (see Denzin, 2001), symbolic interactionism has traditionally been a comparatively neglected approach in feminist work in the UK (Longmore, 1998; Delamont, 2003) – although theorists such as S. Jackson and Scott (2010) and Coleman-Fountain (2014) have recently attempted to revive the tradition as a tool for better understanding how sexualities and genders are constituted through everyday practices. Jackson and Scott seek to locate sexuality 'within the mundane activities of social life' (2010: 2), where sexuality is constructed through practices and interactions. Sexuality and gender are thus 'fully social, embedded in everyday interaction and understood in terms of wider social meanings and patterns of behaviour' (Coleman-Fountain, 2011: 26). The work of S. Jackson and Scott (2010) draws heavily on Simon and Gagnon's (1984) approach to sexuality from the early 1970s, which describes the 'everyday', active social production of sexuality through the reworking of certain scripts. Sexual

and gendered scripts, they argue, operate flexibly and fluidly at the three intersecting levels of cultural, interpersonal and intrapsychic. Cultural scripts are the broader messages from society and culture (including dominant discourses, debate, common knowledge and the media) on what it means to be sexual, and may be rooted in institutions and processes such as marriage and religion (Gecas and Libby, 1976). The interpersonal script is the way in which we play out these dominant cultural scripts in interactions with others – how gender and sexuality are ‘done’ or reworked and enacted through language and embodied conduct that may become habit or routine. The intrapsychic script is our own individual dialogue and experience of gender and sexuality, the elements of scripts that we come to reflexively internalise and understand as part of the self (S. Jackson and Scott, 2010).

It is the interpersonal level that holds the most interest for this study, as it is here that gender and sexuality are reworked as embodied individuals ‘do’ gender and sexuality through ‘actual practical activities - whether having sex, dressing for work or organizing a night out’ (S. Jackson and Scott, 2010: 92). Thus the self arises only through embodied experiences and relations with others, and is continually modified and in a process of becoming. It is the social situatedness of the self that distinguishes it from the ‘the later postmodern decentred and fragmentary subject’ (2010: 123). Determinism can be avoided as symbolic interactionism – whilst not denying the materiality of bodies – appreciates the ways in which bodies are only made meaningful by a society and culture which affect how we understand and experience bodies (both our own and others). This approach also leaves space for the body and agency. It is through embodied, lived experience that cultural and social scripts are critically reworked and enacted as we interact with the world and actively construct identities. At the level of the interpersonal, cultural scripts can be integrated to a greater or lesser extent, allowing for flexibility. The body is here understood as the medium through which we exercise agency and respond to and accommodate/resist social scripts (Welles, 2005; Maxwell and Aggleton, 2009), addressing Denzin’s (2001) calls for further work drawing on social interactionism to take it beyond merely a Goffman-esque surface-level analysis of social interactions. For example, Weitz (2003) explores the extent to which women can accommodate or resist dominant conceptualisations of femininity through their hairstyles, showing women are neither ‘docile bodies’ nor entirely free agents, but rather combine accommodation and resistance as they actively grapple with cultural expectations and social structures. Although in late modernity – a time of perceived

sexual fluidity and plurality - it might appear that we have an abundance of cultural resources upon which to draw and opportunities to construct a myriad of sexual selves, we always remain 'bounded by the cultural resources available to us, which help shape what is thinkable and possible' (S. Jackson and Scott, 2010: 131). This links to the discussion earlier in this chapter regarding the postmodern perceived fluidity of sexual identities versus the idea that gender and sexuality continue to an extent to be bound and regulated by dominant norms, values and institutions.

This research draws partly on a symbolic interactionist approach; Jackson and Scott themselves argue that social interactionism is fairly 'modest' so 'there are no barriers to using it in conjunction with other perspectives that might illuminate different aspects of the social' (2010: 37). Elements of both symbolic interactionism and Butler's theory of gender performativity will be drawn upon for this study in order to contribute to understandings of the ways in which women draw upon cultural scripts and rework them in everyday, embodied practices. The body and lived experience will be positioned as central throughout, as it is through everyday, embodied actions and practices that gendered and feminine bodies are continually produced and it is the material body that interprets, reworks and adapts broader cultural scripts with a degree of agency. The body is also key in understanding the ways in which processes of othering operate to problematise certain bodies, for example through highly embodied and physical sensations of 'disgust' and the associated unpleasant tastes, sights, sounds or smells or embodied secretions and excretions (Miller, 1997, cited in Tyler, 2008: 19). In this sense, disgust is a visceral reaction often directed at the physical bodies of others.

This section has developed the theoretical context of the study further through outlining the central position of the body and highlighting the ways in which symbolic interactionism, performativity and othering will form key components of the study's theoretical basis. The next section will outline in more detail the research setting, the NTE, and explore some of the tensions in contemporary definitions of femininities that may be played out within the NTE.

Theorising Femininities within the NTE

The NTE potentially offers opportunities for women to carve out new feminine identities and re-write sexual scripts in what Hayward and Hobbs (2007) term 'liminal'

spaces filled with uncertainty and pleasure. Spaces within the NTE have been conceptualised as sites of female hedonism where young women are able to play with ‘new’ femininities of empowerment and sexual agency through bodily presentation and shared practices such as alcohol consumption (Waite *et al.*, 2011). The NTE is also conceptualised as a site of female bonding and socialising, with Green (1998) arguing that women’s work on friendships in leisure spaces can be a key part of the process of becoming gendered and doing feminine identities.

Yet the idea of the NTE as a positive space for the rewriting of feminine identities must be called into question when ‘long-standing, traditional discourses around femininity and sexuality are still pervasive’ (Day *et al.*, 2004: 177). The NTE can still be conceptualised as a key site of control and regulation for young female bodies, with women expected to conform in appearance and behaviour to certain modes of heterosexual femininity. Tan agrees that ‘clubs are paradoxical spaces for performing gendered and (hetero)sexualized selves that vacillate between affirming and subverting heteropatriarchal regimes’ (2013: 23), where women are expected to challenge understandings of femininity as timid and reserved, yet still present ‘(hetero)sexy’ bodies for - predominantly - the male gaze. The work of Griffin *et al.* (2013) with over 100 young people on nights out in the UK clearly highlights the ways in which young women are expected to simultaneously:

be sassy and independent – but not feminist; to be ‘up for it’ and to drink and get drunk alongside young men – but not to ‘drink like men’. They are also called on to look and act as agentically sexy within a pornified night-time economy, but to distance themselves from the troubling figure of the ‘drunken slut’ (2013: 184)

Cullen (2011) reports similar findings from a multi-method, qualitative research project in a small English town involving participant observation, 36 group and individual interviews with young women, bulletin board postings and visual methods. Young women, Cullen argues, are left to navigate the complex interplay between the new and traditional, positioning themselves as ‘party girls’ without overstepping the mark and being othered as promiscuous by other women. Bodies remain crucial within these spaces, with Buckley and Fawcett arguing that women are highly visible within the NTE and often ‘reduced to their corporeal selves’ (2002: 135). Femininities are performed through embodied practices in a variety of ways affected by timings, space, alcohol and other users of the NTE (Leyshon, 2008), with women continually having to

negotiate their own embodied positionings (Green and Singleton, 2006). This challenges the idea that women are completely free to redefine femininities and sexual identities in the NTE and highlights the need for further research such as this study to explore the ways feminine identities are constructed within these spaces.

Drinking Practices

Traditionally, women's alcohol consumption has been popularly portrayed as a threat to safety, health and – ultimately – femininity (Day *et al.*, 2004). Yet the NTE has been conceptualised as an increasingly 'feminised' space, and some researchers argue that women are more able to engage in traditionally male leisure pursuits such as public drinking (Lyons and Willott, 2008). Indeed, contemporary research demonstrates that there has been an increase in alcohol consumption amongst young women in the UK during the 21st Century, with teenage girls potentially engaging in binge or heavy drinking more frequently than their male peers (Plant, 2008). Contemporary alcohol consumption is theorised as a key component of female socialising and the negotiation of fun, friendships and group identity (Sheehan and Ridge, 2001). Eldridge and Roberts argue that 'alcohol is a means through which identity is lived and imagined—and through alcohol consumption we are then able to perform new subjectivities that are both temporally and spatially located and dependent' (2008b: 327), highlighting the specific functions of the NTE and drinking in potentially facilitating 'new' ways of doing femininities and identities. Research also suggests that drinking can facilitate a collective sense of belonging, downplay social differences and give people a feeling of corporeal participation and 'togetherness' (Jayne *et al.*, 2010). Following 19 semi-structured interviews with female undergraduates in Scotland, Guise and Gill (2007) report that alcohol was used and enjoyed for a number of reasons, including reducing inhibitions, relaxing, having fun, socialising and spending time with female friends. Yet whilst Stepney's (2014) in-depth interviews with British female students aged 18-25 confirm that practices such as drinking whilst getting ready with friends may take on important roles for women in terms of bonding, she calls for more nuanced analyses of women's drinking that recognise that drinking can also establish a 'space of suspension' that creates the distance required to engage in small talk, 'have a laugh' and at times distance oneself from group tensions and anxieties within the NTE. Such work is important in highlighting that women engage with the NTE and alcohol consumption in multiple ways and for many reasons.

Alcohol consumption has also been linked to conceptualisations of femininity as assertive and sexually empowered for both heterosexual (Sheehan and Ridge, 2001) and non-heterosexual women (Peralta, 2008). By the early 1990s, alcohol consumption was being theorised as a type of embodied resistance against normative values around sexuality and gender (Papagaroufali, 1992). More recently, Peralta carried out over 70 in-depth interviews with heterosexual and non-heterosexual young people to explore the ways in which drinking can be used to justify non-normative gendered and sexualised behaviour, and concluded that alcohol consumption allowed the heterosexual participants to justify gender-divergent behaviour such as - for women - initiating conversations with men or making sexual advances, and - for men - emotional expression. Some of the non-heterosexual female participants described how drinking made sex more 'enjoyable' and lowered sexual inhibitions, alluding to the fact that drinking can facilitate a form of 'bodily empowerment' (2008: 383). Hartley *et al.* report similar findings from their focus groups and interviews with 13-15 year olds in Scotland on the influence of the media on both relationships and drinking, commenting that heterosexual '(t)eenagers may drink alcohol to help them connect with the opposite sex and the ways in which they do this may be shaped by their expectations of what is gender-appropriate' (2014: 784). It is important to explore the extent to which such theorisations reflect the experiences of young women in a 'post-feminist' society of supposed sexual empowerment.

Some contemporary research offers examples where young women's heavy drinking and drunkenness are spoken of unashamedly and as examples of hedonism (Griffin *et al.*, 2013: 196), suggesting that getting drunk and 'rowdy' can be perceived as pleasurable (Guise and Gill, 2007: 900) and young women who do not drink can experience marginalisation and lack access to shared funny stories of drunken behaviour (Griffin *et al.*, 2009a: 224). Drunkenness may even be seen as a way for women to excuse and justify unfeminine behaviour (Measham, 2002; Peralta, 2008). Waitt *et al.* agree that drinking allows young women 'to find pleasure in participating in a bodily comportment that transgresses middle-class norms of respectable femininity' (2011: 271), suggesting drunkenness to an extent allows women to engage in ways of being that would not be regarded as conventionally feminine. In another example, Griffin *et al.* (2009b) describe how a young woman in their research on drinking and 'passing out' stories was able to attribute any inappropriate behaviour to extreme drunkenness and

lack of self-control, and more recently similar findings have been reported by Hartley *et al.* (2014). 'Blaming it on the drink' may allow women to behave in certain ways without jeopardising their position as a respectable young woman (Griffin *et al.*, 2013: 191). However, the extent to which all women are able to do this can be called into question. The examples above focus on the ways in which women can transgress *middle-class* norms of femininity 'without falling into the position of the feckless drunken working-class slag' (Griffin *et al.*, 2009b: 466). Yet if the bodies of women are already pre-read as working-class, it may arguably be more difficult to escape these judgements.

Drinking may now be normalised for young women on a night out; Griffin *et al.* describe the existence of an 'imperative to intoxication' where moderate alcohol consumption is required in the NTE, and women who drink 'too little' (i.e. drink like a girl) carry the risk of being labelled 'boring, 'lightweight' and 'girly'' (2013: 188). This suggests that, to an extent, women are now expected to adopt some elements of more masculine drinking practices and behaviours, and being seen as 'girly' may have negative associations. This is supported by Young *et al.*'s (2005) study of American female students, where participants believed that women who could match men's drinking were seen as more attractive by men than non or low-level drinkers (cited in Plant, 2008: 165). Yet Lyons and Willott argue that although young people may frame women's increasing drinking, consumption of 'male' drinks such as beer and attempts to 'keep up with the guys' in terms of greater equality, such practices could alternatively be read as (hetero)sexualised performances of a type of femininity that may be attractive to young men (2008: 704). It could be argued that imitating masculine drinking practices - particularly to enhance heterosexually desirability - is unlikely to be liberating for women and fails to challenge gender norms or assign more positive meanings to female drinking in its own right.

Furthermore, women may still face judgement if they drink 'too much' and their drinking continues to be viewed more negatively than men's by both women and men (Lyons and Willott, 2008: 698). Drawing on ethnographic research consisting of interactions and observations involving drinkers in Bournemouth, UK, Haydock argues that 'simply to become intoxicated [is]... to place doubt over one's respectable femininity' (2009: 97). Excessive consumption can be seen as particularly damaging, leading Measham to coin the phrase 'controlled loss of control' to describe the desired

level of intoxication which many young women strive to achieve through their recreational use of drugs; a balance between ‘enjoying life but not totally losing control’ (2002: 363). Whilst focusing on drug use more generally, Measham’s (2002) phrase can also be deployed more specifically to examine the drinking practices of young women. As Griffin *et al.* argue, the ‘good’ neoliberal subject is responsible and disciplined, and so within government discourse ‘only rational, civilized and above all moderate drinking is constituted as unproblematic’ (2009b: 461). Similarly, Hey (1986) reports that respectable female identities are heavily tied to self-control, and the voluntary loss of control achieved through heavy drinking may threaten a woman’s reputation (cited in Meyer, 2010: 27). These norms and expectations around control are closely tied to the body. For example, highly embodied consequences of intoxication such as come-downs, hangovers and even hospitalisation may be glorified by men as achievements of masculinity, but downplayed by women and associated with shame and guilt (Measham, 2002: 359).

Research on the embodied drinking practices of young women does suggest that they are ‘likely to show self-policing and self-restraint in terms of intoxication in order to stay within the boundaries of traditional femininity’ (Measham, 2002: 358). Lyons and Willott held discussion groups with young women in New Zealand, reporting that although the young women in their research enjoyed going out and drinking, they also ‘talked about how they have been conditioned to be responsible and in control, making it difficult for them to ‘go out and get plastered with the girls’’ (2008: 706). Even certain types of drink may be less acceptable than others, with women traditionally expected to drink ‘softer’ and somehow more feminine beverages (Papagaroufali, 1992), whilst beer continues to be associated with manliness and masculinity (Rolfe *et al.*, 2009). This appears to be borne out in research, with Lyons and Willott (2008) reporting that the young males in their focus groups were much more likely to drink beer than their female counterparts. When women *do* drink beer, they were described as more likely to drink from a glass than a bottle or can, in part to avoid smudging lipstick, meaning women were ‘subverting the beer/masculinity association by engaging in the behaviour but performing it in feminine ways’ (2008: 702). This is a useful example of the ways in which drinking choices require an awareness of the potential effects of alcohol on the body, not just in terms of embodied drunkenness, but also in terms of the way particular drinks might ‘look’, or the practical, embodied consequences of consuming them such as smudging make-up.

Piacentini *et al.* (2012) note that heavy drinkers may deploy a number of 'neutralisation' techniques to justify their consumption levels, such as denying harm caused, attributing responsibility to others and justifying drinking levels by positioning their heavy drinking as a temporary practice that will decline as they grow older. Another strategy is scapegoating to distance oneself from the potentially dangerous subject position of 'problem drinker' (2012: 847). Lyons and Willott (2008) also found that their participants' own (at times excessive) drinking was connected to fun and pleasure, but other, unknown women were positioned as violating appropriate feminine behaviour through their drunkenness. Such drunkenness was often linked to assumed sexual promiscuity and dressing in certain 'tarty' ways (2008: 705). In her own work with young women around their drinking practices, Cullen remarks that the 'twin themes of reputation and respectability' (2011: 123) were important for young women on a night out, with participants preserving their respectability by othering girls who consumed too much alcohol and were sexually reckless. It is important to understand how this balancing act allows women to negotiate the boundaries of femininity and drunkenness, the extent to which some women may be less able to avoid stigmatised drinking identities, and any implications for non-normative gendered and sexualised subjectivities. For example, excessive drinking is typically identified as working-class behaviour (Rudolfsdottir and Morgan, 2009). Ideas of embodied restraint - or lack thereof - are crucial in defining who can claim to be respectable and feminine, and in contrast to the restrained middle-class body, the working-class body is frequently depicted as loud, excessive and undisciplined (Lawler, 2005; Skeggs, 2005). Working-class girls are often positioned as beyond the boundaries of traditionally acceptable femininity in terms of their drinking practices (Rolfe *et al.*, 2009). Understanding the nuances of these aspects of classed identity and how they impact on engagement with the NTE and femininities has been a key aim of this study.

Age may be relevant here too. Lyons and Willott found that young women can label midlife and older women who are drinking within the NTE as deviant, and this is likely to tie in to discourses around appropriate femininity and motherhood (2008: 709). Interestingly, ethnographic research in Australia suggests that women's use of alcohol actually continues to be important in constructing feminine identities as they become mothers, helping them to come to terms with motherhood and construct positive identities as women with children who retain some independence (Killingsworth, 2006).

However, the picture around motherhood and drinking in general may be more complex, with other research continuing to suggest women with childcare responsibilities may cut down on their drinking and be judgemental towards other mothers who drink (Emslie *et al.*, 2012). The NTE itself is commonly regarded as dominated by younger consumers (typically aged 18-24) and so it is important to understand the ways in which the presence of ‘older’ women – particularly those who are drinking heavily – might be conceptualised and assessed, although very little research has been carried out in this field. Similarly, relatively little research has been carried out on gay individuals and drinking (Peralta, 2008: 375), and the research which has been done tends to be US-based and focus narrowly on levels of consumption and ‘problem’ drinking in gay populations compared to straight ones (Hughes, 2003; Amadio, 2006), either pathologising the drinking practices of gay and lesbian individuals or associating their drinking with social isolation. For example, research suggests lesbians are likely to drink as much as or more than their heterosexual peers (Parks and Hughes, 2005), and there is some evidence to suggest drinking can be a ‘coping’ strategy to manage feelings of being out of place in a venue or even fear of homophobic violence (Jayne *et al.*, 2010). In a rare example of more qualitative work, although still tending to focus on risky or ‘problem’ drinking practices amongst non-heterosexual communities, Drabble and Trocki’s (2014) work does qualitatively explore non-heterosexual American women’s relationships with alcohol and its meaning in their lives, suggesting drinking may play an important role in coming out, establishing LGBT community connections and managing stress. Other research agrees that entry into and involvement in LGBT communities and social networks often centres around drinking in bars; for example Gruskin *et al.* (2006) report that alcohol plays a key role in lesbian identity formation and forging friendships and relationships in bars within LGBT communities, and this may be particularly important where there are limited alternative spaces to meet. However, even these more qualitative approaches have a US focus, and there is a gap in the literature concerning qualitative research on young non-heterosexual women’s engagement with the NTE in the UK, which this study sought to address.

The role of the body is also important in this particular area of research. For example, Jayne *et al.* (2010) identify drinking and drunkenness as key elements of the performative experience of everyday life and call for future research around drinking practices to draw upon affect, emotions and embodiment. Leyshon also touches on the

ways in which 'drinking is performed, resisted and given meaning through embodied practices' (2008: 268) and explores how drinking practices affect young women's sense of their bodies, femininities and belonging in rural environments. For example, young women may use alcohol to 'reconfigure' their bodies for fun, with Leyshon drawing upon the notion of 'corporeal feminism' to understand how theories of embodiment and embodied experiences can be used to understand the performativity of femininity and drinking practices in rural settings. Leyshon explores the ways in which 'young women employ various embodied strategies to move between spaces to experiment with alcohol and alternative femininities and 'do' gender' (2008: 267). The body is important not just in terms of drinking practices within the NTE, but is also expected to be managed and worked on in particular ways in order to present a particular type of dressed body on a night out, as the next section will highlight.

Dress, Appearance and Bodily Presentation

Nayak and Kehily argue that 'the way we style our bodies... is one of the techniques through which we perform, enact and 'do' gender' (2006: 467), as gender is instinctively 'read' off bodies based on visual markers and cues even when we are not consciously 'doing' gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987). This is supported by Reischer and Koo (2004) who argue that for women, 'doing' beauty is a way of negotiating dominant cultural values and 'the 'body beautiful' becomes a key site for displaying and constructing the female gender. Whilst it is recognised that men also engage in bodily practices and manage embodied identities (R. Gill *et al.*, 2005), as Hurd notes, an 'emphasis on the body and its appearance are central aspects and behaviours of the female identity and social experience' (2000: 80).

As Holland argues through her work on the ways in which older, 'alternative' women negotiate femininity through dress, 'there is pleasure to be had from 'doing' feminine, however partial or ambivalent' (2004: 50). Clothing and appearance can thus be understood as a source of empowerment, playfulness and creativity for young women (Baumgardner and Richards, 2004). Gleeson and Frith (2004), in their work with young women on fashion, comment on clothing and appearance as rare opportunities for women to express their sexuality, with ambiguity often used as a tool to hint at sexualised identities in contexts where being explicit about them might cross the boundaries of appropriate femininity. Willett (2008) also recognises that dress and

fashion choices at a younger age – including supposed ‘sexy’ clothes - have recently been theorised by some as a marker of empowerment and a way for young women to express confidence and entrance to womanhood.

However, Skeggs, in her research with working-class women on femininity and respectability, recognises that appearance can also be a site of anxiety where femininity is closely tied to external validation from others and being accepted as part of a social grouping (1997: 107). Such work is important in illustrating some of the ways in which women’s bodies may be informally policed by other women or the self. Furthermore, inappropriate or unfeminine bodily presentation can also physically limit or constrain access to certain spaces – such as particular nightclubs - for young women (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003), undermining further the idea that women are free to adorn their bodies without consequence. Wolf (1991) is highly critical of the ‘beauty myth’ and its impact on the lives of women, and Bartky (2003) argues that although make-up is sold to women as a form of self-expression, there is actually very little space for playfulness and experimentation in its use. Del Busso and Reavey draw on life history interviews with women aged 21 to 35 to argue that ‘the successful production of the feminine body serves to reify the perception and treatment of the female body as static and passive surface, as opposed to offering women empowered ways of being persons in the world’ (2011: 49). However, it is useful to move beyond binary distinctions of empowerment/oppression and explore the ways in which different dynamics of agency and constraint might intersect to shape women’s clothing choices and appearance management, drawing on an approach similar to that of Dilley *et al.* (2014) in their reflections on the role of ‘choice’ and ‘transition’ in shaping women’s footwear decisions as part of a larger project on people’s embodied experiences of footwear and identity. Del Busso and Reavey (2011) do go on to say that investing in a feminine appearance may afford women *some* agency as they are then acknowledged as female subjects within the boundaries of heteronormativity. This is supported by Buckley and Fawcett, who agree that ‘it is possible to accept the dimension of pleasure to be found for women in fashion whilst acknowledging the complex issues that lie at the heart of the positioning of women within it’ (2002: 146).

Dress and appearance may take on a particularly central role within the NTE. Whilst within ‘everyday’ settings, beauty work is expected to remain hidden, for a night out more overt and obvious efforts at grooming may be appropriate (Skeggs, 1997). Griffin

et al.'s research with young people within the NTE suggests that a more sexualised way of dressing is expected within many of the mainstream spaces of the NTE, characterised by 'high heels, short skirts, low-cut tops, fake tan [and] long, straight and (bottle) blonde hair' (2013: 186). This is supported by Buckley and Fawcett (2002), who explore young women's relationships with fashion and identity in Newcastle more specifically, and argue that dress is typically clingy, glossy and revealing. This way of presenting the body has also been referred to as a form of 'hyper-femininity' or emphasised femininity (Allan, 2009), and can be argued to reflect a more general shift towards hyper-sexualised femininities and the increasing 'pornification' of society (Levy, 2005). This implies that young women now live in a 'raunch culture' where empowerment is reduced to being overtly sexual, and a narrow range of sexualised images of women pervade all aspects of popular culture, positioning the female body as sexually available to men at all times (Ticknell *et al.*, 2003). There is some evidence that investment in hyper-femininity can have value and personal benefit for some young women. Waitt *et al.*'s (2011) innovative, mixed-methods research into the embodied geographies of a night out involved young Australian women sketching maps of nights out and keeping photo-diaries, with the researchers reporting that investing in 'sexy' femininity gave some young women a form of individual empowerment and social power and boosted their ego and confidence.

Yet it is important to avoid conflating sexual autonomy and empowerment with sexual availability (Ticknell *et al.*, 2003), and to understand the ways in which the widespread circulation and acceptance of these narrow, heterosexualised images of femininity may impact upon women who adopt or resist them. Furthermore, a performance of femininity deemed *too* hypersexualised may still be criticised within the NTE (Haydock, 2009). This suggests that notions of respectability may continue to impact upon the ways in which young women manage their bodies. As Jackson and Scott argue, 'young women remain concerned with maintaining appropriately feminine sexual respectability while representing themselves as sexually desirable' (2010: 96), suggesting young women may be balancing the expectation to dress in more sexualised ways with more traditional notions of appropriateness and respectability.

Performances of hyper-femininity may also be read differently on working-class bodies, with Skeggs referring to the 'devalued class signifiers of excess (big hair, short skirts, lots of make-up)' (2001: 302). The working-class female body has long been positioned

as distasteful, excessive and vulgar (Lawler, 2005). It is important to understand the ways in which discourses positioning bodies in this way actually link to the ways in which women experience their bodies and the bodies of others. It is also important to explore the extent to which such stereotypes are associated with working-class Geordies. Nayak reports that contemporary Geordie male identities are created through an exaggerated ‘corporeal enactment of white masculine excess’ (2003: 21), and this may to an extent also be relevant for Geordie women. For example, Buckley and Fawcett (2002) argue that the NTE in the North-East is associated with hyper-visible and overtly sexualised forms of working-class feminine appearance and displays of ‘glamour’. They suggest that as hyper-feminine appearances have become more mainstream across class and geographical boundaries in the UK’s NTE, this changes the classed significance of these types of identity and as a result ‘leads to even greater stylistic excess in sites such as Newcastle’ (2002: 138). Yet research suggests glamour may be read as excessive or distasteful beyond the immediate female friendship group or community, in much the same way as stereotypes like the ‘Essex girl’ are associated with a glamorous way of dressing that can be derided and dismissed beyond the local context (Woods, 2014). These tensions demand further exploration in the context of Newcastle.

Notions of (in)visibility may also be key in terms of understanding the ways in which older women dress and negotiate femininity within the NTE. Twigg (2012) argues that dress, sexuality and the erotic are inextricably tied, and her research with high street clothing companies suggests that older women are expected to dress in more conservative ways that avoid excessive exposure of ageing flesh, using clothing to cover signs of the ageing body such as sagging breasts and larger stomachs and dressing in softer, less bold colours. According to Twigg, this forms part of ‘a wider process of ‘toning down’ in dress, the adoption of self-effacing, don’t-look-at-me clothes, that reflect the imposed cultural invisibility of older... women’ (2012: 1045). Vares (2009) undertook an interesting piece of work with female focus group participants aged 52-82 who were asked to discuss a film representation of an older, sexually active woman. They often viewed this figure with revulsion and disgust, and framed appropriate ageing femininity in terms of invisibility and the body remaining hidden and covered, suggesting the discourses around the unpleasantness of the female ageing body are so powerful that they come to be internalised by women of a range of ages. I acknowledge that ageing *can* be positively associated with a sense of freedom from beauty norms, the

male gaze and male harassment and abuse (meaning invisibility does not always have to have negative connotations) (Winterich, 2007). Yet I argue that the visible presence of older women's bodies – particularly when dressed in certain ways within the NTE - goes against certain expectations around the performativity and embodiment of gender and sexuality in midlife and beyond. The loud, visible presence of older women dressed in hyper-feminine ways in such spaces can be read as a way to challenge expectations around gender and ageing through 'campy' performances of femininity and rewrite ageing identities in more positive ways (Stalp *et al.*, 2008), although it is important to understand the ways in which the presence of older women and their dress is actually interpreted and responded to by younger users of the NTE, particularly when bodies that refuse to 'grow old gracefully' may be regarded as monstrous or grotesque (Holland, 2004). This is hugely under-explored in the current literature, and this study will make a contribution here through offering some initial findings in terms of younger women's attitudes to older women's presence in the NTE.

It is also important to explore the ways in which non-heterosexual young women negotiate these frequently heterosexualised expectations around the presentation of bodies. Dress and appearance have been recognised as potential sites for some women to adorn their bodies with a range of markers of lesbian identities and resist the visual norms of heterosexuality and femininity (Hayfield *et al.*, 2013). For example, Corteen's research with lesbian women consisting of focus groups around safety, sexuality and gender presentation suggests that lesbians may identify themselves in terms of absence or lack (for example lack of jewellery or the 'right' hair) (2002: 271). This may have implications for the ways in which they engage – or do not engage - with discourses of hyper-femininity and excess. Huxley *et al.* (2014) note that although of course butch or androgynous dress codes are not adopted by all non-heterosexual women, their research with lesbian and bisexual women regarding style does show that whilst some participants pointed towards a diversification of lesbian styles, many still described it in terms such as 'butch' and 'boyish'. Yet whilst a 'butch' appearance typically marks a rejection of feminine beauty norms through masculine dress and short hair, 'femme' lesbians may be more likely to invest in a more normative feminine appearance. The management of dress, appearance and sexuality may be even more complex for the older, non-heterosexual woman, with Walker (2012) querying whether ageing lesbians experience similar pressures to tone down appearance and suggesting that older femme lesbians - for example - may lack role models on ageing gracefully and still experience

pressure to avoid looking like ‘mutton dressed as lamb’, whereas the ageing process may be easier to manage for butch lesbians. Huxley *et al.*’s (2014) research does show there was some negativity expressed by younger women towards the butch style and a suggestion it was outdated or limited mainly to older lesbians whilst their own appearances were more individual and authentic. This suggests further research is required in order to understand the appearance management practices of young non-heterosexual women in contemporary society and how sexuality is embodied through dress on a night out both in straight space and on the ‘gay scene’. This study will contribute to this through its inclusion of a more diverse range of participants in terms of sexuality than has been typical in previous research on the NTE.

This section has demonstrated the ways in which managing tensions around dress and appearance may continue to be important for young women engaging with the NTE. This specific area has received less attention in the literature than drinking practices, and this study has provided an opportunity to explore these contradictions in more detail. Arguably, whilst managing dress and appearance in these contexts may represent one of the ‘pleasures’ on a night out, the NTE is also conceptualised as a space of potential ‘dangers’ and ‘anxieties’ (Hubbard, 2007). The next section will explore some more of these anxieties through examining the ways in which the literature has conceptualised risk and femininities, both more broadly and within the specific context of the NTE.

Risk and Safekeeping

As Stanko (1997) argues, the management of everyday risks through ‘safekeeping’ practices is inextricably bound up with the performance of appropriate femininity. Haydock agrees that ‘appropriate feminine behaviour is to be responsible, calculating [and] risk-averse’ (Haydock, 2009: 96). Drawing on Foucault, risk is theorised by Lupton as a tool of regulation and control, where risk discourses ‘are directed at the regulation of the body’ and used as a disciplining technique (1999: 88). As Campbell (2005) identifies, the body also has crucial links to the area of risk and power, where female bodies are regulated and controlled through ‘knowledges’ positioning them as vulnerable. Campbell argues that the ‘knowledges’ of dominant discourses ‘strike the body, bending and contorting it, as it engages in normative feminine safekeeping strategies in ways which confirm a specific femininity’ (2005: 130). For example,

women's fear of rape actually produces vulnerable bodies that may be fearful in public space and this has very real consequences as women may learn to imagine their own bodies as weak, fragile and unable to fend off an attacker. This study will draw upon these ideas by taking risk and risk management discourses to be highly gendered mechanisms of informal control of female bodies; these techniques typically include informal policing through reputation or judgement rather than more formal sanctions (Brooks, 2008). Such discourses may have very real consequences for young women in terms of the ways in which they live their everyday lives.

As traditional femininity requires women to engage in various 'safekeeping' strategies (Campbell, 2005), women are charged with taking responsibility for their own safety and may be subjected to blame if they are seen to have made themselves 'vulnerable' to risky situations through failing to adhere to standards of appropriate feminine behaviour (Brooks, 2008). Safety campaigns within the NTE in the UK are overwhelmingly targeted at women (Brooks, 2011), and young women's fears may be exacerbated by media discourse (see for example Meyer, 2010) and victim-blaming. Rape is a classic example, where conviction rates are low and victim-blaming rife; van de Bruggen and Grubb (2014) argue that various factors or different 'rape myths' shape the degree of blame attributed to the victim, such as victim dress, intoxication and perceived attractiveness and respectability. In a meta-analysis of contemporary empirical studies, the authors conclude that victims remain likely to be subjected to a certain degree of blame and attributed some responsibility for their own victimisation. These points 'appear to be contradictory, as... women are simultaneously made victims and held responsible for their actions' (Bernhardsson and Bogren, 2011: 9). Women are constantly exposed to a range of advisory discourses cautioning them to remain vigilant at all times, which may limit their ability to use public space autonomously (Brooks, 2011). Green and Singleton (2006), for example, found that young women are forced to deploy risk management strategies such as regarding certain streets as 'off-limits', identifying 'risky' places such as poorly-lit areas and seeking safety in numbers.

Engaging in the NTE may be seen as particularly problematic as this takes place at night in spaces that are characterised by uncertainties and various pleasures and dangers. Hubbard (2007) argues that embodied negotiations of public space in darkness can trigger excitement and anxiety as the city centre is transformed into a site of both potential stimulation and potential danger. Furthermore, drunkenness positions women

both as unfeminine and as potentially less able to manage risk. Drinking may mark a loss of bodily control, which sits at odds with the need to be vigilant, responsible and aware of potential risk on a night out. Lyons and Willott found in their focus groups that participants tended to draw on the connections between respectability and restraint and talk about how they had been brought up to drink responsibly and stay in control (2008: 706), tying into discourses of respectable femininity. Even academia is not immune from elements of victim-blaming; for example, Buddie and Parks (2003) link drinking and ‘risky behaviour’ and argue that ‘alcohol consumption has been shown to interfere with women’s ability to recognize and respond to danger’ (2003: 1389), reinforcing the idea that women are charged with taking responsibility for their behaviour *and* for the behaviour of potential male perpetrators. This also parallels educational materials and literature on safer sex, which often position women as responsible for managing and controlling male desire and negotiating condom use (Holland *et al.*, 1994).

Within the NTE, Brooks – who used focus groups and interviews with 35 young women to explore perceptions of risk and safety within the NTE – argues that young women report investing in ‘an extensive range of safety behaviours’ (2011: 639), regarding them as common-sense and gender-specific. Sheard (2011), researching young women’s participation in the NTE and drinking cultures in the North of England, found that the fear of drink-spiking and male violence was very real, with women describing a range of practices in which they engaged in order to minimise risk, including constant supervision of drinks. Young women may also avoid particular venues and parts of town that are perceived as ‘risky’. Some spaces may be evaluated as safer than others, and women’s use of public spaces may be shaped by notions of comfort and perceived safety. A decade ago, Casey (2004) observed that straight young women were starting to encroach on gay spaces within Newcastle, in part to escape the heterosexual male gaze and avoid male harassment. Skeggs connects this back to the idea of invisibility, arguing that ‘(f)or straight women who are constantly judged and made visible through the discourse of respectability, invisibility comes as a relief, a respite’ (1999: 228). However, Skeggs (1999) also recognises that heterosexual practices of normalised femininity may threaten lesbian and bisexual claims of legitimate ownership of space and construction of identities, highlighting the consequences of the presence of different bodies in certain spaces. This often operates along classed lines and student/local divisions too. For example, Holt and Griffin (2005) demonstrate through their research on students’ and locals’ use of the NTE the ways in which working-class locals and the

venues they frequent may be both feared and desired, viewed as an ‘exotic’ other. Although they do report that working-class venues may be sought out as somewhere risky and exciting as the middle-class engage in a form of ‘class tourism’, it may be that such practices are avoided by some young women and men who fear experiencing discomfort. Feelings of comfort and familiarity are likely to be important and may explain why - for example - students may be more likely to frequent student venues (Holt and Griffin, 2005) (although of course factors such as cost may also be important).

Whilst a great deal of work has been done on femininity and risk more generally, less work has engaged specifically with risk and risk management on the girls’ night out. However, research does suggest that the role of the female friendship group may be important in managing risk and providing ‘safety in numbers’. The focus group participants in the work of Griffin *et al.* (2009a) reported that the friendship group operates as a safety net, and this was further enhanced if there was a non-drinker or relatively sober young woman within the group to look out for others. The young women participating in Lyons and Willott’s (2008) focus groups also talked about the importance of looking out for other female friends when drinking. Stepney (2014), however, reports that the young women she researched felt that women *should* look out for one another but often lacked trust in their friends and had experienced situations where they were extremely drunk and had been encouraged to drink more or laughed at by female friends. This often resulted in feelings of shame and betrayal, suggesting women do not always unquestioningly engage in safekeeping measures and buy into ideas of appropriate and feminine behaviour. These tensions demand further investigation which this project sought to explore.

Furthermore, whilst there has been a considerable amount of useful research on risk and safekeeping within the NTE, this often focuses on management of physical risks to safety such as drink-spiking rather than combining this with a broader understanding of risk to reputation. However, these types of risk are also important. As Lees notes ‘a woman’s sexuality is central to the way she is judged and seen in everyday life’ (1989: 19). Crucially, reputation can be damaged by a whole host of women’s behaviours, not just actual or perceived sexual ‘promiscuity’. It is important to understand the relevance of reputation within a supposed ‘post-feminist’ society, where Attwood argues that the re-appropriation of the word ‘slut’ - for example through the Slutwalks - may represent

a move away from traditional femininity (although she acknowledges that it is unclear what it *does* actually represent a shift towards - perhaps a more 'predatory' male model of sexuality (2007: 238)). S. Jackson and Cram agree that the continuing 'negative labelling of an active, desiring female sexuality' (2003: 114) still makes it difficult for such an identity to be safely adopted by young women. This highlights some tensions in contemporary discourses around reputation and respectability. This study sought to explore these tensions in a society that is arguably still affected by the continuing importance of respectability and the endurance of the double standard of reputation. According to Gill:

these newer discourses are overlaid onto tenacious existing notions of 'good girls' and 'bad girls'. Sexual reputation is still policed punitively and at great cost to some girls whose behaviour is reframed within more negative discourses of female sexuality (2007: 73)

Preservation of reputation is often linked to the othering of less respectable, more 'risky' bodies. Green and Singleton (2006) observed in their own research on risk and leisure with young women in the North-East a process of - often classed - othering which allowed girl groups to distinguish themselves from others by labelling certain 'non-respectable' young women as 'slappers' who wear certain types of clothing and occupy risky spaces on the streets after dark. Risk was thus perceived as quite literally embodied by certain (working-class) girls (2006: 865).

Class is also implicated in the positioning of other women as aggressive and engaging in fights, behaviour which is traditionally regarded as unfeminine and risky (Day *et al.*, 2003). Lindsay's (2012b) research with young drinkers in Australia found that the women tended to avoid fights and their main involvement with violence tended to be in a 'peacekeeper' role, breaking up fights between male friends and male partners through soothing and calming. Again, this demonstrates the way in which women are often charged with managing and taking responsibility for male bodies and behaviour. In this sense, avoidance may be a key safekeeping mechanism, and this may include not reacting to provocation or attempting to minimise visibility and not draw attention to oneself. This is likely to be embedded from an early age, with Reay demonstrating in her research with primary school pupils that the 'nice girls' did not challenge harassment and bullying from male pupils 'but rather developed avoidance strategies which further circumscribed their practices' (2001: 159).

Bodily invisibility through dress can also be a safety mechanism. Some participants in Winterich's (2007) study of ageing and femininity talked about how being overweight allowed them to be invisible to men and avoid unwanted attention, harassment and male violence. In the NTE more specifically, Leyshon remarks on the ways in which women in rural drinking venues might dress conservatively to avoid unwanted attention from men (2008: 278). Sexuality is also implicated in risk management within the NTE, and again considerations of (in)visibility may be important here; Corteen – who carried out focus groups with lesbians to examine how 'safe' public space is maintained against the threat of homophobic violence - recognises that non-heterosexuals may take steps to minimise the visible indicators of their sexuality in order to limit the risk of homophobic violence in public spaces, with some attempting to 'pass' as heterosexual or invisible (2002: 260). Another common trend is that clothing that visibly marks individuals out as lesbians can be worn only in certain safe spaces (2002: 267). As Hayfield *et al.* note, for butch lesbians in particular, 'visibility becomes vulnerability' (2013: 173). This is supported by Mason (2001), who considers the role visibility plays in the risk (real or perceived) of homophobic violence, arguing individuals engage in highly embodied practices of self-surveillance to control the ways in which the visible markers of their sexuality are displayed or hidden. Mason (2001) draws on the importance of gay and lesbian knowledge of homophobic violence and their construction of 'safety maps', based on individual and group interviews with 75 lesbian and bisexual women. She emphasises how bodily these techniques are, in a sense the 'safety map' is also a 'body map' in which the non-heterosexual body is mapped for signs of non-compliance with heterosexual norms that may put them at increased risk of violence.

Before closing this section, it is important to note that this study did not seek to position women as passive victims of risk. Safekeeping strategies can be regarded as proactive attempts to mitigate risk. Furthermore, research demonstrates that some women are to an extent able to resist scripts of women as vulnerable to male violence and engage with safekeeping practices in complex and contradictory ways that may resist and transgress the behaviours recommended in safety campaigns (Brooks, 2011). For example, Hollander's (2002) focus groups with women on their perceived vulnerability to male violence showed that some women described their confidence in moving freely through public space or their belief that they would be able to resist and 'fight back' if subjected

to male violence. This suggests some women may be able to configure their bodies as strong and agentic against dominant scripts of passivity and vulnerability.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the relationships between gender, femininities and sexualities and made the case for further empirical examination of the implications of shifting understandings of femininities for the lived experiences of women within a supposed 'post-feminist' society. Whilst traditionally, some ways of 'doing' femininity have been recognised as more appropriate than others, it is more useful to imagine 'femininities' as a plural term, reflecting the multiple dimensions of femininities and the ways in which ideas of appropriate femininity may vary across time and space and intersect with other elements of identity. Whilst contemporary literature points to the emergence of shifting understandings of femininities that draw on elements of both traditional and 'new' femininities, it is important to understand the ways in which femininities are actually embodied by young women today. This study offers an original contribution to an emerging body of literature exploring the ways in which contemporary femininities are embodied across contexts and the ways in which this might empower or constrain women in a 'post-feminist' era. The spaces of the NTE are recognised as gendered and (hetero)sexualised, and a key site in which femininities are negotiated through dress and appearance, drinking practices and risk management. This chapter has raised a number of potential tensions and nuances around the meanings of femininities in these spaces which demand further investigation and form the basis of this study.

Chapter 3. Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted to address the research questions, initially situating the project within a particular way of understanding and producing knowledges drawing on feminist theory and symbolic interactionism. The rationale for the research design and methods is then presented, followed by a discussion of the process of sampling and recruitment, before turning to the practicalities of data collection and analysis. This is followed by a consideration of ethical issues. In line with the reflexive, feminist approach adopted for this research, the ways in which researcher identity may have impacted upon the research are highlighted. The final section of the chapter reflects on my experiences of the entire research process, expanding on the discussion of reflexivity to consider how my wider social identity and positionality may have impacted on the research, and reflecting on what might have been done differently had greater time and resources been available.

Research Design: Methodology and Methods

A methodology can be understood as more than ‘simply a posh way of saying method’ (Skinner *et al.*, 2005: 9), rather it can be seen as a coherent set of beliefs around epistemology, philosophy, methods and ethics. Epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowing and how knowledges can be produced and understood (Delamont, 2003: 72). This project draws on elements of feminist epistemologies and methodologies, which centre around the idea that ‘to do feminist research is to put the social construction of gender at the center of one’s inquiry’ (Lather, 1988: 571). Whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a history of the rise of feminist sociology and methodologies, it is important to note that distinctive variations exist in feminist approaches, meaning there is no such thing as a singular feminist method, rather a plurality of *methods*. Whilst I acknowledge this, I would argue there are still some themes common to much feminist research. For the epistemological underpinnings of this study, I adopt ideas common to feminist methodologies and reject the idea that an objective and stable social reality or ‘truth’ exists which can be studied by a neutral observer (Acker *et al.*, 1983). I instead seek to understand the social through researching the experiences of women themselves. The study also draws on elements of symbolic

interactionism, which is similarly concerned with exploring the meanings of experiences and interactions. Key to the study is a focus on the links between practices and identities and the ways in which identities might be constituted by individuals through everyday interactions and experiences.

A consideration of both feminist methodologies and symbolic interactionism strongly pointed towards the use of qualitative methods as the most appropriate means for eliciting data. As the study sought to gain rich data on women's lives, I decided that a quantitative approach would not elicit the detail required. A recognition that 'quantitative methods offer limited access to accounts of experiences, nuances of meaning, the nature of social relationships, and their shifts and contradictions' (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2006: 155) suggested that these would not be the most appropriate means of obtaining the detailed data required. Rather, it was decided that a combination of 25-30 individual semi-structured interviews and 2-3 focus groups would be the most useful and appropriate means of eliciting rich qualitative data from young women regarding their behaviours and everyday practices within the NTE.

The in-depth individual interview is recognised as a useful tool through which researchers can understand the social by exploring the 'perceptions, attitudes and experiences of individuals' (Sheard, 2011: 623), allowing researchers to obtain rich understandings of individuals' lives, the meanings they give to practices and experiences and how they construct social reality (Warren, 2002). Howson highlights the value of using methods such as interviews to elicit a deeper understanding of the lived and embodied experiences of individuals, placing emphasis on 'individuals themselves as the authors of valid and reliable accounts of embodied experience through the personal stories in which experience is invoked' (2005: 39). This is important as the research sought to draw on symbolic interactionism to understand aspects of women's lives and explore the ways in which everyday practices and experiences intersect with identities. Coleman-Fountain (2011) also recognises the value of adopting qualitative interviews as a means through which to conduct research from a symbolic interactionist perspective, providing researchers with insights into the ways individuals make sense and meaning of their lived experiences.

Having said this, I acknowledge that interview data may not always unproblematically tell us about what actually happens in the social world, as the interview is affected by

what participants choose to tell or not tell, and *how* it is told. The interview setting offers specific opportunities for participants to present the self and frame their experiences in certain ways through means such as exaggeration or exclusion. In light of these reflections, participant observation of young women in the NTE might be suggested as a useful way to more directly research participants' practices whilst on a night out through observing and interpreting interactions in the spaces within which they occur. However, I wanted to explore what young women themselves see as the motivations *behind* their actions (or perceived actions). In a sense, the interview itself can be regarded as an everyday context in which participants engage in a particular self-construction; as Haydock comments 'the interview is not simply an occasion to access objective information; it is also an instance of social interaction and presentation of self' (2009: 133). In other words, it is not only the content of interviews that can be revealing of the construction of certain classed and gendered selves, but also the way in which this content is framed and structured within the interview setting (2009: 134). This is useful from a symbolic interactionist perspective as it allows us to understand the interview itself as a particular social situation where participants engage in mediated forms of interaction and everyday identity construction.

Researchers working on femininity and the NTE have provided useful justifications for the use of in-depth interviews, and the interview is well-utilised within research engaging with themes such as risk and safety in the NTE. For example, Sheard carried out in-depth interviews with 40 women covering themes of risk and personal safety in public space, and argues that interviews are 'the greatest way of 'mining' the richness and depth needed for a topic of this contextual, sensitive and individualistic nature' (2011: 623). Similarly, Brooks (2008) drew in part on interviews in order to explore the 'individual biographies' of young women around risk and safety and provide a more private space for the disclosure of personal and potentially sensitive data. It was recognised that whilst not necessarily an inherently sensitive topic, the current study might also touch on sensitive areas around, for example, sexuality, alcohol consumption or risk. Research around drinking practices has frequently also included interviews; for example Rolfe *et al.* (2009) undertook 24 qualitative interviews with women 'heavy' drinkers as part of a wider study, whilst Stepney's (2014) recent research on young women's drinking practices involved in-depth interviews with 25 young women, and she specifically highlights the value of using qualitative research in order to understand young women's relationships with alcohol.

As this study was concerned with women's accounts of their own experiences and practices, the semi-structured interview format was selected to allow me to build on and respond to what participants were saying through the use of prompts that drew on the language used by the women. The semi-structured approach allows for probing of topics in ways that centre on what is important to participants themselves, allowing the researcher to at times pursue interesting and relevant avenues of discussion that may not have been anticipated. At the same time, a semi-structured approach still maintains some sense of consistency across interviews through the use of an interview schedule highlighting key themes to be explored and suggested topics and questions. Whilst a fully-structured interview would have denied me the opportunity to follow up on some of the leads and topics that emerged, retaining *some* structure and consistency in questions can be useful as it allows for comparability across interviews. The semi-structured approach also avoids what Coleman-Fountain (2011) describes as one of the 'pitfalls' of unstructured interviews, being 'under-prescriptive' or vague and leaving the participant unclear as to the nature and focus of the research. The semi-structured interview thus offered a useful balance between an unstructured and fully-structured interview, maintaining a sense of structure and direction yet allowing the process to be suitably flexible and responsive.

Whilst in-depth biographical or narrative interviews can elicit rich data about the complexities of people's lives and encourage participants to 'tell' significant events and life stories in their own words (Bates, 2004), this research was concerned with focusing more tightly on one specific area of women's lives, and one that was likely to be a fairly recent component of their everyday lives rather than forming a considerable part of their life-history. For this reason, narrative or biographical interviews were avoided in favour of the in-depth, semi-structured approach. Bauer (1996) draws distinctions between narrative interviews, which focus on specific events and are typically very loosely structured, and semi-structured, in-depth interviews which tend to elicit more talk of everyday experiences as responses to particular questions. A focus on everyday – even sometimes mundane – experience rather than significant life events is a pivotal component of an approach drawing on symbolic interactionism, meaning this form of interview was well-suited to addressing the research aims.

Having said this, the research process *did* draw on elements of storytelling through asking participants to describe a ‘typical’ night out with female friends. This often drew on some elements of narrative interviewing through eliciting particular chronological ‘stories’ of nights out, as discussed in depth by McCormack (2004). Plummer (1995) agrees that the stories that individuals tell may offer us a real insight into the cultures they are part of. In research around drinking and nights out more specifically, a number of commentators have drawn on and recognised the role of such ‘stories’ and funny memories in constructing selves (Sheehan and Ridge, 2001; Cullen, 2011), and highlighting the ways in which femininities and gender are constructed and mediated through drinking practices. Haydock, for example, draws upon the importance of using the interview methodology to capture the ‘cultural stories’ around young people’s drinking practices and understand their ‘discursive ideas of responsibility, gender and class in relation to drinking and the night-time economy’ (2009: 133). This provides further evidence to suggest that the way young people ‘tell’ their practices can provide rich data in the form of ‘cultural stories’ regarding their practices, behaviours and identities on a night out and what these actually mean to participants.

Focus groups were also selected to complement the interviews, as it was anticipated that these would provide more of an insight into the collective dimensions of the negotiation of femininities. This is important as the boundaries of femininity are maintained and managed collectively as well as individually. Whilst interviews are likely to have value in capturing individual experiences, the focus group is recognised as a useful means through which to explore group interaction (Brooks, 2008), and the value of this method has been well demonstrated in previous research on drinking and the NTE. For example, Sheehan and Ridge (2001) used focus groups in conjunction with questionnaires to research young people’s alcohol consumption in Australia. They argue that the use of focus groups was important ‘to allow participants to interact socially with each other and create dialogue around alcohol experiences in a manner consistent with their experiences of drinking’ (2001: 350). In other words, as drinking, managing dress and appearance and engaging with the NTE more widely are collective processes and experiences, it can be argued that there is value in exploring these practices in a group setting. In addition, theoretical frameworks such as symbolic interactionism consider the ways in which understandings of social phenomena and practices are actively constructed through interaction, highlighting further the potential contribution of focus groups to the project. Albeit within a contrived situation, focus groups offer

opportunities for individuals to develop meaning and share evaluations and values through interaction, with Bryman commenting on the value of focus groups in exploring ‘the ways in which individuals discuss certain issues as members of a group, rather than simply as individuals’ (2004: 346). The ability of focus groups to potentially explore how ‘individuals collectively make sense of a phenomenon and construct meanings around it’ (Bryman, 2004: 348) also highlights their value as a research tool for research drawing on symbolic interactionism, allowing researchers to elicit the shared frameworks, language and terms of reference that are actually relevant to young women.

Focus groups may also help in measuring group consensus or social norms and uncovering what it is acceptable to say in public (Kitzinger, 1994). Some focus group discussions may be characterised by a desire to reach consensus and provide socially desirable answers, providing insights into group norms and what is not – perhaps *cannot* – be challenged or said. Of course, focus groups may also highlight disagreement and contradiction as well as consensus, and could thus be potentially useful in revealing tensions around the boundaries of (in)appropriate femininities and the ways in which these boundaries might vary across time and space and for different individuals. The merits of focus groups in terms of bringing together a number of different opinions and viewpoints is recognised by Puchta and Potter (2004), and the group setting may offer opportunities for participants to challenge and question one another in a way that would not feel appropriate for a researcher in a one-to-one interview.

For these reasons, I planned to follow-up the individual interviews with 2 or 3 focus groups with young women who were already involved in the research, and their friends if they wished to invite other young women to participate. I anticipated that the focus groups would use vignettes to prompt discussions that would build on interesting themes emerging from the earlier interviews. However, one of the most significant changes to the research process was that focus groups were later omitted for a number of reasons related to difficulties arranging the groups and limits in time and resources. These reasons will be explored in more depth later in this chapter.

Sampling

For the purposes of this study, the voices of ‘young women who go out in Newcastle with female friends’ were sought. The inclusion of ‘with female friends’ was important

as some of the interview questions pertained specifically to the girls' night out and others contrasted this with experiences of going out with a mixed group or male friends. As the research questions were concerned with group processes and interactions, I felt that it was crucial to speak to young women about their experiences with female friends and the ways in which they interact, bond and socialise within the NTE. Furthermore, as outlined in Chapter 1, there is a lack of research focusing on the girls' night out as a discreet phenomenon distinctive to other ways of engaging with the NTE, a gap this study sought to move towards addressing. Sampling was limited to users of the NTE within Newcastle-upon-Tyne in order to geographically situate the study within particular spatial boundaries.

All 26 participants agreed to complete a demographic form [appendix A] prior to the interview, allowing further information on participants to be gleaned and to shape how questions on sexuality or class were worded. Broadly, diversity within the sample was sought in terms of age, sexuality and class for a number of reasons. Firstly, the research questions are concerned specifically with exploring dynamics of age, sexuality and class and the ways in which these might impact under the boundaries of femininity, processes of othering and understandings of feminine identities, so I felt that some variation in the demographics of the participants themselves would contribute to addressing such questions. In this sense, the research drew on the principles of purposive sampling, where the researcher strategically samples 'on the basis of wanting to interview people who are relevant to the research questions' to ensure a good correspondence between questions and sampling (Bryman, 2008: 458). Furthermore, the attempts to ensure a diversity in participant demographics address calls to broaden research on the NTE to consider dynamics of class and sexuality more thoroughly (Peralta, 2008; Haydock, 2009) and to move beyond focusing primarily or exclusively on middle-class university students (Lindsay, 2003).

The age range 18-25 was chosen as this group are a key population within the NTE, with the marketing of many alcoholic drinks and clubnights aimed at this age range (Emslie *et al.*, 2012: 482). Research also demonstrates that alcohol consumption has been increasing within this age group over recent years (Brooks, 2008: 336), and whilst drinking levels per se are not a key focus of the research, this reinforces the idea that young women are key consumers within the contemporary NTE. The fact that young women's alcohol consumption is increasing may also be reflecting changes in the

boundaries of appropriate femininities. As will be explored in the forthcoming chapters, this choice was justified in the data obtained, with the participants describing the NTE as a ‘young person’s market’ and generally labelling women in their late 20s or early 30s as ‘older’ women. The experiences for midlife and older women engaging with the NTE are likely to be different to those of younger women. For example, as will be highlighted through the data chapters, norms and expectations around dress and drinking practices may be different, and midlife women may be subject to particular expectations around appropriate femininities, marriage and motherhood that do not impact upon women in their late teens and early 20s in the same way. A sample of ages across the age range 18-25 were included in the study:

| Age | Number of Participants |
|------------|-------------------------------|
| 18-20 | 9 |
| 21-22 | 7 |
| 23-25 | 7 |

Table 1. Age of Participants

Initially, it was proposed that the study would only recruit heterosexual women, reflecting early thoughts around the relationship between femininity and sexuality. Additionally, this group form part of the main target market of the NTE, and I felt that non-heterosexual women might have very different experiences, particularly as many nightlife venues outside of Newcastle’s gay scene are arguably highly (hetero)sexualised and gendered. However, I later decided to open up the study to non-heterosexual women to add a different dynamic to the research and explore some of the ways in which sexualities and femininities might intersect. I also decided that broadening the study could add differing perspectives around drinking practices, dress, risk and the relationship between gender and sexuality. For example, non-heterosexual participants might be required to manage risk differently in light of the threat of homophobic violence (see Corteen, 2002). A range of participants were recruited in terms of sexuality, with a third of participants identifying as non-heterosexual:

| Sexuality | Number of Participants |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Straight | 17 |
| Bisexual | 4 |
| Lesbian | 3 |
| Queer | 1 |
| Other: Bisexual(ish) | 1 |

Table 2. Sexuality of Participants

Crucially, the successful involvement of non-heterosexual women in the project added a degree of originality in comparison to other research on the NTE which has engaged primarily with heterosexual women (Brooks, 2008; Stepney, 2014). Whilst two-thirds of the participants did identify as straight, this diversity still allowed the voices of young women of a range of sexualities to come through in the project in a way that has not been possible in some other studies.

Attempts were made to recruit women from a range of class backgrounds by targeting both Russell Group and ‘new’ universities, and targeting workplaces and more vocational courses at colleges. Whilst, of course, it is far too simplistic to make assumptions about the class backgrounds of all those attending a particular institution or working in a particular job role, broadly speaking, those participants who worked full-time or attended college tended to self-identify as working-class. Those attending Russell Group universities were also slightly more likely to identify as middle-class than those attending new universities, supporting research demonstrating that there are still constraints that may continue to limit the ability of young people from working-class backgrounds to access more elite universities, or even to access higher education at all (Boliver, 2011). Overall, participants from a range of backgrounds were recruited:

| Class Self-Identification | Local | Non-local | Total |
|----------------------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|
| Working-class | 9 | 3 | 12 |
| Middle-class | 1 | 7 | 8 |
| Do not identify with class | 3 | 3 | 6 |

Table 3. Class of Participants

No participants identified as upper-class or ‘other’, despite these being options on the demographic form. Interestingly, local participants were more likely to claim a working-class identity, and this may be tied to the working-class, industrial heritage of Newcastle (Nayak, 2003), with some participants referring to themselves as ‘proud, working-class Geordies’. It should be noted that being local of course cannot be conflated with being working-class, but as Barton (1990) argues, the identity of the Geordie is a regional, North-East identity associated with the values of working-class life such as a history of heavy industry, strong local communities and regional pride. Similarly, referring to residents in the west end of Newcastle, Alexander argues that ‘[l]ocalism has a particular importance for understanding the spatial orientations of these young, white, working class people, which include a strong identification and pride in their local area’ (2008: 184). It may also be that the non-local participants were more likely to be those who had the capital and resources to attend a university away from home, whilst local participants were much more likely to also be studying (or have studied) locally.

It should be noted that class information for participants was based on self-identification, with the young women asked to identify their own class background rather than answer questions drawing on commonly-used indicators such as parental occupation or income. Self-identification was felt to be a useful mechanism here, as what was important was what class the participants *felt* that they identified with, rather than using any more objective measure of classification. Whilst it is recognised that self-identified class may not always reflect objective class position (Savage *et al.*, 2001), actual class identity as measured more objectively was not of primary concern for the purposes of this study, rather, perceived class identity may affect practices and processes of labelling others (and this may be particularly important in terms of othering ‘undesirable’ classed identities).

Although participants were primarily white, heterosexual women either in higher education or who had previously completed a higher education degree and were now working, there was still some important variation in the demographics of the young women. For example, the majority of participants self-identified as working-class. The exact living locations of the young women also varied considerably. Over half lived in rented accommodation. Other living arrangements included the parental home or own home. The majority lived with friends, however some lived with family, a partner

and/or their child or alone. Whilst several of the young women *had* been to university, their experiences were often diverse. For example, some were local young women who had remained living at home whilst studying at a local university, whilst others had moved away from home to attend a non-local university. This is reflected in the fact that 13 of the participants were local to the area and 13 non-local. College students and young women who had not accessed higher education were also represented in the study, demonstrating engagement with a range of women from different backgrounds and currently in different circumstances. I also asked the participants to provide an indication of their education level:

| Highest Education level | Number |
|--|---------------|
| GCSEs and A-levels completed, now working full-time | 1 |
| Currently studying A-level equivalent, part-time college and working full-time | 1 |
| Currently studying further education course part-time college | 2 |
| Current undergraduate student (several also working full or part-time) | 13 |
| Completed undergraduate degree locally and now working full-time/part-time or unemployed | 5 |
| Current postgraduate student | 3 |
| Completed postgraduate degree and now working full-time | 1 |

Table 4. Highest Education Level of Participants

| Educational Background | Number |
|--|---------------|
| Local, completed A-levels | 1 |
| Local and attending college | 3 |
| Local and previously attended local University | 5 |
| Local and previously attended non-local University | 1 |
| Local and currently attending non-local university | 1 |
| Local and currently attending local University | 2 |
| Non-local and attending local University | 13 |

Table 5. Educational Background of Participants

All women interviewed self-identified as White British and were living in the North-East. Ethnic diversity in large parts of Newcastle continues to be limited compared to

many areas in the UK (Alexander, 2008), and whilst it was not the intention of the research to exclusively interview White British women, specific attempts to seek ethnic diversity - for example by targeting specific recruitment mechanisms at the west end of the city - were considered but not adopted as it was beyond the scope of this research to include dimensions of ethnicity as a core focus in addition to age, class and sexuality. Having said this, whiteness is of course still an ethnicity and may be relevant to the research findings, with other research suggesting that the 'slut' or drunken woman is often positioned as implicitly white (Griffin *et al.*, 2009a) and that class and ethnicity often intersect in the construction of the 'hyper-white' working-class woman (Lawler, 2012).

The research sought to engage with women who frequented a variety of pub, bar and club venues within the city, and there was no requirement that participants visit certain spaces or go out a certain minimum amount of times per week or month. The NTE in Newcastle includes a combination of diverse and different venues and clubnights which might offer very different environments and experiences for young women, and again, I felt that it would be useful and interesting to capture and compare these, as has been touched on in previous research. For example, using field observations and interviews, Lindsay outlines key differences in the ways in which class and gender are performed in both mainstream and niche venues in Melbourne, Australia, with more emphasised displays of femininity often occurring in mainstream venues alongside more explicit set patterns of heterosexual interaction (2006: 51). There was some variation in the types of venue typically frequented by the participants in this study, with the young women representing a cross-section of women who attended mainstream and alternative nights, 'cheap' bars and cocktail bars, and places identified as 'more studenty' or 'more local'. Several of the participants went out on in Newcastle's gay scene, although often not exclusively. This was not always linked to sexuality, for example with some straight participants frequenting the bars and clubs on the gay scene, and some who identified as bisexual, lesbian or queer avoiding the scene. Additionally there was considerable range in how frequently participants went out and whether they preferred to go out on weeknights or weekends:

| Frequency of going out | Number |
|-------------------------------|---------------|
| Once a month or less | 7 |
| Once every few weeks | 10 |
| Once a week | 7 |
| More than once a week | 2 |

Table 6. Frequency of Engagement with NTE

| Preferred time to go out | Number |
|---------------------------------|---------------|
| Weeknights | 7 |
| Weekends | 6 |
| Both | 13 |

Table 7. Preferred Time to Go Out

All participants had consumed alcohol in the NTE, although there was variety in the ways in which they described the amounts they consumed, with some positioning themselves as infrequent drinkers, and others describing much heavier levels of consumption. All were current drinkers with the exception of one participant who – although not identifying as an abstainer per se - hadn't drunk alcohol for the past 9 months on a night out for financial reasons (see Nairn *et al.*, 2006; Piacentini *et al.*, 2012 for research on non-drinkers).

Another consideration was whether it would be fruitful to directly target recruitment at young women who work within the NTE specifically to see whether and how their understandings of the boundaries of (in)appropriateness within these spaces might differ from the understandings of other users. There are examples within existing research of where this has been done successfully to produce a broader, more complete understanding of engagement with space in the NTE. For example, Skeggs (1999) carried out interviews with 'key informants' including bar owners and bouncers as part of an investigation into use of space within the NTE of two UK cities by gay men, lesbians and straight women (see also Haydock, 2009). However, after some thought it was decided that this would be a move away from trying to capture the everyday practices of participants who are recreational users of the NTE. Whilst not targeted specifically, women who work in the NTE were not excluded from participation as consumers of the NTE, and in fact several of the participants did have either current or

former experience working within bars and clubs, and so were able to bring this into the discussions whilst also sharing their experiences as social and recreational users of the NTE.

Recruitment

Recruitment took place between November 2012 and September 2013. The sample was self-selecting and opportunistic in that I did not seek to recruit a certain minimum quota of non-heterosexual women or women accessing non-mainstream nightlife spaces – for example - but at the same time I did bring in elements of more purposive sampling and use specific recruitment mechanisms in an attempt to engage certain groups, such as non-heterosexual young women, particularly as it is recognised that such groups may be more difficult to recruit (Peralta, 2008). Likewise, I consciously sought to recruit a range of participants in terms of class and educational background. Opportunistic and open recruitment was also regarded as a useful route by which to reach those who were genuinely interested in the topic and keen to engage.

Recruitment took place through four main routes; social media, university and college presentations/society mailing lists, word of mouth/snowballing and flyering in local cafes, bars, shops and workplaces. Attempts were also made to engage more directly with local workplaces and a sixth form college in order to help ensure sample diversity, but these ultimately fell through.

Participants were given a range of means through which to contact me, including a Facebook page, email address and phone number (all dedicated to the project). A website [appendix B] was also created to provide further information and list the various means by which I could be contacted. 12 interview participants contacted me initially via email, 11 via Facebook and three by text message, demonstrating that providing a range of different contact routes was useful. Several participants communicated through more than one route (for example by initially texting and then providing an email address in order to receive the information sheet, or by initially messaging via Facebook and then using the mobile number to text confirmation that they were on their way to the interview).

Overall 41 contacts were made, with 26 of these (almost two-thirds) leading to interview. A full timeline of recruitment strategies is available in appendix C, but broadly the methods used were as follows:

| Method | Number of Contacts | Number of Interview Participants Recruited |
|---|---------------------------|---|
| Facebook | 18 | 13 |
| University and College presentations | 9 | 6 |
| Word of mouth | 6 | 3 |
| Snowballing | 6 | 2 |
| University and college society mailing lists | 1 | 1 |
| Public Presentation | 1 | 1 |
| Flyering at local events and in shops, cafes, leisure centres | 0 | 0 |
| Workplace flyers and emails | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 41 | 26 |

Table 8. Recruitment Methods

It should be noted that some participants mentioned hearing about the research through multiple routes (for example a friend mentioning it *and* seeing the Facebook page) so where information regarding how participants heard about the research is given, this refers to what they identify as the primary route by which they heard about it.

Social media proved to be the most effective route for recruitment, specifically the use of Facebook for both generic and targeted recruitment. A dedicated Facebook page [appendix D] was created for the research project, meaning I was able to provide information on the study, offer a means for young women to contact me, and promote and share status updates about the research anonymously. The Facebook page received over 60 ‘likes’ from friends, colleagues, participants and others, 83% of whom were women and 49% of whom were aged 18-24. In addition, the reach of the page went wider than this, as people shared, liked and commented on individual status updates. For example, the most popular post inviting women to participate was seen by over

1,700 people. The average post received 16 clicks and 17 'likes', comments and 'shares'. I also messaged the Facebook pages of local colleges, groups and clubnights and university or college societies asking them to post a link to my page on their public walls, and although this method had a low response rate, some were keen to engage. 13 participants (half of those involved in the study) found out about the study through Facebook (although not all of the young women contacted me on Facebook, possibly for reasons of maintaining privacy and not wanting to use their personal accounts to message me). Of these, 3 explicitly identified that they had seen a post about the study on a society Facebook page, whilst others just referred to seeing information on Facebook more generally, which may have included either seeing a specific post on another page, or possibly other activity such as their friends liking the page or sharing status updates.

It was important for the purposes of this study to engage with both students and non-students, as students are key users of the NTE in Newcastle and the city's nightlife is heavily shaped by student nights, particularly during the week. It is also recognised that students and local young people might engage with the NTE in very different ways (Holt and Griffin, 2005). I would also argue that even amongst students, there may be contrasts between those studying at university compared to college students, and full-time versus part-time students. Recruitment through educational establishments was primarily directed through two universities and one college within the city of Newcastle. I negotiated access through a 'gatekeeper' member of staff and gave a brief presentation on the project to a class of students. I also handed out flyers at these classes to encourage potential participants to get in touch. The educational institutions and the courses approached were diverse. For example, Newcastle University is a traditional, Russell Group institution and can be defined as an 'elite' university, whereas Northumbria University is a former polytechnic. Newcastle College offers a range of higher and further education courses, and foundation and access courses, including a considerable proportion of more vocational courses. The courses or classes were selected on the basis that – again – they offered potential diversity. They included undergraduate law and public health at Newcastle University, undergraduate geography at Northumbria University, and more vocational courses in dance and hair and beauty at Newcastle College. This approach was consolidated where possible by putting up physical flyers [appendix E] in common rooms for the students studying that particular subject and a follow-up email sent by the module leader to all students registered on the

relevant module. This multi-faceted approach to recruitment is, I would argue, likely to have been useful in encouraging women to consider taking part. Six participants were recruited directly through university presentations, although it proved more difficult to recruit via presenting at college classes (two young women showed an initial interest but dropped out prior to interview). This may be because the participants in university settings were more likely to identify with a fellow university student.

All interview participants were invited to pass the information on through their friendship networks, and both word of mouth and snowballing proved useful routes through which to recruit. For the purposes of clarification, ‘word of mouth’ is used to refer to instances where the study was mentioned to participants by other people – such as my friends and colleagues - and ‘snowballing’ is used to refer more specifically to where participants heard about the study directly from other participants. Three participants heard about the study via word of mouth, and two via snowballing from one participant, meaning a group of three friends were interviewed separately. Other research in this area also recognises the value of the use of snowball sampling techniques. For example, Montemurro and McClure (2005) used snowball sampling to recruit women for qualitative interviews on their experiences of hen parties, and commented that the informal snowballing technique created a relaxed environment where participants could talk more openly about their personal experiences. This method of recruitment also added a complex new dimension to this study, in that three of the participants came from the same close-knit group of friends (two of whom were sisters). The sisters were very close and referred to one another fairly frequently during interview. It was felt that this was not detrimental to the interview process, rather it added an interesting new angle to what the young women were telling – or not telling – me.

An additional route used for recruitment was contacting local societies including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) societies and rock societies and asking them to circulate information about the study via their mailing list, which most were happy to do. I also offered to come and talk in person about the research, although this offer was not taken up by any group. One participant was recruited via this route (through Newcastle University LGBT Society).

One participant was also recruited via a public presentation given at an evening event in a pub in Newcastle. Although the primary focus of the presentation was dissemination of early findings and public engagement rather than recruitment per se, I did mention that I was still looking for participants and brought along some flyers.

Recruitment flyers were designed and printed in bulk to be handed out at university and college sessions, as well as more generally across the city. Flyers were distributed in a range of settings likely to be frequented by young women including colleges, sixth forms, gyms, libraries, cafes, cinemas and bars, and also placed on staff noticeboards or in staffrooms at a number of supermarkets and shops selling young women's fashion in the hope of recruiting young women working in these settings. Flyers explicitly identified that women from a diverse range of sexualities were welcome to participate and flyering also took place at particular events, including the local Pride Festival in Newcastle in July 2013. Flyering alone did not directly lead to any contacts or participants, and looking back I acknowledge that it may be that flyering was too indirect and hands-off a recruitment mechanism to yield any success.

Accessing local workplaces proved more difficult than accessing university and college settings. Where possible, existing contacts – friends and professionals - were used as gatekeepers to promote the research, including in a local secondary school (to recruit staff rather than students) and the city council. A local accounting firm where a friend is employed was also considered but rejected as a result of the lack of eligible staff (the firm predominantly consisted of men and older women). The approach was flexible, including my contact chatting informally about the research in the school setting, and an email being circulated to all staff working for the city council (attempts to follow this up with flyers in council offices, toilets or canteens were unsuccessful). Recruitment through workplaces did not lead to any contacts or participants. Upon reflection, again it is likely that the approaches used may have been too hands-off or indirect to encourage people to take part.

An article about the research was published in a free, local online newspaper and a local dance studio agreed to publish a copy of the flyer in their newsletter, although other attempts to engage with local print media and radio were ultimately unsuccessful. A lengthy email dialogue took place with a local sixth form college, who were in principle happy to share the research information with students, but this ultimately failed to go

ahead despite several attempts. Several local groups that were contacted did not respond, particularly local mother and baby groups contacted in an attempt to recruit young mothers (although two mothers were recruited through other means). Others initially responded but eventually contact dropped off, for example a local cinema showing weekly mother and baby film screenings.

Data Collection

Interview Design and Process

The interview phase of the research lasted from October 2012 to September 2013 and consisted of two pilot interviews and 26 interviews, lasting between 35 minutes and 1 hour 45 minutes. The average length of interview was 59 minutes. All interviews were based on a semi-structured interview schedule [appendix F], although this was amended, updated and refined during the research, as will be outlined below. The semi-structured interview schedule was devised incrementally in the early stages of the research process, with adaptations made prior to commencing the research and also during the research process.

The original schedule was developed from the starting point that the key concern of the study is to understand and explore the boundaries of 'appropriate' femininities and the ways in which they are negotiated. These broader questions around where the boundaries might be situated had to be translated into more specific and meaningful questions that would successfully 'get at' women's understandings of the boundaries in the interview context, in ways that both generated useful data and made sense to participants. Turning to the research questions offered a useful route through which to start devising some more specific and focused questions, through structuring the bulk of the interview into three distinct sections around the themes of drinking, dress and appearance and risk. Through asking questions about these distinct components of a night out, it was anticipated that wider insights into the boundaries of femininities would be obtained. More specific questions around what types of behaviour or dress the women felt might be unfeminine in the NTE were then added into the interview schedule, for example asking women whether there were any particular types of behaviour they would describe as inappropriate or unfeminine in the NTE. This study was also concerned with understanding not just the boundaries of femininities, but also

the ways in which the embodiment of particular femininities might be enabled or constrained by particular markers of identity such as class and sexuality, and from an early stage the interview schedule included a question explicitly asking participants whether they thought ideas of ‘appropriate’ behaviour were similar for all women. A question on what going out with female friends meant to the participants was also included in order to explore the value and importance – or otherwise – of nights out for young women.

Once the original interview schedule was devised, I carried out two pilot interviews with young women known personally to me as friends and colleagues, in order to establish whether the questions were clear and relevant, the types of data that might be obtained and the average interview length. Participants were recruited through existing contacts so that the pool of potential research participants was not reduced for the actual study. The interviews were classed as pilots rather than rehearsals as I asked the participants - both young women in their 20s or early 30s – to talk about their own experiences rather than play a role in the interview. Both pilot interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. This was followed by an analysis of the process, focusing on which questions worked and which didn’t, the relevance of the data obtained and how I managed the interview itself in terms of the use of prompts, probes and pauses, for example.

Some further changes were made to the interview schedule after the pilot interviews. The quite descriptive questions asking women how often they like to go out and whether they prefer to go out at weekends or on weeknights were removed and added to the demographic form, as I decided it would be more appropriate to capture this data here. I identified that questions around different markers of identity could be usefully threaded throughout the whole interview rather than just explored in a single question around whether they thought ideas of ‘appropriate’ behaviour were similar for all women. As a result, I amended the schedule to encourage participants to talk about their perceptions of women of different classes, backgrounds and sexualities throughout the whole interview. In hindsight this proved very useful for widening discussions around class in particular, as this was often originally alluded to in very veiled terms and required careful prompting to encourage women to elaborate and expand. Another question that was added in after the pilots and proved to be extremely useful in ‘getting at’ the absolute boundaries or limits of appropriate femininity was ‘what’s the worst

thing somebody could think or say about you on a night out?'. Finally, the opening question was changed from the somewhat vague 'talk me through the kinds of nights out you have in Newcastle' to asking women to describe a 'typical' night out with female friends. This proved to elicit a better response and act as a good icebreaker to encourage the women to start describing their experiences, and also often provided some context and background about what a typical night out consisted of for each woman, what happened whilst getting ready, where the women liked to go, what they liked to drink etc. This also allowed for comparisons across interviews; whilst it is recognised that there is unlikely to be a 'typical' girls' night out and young women engage with the NTE in very different ways, this exercise was useful as it highlighted some key features that were almost universally recognised across the interviews as being what 'makes' the girls' night out, namely the central importance of getting ready together, and the importance of spending the whole night together in the female friendship group. The questions around women's own embodied drinking practices, management of dress and appearance and risk management generally worked well, and these remained consistent in all versions of the interview schedule.

Following the pilot exercise, recruitment for interviews commenced, and between November 2012 and September 2013, 26 interviews were conducted. It should be noted that the schedule was also revised very slightly during the interview process. Some minor amendments were made to suggested prompts in January 2013 after the first interview, and again in February 2013 after a mini-analysis of the first four interviews. Other similarly minor amendments were made following the analysis of the first 9 interviews. For example, age was identified as a key theme from the early interviews, so more questions around age and femininity were added into the schedule, and the research questions also updated accordingly. However, the schedule was also being updated more informally throughout the interview process, for example with slight adjustments to question wording, question order or the addition or removal of questions. The amendments and adjustments made throughout did not hugely change the schedule from its original form, and of course in line with the semi-structured nature of the interviews, the schedule was used flexibly in each interview.

When reflecting upon the interview process, I found that the schedule was a particularly useful tool for the interviews with young women who were less talkative and responded more to a structured and formal 'question and answer' approach. The semi-structured

nature of the interview allowed me to quickly assess each interview and adapt my own approach accordingly as it progressed, following more of a structured pattern with some participants, whilst engaging with extremely talkative participants through a more flexible use of prompts and follow-up questions that at times could deviate from the interview schedule and allow me to pursue new and interesting avenues of discussion.

Rather than being viewed as a separate stage to data collection, analysis was woven throughout the research process, with 'mini-analysis' exercises taking place as the research progressed. Early analysis focused more on process and allowed me to check that the interview questions were eliciting sufficiently rich and relevant data, check that questions worked well and made sense to the participants, and reflexively monitor my own practice as an interviewer. This took place in February 2013 after the first four interviews. The four interviews were fully transcribed and comments made on the process for each throughout. The annotated transcripts were also shared with supervisors for comment. Early reflections were that the process was generally working well and eliciting a lot of data, but that some questions needed to link to femininity and its boundaries more clearly. The meanings of certain terms used by the women (including feminine, unfeminine, masculine) also needed to be unpicked and explored more with participants. The mid-fieldwork analysis exercise took place in March 2013 after the first nine interviews, and continued to look at the process, but also began to look more at emerging themes. All nine interviews were fully transcribed and coded into themes. A three stage analysis was carried out, focusing on the key emerging themes, what was missing so far from the data, and what could be improved through slight amends to the schedule.

The interview process was completed after 26 in-depth interviews had been undertaken, consisting of over 25 and a half hours of interview data. Knowing when data saturation has been reached is difficult, particularly with semi-structured and in-depth interviews where new – and sometimes unexpected - topics may frequently emerge. However, in reality all research involves a trade-off between the aim of collecting sufficient data and the need to work within the timescales, budget and resources available, as well as the need to ensure that the sheer amount of data produced is not overwhelming or impossible to work with. From the richness of the interview material obtained and what had already been gleaned from ongoing analysis – and also partly as a result of time and resource limitations - it was decided that sufficient data to address the research

questions had been collected after the 26 interviews, and cessation of this stage of the research was thus justified.

Focus Groups

As highlighted earlier in this chapter, the original intention of the project was to hold two or three focus groups in addition to the interviews. These were to be held after the interview stage had commenced, although with overlaps between the later interviews if required. The decision to undertake the interviews first was made as I felt that the focus groups could offer a useful opportunity to follow-up on and explore in more depth themes emerging in the interviews, whilst drawing on the language, concepts and ideas important to young women themselves. All interview participants gave consent to be contacted about taking part in a focus group, and were also encouraged to consider taking part with any eligible friends if they wished. In this way, it was anticipated that some – but not all – of the young women might already know one another, depending on who eventually came forward and how they were grouped.

The intention was to present small groups of 4-6 young women with semi-fictional vignettes about a girls' night out, drawing on material and themes from across the individual interviews, which – partly to preserve anonymity – would blend the accounts and experiences of different participants into a single narrative and also include some statements which challenged, rather than reflected, the points made in interviews. The vignettes would be used as triggers for discussion of ideas and content, allowing women to explore in a group setting how far they might relate to, agree with or disagree with the content, with additional prompts and follow-up questions available for each story. Vignettes were anticipated to be a useful approach as much of the young women's talk emerging in the early interviews was built around constructing identities and norms through comparison to others (e.g. 'I'm *not* a slut / I'm not like that').

However, as has been highlighted earlier in this chapter, attempts to hold focus groups ultimately proved unsuccessful. Organising and arranging the groups proved extremely difficult, and despite several attempts, it was not possible to secure a date and time when enough women were available to take part. I eventually decided to cease efforts to arrange focus groups for a number of reasons. Firstly, it was felt that a vast amount of useful and relevant data had already been collected during the interview process, and I

decided following discussions with supervisors that this data was sufficient to address the research questions. Secondly, I began to question the ethics of risking ‘bombarding’ the young women with communications, changing dates and cancelling potential groups, and asking them to give up more of their time responding to emails and messages regarding groups that may not be able to go ahead (particularly when they had already generously given up their time for interviews). Finally, as so little progress was being made in organising the groups, I thought that it would be a more productive use of time and resources to complete analysis of existing data and progress the writing of the thesis. With more time and resources at my disposal, it is possible that the aim to undertake focus groups may have been realised (this will be explored in more detail later in this chapter).

Data Analysis

As described above, data analysis was not a separate stage to data collection, rather the research was an evolving process of reflection and change, with early analysis helping to shape the direction of later interviews. This allowed for themes important to the participants themselves to emerge as the research progressed and be incorporated into later interviews. For example, whilst class and sexuality were initially identified as key areas of interest around identity and othering, it quickly became apparent through early interviews that age was also an important related theme.

All interviews were fully transcribed prior to coding and analysis [see appendix G for transcription key]. A distinction can be made between the coding stage and analysis stage; whilst coding is more of a descriptive process of grouping similar themes and topics, the next stage involves making sense and meaning out of this coding. The initial analysis tends to focus on pulling together these grouped themes and making connections between them in order to start building arguments (Haydock, 2009: 142). Throughout the project, data was coded manually in order to keep the researcher ‘close’ to the material, rather than producing a potentially more fractured analysis using software. Initially, a key list of themes were devised (based on the research questions, interview schedules, initial reading and the earlier ‘mini-analysis’ exercises), and content in the interview transcripts was coded according to theme, including an indication of where data fit multiple themes. Each interview was then rearranged with material grouped into themes. All quotes and sections of text *across* interviews were

then grouped together under each theme (for example 'dress and appearance'). Sub-themes were identified and material allocated to such themes as appropriate (for example 'making an effort'). The interview transcripts were also searched for new emerging themes which could then be added to the initial list, as was the case with some of the sub-themes around age, which emerged as much more important than had originally been anticipated. Linkages and overlaps between themes were also identified, as well as gaps (i.e. what the young women *weren't* saying) and areas where there was disagreement between participants.

Upon completion of the interview process, coding and early thematic grouping, an overarching table of themes was produced in order to identify the significance of themes [see extract in appendix H]. Each theme and sub-theme was listed and the relevance to the research questions recorded as low, medium or high. The frequency with which the theme was mentioned was also recorded. This was then broken down further, to look at the depth and the range of the theme. The depth column listed which young women spoke about the theme in great detail, whilst the range column listed the names of all the young women who mentioned the theme at all, to get a better idea of how common themes and subthemes were. Finally, the variation in the theme was explored by indicating which young women had disagreed with the majority around this subtheme. Wherever the names of young women were listed, page numbers were also included to denote the transcript page(s) on which they discussed the theme in question. This helped me to easily reference back to sections of the interviews and to examine quotations in the wider context in which they were situated within the transcripts. Broadly, the themes and subthemes with the greatest relevance, depth and range were selected for inclusion within the thesis. There were some exceptions to this, for example where some very interesting subthemes were talked about in great depth by a smaller number of the participants, they might still be included. Themes were devised into rough chapter structures, and in line with the research questions and interview schedules, the themes divided into three chapters centred around drinking practices, dress and appearance and risk. The drinking practices chapter was later expanded out to also include discussion of the value and functions of the girls' night out and associated behaviours and drinking practices. Draft chapters were produced, drawing where appropriate on illustrative extracts and examples from the data to illustrate subthemes and key points.

Overall, the data analysis process highlighted that the key themes of drinking, dress and risk management had all come through strongly in the data, perhaps understandably as the interview schedule addressed these topics explicitly. One interesting finding was the overlap between the different themes. For example, notions around risk and safety were often threaded throughout the whole interview. In particular, talk around risk and drinking often intersected, because the young women felt alcohol consumption and drunkenness were closely tied with increased risk. Interestingly, risk and dress could also intersect in terms of the ways in which women talked about ‘promiscuous’ dress and behaviour and being a ‘slut’. There were less linkages made between drinking and dress. A key theme around the value, functions and pleasures – yet also the tensions - of the girls’ night out was also threaded throughout the data, including data that was specific to the girls’ night out compared to other types of engagement with the NTE. In other words, there was some interesting data around what makes the girls’ night out different to other types of nights out in terms of behaviour, drinking, dress and how risk is negotiated, and data on what it means to be feminine or ‘girly’ in this context. There was also data around how class and age might intersect with the key themes present throughout many of the interviews. Class and age were very frequently drawn upon by the young women to engage in processes of othering women perceived to be unfeminine or *too* feminine, providing insights into the boundaries of femininities and their fluidity. However, although there was some interesting data on sexuality in terms of how the women’s own sexuality affected their behaviours, dress and understandings of risk (for example), sexuality was used less often in processes of othering. The heterosexual women in particular expressed a reluctance to talk about the behaviours, practices or identities of non-heterosexual women, whereas women of all class backgrounds often talked about age and class (either implicitly and in coded terms or more explicitly). This will be discussed in further detail in the Conclusion, Chapter 7. Sufficient data was obtained to be able to address the research questions and highlight a number of findings around what it means to be feminine on a night out, where the boundaries of femininities sit, and the ways in which femininities are lived and embodied through women’s everyday experiences.

Researchers potentially have a great deal of power in terms of how they code, understand, interpret and disseminate the words of participants. With this in mind, I attempted at all times to remain truthful to what I felt the participants were saying, through seeking clarification in the interview where this was needed, and attempting to

interpret quotes within their original context rather than artificially ‘chopping’ data into themes and losing the sense of the contextual discussion preceding and following quotations. At the same time, feminist researchers do acknowledge that the researcher has a right to claim some epistemic privilege or authority and ‘be regarded as a knower’ (Letherby, 2002: 7) (albeit with a duty to take responsibility for this authority). As Millen argues, participants themselves ‘may not have a full awareness of the systems which surround and constrain them, and as researchers, we have a responsibility to illuminate these systems using their experiences, and illuminate their experiences using these systems’ (1997: paragraph 3.5). As feminist researchers with a wider interest in the broader structures, social worlds and institutions that shape and constrain women’s lived realities, we can shed light on the ‘bigger picture’ shaping the lives of individuals, in ways that reflect the voices of participants fairly. Neuman’s idea of authenticity has value here, as it is concerned primarily with ‘giving a fair, honest and balanced account of social life from the viewpoint of someone who lives it everyday’ (2007: 120). I hope that I have managed to capture some of the nuances, insights, reflections and – at times – humour that the young women demonstrated in the interviews, and to do justice to the rich data the interviews produced, whilst acknowledging the restrictions of the thesis format and the impracticality of covering *all* themes raised in the data and all areas of interest.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to the commencement of this study, full ethical approval was granted by the Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Committee at Newcastle University in May 2012. The materials submitted as part of this included a participant information sheet [appendix I] and consent form [appendix J]. A completed risk assessment form was also submitted and approved in October 2012. The project adopted elements of reflexivity and an awareness of power relations between the researcher and the researched (Oakley, 1981), which are central to feminist approaches to methodological enquiry and will be outlined in more detail below, followed by a consideration of participant and researcher wellbeing.

Power

Feminist methodologies call for an awareness of the power dynamics present in all stages of the research and in numerous forms. For example, the researcher's capacity to select the topic of investigation and devise an interview schedule that highlights particular themes or issues deemed relevant to the project represents a form of power over the process and participants. Similarly, the researcher's analysis and dissemination of the data further represent a form of power over participants in terms of how their words are interpreted, analysed and presented (as outlined in the previous section). Whilst the researcher's power often appears more 'hidden' during these stages of the research, power dynamics around the researcher/participant relationship may be played out most explicitly during the data collection context (see Oakley, 1981; Maynard, 1994). I would suggest that some degree of power imbalance may be inevitable in most research settings, but should be fully recognised and limited wherever possible. With this in mind, I attempted to recognise, address and limit some of these potential imbalances through a range of strategies. It is also important to note that the research relationship may not always be so one-sided, not just in the case of interviewing elites but also more generally, with feminist researchers citing examples of the ways in which participants may resist exploitation and so should not be portrayed as passive victims (see for example Skeggs, 1994).

Firstly, a relaxed and informal approach to the research was used throughout, arguably assisted by my own position as a young, female researcher slightly older than participants. All communications with participants were kept friendly and informal to help limit the extent to which I was seen as distant professional, researcher or 'other'. Attempts were made to develop rapport before and during interviews, for example by meeting several participants at an agreed location near to the interview site, and engaging in conversation on the short walk to the interview. Participants were given some choice over where the interview took place, with all invited to either attend an interview at Newcastle University or to suggest an alternative, suitable venue of their choice, such as their workplace. Although the majority were happy to be interviewed on the university campus, a minority of the interviews took place in participants' workplaces - typically in a quiet canteen or seating area - although this may have been linked to convenience as much as any feelings of reluctance to visit the campus setting. Whilst holding interviews in the workplace setting may potentially have had implications in terms of what the young women felt able to discuss openly (as although all workplaces settings were quiet, not all of them were completely private), I felt that it

was important to offer young women these choices. Additionally, there did not appear to be noticeable differences between the extent to which those taking part in workplace interviews appeared able to open up, with many talking as frankly about topics such as drinking and drunkenness or risky behaviours as those interviewed in a private room on campus. However, it should also be noted that factors around venues may have contributed to two contacts failing to lead to interview. The two women, who attended Newcastle College, asked if they could be interviewed on the college campus. However, delays in attempting to secure an appropriate and private setting on the college campus led to a decline in interest and meant the young women's motivation for participation was not sustained, causing both to withdraw their involvement. This suggests that considerations around interview location may have had an impact on who eventually took part in the research, and spaces such as university campuses, which are generally considered to be 'neutral territory' for research (Clavering and McLaughlin, 2007) may not always be viewed in this way by all potential participants.

Secondly, the interview schedule and prompts were very much designed to allow participants to lead the conversation, and the semi-structured nature of the interview gave the women some scope to focus on the topics and themes they deemed to be the most important and relevant to them. In reality, the participants responded to the flexible questioning style in different ways, with some giving quite brief answers to questions and prompts and clearly preferring a more formal and structured 'question and answer' approach. Others gave very detailed and extensive responses to opening questions and so the use of the interview schedule was more limited, although prompts to follow-up on points raised by the young women were still used. These particularly vocal young women were often fairly active in shaping the direction of the conversation and focusing on what they wanted to talk about. The semi-structured nature of the interview also gave participants scope to express terms and ideas in their own words. Whilst this clearly does not meet any threshold for what Acker *et al.* (1983) would describe as participatory research, it helped to ensure the research engaged with and recognised the language and concepts that had meaning for young women.

Attempts were also made to limit power dynamics through ensuring that participants were well informed prior to their involvement in the project and thus able to give fully informed consent. In line with other feminist work such as Halse and Honey's (2005) ethically complex research with young women with eating disorders, consent was

viewed as an ongoing process of negotiation rather than sought as a one-off instance. In order to allow women to (re)negotiate their consent throughout the research process, consent was sought informally at numerous stages throughout the process, and the information sheet was circulated via Facebook or email prior to interview. The information sheet was shared again immediately prior to the interview commencing, to allow the participants to ask any questions in person. Written consent was obtained at this point, with the consent form outlining all salient points around consent, withdrawal, anonymity and data storage. Key to the ongoing negotiation of consent, it was stressed that participants were free to decline to answer any questions during interview, and that they could freely withdraw from the study at any time.

Confidentiality and anonymity were preserved through storing hard data securely in locked storage facilities in an office with limited access on university campus. Electronic data including voice recordings and full transcriptions were stored securely on the password-protected university network and identified by pseudonym or interview number rather than participant name. Other working documents such as draft analysis work was stored as required on an encrypted memory stick, and work was backed up to a password-protected hard-drive. In any publications or conference presentations, pseudonyms are used, and any potentially identifying information (such as friend's or partner's names, or workplace) has been changed.

Reflexivity

Feminist research calls for a reflexive awareness and recognition of the researcher's own presence within their work, including the values and biases they may bring by the nature of their own beliefs and characteristics such as gender, class and age (see Letherby, 2002 for a good example). Reflexivity requires the researcher to reflect on their own involvement at all stages of the research process, challenging traditional notions of objectivity and producing open research processes and 'accountable knowledge' (Letherby, 2002: 11), whilst recognising throughout that even a seemingly unbiased task such as – for example - interview transcription 'is neither neutral nor value-free' (Arksey and Knight, 1999: 141). Acker *et al.* argue that 'the impossibility of eliminating all objectification exists in all social research, and the problem cannot be solved by creating the illusion that no relationship exists between the researcher and her research object' (1983: 425). As such, my own position as a young heterosexual woman

and regular user of the NTE must be recognised within the research. It was anticipated that similarities to the young women in terms of age, gender and familiarity with the NTE in Newcastle might help to build trust and rapport and facilitate discussion through an identification with venues, practices and experiences (as was the case in Waitt et al's study (2011: 259)), although, as will be elaborated below, insider researcher status may also have limitations, such as the young women taking for granted that I knew certain things, meaning they may have been less likely to elaborate.

My own gender may have had a significant impact on the research process. Many participants engaged particularly well with questions around dress and appearance, sometimes going into very specific details about make-up regimes or clothing preferences. It is possible that such rich detail may not have been shared with a male researcher (or perhaps even an older female researcher). The research process was also affected by my age and own knowledge of Newcastle nightlife. This allowed me to engage and build rapport with participants through confirming knowledge of venues. Participants would often ask if I was familiar with the location or name of a venue, and I was able to nod or verbally confirm this, allowing the interview to flow and the participants to possibly feel able to relate to me on a certain level. However, my age and familiarity with the NTE may also have had negative consequences, as participants may have assumed that I was already familiar with venues and terms and so gone into less detail than they might have with an older researcher. For example, there were a number of occasions where it was assumed that I would know the meaning of terms, so clarification was not provided. I had to very consciously make the effort to ask them to define these expressions in their own words, regardless of whether I actually knew them (e.g. 'pre-drinking') or not (e.g. 'slut-dropping'). Being somewhat of an 'insider' in terms of my similarities to the participants and familiarity with Newcastle nightlife may also have resulted in participants feeling less able to be completely honest and open, whereas they may have opened up more to a researcher perceived as different or more of an outsider (Allen, 2010).

It is important to note that my class background may also have impacted on the ways in which I was able to interact with participants. It could be argued that the more middle-class participants, particularly students, may have felt the most comfortable within the interview setting with a middle-class, university-educated interviewer, especially when the interview took place on campus. However, some of the most animated and in-depth

interviews took place with working-class women who self-identified as Geordies. It may be that my participants were able to ‘read’ my own middle-class background – and the fact that I am from the South of England - through cues such as my accent, but this did not appear to greatly impact upon my ability to build rapport with the majority of the young women. This may be in part attributable to the fact that I have lived in Newcastle on and off for around 5 years, meaning I have some familiarity with the Geordie accent and colloquialisms used in Geordie dialect. It is possible that this experience, alongside my familiarity with local nightlife and relative closeness in age to the young women, made me appear less of an ‘outsider’ despite my class background and accent.

It is perhaps more difficult to assess ways in which my identity as a heterosexual woman impacted upon the research, and indeed Allen (2010) argues that whilst researchers tend to recognise the impact of their own class and gender upon their work, few engage with the ways in which sexual identity is likely to impact upon research, with those who do often identifying as non-heterosexual. Whilst it is not possible to avoid being read in particular ways based on visible and verbal markers of gender, age and class, arguably my (hetero)sexuality was less visible or apparent in the research process, and none of the participants made any obvious assumptions regarding my sexuality or asked me any specific questions regarding my own sexual preferences. Whether visible to participants or not, my heterosexuality is likely to have impacted upon the way in which the research was framed, shaped and conducted, and raises questions around the extent to which heterosexual researchers can represent non-heterosexual voices, and whether we may implicitly risk reinforcing the ‘normative heterosexual social and institutional order’ (Allen, 2010: 150) through our work. This is supported by Braun’s (2000) argument that heterosexist bias continues to exist in much research, sometimes in subtle and everyday ways, leading her to offer the warning that ‘(a)s heterosexual researchers, we need to be particularly attuned to the possibility (indeed probability) that our research is heterosexist’ (2000: 139). Allen (2010) also provides examples where – as a heterosexual researcher herself- she has accidentally found herself ‘thinking straight’ in her research, and in line with this I fully recognise that there may have been times in the study when I framed questions, responses or dimensions of analysis in ways that implicitly draw on, reinforce or collude with heteronormativity. Yet Allen argues that this is more a sign of the dominance and pervasiveness of heteronormativity itself than an indication that heterosexual

researchers can only produce heteronormative knowledge, decoupling identity from knowledge production and claiming that regardless of sexual identity, all researchers can be influenced by the pervasiveness of heteronormativity. I would also argue that other aspects of my identity – such as my middle-classness – will have had at least an implicit bearing on the ways in which the research was conducted, analysed and presented. In fact, all the aspects of my identity as explored in this section will inevitably have contributed towards shaping the research and analysis in particular ways. As Letherby argues, as feminist researchers, ‘it is better to acknowledge our involvement rather than pretend to objectivity’ (2002: 9), and this section has attempted to at least make explicit some of the inevitable ways in which researcher identity may have impacted upon the research process.

Participant and Researcher Wellbeing

Participant and researcher wellbeing was maximised through several measures. A full risk assessment covering potential risks to both researcher and participants was completed and approved prior to research commencing. Interviews took place in public buildings and, wherever possible, within normal working hours when other staff members were present in the building.

It was anticipated that this topic would prove interesting and relevant to young women, offering them an opportunity to express their own views and share their experiences. Indeed, several participants commented on their enjoyment of involvement in the research process. However, whilst the research topic is not inherently sensitive, it was recognised that participants might discuss personal experiences around risk and drinking, for example. Participants were handed a brief contact sheet [appendix K] at the end of the interview with contact details for local support organisations in case participation in the research process had raised any personal issues or caused any discomfort or distress. This issue was also managed by stressing upon commencement of the interview that participants had the right to decline to answer any questions or to withdraw from the study at any point (none of the participants utilised these options). Direct questions of a more sensitive nature around participants’ own experiences of risk and safety on a night out were avoided, although several participants volunteered information about their own experiences, including harassment, drink-spiking and one case of sexual assault. In these instances, probing was used with sensitivity to ensure

participants did not feel pushed to talk about these experiences in more detail than they might wish. Participants were also informed that the confidentiality of their data might need to be breached if they were to disclose something that potentially indicated that they or someone else was at immediate risk of harm, however this did not occur in the interviews. It should be noted that it did not appear from the interviews that any participants were seriously misusing alcohol or putting themselves or others at high levels of risk through their drinking practices. It may of course be that some participants were attempting to downplay their drinking, but it was hoped that the support organisation contact details handed to each participant may have been useful for any who did have concerns about their drinking but did not wish to mention them in the interview setting.

Many of the ethical issues already discussed were anticipated in advance of the commencement of the project, however, as with all research, the process itself may throw up new ethical dilemmas that have not previously been considered. This was the case when a transgender participant was interviewed for this project. Whilst she identified as a lesbian woman and did not talk directly about being transgender, the participant alluded to this at points throughout the interview, for example giving examples of instances where she had been read as a different gender to the one with which she identified. This raised an unanticipated ethical dilemma as to how the participant's gender identity should be represented in the project. On the one hand, the participant did voluntarily allude to aspects of being transgender, but on the other hand she had clearly responded to the call to participate as a young woman and she identified herself to me as a 'butch lesbian'. There are also potential issues around confidentiality and anonymity to be considered in 'outing' one of the participants as transgender, as Newcastle may not have a sizeable transgender community. However, as the participant in question did allude to aspects of her trans identity – in terms of her body, practices and experiences – I felt that it was important to acknowledge her as a trans butch lesbian woman in order to contextualise her experiences. However, it has also been important for me to avoid 'reducing' this participant to being understood only in terms of her transgender identity when analysing the interview data or representing her voice in the thesis.

Reflections on Research Process

Whilst above I have discussed reflexivity in a more conventional sense in terms of considering the impact my gender, age, class and sexuality might have had upon the research process, it has also been interesting for me to reflect more personally upon other aspects of my identity and positionality and how these are likely to have shaped my embodied experiences of undertaking this research. Del Busso argues that of particular interest to those researching everyday, embodied practices should be the ways in which physical bodies within the interview context represent and reproduce certain power dynamics, and she calls for ‘embodied reflexivity’ on the part of researchers (2007: 309). This was certainly relevant for my own research, particularly in discussions around dress and appearance. For example, the women’s discussions around clothing and make-up took place with a researcher whose body was also dressed and made-up in particular ways, and some consideration around how to dress and present myself in the interview setting was required. I dressed in a casual and neutral way in order to help foster a relaxed and informal environment and there were certain clothes I consciously avoided wearing. For example, I own a number of alternative and punk band t-shirts, and avoided wearing these to the interview as I felt that they might convey part of my identity to the participants in a particular way, perhaps as somebody who frequented non-mainstream venues and might be judgemental towards certain venues, types of music or ways of dressing. I was however aware that there were other visible markers of my identity that the participants may have read in certain ways, such as my bright dyed hair and facial piercings. Thus, despite attempts to clothe my body neutrally, it is likely that these bodily markers still conveyed a particular impression about me to the young women (although, having said this, this did not appear to discourage women from talking openly about their own music and venue preferences).

I was also aware of the way in which I positioned and moved my body, and tried to do so in ways that I hope established an informal environment and showed I was engaged with and interested in the interview content. Similarly, my embodied reactions such as facial expressions and embodied expressions of humour or (dis)agreement had to be carefully mediated. For example, laughter helped to build rapport in the interview, whilst I used bodily cues such as nodding to convey understanding. However, it is always possible that my body language or facial expression still communicated opinions or thoughts about certain practices or venues which may have affected the interview. As

Neuman notes, ‘the appearance, tone of voice, [and] question wording...of the interviewer may affect the respondent’ (2007: 190). Despite my attempts to react and dress neutrally, it was important to be acutely aware as a researcher of my own biases and preferences for rock and alternative venues within the NTE. However, despite my current preference for engaging more with Newcastle’s ‘alternative’ venues, I also have extensive experience as a younger student attending more mainstream nights within the city, and experience going out on the gay scene. This broad range of experiences hopefully influenced the conduct of the research in a positive way.

Further reflecting on my embodied reactions and responses, any reactions of shock or personal judgement were concealed from the participants as far as possible, and I had to make decisions regarding how to react to – for example – stories of extreme drunkenness. In terms of managing reactions to this stories, my own experiences were very similar to those of Stepney (2014), who reports that in her research interviews with young women regarding drinking, she was required to manage the dynamics of self-presentation as she attempted to come across as non-judgemental regarding women’s drinking stories, yet at the same time did not want to appear as though she was endorsing potentially harmful drinking behaviour. I was engaged in similar processes whereby I did not want to appear to be either judging or colluding with women’s drinking. I feel that in this respect two different aspects of my own identity were significant and possibly conflicting in shaping how I might manage these situations. On the one hand, I was present in the interview context as a professional researcher representing the university, and whilst I in no way wanted to appear judgemental of particular practices, I faced something of an ethical dilemma in that I also did not wish to be endorsing them. On the other hand, I was present as a young woman who – like many of the participants – engages enthusiastically in the NTE in Newcastle, a fact which undoubtedly contributed to my decision to carry out research in this area in the first place. In a sense, dimensions of my professional and personal sense of identity were both implicated in the research process in different ways, highlighting the ways in which our research interests can – and often do – stem from our wider personal interests, passions and experiences. I managed some of these dynamics by remaining fairly neutral towards some of the young women’s stories regarding heavy drinking and consequences such as being sick or memory loss, whilst at the same time I felt it was appropriate to be honest with participants who asked me if I like to ‘go out and have a few drinks’ or questions along these lines. I felt it was relatively unproblematic to

disclose this information to participants, and probably helped to build rapport in the interview setting. Having said this, had any participants asked me more morally dubious questions around – for example – heavy drinking and its consequences, these may have been less easy for me to negotiate in a way that didn't compromise either my professional or personal integrity.

As part of my wider reflections on the research process, I also considered some of the challenges and things I could have, upon reflection, done differently. One of the areas of the research requiring a great deal of thought and background research was around choosing and justifying the most appropriate methodology, and the decision to undertake interviews – and initially, focus groups - was not made lightly. Participant observation was also considered for use alongside interviews as a route to enhancing understanding of women's practices and embodied behaviours within the NTE, although not eventually utilised. I acknowledge that supplementing the interviews with actual observation of women's everyday practices in the NTE could have added a useful dimension to the study in terms of allowing me to observe what young women actually *do* within the NTE. This is supported by Mulhall, who recommends the use of observation techniques to examine how people 'move, dress, interact and use space' (2003: 307). From a symbolic interactionist perspective, observing these elements – in particular interactions – would have potentially enhanced the study further and provided opportunities to explore any contradictions between what women do on nights out and what they *say* they do. Had there been the additional scope and resources to use this method, it would have required careful consideration in terms of management of a number of practicalities. For example, there may be ethical issues associated with the ability of participants to give informed consent to ongoing participation under the influence of alcohol, alongside consideration of researcher safety in the spaces of the NTE. Nevertheless, it should be noted that participant observation has been used productively and successfully in this area of research – for an excellent example see Malbon's (1999) research on first-hand experiences of clubbing - and future studies should continue to consider its potential merit in this field.

As outlined earlier in this chapter, I also originally intended to carry out follow-up focus groups and, had more time and resources been available, I would have further pursued the possibility of going ahead with these. All of the young women consented to be contacted about the focus groups, and half confirmed they would like to take part when

contacted in July 2012. However, it was extremely difficult to find a time suitable for all, and generally only two or three women would be available for each date and time offered. Despite the attempts to offer flexibility in terms of timings to accommodate women with a range of occupations and working patterns, it was not possible to secure sufficient numbers to advance the focus groups. One thing I learnt with the benefit of hindsight is that the proposed timings of the focus groups (August 2012) made it difficult for many of the participants – particularly students - to commit. This may explain why I only had 13 participants who continued to be engaged in the process during the summer. Eight participants of the 26 did not respond to any follow-up emails regarding possible dates, and five said they were no longer available as they had graduated from university or moved away for the summer. Whilst it was anticipated that holding the focus groups late in the research process would be useful as it would allow the content to be well-informed by interview findings, it would likely have been useful to introduce the focus groups earlier. This would have avoided summer holidays and also the women may have been more engaged in the research if they had recently completed an interview (for some, almost a year had elapsed between interview and proposed focus group). An alternative measure would have been to hold the focus groups later, possibly attempting to re-recruit a new group of participants later in the year if required. However, as Arksey and Knight rightly note, ‘all research is a compromise... between what we would wish to do and what we can do’ (1999: 171), and as a postgraduate researcher with limited time and resources, a decision had to be made regarding whether re-recruiting for focus groups would be a good use of time and resources as I entered the third year of my PhD. Recognising that recruiting from scratch may have been time-consuming and resource-intensive, and considering the quality of the data I had already obtained, I made the decision in consultation with my supervisors to focus on analysing the existing data rather than attempting to gather more.

These decisions and responses highlight the messy and unpredictable nature of research and remind us of the ways in which real-world research is necessarily composed of a series of trade-offs concerning time, resources and the desire to obtain relevant and high-quality data. Overall, despite the challenges encountered in the research process, the rich, detailed data obtained covered a range of themes, linked strongly to the research questions and allowed me to engage in detailed data analysis, the findings of which will be outlined in the following three chapters. The next chapter, Chapter 4, will

introduce readers to the data through an analysis of the ways in which the girls' night out – and participation in the NTE more broadly – could represent a key way in which to 'do' femininities and girliness, particularly through drinking practices.

Chapter 4. Doing and Undoing ‘Girly’ through Drinking and Behaviour

Introduction

Set against a backdrop of conflicting debates positioning the NTE as a site of pleasure and hedonism, yet also regulation and control, it is important to understand the value engaging with the NTE had for the young women, and the ways in which this offered opportunities for both ‘doing’ and ‘undoing’ femininities. As this study sought to offer some specific insights into the co-production of femininities on the girls’ night out, this chapter will begin by highlighting how this mode of engagement with the NTE could represent an opportunity for some women to do girliness through the performance of collective feminine identities. This chapter will go on to consider some of the ways in which participating in the NTE more generally could also be used in some ways to *challenge* expectations around feminine and ‘ladylike’ behaviour. The chapter will then consider the ways in which alcohol consumption could be used as a way to do femininities, suggesting young women are expected to be active consumers of *some* alcohol within the NTE, but at the same time, certain drinking practices – and excessive consumption - may still threaten feminine respectability (Griffin *et al.*, 2013). Finally, the chapter will examine how classed and spatialised othering operated to determine *who* could legitimately consume alcohol and perform femininities in the NTE.

(Un)Doing ‘Girly’ in the NTE

The data clearly demonstrated that the girls’ night out had inherent value for many of the young women, and was often conceptualised differently to nights out in mixed-gender groups or with men. As this section will outline, the young women constructed the girls’ night out as an opportunity to be sociable, bond with female friends and do femininity and girliness. However, there were also nuances in the data which suggested that the girls’ night out – and nights out more generally – could for some women represent a space in which to engage in practices and behaviours that might be regarded as unfeminine.

Doing 'Girly': Femininities, Friendships and Drink Choices

The idea of 'time with the girls' was often perceived as important, and for some young women the main way to spend time together and catch up with female friends. Of those who expressed a preference, over half said they preferred to go out with female friends rather than male friends or in a mixed group. The girls' night out crucially represented a break from time with their partners for a number of the young women, who often stressed that it was important to do things with female friends outside of a relationship. The girls' night out could offer an opportunity to vent or complain about partners at times, mirroring research suggesting women's talk can – for straight women at least - be used to 'review the constraints of heterosexuality' (Green, 1998: 178):

It means a lot because it's *girl* time, and I think, although I love Sam to bits, and we've bought a house together and we've been together over 3 years, sometimes you just *need* your girl time.

(Kirsty, 23, working-class non-student, straight)

Whilst previous research has suggested women's opportunities to engage in leisure activities with friends are often curbed when they are in heterosexual relationships (Herridge *et al.*, 2003), Kirsty and some of the other young women challenged this idea by emphasising the importance of making time for girl friends. There was also a sense of the need to maintain female friendships from childhood or university in the face of other competing demands such as work and childcare. This was particularly important for both of the young mothers in the study, who regarded their nights out as time to themselves and freedom from the responsibilities and routine of motherhood:

Obviously when I'm with my little girl, I have to be responsible. I have to be a parent. But I feel more like, at the weekends, when I'm free... I don't have to be 'on guard', I don't have to be sensible. I can just be silly and just have fun.

(Jade, 23, working-class non-student, straight)

Similarly, for Megan nights out with female friends became a means to construct other aspects of a youthful identity outside of mothering responsibilities; she felt that if she didn't go out her social life would centre around socialising with other mothers and turn her into a 'baby brain':

I think it keeps us sane. It keeps me from turning into a baby brain, and it's a way to unwind... I feel like it's a way to keep us young, and give us something else to talk about! [laughter]

(25, working-class non-student, straight)

Bialeschki and Michener (1994) suggest that the need to make some time for themselves through leisure activities can be highly important for young mothers, bringing balance into their lives and allowing them to maintain a sense of personal identity (cited in Green, 1998: 175), and there was a strong sense that this was important for both young mothers in the study, Jade and Megan. However, the data also clearly shows that *regardless* of relationship status and whether or not they had children, the girls' night out was typically important for most of the young women as a way of maintaining female friendships through establishing dedicated 'girly' time outside of relationships or other commitments. It is important to note that this was not always about femininity per se for the majority of women, although a small number of participants *did* tie time with female friends more explicitly to femininity. For example, when asked about what it means to be feminine on a night out, Kimberley specifically referenced the value of relationships with female friends as a way of doing femininity:

...being feminine.... would be.... [cut].... your *relationships* with your other friends, like, your girl friends.... [pause].... Cause I think two girls will have a different relationship than like, two *boys* would have a relationship. So *that*, I think, is part of being feminine.

(20, middle-class student, straight)

Other participants were more likely to construct the night out with female friends as a way to do 'girly' rather than femininity per se, although in the vast majority of cases, girliness was equated with femininity by the women; there was much slippage between the two terms. Participants tended to use the terms interchangeably; to do femininity *was* to do girliness, as will be explored in more depth in the Conclusion. Almost two thirds of participants used the term 'girly' in interviews to describe certain ways of dressing, behaviours or types of drink, and just physically being with and spending time with the girls could be a way to do girly for some of the women:

EN: And what does going out with your girlfriends mean to you?

Umm.... like, having a *laugh*... Umm.... just being stupid and girly...

EN: What does that mean, being girly? What's that about?

Umm.... [pause]... I don't know. Maybe, yeah, maybe like... feeling *nice* and like you've made a bit of an effort to go out. Umm.... just, I don't know... I dunno, just... *being with* the girls.

(Ruth, 20, middle-class student, straight)

Through her use of hesitations and pauses, it seems that Ruth is struggling to define exactly what it is about the girls' night out that offers a way to do girly, although she settles on defining it as being in the company of female friends. This reflects Green's (1998) argument that doing female friendship in leisure spaces is a key component of the negotiation of gendered identities, and suggests that engagement with the NTE may be a key means through which women can do both femininities and friendships, with some overlaps between the two.

In addition to just physically being with female friends, alcohol consumption within the female friendship group was another key way in which the young women performed friendships collectively. All of the young women participating in the study had at some point consumed alcohol within the NTE, and none identified as current non-drinkers. Pre-drinking (drinking together at home before going out) often took on a particularly important role in terms of spending time with female friends:

... if I go out with only *female* friends, we make a bit more of a, kind of, *thing* of drinking *together* beforehand, and chatting and that.... [cut].... as in like 'here's a bottle of wine, now let's sit and chat about our lives'.

(Gail, 24, middle-class student, bisexual)

Commencing pre-drinking together through the collective act of opening and sharing a bottle of wine - for example - could mark out private time and space for young women to talk and be together (see also Stepney, 2014), and it is almost difficult to separate out the processes of drinking and chatting above, as they are closely intertwined. It is interesting to note how Gail comments that such practices become important when going out with 'only *female* friends' [her emphasis], suggesting this is unique and would not be the same in a mixed-gender group. Pre-drinking in domestic spaces also offered a relatively safe space in which to consume alcohol according to the women, and letting one's hair down and relinquishing control could be done in the pre-drinking environment without wider concerns around risk and visibility needing to be taken into

consideration. Again, this is unlikely to be the same in a mixed group, and there were many examples of the particular importance of getting ready and pre-drinking specifically with female friends. The data around the collective value of group pre-drinking contrasts with the findings of Bancroft (2012), who argues that pre-drinking for young women is a largely practical activity lacking in pleasure and simply used as a shared cost-saving measure to reach a particular level of intoxication prior to club entry. Whilst the cost-saving element of pre-drinking *was* mentioned by a number of participants, this was clearly not the only reason for engaging in alcohol consumption at home, or the most important one.

The collective value of drinking later in the night within the public spaces of the NTE was also recognised by a number of the participants, particularly when more ‘feminine’ drinks were consumed. Research widely recognises the historic associations between beer and masculinity (Lyons and Willott, 2008), and there was broad agreement amongst participants that beer continues to be regarded by society as a more masculine drink and tied to more traditional drinking practices within the masculinised pub environment:

I think pints are just associated with *men* sat in your local pub drinking a pint by themselves, grunting at each other.

(Ruth, 21, doesn’t identify with a class, student, straight)

It is particularly interesting that when alluding to imagined beer consumption practices by men, Ruth actually removes the collective element and associates beer with men drinking ‘by themselves’ and engaging in minimal levels of communication with other men in the pub. Whilst this of course is only a perception of the functions and circumstances of male drinking rather than necessarily a reality (see Thurnell-Read, 2012), it is interesting that the collective value of drinking in terms of bonding and doing friendships is reserved for women here.

Wine and cocktails were typically labelled as more ‘feminine’ beverages by a number of participants. Interestingly, some of the women felt pressure not just to drink with female friends, but to drink similar beverages and engage in shared practices of consuming more feminine drinks such as sharing a bottle of wine, again pointing to the importance of drinking as a communal activity and showing overlaps between doing

femininities and doing friendships. Eve in particular talked about experiencing pressure on a girls' night out to drink more feminine beverages. She contrasts going out with her female friends from sixth form with going out in a mixed-gender group with her PhD friends in a number of ways, including around the type of alcohol she would typically consume:

I would say when I do go out with my friends from sixth form, we tend to start drinking really girly drinks, like rose wine and cocktails. But when I'm with my PhD friends, I don't feel as though I have to do that as much. I don't mind doing it when I'm out with my sixth form friends, but when I'm out with my PhD friends, I just drink *cider* and things like that.

(24, doesn't identify with a class, student, bisexual(ish))

It is interesting to note that Eve changes her drinking practices when out with only female friends in order to consume more 'girly' drinks, and this was also noted by other participants, suggesting there may be specific expectations around drinking that are more likely to apply to the girls' night out than to other types of night:

Drinking on a girly night? I tend to drink wine when I go out with the girls. If I go out with the boys, I'll have a pint. So I guess it's *what* I drink...

EN: So why's that different?

[long pause]..... Dunno, I think it's cause all the other girls drink wine, I've made myself like wine.

(Ally, 21, doesn't identify with a class, student, bisexual)

Ally also preferred to drink cider but had trained herself to like the taste of wine so she could drink it with female friends. Likewise, for Fran the girls' night out marked a contrast with other – potentially less feminine - drinking activities and behaviours:

We've always had this long-running joke that when we meet up and we go .to the pub, we're just sitting there like little old men.... complaining and sitting there with wor [our] pints... I think it's just nice to feel that bit more *girly* now and then....

EN: So what is it about a night out that makes you feel more girly?

I think it's cause I'm there out with my girlfriends, and not, kind of, on the pull.

(18, working-class college student, bisexual)

Again, just ‘being with’ girl friends was depicted as important, in contrast to going out ‘on the pull’ to seek male attention. This also highlights the importance of female friendships and collective feminine identities as many of the young women felt it was inappropriate to focus on ‘pulling’ or seeking male attention or validation when out with female friends. It is also possible that Fran’s more usual drinking practices may be labelled as more masculine – based within the traditionally male space of the pub and involving the consumption of pints of beer – and this may to an extent be mitigated as Fran also talks about being girly ‘now and then’. The occasional act of doing girly may allow young women to resist being positioned as masculine; this is similar to the ways in which some of the young women who saw themselves as quite ‘manly’ might use a night out as an opportunity to get dressed up and ‘flash’ their femininity (see Chapter 5). The consumption of beverages identified as more feminine also represents a way to do girliness collectively though ‘doing what the other girls do’. For example, Ally drinks wine ‘cause all the other girls drink wine’, and Eve also talked about how drinking cider or lager and declining the offer to share a bottle of wine could potentially be read as a way to snub female friends, although it is interesting to consider whether this might be more a result of peer pressure from the immediate group or wider societal pressure to engage in femininity:

EN: So why wouldn’t you feel comfortable drinking a pint of lager when all the girls are sharing a bottle of wine, say?

I guess it’s because I feel like I kind of *have* to become part of that *identity*. And I’d feel like I was almost pushing them away a bit if they asked if I’d like to share a bottle of wine with them and I was just like ‘oh no, I’ll go and get a lager’. It’s kind of like, when you’re all there together, obviously you’re an individual, but you’re part of a group as well. And you feel inclined to do the same things, and drink the same kind of things because of it.

(24, doesn’t identify with a class, student, bisexual(ish))

Eve draws on the importance of ‘being together’ and the contrasts between individual and group identity here. Drinking together could be a key way to forge shared group identities, and in this way, drinking was feminised and defined by several participants as an important component of female bonding and a means through which to forge a strong sense of shared identity with girl friends. There were some limited counter-examples where women did not experience pressure to drink feminine beverages with

female friends and drank whatever they wanted, although these were not widespread across the data.

When elaborating on drinking with female friends, Ally also positions wine-drinking as more ‘upmarket’ – and later in the interview ‘less uncouth’ - than other drinks. This reflects a trend across the interviews through which certain drinks were classed in particular ways, as well as being positioned as more or less feminine. Ally’s reflections on wine as both a feminine and classy drink choice were echoed by other women:

I like white wine because - it’s so stupid, and I can’t believe I’m even gonna say this – I just like the way it *looks*, and I do obviously like the taste. I just *feel* nice with a glass of wine. It just seems a bit more elegant.

(Megan, 25, working-class non-student, straight)

Megan - a self-professed ‘girly girl’ – draws on the way in which a glass of wine both looks and feels in her hand, describing it as ‘more elegant’ than other options. Cocktails were also defined by the majority of participants as feminine, and by some as classy. The positioning of some drinks as both feminine and ‘elegant’ mirrors research that describes traditionally feminine drink choices as ‘glamorous and sparkling’ (Lyons and Willott, 2008: 701). In contrast to the links made between feminine beverages and class, pints of beer were seen as both manly *and* rough by some of the young women, mirroring the recent work of Emslie *et al.* (2015) who report similar findings with a sample of midlife women. For example, Nicole associated what she regarded as masculine drink choices with the working-class and went on to argue that drinking pints is not associated with respectable middle-class femininity:

...women who drink pints is [sic] a bit *manly*, therefore a bit rough. If you were well-to-do and middle-class then you just *wouldn’t* do it.

(24, working-class non-student, straight)

Lyons and Willott (2008) noted in their focus groups with young people in New Zealand that young men sometimes viewed women who drank pints as ‘not well brought up’, and the above example and others within the data demonstrate that particular ‘masculine’ drinks could also be read as ‘rough’ by women themselves. This demonstrates some of the ways in which gender and class may intersect to define what it means to be appropriately feminine. However, although Nicole resisted drinking pints

in particular settings – such as the girls’ night out - in other contexts she regarded this as more acceptable, again alluding to the ways in which the girls’ night out could be associated with particular collective norms and expectations around drinking that did not necessarily apply to other drinking contexts:

If I go and watch the football, I’ll have, sometimes, a pint of snakebite² on an afternoon. And I think if I was to drink that in town, people would think that I was a bit... *manly*.... [cut]... It’s only cause I’m sitting with my dad and his mates [watching the football in the pub] so I don’t care. *They* don’t care either, they’re not gonna sit and be like ‘Oh my god, you’re having a pint’... They’ll say ‘Do you want a pint of snakebite, like?’ And I’ll say ‘Yeah’ cause I *do* like it. I think it’s your *company*. *My* friends wouldn’t care if I had a snakebite in the house, but I *don’t* think I’d be comfortable standing in a bar, because I would just be aware that people would be like ‘What on earth is *she* drinking?’

(24, working-class non-student, straight)

For Nicole, drinking a pint of snakebite was more acceptable in the masculine pub environment or private home environment, but not in the public spaces of ‘town’. This suggests that performing femininity in certain ways can take on a differing level of importance in different contexts and with different company. A number of other participants also suggested that feminine or classy drinking choices and practices take on varying amounts of significance in different settings. As Nicole claims above, one of the key distinctions for the participants was around drinking in the pub compared to the club environment, as argued by Joanna:

If I was in the pub, I would happily drink a shandy³ or - what’s it called? – cider. But if I go out to a club, I don’t wanna be walking round with a pint... [cut]

EN: So why wouldn’t you want to be walking round with a pint? What wouldn’t you like about that?

I just don’t think that’s very girly. But it is in the pub, but it’s not in a club.

(24, working-class full-time worker and student, straight)

This quote from Joanna suggests that what it means to be ‘girly’ varies in different settings, and the criteria of girliness or femininity appear to be stricter in a club setting. This was often also echoed in terms of dress and appearance, where looking *more* girly

² Cider mixed with lager and blackcurrant

³ Lager topped up with lemonade

than usual was perceived to be particularly important in certain settings, such as clubs. Again linking to clothing, Ruth explained that she would happily drink a pint on a quiet afternoon in the pub, but not if she was all dressed up for a night out. This mirrors the recent findings of Emslie *et al.* who report that in their work with older women ‘clothing and drinks were deployed for different performances of gender on different occasions (high heels and wine vs. trainers and beer)’ (2015: 4). It may be that there is something jarring about bringing together feminine dress with less feminine drinking choices. As Holliday (1999) argues, individuals often wish to convey a coherent identity, and it may be that particular ways of dressing seem to sit at odds with certain drinks. Furthermore, getting ‘dressed up’ can typically be associated with the girls’ night out (see Chapter 5), and these various examples clearly suggest there may be particular patterns of drinking that are distinctive to this context. Drinking on the girls’ night out may serve specific functions in constructing collective feminine identities through shared consumption of feminine and ‘upmarket’ drinks. As Jayne *et al.* report, drinking may facilitate social relations, create a shared and embodied community and forge senses of ‘belonging’ and ‘togetherness’ (2010), although it is also important to consider the extent to which there is pressure from peers and from wider norms and expectations of femininity to drink in certain ways or make particular drink choices.

Girls’ Night Off? Expectations and Norms around Feminine Behaviour

Alongside particular expectations around drink choices, the young women also recognised a wider set of behavioural norms that could be important in determining what and who was seen as (un)feminine within the wider spaces of the NTE. A number of specific behaviours were often depicted as masculine or violating the norms of feminine behaviour, and also as ‘uncouth’ or ‘unladylike’, tying into notions of feminine respectability. The feminine woman has traditionally been conceptualised as contained and petite; she does not dominate or take up space or draw attention to her presence (Young, 1980), and some of the young women explicitly argued femininity was to an extent still associated with speaking softly and avoiding ‘making a scene’ rather than being loud and visible:

I think that it is seen that women who *are* very loud are not very attractive because of that, and they’re not very... feminine... girly. Cause I think that is seen as a *male* sort of thing, isn’t it, like being louder?

(Kimberley, 20, middle-class student, straight)

Notions of what was ladylike, feminine and respectable tied into being quiet and not drawing attention to oneself in the NTE, in contrast to the construction of the unfeminine woman as loud, lairy and vulgar, as well as promiscuous, aggressive and potentially violent (see Chapter 6). Whilst it is important to note that young women may of course recognise and comment upon these norms and expectations without actually buying into them, a number of the participants *did* feel that loud and lairy behaviour was unacceptable for women on a night out. The judgements around the lairy or potentially aggressive woman could be tied into ideas around excess and losing control, which were very prominent in interviews and will be explored in further detail later in this chapter. The loud and lairy woman represents a lack of restraint in terms of her ‘brash’ behaviour such as, for instance, public swearing. In direct contrast to this unfeminine behaviour, Day *et al.* argue that ‘(r)espectable femininity is defined around not using swear words (and perhaps not being rowdy in public places)’ (2003: 150).

Heavy drinking was also depicted by some participants as unfeminine behaviour. Certain ways of consuming alcohol were portrayed as masculine or manly, such as ‘chugging’ (rapidly drinking or downing) pints or attempting to drink more than their male counterparts. There were marked differences in the ways in which the young women talked about men and women’s drinking, with a common expectation that men tend to drink more heavily than women and that it is inappropriate for women to attempt to match or exceed the drinking levels of their male peers:

EN: So what’s manly about drinking a pint then?

I think it *suggests* that you’re drinking to get drunk. As a woman, I think it’s the suggestion that you’re downing pints with the intention of getting as drunk as you possibly can...

EN: So why does that then link back to being manly?

I think because men can handle pints. Men can drink more than women can, normally because of physical size I guess.

(Claire, 25, working-class non-student, straight)

Claire expresses the commonly held view that pint-drinking is manly, suggesting that this may be because it makes it look as though women are drinking with the intention of

getting drunk. This reinforces the idea that *some* alcohol consumption may be normalised and expected but that drinking with the specific *intention* of getting very drunk is problematic for women. Interestingly, Claire then draws on the idea - mentioned by over a third of participants – that men are capable of drinking more than women. Participants tended to take these differences as given, citing biology or differences in physical size between men and women. Joanna’s comment that ‘men can always, obviously, take a lot more [alcohol]’ is a good example of the way in which the assumption that men could naturally drink more than women generally went unchallenged. Thus the status of the pint of beer as unfeminine appears to derive in part for the participants from its volume and the suggestion that the drinker is consuming large quantities to become drunk. There was also some suggestion that the large pint glass doesn’t ‘look’ feminine:

...it is always so associated with... ‘men should drink pints, and women should be seen and not *heard*’, with them being smaller and more petite...

EN: So is it about the size of the pint, or the beer itself? Like, is beer acceptable in a *bottle* or...?

I think it’s more acceptable in a bottle or a smaller glass, it’s almost like some women are trying to *hide* it, the fact that they’re drinking beer.

(Fran, 18, working-class college student, bisexual)

Fran’s sarcastic comment around how women ‘should be seen and not heard’ and also small and petite links back to discussions raised earlier in this section of the feminine woman as quiet and contained in the NTE. As Fran suggests, one way in which women might attempt to mitigate the unfeminine practice of drinking beer might be to drink it in a smaller, more feminine glass or from a bottle, and there was evidence that some of the participants subscribed to this rule themselves:

I would maybe have a *bottle* of beer, but I would *never* drink a pint of beer. I just would not wanna be seen with a pint.

(Megan, 25, working-class non-student, straight)

Interestingly, Megan’s reason for not drinking a pint of beer is explicitly because of the way in which she might be seen or perceived by others. Rolfe *et al.* (2009: 331) note that in their own research on female heavy drinkers, some women attempted to retain appropriately feminine identities and mitigate the negative associations of women’s

heavy drinking and beer consumption through drinking half-pints. Lyons and Willott report similar findings and argue that '(i)n this way women are subverting the beer/masculinity association by engaging in the behaviour but performing it in feminine ways' (2008: 702). This research also indicates that when women *do* drink beer, they may be able to do it in more 'girly' ways not just through drinking half-pints or using more 'elegant' glasses, but also drinking fruit-flavoured beer or cider. The young women generally found it difficult to articulate why this might make drinks more feminine or girly, but it may be related to the idea that fruity or sweeter beverages are considered more feminine:

...a typically 'man' drink would be beer or lager – whereas a lot of my friends would have that and really enjoy it. To be fair, they would usually have it with blackcurrant cordial to make it slightly more feminine.

(Sophia, 20, middle-class student, straight)

As illustrated by Sophia, similar strategies such as adding cordial to beer could also be a useful way to limit the negative associations of beer consumption, and it is interesting to note that women were both aware of and actively engaged in some of these practices for the explicit reason of appearing less unfeminine. Such practices highlight the importance of maintaining an appropriately feminine identity for some of the participants. However, there was some resistance to the idea that women are expected to be 'seen and not heard' on a night out, drink less than men and avoid being loud and rowdy. For example, some of the young women embraced being loud and rowdy within the NTE and were aware that this might not be regarded as traditionally feminine but did not see this as problematic:

I dunno what other people *do* on their nights out. *We're* really loud, we're really lairy. We have got really horrendous songs that we sing at people, and if we see someone having a wee round the corner, then *we've* got a song for that!
[laughter] I don't think that would be perceived as feminine!

(Hayley, 24, working-class college student, straight)

This appears to threaten 'the normative ordering of gendered space' (Holland, 2004: 99), whereby the conventionally feminine woman is petite and delicate and is literally expected to take up little space. Whilst Hayley embraced singing and acting in an unfeminine, loud manner, Nicole also talked about how her sister Kirsty sings football

songs in the street, and acknowledged that many people might think that was unfeminine:

EN: And what do you think it would mean to be or act unfeminine on a night out?

[pause].... It depends how you define unfeminine... cause me and ma sister... My sister is *terrible* for singing football songs in the middle of the street, like a man. And she gets men to join in. And a lot of people would say that's unfeminine, but, to *me*, I just see that as a good laugh.

(Nicole, 24, working-class non-student, straight)

This is interesting as Nicole was one of the participants who most clearly stressed that she would not want to be seen in town drinking a pint as she associated this with being labelled as 'manly' and 'rough', highlighting how, even for individual women, the ways in which they set, negotiate or play with the imagined boundaries of femininity can be complex and nuanced. Related to this, Guise and Gill recognise that whilst alcohol serves a variety of functions for women, getting drunk and even 'rowdy' can be enjoyed in their own right (2007: 900), and there was certainly some suggestion in the data that the NTE was in fact a particularly suitable place in which to be loud and rowdy:

Rowdy...? That's the whole *point* of going on a night out...

(Sophia, 20, middle-class student, straight)

In some respects then, it seems that a night out could represent a night *off* from femininity in some ways. This supports Skeggs' argument that behaviour on a night out may be characterised by 'raucousness, rudeness, outrageousness and challenge to femininity' (1997: 105) in the form of humour, camaraderie and secret jokes, marking an important way for women to loudly claim their right to pleasure and the use of public space (which women have typically been denied). This also suggests that public space may be becoming less masculinised. Whilst loud, rowdy or unfeminine behaviour was not always demarcated by class, the local, working-class young women tended to be the most vocal about engaging in rowdy practices and behaviours. There was even a sense that the middle-class woman is actually more restricted in terms of how she can behave whilst working-class women may have more freedom to act in ways that might not traditionally be seen as respectable, as illustrated by Jade and Fran (both working-class young Geordie women):

...it sounds quite shallow but I think, quite often you find women who are from well-off families, they tend to act more respectably, whereas you quite often see.... [women from] working-class backgrounds don't really care as much about what people think of them, they tend to be a bit more.... 'yeah sorted' ... just not really caring as much, just doing what they want.

(Jade, 23, working-class non-student, straight)

I think with, perhaps more working-class women, it's deemed more acceptable to go out and get wanked. But if you're from a more well-off background, then you have to remain composed and presentable at all times. You can't be seen to be making a tit of yerself.

(Fran, 18, working-class college student, bisexual)

Other research does suggest that 'in some respects working-class life may be thought of as more authentic and less restricted than middle-class life' (Holt and Griffin, 2005: 249), with the classed discourse of the 'lady' still holding sway over the ways in which middle-class women negotiate dimensions of gender, femininity and sexuality (Allan, 2009) and research suggesting middle-class/professional women may be most likely to strive to talk about their drinking behaviour in terms of moderation and control (Day *et al.*, 2004: 174). This is supported by Rudolfsdottir and Morgan who comment that the middle-class, female university students they interviewed about their drinking practices 'did not feel they had license to behave in an overtly rowdy manner' or engage in violent, uncouth or unfeminine behaviour (2009: 499). This is particularly interesting as it sits at odds with research suggesting that the practices of working-class women remain more scrutinised and visible and these women are more likely to be subject to moral judgement based on their behaviour.

References to being loud, rowdy or vulgar were also one of the few contexts where being seen as manly or 'boyish' could have more positive associations. Whilst being girly was to an extent seen as positive, some participants talked negatively about being *very* girly or *too* girly and worked to resist these types of identities. Just as hyper-feminine dress could be read as being 'too girly' (see Chapter 5) and it was possible to be 'too much of a girl' in terms of promiscuous and sexualised behaviour (see Chapter 6), some 'really girly girls' were positioned as unable to 'let their hair down' or have a laugh in the same way as others:

I feel like my group of friends as well, we are quite... *boyish*... sometimes. We're not particularly - we are *girly*, we like to shop and do girly things – but we are very vulgar sometimes [laughter]... I don't know, just funny though, yeah. Just... take the mic out of each other a bit more...[cut]... Some really girly girls, you can't really say sarcastic comments to them. Whereas, in my close group of friends you could say anything and it would just be like 'ah shut up'... you wouldn't take it to heart.

(Ruth, 21, doesn't identify with a class, student, straight)

Here, Ruth reconfigures 'boyish' to have more positive associations. Similarly, for some women, the idea of being able to 'keep up with the lads' in terms of alcohol consumption was seen in positive ways, for example as a source of pride. This supports Griffin *et al.*'s argument that drinking 'like a girl' can actually have negative associations for some women, who conflate this with being boring or a lightweight (2013: 188):

EN: So what does that mean, to be a lightweight?

Be a lightweight? Like, can't handle your drink. I can keep up with the boys, I'm quite small, but I can keep up with the *boys*.

(Ally, 21, doesn't identify with a class, student, bisexual)

These opportunities for young women to behave in 'boyish' or rowdy ways or 'drink like a man' could be read as a marker of increasing equality. However, the extent to which mimicking masculine behaviour and practices through 'keeping up with the boys' is genuinely empowering or liberating for young women is debatable, as this does not reinscribe femininity itself with more positive meanings or challenge gendered norms that valorise male behaviour. As Chatterton and Hollands argue, 'young women appear to be simply competing on men's terms through a crude 'equality' paradigm' (2003: 155). What is also interesting is that Ruth feels the need to point to the 'girly things' – such as shopping - that she and her friends also like doing, reflecting other examples where participants still stressed that they were girly to a certain extent or in certain contexts. Ruth is careful not to distance herself and her friends *too* far from femininity here, emphasising the point that 'we are *girly*' even as she attempts to imbue being boyish with more positive meanings too. Her boyishness is thus arguably bounded and contained. These complexities tie into ongoing debates around the tensions inherent in contemporary articulations of femininity as 'girliness' or 'girlpower' in a post-feminist

context (Gonick, 2004; Budgeon, 2014), and will be explored in more depth in Chapter 7, the Conclusion.

Moderation and Control: Drinking and Drunkenness on a Night Out

As this chapter has begun to illustrate, the consumption of *some* alcohol in the NTE clearly continues to be normalised, yet as this section will show, women may feel they have to balance this against the norm that continues to label drinking as unfeminine by positioning themselves as moderate yet ‘fun’ drinkers who remain in control of their consumption. This section will also demonstrate that excessive drinking or being ‘too drunk’ could continue to be perceived as inappropriate and unfeminine.

The Imperative to Intoxication

Over two-thirds of participants of a range of ages, classes and sexualities said drinking alcohol was an important part of a night out in general, with several positioning it as a priority. Only a small minority rejected the idea that alcohol was important on a night out, and claimed they didn’t drink ‘much’ or drank a lot less than they used to. Lydia’s reflections on the value of drinking were fairly typical:

You can’t *really* enjoy it unless you’ve had a couple of drinks. I mean, don’t get me wrong, not wasted but, you know, tipsy. If you have to drive on a night out, oh god [sigh]... there’s no point going, it’s just so boring.

(21, middle-class student, straight)

Much of the data reinforced what Griffin *et al.* term the ‘imperative to intoxication’ (2009b: 463); the idea that *some* alcohol consumption is expected on a night out:

I’d not say ‘oh I’m *not* drinkin’ tonight’... or ‘I’m only gonna have, like, two drinks tonight’. I’d never vocalise that, because then it’s like you’re not honouring a part of the agreement in going out, which is to get a bit drunk, because ‘then you *will* be fun’.

(Jessie, 21, working-class non-student, straight)

Jessie claims that she would avoid drawing attention to any attempts to limit or minimise consumption in the NTE, and this strategy mirrors the findings of Nairn *et al.* (2006), who suggest that some young people who are non-drinkers may attempt to

‘pass’ as drinkers in social situations. Other participants described the ways in which non-drinking or even limiting consumption to a few drinks was often challenged by friends:

I can go out and I don’t need to have a drink, but sometimes if I’m out with a different group of friends, they will *challenge* that... ‘What you not drinking for?’ ‘Are you *ill*?’ and stuff like that.

(Hayley, 24, working-class college student, straight)

The data showed that the young women both experienced the pressure to drink from others but also engaged in their own processes of encouraging friends to drink, reinforcing the idea that the friendship group plays a role in policing alcohol consumption. As well as this peer pressure, women also experienced self-pressure to drink, shaped by wider cultural influences such as the normalisation of alcohol consumption and assumptions that non-drinkers could be associated with being ‘stuck-up’, ‘weird’ or ‘boring’. Survey research in Australia suggests that female drinkers may be regarded by both young men and young women as more interesting, popular, outgoing and self-assured than their non-drinking peers (Jones and Rossiter, 2003: 117), and this was reinforced in the analysis of the data:

I’ve got a friend who doesn’t drink as well – she doesn’t really come out with wur [us] anymore, I wonder why(!)

(Nicole, 24, working-class non-student, straight)

Nicole’s sarcastic example of the exclusion of her non-drinking friend demonstrates that the failure to comply with drinking norms can have real consequences, supporting Griffin *et al.*’s (2009b) argument that non-drinking can be a source of social exclusion for young people, particularly as they then lack access to shared stories and memories around drinking and drunkenness. Well over half of the participants did mention the role of drinking in facilitating ‘banter’ and funny stories on a night out, allowing them to construct shared memories that could then be reflected upon at a later date:

EN: ...and do you think drinking’s part of your identity?

Yeah, because, you know, people have memories of things you’ve said. It’s always ‘remember when we went out that week and you said this, or you did this?’ A lot of memories that we’ve done or remember are from drinking.

(Joanna, 24, working-class full-time worker and student, straight)

There was broad agreement that alcohol could be used as a tool to facilitate funny stories and silly behaviour, and this was rarely challenged or questioned. Hayley was one of the few participants who resisted the idea that alcohol is required to facilitate silly or 'daft' behaviour on a night out. Her group of female friends frequently challenged one another to go out sober:

....it came out the back of that, of us just being, you know, 'We don't *need* a drink to be daft'... tryin' to prove to ourselves that we *didn't* need a drink to be daft.

(24, working-class college student, straight)

Hayley however represents a minority voice, and the majority of participants argued that a certain degree of drunkenness was required in order to 'have a laugh' and 'loosen up'. This reflects the findings of Stepney (2014), who argues that women's consumption of alcohol within the NTE *can* establish closeness and intimacy, but can also establish the space and distance to engage in small talk and 'have a laugh'. Several participants also saw alcohol as a tool that could - almost *should* - be used to boost confidence and lower inhibitions, and talked about the ways in which drinking increased their confidence and made them feel more able to dance and to interact with others. The pressures or awkwardness associated with meeting new people could be eased through the use of alcohol as a social lubricant, reflecting other research suggesting alcohol consumption may make people feel more confident and less inhibited, such as Montemurro and McClure's (2005) work on the way in which alcohol consumption can facilitate solidarity on a hen party between women who may have very little in common and not know one another well. Several of the women also felt that feelings of anxiety or self-consciousness could be reduced through alcohol consumption:

If I was *sober* and went to the Diamond Strip, I'd be very self-conscious of how I looked, if I was acting the right way, if people were staring at me. But if I was drunk I wouldn't care. Or I'd care a lot less anyway.

(Kate, 20, working-class student, lesbian)

Kate talked in the interview about the differences between going out with the LGBT society on the gay scene and going out with straight female friends in the bars on the Diamond Strip, where she said she often felt out of place. It may be that to an extent she

used drinking as a way of alleviating her own feelings of insecurity and self-consciousness in these less comfortable contexts. Here, she talks about relinquishing control of her concerns over how her body looks and acts in spaces of the NTE with a fairly rigid dress code tied to heteronormative standards of feminine appearance. It is also interesting that she suggests there is a 'right way' to act in these venues. This mirrors the findings of Jayne *et al.* (2010) who report that non-heterosexual users of the NTE may use alcohol consumption to ease feelings of being 'out of place' and to alleviate anxieties around the risk of homophobic violence. However, it should also be noted that young women can feel 'out of place' in different spaces for a number of reasons, and the use of alcohol to ease anxieties in particular spaces may not always be tied to sexuality. For example, as illustrated through the many examples in this discussion, drinking was used more generally by other women in the study to lower inhibitions and loosen up. This general consensus around the value of alcohol consumption in reconfiguring the women's bodies for fun (Leysdon, 2008) demonstrates clearly that a continued 'imperative to intoxication' comes not only from others but can also operate as a form of self-regulation. Young women may put pressure on themselves to consume alcohol as they have internalised the idea that moderate alcohol consumption can enhance the experience of a night out through facilitating fun and banter, generating funny stories, easing social interaction and relieving self-consciousness. As the next section will go on to demonstrate, notions of control were also crucial in shaping women's drinking practices and choices, through the construction of the responsible women's drinking as moderate and controlled, yet still sufficient to enable her to 'let her hair down'.

Control and Excess

Traditional conceptualisations of femininity position the feminine woman as risk-averse and responsible, but 'the drunken body does not conform to [these] conventional gendered notions of femininity' (Waitt *et al.*, 2011: 271). Several of the young women talked about the role of alcohol in encouraging silly, fun behaviour. However, relinquishing control on a night out was only seen as acceptable up to a certain point, and the young women still had to work hard to resist some of the negative and traditional assumptions around women's drinking by positioning themselves as moderate and responsible drinkers who retained a degree of control over their consumption. This need to present a controlled drinking identity was clearly

demonstrated by Susie; she very much constructed herself as a moderate drinker, describing herself throughout the interview as ‘Sensible Susie’, yet also explained how drinking *some* alcohol on a night out helped her to reposition herself as able to act in silly ways, in contrast to her usual ‘boring’ self. When asked what makes a good night out, she emphasised the importance of moderate alcohol consumption:

Not necessarily getting that drunk, but, merry, so that you’re having a laugh and you can loosen up a bit.

(22, middle-class student, straight)

Analysis of the data clearly demonstrated that excessive consumption still risks positioning women as losing control completely. Like Susie, the majority of participants drew on the importance of being ‘tipsy’ rather than ‘wasted’. This need to balance alcohol consumption clearly reflects Measham’s (2002) notion of a ‘controlled loss of control’, which refers to women’s efforts to moderate their drug and alcohol intake in order to achieve a desired level of intoxication yet remain in control. There was a clear consensus that drinking behaviour should be managed and regulated by women themselves and consumption should be moderate, with women who were unable to manage their own drinking described as ‘idiots’ or similar:

There’s always a couple of individuals on a night out that just make a complete fool of themselves, and you can’t help but go, like, just ‘*what* are you doing with yourself?! *Why* are you in this state?!’

(Georgina, 20, doesn’t identify with a class, student, lesbian)

Several participants also positioned themselves as responsible drinkers who were aware of their own limits and knew when to slow down, drink water or stop drinking. Interestingly, there were no hard and fast ‘rules’ about where the limits of drinking should be, and drunkenness was never measured in terms of units consumed, rather through embodied or bodily cues such as feeling dizzy or sick, reduced awareness or losing a sense of control (see also Guise and Gill, 2007):

There’s a thin line of being drunk where you’re enjoying it and it’s a good drunk, to being in that position of... you know... *horrendous* feeling...

EN: And how do you know where that line is?

[long pause]... Probably from... [pause]... how you're able to stand and thoughts of being *aware*. If you start thinking you're not aware of what's around you, and things are getting a bit *blurred*, literally blurred, your head's all over.

(Kimberley, 20, middle-class student, straight)

In this sense, a 'controlled loss of control' represents the ideal state of intoxication, where drunkenness is acceptable but only up to a certain point, and drinking is used strategically to achieve a desired mental and physical state of fun and relaxation but must still be regulated to avoid excessive drunkenness. For the majority of participants, notions of control were absolutely essential in defining where the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable levels of drunkenness might lie, and several of the young women sought to legitimise and justify their own moderate drinking practices through othering the irresponsible behaviour and drinking choices of other women. As Rolfe *et al.* argue, women who drink are required 'to perform a balancing act in order to protect against a stigmatized identity - particularly that of 'manly woman', 'unrespectable or irresponsible' woman, 'addict' or more generally 'woman out of control'' (2009: 333).

The drunk female body was frequently depicted by participants as unattractive and unfeminine, mirroring previous research (Griffin *et al.*, 2009b). Half of the participants described the need for the feminine body to remain 'ladylike' or 'in control':

I think if you're staggering around, you're unable to stand up... it's just a *lack of control*. And I think if you look like you've lost control of yourself, it's just unattractive.

(Nicole, 24, working-class non-student, straight)

...being feminine, I think, you just... as long as you're in control of yourself. You can do... you can dance... if you get sick, you get sick... [laughter]... you've just gotta *control* it.

(Joanna, 24, working-class full-time worker and student, straight)

The links between femininity and control were particularly well-illustrated by Kimberley:

EN: So why do you think it's not seen as *feminine*, to be drunk?

I think cause you lose control of yourself, and you don't really *care*, you don't hold yourself together as much. And I think, being *feminine* is about being respectable and being *ladylike*. But obviously, when you're drunk, that all goes

out the window. And you'll do whatever you want, and you don't *care* and you'll] have your make-up running down your face and things like that. And obviously in that sense, you won't *look* feminine.

(20, middle-class student, straight)

As Kimberley suggests, the drunken woman subverts the expectation that the appropriately ladylike women maintains control over her behaviour, appearance and body. This was supported by other participants, with Christina arguing that being ladylike 'can go out of the window after a few drinks'. The women also experienced a sense of duty to manage their appearance within the NTE through the use of make-up and dress, but the drunken woman does not make the required effort to maintain a feminine appearance, and was frequently described as a 'mess' or a 'state' by a number of the young women, reinforcing the idea that she lacks control over her disorderly body. The drunken woman may thus be particularly problematic because she goes on to ruin the often significant amount of effort and labour that is expected to go into producing an exaggeratedly feminine appearance for a night out (see Chapter 5). The drunken woman may also literally lose control of the boundaries of her own body; for example several of the participants talked very negatively about women who vomit, urinate in the streets or expose their body on a night out:

I think it looks quite bad when you see young girls that are not in control of themselves whatsoever. And are just, sort of, *crawling* round the streets and being sick.

(Jade, 23, working-class non-student, straight)

Analysis of the data clearly highlights that the young women self-defined as 'responsible' drinkers and focused on the smelly, unpleasant outcomes of excessive drinking to construct the drunken body as out of control. Similarly, in other research, Nairn *et al.* report that one strategy non-drinkers may use to validate their decision to avoid alcohol is to construct the drunken body as abject through drawing on some of the potential bodily consequences of drinking such as vomiting and the consequences this has for others, who risk 'contamination' and have to manage the mess and smell (2006: 298). Whilst there were no non-drinkers in the current study, the bodily consequences of drunkenness were still seen as particularly problematic for women; for example some participants – whilst also disapproving of men urinating in public - felt this was somehow even less acceptable for women, echoing Cullen's (2011) argument that the

corporeality of drunkenness and associated bodily practices such as urinating in public are seen as more acceptable for men than women (see also Eldridge, 2010; Thurnell-Read, 2011).

Overall the data strongly suggests that women are judged much more negatively than men for being drunk and 'out of control' in public, as Gail suggests:

When you're walking through town, and everybody's ill or throwing up and stuff, you *do* get a lot of people being really *nasty* about women that are drunk and throwing up on the side of the road. Whereas if it's a guy, they're just like 'Oh, never mind'...

EN: So why is there that gender difference, do you think?

I guess it's not seen as very feminine, or it's not very classy, or ladylike, whatever...

EN: So what about it, do you think, isn't seen as classy or ladylike?

Hmm... it's that thing of, like, women are meant to maintain more control over their bodies and their actions in a public place.

(24, middle-class student, bisexual)

The expectation that women should control their bodies in public is one example of the way in which women's behaviour and alcohol consumption might be informally policed and regulated by others through drawing on ideas of control and respectability, without resorting to formal sanction. Lyons and Willott (2008) argue that women's public drunkenness and embodied practices such as falling over in public space often result in them being excluded from the NTE and sent home by male friends or partners, who are able to police and control access to the spaces of the NTE. This represents a technique by which women's participation in the NTE is curtailed and regulated. Interestingly, a number of the participants claimed that if they saw a drunk woman in public they were more likely to think she should be taken home than – for example – be offered water, suggesting women may also play a part in policing who can access the spaces of the NTE and penalising or expelling public drunkenness. The same judgement was rarely placed on men, whose public drunkenness was widely seen as more likely to be ignored or regarded with indifference or even humour. As in the quote above, young women often described a double standard where it is seen as less appropriate for women to be drunk than men, reflecting traditional understandings of alcohol consumption as a male

leisure activity (Day *et al.*, 2004). This was sometimes recognised as such and perceived to be unfair, as with Gail above, but other young women *did* think it was less acceptable for women to be visibly very drunk and out of control in public.

Interestingly, some of the participants felt that women who are less feminine are better able to engage in more manly drinking practices or get very drunk without being judged. Whilst this view was only put forward by a small number of women, it is interesting to note the connections made between dressing in what they perceived to be a more manly way and being able to get away with more manly drinking behaviours:

I went through this whole phase where I was like ‘ah I’m just gonna go out wearing a football shirt and shorts and a jumper’ or something. And wearing no make-up or whatever. It’s really good, cause you just feel completely invisible, and you can get completely drunk and no-one cares.

(Gail, 24, middle-class student, bisexual)

Whilst some participants drew on the value of dressing in more masculine ways and the associated invisibility in terms of the ways it limited harassment from men (see Chapter 6), Gail also remarked that dressing ‘like a 15 year old boy’ through wearing no make-up and dressing in more masculine clothing such as a football shirt meant she was better able to escape judgement for consuming too much alcohol, for example. For other young women, dressing in a more masculine way was not felt to position women as invisible, but rather to result in them basically being seen as men, and this could be tied to sexuality:

A woman downing a pint at the bar is more acceptable if you’re a lesbian woman than if you’re a straight woman, I think.

EN: So why’s that?

Cause a lot of the time, especially older, stereotypical lesbian women have the short hair and the bulldog tattoos on their arms and *are* dressing the exact same way as men dress. So *are* looked at by a lot of people, just *as men*. So, what men can get away with, they’re just like it’s perfectly acceptable for this woman to get away with, because she is seen, pretty much *as a man*.

(Kate, 20, working-class student, lesbian)

Kate explicitly ties this into sexuality and age, arguing that ‘older stereotypical lesbian women’ in particular are more likely to dress in particular manly or masculine ways

which may enable them to get away with less traditionally feminine behaviour such as rapidly consuming pints of beer at the bar. Emslie *et al.* (2015) also found evidence in their research on midlife women's drinking that women who drink pints can be labelled as 'butch' or 'possibly lesbian'. Research also suggests that despite the supposed 'feminisation' of the spaces of the NTE, different spaces within venues still tend to remain gendered; with the central space of the bar tending to be a male-dominated space (Lindsay, 2006). In this sense, even occupying the central space around the bar itself rather than sitting elsewhere might be read as unfeminine. Kate positions the 'stereotypical' lesbian's physical presence at the bar as less problematic than it might be for other women as she is seen 'pretty much as a man'. It is possible that such women may already be positioned as outside of femininity in terms of their appearance, and so have less to lose if they choose to transgress or ignore the boundaries of femininity in other ways, such as through their drinking practices.

Despite their attempts to describe themselves as drinkers who 'knew their limits', there was some recognition by the participants that women negotiate a difficult boundary when attempting to position themselves as moderate and feminine drinkers:

You want to give an impression that you're *fun* and *light hearted* and dancing, as supposed [sic] to, sort of, shy and hiding in a corner, which is what I would otherwise do. Or throwing up on the floor, which is the issue of overshooting.

(Donna, 21, middle-class student, queer)

Lyons and Willott also found that although the young women in their research enjoyed and normalised going out and drinking, they too talked about the need to balance this with being responsible and in control, which made it difficult to 'go out and get plastered with the girls' (2008: 706). The young women in the current study often agreed that the line between being 'tipsy' and 'too drunk' could be difficult to manage. With young women experiencing the pervasive 'imperative to intoxication' within the NTE, the majority recognised their own precarious position as just a drink or two away from the problem drinker as they attempted to manage their consumption levels effectively. For example, some of the young women claimed they would not judge drunk women as they recognised that they themselves can find it hard to negotiate the line between being 'merry' and 'overshooting':

I don't judge women as much, cause I know *I* could be in that situation... people buy you *drinks*... it can happen to anyone.

(Christina, 20, working-class student, straight)

Even more commonly, a significant number of participants also claimed that they *had* been in a 'state' before, so would be less likely to be judgemental towards a drunken woman. For example, Joanna's comment of 'we've all been there' was fairly representative of the comments made by the participants in general. A handful had a more complex reaction when asked how they would react to seeing a very drunk woman:

If somebody is absolutely storming drunk, and she's being sick, and she's all over the place... I think that looks absolutely horrendous. But then I also say to meself, *I* can't talk because that is me on a regular basis.

(Nicole, 24, working-class non-student, straight)

Ah, I would probably judge her, but I do it meself, so... I've got no room to judge... It's just not attractive if somebody.... like.... slurrin' their words, or shouting, or being sick, or god forbid, anything like that! It's *not* attractive. And I think when it's you, and your friends are there, you don't even notice, but when you see it on someone else, it does make you think 'Oh my god, am I like that?!'

(Megan, 25, working-class non-student, straight)

Both Megan and Nicole have negative reactions to seeing drunk women, describing it as 'absolutely horrendous' or unattractive. Yet both acknowledge that they themselves have been in similar situations. These examples demonstrate that attempts to other drunken women may not always be simple and clear-cut, as young women recognised the precariousness and fluidity of their own drinking identities.

It is clear then that ideas of control and restraint - or lack thereof - are crucial in defining who can claim to be respectable and feminine, and women's drinking identities are a case in point. This chapter has begun to highlight some of the tensions and boundaries around the management of individual and collective feminine identities in the NTE. These tensions are complex and overlapping, for example the NTE clearly has value as a space in which to enact femininities collectively, yet can also be a space in which to push the boundaries of feminine and 'ladylike' behaviour for some young women. Similarly, young women continue to experience an 'imperative to intoxication' where

moderate alcohol consumption is expected, yet excessive, unfeminine drinking continues to be deemed inappropriate. The difficulties in managing these boundaries lead some young women to experience conflicting reactions as they judged the drinking practices of others yet recognised that ‘it could be me’. With these precarious lines to walk in terms of femininities, the data demonstrates that processes of othering became particularly important in order to distance the self from women whose drinking, behaviours and even presence in the NTE was seen as problematic. The next section will demonstrate some of the ways in which these processes of othering operated to position some women as respectable users of the NTE, in contrast to others who were felt to engage in inappropriate drinking practices and behaviour or who may literally be seen as misplaced in the NTE.

(Mis)Placement, Othering and Belonging

This section will explore some of the ways in which the women consolidated their own positions as feminine women and controlled and responsible drinkers through the othering of particular behaviours, identities and social groupings. The chapter has so far outlined the ways in which heavy drinking, drunkenness and rowdiness could be labelled as unfeminine practices, and this section will further highlight the ways in which such practices were generally associated with women of particular ages and classes. Class was often implicitly or explicitly referenced frequently in the construction of the drunk female body in the spaces of the NTE. A small number of participants openly contrasted the notion of middle-class respectability with the image of the drunk and rowdy working-class (or more commonly ‘lower-class’) female body in attempts to distance themselves from undesirable drinking practices and behaviours:

I’d say that me and my friends think it’s appropriate to act in a certain way but maybe not lower class people. They might act differently to how we act. I mean, I’ve never *screamed* down the street.... and when you do see that, I normally think it is mainly lower class people that do that.

(Alex, 19, middle-class student, straight)

The data supports other research suggesting that ‘lower’ or working-class women may continue to be positioned as potentially beyond the boundaries of respectable femininity by other women, embodying ‘the folk devil of the rough, binge drinking woman exhibiting ‘out of control’ public behaviour’ (Rolfe *et al.*, 2009: 332) such as

‘screaming down the street’. However, whilst class-based othering was overt in the above example, processes of othering were often more subtle and heavily tied to dynamics of space as well as class:

[The] Bigg Market does tend to be, sort of, working class.... and I’ve always thought of the places I go as being the same, so maybe it’s like a bit of a mix. And then you have the Quayside which seems to be more middle class.

(Jade, 23, working-class non-student, straight)

Jade recognises the ways in which certain areas of the city centre, whilst often in close proximity, are frequently classed in different ways. The Bigg Market represents a small area within the city centre with a high concentration of what were widely perceived by the majority of participants to be ‘rough’ bars and clubs. Almost all of the young women mapped the Bigg Market as undesirable and frequented by women who drink too much and engage in violent, unladylike or out-of-control behaviour, commonly using terms such as ‘cheap’, ‘easy’ and ‘rough’ to describe the venues of the Bigg Market or those who frequent them. Several of the non-local students in particular attributed heavy drinking and unfeminine or unladylike behaviour to working-class, local women, despite research suggesting that female university students consistently consume more alcohol than their peers who are working (Kypri *et al.*, 2003). ‘Locals’ or ‘Geordies’ were positioned as working-class and - crucially - associated with these less desirable parts of the city:

I know I’m stereotyping massively here, but students tend to be from a better background [laughter]... than those who are down the Bigg Market. Ummm.... that sounds kinda bad [laughter]...

(Susie, 22, middle-class student, straight)

Susie does not mention class explicitly in this extract, although through her hesitations, laughter and the disclaimer of ‘that sounds kinda bad’ still expresses discomfort in talking about class even in coded terms. Despite this, class is alluded to in multiple ways, firstly by the use of ‘student’ to implicitly represent middle-classness. She argues that students tend to be from a ‘better background’ than women ‘down the Bigg Market’, marking out class distinctions between different women and spaces, as Jade and many other young women also did when talking about the Bigg Market. As suggested in the extensive work of Hollands and Chatterton, the Bigg Market appears to have come to represent the public face and focal point of some of the negative national

media coverage around the imagined Geordie drinking culture (2002: 302), which may in part explain why such judgements were so pervasive across the interviews. There is also a historical legacy here, as traditionally drinking in the city was largely confined to the Bigg Market as a form of regulation and control (2002: 302). Confining unladylike behaviour to these spaces allowed the middle-class drinker to position herself as able to act and drink responsibly outside of these risky spaces without threatening her respectability, whilst behaviour and bodies within the Bigg Market became ‘hyper-visible’. Lydia, for example, described the practices of local women as more ‘obvious’ and subject to scrutiny, in part because of the spaces they frequent. This links into the idea that the Bigg Market is an area defined as much by what is going on outside the venues as inside the venues, leading Hollands and Chatterton to describe these narrow, cobbled streets as ‘a *stage* [emphasis added] between pubs for roving groups of drunken revellers’ (2002: 307). Gail recognises that the practices of the working-class woman might be more visible than those of her middle-class peers, and is less judgemental in tone than some of the other participants:

...you *do* get this thing of ‘oh yeah, working-class women go out and are really *messy* and get too drunk and sleep around and stuff’. And it’s like, middle-class women do it as well, they just do it in a *different* way. So I guess it’s the way that what you’re doing *looks*, rather than what you’re *actually* doing.

EN: So how would middle-class women do that in a different way?

Going to different *places*, probably.

(24, middle-class student, bisexual)

It may not even necessarily be that these women are doing anything differently, rather it is likely that there continues to be a discrepancy in the ways in which drunken or loud women of different class backgrounds are judged, as Gail argues. Griffin *et al.* agree that ‘the upper class as a whole is not subject to the same level of horrified moral outrage and disgust that has been directed at the drinking practices of white working-class youth’ (2013: 186).

The local women were very much aware of the negative connotations others – such as people from ‘down south’ - might make about their drinking levels and behaviour. However, they too often positioned the Bigg Market as a problematic space and were generally the keenest to stress that they would never go out there; in fact several made a

point of emphasising that the ‘classy’ bars of the ‘Diamond Strip’ were the ones they frequented most often. The young women thus resisted constructions of their bodies as problematic through engaging in their own processes of othering. For example, Megan described the women who go out in the Bigg Market as ‘rough’, and this was very much echoed by other Geordie women, such as Kirsty, who described herself and her sister Nicole as ‘working-class, down to earth Geordies’. Kirsty was adamant that she and her sister would never go out in the Bigg Market, establishing a sense of physical distance by claiming that ‘they’re not the types of people that we would wanna be hanging around with’. Similarly, Nicole claimed that:

A lot of people I think - down south especially - will look at us and think we’re all like the people who are down the Bigg Market... which, I’m not being funny but you can tell that a lot of them *don’t* have jobs, just from the way they’re behaving and what they’re dressed in. They’re what we would call the Underclass, if you like.

(24, working-class non-student, straight)

Here, Nicole recognises the existence of a ‘North/South divide’, which may to an extent at least partially reflect the ‘Northernisation’ of the working-class in popular media (Milestone, 2008). This refers to the ways in which the North of England is associated with working-class identities and industries, for example, the idea of a ‘North-South’ divide remains popular and well-recognised in both the media (The Economist, 2012) and research (Spracklen, 1996). However, despite identifying as working-class, Nicole still positions women who ‘go down the Bigg Market’ as ‘rough’ and more likely to be ‘really drunk’, as well as visibly different from her friends through the way that they dress and their behaviour (this will also be explored further in Chapters 5 and 6). She also implies that the joblessness of the Underclass can literally be ‘read’ off their bodies. Throughout the interview, Nicole distinguished herself from an ‘Underclass’ defined by generations of worklessness in contrast to hard-working Geordies such as herself, stressing the fact that she attended the local former polytechnic university and was working in customer services at the time of the interview. However, one point that is important to note is that not all local women identified as either working-class or Geordie:

I was born in a really working class area. I was born in a council house in a council estate in Newcastle. But I’ve never really felt like a Geordie as such, and

I don't even think I have much of a Geordie accent. I mean my parents aren't really from around here either, they just kinda wound up in Newcastle.

(Eve, 24, doesn't identify with a class, student, bisexual(ish))

This is one example of the complexities around identity, class and region which the young women demonstrated. Some women local to the area did not describe themselves as Geordie or mention Geordie identity in any way, whilst others, such as Eve, more explicitly rejected the Geordie label. Furthermore, not all of the locals positioned the Bigg Market as a negative space and engaged in processes of othering. There were also some examples where students could be othered and the Bigg Market constructed less negatively and as a more 'authentic' and friendly space than other parts of town:

...even though the Bigg Market's terrible... there's something about it, because it's like 'Ahhh there's all those people that I know' [laughter].... on a weekend it's somewhere where you probably wouldn't see someone called Hugo.... [both laugh]...

EN: So what does that mean... 'You wouldn't see someone called Hugo?'

It's *not* full of people who seem to be *posturing* about.... [pause]... 'the uni experience'... and it's just people who have been going out every weekend in their hometown. And even though you *do* still get the same type of behaviour... it doesn't seem as *touristy* as the students do.

(Jessie, 21, working-class non-student, straight)

Again, classed distinctions are alluded to here rather than outlined directly. Like a number of the young women, Jessie draws on spatialised and temporal ways of highlighting distinctions between students and locals. As well as positioning the Bigg Market as a local space rather than a student one, several women described weeknights as 'student nights' in contrast to weekends, when the locals were imagined to go out. Jessie also implicitly classes the student through her description of the 'posturing' student called 'Hugo'. Some other local young women also felt that so-called working-class or local spaces within town were less intimidating, for example with Joanna commenting that she knows that in the bars she visits 'I'm not gonna bump into some posh boy, or some posh girl, who will just tut and look down on me'. Similarly, Zoe described certain students as 'rah' girls – stereotypically 'posh' young women. The construction of the 'rah' is also implicitly classed. Research also draws on these ideas and explores some of the ways in which the idea of a North-South distinction may be perpetuated by Northern communities themselves; for example Spracklen's (1996) work

on Rugby Union versus Rugby League fans highlights the ways in which the ‘imagined community’ of the ‘mythical’ working-class North distinguishes itself from ‘Southern toffs’ through supporting Rugby League. Jessie’s labelling of students as ‘posturing’ and ‘tourists’ also connects to notions of authenticity on a night out (Holt and Griffin, 2005) and reinforces the idea of local nights out as somehow more genuine and less restricted for working-class women. The idea of the local regularly going out ‘every weekend’ and seeing others there that they know also ties into understandings of spatialisation, (mis)placement and belonging; it is interesting that Jessie uses the term ‘hometown’ to describe the local revellers’ ties to Newcastle in contrast to the ‘posturing’ students who can only experience the city as tourists. Whilst this is only one example, it is particularly interesting in terms of the way it reverses understandings of (mis)placement and belonging that exclude the working-classes from accessing particular consumer spaces (either literally through pricing or symbolically through the classing of areas and venues). This is only an emerging finding and further research into this area would be required in order to explore this in more depth, however it does suggest that there was some tentative evidence that spaces associated with local, working-class clientele could be labelled as more fun and authentic. This ties into Hollands and Chatterton’s (2002) depiction of the Bigg Market as fun, boisterous and carnivalesque and also to the arguments made by Holt and Griffin (2005) around the perceived authenticity of working-class lives and spaces.

However, it should be noted that overall the Bigg Market was still mainly viewed negatively and was also associated for some of the participants with the problematic presence of older women. University students tended to be more judgemental than local, working women and college students of the drinking habits of older women and their participation in the NTE. This could take place either explicitly or more implicitly as they contrasted the places they felt younger women - typically students - went with the places locals were imagined to frequent:

...obviously not *everyone* that’s from Newcastle goes out in the Bigg Market. But I think it’s generally older people, maybe 30 onwards, that go there. Umm.... or, just a bit chavvy, I dunno.

(Ruth, 21, doesn’t identify with a class, student, straight)

Ruth associates the Bigg Market with clientele who are local, older and ‘chavvy’ (a demeaning classed term), highlighting the ways in which Geordie identities, age and

class were seen to intersect. As with the discussions of ageing and dress (see Chapter 5), 'older' was generally described as 30-plus by the participants. The behaviours of 'older' women within the NTE were frequently regarded as problematic, particularly around drinking; older women who were seen as 'too drunk' were not subject to the same leniency as younger women, despite research suggesting there are actually many similarities between drinking in youth and midlife (Emslie *et al.*, 2012). The data mirrors the findings of Cullen (2011), where younger women may legitimise and excuse their own youthful drinking and that of others through labelling it as a 'phase' and envisaging a future of being 'grown-up' and 'sober', which the older, drunken woman appears to challenge. Linked to this, the drunken or rowdy older woman was also frequently conceived of as a figure of pity and ridicule. Claire described her reaction to an older drunk woman as 'you might feel *sorry* for her', and the mere presence of older women could be read as problematic within the spaces of the NTE. For some participants, the physical bodies of older women were literally unwelcome in the spaces of the NTE:

It's a younger person's market isn't it, really? Clubs... bars... [pause]... It's like, 'you've got kids, you don't wanna go hanging around with them, do you?'

(Ally, 21, doesn't identify with a class, student, bisexual)

Ideas of misplacement, not fitting into spaces and literally looking out of place were drawn upon here by the young women, with Donna also commenting that thinking 'they do not belong here' is almost an instinctual reaction to seeing an older woman on a night out. Whilst the young women themselves often positioned nights out as a legitimate opportunity to socialise with friends and 'do' femininities and girliness, this did not extend to older women, who were imagined to typically engage in the NTE predominantly through attending embarrassing and rowdy hen parties:

...there's like all these hen nights of like, *older* ladies. But I think older women of a lower class act in a different way to older women of middle or upper class. I just think they act differently and... you know, what they wear. Obviously you see loads of hen nights with people chanting down the street.

(Alex, 19, middle-class student, straight)

The older – and as Alex suggests, typically lower-class – women on a hen night were in some sense depicted as embodying a less legitimate and respectable form of

engagement with the NTE, described as acting in loud and raucous ways. The overlaps with class here are clearly recognised in other research, where even the respectability of the middle-class woman is – albeit temporarily – undermined if she participates in the hen party, according to Eldridge and Roberts (2008b: 327). This study also highlights that not all women are equally able to use the NTE as a legitimate way of bonding and socialising in all-female groups, echoing Skeggs’ (2005) work positioning the ‘loud’ and ‘disgusting’ hen-partying woman as the contemporary embodiment of moral disgust at the working-class. This study found similar evidence of moral judgement around the behaviour of older women. As Lucy suggests, the presence of older women who are assumed to be mothers – and grandmothers - was viewed as particularly ‘cringey’ or ‘wrong’ by several of the young women:

It’s always a little bit awkward when you see a Nana, well, I say *Nana*, it’s not even a Nana, more a Mum! Like 55/50, and they’re dancing how *you* dance. Or how girls our age dance. And it’s a bit cringey and a bit... churns your stomach... [cut]... Like, dancing... [pause]... *sexy*, if you know what I mean. It just looks wrong cause you could think ‘eugh that’s my mum, but it’s *not* my mum, but she’s my mum’s *age*! And my mum’s at home watching X-factor!’

(21, doesn’t identify with a class, student, straight)

In the data, there was a sense that women aged anywhere between their thirties and fifties (there was very little differentiation amongst this wide age group, who were simply labelled as ‘older’ women) are expected to exist in domestic space ‘at home’ watching television on a Saturday night,. The drunken older body can be conceived of as violating normative expectations that associate femininity in midlife and beyond with childcare and other domestic responsibilities (Lyons and Willott, 2008), although recent research suggests that excessive drinking can be important in the lives of women with children in constructing identities and marking a temporary return to carefree youth (Emslie *et al.*, 2015). Lucy’s reference to the ways in which attempted ‘sexy’ dancing can cause a reaction of tangible disgust as it ‘churns your stomach’ is also interesting, and links to other examples in the data suggesting that the *sexualised* older women elicits a particularly negative reaction. If older women are expected to be both invisible and desexualised (see Chapter 5), their presence in the NTE is doubly deviant; they are occupying space where their older bodies are hypervisible and refuse to fit in with the majority of the young consumers of the NTE, and they are present in spaces such as bars and clubs which may be frequently (hetero)sexualised (Corteen, 2002). Clearly then, for the participants in the current study, it was not just the bodies of other young

women who could be othered, but also those of older women who appeared to be violating normative gendered expectations around appropriate femininity and sexuality for 'midlife' women.

However, in seemingly contradictory findings, the presence of midlife or older women and cross-generational networks of family members and close friends going out together was also defined as a distinctive aspect of Newcastle nightlife by both Geordie and non-Geordie participants, and this is supported by Hollands and Chatterton, who argue that one of the distinctive features of the Geordie night out is the 'larger proportion of older revellers' (2002: 307). Whilst the middle-class students could be quite scathing of this, as illustrated above, some of the self-identified Geordies advocated and endorsed this more inter-generational focus to nights out, discussing their mothers' or grandmothers' engagement with the NTE and the strong historical and ongoing connections they saw between Geordie identity, class and participation in the NTE:

...people still go out with their *mams* here. So I think that the sorta class thing... it's like how long it's acceptable. I know loads of people who didn't even drink before they came to university, went all out, and then they're probably not really gonna drink when they *leave*. I think *definitely*, [in] this *area* working-class people... it's acceptable to go out for *longer* in your life. It's perfectly acceptable, like, you wouldn't bat an eyelid to see someone's 56 year old mam out with them, dressed in exactly the same way. But... *that* would be such a novelty. I expect, in some middle-class town.

(Jessie, 21, working-class non-student, straight)

This is a particularly interesting example as not only does Jessie associate working-class people with the local area, she also classes towns and cities themselves, positioning Newcastle as a working-class city implicitly through contrasting it to 'some middle-class town'. Contrasts are made that again mark distinctions between students and locals where students' drinking is positioned as a temporary activity as part of student life only in contrast to embedded Geordie working-class drinking and socialising patterns. This was reinforced in other examples in the data, where some of the young women described participating in the NTE with older relatives themselves. There appear to be some real tensions here where the presence of older women in Newcastle's NTE is both normalised and problematised. Perhaps the increased presence of older women in the city's nightlife venues may actually increase antagonism and a sense of difference rather

than increasing tolerance as different groups compete for space and recognition within the city centre.

The data clearly demonstrates the ways in which processes of othering continue to operate along classed and aged lines that allowed some women to position themselves as respectable in contrast to the unruly, drunken working-class woman who lacks control over her body. The distinction between students and locals and the ways in which this is classed was a strong theme in the data. This is supported by the work of Holt and Griffin (2005), who argue that dimensions of class are often played out within the NTE through tensions between locals and students. When certain areas in the city centre are associated with problematic working-class and/or older female drinkers, this may allow young women to contain 'deviant' drinking practices and identities within geographical boundaries. Some of the most vocal critiques of the spaces of the Bigg Market were the women who identified as working-class Geordies. This may be because such women are already positioned as on the boundaries of respectability, so it is more important for working-class women to distance themselves from the drunken female body and the spaces in which she consumes alcohol. In this sense, while young white middle-class women may use classed disgust to distance themselves from non-respectable working-class others, working-class women may engage in similar processes targeted at particular local groups of 'cheap' and 'rough' working-class or lower-class youth (Griffin *et al.*, 2013: 196).

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the ways in which young women manage the tensions around feminine behaviour, drinking practices and ways of engaging with the NTE through positioning certain practices and identities as more or less acceptable, feminine or ladylike. There is often a collective element to this, particularly on a night out with female friends. This is likely to be an important practice for young women – who in contrast to their male peers – have only comparatively recently been permitted to consume alcohol publicly and to access a more 'feminised' contemporary NTE (Day *et al.*, 2004). Whilst young men may be able to draw on historical, traditional narratives around male drinking within the spaces of the 'pub' (Leyshon, 2008) as positive characteristics of masculinity, it may be that women have to work harder to create positive associations between femininity, participation in the NTE and drinking in a

culture of intoxication where some alcohol consumption is expected and normalised on a night out, yet traditional discourses still position women's drinking as unfeminine and unattractive (Day *et al.*, 2004). The young women used various techniques to link participation in the girls' night out and NTE more widely with positive and feminine meanings, including positioning certain drinks as feminine. These ways of talking about nights out and drinking may also to some extent reflect alcohol advertising aimed at young people, which frequently centre around drinking as a social or collective activity, often within gendered friendship groups (Griffin *et al.*, 2009a: 214).

The women recognised that they still tread a fine line in terms of drinking and respectability, and managing behaviour and alcohol intake can be difficult in practice. For example, the young women frequently experienced pressure to consume alcohol, with many recognising the existence of a precarious, unclear and shifting boundary between moderate and excessive drinking. This meant that many of the women themselves felt they had at times overstepped the line and been 'too drunk'. Notions of control thus became highly important in demarcating the boundaries between moderate and excessive drinking, tying back into traditional conceptualisations of the appropriate feminine woman as restrained and in control of her body, behaviour and sexuality. In contrast, the woman who is 'too drunk' lacks control over her consumption practices and her own body and behaviour. Using classed, aged and heavily spatialised processes of othering helped the young women to consolidate their own position as responsible and moderate drinkers. This was a crucial way to maintain respectability when women's own drinking identities could be precarious. This may be an example of what Skeggs describes as part of the recent 'crisis' in the boundaries of acceptability, where shifts away from traditional conceptualisations of classed respectability are muddying the boundaries of 'good' and 'bad' (2005: 969). Whilst for Skeggs, this crisis is materialised through the extension of sexuality to the middle-class, with middle-class women permitted to be more sexual and talk about sexuality, this 'crisis' could also be applied to shifting understandings in the acceptability of female public drinking. Skeggs argues that the crisis creates a level of ontological insecurity which means that the 'other' needs to be rendered clear and obvious, and the data suggest that processes of othering are taking on important meanings for contemporary young women along not just classed but also spatialised lines. When problematic drinking is largely depicted as confined to Bigg Market venues and the women who frequent them, this allows excessive alcohol consumption and unrespectable feminine identities to be contained

within these tight geographical boundaries. Such processes of spatialised othering may be particularly important for the working-class Geordie, as her claim to respectability may be more precarious than for her middle-class peers (for example, it is possible that she cannot justify being in these spaces as a ‘tourist’ in the same way that non-locals might). Whilst this chapter has in places focused largely on the ways in which either middle-class students *or* working-class, self-identified Geordies engaged in such processes, it has also flagged up that not all local women identified as either Geordie or working-class. More research into the experiences of middle-class Geordies, would likely prove useful and illuminate further the ways in which elements of classed and regional identities intersect.

Chapter 5. The Management and Negotiation of Dress and Appearance

Introduction

Previous research demonstrates that managing appearance plays a key role in the performativity of femininities (Nayak and Kehily, 2006), with the adorned body sending out important messages around class, taste and respectability as well as femininity (Hockey *et al.*, 2013). However, it is important to understand what it means to look feminine in different contexts, and the extent to which dressing in a feminine way is even considered to be important for young women. This chapter will explore what it might mean to look feminine in the NTE for young women and the importance and value of ‘doing’ femininities through appearance in these spaces. Firstly, the chapter will outline the types of dress and appearance that were understood by participants as feminine, suggesting that a somewhat ‘exaggerated’ performance of femininity is normalised, although there are nuances around what is expected based on context. The chapter will then consider the value of feminine dress for women. Recognising that femininity is not important for all young women, the chapter will also explore examples of resistance or rejection of normative feminine appearances. Finally, this chapter will argue that for many women it remained possible to be *too* feminine and ‘try too hard’. The hyper-feminine body thus represented an undesirable way of being within the NTE, challenging research suggesting it is normalised (Buckley and Fawcett, 2002).

What it means to look Feminine on a Girls’ Night Out: Exaggerated Femininities

The first section of this chapter explores what it meant to the young women to look feminine in the NTE and the ways in which this was frequently associated with being ‘more feminine’ than in other contexts. This could only be achieved through making the appropriate amount of effort. This does to an extent support the argument that a more hyper-feminine appearance is expected and recognised as feminine (Buckley and Fawcett, 2002). However, as the discussion will go on to show, there were particular nuances that dictated the level of effort that was deemed appropriate in different times and spaces, with the data suggesting that what was important was *exaggerated* femininity rather than hyper-femininity per se.

All of the women were able to clearly identify what they felt it means to look conventionally feminine on a night out. Wearing dresses and heels, and investing in hair and make-up were almost universally recognised as markers of a feminine appearance:

When I think of the word 'feminine' itself, I kinda think dresses, and make-up, and possibly heels.

(Eve, 24, doesn't identify with a class, student, bisexual(ish))

Almost three-quarters of the young women claimed wearing a dress was an important marker of femininity within the NTE, and heels were also frequently described as important. It was clear that the women felt that looking suitably feminine in the NTE required more investment than a young woman would usually engage in. Some participants explicitly recognised and referred to the expectation that women should invest in an 'exaggerated' or 'overperformed' femininity, such as Gail:

...on a night out, it tends to be this really, really exaggerated kind of femininity, right? I can probably manage feminine in the day, but on a night out, it seems to be massive heels, a dress, loads more make-up and jewellery and stuff. This sort of caricature of femininity.

(24, middle-class student, bisexual)

Gail elaborated by defining a caricature of femininity as 'everything that you could do to your appearance that would be coded as really feminine all at once'. Similarly, Claire talked about the requirement to 'accentuate or enhance your femininity' on a night out. This suggests that the argument originally put forward by Connell (1995), suggesting that women are required to perform 'an exaggerated hegemonic femininity' (cited in Stalp *et al.*, 2008: 331) is still relevant and can usefully be applied to specific contexts such as the NTE. However, whilst many of the women recognised the expectation to be 'more' feminine or make 'more' effort, it is important to consider the reference point against which they were positioning femininity on a night out. The most frequent contrast made by the women in this study was temporal, with a number of participants distinguishing appropriate femininity during the day from femininity for a night out:

...on a night out, you probably want to look feminine, more so than you do during the day.

(Emma, 20, working-class student, bisexual)

Going out in daytime clothing was deemed inappropriate for a night out for a number of the young women:

It even comes down to the different sort of things that you'd *wear*. When I'm going out with people from home it's more 'going out' clothes, [laughter] rather than... 'Ah, I'll get changed into another dress that's exactly the same that I've been wearing all day... [cut]... *They* bought these clothes specifically for *going out*... these are *going out clothes*, they wouldn't wear that during the *day*.

(Jessie, 21, working-class non-student, straight)

Making a suitable amount of effort was also very important in defining femininity. Effort – particularly in terms of the labour that goes into producing the suitably feminine body – was one of the strongest and most common themes across interviews when young women talked about both what it means to be feminine in general on a night out, and their own preferences and bodily practices. Such conceptualisations of femininity frequently spanned the boundaries of class and sexuality, with very little deviation and few examples of the young women conceptualising femininity in other ways. This was summarised succinctly by Jessie:

I think that people do really want to match this sorta like... 'everything's perfect, everything's spotless... I'm wearing a new dress... I've made sure everything's perfect... I've spent *ages* gettin' ready... I've spent ages making maself look so feminine'.

(21, working-class non-student, straight)

Jessie mentioned several times during the interview the importance of putting time and effort into achieving a suitably feminine appearance. 'Perfection' necessarily takes a significant amount of time and labour to achieve - if it is possible to achieve at all - reflecting the idea in the literature that femininity is in part constructed through the potentially time-consuming embodied practices and rituals of beautification (Holland, 2004). And just as femininity was associated with making an effort, almost all of the participants associated looking *unfeminine* on a night out with making too *little* effort in terms of investment in and time spent on bodily practices:

...it's just about making an effort, isn't it? I think it looks more feminine if you've made a bigger effort with your appearance. So if you were *scruffier*... or greasy hair... I'd say that's less feminine.

(Zoe, 23, middle-class non-student, straight)

Looking messy, scruffy or unwashed was frequently associated with looking unfeminine, and issues around cleanliness and hygiene were also raised, with the unfeminine female body constructed as sweaty, dirty and hairy, reflecting popular conceptualisations of failure to remove female body hair as dirty and unhygienic (Toerien *et al.*, 2005). This also ties into Skeggs' (1997) argument that women are expected to work at managing their bodies in certain ways, and the smelly or fat body that is perceived to have 'let itself go' marks a failure of respectable femininity. Several young women also regarded it as a marker of femininity on a night out that the 'finished product' of the feminine body look polished and well-groomed, whilst equating unfeminine clothing with 'manly' clothes such as baggy jeans or with more 'scruffy' clothing. Over half of the participants described a binary division of gendered clothing and argued that to look unfeminine on a night out would be epitomised by wearing trainers, tracksuits or jeans cut or designed for men:

I guess just to wear tracksuit bottoms or something like that would be quite unfeminine, do you know what I mean? Clothes that men would wear as well.

(Jade, 23, working-class non-student, straight)

Whilst trainers or even flat shoes were often associated with an unfeminine appearance (see also Dilley *et al.*, 2014), over half of the participants noted that heels represent a key marker of femininity within the NTE. Again, an element of exaggeration was important here, with several participants referencing the importance of not just heels, but 'big heels' in defining standards of normative femininity on a night out. High heels could also be used to accentuate and emphasise feminine curves, with femininity described in terms of dressing to flatter one's figure or show off breasts, hips and buttocks:

...when you have the heels, it makes your legs look better, it makes your arse look better, taller... it gives you a better figure. I know they're not good for your feet, for your legs and everything, but... [pause]... they shape you, just a bit more feminine, like, the curves.

(Ally, 21, doesn't identify with a class, student, bisexual)

Similarly, feminine dresses were frequently imagined to be tight-fitting and accentuate feminine curves, whilst in contrast, the participants frequently described unfeminine clothing as baggy or ill-fitting, cut for male bodies and seen to conceal feminine curves:

EN: And what does it mean to look feminine, do you think?

Umm....[long pause]..... I think, putting a lot of *pride* into your appearance.... Umm.... clothes which are cut for your body... Ummm... highlights certain assets... [laughter]....

EN: So what does that mean?

...fitted for your body, so it like... shows your waist and your bust. Whereas clothes that I wear for LGBT [nights] aren't necessarily feminine, a lot of the time they're just men's t-shirts, and they're straight-cut and baggy.... that's not feminine.

(Kate, 20, working-class student, lesbian)

This mirrors the findings of Buckley and Fawcett, who argue that the female body acts as a marker of 'value' for women in the NTE, as clothes and accessories are chosen deliberately to highlight and foreground aspects of the feminine body (2002: 138). Similarly, Dilley *et al.* (2014) remark that emphasised femininity is associated with the manipulation or emphasis of bodily gender differences between women and men. In line with Gill's (2007) argument, the idea here is to exaggerate the typically feminine – and frequently sexualised - features of the body.

However, it is important to understand the extent to which there were differences between what young women described as the norms of expectations of femininity, and what they described as their own practices and ways of managing appearance. Being able to recognise that which is valued as feminine on a night out does not necessarily mean that these women all chose to invest in such displays of femininity to the same extent. Having said this, the vast majority of participants *did* describe their own practices of investing – at least to some extent – in an exaggeratedly feminine appearance. Several participants positioned themselves as 'girly' girls for whom looking and feeling like a feminine woman was important personally, sometimes in contexts beyond the NTE:

I'm a really girly person anyway, so every day I'm quite.... I'm girly. So it's important to me.

(Megan, 25, working-class non student, straight)

'Doing' femininity in terms of dress and appearance was identified as important at least some of the time for the majority of participants, and exactly half of the young women stated clearly that being read as feminine was important to them most of or all of the time. This often took on particular importance for a night out. Many of the participants remarked that they would always wear dresses and heels for a night out, and would not want to be seen as under-dressed or scruffy. Taking time to carefully apply make-up or style hair became more important on a night out - particularly one with female friends - compared to during the day for a number of participants. Typically, the make-up products talked about would include those that could enhance parts of the body typically associated with femininity - such as false eyelashes or lipstick - reaffirming the idea that an exaggerated feminine body is required within the NTE. Several of the young women also talked about engaging in grooming regimes that they would not feel comfortable doing during the day for fear of looking too overdressed. In this sense, bodily adornments such as false eyelashes and practices such as applying fake tan took on new meanings within the NTE, where they now became an important way to signify that the required amount of effort was being made. In contrast, wearing such accessories in other everyday spaces and contexts might be seen as excessive:

I always wear lipstick [on a night out] as well cause I always feel like if you wear lipstick you're more dressed up. Once I wore lipstick for *uni*, and I felt like such an idiot. Even though loads of people wear lipstick for uni and I don't think twice, but when *I* wear it I always feel a bit over-dressed.

(Kimberley, 20, middle-class student, straight)

This is very much mirrored by Skeggs' research with working-class women. For her participants 'spending obvious amounts of time with make-up just to go to work or college was seen to be embarrassing and inappropriate, but spending the same amount of time preparing to go out is expected' (1997: 108). Importantly, distinctions were made not just between the amount of effort and investment in femininity required for a night out compared to during the day, but even within the NTE, the participants would make varying amounts of effort for different nights or occasions:

Day-to-day, I hardly wear any make-up at all. I just wear mascara and a bit of concealer. Whereas on a night out, I'll have foundation, highlighter, blusher,

bronzer.... maybe some fake eyelashes if it's a really special occasion.... [cut]... I definitely wouldn't do it on a more casual night, cause I think it just looks a bit 'try-hardy'.

(Zoe, 23, middle-class non-student, straight)

Zoe contrasts the amount and types of make-up she wears for more casual nights compared to special occasions. Other participants also used special occasions as justification for making even more effort than usual, without risking looking overdone or like they were 'trying too hard':

Dresses.... well... it depends entirely. I bought a dress that's like... blue... turquoise sequins... cut off arms... and it had a cut out at the back, and it was quite short, which is not usually my thing but.... it was my birthday party so I thought 'I'll push the boat out a bit!'

(Lydia, 21, middle-class student, straight)

Lydia was keen to stress throughout the interview that she avoids dressing in too sexualised or revealing a manner, yet significant events such as birthdays could be used as an opportunity to 'push the boat out' and get more dressed up without judgement. This mirrors Woodward's (2007) work on the distinctions between women's 'everyday' and 'glamorous' wardrobes and the ways in which clothing decisions are made according to whether women define events as 'occasions' or 'non-occasions'.

As well as occasion, space could also alter the boundaries of appropriate femininity. A number of participants recognised that different feminine dress is appropriate in different settings, and this was often tied to the concept of 'fitting in' to venues. One of the more common contrasts made was between a full 'night out' in town, where more dressy attire was expected, and a few more informal drinks in the pub, where more casual dress was usually expected and the exaggerated femininity of full make-up and a dress and heels might look out of place. The standard dress and heels of exaggerated femininity could also look out of place in less dressy venues or at gigs, whilst for some of the young women, their dress choices would be different on the straight scene compared to the gay scene:

Say you were going to the Cut, I would never go in heels and a dress. Cause you'd stand out like a sore thumb. Yeah, I suppose people do *adapt*. Or say you were going to like a gig, or to see a DJ, then you'd dress more *daytimey*.... like.... [pause]... *grungier*. Whereas if you were going to a nice cocktail bar...

like, I think that's just... *knowledge* about where you're going. I think that you *do* want to fit in.

(Ruth, 21, doesn't identify with a class, student, straight)

...if you go straight scene... dress, heels, make-up, hair. Gay scene, sometimes you just roll up in what you're wearing, don't like to wear dresses there.

(Ally, 21, doesn't identify with a class, student, bisexual)

Black, researching appropriate appearance within the beauty salon, agrees that 'getting it right' for the situation by dressing in a suitably feminine and respectable way is extremely important (2002: 9), where – for example – workplaces, exercise spaces and nights out require the body to be adorned and managed in potentially very different ways. This study suggests that Black's argument can be extended to describe the importance of 'getting it right' even on different types of night out.

Several of the young women claimed that what it means to be appropriately feminine also shifts with age, and they frequently othered older women who were seen to dress inappropriately, particularly Geordie women. When asked what it means to look feminine on a night out, Susie replied 'I guess it depends on your age', and described one of her friends from university who is in her early thirties (echoing comments made in the previous chapter highlighting how the women tended to label any woman over 30 as 'older'):

...she would look feminine but she might have jeans on and a nice top, but because she's a little bit older, you'd probably look at her a bit funny if she turned up in a tiny dress and heels.

(22, middle-class student, straight)

Susie – and some of the other young women – articulated the idea that appropriate femininity as women age is associated with a toning down of femininity, shifting away from the 'tiny dress and heels' towards 'nice', more conservative clothing. The idea that the boundaries of appropriate femininity shift to reflect the expectation that femininity should be toned down with age was echoed by a number of other women:

I would say that they should.... to look more feminine in *my* eyes, probably to.... [pause].... urrrr.... oh, I'm trying to think, what.... [long pause].... *Longer* dresses, and skirts, and maybe more fitted. Umm.... [long pause].... umm, like their *hair*... don't do it really big... And like again, the make-up, just more simple.

(Kimberley, 20, middle-class student, straight)

Kimberley was one of the most articulate participants, yet she struggles initially to vocalise how an older woman might look feminine - although all of the participants were able to describe what looked feminine on younger women - suggesting young women may not be exposed to positive images of ageing femininity. The idea of 'toning down' in order to remain appropriately feminine whilst growing older is also noted in research on ageing and femininity, with Twigg (2012) arguing that women in older age are expected to adopt more conservative, less sexualised, 'don't-look-at-me' clothes, highlighting the inter-relationships between gender and sexuality. Expectations of the ways older women should dress were often connected to ideas of appropriate femininity and motherhood:

...some of them are middle-aged women, going round in short skirts and stuff. And you've gotta think, 'Christ have you got any kids? That's *embarrassing!*' Like, my mum definitely doesn't do *that!* I'm not saying you get to a certain age and you cut off your *life*, but it's like, dressing appropriately. I just don't think it's very *nice*. I'd have far more respect for a woman of *older* age if they dressed right. Like, nice and *appropriately*.

(Lydia, 21, middle-class student, straight)

In the extract above, Lydia again draws on ideas that women as they age should dress in a way that is 'nice' and 'appropriate' and, like Emma, uses the example of more revealing clothing as inappropriate (particularly for mothers who risk 'embarrassing' their children). Some research does suggest that women may tone down their femininity as they become mothers, as well as just as they age more generally (Holland, 2004), again tying into particular ideas around (hetero)sexuality and the desexualisation of older women as they are repositioned as mothers and confined to the domestic sphere (Lyons and Willott, 2008). Interestingly, the two mothers who participated in the research did not talk about toning down their dress on becoming parents, with both positioning nights out as a release and break from motherhood and Megan in particular talking about enjoying getting dressed up for a girls' night out. However, it may be that the participants were imagining older mothers than Jade and Megan, who were 23 and 25 respectively at the time of interview. Older women - whether perceived to be mothers or not, and whether in their 30s or their 50s - who did not conform to these

ways of dressing could be judged in particular ways, as will be highlighted later in this chapter.

This section has demonstrated that whilst a somewhat exaggerated performance of femininity through dress and appearance is typically expected within the NTE, the amount of effort and investment required can vary according to the spaces and venues frequented and the type of night out. As the next section will show, the girls' night out typically required more investment in appearance than some other types of engagement with the NTE, and this may be in part as a result of the centrality of the collective processes of getting ready with female friends described by many of the young women.

The Value of Investing in a Feminine Appearance

The data clearly highlights that several of the young women were personally invested in presenting an exaggeratedly feminine appearance within the NTE. Various pleasures could be derived from investing in femininity for many of the young women, including giving women a way to bond with female friends, perform friendships and boost self-esteem. However such 'pleasures' could be ambiguous as some women experienced pressure to buy into the norms of femininity. Another common theme from the interviews was the practical way in which some of the young women used performances of femininity through dress as a way to 'flash' femininity and resist negative readings of their bodies or sexuality. However, investment in a feminine appearance was not important for all of the young women, and some participants rejected feminine dress, often because it was associated with discomfort, as this section will show.

Feminine Dress and doing 'Girly' on the Girls' Night Out

The girls' night out offered a specific context in which to bond with female friends through the collective performance of feminine beauty rituals and construction of feminine bodies prior to the night out. Getting ready was portrayed as an important - if not the *most* important - part of the night by some of the young women, offering an opportunity for doing femininity collectively through practices such as tanning and applying make-up, and sharing the labour and costs of investment in beauty with friends (Best, 2004):

...you're going over to their house at, like, *six*, and then you're all gettin' ready together.... you'll get there and.... you wouldn't *turn up* dressed, because it's more about the entire thing happening together... and like 'eeee I like that, eeee'... So we probably wouldn't be going out for another three hours... but for *them*, I suppose it's more about the getting ready, and then the going out's a bit of an afterthought sometimes [laughter].

(Jessie, 21, working-class non-student, straight)

Getting ready together at home also allowed women to bond, socialise and drink outside of the loud music and visibility of the bar or club setting. The shared rituals of getting ready marked out women-only time and space away from the public eye and the gaze of men and other women, including partners:

I love getting ready, it's one of my favourite bits of the night!... [cut].. It's especially nice in our group, I think, cause the girls don't spend *loads* of time just as the girls... So it's nice to have proper girly time when there's [no] boys trying to play their instruments, or play their computer games or whatever. It's just girls together, doing stupid girly stuff... it's nice...

EN: So what's that mean then, doing 'stupid girly stuff'?

Umm.... well, like my friend Jill especially will come round and raid my wardrobe and go through all my shoes... and I'll be doing people's *hair*, and stuff like that.

(Zoe, 23, middle-class non-student, straight)

Whilst several participants stressed the value and excitement of getting ready with female friends, some of them also positioned it more explicitly as a way to 'do' girly, as Zoe suggests above, with many participants equating femininity and girliness throughout the interviews and using the terms interchangeably (although it is interesting that Zoe simultaneously belittles 'girly' stuff as stupid, alluding to tensions in contemporary meanings of girlhood and girliness which will be explored further in Chapter 7). Joanna also stressed the ways in which she used getting ready for a night out as a way to enact a 'girly girly' identity:

Girly girly is, you know, play with make-up, test make-up on each other. If you've bought something new, just show all the girls.

(24, working-class full-time worker and student, straight)

What frequently linked the different accounts of doing ‘girly’ was the importance of the collective or communal, as illustrated by Zoe’s description of girly as styling her friends’ hair, and Joanna’s description of it as testing make-up on one another. This echoes Skeggs’ findings that the collective ‘putting on of femininity’ often acts as a form of camaraderie for women and helps to establish closeness (1997: 106). For the participants in the current study, this often centred around doing one another’s hair and make-up or sharing clothes, although not all women bought into this:

I wouldn’t say that we’re not *girly*, ‘cause we probably *are*, but we’re not *really* girly, if that makes sense? I mean, I can’t think of anything *worse* than someone sat doing my hair for me... it just creeps me out.

(Claire, 25, working-class non-student, straight)

Again, Claire associates being ‘really’ girly with collective practices of grooming, although she rejects these personally. However, for some of the young women, any failure to engage with the labour and effort required to produce the feminine body was described as potentially having consequences within the peer group. Some of the young women talked about experiencing a pressure to fit in with female friends and get suitably dressed up for a night out:

I feel like when you’re going out with the girls, maybe they’re all dressing up a bit more, so you feel like you have to.

(Christina, 20, working-class student, straight)

The girls’ night out was seen as more of an occasion and an event that required more effort and investment than nights out in mixed groups, with partners or with male friends, with some participants experiencing more (real or imagined) pressure – both from their friendship groups and themselves - to get dressed up:

In terms of the people that I go out with.... [pause].... if it’s, kind of, implied, or if they create a Facebook group, or... invitation or whatever, and it explicitly says, like, ‘girly night out’, then I feel like.... I *should* dress up in a certain way.

(Eve, 24, doesn’t identify with a class, student, bisexual(ish))

This example positions the girls’ night out as an event distinct to other types of night out. For some participants, this would actually involve female friends encouraging them to change their outfits, hair or make-up, and sometimes it was not seen as worth the

effort to resist appropriately feminine ways of dressing, regardless of a young woman's personal preferences. For example Donna, who commented that 'I have to be threatened with being locked in my room in order to get changed out of a pair of jeans', described how it was just 'easier' if she dressed 'properly' for a girls' night out to avoid embarrassing her friends. Similarly, Fran talked about checking outfits with female friends to make sure she wasn't embarrassing them, and several other participants mentioned the pressure to look appropriately feminine to fit in with friends and not look underdressed. Failing to buy into femininity could also sometimes be interpreted as a way of 'shunning' female friends. For example, as Jessie explained, turning up at a friends' house already dressed and ready to go might in some sense mean missing out on an important element of the night out and undermining the collective act of constructing appropriately feminine bodies together prior to a night out:

If you *do* turn up really late, like, already dressed.... all of your stuff on... and then you're just like 'Oh I've just got back from so-and-so so I've had a quick shower and then I've just come here'... then it seems like you've done something wrong. It's like you've side-stepped an entire part of going out.

(21, working-class non-student, straight)

This was supported by other young women. Eve in particular, who had one of the most complex relationships with femininity of all the participants, often felt torn between pressure to dress in a way that felt comfortable and pressure to fit in with female friends who were more actively engaging in doing femininity. She usually preferred to get ready alone if possible and talked about the ways in which sometimes she enjoyed dressing up for a girls' night out, but at other times found it extremely difficult:

I can remember one case where my friends were all really dressed up in dresses and everything, and I think they expected *me* to dress that way as well. But I just, I didn't *feel* like I could, it just felt *wrong*, almost, do you know what I mean? I had a few months where I just very much didn't feel like a woman at all, and I didn't feel very feminine.

(24, doesn't identify with a class, student, bisexual(ish))

Eve talked at length about the subtle policing of her dress by female friends, recognising that rather than verbal pressure, it was more of an expectation. Similarly, one friend had actually stopped being invited to social activities, and Eve felt that this was in part because of the way she dressed. This interestingly echoes the example provided in the

previous chapter where a member of Nicole's peer group was no longer invited on girls' nights out as she didn't engage in the expected collective drinking practices. In ways that further parallel the idea that refusing to engage in collective behaviours or drinking practices could be read as a snub or dig, Eve commented that her friends would never verbally pressure her into dressing in particular ways, but refusal to make an effort could be read as a 'knock' to them and the things they enjoyed doing:

I don't think it would be unacceptable, as such, if I didn't dress up in that way, but I feel like it would kind of be... almost, like, a little knock to them because they, kinda, *want* to go out and do this whole dressing up and going out to certain places kinda thing.

(24, doesn't identify with a class, student, bisexual(ish))

Other participants also commented that they experienced pressure to dress in particular ways or risk being judged by friends. This is supported by Skeggs (1997), who explains that a failure to invest in femininity may jeopardise the investments of others and make them feel self-conscious of their own labour and effort. These examples demonstrate the key and often subtle role that the female friendship group could play in policing and managing femininity. However, it is important to also note that some women resisted or ignored the judgements of others and made decisions to avoid investing in feminine dress and appearance in order to challenge the collective norms and expectations around femininity:

I don't make the effort to look a certain way, but I could understand that people *do*, and for *me*, I make a point of *not* conforming to that.

(Hayley, 24, working-class college student, straight)

Whilst this was most often manifested through wearing more 'manly' clothing such as jeans, baggy clothing or flat shoes, a few participants went beyond dressing in more masculine clothing, with Eve talking about strapping her breasts down for a night out:

Some times during the month I just won't feel I wanna dress in dresses, or dress in a feminine way at all. And I'll dress really boyishly, sometimes to the point where I intentionally strap my boobs down [laughter]! And other times I do like to wear a dress or skirt.

(24, doesn't identify with a class, student, bisexual(ish))

Eve's own clothing choices varied from wearing dresses and – more rarely – heels, through to dressing 'boyishly' and engaging in practices that minimise or hide conventional markers of femininity such as strapping down her breasts. She also very much equated femininity with looking or feeling like a woman. Eve grappled with her own femininity – and sexuality - throughout the interview and provided detailed narratives about her own struggles in managing femininity and her changing moods in terms of how feminine (or not) she wanted to be on a daily basis:

Sometimes I feel quite feminine and sometimes I *don't*, and I think sometimes, during one of those periods where I'm not feeling very feminine, I feel a bit uncomfortable and a bit out of place. It's something that I've kind of tried to train myself out of, I guess, but it *is* a bit tough. Sometimes I just literally don't *feel* like one of the girls.

(24, doesn't identify with a class, student, bisexual(ish))

Other participants – such as Hayley – also engaged in practices that could be seen as flouting gender norms and expectations:

Occasionally, I have gone out dressed as a man... [laughter]... You know, wearing a tie and a shirt, and stuff like that. It doesn't, I dunno, I didn't feel *unfeminine* wearing that, that was just me wearing something different... just nights out where we all just dress as men and wear fake moustaches!

(24, working-class college student, straight)

However, these practices cannot necessarily be read in the same way. For Eve, who had a very complicated relationship with femininity, the act of strapping down her breasts is likely to have a very different meaning to Hayley's recounting of wearing a moustache. The novelty moustache could be read as more playful experimentation or joke than a conscious negotiation of Hayley's own femininity. For example, Hayley found the experience 'hilarious' and talked about the attention she received when going out dressed like this, suggesting an element of performance and of wanting to be noticed and responded to by others. There was also a collective element to this, where Hayley's friends would also engage in these practices; 'we all just dress as men'. This was very different to the way in which Eve grappled with her own sense of femininity and identity. Eve's management of the way her identity and femininity were portrayed through clothing was a much more individualised process that often sat at odds with the

practices of her female friends and could make her feel different from her friendship group.

'Stop Being a Pussy': Individual Strength and Agency?

As well as being a way for women to collectively 'do' femininity and girliness with female friends, some participants argued that doing femininity made them feel good about themselves and boosted their confidence and self-esteem, suggesting that performing femininity could be important on an individual as well as a collective level. For example, Ruth explicitly argued that women wear make-up in order to feel good rather than receive validation and approval from others and this was supported by a number of other participants:

I think generally, girls put make-up on every day to feel good about themselves, rather than for people to look at them and be like, 'Oh she looks nice'.

(21, doesn't identify with a class, student, straight)

There was a sense that dressing in a feminine way could be tied into ideas of individual agency and choice, with women doing it 'for themselves' rather than acting as passive dupes of cultural and societal pressure (Baumgardner and Richards, 2004). This mirrors Dilley *et al.*'s work (2014), where women's individual freedom and choice over - for example - footwear can be understood as a source of micro-level and everyday agency. Interestingly, Robinson (2014) reports parallel findings in research with men on their footwear choices, where particular shoe options could represent a source of creativity and agency. However, the idea of women doing femininity to 'feel good' may be reflecting broader shifts in advertising and marketing that re-label investment in beauty products and activities as something that women should engage in for themselves and their own pleasure rather than as objects of a male gaze (Black, 2002: 8). Indeed, the empowered, post-feminist consumer is frequently depicted as 'able to choose to 'use beauty' to make herself feel good [and] feel confident' (R. Gill, 2007: 74). For the young women, femininity could also be associated with skill, for example in applying make-up or wearing heels:

...heels, that's definitely a feminine thing. If you can't wear heels then where have you *been*? [both laugh] I don't like kitten heels, I'm like 'if you're gonna wear heels, stop being a pussy and wear some heels'.

(Ally, 21, doesn't identify with a class, student, bisexual)

Heels were widely recognised as a source of pain and discomfort, and wearing the 'big heels' successfully was sometimes described as a skill or a sign of a femininity associated with toughness and strength. Ally implies that having the endurance and skill to wear heels on a night out can be associated with courage and confidence, imploring women to 'stop being a pussy' and wear a decent-sized pair of heels. Similarly, Dilley *et al.* report that in their own research on embodied experiences of footwear, 'women of all ages described learning to walk in high-heeled shoes and made disparaging assessments of those who performed badly' (2014: 8), confirming the ability to walk successfully in high heels can be regarded as 'an accomplishment or skill to be taught and learnt' (2014: 8). This was echoed in the data, and, for some women, heels were also imbued with a real sense of significance in terms of marking entry into 'night out mode':

I think you can have any kind of outfit, but for me, the shoes make it... And to feel feminine is putting on your big heels... just putting the *heels* on, you could have everything else on, and then as soon as I put my heels on, it's night out mode.

(Kirsty, 23, working-class non-student, straight)

Hockey *et al.* (2013) suggest that shoes can function as a vehicle for everyday transition and transformation, and this is mirrored here where, for Kirsty, the physical act of stepping into her shoes switches her into 'night out mode' and 'makes' or completes the outfit. Others similarly talked about the ability of heels to complete their outfits, tying into ideas of footwear's role in 'finishing' the body in a way the wearer desires (Hockey *et al.*, 2013: 6). Whilst they were recognised as potentially uncomfortable, the transformative power of wearing heels might be seen to override this. There was also a sense that the strong, feminine woman could endure or rise above such discomforts:

...it is feminine to be uncomfortable. It's like, beauty is pain, isn't it? That's what they say.

EN: So what does that mean, why is beauty pain?

Waxing is painful, *heels* can be painful, pulling your *eyelashes* off when you get in can be painful. And I just think *that's* where you get it from, because a few things that you do to make yourself *look* better and *feel* better *are* painful.... and

I think that's where we think 'well, we're feminine, so we've gotta have the big heels and we've gotta have the...'...and it *does* hurt sometimes.

(Kirsty, 23, working-class non-student, straight)

Other research recognises that feminine beauty rituals such as hair removal frequently cause women discomfort and pain (for example Toerien *et al.*, 2005), with Holland (2004: 113) arguing that engaging in painful and time-consuming rituals may be a means for women to connect with their own bodies, although of course engaging in these painful rituals could also be read much more negatively. Some young women accepted such discomfort, and for Kirsty it was almost an inevitable part of appropriate femininity. However, it is possible to query the extent to which such ways of dressing genuinely offered young women ways to reinscribe femininity with agency and strength. Wearing heels could certainly be restrictive and limit the ability of young women to explore and experience the spaces of the NTE:

...in first year as well I think you've done a lot more when you're on a night out [wearing flat shoes]. You went to more pubs, you went to more bars. You just *explored*... you experienced it all. So obviously you didn't really wanna be restricted by your heels.

(Kimberley, 20, middle-class student, straight)

Kimberley expanded on this to admit that the pain of wearing heels could even dictate when the night ended, highlighting how clothes and footwear literally impact upon the way bodies orientate themselves within and interact with their material surroundings, affecting the ways in which bodies move through and experience spaces (Hockey *et al.*, 2013: 5). Del Busso and Reavey (2011) argue that women's ability to move actively through the world may contribute to a sense of embodied agency, suggesting that an inability to inhabit space effectively can be theorised as potentially disempowering for women. This is arguably being illustrated here, as women's free, embodied movement through space may be impeded by painful or uncomfortable footwear (see also Dilley *et al.*, 2014). These experiences sit somewhat at odds with the idea of the night out as carefree and hedonistic (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003), and with understanding femininity as a source of strength and agency for young women, linking to McRobbie's scepticism regarding the extent to which doing femininity through 'spindly stilettos and 'pencil' skirts' (2007: 723) represents a source of genuine 'choice' and agency.

A fairly small minority of women argued that looking and feeling feminine was not important to them, and at times they might transgress the norms of femininity. This tended to be more common amongst - although was by no means entirely limited to - participants who identified as non-heterosexual. However, it should not be assumed that all of the young women who chose not to invest in looking feminine on a night out were doing so as a conscious act of resistance. For example, much of the talk around inappropriate or unfeminine dress centred around the increased comfort associated with dressing in this way compared to the discomfort associated with managing a more conventionally feminine appearance or wearing heels. High heels were not the only aspect of femininity associated with discomfort and being restricted:

When you're in a short dress and you're constantly pulling your dress down at the back to make sure your bum's not out, and you've got to pull your tights up cause your tights always fall down... I just don't see the point.

(Georgina, 20, doesn't identify with a class, student, lesbian)

You *do* feel like you can, kind of, let your hair down a lot more... if you're not dressed up. It always feels like a bit of a *stress*, if you put all this effort into looking good. Firstly, you feel like you have to maintain it [laughter] and put your make-up on again all the time, it's a bit of an *effort*.

(Gail, 24, middle-class student, bisexual)

As Jantzen *et al.* argue, clothing 'may intensify bodily sensations, but it can also be a straitjacket' (2006: 179). The young women who resisted normative femininity often talked about how they would deliberately go on a night out dressed in what they described as androgynous or boyish clothing, which often included perceived manly clothing (such as baggy jeans and t-shirts), minimal or no make-up and flat shoes:

... when I was younger, I would go out, not quite in drag but, you know, enough that I was androgynous... [cut]... cause I felt so much more comfortable like that. I didn't have dresses squeezing us in or any of that. I looked a lot less feminine but I felt a lot more comfortable.

(Fran, 18, working-class college student, bisexual)

Dressing in this way meant some women felt they were more able to relax and do what they wanted on a night out, commenting that their bodies were not physically restrained or limited, and they were not pre-occupied with having to adjust clothing, check and reapply make-up and manage the discomfort of walking in heels. These young women

tended to embrace the pleasures of dressing for comfort and argued that feminine dress can constrain women's abilities to move freely and use their bodies as they wish, both within the NTE and more generally:

The stuff that's really hyper-feminine I look at and I go 'I couldn't fix a car in that. I couldn't ride my bike in that. I probably wouldn't even feel comfortable walking around in that'...

EN: So what's hyper-feminine look like then?

It's the stuff like the stupidly high heels... hobble skirts, you can't move your legs the full distance of a step when you're walking in those... to go upstairs in one of those skirts is just awful... it's constantly tight around your thighs... You know, they expect you to wear low-cut or tight-fitting things, or things with frills on them, and pretty little ornamental buttons and bows and ribbons... things that are not functional in the slightest.

(Georgina, 20, doesn't identify with a class, student, lesbian)

It is clear from the data that wearing dresses and heels - or refusing to - was often talked about as a lived and embodied experience in terms of the ways in which clothing and shoes shape, hug and alter the body. Wearing and moving in clothing and footwear is an embodied and sensory process and the cut and fit of clothing may shape the way in which the wearer holds and carries their own body (Hockey *et al.*, 2013: 13), whether this is seen to constrain and constrict or liberate it. Some women in the research arguably achieved a sense of embodied agency and strength through *avoiding* rather than investing in feminine ways of dressing and presenting the body, and prioritising comfort and freedom of movement. This is echoed in other research suggesting that confidence may not just be associated with wearing make-up and successfully 'doing' femininity, for example Gillen's (2003) study of women and clothing choice indicates that 'confidence is connected not only with choice of clothes but also with multifaceted feelings of comfort' (cited in Willett, 2008: 431). As the next section will show, another way of managing decisions around dress and appearance involved deploying some elements of feminine dress in a more 'strategic' way in order to avoid being read as manly or having their sexuality misread.

Flashing Femininity and Resisting Negative Readings

For some of the women, femininity was about distancing themselves from other perceived aspects of their identity. For example, Susie mentioned on more than one

occasion that she can sometimes be seen almost as manly, and nights out represented an opportunity for her to reassert a more feminine identity to her university coursemates:

EN: And is it important for you to be seen as looking feminine on a night out?

A little bit, but I think only because I don't go out that often... and I think everyone at uni has this perception of me as being quite like, not *manly* but one of the lads, and quite down to earth, so when I do go out, if I've got a dress on it's like 'bloody hell, you've got a dress on!' [laughter]

(22, middle-class student, straight)

Earlier in the interview Susie also talked about being a 'bit of a tomboy'; yet at times displaying elements of a feminine identity was also important for Susie. For other women, avoiding being read as manly or masculine was tied in to sexuality, with some of the non-heterosexual women claiming it was particularly important for them to be read as feminine. Looking unfeminine or lacking in femininity was often associated with the masculine, the manly and the non-heterosexual for several participants of a range of sexualities, mirroring the work of Hayfield *et al.* (2013), who argues that lesbians are commonly perceived as butch, manly and actively rejecting or resisting the feminine:

LGBT tends to be less feminine as a whole. Like, I mean.... it doesn't happen often but – actually no, it does happen quite a lot – you get the slightly more butch-identifying lesbians who go out in *hoodies*.

(Donna, 21, middle-class student, queer)

Several other participants mentioned that 'butch' or 'stereotypical' lesbians might tend to dress in more masculine clothing such as hoodies or baggy jeans. Lesbianism could also be negatively associated with stereotypes held by others around unattractiveness, as argued by Pitman (1999):

I even had, at work, one of our club organisers came over and went 'Ooh, for a lesbian, you're quite hot'.... what, so I'm meant to be ugly?! [sigh]... There's a lot of horrible attitudes.

(Georgina, 20, doesn't identify with a class, student, lesbian)

For Ally, who identified as bisexual, it was particularly important to avoid being seen as a 'stereotypical' lesbian. At numerous points in the interview Ally distanced herself

from those she perceives to be ‘stereotypical lesbians’, and femininity for her was about resisting that image:

EN: So why is it important for you to be seen as looking feminine?

That’s more of a *personal* thing than anything else. I *hate* the stereotypes of being bisexual or lesbian. And it’s just like, ‘why should I conform to that?’ I like being a girl, I like wearing heels, I like going out in dresses... I like wearing make-up... I like showing off that I’m a *girl*, you know, this is who I am. And I like long hair [laughter].... couldn’t cut my hair.

(21, no class identification, student, bisexual)

It was important for Ally to challenge and resist what she regarded as the stereotypes attributed to lesbian and bisexual women by ‘being a girl’ and showing off her femininity to others. This suggests that in some ways non-heterosexual women may experience different pressures around the management of dress and appearance compared to heterosexual women. Although Ally was comfortable with her own sexuality, she described herself in the interview as ‘not big into being ‘out and proud’’. Similarly, she felt that she often passed as straight when she was out on the scene.

Such practices by Ally and Susie (who both identified as tomboys) mirror Holland’s (2004) reflections on the use of ‘recuperative strategies’ by female tomboys in order to reassert a feminine identity. Similarly, Donna, who identified as queer, avoided wearing what she regarded as ‘butch lesbian hoodies’ on a night out. This links to the findings of Holland’s study, where women who identified as ‘alternative’ and did not always fit the conventions of femininity would still ‘flash’ elements of more traditional femininity to present themselves as feminine women. Similarly, some of the young women in the current study used elements of femininity such as long hair and dresses to achieve the same result. Ally’s long hair was – for her - inextricably tied to her femininity, with other research also suggesting non-heterosexual women may wear their hair long, for example, to ‘fit in’ to heterosexual norms (Weitz, 2003). In contrast, short hair may be considered butch or unfeminine, and has, argues Holland, been used by lesbians as a visual marker of their sexuality (2004: 62). Huxley *et al.* even suggest that hair may be ‘the most important signifier of a woman’s sexuality’ (2014: 211). A number of participants described long hair as feminine, and Gail - who had short hair - felt that she experienced more pressure to demonstrate her femininity in other ways, such as wearing make-up:

With short hair, I always find it really funny. If I wear loads of make-up, then people will think that's still *kind* of feminine. But if you have short hair and you don't wear make-up, it's a bit like... you don't really look like a woman. Whereas if you have long hair you can get away with not wearing make-up.

(24, middle-class student, bisexual)

Other non-heterosexual participants also emphasised that it was important for them to be read as feminine in certain settings and contexts:

I'm with the LGBT Society, so if I'm going out with them, me getting ready doesn't change that much. It's always t-shirt, jeans, trainers. But if I'm going out with my [female] friends who aren't in the LGBT Society, I dress up more. And... it's more feminine.

EN: Yeah. So why are you dressing more 'femininely', as you say, when you're going out with....?

Cause all of my friends are really girly and dress that way. And I don't want it to be that I turn up in converse and jeans and stand out... [pause]... I like to blend into the background.

(Kate 20, working-class student, lesbian)

Kate deployed certain markers of conventional femininity on the girls' night out, where she dressed completely differently and used make-up and dress as signifiers of what she saw as a more appropriate feminine identity in that context, and throughout the interview she very much saw this as part of fitting in when in straight spaces. It could also be argued that it might have been important for Kate to fit in with the way her 'girly' friends were dressing, linking back to the idea that investing in and labouring to produce the appropriately feminine body can be part of female bonding and forging group identities. This also provides further evidence to support the argument raised earlier in this chapter that the girls' night out requires women to make a specific type of effort and invest in femininity in ways that might not be as important in other NTE contexts or groupings. Linking in to Ally's labour to appear girly, blending in for Kate may also have been tied to ideas of 'passing' as straight in the bars of Newcastle's 'Diamond Strip', where there is a fairly rigid dress code in terms of the amount of effort required and conformity to what could be perceived as a dressy and heterosexual way of looking and being. Yet whilst Corteen acknowledges that non-heterosexuals may take steps to minimise and self-police the more visible indicators of their sexuality to 'pass'

as heterosexual (2002: 260), most of her focus group lesbian participants claimed they wanted to pass as *invisible* rather than heterosexual, which often meant playing down their femininity in order to avoid the heterosexual male gaze. These ideas of invisibility may be applicable to Kate, as she did not wish to stand out in any way in straight space, whereas, in contrast, Ally was more keen to ‘show off’ a girly appearance and talked more explicitly about how she felt that often people assume that she is heterosexual. This highlights some of the ways in which young women may invest in femininities in different ways and possibly for different reasons.

For Naomi, who was transgender, looking feminine was identified as sometimes important ‘just to show that I am actually a girl’, and she described how when others draw attention to features that she regarded as markers of masculinity on a night out - such as her Adam’s apple – she found this negative and ‘creepy’. In other public settings, looking feminine was also important for her:

...sometimes I get sick of being referred to as a guy, and if I’m going to the doctors, then I make sure I look feminine, cause otherwise they’ll address me as ‘Miss Walker’, and then everyone just looks at me and goes ‘What?!’

(19, doesn’t identify with a class, college student, lesbian)

In this sense, looking feminine was important in a setting where Naomi’s gender identity was explicitly referenced, in a public space where she wished to ensure congruence between how she was verbally identified and the way in which her body was visibly read by others. In contrast, the degree to which she liked to look feminine on a night out varied more, and represented more of a balance between wanting to pass as a woman but also to show her identity as a butch lesbian:

Sometimes I’ll think it’s quite important to look feminine, just to show that I am actually a girl, and stuff. But then, sometimes, with being butch, it’s like I want to show that I’m butch as well... [cut]...

EN: So say you were going out wanting to accentuate looking butch for example, what kind of things would you do to do that?

Look like I am now [jeans and hoodie]. Not wear as much make-up... umm.... just wear baggy clothes.

EN: And what about if you wanted to up the feminine for a night out?

Then that’s when the make-up comes into play... the dresses and the shoes.

(19, doesn't identify with a class, college student, lesbian)

Naomi talked – albeit briefly - about the flexible use of different accessories that could be used to portray herself in the way in which she wanted on a night out. Minimal make-up and more baggy clothes could be used to look more butch on a night out, with make-up, dresses and shoes worn on nights out when she wanted to be seen as a woman. Building on Mason's (2001) idea of individuals shifting strategically in and out of the metaphorical closet through the extent to which they make their sexuality visibility, the use of particular markers of femininity or masculinity allowed Naomi to play with different aspects of her identity and position herself flexibly at various intersections of femininity, gender and sexuality depending on her mood.

Whilst it was clearly important for a number of the participants who did not identify as heterosexual to portray a feminine identity to some extent and in some contexts, Ally imagined straight women experience less pressure to look feminine, partly because they are not subject to the same stereotypes as lesbians, for example. According to Ally, for straight women, it is as if their sexuality is enough to make them feminine – 'they are *girls*, they are *straight*'. This is important in terms of highlighting the relationship between gender and (hetero)sexuality. However, many of the straight participants also talked about the importance of making efforts to look feminine in order to avoid being read as masculine or manly, suggesting they tended to conceptualise femininity/masculinity at times in binary terms:

EN: And is it important for you to be seen as looking feminine, do you think?

Yeah, well, I wouldn't really want to look like a boy or anything [laughter].

(Ruth, 21, no class identification, student, straight)

Straight women also talked about being misread as lesbians - sometimes in quite negative ways - reflecting literature that argues women are expected to use clothing and bodily appearance to construct both a feminine and a heterosexual identity (Ingraham, 1996):

I think if you don't look feminine, then people automatically assume you're gay.... I can go out in jeans and a hoodie, and people will be like 'You look proper gay', and I think 'Well, what?! What does 'looking gay' mean?' I think,

you've got to look feminine, so then you're not tarred with that kind of brush as well.

(Nicole, 24, working-class non-student, straight)

I don't think anybody would like to be called a lesbian, like if they *weren't*, or as an *insult*.

(Ruth, 21, doesn't identify with a class, student, straight)

This suggests that women experience pressure from a range of sources such as female friendship groups and peers to present normative feminine identities. Arguably, it may be becoming more important for heterosexual women to assert their femininity and heterosexuality as we see a less clear distinction between gay and straight venues and a supposed 'mainstreaming' of non-heterosexual practices and identities (Richardson-Self, 2012). The findings also show women are expected to buy into binary ways of thinking around gender and sexuality and heterosexual norms and how this should be reflected through dress. Very few participants appeared to challenge these ways of conceptualising identity and its intersections with dress, with Georgina representing an interesting exception. Describing herself as 'a girly girl dressed in guy's clothes' who resists some pressures of looking feminine (through her masculine, baggy clothing) yet buys into others (through, she argues, having long hair and not looking like 'your typical lesbian'), it may be that Georgina's way of dressing unsettles binary expectations of femininity/masculinity. Skeggs also refers to femme lesbians as a challenge to the idea of the body as readable truth (2001: 300):

I hate the whole 'look feminine!' thing. I've been known to go on a night out in men's jeans and a big t-shirt. And there were places that said 'You can't come in dressed like that', and I went 'What?! If I had my hair short and I was a bit bigger, and I looked like your typical lesbian, you'd let me in!'... But because I'm a girly girl dressed in guy's clothes, apparently I'm not allowed in.

(20, doesn't identify with a class, student, lesbian)

It may be that if Georgina looked more like what she describes as a 'typical lesbian', her appearance would be read less problematically. She describes real consequences of the way she dresses on a night out in terms of being denied entry to venues (although unfortunately it is not clear whether she is referring to venues on the gay scene or straight scene here).

Clearly, investing in a feminine appearance was important for a number of participants in order to convey particular messages about their gender and sexuality. Here, gender and (hetero)sexuality (and femininity) are imagined to be intimately connected and intersect with one another in a dynamic, fluid and contingent pattern (Richardson, 2007). Heterosexuality may make it easier to ‘do’ femininity, but femininity can also be used to perform heterosexuality or pass as heterosexual. However, participants who identified as straight *did* also frequently comment that it was important to work at femininity in order to be read as feminine for them too, suggesting that it cannot simply be assumed that being read as feminine ‘comes with the territory’ of being heterosexual; identification as heterosexual is not sufficient to position someone as feminine. In other words, femininity and heterosexuality were not seamlessly aligned, and straight women could also be misread as butch, non-heterosexual, manly or unfeminine if they failed to make the required investment in femininity. This suggests that there is not a natural relationship between gender, sexuality and femininity. Femininity was sometimes conceived of in terms of a feminine/masculine binary, for example, Kimberley actually defined femininity in terms of what it is *not* – it’s about doing ‘things that *men don’t do*’. It follows from this that for the majority of participants, being seen as unfeminine was linked to the masculine and the manly. This mirrors other research suggesting young women wish to be recognised as feminine as the only alternative seems to be being regarded as masculine or manly (Holland, 2004), suggesting femininity is being conceptualised at times in quite a narrow sense. Whilst this section has highlighted the importance of being read as feminine in the NTE through making an effort to look feminine *enough*, it was also entirely possible to be *too* feminine in the NTE, and this could also be read in negative ways, as the next section will illustrate.

The Limits of Femininity: Is it Possible to Look *Too* Feminine?

Although this chapter has illustrated some of the ways in which making an effort to perform a somewhat exaggerated femininity in the NTE was seen as important for the majority of women, there was also a clear consensus that it remained entirely possible to ‘do too much’ or ‘try too hard’ on a night out in terms of dress. This section will explore where the boundaries of appropriate femininity may lie and the ways in which a perceived hyper-feminine bodily presentation was commonly regarded in negative ways. The section will go on to explore the ways in which the participants often used dimensions of identity such as age, class or region to mark the bodies of the imagined

hyper-feminine woman and distinguish themselves from these ‘undesirable’ ways of dressing. Such negative characterisations were typically attributed to the older, Geordie, working-class woman, and some of the participants who identified as Geordie *were* more likely to embrace a more exaggeratedly feminine way of dressing.

Hyper-femininity and Looking like a Slut

There was a clear consensus amongst the young women that whilst a somewhat exaggerated display of femininity is normalised on a night out, it is still possible to try too hard:

...you *do* wanna look good, but then on the other hand you don’t wanna look like you’ve put too much effort in, because... no-one likes a tryer... no-one likes someone who tries *too* hard to look good.

(Lydia, 21, middle-class student, straight)

Lydia’s comments that women want to avoid looking as if they have made too much effort were fairly typical. The woman who tries too hard was depicted by participants as *inappropriately* feminine, in contrast to what it meant to look ‘unfeminine’ (or perhaps, as will be suggested in Chapter 7, ‘underfeminine’). I thus use the term ‘hyper-feminine’ to capture the women’s sense that this is about looking ‘too’ feminine rather than lacking femininity. Whilst looking unfeminine was often equated with looking manly, masculine or scruffy and typically making too *little* effort, hyper-femininity was associated with women making too *much* effort (and frequently being ridiculed for it). It was not always easy to pinpoint where exactly the borders between ‘not enough’, ‘enough’ and ‘too much’ might lie. Having said this, an overdone performance of femininity was commonly associated with loud, bright or tight-fitting clothing or excessive make-up that could look unnatural or ‘fake’. There were interesting dynamics around class and sexuality present here too, with a positioning of feminine dress as ‘classy’ and hyper-femininity as ‘tarty’. Whilst fitting in - both to venues and within a friendship group - was generally considered important for many of the participants, hyper-feminine or tarty clothing was characterised as standing out too much due to the colour, shape or material, as with Kimberley’s description of a ‘tarty’ woman below:

It’s not the colour, it’s the shade *of that colour*. I can use the example of yellow [sigh], god I *hate* the colour yellow, you know, like the really bright yellow?

Yellow in a different shade is quite nice, but really bright yellow, I think again it just doesn't fit into this feminine sort of *idea*. Cause it's not *soft*, I think that must be it, it's not *soft*... a harsh, bright, in-your-face colour.

(20, middle-class student, straight)

In this sense, to be hyper-feminine is to be loud and 'in your face', defying the expectation outlined in the previous chapter that traditionally, women 'should be seen and not heard'. Holland (2004) argues that space is ordered and used to reinforce gendered norms, with women's bodies expected to take up as little space as possible and convey a sense of vulnerability and weakness. In contrast, in ways that parallel being loud and rowdy, the body clothed in an 'in your face' manner draws attention to itself and is hyper-visible as it moves through and occupies space, looking out of place rather than fitting in. The idea of looking out of place or unnatural was similarly tied to the ways in which several of the participants talked about inappropriately feminine hair and make-up. As with dress, certain shades or colours of make-up were often discussed, along with unnatural enhancements to the female body, such as hair extensions or too much fake tan. Hair was often described as 'not soft' and 'unnatural', make-up as 'hard' and 'thick'. Hyper-femininity often linked into discourses of authenticity and fakery, with 'overdone' performances of femininity commonly regarded as fake and disingenuous:

So there probably is a bit of an assumption that if a woman has fake boobs, fake nails, fake tan... hair extensions.... what else about her is fake?

(Claire, 25, working-class non-student, straight)

Other research highlights the importance for women of delivering an 'authentic' performance of femininity (Holland, 2004: 46) - or at least a convincing 'fake' one - and discussions around fakery were very common. Many of the participants used the tactic of positioning their own feminine identities on a night out as appropriate by contrasting their own bodies with those of more extreme, hyper-feminine women, or by drawing the line of appropriateness at the point where labour and investment in femininity becomes *too* visible:

It's just not natural, no-one's born orange, no-one's got hair extensions that look... like... you can see where they're stuck in. And I just.... maybe they're trying too hard.

(Alex, 19, middle-class student, straight)

As Woods argues, the most valued form of femininity is that in which beauty appears ‘naturalised’ and the labour and effort that goes into producing and maintaining the feminine body is hidden or minimised (2014: 203). Whilst a natural-looking but conventionally attractive appearance with some emphasis of markers of femininity served to successfully mark women as female and feminine, a fake or overdone performance of femininity could unsettle boundaries around gender and even sexuality. As alluded to through the use of the term ‘tarty’ above, there were clear connections made between a hyper-feminine appearance and slutty dress. Ally described slutty dress as unfeminine and uncouth, and went on to elaborate what she means by uncouth in terms of lack of taste⁴ and ‘trying too hard’:

Uncouth? [long pause and sigh].... Not very *tasteful* [laughter]... Like... [pause]... you can go out, and if you’re wearing something that works for *you*, you can look *stunning*. You don’t have to look like everyone else and just try and beat them by showing more skin, you know?.... [pause].... That’s a definite turn off for me, in women, if you try too hard.

(21, doesn’t identify with a class, student, bisexual)

In order to consolidate their position as respectable and feminine users of the NTE, the young women frequently engaged in processes of othering to distance themselves from the woman who was perceived to be dressed in hyper-feminine way. The majority of young women, when asked what they wouldn’t feel comfortable wearing personally, talked about avoiding what they often referred to as ‘slutty’ clothing. ‘Slutty’ or ‘tarty’ clothing was almost universally described as clothing that was tight or too revealing - or as Ally suggests ‘showing more skin’ - and there was also often an implicit or explicit suggestion that this type of clothing was designed to be (hetero)sexualised and appealing to straight men:

EN: So what does that mean, to look tarty?

Well I don’t know, just... really... appealing to boys, or what they [women] think would appeal to boys. Like wearing really, really short clothes, high heels... revealing clothes.

(Christina, 20, working-class student, straight)

⁴ I use ‘taste’ in a general rather than a Bourdieusian sense. Although Bourdieu’s work may have interesting implications in this area, it is beyond the scope of the project to interpret the data in this way.

In this sense, hyper-feminine or ‘slutty’ dress could be associated with a perceived excess of (hetero)sexuality, and links can be made between looking hyper-feminine and looking ‘slutty’ or over-sexualised. This example is also interesting as it shows that markers of femininity could take on different meanings in different contexts. Whilst the high heel was generally recognised as a marker of the successful display of exaggerated femininity for a night out, when worn in combination with ‘revealing’ clothes – for example – it could be read more negatively as part of a ‘slutty’ way of dressing. Some of the complex nuances regarding the perceived overlaps between ‘slutty’ dress and behaviour will be explored further in Chapter 6. To an extent, these findings challenge contemporary literature that depicts performances of hyper-femininity as desirable on a night out. For example, this at least partly undermines Levy’s (2005) argument that women live in a pornified ‘raunch culture’ where a sexualised form of hyper-femininity is increasingly normalised. Similarly, Griffin *et al.* (2013) argue that within the NTE more specifically, a hyper-feminine and sexualised way of dressing is expected, yet this data suggests that there are still limits and boundaries in terms of what level of sexualisation might be deemed acceptable. The data also shows that processes of othering were important for the young women in establishing these boundaries and positioning themselves on the ‘right’ side of the boundaries in contrast to other women, as the next section will demonstrate.

Age, Class and Geordie Glamour

A hyper-feminine appearance could commonly be regarded as particularly problematic when embodied in a woman described as ‘older’ within the spaces of the NTE. Feelings of uneasiness towards the ageing female body were voiced by a number of participants, who described the presence of older women in the NTE – particularly when dressed in certain ways – as embarrassing or out of place. A strong reaction was evoked, a sense that it is ‘embarrassing’ for an older body to be on display in this way, tying into ideas of older women as subjects to be pitied (Holland, 2004). For example, Susie argues that seeing an ‘older’ woman (in her thirties) dressed in revealing clothing and high heels elicits a particular type of negative reaction:

You’d be like ‘Come on love!’ [laughter]. This sounds really bad [laughter]... I guess it’s just....[pause]..... don’t get me wrong, but I think, at that age you’re sort of getting a little bit older and it’s a little bit.... less.... pleasant! [laughter]

(22, middle-class student, straight)

Susie uses laughter to diffuse the seriousness of what she is saying and says that ‘this sounds really bad’ when she admits that the bodies of ageing women are ‘less pleasant’ to look at. As Susie touches on above, there was frequently reflection upon the older woman’s body as being unpleasant or unattractive in some way, and this was echoed by a number of participants:

It’s really bad when you see older women trying to dress really young [laughter]... that’s just like, ‘don’t do it!’

EN: So what would that look like, an older woman trying to dress young?

When they’ve got really short skirts. And loads of make-up, really over the top...

EN: And what’s not right about that?

I suppose it’s cause... you don’t wanna see them. You don’t wanna see their *skin* and stuff. Cause it’s not as nice [laughter].... That’s really bad...

EN: Why is that bad?

Cause it’s, like.... [pause]... what makes their skin any worse than our skin? Why shouldn’t we want to look at them? [laughter]

(Emma, 20, working-class student, bisexual)

Emma rhetorically queries why we shouldn’t want to look at ageing bodies, yet evidence that society does not wish to look at older bodies – particularly when sexualised - comes from numerous studies (see for example Vares, 2009). The data suggests that there was an almost tangible sense of disgust at the visibility of the skin of the older woman’s body, an embodied and visceral sensation directed at ‘deviant’ bodies that are regarded as unpleasant and unsightly (Miller, 1997, cited in Tyler, 2008: 19). Susie and Emma’s comments are highly revealing in terms of the disgust that might be felt towards older women’s bodies when they ‘dress young’. Clothing such as short skirts was typically depicted as more sexualised, and the bodies of older women may become particularly problematic when clothed in these more sexualised ways or ways that exposes too much flesh. The surface of their bodies, their very skin, is constructed here as ‘not nice’ and something that should be hidden. Such conceptualisations of the inappropriately feminine older woman tie into expectations that the bodies of older

women - or at least parts of their bodies - should remain both invisible and desexualised (Holland, 2004; Vares, 2009).

The data also very strongly indicates that processes of othering particular bodies through appearance could also operate along classed lines. This mirrors the research of others such as Skeggs (2001), who ties performances of hyper-femininity to traditional working-class identities. However, many of the young women in this study also engaged in othering that drew on regional Geordie identities. Many of the middle-class students worked to distance themselves from what they saw as a hyper-feminine, fake and cheap way of dressing which they often associated with Geordie women:

As a general rule, a general horrible, classist rule, lower class dress more 'Geordie Shore'.... [pause].... and sort of sparkly, you know, and leopard print. Whereas, the higher up you go, the less likely you are to see... [cut]... the sort of things I'd call tacky, which is fake eyelashes, an entire dress made of sequins, that sort of thing.

(Donna, 21, middle-class student, queer)

I don't go crazy like a typical Geordie... [laughter] You know, I just don't think that's attractive, being plastered in make-up. Me and my friends, we don't really do the whole hair extension thing. When I first went to the Gate, I stood out because I was like 'Oh my god everyone's *bright orange*'... and we look completely different because we've toned it down a bit.

(Alex, 19, middle-class student, straight)

The perceived 'typical' Geordie style was frequently associated with performances of hyper-femininity through big hair, fake tan and eyelashes, heavy make-up, and revealing, tight-fitting clothing in bright colours or bold prints. Almost half of the participants, most usually non-local students, talked more negatively about this way of dressing. This mirrors societal depictions of the working-class body as excessive (Skeggs, 2005), tasteless and lacking restraint (Lawler, 2005). The working-class Geordie woman was positioned as lacking the skills and knowledge to manage the subtleties of femininity, highlighting the ways in which notions of taste - or lack thereof - are crucial in positioning bodies along the spectrum of femininity. Donna references the MTV structured-reality television show 'Geordie Shore' here, which follows a cast of young people from Newcastle. The show's female characters are frequently slated in the media for their hyper-feminine appearance. There was little resistance to these

positionings of working-class or Geordie women amongst the majority of middle-class women, with Gail representing a notable exception:

I guess it's a bit classist, and it's also just a bit, like, people being judgemental about women wearing short skirts.

EN: So what do you mean when you say about it being a bit classist?

Well I feel like some of this, sort of, 'Oh, all the women up here, like, they wear short skirts' and stuff... it's a bit just, like, you know.... 'Working-class women are *too* slutty' or... you know.... *perform* femininity too much... and wear too much make-up.

(24, middle-class student, bisexual)

Gail offers a critique of the association between working-class identities and hyper-femininity, recognising that working-class women may be more likely to be subjected to judgements about their sexuality and their perceived 'sluttiness' and excess, and this is also reflected in contemporary research recognising that working-class women are often depicted as promiscuous, hyper-sexualised and over-fertile (Tyler, 2008). She also recognises the association between class, excess and regional identities when she talks about the stereotype encompassing women 'up here' in the North-East of England. Some of the Geordie participants were also aware of this potential judgement from others. Nicole talked about feeling judged by other women in the toilets on a night out, and Joanna felt that she also experienced some negative responses on a night out:

I've had people look at me and roll their eyes. Girls. And you just think, 'Well, I'm wearing what I'm wearing, and if you don't like it, then...' I've had people tut, I've had girls whispering in their ears. I've never heard anyone shout anything or say anything harsh, but you know what they're thinking... you know what they're looking at. You're standing right in front of them.

(24, working-class full-time worker and student, straight)

This highlights the ways in which other women play a pivotal role in the policing of the boundaries of feminine dress and appearance within the NTE. There was, however, also evidence of young Geordie women resisting their bodies being read in these negative ways. Some of the working-class, local young women talked proudly about their Geordie heritage and identity and how this impacted upon the ways in which they do femininity on a night out and the types of femininities in which they invest. For these

Geordie young women, the boundaries of femininity often shifted to incorporate a more exaggerated feminine appearance than for the other participants:

...in *my* family, my mam, when she used to get ready, she always used to take a long time. And I dunno if it *is* just... cause a lot of our friends, *their* mams are the same. And I don't know *where* it started, but it always seems to be in Newcastle, the girls take forever to get ready, they have the big hair, they have the big heels, they look quite glamorous.

(Kirsty, 23, working-class non-student, straight)

Here, a more exaggeratedly feminine or 'glamorous' way of dressing is tied into a Geordie identity, and this is positioned as part of Geordie culture and heritage within Newcastle. The data generally suggests that looking appropriately feminine on a night out often appeared to require proportionally greater investment from Geordie women than from other participants, and notions of excess were also apparent in the ways in which some of the young women talked about Geordie femininity and 'glamour' on a night out. This demonstrates that there was considerable variation in terms of where the young women actually drew the boundary between that which they saw as appropriately feminine and that which was regarded as *too* feminine, suggesting such boundaries are not clear or fixed. Interestingly, Geordie identities can also carry well beyond the site of Newcastle in terms of representing a distinctive dress code recognised by others:

I did a year's travelling in India and Sri Lanka, and I met so many different volunteers when I was there. And they *all* said, when you said 'oh I'm from Newcastle', they *all* said, like, 'Oh so you don't wear a coat then? So you just go out in really small clothes even when it's winter?' And I was like 'Well, yeah, we do!'

(Megan, 25, working-class non-student, straight)

Similarly, Nicole talked with pride and humour about being recognised as a Geordie when out in other parts of the UK as a result of her dress, high heels, clutch bag and lack of jacket in all weather conditions. The Geordie participants who invested heavily in femininity also constructed themselves as skilled or knowledgeable in terms of where to shop, what to wear and how to style hair and make-up. Skeggs (1997) argues that the respectable feminine body is one that is invested in and taken care of, and - typically - this respectable body is middle-class. As a result, Skeggs suggests that working-class women may strive to achieve middle-class respectability through skilled labour and investment in the surface of their bodies (1997: 84). Whilst some of the other women

positioned loud and bright clothing as hyper-feminine, these ways of dressing could be invested with alternative meaning for Geordies and standing out could be regarded as positive and desirable:

...when you've got a nice, unique dress on, you just *stand out* from the crowd a little bit. And it's not because I want attention, it's just because I *don't* wanna look the same as every other girl in Newcastle. And I think I've always had a bit of a quirky dress sense anyway, when I'm out. I like the bright colours, I like the unique dresses from as far down as Liverpool... you know, from that designer. I don't mind spending the money, if I feel like I'm gonna look *different*.

(Kirsty, 23, working-class non-student, straight)

Buying into notions of glamour and excess may thus have value for young Geordie women and associations with femininity, agency and strength (Skeggs, 1997). The Geordie women tended to talk about the considerable proportion of their incomes that would be spent on designer make-up and clothing for nights out, although they were keen to stress that this wasn't connected to being 'snobby', but was more tied to a 'work hard, play hard' attitude and wanting to treat themselves and look unique. This is supported by other research arguing that regionalised femininities such as the 'Essex Girl' or 'Scouser' may arguably 'celebrate a form of glamor and femininity that highlights excess and artifice', the display of which is a source of pride and pleasure for women (Woods, 2014: 204). Similarly, Nayak describes working-class male identities in post-industrial Newcastle as demonstrating a 'corporeal enactment of white masculine excess' (2003: 21), and argues that appearing smartly dressed within the NTE was seen as important for his participants, as was moving between a number of bars within the city centre, both of which might be seen as measures to display wealth and status and position the dressed body and consumption practices as highly visible (2003: 18). However, Nayak argues that working-class Geordie masculinities may have little value beyond local circuits (2006: 825) and the same may be true of working-class Geordie femininities. It is important to consider the extent to which the skills and resources invested in producing Geordie feminine identities might have value more widely amongst non-Geordie communities. Working-class culture may indeed have 'a different value system, one not recognized by the dominant symbolic economy' (Skeggs, 2004: 153, cited in Lawler, 2005: 434), and this does seem to be suggested in the current study; the non-Geordies could certainly pass negative judgements on what they perceived to be Geordie ways of dressing, as this section has illustrated.

However, just as several of the non-local students tended to talk negatively about Geordie young women, the Geordies engaged in their own processes of othering focused more on constructing ‘charvers’ - a local North-East term for chavs - as inappropriately feminine identities. As outlined in the previous chapter, Nicole in particular was keen to distance herself and other Geordie women from the ‘Underclass’ or ‘charvers’, who can be distinguished from working-class local women by their lack of employment, taste and classiness, their behaviour and the venues they frequent on a night out. Crucially, the female charver’s lack of resources and inability to afford to do appropriate femininity on a night out is literally written onto her body in numerous ways:

Rebel Rebel dress, cheap shoes – oh god, the shoes – we notice that quite a lot... Garage shoes are about twenty quid, you can spot them a *mile* off. Hair will always be... they’ll have the big fringe, and the rubbish make-up with thick black eyeliner. The cheap perfume’s the worst, you get a headache. They spray it and it’s just like ‘eurgh!’

(24, working-class non-student, straight)

Ideas around consumption were important in processes of othering – with the hyper-feminine woman positioned as consuming the ‘wrong’ kinds of products in terms of dress and appearance. Hayward and Yar (2006) argue that the charver is distinguished not primarily by their lack of economic resources and inability to consume, but rather by their poor, tasteless and vulgar consumer choices. However, it could be argued that a lack of both knowledge or taste *and* finances are relevant here, as the charver also lacks the financial means to ‘do’ femininity, with her cheap shoes and her cheap perfume recognisable even from a ‘mile off’. This is important when set against the way in which the Geordie woman often positioned herself as a skilled and knowledgeable consumer. Woods notes that excessive, regional femininity is often marked by ‘overt construction’ and represents ‘a femininity produced through conspicuous consumption’ (2014: 205), and it very much appears that the young women in the current study were investing heavily in such constructions and distinctive displays of consumption. Nicole’s judgement of charvers also ties together dimensions of disgust and perceived lack of taste, echoing the work of Lawler, who argues that classed disgust remains relatively underexplored yet ‘working-class women can be rendered disgusting by disrespectability and excess’ (2005: 435). The body of the female charver literally elicits a reaction of disgust - ‘eurgh’ - because of the smell of the cheap perfume, tying

into ideas widely recognised in the literature around ‘chavs’ as smelly and disgusting (Lawler, 2005; Tyler, 2008).

As this section has illustrated, in this sense, clothing and shoes may literally ‘class’ the body and ‘materialise abstract notions of power’ (Hockey *et al.*, 2013: 2). These findings are important as they begin to highlight nuances around classed othering both within and between classes. Othering may also be shaped by regional variations such as association with - or rejection of - Geordie identities, and in processes of othering that distinguish the ‘respectable’ working-class from the ‘Underclass’ or ‘rough wedge’ of the working-class (Nayak, 2006). These findings will be explored in further detail in Chapter 7.

Conclusion

This chapter clearly highlights some of the tensions young women are required to manage as they negotiate the boundaries of appropriately feminine dress on a night out. Within the spaces of the NTE, a somewhat exaggerated performance of femininity was expected. This was clearly tied to the idea of making an effort in terms of investment in appearance, yet there was some variation in the level of exaggeration or effort required. For example, the girls’ night out may represent a setting in which investment in doing femininity is particularly valued compared to other types of night. Investing in femininity was far from a free choice, as some women experienced peer pressure to collectively do femininity and girliness or risk looking as though they were snubbing or rejecting the group. This develops the work of Skeggs, who suggests that a failure to collude with the feminine can trigger resentment and envy as it exposes and jeopardises the labour of other women (1997: 109).

Dressing in an ‘appropriately’ feminine way could also have individual value and be associated with ‘feeling good’ as much as with ‘looking good’ for the young women. However, it may be difficult in reality to prise apart the internal sense of ‘feeling good’ and the external sense of ‘being recognised as attractive’. It may be that it is not just the ‘doing’ or performing of identity that has value to individual young women; this must also be accurately read and acknowledged by others (Lawler, 2008). As Holliday notes, ‘a given bodily text can convey its intended meaning only if its readers read it in the way the author requires’ (1999: 486). Hockey *et al.* (2013: 3) draw on Jenkins’ (2004)

‘external-internal dialectic of identification’ to describe the ways in which identity is co-constructed by the self and by others who read the body in particular ways. Feminine appearance could also be associated for the participants with agency and strength, although this was set against very different readings that positioned feminine dress as restrictive and uncomfortable. Despite these tensions, it was often important for the majority of women, regardless of sexuality, to convey an appropriately feminine identity to at least a certain extent to distance themselves from being read as masculine or having their sexuality interpreted or read in a way they were not happy with. Appropriate femininity, whether invested in wholeheartedly, deployed strategically or ‘flashed’ as a recuperative strategy, had value for young women in terms of facilitating the reading of their bodies as feminine (and possibly heterosexual) by others. In this sense, there was often little distinction between bodies, clothing and femininity; a woman *is* what she wears (Holland, 2004: 15).

However, the need to present a suitably and exaggeratedly feminine appearance must be balanced with the risk of overdoing femininity and trying too hard. Notions of excess were important in shaping the boundaries of femininity, indicating that it may be possible to be *too* feminine. Such understandings of appropriate and inappropriate feminine dress and women’s attempts to position themselves on the right side of the boundary between ‘sexy’ and ‘slutty’ were marked by nuances of class and taste, with working-class Geordie women more likely to frame feminine dress on a night out in terms of excess and glamour. This may be to an extent because, as Skeggs points out, middle-class women have ‘far more alternatives to how they *can be*’ (1997: 91), and it is easier for them to get away with dressing in scruffier ways without jeopardising their middle-classness, whilst it may be much more important for the working-class woman to demonstrate investment in appearance as a marker of her worth, value and respectability. This is supported by Emslie *et al.* (2015), who argue middle-class women may not have to publicly invest in femininity to the same extent as working-class women. These investments, however, did not always have value more widely, and the data suggests that processes of othering of the hyper-feminine body continue to operate along frequently classed and aged lines.

Chapter 6. Risk Management and Safekeeping

Introduction

Traditional femininity is associated with risk management, with women expected to engage in safekeeping strategies which limit their participation in the public sphere and leisure activities (Campbell, 2005) to preserve both their physical safety and sexual reputation (Lees, 1989). This may be particularly important within spaces to which women have traditionally had their access curtailed, such as drinking venues, with research suggesting that young women are still expected to engage in active risk management on a night out (Brooks, 2011). However, the NTE is also described as an increasingly feminised space where young women are able to reconceptualise contemporary feminine identities and embody ‘new’ femininities of independence, agency and sexual empowerment (McRobbie, 2007; Waitt *et al.*, 2011). With these tensions in mind, this chapter will examine participants’ understandings of risk and safekeeping within the NTE, exploring the ways in which the perception that the NTE is a risky space where women are expected to engage in particular risk management practices continues to shape attitudes to safekeeping. The chapter will go on to explore the risky spaces and identities associated with participation in the NTE, highlighting the ways in which notions of (in)visibility are key to risk management.

Young Women’s Understandings of Risk and Safekeeping within the NTE

The data clearly highlighted the ways in which risk and safekeeping were still seen as relevant for the young women as they participated in nights out. Over a third of participants argued that women are required to be aware of a range of potential risks and take steps to minimise these. However, whilst some felt that most or even all young women are likely to be concerned about risk, others felt that some women do consider risk and others don’t. In terms of their own personal attitudes to risk, the majority of women expressed that they do consider risk to at least some extent on a night out. This ranged from being ‘aware’ of risks but feeling unconcerned personally through to being extremely concerned with issues of safety. However there was also some awareness of the tensions between the expectation that young people should consume significant quantities of alcohol in the NTE and the idea that the NTE can be a high-risk space in which young people - and women in particular - are expected to take responsibility for

ensuring their own safety. The NTE is simultaneously constructed as hedonistic and carefree yet risky and unpredictable, and a small number of participants rejected the idea that risk should be a key consideration on a night out:

...it's just something you don't *want* to think about, cause you want to think... sort of that kind of get away, relax time. And you don't want to think that there's risks behind it.

(Naomi, 19, doesn't identify with a class, college student, lesbian)

Yet, regardless of what they claimed to be their own level of concerns about risk, many women still discussed it extensively, often before specific interview questions around risk were asked. Ideas around the NTE as a potentially risky environment for women were often present - either explicitly or implicitly - in the young women's discussions of drinking practices, dress and their general behaviours on a night out, demonstrating the subtle ways in which considerations of risk and safety could be threaded throughout every aspect of the night out. It should also be noted that the girls' night out may represent a context in which it is *particularly* difficult to relax and let one's hair down (see also Brooks, 2009). Around half of the young women - of a range of sexualities and backgrounds - said that they felt safer when out with male friends, boyfriends, or in a mixed-gender group, with comments such as this fairly typical:

You feel *safer* when you're with guys. Umm.... [long pause].... because obviously... I think the *threat* is reduced if you're with a guy, cause you always think in your head, 'oh well if I'm with *guys*, no other guy will be able to do anything'.

(Kimberley, 20, middle-class student, straight)

This positions men as a source of both safety and risk, and there was generally a division implicitly made where male friends and partners - or 'known' men - represented safety, and 'unknown' men or strangers represented a potential source of risk or danger (although it is important to note that this fear of 'stranger danger' may be misplaced (Ministry of Justice *et al.*, 2013)). Several women also commented that they would feel more confident drinking greater amounts of alcohol in a mixed group compared to on a girls' night out:

I think I can probably get away with drinking a little bit more if I'm with a mixed group. Cause you've got the guys, just in case something *does* happen.

(Lydia, 21, middle-class student, straight)

The idea of men as a potential source of safety and support mirrors the findings of Day *et al.* (2003), who report that even women who position themselves as tough and able to defend themselves on a night out may also continue to buy into elements of more traditional discourses of femininity and (hetero)sexuality by positioning themselves as vulnerable and requiring male protection to an extent. The fact that around half of the young women commented on feeling much safer when out with known men also challenges the idea of the girls' night out as liberating and suggests that women may anticipate difficulties or disadvantages of socialising within an all-female group.

The women gave numerous examples of their own personal experiences of what they perceived as risky situations or interactions which challenge the idea of the NTE more generally as a carefree and hedonistic space, including drinks being spiked and having belongings stolen. Almost a quarter of participants claimed they had - or suspected they had - been spiked. Feeling or being harassed or threatened by men was even more common and almost always had a sexualised element; this could take various forms ranging from shouting and catcalling to groping. Instances of physical violence were uncommon, and the women did not discuss this topic to anywhere near the same extent as sexual threats, yet some of the women recounted cases where they or a friend have been slapped, punched, pushed and kicked or threatened with physical violence by other women. Interestingly, sexual risk was imagined to come only from men, whereas the rare instances of physical violence and threats of a non-sexual nature tended to come from other women. Reported instances of sexual assault or rape were very rare, with only one young woman talking about being sexually assaulted several years previously. However, despite the relative rarity of sexual assault being spoken about as a personal experience, this remained overwhelmingly the primary concern for the majority of young women. Drink spiking was often linked to this, and seen as greatly increasing the risk of being raped or assaulted, although none of the young women who reported being spiked said they had gone on to be the victims of sexual assault as a result. This mirrors the findings of Sheard (2011), who reports that young women in the North of England describe a very real fear of drink spiking and male violence. Some of the young women in the current study were aware of the contradiction between the fact that sexual assault is rare but remains the risk many women are most concerned about:

EN: And what kind of risks do you think young women think about the most?

Umm..... it's probably definitely.... the rape thing actually. Although it's probably relatively uncommon, it's still the.... 'Oh my god if I walk home by myself, someone *is* going to kidnap me and rape me!' type thing. Whereas you're probably more likely to just get your phone stolen or have someone else punch you!

(Susie, 22, middle-class student, straight)

This does depend on how sexual assault is defined, as when harassment and groping are included, assault may be much more frequent (Ministry of Justice *et al.*, 2013).

However, rape - which was the most commonly mentioned sexual risk - remains more likely to happen in domestic space between people who already know one another (Rape Crisis England and Wales, 2004). There was also a tendency to talk about sexual risk in the interview in vague terms such as being 'preyed on', being seen as 'easy access' by guys or - more commonly - being 'taken advantage of' (which on probing turned out to represent a continuum of sexual risk, including being seen as more up for sex, being groped or harassed or being assaulted or raped). This hesitance to name risks echoes Griffin *et al.*'s (2009b) findings on young women's drinking practices in South West England. The women in Griffin *et al.*'s study rarely referred to specific risks explicitly, instead using coded terms such as 'anything could happen', although risks were often seen as implicitly sexual ones, as found here.

Despite an awareness of the NTE as a potentially high-risk space, women were generally not positioned as passive, powerless victims, but rather as required to engage in various safekeeping activities in order to limit or mitigate risk, mirroring findings from other recent research (Brooks, 2011). Most of the participants recognised that women are still expected to take responsibility for their own safety and engage in a number of risk management practices. Much research positions risk management as a key part of appropriate femininities, for example with Haydock arguing that 'safekeeping strategies can be understood as performative of respectable femininities' (2009: 248). However, the young women participating in this study rarely explicitly referenced femininity when discussing their own safekeeping practices. Rather, they were often talked about as mere common sense. The young women shared a number of strategies that they used in order to minimise perceived risk on a night out. Guarding against drink spiking was one of the most frequently-mentioned safekeeping requirements. Never leaving one's drink unattended was the most common way

described to do this (much as Sheard (2011) found on her own research on drink spiking in Northern England), although a handful of young women also talked about covering drinks and refusing to accept drinks from strangers. Strongly echoing Brooks' (2011) findings, these strategies were described as reflexive or sub-conscious processes that were carried out without thinking:

My grandma has always said to me, keep your thumb over your drink. And that's always stuck with me. I do it without even noticing. Not when I've got a cup, but when I've got a bottle. That's just a sub-conscious kinda thing, I don't even think about doing it.

(Kate, 20, working-class student, lesbian)

The high levels of concern around drink spiking, and the fact that almost a quarter of participants thought they had been spiked, is at odds with research suggesting that levels of spiking are actually relatively low (Plant, 2008). Whilst of course there is always a risk that cases are under-reported or that drink spiking effects may be difficult to distinguish from the general effects of consuming alcohol, Burgess et al. (2009) also suggest that young women tend to focus on 'exotic' yet concrete risks and fears such as drink spiking, which can be easily managed through strategies such as guarding drinks, thus displacing more nebulous and complex risks associated with heavy drinking and downplaying the health risks to the body of alcohol consumption itself. It was certainly the case that very few of the participants talked about the long-term - or even short-term - health risks that might be associated with drinking, focusing much more on risks such as drink-spiking and violence.

Having said this, drinking 'too much' *was* almost universally associated by the participants with increased risk in some senses, particularly in terms of attack or sexual assault. Almost all of the women felt that their own level of concern about risk - and that of other women too - tended to decrease as more alcohol was consumed:

I think about it before I drink, then when I drink I'm just, like, 'Whatever'. I think in a sober state, they [women] obviously would say 'Oh yeah, it's really risky if you do this', but once you start drinking, you kind of just forget about the risks.

(Alex, 19, middle-class student, straight)

What constituted ‘too much’ to drink was almost universally imagined not in terms of units consumed but rather in terms of effects such as women’s loss of ability to maintain a sense of control and awareness of their surroundings. This decrease in awareness was one of the most common factors seen to increase risk and position women as vulnerable:

Often when you’re that drunk, you are just like, ‘I don’t know what’s going on. I’ll just go wherever’. And you don’t really have a say for *yourself*. Cause you’ve put yourself in a position where you can’t speak, you can’t walk.... [pause].... so you are more *vulnerable*.

(Ruth, 21, doesn’t identify with a class, student, straight)

Similarly, Lyons and Willott found that female participants in all of their focus groups with young people in New Zealand ‘drew on a discourse of women being in danger and being vulnerable when they are drunk’ (2008: 706), leading them to argue that the circulation and acceptance of the idea that women are vulnerable to victimisation from men when out drinking reinforces a sense of justification for the condemnation of women who are drunk in public (2008: 708). However, there was a clear line to be negotiated here; as some degree of drunkenness was welcomed, normalised and expected. Being tipsy could be a tactic to help women unwind and actually make them worry less about the risks within the NTE, yet they must always remain wary of potential dangers and stay in control. For example, Emma argues that ‘you don’t *worry* as much when you’re drunk’, and goes on to say:

There’s kind of a *scale* isn’t there... you don’t wanna worry so much that you’re not enjoying yourself. But you don’t wanna not worry so much that you’re just throwing your stuff everywhere.

(20, working-class student, bisexual)

In order to manage this boundary, as outlined in Chapter 4, the women very much continued to subscribe to Measham’s (2002) framing of intoxication as a ‘controlled loss of control’. The management of alcohol intake in this way thus served dual purposes; limiting amounts consumed allowed women to avoid appearing drunk, unfeminine and unattractive, but also acted as a safety measure. Although *some* alcohol was almost always consumed, participants were careful to stress that they were able to manage this, and they frequently highlighted the need to remain in control:

I don't *like* to feel out of control. I like to still know what's going on. I might still be *drunk* but not.... You *know* where you are, who you're with.... [pause]... Yeah, not kinda be *blind* drunk.

(Ruth, 21, doesn't identify with a class, student, straight)

Another safekeeping measure was to draw on the value of the female friendship group in collectively mitigating risk. Over half of the participants felt that it was extremely important to look out for the wellbeing and safety of female friends, often as part of a reciprocal process where the role of the group in looking out for one another was regarded as positive and important. Trust in particular was a key theme, with young women's caring role associated with strengthening friendships:

It's just like someone there to, like, help you, like, if you're being sick... someone to hold your hair back [laughter]... You can trust them.

(Ally, 21, doesn't identify with a class, student, bisexual)

Ally also claimed that 'they've got your back, you've got theirs' and this sentiment was echoed by other women. For example, Donna described shared drinking rituals and caring for intoxicated female friends as an opportunity to see friends at their worst, claiming that 'it gives you an extra layer of relationship with them':

You get to see people at their worst when they're drunk [laughter], and so it makes everything else that little bit easier. If you can say to someone that.... 'Oh, by the way, I dragged you home crying for an *hour* last night'.... then there's not a lot they can do to *shock* you again, and stuff. It's good fun. Not quite friendship-building, but friendship-cementing.

(21, middle-class student, queer)

As Chapters 4 and 5 have highlighted, the girls' night out offered a key context in which to devote time to female friendships, bond and do friendship and femininity collectively through shared drinking practices and rituals of getting ready together. It could also be argued that the young women could 'do' friendship and femininity through looking out for one another as part of a girly friendship group. The data also links to the findings of Griffin *et al.* (2009a) around the function of the female friendship group, where the group was seen as a source of safety and a mobile private space:

I suppose everyone's very aware of things that could happen to their friends as well. It's like 'Ah, where's so-and-so? What's happened to *her*? Has she went

home? Who did she go home with?'.... I think that it's like.... [pause].... sort of trying to preserve a *group* aspect as well, tryin' to look after everyone.

(Jessie, 21, working-class non-student, straight)

Rather than being seen as about femininity per se, this often linked into the idea raised in Chapter 4 that many of the women had been very drunk themselves before and recognised how easy it can be to overstep the mark and lose control of alcohol consumption. Thus there was a sense that helping others might be a strategic move as 'we've all been there before' and 'it could be me', and several participants commented that they would want someone to help them if they were in that position. This often also extended to helping strangers who were on their own too, as women who were outside the support or safety net of their own friendship group were seen as particularly vulnerable:

...if a girl's been sick in the toilet, I'll always wait til she comes out. I've put a girl in a taxi a few times. If she wasn't with her friends then – or she had no-one to look after her – then I feel, like, as *women*, we *do* stick together. I'd like to think that, if *I* was in that position by myself than someone would help me as well. Cause you don't know *what* might happen when they... [pause]... I dunno, pass out or... if they stumbled out by themselves you don't know who's *preying* outside.

(Ruth, 21, doesn't identify with a class, student, straight)

This illuminating quote from Ruth ties together into one example a number of the points outlined around caring for others. This includes the idea that – in the absence of the crucial friendship group – it is important to step in and help other women who might be on their own and lack the support of other women. Like many other participants, Ruth also draws on the more practical reason for helping others; she would like to think that others would also help her were she ever to be in that position. Tying back into discourses of the risks of the NTE, Ruth draws on the power of the vague and nameless threat of 'you don't know *what* might happen', and she also uses other phrases typical of the participants, such as using the word 'preying' to allude to sexual risk from men. Ruth also touches on one of the themes around risk which did link more explicitly to femininity, tapping into discourses of caring and nurturing by arguing that looking out for friends is a gendered process and women are more likely than men to 'stick together' and support one another on a night out. The young women often positioned

their male peers, in contrast, as lacking the same sense of responsibility and less concerned with prioritising looking out for their friends:

...a fair few times, we've seen a girl on her own and she's completely out of it. And you take her under your wing a bit. And it's like, 'Where's your friends? Where do you live?' And come to think of it... it's this sort of, like, *bond* that you have, don't you? Even though, you don't *know* the girl, it doesn't *matter*. Just the fact that she's female. But I don't think *guys* would do that. I think it *is* just this like, girl, sort of, female bond.

(Kimberley, 20, middle-class student, straight)

As highlighted by Ruth and Kimberley, there was a sense that women share a bond or connection with other women. A small number of participants explicitly associated femininity with women adopting a nurturing role and caring for others, and positioned women as naturally inclined to look after others, tying into discourses around femininity and motherhood. However, I argue that tapping into more traditional discourses of femininity in this way may arguably also have acted as a way to mitigate some of the negative associations of drinking and drunkenness. The data aligns with what Stepney describes as 'idealised notions of femininity - a 'good' woman who cares for others' (2014: 110). In other words, describing themselves as caring and supporting other women may allow some women to position themselves as responsible and 'good' drinkers. Lyons and Willott (2008) agree that the women-as-carers discourse may serve to allow individual women to construct themselves as appropriately feminine yet still able to consume alcohol in public spaces (because they are staying in control and caring for others). The data supports this idea and suggests that assisting others who have failed to manage their alcohol consumption and mitigate risk could be seen as a way of distancing oneself from these 'others' who need assistance.

Dimensions of Risk: Gender and Sexuality

Risk was often understood in particular gendered and sexualised ways. Some of these gendered dimensions of risk tied into the ways in which women were positioned as naturally weaker and potentially more vulnerable than men, and also expected to a greater extent to take responsibility for safety and positioned as more likely to be blamed for failing to take appropriate safety measures. This will be explored in the following section, before moving on to explore the ways in which risk was conceptualised as different for heterosexual and non-heterosexual women.

Dimensions of Risk and Gender

Risk management was very frequently understood as a gendered process. Most of the young women claimed that the young men they knew did not think about risk to the same extent as women and were much less likely to limit alcohol consumption and engage in other safekeeping practices:

I don't know whether it's *bravado*, I've had that conversation with a couple of other guys... they *assume* they'll always be able to take care of themselves. And that it'll *never* happen to them... So, you know, guys don't ever think 'Oh, I won't drink to excess' or 'I won't walk home on my own just in case'.

(Donna, 21, middle-class student, queer)

Whilst of course this may only be the perception of the women and it cannot be concluded that this is necessarily true for all or any young men, it is interesting to observe that a considerable number of participants in this research depicted men as unconcerned with risk and as considering themselves to be invincible or less of a target. Whether this is 'true' or not, it may have served to perpetuate ideas amongst the women that they are more weak and vulnerable than men and reinforced gendered hierarchies around how women and men perceive and assess risk. This is particularly interesting because research consistently demonstrates that men are more likely to be both perpetrators and victims of violence within the public sphere (Lindsay, 2012b), suggesting young women's anxieties about risk may be affected to an extent by safety campaigns which continue to be overwhelmingly targeted at young women rather than men (Brooks, 2011: 636). Differences in perceptions of risks for men and women were also tied to the presumed superior strength of men; with a perceived discrepancy in physical size and strength seen as putting women at greater risk than their male counterparts. This was frequently based on the assumption that sexual violence against women on a night out is universally perpetrated by men:

I don't know what the figures are, but men are... I think it's 80% stronger than women. So, you're not really gonna have much of a chance if some big guy *grabs* you. Even a woman who's really into bodybuilding and stuff like that, they're not really gonna have much of a chance, just purely for the size and the frame and stuff.

(Lydia, 21, middle-class student, straight)

Lydia's use of the phrase 'what the figures are' is interesting here as it suggests that there is some sort of undisputable empirical evidence on the superior strength of men. Interestingly, as Campbell (2005) argues, the fear of crime and sexual assault - and the associated safekeeping measures deployed - may actually serve to (re)produce female bodies as weak, making rape seem an inevitable outcome and casting female bodies as 'already victims'. In this sense, power is not just repressive, but also productive as it shapes and produces particular types of vulnerable, feminine bodies. The female body was certainly constructed by some of the participants as lacking in terms of strength and even speed and endurance relative to men, for example with Ruth suggesting that women would likely be unable to punch or out-run an attacker:

I think women feel like they can't defend themselves as much. If someone came up to *me*, and attacked me, then I personally don't have the physical *strength* and I think a lot of females *don't*, whereas men, they *can* punch or.... they could out-run someone.

(21, doesn't identify with a class, student, straight)

Women's doubts around their capacity to physically defend themselves can be linked to feminist work around the female body such as that of Young (1980), who argues that women learn to view their bodies as fragile objects which are not fully within their control and to doubt their abilities and strength rather than engage actively with the world. Whilst Young's argument was made over 30 years ago, it arguably still had relevance for the study participants. The participants' common belief in the alleged superior physical strength of men could work to perpetuate their fear of rape and belief in their own vulnerability. Whilst the rare instances of physical violence or non-sexualised threats had tended to come from other women, none of the participants talked about whether they felt they were capable of defending themselves from this type of threat, highlighting again the ways in which the participants remained largely pre-occupied with the threat of sexual assault or rape from men.

A small number of young women, however, resisted the positioning of women as vulnerable and at high levels of risk, particularly from men. Despite the small numbers making this point, it was often made strongly and passionately, challenging ideas of female vulnerability within the NTE:

EN: So is there any particular reason you stopped carrying a rape alarm?

Just because I'd have more luck kneeling him in the balls, poking him in the eyeballs, giving him a good punch. I used to do weightlifting at school, so I can pack a half-decent punch, especially if someone's drunk.

(Georgina, 20, doesn't identify with a class, student, lesbian)

Some of the young women – such as Georgina - felt that they would be able to physically resist if attacked by a man, although this quote is interesting because Georgina has just been talking about how she used to carry a rape alarm on a night out, suggesting that individual women may be continually renegotiating the ways in which they assess and manage risk. Nicole described the stereotype of the 'defenceless young woman' as 'patronising' and felt she would be able to retaliate if a man threatened her. She also explicitly tied the stereotype into dominant conceptualisations of femininity, and recognised that young men may actually be at greater risk of experiencing violence than young women (Lindsay, 2012b):

...people see yer as defenceless. A defenceless young woman. And it's a bit patronising. It's about femininity in a way, you know, they think 'Ah, poor little girl, walking along by herself... she could get *attacked*'... When actually, 90% of the time... I mean, it *does* happen, and it gets sensationalised in the press... but actually, more young lads get attacked than anything else.

(24, working-class non-student, straight)

Similarly, Kimberley talked about being 'stubborn' and 'independent' regarding her attitude to risk:

A lot of my friends would never walk home alone. *Never*, ever. And they'll get a taxi from a taxi firm that they know, not just like a black cab. But I think that's just me... I *am* very stubborn. I always like to think I'm independent and I don't like to think that somebody else could have a *power* over me or *hurt* me.

(20, middle-class student, straight)

Nicole and Kimberley demonstrate an awareness that expectations around women as vulnerable are shaped by discourses of femininity and power. These and other young women - of a range of class backgrounds and sexualities - are to an extent disregarding or challenging one of the expectations of respectable femininity, which requires women to construct themselves as somewhat passive and 'fearful in public spaces and amongst the unnamed risks stalking the chaotic streets of the night-time economy' (Griffin *et al.*,

2009a: 221). This mirrors the work of Hollander (2002), who reports that young women do not simply internalise discourses around risk unquestioningly and may not simply accept safekeeping measures without challenge. However, only a handful of young women actively resisted these discourses and practices, and attempts to reconfigure women as more powerful and able to effectively mitigate risk were not embraced by all participants:

EN: So why do you think women *don't* think about those kind of risks [walking home alone]?

[long pause]... This is a bit of a *dodgy* answer really but I think it's *more* about the fact that I think women think they... have... [pause]... complete equality... And I don't think that we really *do*... [cut]... Don't get me wrong I'm not an anti-feminist or anything like that, in fact I'm probably more pro-feminist but I don't think that... [pause]... women really understand the risks until it's too late. Because of this culture of, you know, 'we are equal' attitude... I think it's had a bit of a backlash in terms of women thinking it's acceptable to... to walk [alone]... You know, walk in *groups*, that's fine. But walking alone is completely different.

(Lydia, 21, middle-class student, straight)

Lydia reinforces discourses that position women as exposed to various forms of risk in the NTE and suggests women are expected to engage in various safekeeping measures that may limit their independence and free movement through the city and the spaces of the NTE. Feminism is positioned as having damaging effects on women in terms of perpetuating the idea that gender equality has been achieved and women are now at less risk, when Lydia argues that she believes women are still subjected to high levels of gendered risk in the NTE and are still unequal to men and so unable to act like them in terms of their attitudes towards risk.

In contrast to their own practices, when men's risk management was mentioned by the participants it was most commonly constructed as more active and based on individual choice and agency, concerned with men themselves regulating behaviour and choosing not to get involved in fights or do 'daft things':

EN: And do you think that young men think about risk in similar ways to young women?

No. I think they're more likely to focus on not getting in a fight or getting arrested [laughter] for doing daft stuff.

(Susie, 22, middle-class student, straight)

This ties into discourses which position risk-taking behaviour as a desirable characteristic of masculinity (Mitchell *et al.*, 2001) and also naturalises to an extent male aggression. Although this research has only engaged with young women and as such the participants' comments may of course not reflect the realities around risk and safety experienced by young men in the NTE, research with young men *does* suggest that there are gendered distinctions in the ways in which risks are conceptualised, experienced and managed. Haydock found in his research with both men and women in the NTE that whilst women took steps to manage and limit their drinking to stay in control and manage potentially risky, uncomfortable or 'dangerous' situations, men would respond to such situations by deliberately drinking more (in order to 'escape' uncomfortable situations) (2009: 225). This ties into Brooks' argument that whilst women are expected to take responsibility for their own drinking, drunk men are attributed less responsibility for their actions (2008: 343). In contrast, women were positioned as having less of a choice over what happens to them than men; the participants often talked about women's risk management in less agentic ways centred around attempting to avoid drawing attention to themselves and having things done to them by men, such as being harassed, spiked or raped. Whilst such behaviour could be argued to represent a strategic set of choices about how to negotiate risk, the ways in which the young women talked about such strategies appeared arguably more passive than the ways in which they discussed men's risk management. In addition, these practices may be drawn from a fairly limited range of behavioural choices for women within the constraints of appropriate femininity and expectations and norms around safety, risk and victim-blaming (van de Bruggen and Grubb, 2014).

Related to this, recognition of gendered discourses around victim-blaming was widespread across the data. As well as identifying practical safekeeping measures, the young women also frequently described a number of high-risk behaviours which the responsible young woman must avoid:

...you do have it drilled into you from a relatively early age that you don't walk home by yourself... You shouldn't drink too much cause if you do you're definitely gonna get raped...[laughter]... you know, things like that. So I think even if they [women] try to ignore it, it will be in the back of their mind a lot of

the time. Like, walking home thinking ‘I probably shouldn’t be doing this!’ But doing it anyway. [laughter]

(Susie, 22, middle-class student, straight)

Susie presents the risk of getting raped with an element of sarcasm and humour, reflecting the fact that several of the young women recognised the role of - for example - the media in scaremongering and increasing young women’s fear of rape. However, she also recognises that this does impact on women’s actual choices and decisions, placing risk ‘in the back of their mind’ and meaning that even if they do engage in supposed high-risk practices such as walking home or drinking too much, they are likely to feel guilty about it, highlighting the salience of victim-blaming discourses. Other young women talked about how if women do choose to engage in risky practices such as walking home alone, this is often accompanied by feelings of unease, guilt or regret. A small number of women bought into discourses – reinforced in the media (Meyer, 2010) - that attribute blame to young women who were seen to have drunk too much and put themselves in a vulnerable position:

EN: And what do you think when you see a young woman who’s had too much to drink?

Umm [long pause]..... Sometimes I think it’s really sad. Because, you kinda wanna *help* them, because they’re obviously really vulnerable. And then on the flip side, I’m like, ‘You should know your limits’, you know, ‘You kinda brought this.... the only way you can get in that position is by consuming the alcohol yourself’.

(Alex, 19, middle-class student, straight)

However, other young women were critical of this discourse and the elements of ‘victim blaming’ that they felt it perpetuated and reinforced:

...you never get... blame it on the guy. You get ‘Girls, this is what you can do to *avoid* rape; don’t get really drunk, don’t dress provocatively – which is an entire rant in itself! – and then don’t walk home on your own, don’t put yourself in danger’.... to which the obvious flipside should be ‘Make sure guys know what rape is!’

(Donna, 21, middle-class student, queer)

However, even those women who challenged and criticised victim-blaming discourses often continued to be shaped and influenced by them. This demonstrates the powerful

and pervasive impact of traditional discourses around safekeeping, responsibility and femininity and the practical consequences they continue to have for young women.

Dimensions of Risk and Sexuality

Risk was also understood in sexualised as well as gendered ways. Whilst only a small number of the participants overall discussed variations in risk according to sexuality in terms of sexual orientation and preferences, there were strong and interesting differences in opinion amongst those that did. A number of women held a somewhat fatalistic attitude towards risk, where they positioned *all* girls and women as at risk:

I think if you're gonna get sexually assaulted than it's gonna happen, it doesn't matter... whether you're 80.... or.... like, 2. It'll happen, like, whether you're lesbian, straight... gay.

(Ruth, 21, doesn't identify with a class, student, straight)

However, a small number of young women – of a range of sexual orientations - felt that lesbian and bisexual women might be at *less* risk than heterosexual young women:

There's not the same risk because, obviously, lesbians – and when you're out on the gay scene and you're bisexual – you only have to deal with other *women*. Whereas straight women.... have.... guys... And there's obviously a bigger difference with the vulnerability.

(Ally, 21, doesn't identify with a class, student, bisexual)

Here, Ally assumes both that being out on the gay scene as a lesbian or bisexual woman means that only women, rather than men, represent a threat, and also that women are *less* of a threat. This may tie into the earlier discussions around the assumed relative strength of men compared to women. Furthermore, straight women were felt to dress and act more provocatively and so this was seen to increase risk. Lucy argued that even flirting with men could put heterosexual women at increased risk, very much tying into the idea that 'promiscuity' could be seen as risky (see later sections):

I think, obviously if you're a lesbian, obviously you wouldn't be a target to lads in the way a straight person would be. So you wouldn't be worrying 'Aw, are they gonna take advantage of me?' obviously... cause you would never really flirt with them or anything.

(21, doesn't identify with a class, student, straight)

Lucy, and some of the other young women, generally imagined that only heterosexual women were at risk of harassment from straight men, as a result of perceived differences in their behaviour and dress. However, the suggestion that gay, lesbian or bisexual women might be safer in the spaces of the NTE is clearly undermined by the participants' own reports of homophobic abuse and violence, as well as figures suggesting that around 1 in 5 lesbians have experienced homophobic violence or abuse in the last 3 years (Guasp *et al.*, 2013). Several participants who identified as lesbian, bisexual or queer talked about the homophobic abuse they had experienced on nights out, which varied from jeering and catcalling to physical violence. This was typically most pronounced when women were visibly displaying their sexuality - particularly outside of the gay scene - by kissing or holding hands with other women, for example. Reactions from other women tended to be more violent and aggressive, whilst men were more likely to jeer, catcall and try to take photographs or intervene if women were engaging in public displays of their sexuality, particularly kissing other women. This is illustrated by the very different responses from men and women that Fran and Ally received when kissing other women in public:

I've had my face kinda scratched up... scrubbed against a *wall*, so it was a bit of a mess... I'd been out for a cigarette, and I was kissing this girl, and there was a group of girls walking down... And it was like 'Eh you fucking dykes'.... rah rah.... and I think now I should've left it alone, but I didn't want to. And I said 'Look, if you've got a problem, just be reasonable about it. We're not hurting anyone, and if we're offending you, just look the other way and keep walking'... And they were like 'Who do you think you're talking to, you fucking dyke?!'

(Fran, 18, working-class college student, bisexual)

...if you were in a straight club and a guy saw you kissing your girlfriend... they'd be swamping you. And it'd just be like, they'd be trying to get in the middle, or, like, *with* you. And it's just like '*hello*, I'm here with my partner here'.

(Ally, 21, doesn't identify with a class, student, bisexual)

Interestingly, Fran reacted to the harassment (albeit in a calm and measured way) but she argues in hindsight that she 'should've left it alone' and not responded. This was a common reaction to such encounters, for example ignoring abuse or leaving situations to prevent them from escalating was also mentioned:

A lot of the time you can brush it off if it's just one lad jeering. But when it gets to the point where people are in your face, telling you what you're doing is wrong, and it's disgusting and to get out of their city, then I'll leave rather than it escalate.

(Kate, 20, working-class student, lesbian)

Other young women managed the risk of homophobic abuse and violence by avoiding drawing attention to their sexuality in public, demonstrating the ways in which the fear of homophobic reactions from men or women or unwanted attention from men and the heteronormativity of the majority of public spaces continue to act as forms of governance and to police and control 'non-normative' sexual behaviour (Corteen, 2002: 273). Some of the women felt they could avoid drawing attention to themselves by not standing out visually as gay:

I think I'm safe because I don't really look.... I personally don't think I look.... umm.... gay, or like I like girls.

(Ally, 21, doesn't identify with a class, student, bisexual)

Another tactic was to avoid engaging in behaviour and practices that might 'out' their sexuality:

I didn't like to be affectionate in public [with my ex]. It just wasn't me. It's just like... can't deal with it... can't be *bothered* to deal with it. Cause I'm not big into being 'out and proud'... it's just not me. And so it just got a bit... [sigh] *too much* I think, sometimes. And you'd have loads of guys come over, and it's just like 'Leave me alone' basically. So you just wouldn't bother. I think that probably upset my partner a lot.

(Ally, 21, doesn't identify with a class, student, bisexual)

Ally referred to her use of both tactics – despite the fact it could upset her former partner - and felt she was 'safe' on a night out because she was not easily identifiable as bisexual, both because of the way she looked and her avoidance of public displays of affection. Such approaches build on the reflections in Chapter 5 on the ways in which non-heterosexual women may dress in particular ways to 'pass' either as heterosexual or invisible. Mason (2001) also discusses homophobia, sexuality and visibility, with individuals engaging in self-surveillance practices to police visible markers of their sexuality.

Gay space was described as relatively safe by non-heterosexual participants.

Harassment was reported to be more likely to be experienced in spaces such as the Diamond Strip, where men and women are expected to fit a fairly rigid dress code and subscribe to fairly heteronormative codes of behaviour. As Mason (2001) argues, lesbian and bisexual women are likely to construct personal 'safety maps' in order to monitor the potential risk of homophobic violence and adjust behaviour accordingly. Such maps take into account variations in time of day and location, although it is interesting to note that, as highlighted earlier in this chapter, heterosexual women were also likely to create mental maps of safe and less safe spaces. As might be expected, some of the non-heterosexual participants felt that the scene was a much safer space in which to openly display affection towards partners, for example:

Certainly if you were going out in a straight area, that [risk of homophobic abuse] would be something you'd feel very uncomfortable about. You'd have to sit there and go 'do I *want* to go out? Do I want to show *any* sign of affection to my girlfriend at all? Is it worth it, just in case?' That sort of thing. So yeah, definitely a level of risk there. I would feel more comfortable in an LGBT setting in that case.

(Donna, 21, middle-class student, queer)

Gay space was also constructed as a space in which to escape unwanted attention from straight men, but predominantly by non-heterosexual women. Although one of the participants who identified as straight also commented that the gay scene feels safer as there may be less risk of harassment from men, it was predominantly the non-heterosexual participants who talked about the scene in this way. Whilst Skeggs (1999) suggests that gay space may offer a relatively safe haven for straight women in the NTE, and research by Casey (2004) suggested that a decade ago straight young women were increasingly encroaching on gay nightlife spaces in Newcastle, in part to escape the heterosexual male gaze, this was not apparent in this study. However, Casey notes that at the time of the research, accessing the gay scene as a heterosexual woman may have simply been a current trend, and it does appear that ten years later there was less recognition of the scene as a desirable night out space for the young women who identified as straight.

As this section has illustrated, risk was conceptualised along various dimensions of gender and sexuality. The perceived increased risk which the heterosexual woman was imagined to face could be tied into the idea that she was imagined to invite more sexual

attention and potential harassment from men. This begins to allude to the way in which ‘promiscuity’ could be seen as a high-risk behaviour or set of practices for young women, and this will be explored in more detail in the next section.

Risky Practices and Identities: Promiscuity

Much of the discussion around unacceptable, unfeminine and risky dress and behaviour within the NTE centred on female sexuality, with the figure of the ‘slut’ commonly regarded as a focal point of inappropriateness and risk. Thus particular bodies could be positioned as both unfeminine and high-risk. Having said this, discussions around what it means to be ‘slutty’ were often characterised by ambivalence, with several participants claiming that women should be able to dress and act how they want, yet also positioning the ‘slut’ as an unfeminine and risky identity. Such tensions may reflect wider politicised debates where, for example, Slut Walks are organised worldwide to challenge ‘slut-shaming’ and attempt to move towards dismantling the hugely powerful negative connotations of the word ‘slut’. The data certainly suggested that ‘slut’ as a term or label continues to be relevant, meaningful and hugely negative for the young women. As outlined in Chapter 5, the participants typically regarded particular ways of dressing as ‘slutty’, associating this with hyper-femininity and excess. Being labelled as slutty was, however, as much associated with behaviour as dress. There was a general consensus on what would be classified as slutty behaviour, and this was often highly (hetero)sexualised and centred around sexual behaviour and presumed promiscuity. Casual sex was regarded as characteristic of slutty behaviour and ‘high risk’ (although usually in terms of being alone with a stranger rather than risk of pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections), as was kissing several men on a night out:

...if you see a slut, they’re dancing and they’re moving man to man to man, kissing men over and over. You’re *gonna* think, ‘Well she’s a bit of a... gets herself around a bit, doesn’t she?’ I would never shout that out to the person, you know, I’d probably say to my mate ‘Have you seen her over there? She’s a bit of a... how many men has she had in the last ten minutes?’

(Joanna, 24, working-class full-time worker and student, straight)

Very few participants talked about using nights out as opportunities to meet partners or have casual sex, and several actively expressed disapproval of this behaviour (although this may be due in part to the fact that the study involved much discussion around the

girls' night out, and this may be regarded as a particularly inappropriate setting in which to meet partners). More subtle manifestations of perceived slutty behaviour included flirting excessively, dancing in sexualised ways and being regarded as too forward with men. Femininity and respectability were also important here. For example, Kimberley explicitly connects forward and so-called slutty behaviour with being unfeminine:

...people will just say it [describe someone as a slut] as.... they were like, half-naked, and they're kissing loads of boys and... *acting* in an unfeminine way, if you like. Like they're being very *forward*, that's another thing as well, being not [as] refined and *together* as you're meant to be if you're a female.

(20, middle-class student, straight)

Several of the young women recognised that dressing in particular ways was often sufficient to earn a snap judgement and labelling as a 'slut', *regardless* of behaviour. Yet, although many of the participants did describe certain ways of dressing as 'slutty', they often made a distinction between *dressing* in a slutty way and actually *being* a slut in terms of behaviour. For example, Ally described that she and her friends might look at the way another woman was dressed and think 'slut!', but she went on to differentiate between slutty dress and behaviour:

Oh, no [laughter].... I'm not *actually* like 'you're a slut'... it's just like.... [pause].... it's slutty, rather than I'm thinking 'oh my god, you're a slut'... I wouldn't be like 'she goes out and shags everyone' just cause she wears all that. No. You'd just be like 'bit slutty'.

(21, doesn't identify with a class, student, bisexual)

Although most of the young women themselves resisted the idea that dressing in a particular way positions women as sluts, and some advocated that women should be able to wear whatever they want, they often remained aware that society more broadly might continue to make those associations:

I see short dresses and I think 'ah, I like *that*, but I'm not buying it cause it's short and I'm too old... and because people will look and think 'she's a slapper''. And I don't care what anybody says... men will admit it to yer, if some girl's walking round with a short dress on, they'll assume that. And I dunno why, cause to be honest with you, *I* could have a dress down to my knees and be somebody who sleeps around every weekend. You can't, for me, you can't judge someone according to their dress, but it *does* happen.

(Nicole, 24, working-class non-student, straight)

Whilst Nicole argues against the association of particular kinds of dress with certain ways of behaving, she feels that people - particularly men - continue to make such assumptions, and this has consequences regarding what she chooses to wear. Nicole also references age here, describing herself as 'too old' to wear short dresses. This suggests that the same clothes on different bodies can have varied meanings and be read differently by others, particularly around certain markers of identity such as age.

These ambivalences around the meaning of the word 'slut' and how and when it could be used to describe various aspects of dress and behaviour demonstrate the ways in which it could be used flexibly to describe a range of aspects of a woman's appearance and behaviour. Whilst the women were often keen to separate out 'dressing slutty' and 'being slutty', both uses of the term had negative connotations. The very power of the insult 'slut' - and its continued potency - may lie in the fact that it can still be so flexibly and inconsistently deployed to police a variety of ways of looking and acting, as originally argued by Lees (1989):

I've always thought 'what actually *is* a slut? How would you define one? Is it the *actions* or just how they're dressed or... what is it?' I think maybe it's actually just several different things, and you're just *named* it because, you know, apparently *you're it*.

(Kimberley, 20, middle-class student, straight)

Here the 'slut' identity does not particularly need to map onto 'slut' behaviours, but Kimberley suggests that there is some power in the 'naming' associated with labelled being a slut - 'you're it'. A number of young women also made comments around the ways in which they instantly judge other women for dressing, dancing and behaving in certain ways, and they could also use the term 'slut' inconsistently and strategically themselves:

...it would *depend* who it was, which sounds horrible. I have friends who they could go and get with 50 people in a night, and I would just laugh. I have friends that I already - not friends - I *know* people that if they did that, I'd be like 'that's disgusting'. So that's a really *nasty* way of putting it, but I would definitely think of different people in different ways.

(Sophia, 20, middle-class student, straight)

Policing and regulation of women's behaviour was relatively common on a night out and the power of the 'slut' label was evidenced by the fact that the majority of women claimed that being thought of as a 'slut' was the worst thing they could imagine on a night out. As Gill argues 'sexual reputation is still policed punitively and at great cost to some girls whose behaviour is reframed within more negative discourses of female sexuality' (2007: 73). There was, however, some emerging evidence that lesbian and bisexual women are less concerned by the 'slut' label and do not have to manage these particular nuances of sexuality, or that the label is less relevant on the gay scene:

It's *weird*, because that kind of attitude of 'slutty girls', I've never really seen it on the gay scene as much. The only time I would've seen it remotely on the gay scene is if there's been a girl who's been with one girl, and then suddenly another and then suddenly another... something like that. But even then I don't think I've ever heard a girl be called a slut on the gay scene because of that. So it's almost as though it's only if the girl's interacting with a male.

(Eve, 24, doesn't identify with a class, student, bisexual(ish))

Whilst this is an interesting finding, it was only mentioned fleetingly in the data and would necessarily require further research before conclusions could be drawn, particularly as other research argues that young lesbian women may be as subjected to heteronormative 'good girl/slut' binary judgements as their heterosexual peers (Payne, 2010).

Both dressing and behaving in promiscuous or provocative ways were constructed as risky by the young women, tying into ideas that women are expected to take responsibility for their own safety on a night out. Women who let men buy them drinks were regarded as at increased risk of drink-spiking, and going home with strangers or engaging in casual sex were also described as high-risk behaviours, with women seen to be putting themselves in a vulnerable position in terms of being alone with a stranger. Likewise, revealing clothing was associated with getting unwanted attention from heterosexual men. Although there was frequently resistance to the idea that young women could be 'asking for it' in terms of harassment, assault or rape, some young women did connect certain ways of dressing with enticing or encouraging men:

I don't wanna say, asking for it, because that's not what I mean. Because that makes it sound like they're asking for rape and stuff like that, and I certainly don't think anything like that. But it is, sort of like... *enticing* the lads to pay you sometimes unwanted attention.

(Susie, 22, middle-class student, straight)

...men think with their penises, so women who *are* dressed more provocatively, they're showing off their figure, they're showing what they've got, and how *good* they look. And compared to a woman who has her figure *hidden*, she's a lot more attractive. Chances are you're gonna want her more than someone who's... like straight up and down with their figure hidden.

(Kate, 20, working-class student, lesbian)

Some of the participants even proposed that dress and behaviour should to an extent be 'toned down' to minimise harassment. If dressing in a hypersexualised manner was associated with attracting unwelcome sexual attention and harassment, the proposed solution was to – as Lydia put it – 'dull it down' in terms of dress, or dress in a less 'provocative' way:

You've got to dress appropriately cause you've got to be careful that you don't give the wrong impression, and you don't lead people on.

(21, middle-class student, straight)

Toning down sexualised behaviour as well as dress was also important for some of the young women in order to avoid attention or appearing to be 'leading guys on':

If you flirt too much, then that's always a bad thing [laughter]. Cause you don't wanna lead guys on, make them think that they have a chance of something.

(Emma, 20, working-class student, bisexual)

Gail also felt that an 'overperformance' of femininity places women at increased risk within the NTE and talked about feeling 'a lot more safe' when not dressed or behaving in a conventionally feminine way, particularly outside the gay scene:

I was having a conversation with my friend about this, cause she really overperforms femininity on a night out. And she said that's the only way she'll feel good when she's out. But *I* don't feel like it's very *safe*. I feel a lot more safe if I'm *not* doing it.

EN: So why doesn't it feel safe?

I think you just feel like you're in the sorta... *gaze*... of everybody in a club if you're doing that. And you're sort of on their *radar*, especially if it's in a straight club with all these men trying to pick somebody up. Say if you're out in

some club, and it's all these guys trying to pick up women, and you're, kind of like, 'Oh I'm dressed up'... and you look like you're going out to get with someone. You're probably *not* but I guess that's what they assume, right? So you just get to the point where you're thinking, 'Oh there's really predatory men *watching* us'.

(24, middle-class student, bisexual)

Gail felt a hyper-feminine appearance may draw the gaze of predatory, straight men who are 'trying to pick somebody up'. She described her concerns about young men who may watch young women to see if they get too drunk, become separated from their friends or appear vulnerable. In a night out setting where women's bodies are frequently subjected to the gaze of both men and other women, and where - to an extent - sexualised displays of femininity are valued and recognised, some young women felt that dressing in alternative ways could render them invisible to both other women and men. Gail also commented that 'people don't *see* you if you're a woman and you're not really dressed up'. Invisibility through dress was also felt by some of the other young women to minimise unwanted attention and harassment from men:

...when I was younger, I would go out, not quite in drag but, you know, enough that I was androgynous. And I wouldn't get the harassment that I would, if I'd went out all girlied up.

(Fran, 18, working-class college student, bisexual)

Fran talked at various points about preferring to dress in non-sexualised ways that position her as 'invisible' within the NTE. This clearly supports Corteen's (2002) argument that non-heterosexual women may be more concerned with 'passing' as invisible rather than heterosexual by playing down femininity to escape the male gaze entirely (see Chapter 5). Interestingly, some of the heterosexual women also engaged in these processes of toning down dress to position themselves as invisible within the NTE, suggesting Corteen's argument can be extended beyond lesbian and bisexual communities.

There was a very interesting sense that there are complex and potentially shifting boundaries in terms of promiscuity. As outlined in Chapter 5, the young women argued that women are typically expected to get dressed up for a girls' night out and to be seen to be making more effort than during the day, yet avoid trying too hard and being labelled as slutty. Being feminine was often felt to require a certain level or amount of

sexualised dress and flirtatious behaviour, but it was important to avoid crossing the line into sluttiness:

EN: And what do you think it would mean to act in a feminine way on a night out?

I guess... umm.... [pause].... I guess... it would be.... to, kind of..... drink the girly drinks, and dress in a certain way, as in dresses and heels and things like that. And maybe flirt a little bit, but I think people almost have created this fine line between feminine and slutty, to the point where you can be feminine to a certain extent, but then, if you're feminine *and* you flirt too much then suddenly you're slutty.

(Eve, 24, doesn't identify with a class, student, bisexual(ish))

If femininity in the past was, like, this thing about being very controlled in your actions, and very classy, I think the pressure on women to be really sexually available on a night out kind of disrupts that a bit, because it's not quite the same ideal. So it makes it kinda like 'Oh you have to be feminine to a *degree* but then you have to be *this* to a degree as well'.

(Gail, 24, middle-class student, bisexual)

Both Eve and Gail argue that women are required to be feminine and flirtatious - or even sexually available - on a night out, but only to an 'extent' or a 'degree', recognising that there are boundaries here. Other young women noted that a double standard is in operation whereby women are actually expected to dress in sexualised ways and invest time and labour into looking physically attractive, but are then subject to ridicule by other women or to negative judgement if they receive unwanted attention as a result. Eve describes the boundary as a 'fine line', implying it may be difficult to manage. Additionally, Eve's use of the phrase 'suddenly you're slutty' suggests the line between 'sexy' and 'slutty' may be a thin one that is all too easy to cross. Donna also describes the ways in which women must manage 'the tightrope' between 'sexy' and 'slutty', echoing Papayanis' (1999) argument on the ways in which female sexuality is controlled through turning bodies of desire into bodies of disgust (cited in Skeggs, 2005):

...you end up running the tightrope between trying to dress up and make an effort, and look sexy. And then you get people, including other girls, turning round and being like, 'Ah she's dressed like a slag, look at her'.

(Donna, 21, middle-class student, queer)

Again, notions of excess were important in shaping where the boundaries between appropriate 'sexy' dress and hyper-feminine and slutty dress might lie. As Eve notes, flirting 'a little bit' is seen as having value, in contrast to flirting 'too much'. This was supported by other young women, including Lydia, who described the ways in which it was possible to be 'too much' of a girl:

You've gotta be really careful that you don't overstep the mark, or be too much of a *girl*... getting a bit too drunk and flirtatious and stuff like that. You don't wanna leave them with the attitude of, you know, you're unreliable, you're untrustworthy and stuff like that. So, you gotta be careful.

EN: So what does that mean, to be too much of a girl?

Being like, quite flirtatious... getting what you want... talking to different men - I'm not meaning, like, sleeping with them, I'm not meaning *anything* like that - but implying that you're quite happy to.... [pause]... I dunno - not get around - but quite happy to almost, like, network but be very flirtatious, have a bit of a laugh, go outside smoking, be surrounded by men and that sort of thing.

(21, middle-class student, straight)

It is important to note that young women do not even need to actually engage in sexual activity with men to earn a negative reputation, even the act of *implying* they might be happy to do so, though flirting or being 'surrounded by men' can position women as 'unreliable' and 'untrustworthy' (although it is not clear if Lydia means this in terms of being seen as untrustworthy by potential heterosexual male partners or rather by other women as a threat). If being 'too much' of a girl is associated with excessive flirting, this implies that being a girl in the first place is characterised by *some* flirtatious behaviour. This is interesting as it might be expected that being 'girly' could to an extent be safer than being 'feminine', associated with innocence and coyness, whilst femininity might be associated more with being sexualised or with sexual maturity. However, the data suggests that even being too 'girly' could be risky for young women (see Chapter 7 for further discussion). This also mirrors Griffin et al.'s argument that young women are 'called on to look and act as agentically sexy within a pornified night-time economy, but to distance themselves from the troubling figure of the 'drunken slut' (2013: 184) at the same time. Lydia's comments refer specifically to flirting and related behaviour in a heterosexual context, suggesting it is possible to be *too* heterosexual or to be heterosexual in the 'wrong' kinds of ways.

These examples around sexuality and promiscuity suggest that – to an extent – some sort of toning down or controlling of sexuality, dress, behaviour and even girliness is required within the NTE, partly in order to control men’s responses. This is supported by other research in more general contexts that suggests women are expected to avoid adopting overtly sexualised identities, avoid sexually assertive behaviour and remain silent regarding their own desires (Stewart, 1999). It is particularly interesting that women are required to control the ways in which their sexuality and sexualised identities are made visible through processes of ‘toning down’ dress and behaviour in order to avoid giving heterosexual men ‘the wrong impression’ or being seen to be ‘leading them on’. Women are held responsible for men’s behaviour towards them, and, arguably the conventionally feminine or ‘attractive’ women may experience difficulties in managing how she is read by men and other women. This ties into other research suggesting that women continue to be expected to keep not just their own sexuality in check, but that of young men as well, mirroring literature which argues that women are frequently positioned as the ‘guardians’ of male sexuality (Batchelor *et al.*, 2004) and echoing dominant messages in many sex education resources targeted at young people (Holland *et al.*, 1994). Much of these findings challenge the idea that female sexuality and desire are increasingly recognised in the media and society more broadly, with McRobbie’s reflections on the visibility of contemporary media characters ‘brazenly enjoy their sexuality’ (2004: 12) in ‘a growing culture of hypersexuality’ (2004: 9) still appearing to sit some distance from the realities of young women’s lives. As well as keeping their sexuality in check in this way, women also talked about how they were expected to control aggressive behaviour and avoid violence in the NTE, as the next section will illustrate.

Risky Practices and Spaces: Violence and Aggression

For the majority of young women, it was seen as highly important to avoid violence in the NTE, whether as victim or perpetrator. This section will highlight the - often classed - ways in which particular spaces were constructed as high-risk and to be avoided. Similarly, the ways in which young women talked - or remained silent - about perpetrating violence were often shaped by classed dynamics.

Risk and aggression were often associated with particular spaces in the NTE, linking back to the discussion in Chapter 4 where particular behaviours such as drunkenness

and rowdiness were often confined to the Bigg Market. As Hubbard (2007) argues, part of the excitement of participating in the NTE centres around negotiating the various ‘pleasures and dangers’ of a night out through drawing on practical knowledge of the city to seek out certain spaces or situations and avoid others. This was relevant for the participants in a number of ways, mirroring the findings of Green and Singleton (2006), who argue that women are forced to adopt a number of safekeeping strategies to navigate public space, including regarding certain areas as ‘off-limits’ and avoiding ‘risky’ spaces such as alleyways:

I’d never walk home cause I live in Heaton and it’s just a bit too far. And dangerous.

EN: Why’s it dangerous?

Well, I’d either have to walk through Northumbria campus, if I was going that way, or I’d have to walk across Byker Bridge, and I don’t particularly like walking through Byker during the day... never mind at night by myself!

(Susie, 22, middle-class student, straight)

Byker is well-recognised as a particularly working-class area of the city, highlighting the way in which classed assumptions shape the ways in which women construct safety maps of the city and assess the risk levels of certain spaces. The young women also had mental maps of the city centre which positioned certain spaces and the people within them as risky or dangerous. The places, parts of town or venues that young women most liked to go to were frequently those that felt safe and familiar. As recognised in other research by Holt and Griffin (2005), the tensions and perceived differences between local women and students were important, particularly for students, some of whom clearly felt more comfortable and safe frequenting venues where other students go:

I personally feel more comfortable where other students go. That’s why I never go out on the weekend. Because I just don’t feel comfortable. I just think the Geordies are really loud or whatever, and that’s not really my scene. I prefer the students and, cause they’re my *age*, I think it’s like more appro-, not *appropriate*, actually yeah, I think it’s more appropriate because if I’m with people my age, I just think it’s more comfortable.

(Alex, 19, middle-class student, straight)

Although Alex constructs this as being about age, as explored in Chapter 4, particular spaces and venues within the NTE were also heavily classed by participants,

particularly when distinctions were being made between students and locals. Alex talks about feeling more comfortable in student spaces, yet as Corteen argues, there may be a fine line ‘between feeling uncomfortable and feeling unsafe’ (2002: 272), implying that the student spaces associated with comfort and appropriateness are likely to be seen as safe. Eldridge and Roberts (2008a) also draw on the important role of ‘belonging’, ‘inclusion’ and ‘comfort’ in the ways in which their focus group participants talked about their spatialised understandings of safety and risk on nights out. In the current study Kimberley talked about the reasons she likes particular bars in the upmarket student area of Jesmond:

...the *crowd* of people [are] more studenty and more ‘us’... sort of ‘comfort’ environment, where in town sometimes you get some people that are a bit too rowdy. So that’s before we get to the clubs. And then, club-wise, usually we just tend to stick to the same clubs as well, cause we’re *familiar* with them and we feel comfortable and safe with them. And again, I think it’s that feel of a student sort of environment.

(20, middle-class student, straight)

Again, notions of comfort and familiarity were important here, as was the distinction between student and non-student venues. Kimberley also ties comfort and safety together explicitly. As regards more risky spaces within the city’s NTE, the Bigg Market - and to a lesser extent, the nearby Gate - were labelled as problematic spaces in terms of violence. As discussed in Chapter 4, these areas were frequently associated by students with the presence of ‘others’ (working-class, older locals) and regarded as sites of heavy alcohol consumption. This process was very much classed, as evident in the choices of words often associated with the Bigg Market, such as ‘chav’, ‘cheap’ and ‘radgy’, mirroring the findings of Lindsay, who argues that the imagined violent contexts within her own research on the Australian NTE were frequently spatialised and described as ‘rough’ working-class areas; although - interestingly - she also found that university students were just as likely to experience violence as non-professional workers (2012b: 241):

EN: And is there anywhere else that you wouldn’t tend to like to go when you’re on a night out?

Umm.... the Bigg Market. Just because it's.... [pause].... got, like, *local* people, who are a bit... [pause] – as they say – *radgy*.⁵

(Ruth, 21, doesn't identify with a class, student, straight)

The Bigg Market is recognised in the literature as a quintessentially Geordie area embodying local drinking cultures, with its 'boisterous and sexually charged atmosphere' and local reputation as a carnivalesque space (Hollands and Chatterton, 2002: 308), although it was generally viewed more negatively in the data. The - at times intense - focus on the Bigg Market as a hotbed of violence and crime drew attention away from violence in other areas, particularly the so-called 'Diamond Strip' on Collingwood Street associated with more 'classy' bars and popular amongst the majority of participants, regardless of class. Despite the local media naming Collingwood Street a 'crime hotspot' - with the street experiencing the highest reported number of violent and sexual crimes in the region in 2013 (Doughty, 2014) - it is the revellers within the Bigg Market who are associated with crime and violence:

...all the glassings, stabbings, people getting stabbed with machetes and stuff, it's always in the Bigg Market.

(Susie, 22, middle-class student, straight)

The imagined risks posed by the Bigg Market could also include a perceived increased risk of harassment from both men and women. However, it is interesting to note that despite the risks apparently associated with these spaces - or more accurately the people within them - a number of the young women did recount tales of times when they *had* actually been out in the Bigg Market, or at least passed through it. Particular experiences in the Bigg Market were often recounted with humour and relish, sometimes in great detail:

Oh, it was a few Saturdays ago – I don't really like to go out on Saturdays anyway cause I like to go where students go, [I] feel more comfortable with people my own age around.... everyone's in the same boat. We went into this *bar* in the Bigg Market – we thought it would be funny – for like, *five minutes*. Just to see what it was like. And it *was*... everyone kind of looked the same – I know people probably think that about where we go – umm....[pause].... But, it was full of *older* people, and they're all drinking *beer* and everyone was just kinda stood around, no-one was dancing, and all the women were looking

⁵ 'Radgy' is a derogatory term similar to 'charver' but focusing more specifically on presumed violent and aggressive behaviour

everyone up and down all the time. And it just made me feel really uncomfortable. Like, *they* obviously didn't expect *us* to be in there. And probably, if they came to *our* bars then we'd be like 'Why are *they* in here?!' You know, it's like.... misplacement, I dunno. I felt misplaced in there.

(Ruth, 21, doesn't identify with a class, student, straight)

When Ruth explains why she and her friends went into a bar on the Bigg Market, initially she justifies it as a way to pass the time because it was too busy at that time to get a taxi home, but then goes on to say that she felt it might be 'funny' to experience something different, and admits to a level of intrigue and wanting to 'see the kinds of people that were in there'. This may suggest that there was some element of intrigue or something perceived to be in some way 'exotic' about these types of venue. As Holt and Griffin (2005) argue in their own research on students' and locals' use of the NTE, the 'exotic' working-class local and the spaces they frequent can simultaneously be viewed with both disgust and fascination, and 'local' venues may be deliberately sought out because they are seen as risky and authentic. Yet when actually there, Ruth clearly felt uncomfortable and 'misplaced' - suggesting that she may have become the exotic one in this space - and tying into the points made around the familiar feeling safe and comfortable and the unfamiliar feeling uncomfortable and risky. She draws on a number of factors that distinguish the clientele within the bar from the students in the venues she frequents; interestingly this includes othering those present in the bar for their beverage choice and the way they were behaving. Like some of the other participants, Ruth also constructed the locals who visit the Bigg Market as typically older, and stressed that she preferred to go out in more familiar spaces with other, younger students. Age was also mentioned by Susie in her example of an 'accidental' trip to the Bigg Market:

I remember *accidentally* going into the Bigg Market in first year, ended up in a bar and... this woman who, she must have been in her fifties, I think I just glanced at her, and she was just giving me the dirtiest look *ever!* Like 'God, my mum's gonna punch me!' [laughter]

(22, middle-class student, straight)

Although there may have been elements of the exotic in young women's tales of visiting the Bigg Market, overall there was a great deal of negativity associated with these experiences. Hollands and Chatterton first suggested that the area could be associated with making certain revellers feel afraid and intimidated over a decade ago, particularly for 'groups unfamiliar with the area or those who do not look the same'

(2002: 308). They even raised doubts over whether the Bigg Market area could ‘move with the times’ and compete with other city centre areas. The concerns raised here appear to have been borne out, as the spaces of the Bigg Market appeared to be regarded as intimidating and undesirable for the majority of the young women.

The young women were also very much expected to avoid perpetrating violence or engaging in any aggressive behaviour themselves. According to the participants, the violent or confrontational young woman on a night out represented all that the respectable and feminine woman was not. In spaces where women are expected to tone down their dress and behaviour and not react to provocation, being aggressive was very widely regarded as inappropriate. Tying into the discussions in Chapter 4 around loud and rowdy behaviour, several young women described being aggressive or violent in the spaces of the NTE as unfeminine and inappropriate:

Ooh, acting *unfeminine*? That would be being rude to the barman or the bouncer. You know, being shouty and swears and possibly violent as well.... that’s unfeminine behaviour. [cut]... Going back to that idea of being ladylike... cause a lady [is] somebody who’s *polite* and, you know.... doesn’t *swear*, doesn’t *attack* people or call them rude *names*.

(Donna, 21, middle-class student, queer)

As suggested by Donna, several of the young women constructed women who do fight or respond to provocation on a night out as unfeminine or unladylike. Not drawing attention to oneself and actively avoiding any form of confrontation were regarded as key elements of respectable and risk-averse behaviour on a night out for a number of participants. Notions of (in)visibility were key in terms of avoiding confrontation, as young women frequently sought to avoid notice and attention and refused to react to any form of provocation from other women or men:

EN: And is there any way that *you* change your behaviour or anything in particular that *you* do to minimise risk on a night out?

I really wouldn’t wanna draw attention to myself. And if I was walking down the street and I *had* had a bit to drink... instinctively I just don’t.... if men are shouting at you, I just don’t *react*.

(Alex, 19, middle-class student, straight)

This mirrors Reay's findings from research with younger girls demonstrating that 'nice girls' who bought into conventional femininity did not challenge harassment and bullying from male pupils 'but rather developed avoidance strategies which further circumscribed their practices' (2001: 159). This suggests that women are encouraged from a young age to avoid responding to or confronting harassment and violence, partly for strategic purposes.

Some of the participants, particularly the middle-class students, associated fighting more with working-class, local women. Sometimes this was a more implicit connection, for example through talking about the Bigg Market as a working-class part of town where female violence and heavy drinking were common. This mirrors Holt and Griffin's findings that middle-class students' descriptions of nights out are characterised by 'a strong territorial element in which 'they' (i.e. 'locals') are represented as 'the ones that do all the violence'' (2005: 258) (although arguably the accuracy of such assumptions can be challenged). Some of the young women made this connection more explicitly:

When girls fight... I hardly ever see girls fight that are... maybe students or my friends. My friends would never fight on a night out, like proper physical. But then maybe.... lower class people maybe fight more on a night out.

(Alex, 19, middle-class student, straight)

These classed discourses around female aggression allowed women to position themselves as respectable and ladylike on a night out in contrast to others. However, some of the local young women resisted the idea that fighting was always inappropriate on a night out. This challenges to an extent Lindsay's (2012b) conceptualisation of women as 'peacekeepers' whose main exposure to violence is to police the behaviour of young men, and supports other research that demonstrates that female-to-female violence may actually occur as frequently as male-to-male violence on nights out (Forsyth and Lennox, 2010):

I *don't* see it as unacceptable to fight. I won't start a fight but if someone has a go at me then after a few drinks I will, kind of, fight back.

(Fran, 18, working-class college student, bisexual)

Aspects of toughness and pride were tied to the Geordie identity by some of the participants, highlighting some of the ways in which class, 'Geordieness' and conceptualisations of femininities intersect. Day (2010) agrees that working-class women in the North of England may be more likely to buy into classed values of toughness and stoicism than gendered values of passivity and respectability, and there was some evidence of this in the data. However, this toughness and pride was often qualified in terms of never being the one to start or initiate a fight, as Fran suggests. Day *et al.* (2003) also found similar boundaries in their focus groups with working-class women; for example sufficient provocation was often required in order to legitimise women's involvement in fights. Similarly, Nicole claimed she would defend herself if someone else initiated a fight:

...if somebody is gonna turn around and whack yer in the face, and attack yer, are yer gonna stand there and let them?

(24, working-class non-student, straight)

Aggression could be legitimatised in particular contexts where it was positioned as a means of self-defence or protection. In contrast, going out and 'looking' for a fight was always constructed negatively, and this distinction could be used as a way for working-class women to distinguish themselves from 'charvers':

I *am* from a working-class background, and I don't have any bones about that, *but* I do think in my *head*, I don't behave like that... [cut]... We don't *behave* like the young charvers who go out fighting and all that kinda stuff.

(Nicole, 24, working-class non-student, straight)

Thus certain women can be positioned outside of femininity through their physicality, whilst Nicole associates herself again with that respectable working-class identity through her use of the tern 'we' to describe the collective values and behaviours of the respectable Geordie in contrast to 'charvers'. Similarly, Jade differentiated herself from women who initiate fights:

Women in the Bigg Market who are dressed very scantily, and starting fights and stuff, I think they probably don't really think that that is inappropriate behaviour.

(Jade, 23, working-class non-student, straight)

This quote is particularly interesting as it ties together a number of themes that span across all three data analysis chapters. Firstly, Jade contains inappropriate and unfeminine practices within the spaces of the Bigg Market. She describes the Bigg Market elsewhere as a working-class space and associates the women who frequent the Bigg Market with particular sexualised and revealing ways of dressing. Finally, these women are positioned as going out and *starting* fights rather than using aggression as an acceptable response to provocation or the threat of violence initiated by others.

The provocation for a fight need not just be a direct threat or act of violence from another woman; behaviour such as dancing with a woman's partner could also be a sufficient trigger for a violent response, mirroring the findings of Forsyth and Lennox (2010) that fights involving female combatants on a night out tend to most commonly be linked to sexual jealousy. Donna described an incident on the scene where a young woman spat on another woman who had been 'hitting on her girlfriend', and Fran recounted a similar occasion:

I went with my partner and his friends and I saw this *girl* grinding up against him. And I was like, 'Right, I'm gonna fucking boot her if she doesn't move'. So I was standing there looking at her, and she just smiled at us, as if to say 'You could never get him'. And like.... 'Ok, we'll see!' I went up to him, and gave him a nice cuddle, and swung around, went like that and properly kicked her!

(18, working-class college student, bisexual)

Interestingly, these forms of aggression did not generally appear to be bound by sexuality, as Donna's example took place on the gay scene and involved a non-heterosexual couple whereas Fran's encounter occurred when she was out with her male partner. Mirroring the findings of Day *et al.* (2003), anecdotes of violence or aggression were often recounted with relish and humour, for example by Fran when explaining why she likes her Doc Marten shoes:

But it is what I love about Doc Martens, cause they're multi-purpose, you know? You can wear them through the day and wear them on a night out for... [pause].... booting skanks!

(18, working-class college student, bisexual)

'Skanks' in this context is used to describe women who attempt to flirt with Fran's partner, highlighting the fact that physical retaliation can be seen as justified against certain types of women who are in some way deemed to be acting inappropriately or promiscuously. Fran also outlined other examples, including times when she had retaliated physically against a man who touched her on a night out, demonstrating that violence may be deployed against both other women and men. It is - however - important to note that whilst it is true that it was generally the working-class women who talked more openly about engaging in violent or aggressive behaviour when required on a night out, this does not necessarily mean that middle-class women do not ever engage in violence, or that working-class women are more aggressive. Rather aggression may play a role in the construction of some working-class femininities in a way that is not comparable for middle-class women (or possibly these working-class women may be more willing to talk about it). Day *et al.* agree that in their own research having a reputation as 'tough' or 'hard' was seen to have value by the women, leading the authors to argue that 'physical aggression can be understood as playing an important role in the construction of working-class femininities in ways that 'make sense' in local classed contexts' (2003: 141) where women do not have access to more traditional feminine identities as respectable and controlled. Day (2010) also draws on the role of heavy drinking and violence in 're-writing' gendered and feminine identities in ways that resist constructions of feminine bodies as submissive, restrained and passive (although at the same time may buy into scripts of masculinity that might have undesirable consequences for women).

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted some of the young women's key beliefs around risk and safekeeping. The data clearly shows that women continue to modify their behaviour in order to manage perceived risks and are still affected by 'victim-blaming' discourses that position women as the guardians of their own safety and reputations. This at least partly challenges the idea that women's engagement with the NTE enables them to engage in hedonistic and carefree ways with an increasingly 'feminised' space, particularly in all-female groups. This chapter has also highlighted some of the ways in which risk is clearly classed, gendered and sexualised in different ways, for example through the positioning of particular spaces and identities as more risky or 'at risk' than others.

Building on Chapter 4, just as unfeminine drinking practices and being loud and lairy could be ‘contained’ within spaces such as the Bigg Market, allowing participants to construct their own drinking practices as feminine and responsible, the mapping of the Bigg Market as more risky and dangerous allowed other parts of the city centre to be positioned as relatively safe, limiting the many potential *perceived* threats of a night out to a small part of the city and allowing women within these spaces to be depicted as irresponsible or aggressive. Although this mapping of risk to confine it to particular spaces could be seen as having benefits for the young women in terms of facilitating the construction of their own, more positive identities on a night out, clearly this strategy could also be understood as limiting their movement and freedom in public leisure spaces (see Green and Singleton, 2006). The young women felt that considerable parts of the NTE made them feel uncomfortable or out of place, or even at risk. These theorisations around risk and the ways in which it might be mitigated again undermine the idea that engagement with the NTE is an entirely pleasurable, carefree and hedonistic experience for young women.

As the chapter shows discourses around visibility and control are also key here and can be used to help make sense of some of the ways in which non-heterosexual women police their appearance and behaviour to reduce risk within the NTE. However, notions of (in)visibility may be equally important in understanding the ways in which heterosexual women manage risk too. Risk management strategies typically required a toning down of dress, behaviour and drinking levels to avoid drawing attention to the self and avoid harassment and violence. Risk management was typically concerned with blending in and avoiding too overt a display of drunkenness, aggression or sexuality. Women are thus expected to enact hyper-sexualised, exaggerated and excessive forms of femininity within the NTE (Griffin *et al.*, 2013: 186) *to an extent*, whilst remaining mindful of the need to be seen as respectable and appropriately feminine. As with dress management and drinking practices, it can be possible to be ‘too much’ of a girl or ‘too girly’, reinforcing the ways in which women are required to walk particular fine lines in terms of the extent to which - and the ways in which - they invest in feminine identities and practices. Interestingly, whilst girliness was seen as desirable to an extent, women are expected to avoid being ‘*too much of a girl*’; being too flirtatious or promiscuous and ‘leading men on’. This builds on Rudolfsdottir and Morgan’s suggestion that women are expected to contain their sexuality ‘to avoid being harmed by predatory men

but also to ‘protect’ men from misreading the signals about your sexual availability’ (2009: 500). In the heterosexual economy, women are thus responsible both ‘for the desires they evoke in others and the consequences others’ desires have for themselves’ (2009: 503). This clearly links to ideas of control which have represented a common theme across the three data analysis chapters, and will be explored in more detail in the next and final chapter. This chapter will also summarise key findings of the research, explore particular areas of interest in more detail and make recommendations for future research.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter will explore the main findings and contributions of the study, focusing on ways in which young women negotiate feminine identities through experiences, practices and behaviours and some of the tensions inherent in these negotiations. I will also consider the extent to which the NTE might represent a form of empowerment and/or a way for young women to rewrite the scripts of femininity (Waitt *et al.*, 2011). The management of femininities will be conceptualised as a ‘tightrope’, recognising the continued salience of Measham’s (2002) work on the ‘controlled loss of control’ and expanding it to make sense of where the wider boundaries of appropriate femininities sit in terms of intoxication and behaviour. This chapter will then go on to expand upon a number of conceptually interesting findings emerging from the data. I will unpack some of the blurrings and intersections of the meanings of terms such as ‘femininity’, ‘hyper-femininity’ and ‘girly’. I will then explore how the study contributes to theoretical understandings of classed processes of othering, highlighting the nuances of classification in the post-industrial North East both between and *within* classes. Finally, I will draw attention to some of the gaps in the findings and highlight recommendations for further research.

‘(Un)doing’ Femininities in the NTE

For many of the young women in this study, engaging with the NTE represented an important part of their social lives. This builds on much recent research that challenges traditional depictions of public alcohol consumption as a male activity by highlighting women’s greater involvement in leisure activities centred around drinking and participation in the NTE (Sheehan and Ridge, 2001; Day *et al.*, 2004). Nights out provided ways to not just do femininities, but also ways to ‘loosen up’, relax and strengthen and cement friendships. However, there was also evidence that engaging with the NTE could play a role in facilitating the collective and individual ‘doing’ - and sometimes ‘undoing’ - of femininities or girliness in a number of ways.

Whilst the NTE is increasingly recognised as a useful avenue through which to research young people’s lives, less attention has been given to the girls’ night out as a specific type of engagement with the NTE that may illuminate some of the nuances in the ways

in which young women might 'do' gender and femininities. The data clearly showed that the concept of the girls' night out had meaning for all of the participants and there was a consensus on what this entailed; an all-female night out where getting ready together and consuming alcohol at one of the women's houses took on a central role. These nights offered opportunities to individually and collectively engage in particular practices that the women recognised as 'feminine', and also offered ways in which to do female friendships. There was some overlap between the two; simply being a part of the all-female friendship group and enjoying 'girl time' could represent a way to do femininity. Similarly, engaging in particular shared practices of alcohol consumption such as drinking more feminine drinks together was associated with both femininities and friendships. Some participants talked about drinking different beverages on a girls' night out to those they would normally choose to drink in order to buy into collective enactments of femininity and friendship through, for example, sharing a bottle of wine. The girls' night out was also a space in which trust could be established between members of the female friendship group, particularly when looking out for one another's wellbeing in the NTE. The girls' night out was also felt to necessitate a particular level of investment in feminine dress and appearance, requiring a level of effort to be made that might not be needed in other settings. Collective processes of getting dressed up and ready together before leaving the house were positioned as a key way in which to do femininity and mark out private, women-only time and space. Often, getting ready and consuming alcohol together in domestic spaces was positioned as a great source of pleasure and sometimes the highlight of the night. These findings offer a challenge to the work of – for example - Bancroft (2012), who suggests women's pre-drinking is a practical cost-saving measure to achieve a level of drunkenness before going out rather than a pleasurable experience in itself.

This is not to say that the types of practices or behaviours outlined above are never important or relevant for other types of participation in the NTE, yet arguably the girls' night out - with the centrality of 'girly time' and the particular collective processes of getting ready and drinking – may offer specific and nuanced ways in which to do femininities and friendships which are not present in other types of night out, and perhaps also specific types of *pressure* to do femininity. There was certainly evidence from some of the women who were less invested in doing femininity that they *did* feel more pressure to engage in 'feminine' dress and drinking practices on the girls' night out. The sources of such pressure may arguably come both externally from societal

expectations and/or the immediate peer group, and internally from the young women themselves. The data highlighted that a certain degree of policing of women's behaviour, dress and drinking practices took place within the friendship group itself, and the consequences of violating norms around femininities and friendships could be very real, including being excluded from participating in nights out with female friends for failing to buy into being 'one of the girls' through practices, choices and behaviour.

This study also set out to highlight some of the tensions young women might experience in their negotiations of femininities in a supposed 'post-feminist' society, providing empirical data to inform ongoing theoretical debates around the contradictions inherent in contemporary models of femininity (Budgeon, 2014). The data clearly highlighted that both on a girls' night out and more generally, the young women worked to find the balance between getting moderately drunk and 'overshooting'. In a drinking culture shaped by an 'imperative to intoxication' (Griffin *et al.*, 2013), the young women felt pressure to consume alcohol in order to reconfigure themselves as fun and sociable. Yet they recognised that there continues to be a fine line between acceptable levels of intoxication and unacceptable drunkenness. A decade ago, Day *et al.* (2004) argued that drunkenness could be positioned as unfeminine, unattractive and risky and this study highlights that such conceptualisations continue to be highly relevant as women pass judgement on other women perceived to be 'too drunk'. These processes of passing judgement could be fraught with contradictions as several of the young women felt that they had been in that position before. Notions of excess and control are also highly relevant here in shaping the boundaries between being 'tipsy' and 'wasted'; moderate drinking is permitted - even encouraged - yet excessive drinking and drunkenness can still be regarded as representing a problematic lack of control and restraint.

Similarly, it was felt to be important to invest in the production of a somewhat exaggerated femininity in terms of appearance for a night out. Making an effort was very frequently highlighted as important, although there were nuances around how much additional effort might be required for different types of engagement with the NTE. Whilst making the appropriate amount of effort was strongly tied to normative femininity in the NTE, it was crucial to avoid looking 'overdone'. In other words, whilst some exaggeration of the typically 'feminine' parts of the body was normalised and expected, there was still a sense that the labour invested should be hidden and the finished product look 'natural' (Woods, 2014). Clearly, the women were expected to

invest to an extent in appearances that were ‘more feminine’ than ways of dressing and looking in the day, but whilst still recognising the variations required even within the spaces of the NTE according to factors such as context, venue and occasion. Much as appropriate drinking practices could be understood in terms of distinctions between control and excess, women appear to be similarly constrained as regards clothing as they remain expected to present a visual display of femininity that is exaggerated to an extent but not excessive. Having said this, dress arguably offered women some opportunities to redefine what it might mean to be feminine, with some of the young women engaging flexibly with the norms of expectations around feminine dress. For example, some chose to ‘flash’ their femininity (Holland, 2004) or buy into some elements of normative femininities and not others. However, these choices were often framed in terms of wanting to be either more comfortable or less visible in the NTE, rather than as a conscious effort to challenge what it means to be feminine per se. Some of the young women did, however, imbue traditional markers of femininity with alternative meanings. For example, whilst high heels might be traditionally associated by researchers with a somewhat restricted way of being-in-the-world limiting women’s freedom and movements, there was a sense that having the confidence and skill to wear high heels could redefine this classically feminine type of footwear through associations with agency and strength. Enduring the bodily pain and discomfort of heels (or indeed painful beauty rituals such as waxing) could link for the young women to models of contemporary femininity drawing on strength and toughness. It is important to note - however - that the women did continue to face real limitations in terms of the ways in which high heels continued to impede and restrict their movements, raising questions as to whether investing heel-wearing with these meanings actually translates into genuine forms of empowerment.

In terms of behaviour, the women recognised the continuing influence of traditional feminine values, with the feminine woman still expected to be quiet and reserved in public (Day *et al.*, 2003). However, at the same time, the NTE can be understood as a liminal or ‘carnavalesque’ space (Haydock, 2009) where hedonistic, carefree and drunken behaviour is permitted, perhaps even encouraged. There was some evidence that women were subverting traditional ideals and expectations of femininity, through embracing being loud and rowdy in the NTE. This can be seen as more of a challenge to femininity rather than a ‘rewriting’ of femininities, as the women described this behaviour explicitly as unfeminine or unladylike. Yet the young women were also

aware that there remained a risk of these modes of behaviour being subjected to negative judgement. Women are traditionally associating with ‘civilising’ public spaces (Eldridge and Roberts, 2008b), which may render the presence of the loud and rowdy young woman in the NTE particularly problematic and mean women are forced to engage in something of a balancing act in terms of how they behave when drinking and participating in the NTE. Furthermore, Eldridge and Roberts (2008b) rightly point out that women’s freedom to engage in ‘rowdiness’ in the public spaces of the NTE does not necessarily translate into or reflect advances in broader gender equality outside of this setting. Once again notions of control and restraint versus excess are important in helping us to understand what types of behaviour and ways of conducting oneself are regarded as appropriate for women in the NTE.

Finally, the participants described the NTE as a space in which young women could encounter a range of risks and risky situations. Post-feminist discourses position women as empowered, active agents, yet the data shows considerations of risk remained central to the participants’ negotiations with the venues of the NTE and the ways in which they behaved and dressed. At the same time, women should not be regarded simply as passive victims of the risks of the NTE, rather there was evidence that they continue to actively adopt safekeeping strategies in order to limit and mitigate risk, highlighting the continuing applicability of Brooks’ (2011) findings on risk management in NTE contexts. There were also some interesting examples of women resisting discourses that position them as potentially vulnerable, and examples of participants identifying as strong and able to proactively manage risk in the NTE. Appropriate risk management was also clearly tied to notions of control, as the feminine woman is expected to be sensible, controlled, risk-averse and responsible, for example through limiting her levels of alcohol consumption. In terms of reputation, the data highlighted the ways in which the suitably feminine woman is expected to demonstrate restraint and control over her own sexuality and also that of men, and may be required to ‘tone down’ her dress and behaviour as the guardian of both her own and male sexuality.

These findings clearly expose the complexities of the boundaries of contemporary femininities. The boundaries around appropriate and acceptable femininities were complex and shifting, leading participants to describe the process of negotiating dress and behaviour as a ‘tightrope’, a ‘fine line’ or in terms of a series of borders that women must not overstep. With such fine lines to tread, it is important to understand what

might determine where the boundaries of femininity sit in a 'post-feminist' context where researchers argue that contemporary femininity 'is being rearticulated through an ever increasing array of contradictions' (Gonick, 2004: 207). The most dominant theme across all of the analysis chapters was around the notion of control/excess in policing the boundaries of femininities and deciding when a young woman had 'crossed the line' from respectability to inappropriateness through her practices and behaviours. Excess and lack or loss of control can be defined as the antithesis of the traditionally feminine characteristics of moderation and restraint, and it is typically those bodies and behaviours perceived as 'excessive' that are depicted as crossing the line beyond the limits of normative femininity. In this sense, Measham's (2002) notion of the 'controlled loss of control' can be extended beyond desired level of intoxication in order to encompass engagement with the NTE more generally. Measham (2002) originally used the expression to reflect the perceived 'ideal' level of intoxication amongst female recreational drug users, but it can usefully be extended to demonstrate desired drunkenness levels and also to capture what might be desirable in terms of behaviour. Whilst being loud and rowdy might to an extent represent a night *off* from femininity and a way to loosen up, many women drew the line at particular practices and behaviours perceived to represent too great a loss of control, such as initiating fights. It is, however, important to emphasise that whilst drawing on ideas of control and excess can be useful in understanding what it might mean to be (in)appropriately feminine on a night out and where the boundaries might sit, this does not mean that the lines were always drawn in the same place for all the young women or even had the same meanings for all. In other words, whilst conceptualising femininity as a tightrope may usefully reflect the realities of negotiating femininities for the young women, the meanings and importance of being feminine - or indeed unfeminine - were not always consistent. The next section will explore some of the blurring between 'feminine', 'unfeminine' and related terms, demonstrating that the boundaries of femininity are not stable and clear-cut.

What does 'feminine' really mean? Intersections and Blurrings

The terms 'feminine' and 'femininity' clearly had some resonance for the young women, and they were all able to describe in varying amounts of detail what it means to behave, drink and dress in a feminine way on a night out. Alongside some of the variation alluded to above, there was also consensus in these descriptions, particularly

around dress and appearance. Drawing on the data, it is useful to interpret the women's understandings of femininity as a matter of degree or a spectrum, rather than thinking about feminine/unfeminine in simple binary terms. Whilst at times, the women *did* position feminine and unfeminine - or feminine and masculine (see below) - in a simple binary relationship, there was also a more nuanced sense of what it might mean to be 'feminine', 'unfeminine' or 'too feminine' and crucially where the lines might be between these positions. Appropriate femininity was thus a relative term, positioned somewhere between a perceived *lack* and *excess* of femininity. Hence in terms of femininity, this study highlights that it is entirely possible to do either too much or too little and fail to be read by others - particularly other women - as appropriately feminine. Yet the boundaries of what it means to be feminine (and indeed what constitutes too much or too little) can be fluid and shift according to time, contexts and individuals.

Other complexities centred around the intersections between what it might mean to be (un)feminine and what it might mean to be masculine, linking to the work of Budgeon (2014), who highlights the importance of investigating the ways in which 'new' femininities might be impacting upon binary understandings of masculinity/femininity. Whilst appropriate femininity could be conceptualised more as a position on a *scale* of femininities, femininity and masculinity were more often imagined to exist in a binary relationship. The terms 'manly' and 'masculine' could be used interchangeably, and at times equated with being 'unfeminine' too, although again this was not always the case. Holland (2004) found in her research with older women that when participants conceptualised femininity in terms of a masculine/feminine binary - which they did sometimes but not always - they claimed they wanted to be read as feminine as the only alternative seemed to be being read as 'manly'. This study shows these findings can usefully be extended to younger women. Future research could explore some of the dynamics and distinctions around these terms, as even though 'unfeminine' and 'manly' were sometimes equated, it is likely that there are important differences between them that could be teased out through further research. Common to both the unfeminine and the masculine was a sense of a 'lack' of femininity or the notion of not being 'feminine enough'. This was complicated even further by the idea that perceived unfeminine or masculine drinking behaviour or dress could result in one being read not just as manly, but also in terms of having one's (hetero)sexuality interpreted in ways some women weren't happy with. This ties in with wider ideas around non-heterosexual women, in

particular lesbians, being commonly positioned as representing a lack of femininity, lacking jewellery, make-up or the 'right' hair or shoes (Corteen, 2002). Although none of the women used this term, the data also raises the issue of whether the term '*underfeminine*' might have some theoretical value in (re)conceptualising the boundaries of femininities, as this may represent a different way to capture and reflect the overlaps between being unfeminine and lacking the required amount of femininity.

At the same time, it was also entirely possible to be *too* feminine, particularly in terms of dress and appearance. Whilst the young women felt that it is possible to be both not feminine enough and *too* feminine on a night out, it was almost universally a perceived excess rather than a lack of femininity that was viewed with the most distaste and even disgust. The woman who tries too hard was depicted as *inappropriately* feminine or 'too' feminine rather than unfeminine, and was associated with being fake and unnatural and embodying an overdone or 'tarty' form of femininity. One interesting emerging finding here was the association made by a small number of participants between hyper-feminine dress and a 'drag' appearance, constructing hyper-femininity as overcompensation or a parody of femininity. This parallels Holland and Harpin's (2013) reflections on the ways in which tomboys might position the hyper-feminine woman, and could usefully be investigated further in order to examine whether doing femininity in certain ways could actually be seen to disrupt gender binaries.

One final point to note around the meaning and definition of femininity is that for the participants it was very frequently equated with girliness. Whilst I typically phrased initial questions in terms of femininity rather than girliness, there was much conflation of the two terms by the women, and they often responded to questions about what it means to be feminine by linking it to being 'girly'. This may reflect in part the demographics of the women studied in terms of their age ranges, where being or doing girly often appeared to have more relevance and meaning than doing femininity. Whilst Holland (2004) demonstrates the ways in which older women may engage with the concept of femininity but distance themselves from 'girly-girl' identities which they associated with childishness and innocence, 'girly' is likely to have different meanings for younger women and I would argue may be associated with youth and playfulness in more positive ways, or even be seen as a 'safer' and less sexualised way to do gender. 'Girly' also appeared to be a term that could more usefully capture the collective aspects of engagement with the NTE, particularly with female friends, whilst femininity could

be read in places as more individualised. For example, on the girls' night out, the women talked about 'girly time' and girly group processes of getting ready, and they conceptualised collective consumption of drinks such as wine and cocktails as girly rather than feminine practices *per se*.

Yet in ways that parallel femininity, it was possible to be both not girly enough and 'too much of a girl', and being a 'girl' could be read in both positive and negative ways. This contributes to ongoing debates about contradictions within the meanings and values of 'girly' and 'girlhood' in a 'post-feminist' society (see for example Budgeon, 2014), where the concept of 'girlpower' has been constructed in the popular imagination as a contemporary discourse of femininity with some positive associations, such as the valuing of female friendships, fun and sassiness (Harris, 2004). Yet the contradictions apparent in the 'girly-girl' identity reflect some of the complexities that position contemporary femininities as difficult spaces to occupy; the girly-girl is an object of both desire and resentment, simultaneously imagined to embody 'perfect' femininity yet paradoxically 'a marker of the worst excesses of hegemonic 'femininity'' (Holland and Harpin, 2013: 15). In this study, these contradictions were highly apparent, as being sensible, boring and unable to have a laugh on a night out was girly in a problematic sense, as was too much of a pre-occupation with appearance. Again, girliness could be conceptualised as a spectrum where being girly was generally read as unproblematic or positive but being 'girly girly' or 'really girly' could have negative associations, although the women tended to draw the line of what it might mean to be too girly in different places. Whilst doing girliness with female friends in terms of dress and drinking was generally read positively, at the same time not engaging in sufficient alcohol consumption could position women as too 'girly' and a lightweight, building on the earlier work of Griffin *et al.* (2013). Whilst some participants identified themselves as 'girly girls', others did associate the girly girl with a problematic excess of femininity and disassociated from this, with some positioning themselves as 'tomboys' (although interestingly, being read as a tomboy in all contexts and settings was generally not desirable). Similarly, participants' claims of being 'boyish' or 'not that girly' were often softened with a quick follow-up claim to stress that they are girly in some ways and to some extents. Even for those who identified as more girly, the term 'stupid' was associated with girly more than once. Terms such as 'stupid, girly stuff' or 'stupid and girly' almost seemed to be used without thinking, suggesting that women weren't consciously attempting to condemn being girly, but rather that they may have

internalised to an extent the idea that girliness is fundamentally something trivial. These findings develop Budgeon's (2014) work on 'pariah femininities'. She argues that in order to uphold certain enactments of femininity as appropriate and normative, different ways of enacting femininity must be placed in a hierarchy where the performance of 'traditional femininity in excessively accentuated ways' (2014: 327) is now positioned as pathetic and undesirable. The legitimacy of contemporary normative femininity therefore 'relies upon casting out overly obvious feminized qualities' (2014: 327), and this was evidenced in the current study, where being 'too much of girl' could negatively describe a woman who was too flirtatious and sexualised in her behaviour. This also highlights the ways in which it is important to consider how girliness, femininity and sexuality might overlap. Allan (2009) highlights the overlaps between hyper-femininity, heterosexuality and the 'girly girl', and there was a strong sense in the data of the overlaps between being *too* girly and being hyper-feminine.

Women quite clearly engage with the NTE in complex and contradictory ways and they do not unquestioningly seek to achieve the 'holy grail' of femininity or girliness in all contexts, adding to Skeggs' (1997) argument that femininity is not something to be blindly aspired to at all times. These observations highlight that in terms of femininity and girliness, there are boundaries that can be drawn which show that it is not simply a case of 'the more feminine the better'. It was possible to be 'too much of a girl' or even to embody simultaneously both a problematic *lack* of femininity, for example through loud and rowdy behaviour, and an equally problematic *excess* of femininity, for example through revealing and hyper-feminine dress. Typically, both lack and excess were imagined to be simultaneously embodied in the 'other', the older and/or working-class Geordie (or charver). These distinctions made around class were particularly illuminating and will be explored in the next section in more detail.

(Re)conceptualising Classed Distinctions

It is 20 years since Hollands (1995) first began to explore Geordie drinking cultures in the NTE in Newcastle (see also Hollands and Chatterton, 2002), and over a decade since Nayak (2003) offered us new and useful ways to conceptualise Geordie identities and classed masculinities in the NTE and beyond. Such work offered a solid foundation from which to reengage with contemporary constructions of Geordie identity and class in the post-industrial city with a change in focus to consider more specifically the ways

in which *femininities* are embodied and classed in the NTE. Hollands and Chatterton describe the presence of ‘stronger regional and working-class cultures’ (2002: 307) on a night out in cities such as Newcastle relative to other parts of the UK, and this study has confirmed the continued salience of class and Geordie identities within the NTE for all young women, whether identifying as student or non-student, local or non-local, middle-class, working-class or other. All of these subjectivities could be explicitly or implicitly defined in relation to the Geordie, either through identification/association or disidentification/difference. Processes of othering along classed and regional lines were threaded throughout the data as women worked to construct their own appropriately feminine identities through distancing themselves from others.

Holt and Griffin claim that ‘analysing an aspect of everyday life such as leisure and ‘going out’ can reveal the reproduction of dominant discourses about class’ (2005: 241). Other recent research on the NTE, such as the work of Cullen (2011), highlights some of the ways in which processes of othering function to preserve particular subjectivities as appropriately feminine through positioning the self as respectable and controlled in contrast to the drunken or slutty ‘other’. Whilst such work is useful and often touches on how class is implicated in these processes, this study has clearly highlighted that there may be particular dynamics of both between and *within* class othering that also draw on regional identities and warrant further exploration. These have not necessarily been observed in previous research in the North East. For example, whilst Green and Singleton’s (2006) work on risk, safety and leisure in the region usefully explores some of the dynamics of othering according to class and ethnicity, regional identities are not made explicitly significant. Rather, Green and Singleton stress the importance of the distinctions between how women use leisure spaces, with the young women in their study who frequent the local community centre positioning themselves as respectable ‘good girls’ in contrast to the groups of young women who socialise in the public spaces of the street and represent risky bodies. Although, as has been highlighted throughout this thesis, there were certainly spatialised dynamics to processes of othering in the current study, othering along classed and regional boundaries was the most prolific and pertinent form of distinction made. A number of participants who self-identified as middle-class drew on notions of middle-class respectability in contrast to the dress, drinking practices and behaviour of the working (or ‘lower’) class. Notably those identifying as middle-class students who were not local to the area frequently equated working-class identities in the city with Geordie identities, highlighting the continued

durability of the North/South divide (Spracklen, 1996) and ‘Northernisation’ of the working-class (Milestone, 2008). The working-class Geordie woman was frequently imagined to embody problematic ways of being for women in the NTE, drawing on notions of excess and lack of control in terms of drunkenness, dress and behaviour.

This is not to say that space did not play an important role in othering, but rather that this was also always tied to notions of regionality, for example through the mapping of ‘student/non-local’ and ‘non-student/local’ spaces and venues and the positioning of the Bigg Market by non-local women as a ‘rough’, ‘radgy’ and violent space frequented almost exclusively by local Geordies. Crucially, these ways of imagining the Bigg Market allowed the participants to ‘contain’ undesirable behaviours, drinking practices and perceived risks and dangers within this space. This geographical containment may be particularly important when young women’s own respectability is precarious and they risk at times being labelled as ‘too drunk’ or ‘too rowdy’ themselves. In other words, such modes of othering may have become particularly pertinent as the boundaries of femininities become less stable and young women are increasingly expected to consume moderate amounts of alcohol and dress – to an extent – in more exaggerated and sexualised ways (Stepney, 2015) . With women recognising when they saw a drunk woman that they themselves could easily be in that position, shoring up and consolidating the boundaries of femininities may become even more essential. The intense scrutiny of women’s drinking practices and associated behaviours within these spaces may also concentrate attention on certain areas within the city centre, as the Bigg Market comes to publicly symbolise a perceived ‘crass and boisterous Geordie drinking culture’ (Hollands and Chatterton, 2002: 302) and becomes a nexus of scrutiny and - often negative - media attention.

However, a model positioning othering as something that is done *by* the middle-class and *to* the working-class is far too simplistic. Important distinctions were made by the Geordies between themselves as respectable working-class women and the ‘charver’ or Underclass. An important part of this distinction was the positioning of the Geordie as proud, down-to-earth and hard-working, in contrast to an Underclass characterised by worklessness and unemployment across generations. This allowed the Geordie women to construct locally legitimate femininities of ‘conspicuous consumption’ (Woods, 2014) in the NTE, drawing on a ‘work hard, play hard’ ethos to justify the high proportion of income spent on clothing, appearance and nights out, and to differentiate

between their expensive or glamorous dresses and shoes and the ‘cheap’ shoes, perfume and make-up associated with the charver or Underclass. Interestingly, the Geordies often positioned themselves as skilled compared to the Underclass not just in terms of their ability to earn a living, but also in terms of their superior skills and knowledge in dressing and doing hair and make-up for a night out, highlighting that the charver lacks both the financial means and the ‘taste’ and skill to do authentic Geordie femininity. These distinctions highlight the continued relevance of Nayak’s (2003) work and demonstrate that it can cross gendered boundaries to conceptualise the ways in which young women in the North East, as well as young men, construct positive working-class identities through locating themselves firmly within the ‘respectable’ rather than the ‘rough’ wedge of the working-class. The Geordie participants also worked hardest to distance themselves from the Bigg Market and often made it very clear they would never go out here. This builds on previous work by Griffin *et al.* (2013) demonstrating the particular importance of spatial dynamics of othering for working-class women, although it should be noted that in Griffin *et al.*’s work, these spatialised dynamics drew more on the significance of labelling other working-class women from particular suburbs in certain ways - ‘the Dissmoor scum’ (2013: 196) - rather than othering those who frequent certain parts of the city centre. Nevertheless, this work is useful in demonstrating othering *within* classes and highlights that findings around the localised dynamics of othering are emerging in other contemporary research.

This study also invites us to consider how the ways in which the women either associated with or disassociated from a Geordie identity could both enable and constrain particular types of classed feminine subjectivities; for example ‘glamour’ was important in constituting the identity of working-class Geordies, but this had little relevance for some of the other women and could even be read negatively. One woman’s ‘glamour’ was often another woman’s ‘tacky’. For example, Geordies were often positioned by others as tasteless and lacking restraint, yet they framed their own ways of dressing in terms of skill and glamour. A good example of this is the discussion around bright and colourful dresses, constituted as tacky, tasteless and even tarty by some of the middle-class women, yet unique and glamorous by some of the self-identified Geordies. Another interesting observation is that the same type of dress or behaviour could be read differently on different classed bodies. The sequined dress is an excellent example. On the middle-class body, it could be imbued with positive meanings as long as it was reserved for the right kind of special occasion (such as a birthday night out) where a

particularly dressy appearance was required. At the same time, a sequined dress on a working-class, Geordie body could be read as tacky and overdone. High heels could also be positioned as either ‘classy’ or ‘tarty’, depending on a number of factors, such as what the rest of the outfit looked like, who was wearing them and where they were from.

It has also proved useful to reflect in more depth on the different terms used by the participants. The term ‘lower-class’ was often used by the participants regardless of background, and this is interesting as it implies some sort of relational dynamic to othering, through positioning someone as ‘lower’ in terms of their class than the speaker. The distinctions made within the working-class were also interesting; for example the term ‘Underclass’ mirrors ‘lower’ class in terms of positioning class in a *relational* sense. The functions of terms such as ‘charver’ also demand further exploration and this will likely help to shed light on nuances of othering within classes. These findings around local or Geordie identities contribute to a fresh and emerging area of work exploring regional femininities (Woods, 2014) and usefully complement Nayak’s (2006) work on working-class Geordie masculinities. Classed and regionalised processes of othering may be particularly salient in cities such as Newcastle where despite attempts to reinvent the city as a cosmopolitan hub of culture and nightlife, it continues to be marked by social polarisation, possible ‘lifestyle clashes’ between students and locals and a legacy of ongoing deprivation from its industrial history (Buckley and Fawcett, 2002; Hollands and Chatterton, 2002). Yet such findings may also have wider relevance to broader post-industrial city spaces where different class groupings compete for recognition and space.

It is important to stress here that whilst the voices of self-identified working-class Geordies were present in the study, further research is required in order to engage with middle-class women who identify as Geordie, and I acknowledge the tendency in this study to conflate working-class and local identity and middle-class and student identity (in line with participants’ self-identifications). Whilst being Geordie is associated in both other research (Barton, 1990; Woods, 2014) and in the current study with being working-class, it would be valuable to explore in more depth the ways in which middle-class women local to Newcastle (dis)identify with what it means to be ‘Geordie’. Further research could also usefully expand upon the interesting findings emerging in this thesis around the ways in which working-class women might other middle-class

women through the positioning of working-class identities as more authentic and less restricted, or the negative labelling of middle-class women as ‘posh’ or ‘rahs’. As Bernhardsson and Bogren point out, when it comes to drinking identities, it is important to note that ‘troubled positions do not automatically account for the non-powerful and the non-privileged (e.g... the working class), and untroublesome positions for the privileged and powerful’ (2011: 4). This is important as it is problematic to simply assume that processes of othering operate exclusively in a unidirectional way downwards through classed hierarchies, and research focusing solely on the problematisation and even demonisation of working-class behaviours and identities may result in a failure to recognise and explore the ways in which working-class women might advance positive ways of doing gender, femininities and class drawing on – for example – notions of glamour, strength or authenticity.

Directions for Future Research

I recognise that this research has not been able to address all of the issues and questions that might be pertinent to this area of study. Some topics and themes clearly emerged more strongly than others through the research and by necessity it has not been possible to explore all the emerging findings or themes peripheral to the research questions within the scope of this thesis. Here, I will expand upon some of the gaps and emerging findings and make recommendations for future research.

This study has worked towards addressing gaps in the literature around the ways in which the boundaries of femininities are managed and negotiated in a supposed ‘post-feminist’ society of gender equality, meeting calls from contemporary researchers for further work in this area (Griffin *et al.*, 2013). The research also sought to examine the ways in which dimensions of class, age and sexuality were implicated in processes of othering as women negotiated the boundaries of femininity. Whilst rich data was obtained on both age and class in this respect, there was much less discussion in the interviews of how sexualities might be implicated in processes of othering. However, what is *not* said in research can be as interesting as what *is* said. I noted a particular reluctance amongst heterosexual participants to talk about how sexualities or sexual preferences might be important in policing the boundaries of femininities, and this may be attributed to a number of factors. Firstly, the women may have been engaged in processes of self-presentation in the interview whereby they did not wish to risk

appearing judgemental or homophobic. Arguably, talking openly about class may be somewhat taboo too, but the young women deployed numerous strategies to talk about class in coded ways, for example through referring to the differences between ‘students’ and ‘locals’ (Holt and Griffin, 2005). It may be that there were no neat equivalent ways to talk about sexuality. Having said this, the women often openly expressed negative judgements towards older women without the use of veiled or coded language, suggesting the women didn’t see any problems commenting about age, but felt less comfortable commenting on homosexuality. It is also possible that heterosexual women do not really have to think about sexuality very much as the social realities in which they live are highly heterosexualised. This was evidenced in the data as when I prompted women around homophobic violence they often admitted that was something they never thought about and wouldn’t have considered when thinking about the risks different women face on a night out. The straight participants also said that the experiences of non-heterosexual women were something they couldn’t comment on *because* they were straight. In a society where non-heterosexuality can be policed or made invisible, it may not have been something the women gave much thought to, although arguably this might be shifting as non-heterosexual identities and practices are increasingly mainstreamed and assimilated through changes such as the legalisation of gay marriage (Richardson-Self, 2012). Despite the relative silences around sexuality – which are interesting in themselves - this research has still offered a diversification in terms of research sample, moving beyond previous research that has set strong foundations for work in this field but tended to focus primarily or exclusively on the experiences of heterosexual, female students. The research also meets Emslie *et al.*’s (2015) very recent calls for future research on drinking to include gay, lesbian and bisexual participants. Furthermore, interesting findings around sexuality more generally did emerge, particularly around the non-heterosexual women’s negotiations of risk and dress. And of course, the findings around promiscuity in terms of dress and behaviour tie into discourses around the ways in which women’s (hetero)sexuality more broadly is controlled, managed and shaped.

During the interviews, discussions around dynamics of age and class came through much more strongly than ethnicity, and whilst of course this may be a reflection of the sampling process and interview questions, it may also suggest that ethnicity was a less relevant discussion point for the participants than it might have been in other parts of the UK. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore dynamics of ethnicity and also to

examine whether the ‘othered’ working-class binge-drinking or promiscuous woman is implicitly white, as has been suggested in some other research (Griffin *et al.*, 2013). Further research could usefully examine dimensions of ethnicity on a night out, and arguably this might be a much more salient issue in other parts of the UK as ethnic diversity in Newcastle remains limited (Alexander, 2008). Likewise, issues around disability or able-bodiedness were not raised in any of the interviews. Whilst of course this is partly because specific questions around this topic were not asked, it is interesting that none of the women raised this issue in any way. This may tell us something about the continued invisibility of disabled bodies within both the spaces of the NTE and also within the research landscape and literature, and the ways in which certain assumptions around the capabilities and appearance of the ‘typical’ user of the NTE might persist and remain relatively unchallenged. It has been beyond the remit of this study to consider some of the ways in which bodily differences such as (dis)ability, body size and race or ethnicity might impact upon constructions and embodiments of femininities within the NTE, and future work could usefully engage further with these topics.

Finally, this study has thrown up some interesting potential directions for future research around femininity and ageing. The dynamics around age came through in the data much more strongly than had originally been anticipated. Within the spaces of the NTE, the young women very clearly positioned ‘midlife’ women or women over 30 as ‘older’ women and subjected them to particular negative judgements. The loud, hypervisible presence of older women may be seen as problematic in the spaces of the NTE, violating norms of appropriate feminine behaviour and expectations that associate midlife with motherhood and the domestic sphere (Lyons and Willott, 2008). This is important because there is a conception amongst the public and in research that Newcastle is particularly renowned for intergenerational nights out. This appears to sit at odds with the at times quite vocal hostility and criticism with which the presence of ‘older’ women was discussed, suggesting in Newcastle the presence of older women is both normalised and problematic. Future research could usefully explore whether findings are similar in other cities and locations with less of a reputation for inter-generational engagement with nightlife.

There is also a gap in terms of understanding how midlife women themselves might negotiate some of these tensions around femininities on a night out. Midlife women are a neglected group in research on the NTE (which focuses on younger women) and

ageing femininities (which tends to focus on older women). Where research does look at midlife engagement with nightlife, this tends to focus on midlife gay men, although Emslie *et al.* (2015) have carried out recent work on midlife women and alcohol consumption which represents a helpful exception to this. Despite a lack of research into midlife women's experiences in the NTE, they are clearly engaging with these spaces, possibly in very different ways to younger women. Furthermore, societal upheavals such as changing patterns of sexual relationships, delayed marriage and motherhood and increasing divorce rates may be regarded as unsettling the moral order of society and challenging traditional expectations of respectable femininity in midlife as embodied through domesticity, marriage and motherhood. This may point towards changing ways of understanding and embodying what it may mean to be 'feminine' in contemporary midlife. Yet the media continues to problematise midlife women's participation in the NTE, and little research on alcohol use has focused on this group (Emslie *et al.*, 2015), with that which does often coming from a public health or medical perspective. Such approaches fail to engage with the experiences and motivations of midlife women directly and deny researchers the opportunity to highlight the meanings behind drinking and explore whether it can play a positive role in identity construction in midlife. I argue that participating in the NTE might allow midlife women to construct positive sexualised identities moving beyond popular conceptions of them as either asexual or 'desperate' (Montemurro and Siefken, 2014). For example, Stalp *et al.* (2008) argue that for older women, dressing in hyper-feminine clothing can be a way to challenge the invisibility that comes with ageing and represent a subversive gesture to recapture the male gaze that is typically directed at young women.

This chapter has suggested topics that might usefully be explored in future research, explored empirically the ways in which young women might negotiate in their own lives some of the tensions present in contemporary understandings of femininities, and highlighted the contribution of this study towards unpacking definitions of contested terms such as 'femininity' and 'girliness'. With researchers recently highlighting gaps in our understandings of the meanings young women give to their drinking practices and participation in nights out and the ways in which these actively *construct* gender (Haydock, 2009), this study clearly contributes to an emerging body of work that is starting to consider these issues in more depth (Griffin *et al.*, 2013; Stepney, 2014; 2015). Furthermore, the classed and regionalised subtleties of othering in Newcastle offer nuanced ways to understand class in a former industrial city with a

strong sense of regional identity, and may extend to other post-industrial landscapes. The findings around the centrality of local identities in constructing femininities within the NTE also represent a move towards addressing Lindsay's (2006) calls for research on drinking landscapes which recognises alcohol consumption as a situated, localised practice. This study also offers a timely contribution towards understanding the ways in which bodies marked by class, age and sexuality might be enabled or restricted in their attempts to adopt or reject appropriately feminine identities in a 'post-feminist' society.

Appendix A: Demographic Form



A Girls' Night Out Research Project: Young women and nights out in Newcastle



Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research. Please complete this short form with some brief details about yourself:

Age: _____

Where I live (please tick all that apply):

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Parental Home | |
| Student accommodation | |
| Rented property | |
| Own home | |
| On my own | |
| With family | |
| With partner | |
| With friends | |
| With my child / children | |
| Other:- _____ | |
| Prefer Not to Say | |

Postcode: _____

My educational background (please tick all that apply):

| | |
|---|--|
| GCSEs | |
| A levels | |
| International Baccalaureate | |
| College vocational course (e.g. diploma, BTEC, NVQ) | |
| Apprenticeship | |
| Foundation degree | |
| Undergraduate degree | |
| Postgraduate degree | |
| Other: _____ | |
| Prefer Not to Say | |

Current occupation (please tick all that apply):

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Working full-time | |
| Working part-time | |
| Full-time College student | |
| Part-time College student | |
| Full-time University student | |
| Part-time University student | |
| Unemployed | |
| Prefer Not to Say | |

What is your current job or course of study?

I identify my sexual orientation as:

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Straight | |
| Lesbian | |
| Queer | |
| Bisexual | |
| Other: _____ | |
| Prefer Not to Say | |

I identify my class as:

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Working-class | |
| Middle-class | |
| Upper-class | |
| Other: _____ | |
| Prefer Not to Say | |
| I don't identify with a class | |

I identify my race or ethnicity as:

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| White British | |
| White (other) | |
| Indian | |
| Pakistani | |
| Bangladeshi | |
| Black African | |
| Black Caribbean | |
| Other Black | |
| Chinese | |
| Other Asian | |
| Mixed | |
| Other: _____ | |
| Prefer Not to Say | |

I go on a night out in Newcastle with female friends:

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Once a month or less | |
| Once every few weeks | |
| Once a week | |
| More than once a week | |

I prefer to go out in Newcastle:

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Weeknights only | |
| Weekends only | |
| Weeknights and weekends | |

Appendix B: Website Screenshots

The screenshot shows the home page of the 'A Girls' Night Out Research Project (agnorp)' website. The header is yellow with the Newcastle University logo on the right and a search bar. Below the header is a navigation menu with links: 'About My Project', 'How can I Take Part?', 'Further Information', and 'Contact Me'. The main content area has a green heading 'A Girls' Night Out Research Project (agnorp)'. The text below reads: 'Thank you for your interest in taking part in my postgraduate research project. If you are a woman aged 18-25 who goes out to bars, pubs or clubs in Newcastle with female friends, then you can get involved. This website contains a little more information about the study, which should hopefully answer any questions you may have if you are deciding whether or not you would like to get involved. Please contact me if you have any further questions or would like to know more about the study. I would really value your participation, please have a look around the site and let me know if would like to take part. Please also pass on this information to anybody else you know who might like to take part, and like me on Facebook [here](#) to help spread the word about the research! You can also follow me on Twitter [@agnorp](#)'. Below the text is a photograph of two colorful cocktails on a bar counter. At the bottom, contact information is provided: 'Contact Emily (postgraduate researcher) Email: agnorp@gmail.com Call or text: 07583 374848 Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne'.

The screenshot shows the 'How can I Take Part?' page of the 'A Girls' Night Out Research Project (agnorp)' website. The breadcrumb trail at the top reads: 'You are here: Newcastle University » A Girls' Night Out Research Project (agnorp) » How can I Take Part?'. The header is yellow with the Newcastle University logo on the right and a search bar. Below the header is a navigation menu with links: 'About My Project', 'How can I Take Part?', 'Further Information', and 'Contact Me'. The main content area has a green heading 'How can I Take Part?'. The text below reads: 'The project involves:

- one to one interviews lasting about an hour
- focus groups with young women lasting about an hour

It is up to you whether you take part in both activities or just one, and you are free to change your mind at any point. I would also like some groups of friends who go out together to take part in a focus group. If you are interested in getting involved with your friends let me know. Your travel costs will be fully covered. **What Are the Next Steps?** If you have any further questions before deciding whether or not you wish to take part please contact me. If you would like to get involved, please contact me. Please pass on this information to anybody else who you think might like to take part.' At the bottom, contact information is provided: 'Contact Emily (postgraduate researcher) Email: agnorp@gmail.com Call or text: 07583 374848 Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 7RU, United Kingdom'.

Appendix C: Timeline of Recruitment Mechanisms

| Month | Recruitment Mechanisms | Contacts and Participants |
|----------------------|--|--|
| October 2012 | <p>Contacted Newcastle University student paper (no response)</p> <p>Contacted Northumbria University student paper (no response)</p> <p>Contacted Spark magazine, Sunderland (ongoing emails and article draft sent across December 2012 – no response)</p> <p>Sunderland Spark Community Radio and Newcastle University student radio (contacted and email dialogue but nothing finalised)</p> | |
| November 2012 | <p>Presented at Newcastle University undergraduate third year law lecture and put posters up</p> <p>Asked friend at Newcastle college to pass contact details of her hairdressing tutor to me (fell through after chasing)</p> <p>Facebook messages on various pages (universities, colleges, clubs)</p> | <p>Jade (21/11) through Facebook. Interview completed 29/11</p> <p>Lydia (23/11) through another seminar tutor mentioning it to her class. Interview completed 13/02/13</p> <p>One contact through Facebook but did not lead to interview</p> <p>One contact through seminar tutor but did not lead to interview</p> <p>One contact through snowballing from Lydia but did not lead to interview</p> |
| December 2012 | <p>Presented at Newcastle University undergraduate health studies lecture and put posters up</p> | |
| January 2013 | <p>Contacted Newcastle Free Press – happy to run article</p> | <p>Susie (19/01) through law lecture. Interview completed 31/01</p> |

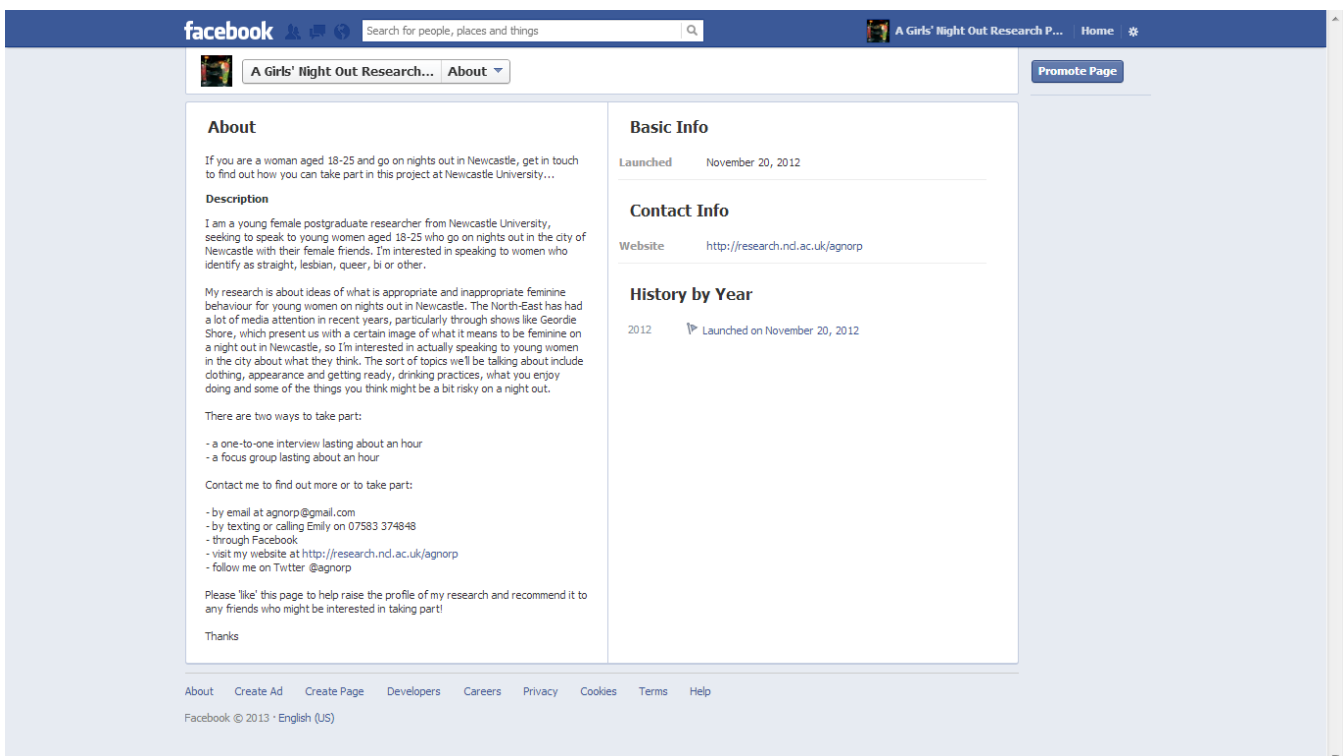
| | | |
|-----------------------------|---|--|
| | <p>Follow up email after presentations to Newcastle University law and health studies students</p> <p>Presented to 1st and 2nd year undergraduate geography students at Northumbria University (with follow-up emails)</p> <p>Presented to group of 1st and 2nd year Higher Education dance students at Newcastle college</p> <p>Spare flyers handed out to theatre studies students</p> <p>Contacted local Sixth form college (lengthy ongoing dialogue but ultimately no success)</p> <p>Contacted Newcastle University LGBT Society and Northumbria University LGBT Society who circulated information via Facebook page and mailing list</p> <p>Contacted Newcastle College LGBT Society who passed message on to LGBT officer and leader of Femsoc (no further response, followed up again in May 2013, no response)</p> <p>Contacted Northumbria (no response) and Newcastle Rock Societies (message placed on Facebook page)</p> | <p>Emma (21/01) through Newcastle University Rock Society Facebook page. Interview completed 11/02</p> <p>Lucy (22/01) through law lecture. Interview completed 07/02</p> <p>Kate (23/01) through Newcastle University LGBT Facebook page. Interview completed 04/02</p> <p>Alex (30/01) through geography lecture at Northumbria University. Interview completed 15/02</p> <p>Two contacts through presentation to Newcastle College dance students but did not lead to interview</p> |
| <p>February 2013</p> | <p>Presented to 3rd year undergraduate geography students at Northumbria University (with follow-up emails)</p> <p>3 workplace sites identified with existing contacts (accounting firm, Newcastle City Council, secondary school) and contacted</p> <p>Accounting firm not appropriate as very few eligible participants</p> <p>Secondary school and city council discussions ongoing</p> | <p>Kimberley (06/02) through geography lecture at Northumbria University. Interview completed 25/02</p> <p>Ruth (07/02) through geography lecture at Northumbria University. Interview completed 22/02</p> |

| | | |
|-------------------|--|---|
| | | <p>Christina (11/02) through geography lecture at Northumbria University. Interview completed 11/03</p> <p>Donna (20/02) through Newcastle University LGBT Facebook page. Interview completed 08/03</p> <p>Ally (20/02) through Northumbria University LGBT Facebook page. Interview completed 14/03</p> <p>One contact through geography lecture at Northumbria University but did not lead to interview</p> |
| March 2013 | Article published in Newcastle Free Press | <p>Fran (28/03) through Facebook page. Interview completed 12/04</p> <p>Four contacts through Facebook page and/or word of mouth but did not lead to interview</p> |
| April 2013 | <p>Message circulated to all city council staff via weekly email bulletin</p> <p>New messages targeting local young women put on various Facebook pages (colleges and local clubs)</p> <p>Flyers in public spaces/staffrooms at gyms, cinemas, libraries, shops and bars</p> | |
| May 2013 | <p>Attempts to follow-up and build on city council email bulletin by putting flyers in council locations unsuccessful</p> <p>Nothing has come from the multiple flyers, it may be that this is too far removed and distant as a recruitment process</p> | <p>Nicole (14/05) through word of mouth. Interview completed 30/05</p> <p>Kirsty (15/05) through snowballing by Nicole. Interview completed 23/05</p> |

| | | |
|------------------|---|--|
| | <p>Contacted city council LGBT officer and women's only running group (no response)</p> <p>Word of mouth and snowballing (local workplaces)</p> | <p>Joanna (16/05) through snowballing by Nicole. Interview completed 29/06</p> <p>Two contacts through snowballing but did not lead to interview</p> |
| June 2013 | <p>Contacted Gateshead College Gay-Straight Alliance as they are currently working on a project on sexuality. President is going to circulate information via mailing list</p> <p>In conversations with publicity manager at Tyneside cinema re dropping in to a mother and baby film screening to introduce myself and the research and hand out some flyers</p> <p>Flyers put up in Dance City dance school and flyer to be included in newsletter, although it wasn't deemed appropriate for me to come along and talk in person to some of the students</p> <p>Got contact details for manager of Pride Cafe</p> <p>Presented to hairdressing students at Newcastle College</p> <p>Flyers put up in Newcastle College Library and Space building, Newcastle Sixth Form College Student Union and Cafeteria</p> <p>Secondary school contact was sent relevant information on the study and informally promoted research amongst colleagues</p> | <p>Hayley (05/06) through Gateshead College Gay-Straight Alliance. Interview completed 12/06</p> <p>Zoe (25/06) through Facebook. Interview completed 01/07</p> <p>Jessie (27/06) through Facebook. Interview completed 24/07</p> <p>One contact through word of mouth but did not lead to interview</p> |
| July 2013 | <p>Finalised focus group schedule and vignettes</p> <p>Held rehearsal focus group (12/07) and reflected upon process and content</p> <p>Flyering at Northern Pride festival</p> <p>Presented at city library evening seminar series and handed out flyers</p> | <p>Claire (03/07) through Facebook (originally met when presenting on research in evening seminar series in March 2013). Interview completed 16/07</p> |

| | | |
|------------------------------|--|---|
| <p>August 2013</p> | <p>Twitter and Facebook recruitment shout-outs</p> <p>Contacted manager of Pride Cafe</p> <p>Contacted Only People Facebook Page</p> <p>Guest blog entry</p> <p>Flyers in Tesco and cafe in local Business Park</p> <p>Attempted to arrange two focus groups</p> | <p>Gail (05/08) through Facebook. Interview completed 09/08</p> <p>Eve (05/08) through Facebook. Interview completed 10/08</p> <p>Georgina (05/08) through Facebook. Interview completed 23/08</p> <p>Sophia (06/08) through word of mouth. Interview completed 12/08</p> <p>Naomi (06/08) through Facebook. Interview completed 15/08</p> <p>Two contacts through Facebook but did not lead to interview</p> |
| <p>September 2013</p> | <p>Recruitment shout outs on Facebook</p> <p>Attempted to arrange two focus groups</p> | <p>Megan (03/09) through Facebook. Interview completed 04/09</p> |

Appendix D: Facebook Screenshots



A Girls' Night Out Research Project

Young women and nights out in Newcastle

If you are a woman aged 18-25 who goes out in Newcastle, I want to hear from you!

I am a postgraduate student from Newcastle University looking to speak to young women about the nights out they go on with their female friends



Wherever it is you like to go out, and whether you identify as straight, lesbian or bi, you can get involved
For more information or to take part in an interview and/or focus group:

visit <http://research.ncl.ac.uk/agnorp>

email agnorp@gmail.com

text or call Emily on 07583 374848

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/agnorp>

Appendix F: Interview Schedule

1. Talk me through a typical night out in Newcastle for you and your female friends:
 - Who exactly do you go out with? [prompt: stay with female friends all night, meet others later etc?]
 - Where do you get ready?
 - What does getting ready involve?
 - Does getting ready feel like an important part of a night out? / how does getting ready make you feel?
 - What do you do next?
 - Where do you go? [home, pubs, bars, clubs?]
 - What do you do when you're out?
 - What happens at the end of the night?

2. What does going out with your girl friends mean to you?
 - Does going out feel like part of who you are? In what ways?
 - Does going out feel like an 'occasion' / special occasion?
 - What makes a good night out?
 - What is it about going out with female friends that you like?
 - Do you like going out in a mixed group too sometimes?
 - How is this different?
 - Is there anything you don't enjoy about the nights out you usually have?
 - Where don't you like to go? Why is that?

3. Tell me about your clothes, hair and make-up on a night out:
 - What do you wear?
 - How do you do your hair and make-up?
 - Is how you look different compared to during the day? How?
 - Is what you look like different when you go out with female friends compared to going out in a mixed group? How? Why?
 - Who are you dressing for? [prompts: men? Which men? Self? Other women?]
 - Do you feel any pressure to look a certain way? Where does this pressure come from? [prompts: men, self, women, media?]
 - What does it mean to look feminine? / What does it mean to look feminine on a night out?
 - What would it mean to look unfeminine on a night out? [prompt on who looks unfeminine on a night out]
 - Is it important for you to be seen as looking 'feminine'? Do you think other young women you know feel the same? Is it different for straight women compared to gay women / women who identify as lesbian?
 - Are there things you see other woman wearing that you wouldn't feel right wearing? Can you give me an example? Why wouldn't you feel right? [prompt around *who* is wearing these outfits]
 - Are there certain ways to dress that are unacceptable? Who is dressing like that?

- Can women get judged for dressing in certain ways? By who?
 - What might be the consequences of dressing in this way?
4. Is drinking alcohol an important part of a night out?
- Do you like to drink alcohol on a night out? What do / don't you like about it?
 - Why do you think women like to drink on a night out?
 - Why do you think women might *not* drink on nights out?
 - Do you drink as much as you want on a night out? If not, why not?
 - Would you think differently about how and what you drink if you were going out in a mixed group compared to just with female friends?
 - Is it possible to have too much to drink on a night out? Can you give an example? How much is too much?
 - What do you think when you see women who you think have had too much to drink? Is this what your female friends would also think? Do you think other women might think differently? [prompt around who it is you tend to see who has had too much to drink?]
 - What are some of the consequences of having too much to drink?
5. Do you think young women think about risk on a night out?
- What kinds of risk? [prompts: getting home, drink spiking etc]
 - Where do young women get their ideas of risk from? [prompts: media, peers, parents?]
 - Do you think young men think about risk in similar ways? Can you give me examples?
 - Do you think straight women and gay women think about risks differently?
 - Are any of these risks something you feel you need to be concerned about? / do you think about staying safe on a night out?
 - Does this affect your behaviour? How? [prompts: where you go, routes you walk, what and how you drink?]
 - Would you think differently about risk if you were going out in a mixed group compared to just with female friends?
 - What might happen if someone doesn't take risks such as these into account?
6. Are there certain behaviours that are unacceptable for young woman on a night out?
- What does it mean to act or be feminine on a night out?
 - What would it mean to act or be unfeminine on a night out? [prompt on who is unfeminine on a night out and how they behave]
 - Can you give an example of unacceptable behaviour by women you have seen on a night out? Who behaves like that?
 - Why is that unacceptable? Is this what your female friends would also think? Do you think other women might think differently?
 - Do they [inappropriate groups of women] think about it in the same way?
 - Why do you think they believe their behaviour is appropriate?
 - Do you ever have to think about the way you behave on a night out? In what ways?
 - Would you think differently about how you behave if you were going out in a mixed group compared to just with female friends?

- What might be the consequences of behaving inappropriately on a night out?
 - Can women get judged for acting in certain ways? By who?
7. What's the worst thing someone could think of you / say about you on a night out?
- *Why* is that the worst thing?
 - What would you have to do for someone to think that?
 - Has anybody ever said anything like that to you / your friends?
 - Is this what your female friends would also think?
 - Do you think other women might think differently? [prompt on which types of women]
 - What if someone said you'd had too much to drink?
 - What would it take to be called a slut on a night out?
8. Do you think ideas of 'appropriate' behaviour are similar for all women?
- Why / why not?
 - Do you think that ideas of what is appropriate might be different for women from different backgrounds? In what ways?
 - Could they be different for women who go to different places? How?
 - Do you think that ideas of what is appropriate might be different for straight, lesbian or bisexual women? In what ways?
 - Could they be different for women of different ages? In what ways?

Appendix G: Transcription Key

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| ... | Very short pause / hesitation |
| [.....] | Additional text added by EN to contextualise quote |
| [both laugh] | Participant and interviewer both laugh |
| [cut] | Portion of text removed |
| <i>Italicised Text</i> | Emphasis placed by participant |
| [laughter] | Participant laughs |
| [long pause] | Pause longer than 5-6 seconds |
| [pause] | Pause longer than 2-3 seconds |
| [sic] | Participant's phrasing grammatically incorrect |
| [sigh] | Participant sighs |

Appendix H: Extract from Theme Analysis Table

| Theme/ subtheme | What are they saying | Relevance to research questions | Frequency of occurrence | Depth: Who mentions it in detail / star quotes? | Range: Who else mentions it? | Variation: Who challenges / disagrees? | What other themes overlap with? |
|--|---------------------------------|--|--|--|---|---|--|
| Drinking Practices | | | | | | | |
| Unfeminine Drinkers: Drunkennes s and Inappropria teness: Unfeminine Drink Choice | Beer is masculine | High | High | Ruth – wouldn't have a pint if all dressed up (17,18) Nicole – rough and manly (11) | Emma (10) , Kim (11), Donna (13, and whiskey), Chris (5) Ally (18) Hayley (8) Claire (10), Gail (11) Jessie (10 – more pub drink and masc, but wouldn't affect what I drink, 11) | Chris (could be masc but drink what want) Fran (wouldn't drink on night out as bloats you, but like it in pub, seen as manly sitting with pint) (12), Zoe (8) | Dress , class |
| | Esp. Pints (big, manly) | High | High | Fran (ex refused to buy her pints, women should be small and petite and not heard) (12,13) Claire – pints suggest as a woman that you want to get drunk (10) | Kim (11 – age thing though), Ally (drink pints with guys, wine with girls), Jessie, Megan, Nicole (11) Ruth (18 – big volume) ***Chris (5 – but maybe about taste as much as being classy) Jessie (10,11) Joanna (10) | Emma (drinking from bottles less fem) Chris – I drink what I want to drink Zoe (8,9) Joanna (13) | |
| | Feminine drinks | High | High | Gail, Eve (little, pretty, colourful) | Kim (cocktails) – classy drinks (16), Georgina (alcopops) | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | | | <p>Megan (wine, glass)</p> <p>Lydia – brother spiked, fem drink (15)</p> | <p>Ally (vodka, ‘girly shots’, cocktails (18)) Hayley (wine, small, pretty, colour) (8, 11), Donna (13) cocktails, vodka lemonade, Chris (wine, vodka, 5) Joanna (cocktail 10) Zoe (8 – fruity cider and cocktails) Jessie (10 – wine spirits cocktails)</p> | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|

A Girls' Night Out Research Project: Young women and nights out in Newcastle

Thank you for your interest in taking part in this research project. This sheet provides information about the study which should answer any questions you may have and help you decide if you want to get involved.

What Exactly is the Research About?

I am a young female postgraduate researcher from Newcastle University, seeking to speak to young women aged 18-25 who go on nights out in the city of Newcastle with their female friends. I want to talk to young women about going out in the city, including discussions about where you like to go, clothing and appearance, what you enjoy doing and some of the things you think might be a bit risky.

I'm interested in talking to both straight and lesbian or bisexual young women, as well as women who also work in bars, pubs and clubs in the city.

How Can I Take Part?

The project involves:

- one to one interviews lasting about an hour
- focus groups with young women lasting about an hour

It is up to you whether you take part in both activities or just one, and you are free to change your mind at any point.

I would also like some groups of friends who go out together to take part in a focus group. If you are interested in getting involved with your friends let me know.

Your travel costs will be fully covered.

Will Everything I Say Be Confidential?

Yes. I will be doing all the focus groups and interviews and, with your permission, digitally recording them. Nobody else will listen to the recordings and only my supervisors will be able to see the full typed up, anonymous texts.

All the data will be stored securely and anonymously on a computer at Newcastle University and will be password-protected.

Your name will not be used in the published research and everything you say will remain entirely anonymous.

What we discuss will be in confidence, however disclosure may be required if you were to say something that potentially indicated that you or someone else was at risk of harm. If you said something of this type, I would indicate this and you could then choose whether or not to continue the discussion. We would also discuss what the next steps would be.

What Will Happen to the Information I Give?

The interviews and focus groups will be analysed and anonymous quotes may be used in my postgraduate research project and in any related research, publications and presentations.

All data will be destroyed after the study.

What Are the Next Steps?

If you have any further questions before deciding whether or not you wish to take part please contact me.

If you would like to get involved, please contact me.

Please pass on this information to anybody else who you think might like to take part.

Thank you.

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Appendix J: Interview Consent Form

A Girls' Night Out Research Project: Young women and nights out in Newcastle

Researcher: Emily Nicholls (postgraduate researcher)

Supervisory Team: Professor Diane Richardson and Professor Janice McLaughlin

Please read the following, circle as appropriate and then sign at the bottom:-

| | |
|--|----------|
| Have you read and understood the information sheet? | Yes / No |
| Have you had an opportunity to ask any questions and discuss the study? | Yes / No |
| Have you received enough information about the study? | Yes / No |
| Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time during the interview or afterwards, without needing to give a reason? | Yes / No |
| Are you happy for the interview to be digitally recorded and transcribed? | Yes / No |
| Have you been informed that the recordings will be stored securely and anonymously, will only be accessed by the researcher and will be destroyed at the end of the project? | Yes / No |
| Have you been informed that in the publication of the research, your anonymity will be preserved and you will not be identifiable in any way? | Yes / No |
| Do you voluntarily agree to take part in this study? | Yes / No |
| Are you willing to be contacted about also taking part in a focus group? | Yes / No |

Name.....

Signature..... Date.....

Signature of researcher.....

Supervisory Team Contact Details:

Professor Diane Richardson
0191 222 7643
diane.richardson@ncl.ac.uk

Professor Janice McLaughlin
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janice.mclaughlin@ncl.ac.uk



A Girls' Night Out Research Project

Useful Contacts

Advice and Counselling for Young People (any issue)

Streetwise 0191 230 5400
<http://www.streetwisenorth.org.uk/>

Alcohol and Drugs

Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Trust
Integrated drug and alcohol service 0191 219 5600
Drinkline 0800 917 8282

Sexual Assault or Rape

Northumbria Police Non-emergency number 101
Tyneside Rape Crisis Centre, Newcastle 0800 035 2794

STI / HIV Testing, Contraception, Pregnancy and Sexual Health Services

New Croft Centre, Newcastle 0191 229 2999

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